

Perspectives on Mormon Theology

PERSPECTIVES ON MORMON THEOLOGY

PERSPECTIVES ON MORMON THEOLOGY is designed to facilitate and advance the academic study of Latter-day Saint thought. As Mormon Studies continues to develop as an academic field, there is increasing demand for scholarship that engages theological studies and the philosophy of religion. This series is a response to this need and is designed to provide interested readers additional resources in understanding this rich and intriguing religious tradition. Each volume engages a specific theological topic and exhibits a variety of perspectives in the topic area. The series is not intended to defend any particular position, but rather to provide a forum within which a range of approaches and methodologies are given voice.

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*Perspectives on
Mormon Theology*

Scriptural Theology

Edited by
James E. Faulconer
and Joseph M. Spencer

Series edited by
Brian D. Birch
and Loyd Isao Ericson

GREG KOFFORD BOOKS
SALT LAKE CITY, 2015

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Greg Kofford Books
P.O. Box 1362
Draper, UT 84020
www.gregkofford.com
facebook.com/gkbooks

Also available in ebook.

2019 18 17 16 15 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Perspectives on Mormon Theology

Brian D. Birch and Loyd Isao Ericson,
Series Editors

From its beginnings, Mormonism has challenged the boundaries of Christian theology. On the one hand, it affirms the core features of the Christian faith—including a belief in the Bible as God’s word and the divinity, atonement for the sins of humanity, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus Christ—and yet it does so within a remarkably unorthodox framework.

The primary source of these ideas is Joseph Smith who, between 1829 and 1844, produced a remarkable 750 pages of additional scripture. These works—the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price—do not replace the Bible; rather they are understood by Latter-day Saints to affirm, clarify, and ultimately complement the Biblical text.

The ability to produce new scripture is borne from Smith’s self-understanding as a prophet for the latter days. His revelations are understood to constitute not only a restoration of the ancient Christian church, but to be the “restoration of all things” in which the God’s activities across the ages are brought to a fulfillment in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This sweeping narrative includes the belief that the fullness of God’s truths and plan for humanity were given to Adam and Eve and other biblical Patriarchs but had been lost and recovered through multiple restorations.

This robust concept of restoration led historian Jan Shippers to argue that Mormonism is a “new religious tradition” that emerged out of Christianity in a similar fashion to that of Christianity out of Judaism.¹

1. Jan Shippers, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

This designation has also proven useful as well for Christian leaders anxious to distance Mormonism from mainstream Christianity. Richard Land, a longtime point person for the Southern Baptist Convention, said in a *Time* magazine article that “the fairest and most charitable way to define Mormonism would be to call it the fourth Abrahamic religion.”²

The production of new revelation created a fluid and dynamic environment in the early years of Mormonism. Theology, ritual, and church governance were being shaped and reshaped in accordance with Smith’s expanding canon. This developmental dynamic has had interesting implications for Mormon theological studies. Mormonism’s earliest new scripture, the Book of Mormon, fit more comfortably within early nineteenth-century Protestant theology. Critics of Mormonism rarely raised concerns over the theological content of the Book of Mormon but rather drew contempt over Smith’s claim of producing additional scripture on par with the Bible. They were also discomfited by stories of the miraculous events surrounding its coming forth, which included angelic visitation, buried golden plates, and the miraculous use of seer stones to aid in the translation process.

However, the theological comfort present in the earliest years of Mormonism soon disappeared. In the decade and a half following the publication of the Book of Mormon and a formal establishment of a church in 1830, Smith’s revelations proclaimed new doctrines that further separated Mormon theology from its Christian environs. Among these new teachings, Smith reconceptualized heaven and hell, separated the Trinity into physically distinct beings, embodied God with flesh and bone, and taught that marriage was an essential ordinance for human deification.

Among the more intriguing features of Mormonism is that, despite its centralized authority, there has been no theological tradition to synthesize their unique doctrines. Historically, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has discouraged attempts within its ranks to apply rigorous philosophical and theological analysis to its doctrinal teachings. This has been largely informed by the Church’s emphasis on continuing revelation and, with it, the understanding that theology is largely unnecessary because living prophets and apostles provide whatever guidance is necessary in interpreting and applying Latter-day Saint scripture and doctrine. This sensibility is readily observed in the absence of theological

2. David Van Biema, “What is Mormonism? A Baptist Answer,” *Time*, October 24, 2007, available at <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1675308,00.html> (accessed February 2, 2015).

training for its lay leadership who are overwhelmingly selected based upon pastoral and organizational skills. While some early Mormon authorities attempted to provide rigorous philosophical and exegetical analyses of Mormon thought, their works never gained authoritative status and have little direct influence on church teachings today.

In the twentieth century, the first significant theoretical treatment of Mormon theology was Sterling M. McMurrin's *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*.³ A self-described agnostic Mormon, McMurrin began his career in the LDS Church's Church Educational System (CES) and migrated to academia where he taught philosophy at the University of Utah and served in a variety of administrative positions. Published in 1965, McMurrin's book stood alone for a generation as the only attempt at a sustained theological engagement with the Christian tradition.

The landscape has changed in recent years, however, as a number of Latter-day Saint scholars have pursued formal academic training in theology and the philosophy of religion, and they have applied this training within the context of an emerging interdisciplinary field of Mormon Studies. The work of Truman Madsen, David Paulsen, Robert Millet, and James Faulconer at Brigham Young University paved the way through their efforts to create dialogue between Mormon thinkers and the broader Christian theological community. In 2007, Paulsen co-edited a volume with Baptist theologian Donald Musser entitled *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*.⁴ Four years prior, the Society for Mormon Philosophy was formed at the Yale Divinity School during a major academic conference on Mormon history, thought, and culture.

Blake Ostler, an independent scholar and theologian, has offered the most thorough examination of a Latter-day Saint theology in his *Exploring Mormon Thought* series.⁵ These and other publications on Mormon thought in the late twentieth and current century have largely been limited to either monographic works portraying a single perspective on Mormon theology, such as the works by McMurrin and Ostler, or scat-

3. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965).

4. David L. Paulsen and Donald W. Musser, *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2007).

5. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008).

tered across various scholarly journals and anthologies.⁶ The most recent full-length treatment of Mormon thought is Terryl Givens's *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought*.⁷

As Mormon Studies continues to develop as an academic field, there is increasing demand for scholarship that engages theological studies and the philosophy of religion. *Perspectives on Mormon Theology* is a response to this need and is designed to provide interested readers additional resources in understanding this rich and intriguing religious tradition. This series is designed to both facilitate and advance the academic study of the Latter-day Saint thought. Each volume engages a specific theological topic and exhibits a variety of perspectives in the topic area. The series is not intended to defend any particular position, but rather to provide a forum within which a range of approaches and methodologies are given voice.

We begin the series with scriptural theology, the most primary form of theological reflection. James Faulconer and Joseph Spencer have gathered scholars from diverse disciplines to examine the role of scripture and to demonstrate the connection between theological reflection and scriptural exegesis. Subsequent volumes will explore the atonement, grace, revelation, and apologetics to name a few. We are grateful to all who have contributed to this series and look forward to quality dialogue on the issues contained therein.

Brian D. Birch
Loyd Isao Ericson

6. These journals include *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Faith and Philosophy*, *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology*, *BYU Studies*, and *Sunstone*. Anthologies include Jacob T. Baker, *Mormonism at the Crossroads of Philosophy and Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), James McLachlan and Loyd Ericson, *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007). Charles Harrell offers a historical analysis of Mormon thought in his *This is My Doctrine: The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City, Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

7. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: God, Cosmos, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

*Perspectives on
Mormon Theology*

Scriptural Theology

INTRODUCTION

Scriptural Theology

James E. Faulconer and Joseph M. Spencer

The phrase “theology of scripture” can be understood in two distinct ways. First, theology of scripture would be reflection on the nature of scripture, asking questions about what it means for a person or a people to be oriented by a written text (rather than or in addition to an oral tradition or a ritual tradition). In this first sense, theology of scripture would form a relatively minor part of the broader theological project, since the nature of scripture is just *one* of many things on which theologians reflect. Second, theology of scripture would be theological reflection guided by scripture, asking questions of scriptural texts and allowing those texts to shape the direction the theologian’s thoughts pursue. In this second sense, theology of scripture would be less a part of the larger theological project than a way of doing theology, since whatever the theologian takes up reflectively, she investigates through the lens of scripture.

The essays making up this collection reflect attentiveness to both ways of understanding the phrase “theology of scripture.” Each essay takes up the relatively un-self-conscious work of reading a scriptural text but then—at some point or another—asks the self-conscious question of exactly what she or he is doing in the work of reading scripture. We have thus attempted in this book (1) to create a dialogue concerning what scripture is for Latter-day Saints, and (2) to focus that dialogue on concrete examples of Latter-day Saints reading actual scripture texts.

In fact, this volume has grown out of an actual dialogue. It began in the summer of 2010 with an online seminar (available in its entirety at <http://scripturaltheology.wordpress.com/>), during which the several contributors were able to present to each other readings of particular scriptural texts and reflections on what it means to read scripture as a Latter-day Saint. When the online discussions came to an end, some conclusions were presented and further discussed in a one-day symposium, “Mormon

Scriptural Theology,” held at Brigham Young University on October 4, 2010, and graciously hosted jointly by the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding and Greg Kofford Books. The present book crystallizes that ongoing conversation at a moment in its development—a development that we hope continues into the future.

This collection is a dialogue in a still profounder sense as well. From the outset, we aimed to bring together diverse voices. All participants were selected in part because of their interest in scripture, but we also tried to bring together people with varied backgrounds and distinct kinds of training. Participants hail from philosophy (Faulconer, Miller, and Spencer), humanities (Webb and Handley), English (Hafen and Jorgensen), religious studies (Huntsman), history (Bushman), and even finance (Couch). Moreover, as the essays demonstrate, even those trained in the same discipline have rather different scriptural and theological interests. While Webb offers a close reading of Doctrine and Covenants 128 largely guided by her interest in scripture’s reflection on textuality, Handley is guided to the Book of Moses by his ecological concerns; while Hafen’s interest in Doctrine and Covenants 46 is driven by her personal and academic interest in questions of community, Jorgensen’s reading of Alma 37 is heavily inflected by his formalist training; Faulconer’s attention to Moses 5 is driven by his interest in ritual and presence, Miller turns to Matthew 6 as part of his larger project of investigating consciousness, and Spencer addresses Job 19 because of his interest in the uniqueness of the Book of Mormon. The dialogue that has resulted from the variety of perspectives and interests has been most fruitful and edifying for us; we hope it will be similarly fruitful and edifying for those who are listening in on the conversation.

What has guided our approach from the beginning is the (in our eyes unfortunate) fact that relatively little—indeed, almost nothing—has been published about serious theology of scripture in the Mormon tradition. Our intention in carrying on this dialogue, and then in capturing it in this volume, is to lay some of the groundwork for a conversation that largely remains to be held. If we will have drawn attention to the basic questions, we will have succeeded. If not, we can take comfort in the fact that we have immensely enjoyed talking together about scripture.

A few words of introduction to the several essays might be in order.

The first two essays address texts from the Old Testament. Both focus profoundly on how uniquely Mormon scripture should inflect the interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures, though each does so in a rather differ-

ent way. In “A Mormon Reading of Job 19:23–25a,” Joseph Spencer draws on the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants in order to construct a framework for the interpretation of the Old Testament—thus bringing non-biblical scriptural texts to bear directly on a biblical text. The result is a speculative interpretation of the Book of Job in which Spencer takes it to have been oriented to the eschatological event to which Joseph Smith gave the name “Adam-ondi-Ahman.” In “Without Money,” however, Robert Couch traces quotations of and allusions to a particular Old Testament text in the Book of Mormon—thus asking how biblical texts worm their way into non-biblical scriptural texts. Further, Couch uses the passage from Isaiah 55 that is his focus to assess the limits of certain modern academic approaches to scriptural themes, arguing that the social and economic ideals set forth in scripture outstrip especially contemporary political and economic discourse.

The New Testament is the focus of the next two essays. Here, the focus is a bit different. In “Take No Thought,” Adam Miller uses a passage from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount to model what in an addendum he calls a hermeneutics of “semiotic materialism,” a style of interpretation that takes the words of scripture to be as material as the concrete objects of everyday experience. In the actual work of his reading, moreover, he displays a still deeper concern with conscious dwelling in a world of material realities, finding in Jesus’s words so much counsel to avoid fantastic flights from the work of paying attention to the here and now. For his part, Eric Huntsman, in “Jesus on Jesus,” roots exposition in strict, traditional exegesis while nonetheless asking at every point how the carefully interpreted biblical text relates to Restoration texts and teachings. Looking closely at a few of Jesus’s teachings in the Gospel of John, Huntsman pays particularly close attention to the role of the symbolic in scripture.

Turning to uniquely Mormon scripture, the next two essays address themselves to the Book of Mormon. Where there has been a consistent emphasis in the first four essays to determine what it means to read scriptural texts that Latter-day Saints share with other faith traditions, these essays begin to ask what it means to read scripture unique to the Mormon tradition. In “I, Nephi,” Claudia Bushman demonstrates the power of taking the Book of Mormon’s claim to historicity seriously by reading the text of First Nephi as she would any other historical text—asking about what the author veils over as much as about what the author puts on display. Bushman thus outlines a kind of hermeneutics of suspicion that is ultimately inseparable from the commitments of her faith. In a

somewhat similar vein, Bruce Jorgensen, in “Alma’s Wisdom-Poem to Helaman,” openly doubts whether there is anything unique about a specifically “Mormon” interpretation of texts—scriptural or otherwise. But rather than bringing the tools of the historian’s trade to the task of reading the Book of Mormon, Jorgensen uses his training as a formalist to mine several poetic lines from Alma 37 for meaning.

The Doctrine and Covenants, naturally, is the focus of the next two essays. As the only book of Mormon scripture exclusively containing modern revelation, the Doctrine and Covenants raises some unique questions. This can be sensed in these two essays. Jane Hafen’s profoundly personal essay, “Seek Ye Earnestly the Best Gifts,” models the immediate relevance of modern revelation to the contemporary Church by taking the words of section 46 to describe exactly how the community that is today’s Church should work. As she shows over the course of her essay, a heightened sense of normativity can lead, in a community that is seldom fully attentive to scripture, to tension and fractures that can be painful. Because Jenny Webb, in “Records, Reading, and Writing in Doctrine and Covenants 128,” looks at a canonized letter from the Doctrine and Covenants rather than a revelation, she understands the immediate relevance of the scriptural text somewhat differently—finding in Joseph Smith’s creativity with the biblical texts on which he draws a kind of model for engaging with scripture. Along with providing a most provocative reading of section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Webb asks what it means for Latter-day Saints to engage with the scriptures on a daily basis, and argues that there is something essential about the experience of reading scripture consistently, whether or not there is a particular goal or project guiding such reading.

Finally, the last two essays in this collection are dedicated to the Pearl of Great Price. Given the complexity of the relationship between most of this last of the Standard Works to the Old Testament—a complexity that has raised more serious doubts about the historicity of uniquely Mormon scripture than any other single source—it might seem that the principal focus of these last essays should be historical and exegetical. As it turns out, however, neither contributor privileges such questions; each, instead, reads the Pearl of Great Price simply as scripture. Thus, in “Faith and the Ethics of Climate Change,” George Handley takes the Book of Moses as a canonical and therefore binding text to be interpreted faithfully by the believing Latter-day Saint, always from within the context of the reader’s historical and social milieu. More important to his approach than tortuous questions of historicity, then, are the ethical demands of contem-

porary life—demands that he carefully (and impressively) uproots from political ideology in order to plant them securely in faith—and Handley shows how dutiful attention to both the text and such demands allows scripture to speak profoundly to contemporary concerns. For his part, James Faulconer, in “The Way toward the Garden: Moses 5:1–12,” pays somewhat more attention to the relationship between the Book of Moses and the Book of Genesis, but he does so to better understand the meaning and implications of the canonical text. With nuanced attention to the details of Moses 5, Faulconer shows how scripture reveals what it means to live in the world in the way God ordains.

The telling variety of these essays, we believe, demonstrates how much this discussion needs to continue to take place. We therefore express our gratitude to everyone who has helped to make this project possible. We owe thanks to Brian Birch and Loyd Ericson, general editors of the *Perspectives on Mormon Theology* series, for inviting us to produce this volume. Obviously, we owe thanks to all the contributors, as well as to other potential contributors we approached who, for one reason or another, could not participate with us. The conference in which these papers were first presented would not have been possible without generous financial assistance from the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding at Brigham Young University, nor without the support, more generally, of both Brigham Young University and Greg Kofford Books. Particularly helpful in organizing the conference was Karen Lambert. We are grateful also to Nate Noorlander, who provided some formatting and editorial assistance. Two essays in this volume appeared in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* after they were presented at the conference; we express our thanks to Kristine Haglund for her interest in our project and for being happy to see those essays appear in this volume as well as the journal she has more than ably edited. Finally, and most especially, we express gratitude to our families, who are far more supportive of our efforts than we deserve.

ONE

A Mormon Reading of Job 19:23–25a

Joseph M. Spencer

I take as my task here to read, with the eyes of a Mormon theologian, a text from the Old Testament.¹ The eyes of a Mormon theologian—that implies two things. First, the reading I will offer here is that of a theologian. It will be, therefore, speculative. Second, the reading I will offer here is that of a Mormon. It will be, therefore, oriented by the events, the texts, and the truths that motivate Mormonism. Speculative in methodology and Mormon in orientation, what I set forth in this paper will be an attempt to embody the interpretive implications of what Joseph Smith said in his eighth article of faith. That is, if Mormons “believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly,” then it seems they have the task, whenever they read the Bible, to transform the received text into the word of God through what I can only understand to be a theological endeavor. It is that task that I assume here.

What follows comes in two parts. In the first part, I want to say a little bit more about what I have just outlined, that is, what did Joseph Smith mean—or what *might* he have meant—when he spoke of translating the Bible correctly? In the second part of the paper, I will turn to the task of actually reading a passage from the Old Testament in a distinctly Mormon and explicitly theological way. The text I will consider is Job 19:23–25a, and I will have a good deal more to say by way of introduction to that passage when I come to the second part of the paper.

1. For a broad-stroke analysis of the history of biblical interpretation in the LDS tradition, see Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

I

I suspect that the eighth article of faith was in part inspired by Nephi.² In the Book of Mormon, Nephi offers both a forthright affirmation of biblical inspiration and an equally forthright denial of biblical sufficiency. Importantly, according to Nephi—or rather, according to the angel to whom Nephi attributes the words—both the inspired nature of the Bible and its essential insufficiency are revealed specifically by the Book of Mormon. In the words to be found in Nephi’s writings, at once the Book of Mormon “shall establish the truth” of the Bible and “shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away” from it (1 Ne. 13:40). This double gesture—or at least its spirit—clearly lies behind the claim that we Mormons “believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly,” while we “believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God” pure and simple. Thus, to approach the Bible from an irremediably Mormon point of view is to regard the received biblical text both with a vow of faithful obedience and with a vow of suspicious rigor.³

From the angel’s words to Nephi an initial picture might be drawn up of what Joseph Smith meant when he spoke of the Bible being translated correctly.⁴ It is, at the very least, a matter of reading the Bible through the lens of the Book of Mormon, and doing so in a way that both establishes the Bible’s truth and makes known the plain and precious things taken from it. Of course, each of the two crucial elements of this formulation deserves to be clarified in some detail. What does it mean to “establish the

2. The eighth article of faith, along with the other articles of faith, was largely drawn from Orson Pratt’s pamphlet, “Remarkable Visions.” It thus draws on but subtly reworks Orson Pratt’s statement there: “The gospel in the ‘Book of Mormon,’ is the same as that in the New Testament, and is revealed in great plainness, so that no one that reads it can misunderstand its principles.” See Orson P. Pratt, *Remarkable Visions* (Liverpool: R. James, 1848).

3. I use here the language of Paul Ricoeur. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 27. It is worth noting, however, that Ricoeur’s and the Latter-day Saint’s motivations for doubling fidelity with suspicion in the work of interpretation are distinct. Ricoeur’s commitment to suspicion is drawn from the philosophical insights of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud; the Latter-day Saint’s commitment to suspicion is drawn directly from scripture. That difference seems to me crucial.

4. Regarding just the word “to translate” in Joseph Smith’s thinking, it is worth reviewing Hugh Nibley’s important remarks in Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 47–54.

truth” of something? And what does it mean to speak of “the plain and precious things” supposedly taken from the Bible?

Regarding the first of these two questions, the essential ambiguity of the phrase “to establish the truth of something” should be noted. This phrase can have reference either to establishing that the “something” in question is true (to establish, for example, that the proposition “the Bible is true” is in fact the case) or to discovering and elaborating a truth indiscernibly proper to the “something” in question (to discover and elaborate, for example, the truth that is proper to the Bible). I suspect that most of Nephi’s readers assume he means the first of these two options—the Book of Mormon establishes the fact that the Bible is true—but I want to make a case for the possibility that he means the second, that he means in fact to suggest that the Book of Mormon allows one to discover and even to elaborate the truth around which the whole Bible circulates without ever quite stating it overtly.

In order to defend such a reading, however, it is necessary to address the second question above. What does it mean to speak of “the plain and precious things” supposedly taken from the Bible? On this point Nephi’s angel could not be clearer. When Nephi first sees the emergence of the Bible in his vision, the angel explains to him: “The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets” (1 Ne. 13:23). The Bible as Nephi sees it gathers together a historical record and a collection of prophecies, but what binds it together is, it seems, “the *covenants* . . . made unto the house of Israel.” The angel again emphasizes this covenantal theme only moments later in his words to Nephi. Though the book seen in vision is not so large as the brass plates Nephi brought from Jerusalem, “nevertheless, they contain the *covenants* of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; *wherefore*, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles” (v. 23; emphases mine). What made the first Gentile readers so deeply interested in the Bible they received as it “proceede[d] out of the mouth of a Jew” (v. 23) was, specifically, its *covenantal* content.

What has this covenantal focus to do with the plain and precious things? Nephi goes on in his vision to see “the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches,” concerning which event the angel explains: “they have 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 Ne. 13:26; em-

phasis mine). This is, it seems to me, absolutely crucial. What is lost from the Bible in the course of its Gentile appropriation is first and foremost an emphasis on the covenant. Whether any actual passages were removed or altered we do not know—and we in fact have reason to doubt. But that the meaning and centrality of the Abrahamic covenant were downplayed seems clear. And that is Nephi's focus.

Is it too much, then, to suggest that what it means to translate the Bible correctly—what it means to read the Bible through the truth-establishing lens of the Book of Mormon—is to restore to the Bible its covenantal center? It is something like this that, I suspect, Nephi has in mind when he says that the Book of Mormon and the Bible “shall be established in one” (1 Ne. 13:41). To translate the Bible correctly is to read the letter of the biblical text with a spiritual eye trained on the covenantal focus of the Book of Mormon—on the covenantal focus that is established at length in Nephi's writings and brought back to the Lehtes' attention during Christ's climactic visit to the New World. The task of the translator, it would seem, is less a question of sorting out the Hebrew or the Greek originals, or of sifting through mounds of manuscript finds to establish an earliest biblical text, than of establishing the covenantal focus of the Bible. Obviously, such a covenantal focus is particularly important in reading the Old Testament.

A confirmation of the approach I am laying out here can perhaps be found in Joseph Smith's own efforts at translating the Bible. Those efforts took two rather distinct shapes over the course of Joseph's prophetic career. Between 1830 and 1833, Joseph was at work on what he called the “New Translation” (but what Latter-day Saints commonly call the “Joseph Smith Translation”) of the Bible. Subsequently, beginning especially in 1835 in Kirtland's “school of the prophets,” Joseph launched a second, ongoing but intermittent, attempt to translate the Bible, though never with the aim of producing a complete or systematic translation. These two efforts at translation, investigated carefully, make clear that what Joseph understood by “translation” was nothing like the mechanical work of shifting intellectual content from one language to another. While working on the New Translation between 1830 and 1833, Joseph never even pretended to consult the “original” Hebrew of the Old Testament or Greek of the New Testament. Instead, he seems simply to have worked from the English of the King James Version, making alterations wherever he felt inspired to do so, regardless—and often against the grain—of the actual Hebrew or Greek

“originals.”⁵ Again, when in 1835 Joseph began seriously to study the strictly biblical languages (especially Hebrew) and so turned his attention anew to translation, it is clear that his intent was not to provide a straightforwardly accurate rendering of the “original.” Instead, up through the last sermons he gave before his martyrdom, his efforts aimed at using the nuances of the biblical languages to launch radically innovative and theologically expansive interpretations of otherwise relatively banal biblical passages.⁶

If it is clear that Joseph Smith did not understand the translation of the Bible simply to be the slavish reproduction of the plain meaning of the “original” text, what, *positively*, did he mean by “translation”? What was common to Joseph’s two distinct attempts to translate the Bible was his intention to rework the received biblical text—whether the received English of the KJV or the *textus receptus* of the Hebrew and Greek “originals”—in terms of the scriptures and revelations he had himself prophetically provided to the Saints. On one occasion in 1844, Joseph intimated as much while commending Luther’s German translation of the Bible: “I have been reading the German: I find it to be the most correct that I have found and it corresponds the nearest to the revelations that I have given the last 16 years.”⁷ What seems to have guided Joseph’s efforts to translate the Bible correctly first and foremost was the need to reorient the received text to the events, the texts, and the truths that he had himself produced.⁸

5. Though it represents only a first—and not entirely rigorous—approach, the standard work on the New Translation remains Robert J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1985). See also, of course, Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004).

6. The most famous such interpretation—a wildly speculative but theologically fascinating reading of Genesis 1:1 offered in the course of the famous “King Follett Discourse”—perfectly illustrates the kind of “translation” project that interested Joseph. See Joseph Smith Jr., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 340–62.

7. *Ibid.*, 351. I have expanded the occasional abbreviations found in Thomas Bullock’s notes.

8. It may be that the Book of Abraham fits more into Joseph’s efforts at translating the Bible than it does into his efforts at translating original, ancient documents. The close relationship between the Book of Abraham and the Book of Genesis is unmistakable. In some ways, the Book of Abraham is to Joseph’s

All of this is to say, I think, that Joseph Smith's efforts at translation were an experiment in Mormon theology. What Joseph produced in his ongoing engagement with biblical texts was speculative, and he launched his theological speculations from a deliberately Mormon platform. But what does it mean to say that Joseph's translations were theological or speculative? I have in mind here what Adam Miller has described very well in the following words:

Theology is an attempt to explore the range of meanings that scripture is capable of producing beyond the bounds of its historical, doctrinal, and devotional responses. Theology runs experiments for the sake of mapping a text's own latent patterns. Its power to illuminate these unseen, latent patterns derives from its freedom to pose hypothetical questions: *if* such and such were the case, *then* what meaningful pattern would the text produce in response?⁹

Theological speculation, contrary to what is often said about it among Latter-day Saints, is anything but so much spinning in the void, anything but asking pointless or unanswerable questions, anything but sensational attention to so-called mysteries. Theological speculation is, rather, an attempt, undertaken in the name of charity, to see what scriptural texts have to teach us and to see what scripture can do in addition to providing grist for the historical mill and confirming doctrine we all already know to be true. To speculate is to hold a mirror up to the scriptures, to allow them to reflect on themselves, to give them something to say to us about their meaning and significance.

Joseph Smith was a speculator. And the mirror he held up to the Bible in his efforts at translation was a distinctly Mormon one, constructed of the events that had started him on his prophetic career, the texts that had been given to the world through him, and the truths that had been forced on him by his experiences. If the Bible is to be translated correctly, it seems to me that it has to be approached in the way that Joseph approached it. That is, Latter-day Saints must approach it speculatively, and must do so in a distinctly Mormon fashion. The task of the translator is to put to each biblical text a set of questions that arise in connection with the unique founding events of Mormonism, questions that emerge from close study of uniquely Mormon scripture, and questions that issue from unswerving commitment to the truths uniquely set forth in the Restoration. Mormon

efforts at translating the Bible after 1835 as the Book of Moses is to his efforts at translating the Bible before 1835.

9. Adam Miller, ed., *An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32* (Provo: Maxwell Institute Press, 2014), 4; emphases in original.

theological speculation yields profit only (1) when it is undertaken with the hope of profiting from its distinctly Mormon investment, (2) when it invests specifically in the Bible and does so with full faith, and (3) when it aims to give away what profits it yields in real charity.

Of course, to quote Adam Miller again, “it is essential to remember that, because it is fundamentally hypothetical, theology is always tentative and nonbinding. Theology, though sensitive to what is normatively binding, never decides doctrine.”¹⁰ This seems, curiously, to have been largely true even of Joseph Smith’s work at translating the Bible. Although a few chapters of the 1830–1833 project have been canonized (in the Pearl of Great Price), almost all of Joseph’s extensive efforts at translating the Bible—from 1830 to 1844—remain nonbinding for the Latter-day Saint. Joseph’s translations, despite the fact that they occupied more of his prophetic attention than any other project during the course of his life, have not—have *never*—decided doctrine.¹¹

Perhaps for this last reason above all, I think it is prudent to suggest that every Latter-day Saint has the freedom—if not the responsibility—to translate the Bible in something like the way that Joseph Smith did. But what shape—what *specific* shape—might such a translation take? Does Joseph’s example provide some guidance about how one is to move forward? I think it does, and spelling out that guidance will pave the way at last to the attempt I would like to wager here of reading Job 19:23–25a.

As I have already made clear, Joseph Smith’s own work on the Bible unfolded in two distinct sequences: a first between 1830 and 1833, the product of which was the New Translation, and a second beginning in 1835 and lasting until the prophet’s death, the product of which was a smattering of writings and sermons that dealt with biblical texts. Each of

10. *Ibid.*, 6.

11. One might point out that the close relationship between the New Translation and the revelations making up the bulk of the Doctrine and Covenants suggests that the New Translation was indeed doctrinally binding. But this proves precisely the opposite. The fact that the doctrines that would become binding had to appear in the revelations that would be canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants makes all the clearer that what appeared only in the New Translation was not binding. On the relationship between the New Translation and Joseph Smith’s revelations, see Kerry Muhlestein, “One Continuous Flow: Revelations Surrounding the ‘New Translation,’” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Alonzo Gaskill (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2008), 40–65.

these projects allows one to put a finer point on what Joseph Smith taught us by his example about translating the Bible correctly.

What, then, can be learned from Joseph's efforts with the Bible between 1830 and 1833? The motivation for this project seems to have been the Book of Mormon—or, more specifically, two crucial but subtle theological innovations introduced by the Book of Mormon. First, the Book of Mormon launches a remarkably complex and startlingly sophisticated theology of writing, rooted in nuanced interpretations of Isaiah and expounded in great detail in the writings of Nephi especially (though clearly relied on in the subsequent editorial work of Mormon and Moroni).¹² This Nephite theology of writing seems to have informed every stage of Mormonism's early development, culminating in the remarkable and too-often ignored section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants.¹³

Second, the Book of Mormon organizes from its very beginning and with consistent clarity through to its end a markedly unique messianic theology, a theology that even within the Nephite volume itself called for systematic reinterpretation of major biblical themes, from the Abrahamic covenant through the Law of Moses, to the resurrection and salvation by grace. In my view, these two Book of Mormon themes—the Nephite theology of writing and Nephite messianism—were in large part what called for the revisionary program of the New Translation.

Significantly for Mormon interpretation of the Old Testament, neither Nephite messianism nor the Nephite theology of writing is presented in the Book of Mormon as being a uniquely New World phenomenon. Rather, the Nephite understanding of the Messiah is often attributed in the Book of Mormon to the prophets of the Old World, and Nephi so closely connects his theology of writing to the Isaianic tradition that it is impossible to describe it solely as a New World development. As if following out the implications of such Nephite confidence in their continuity with the Old World, Joseph Smith's early work on the New Translation finds him emending the biblical text in precisely these two directions. The Book of Moses in particular, which represents Joseph's first months at work on the Bible, reads like an investigation of the possibility of finding in the biblical text—in particular in the narratives dealing with Adam and Eve and their immediate descendants—traces of both Nephite messian-

12. I work through some details of the Nephite theology of writing in Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, Ore.: Salt Press, 2012).

13. For an excellent study of the theme of writing in Doctrine and Covenants 128, see Jenny Webb's contribution to the present volume.

ism and Nephite understandings of writing.¹⁴ And from this one might draw a somewhat clearer picture of what, concretely, “correct” translation of the Bible meant in Joseph Smith’s own thinking. It seems to have been, at least at first, an attempt to trace distinctly Nephite theological themes to biblical sources, and even to revise the biblical text—whether slightly or drastically—in fidelity to Nephite claims that such theological themes had come to them from the Old Testament.

What, in turn, might be drawn from Joseph Smith’s later work with the Bible? In many ways, the second sequence of Joseph’s work on the Bible is a development or even an expansion of the first. Once Joseph began to study ancient languages, his interest in returning to and revising his revisions of the Bible became insatiable. With these new tools ready at hand, Joseph seems to have felt more prepared than before to do serious work on making sense of biblical texts. Not only might he work with the received English rendering in order to trace ideas and theological conceptions introduced in uniquely LDS scripture, but now he might return to the original languages—as well as come for the first time to other important translations. (Joseph was deeply interested in the German translation of the Bible especially.) Thus finding himself occupying the space between different renderings of the biblical text—the space between the lines of interlinear translations, as it were—Joseph was caught between what is traditionally taken to be the two “conflicting tendencies” of translation: “fidelity and freedom.”¹⁵

Joseph Smith’s later work on the Bible is thus characterized by a double tendency, a double tendency that pulled him in opposite directions. On the one hand, by adding to his familiarity with the King James Version some facility with Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and German renderings of the Bible, Joseph added what might loosely be called an academic edge to his interpretation. At any rate, Joseph began to make reference in his sermons to the “learned men,” and not only to bolster the authority of his inter-

14. To see this as clearly as possible, it is best to look at both versions of the Book of Moses, as can be found in Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 83–113, 591–625. See also the interesting theological discussion of this point in Terryl L. Givens, “Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plenitude,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 55–68.

15. See Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed., Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 69–82.

pretations (“if you do not believe it you do not believe the learned man of God”), but also to challenge the scholarly world to contradict his interpretations of the Hebrew (“come here ye learned men & read if you can”)!¹⁶

On the other hand, by placing himself at the complex intersection of radically distinct languages, Joseph gave himself to much more imaginative interpretations, playing off the nuances of several drastically different renderings of a single text. His willingness to make reference to three or four different languages in justifying a single interpretation makes clear that he was attuned to the freedom of interpretation that comes with looking at alternative translations.¹⁷ Joseph’s later work on the Bible thus at once forced him to be more careful and rigorous and allowed him the most unrestrained interpretive freedom imaginable.¹⁸

Importantly, it was in the thick of this relatively late work on the Bible that Joseph wrote the eighth article of faith with its affirmation of the Bible’s divinity “as far as it is translated correctly.” Not only was he at that time continuing in essence what he had begun in his work on the New Translation—continuing, in other words, to rework the biblical text from the specific perspective of Book of Mormon theological innovations—but he was doing so with the increased rigor and multiplied imagination of looking at original sources, the slipperiness of language, and the play of inventive translations. All of this, it seems to me, puts a finer point on what a distinctly Mormon interpretation of the Bible—or, for my purposes here, specifically of the Old Testament—might look like. Fidelity to the text as it stands is crucial and should even be attended by academic rigor, underpinned by serious study of languages, history, and texts. It is not good, at the same time, for this fidelity to be alone; rather, it should be accompanied by a strong commitment to imagination or theological speculation (in the sense discussed above). And from both the early and the late attempts on Joseph’s part to take up the speculative task, it is clear that what orients every imaginative gesture is the deepest commitment to the most consistent theological innovations of the Book of Mormon.

16. Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 351.

17. See *ibid.* Also, see Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 26–62.

18. I think it is crucially significant that whereas Joseph Smith’s early work at translating the Bible amounted to an alteration of the received text, his late work replaced alteration with imaginative recasting rooted in the original.

Such, I think, is what Joseph Smith had in mind when he spoke of translating the Bible correctly. And it is this sort of program I will follow next, turning my attention directly to an Old Testament text: Job 19:23–25a. I should note briefly that Joseph Smith had nothing, really, to say about this passage. The Book of Job received only marginal treatment in the New Translation. Indeed, only four slight changes to the entire book are to be found in the manuscripts, none of them enormously significant theologically. Chapter 19, like most of the chapters of the Book of Job, is simply labeled, “Correct.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, I wonder whether, had Joseph given more time and attention to Job during his most sustained efforts at translation, we might not have a rather different reading provided to us. In what remains I will in part be exploring how Joseph Smith *might* have reworked or at least have reinterpreted one passage from Job—though, obviously, I do not at all pretend to have the same prophetic ability or authority that Joseph Smith himself had.

II

I understand grace to be the central theme of the Book of Job. The textual cue is Job 2:3, in which God brags to Satan about Job’s steadfastness after the first round of disasters: “still he [Job] holdeth fast his integrity, although thou [Satan] movedst me against him, to destroy him *without cause*” (emphasis mine). “Without cause” in this passage translates the adverbial form of the Hebrew word *hen*, grace. It thus means “without cause,” but also could be translated “freely,” “gracefully,” even “as a gift.”²⁰

19. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation*, 738–43. The changes actually made are as follows: (1) in Job 1:6, “sons of God” is changed to “children of God”; (2) in Job 2:1, “sons of God” is again changed to “children of God”; (3) in Job 2:3, the word “me” is crossed out of “thou movedst me against him”; and (4) in Job 6:29, “my righteousness is in it” is changed to “my righteousness in me.”

20. Wyclif translated it “in veyn,” but all other English translations have more or less followed the “without cause” translation: the Bishop’s Bible and the Geneva Bible at the time of the KJV; the RSV more modernly—the NIV and ESV translate it similarly: “without any reason.” Luther translated it similarly to the KJV tradition (*ohne Ursache*), as did the translators of the Louis Segond version (*sans motif*) and the Reina Valera (*sin causa*). As for ancient versions, the Septuagint translates it *diakeneis*, “emptily” or “in vain,” and the Vulgate renders it with the somewhat ambiguous *frustra*, which does indeed mean “without cause,” but which can also mean “wrongly.”

However bizarre it might sound, I want to wager that the point of the narrative of the Book of Job is to track the process through which its main character comes to see the absurd horror of his life as a manifestation of grace, as a gift. On this reading, what is so adversarial about the speeches of Job's friends is not simply that they adhere to the God of retribution or wrongfully accuse Job of wickedness. Rather, the difficulty is that such adherence or accusation—not to mention their constant interruptions of Job's attempts to ask God about his situation—impedes Job's full recognition that his situation is one of grace. Job must come to see his sufferings as unearned if he is to begin to get a sense for the nature of grace, but his friends are constantly telling him that all he is going through is something he has himself brought about.

The passage I will be considering in detail comes in the second round of debate between Job and his friends—at a point, specifically, when Job seems to have left off calling on God so as to fight off the accusations of his adversaries. At the heart of this second round, Job offers what is generally regarded among Latter-day Saints as the book's high point, his declaration that he has a living advocate who will—even if only after his own death—vindicate him (Job 19:25–27). The celebrated actual announcement of the advocate's existence (“I know that my redeemer liveth,” etc.) is, it turns out, among the most difficult passages in scripture.²¹ Christians traditionally read the passage typologically, taking the mentioned advocate or redeemer to be Jesus Christ. This is, of course, not an entirely unjustified interpretation, but it should be ventured only with full recognition that the Hebrew of the passage is so difficult, if not actually corrupt, that one cannot be responsibly confident about any interpretation of the text.²² I will be considering only the first line of Job's famous confession (Job

21. After translating the first line of verse 25 (“As for me, I know my avenger lives”), Edwin M. Good confesses: Job “goes on for six more lines, in which I can read each word, but they do not combine into sentences that make sense to me.” See Edwin M. Good, “The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job,” in *The Voice from the Whirlwind*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 60. See also Janzen's helpful discussion of the history of the passage's interpretation in J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta: John Know, 1985), 134–50.

22. In what amounts to the only serious full-length Mormon book on Job, published only since I had finished my work on this essay, Michael Austin has provided a lengthy critique of the traditional Mormon (and traditional Christian) interpretation of Job 19. His criticisms echo those of modern biblical interpreters rather generally. Obviously, the criteria guiding my own interpretive approach are different from Austin's, despite the fact that I too part ways with the traditional

19:25a), coupling and contextualizing it with the two verses that precede and introduce it (Job 19:23–24). In offering a distinctly Mormon interpretation of this passage, I will ultimately suggest what might seem an entirely unconventional reading, even for a Latter-day Saint, but one that I can easily see Joseph Smith himself having produced.

I am not entirely unsatisfied with the King James rendering of Job 19:23–25a (“Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth . . .”), since it matters little to me how one translates the various technical terms associated with ancient writing practices.²³ I want, nonetheless, to raise a question about the Hebrew phrase *my yitten* (unvoiced: *my ytn*), which is translated as “Oh that . . . !” in the KJV despite the fact that it literally means “Who will give/grant . . . ?” Following a more literalist translational tradition, I will render the passage as follows: “Who will give now, and my words are written? Who will give, and they are printed in a book—graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever? For I know that my redeemer liveth . . .”²⁴ The emphasis on “giving” that comes along with this translation of the text seems to me to square

interpretation. See Michael Austin, *Re-reading Job: Understanding the Ancient World's Greatest Poem* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 103–17.

23. Commentaries focus, *ad nauseum*, on the theologically immaterial details: Is “written” quite right, or should it be rendered “carved”? Certainly “printed” should be replaced by something less anachronistic! Is it quite appropriate to speak of “books” at the time? How should the word behind “iron pen” be translated? What curious technique lies behind the mention of “lead”? Is “rock” meant to point to a stela, a simple stone inscription, a cliff wall, or what? And so on.

24. In English, see Wyclif’s translation, as well as the Douay Rheims Bible, among the earlier translations. Note also that both the Septuagint (Greek) and the Vulgate (Latin) translated the Hebrew literally in their renderings, among the ancient sources. One might justifiably object, however, that experts in Hebrew grammar universally note that the use of *my ytn* in Job 19:23 is in a late, attenuated form and so should not be taken literally. See Wilheml Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (Mineola, New York: Dover, 2006), 476–77; B. Jongeling, “L’expression *my ytn* dans l’ancien testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974): 32–40; and Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 257. In response, however, one might suggest, with Dermot Cox, that the author of Job “prescinds from [standard] Hebrew usage,” and that, at any rate, “no creative writer—much less a poet—holds himself bound to strict grammatical usage.” Dermot Cox, *The Triumph of Impotence* (Rome: Università Gregoriana), 34.

nically with the larger theme of grace that, on my reading, characterizes the whole Book of Job.

Now, what words does Job want written? Traditionally, readers have assumed that the testimony of verses 25–27 (“I know that my redeemer liveth,” etc.) is what Job wishes to have inscribed in a book. More modern interpreters, however, generally agree that the words to be written are actually all of Job’s words, everything he says in the course of the whole Book of Job—his consistent case for his own innocence.²⁵ This more modern approach calls for a reworking of the relationship between verses 23–24 on the one hand, and verses 25–27 on the other. Various models have been proposed,²⁶ but the most intriguing, in my opinion, takes the connection to be causal: Job’s awareness of the advent of an advocate (verses 25–27) makes him desirous to begin assembling a dossier of his innocence, a written record of his defense that then could be used by that advocate in court with God (verses 23–24).²⁷ That approach makes Job’s “Who will give . . . ?” sound a bit more hopeful than it appears at first.²⁸ Perhaps the implicit answer to Job’s “Who will give . . . ?” is not, in the end, “No one!”

And indeed, is it not clear that the answer to Job’s question or cry cannot actually be “No one!” for the simple fact that his words *have* been written? We only know of Job’s desire to have his words written because that desire, along with Job’s words more generally, has indeed been printed in a book. Commentators, of course, generally recognize this irony, though

25. See, for example, David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (Waco: Word Books, 1989), 456.

26. See Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1866), 354; H. Torczyner, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1941), 302–4; and Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary Press, 1978), 204.

27. For this interpretation, see Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 303: “Job wants more than ‘words’ recorded; he wants the details of the case which justifies his innocence publicly recorded. Job’s final cry in 31:35 is a challenge to God, his adversary at law, to follow suit and also write down the particulars of his legal case against Job. Job’s written testimony would be available for his defender to utilize when he rose to support Job’s case (v. 25).” Note that other texts in Job make clear that God in heaven, against whom Job’s advocate will be arguing, has already written out an indictment against Job.

28. Commentators generally see Job’s cry as indicative of complete despair. See, in particular, Cox, *The Triumph of Impotence*, 34–35.

they do not, I believe, probe its significance enough.²⁹ Job's written wish to have his words written deserves far more attention, particularly if, as commentators universally claim, the speeches in the Book of Job are inventions by the book's author, not the actual words spoken in the course of whatever historical events lie behind the text.³⁰ If the writer (or writers) of Job's discourses produced them whole cloth, then there was never a real gap between the "expression" of Job's desire to have his words written and the actual putting of his words into writing.³¹ Job's wish, in a word, was fulfilled in its very expression. And this is, I believe, essential—rather than incidental—to the purposes of the text. It is not, I suspect, something unintended by the author (or authors) that only "we moderns" recognize.

One way—an unmistakably theological way—of sorting out the difficulty posed by this irony would be to suggest that Job had reference,

29. See Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 257: "The irony is, of course, that Job's words *are* written, are nothing but written"; Robert D. Sacks, *The Book of Job with Commentary: A Translation for Our Time* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 191: "When one reads this verse, it is hard not to be aware of the fact that there was a[t] least one man who did in fact provide that place. The Book of Job lies open before us"; Habel, *The Book of Job*, 303: "Ironically, it was not a stone witness but the book that bears Job's name which survived to clear his name"; and Strahan, quoted in Clines, *Job 1–20*, 456: "Yet how splendidly his idea has been realized! His singular fancy of a testimony 'in the rocks' could not be gratified, but he has his *apologia* . . . 'in a book' which is the masterpiece of Hebrew poetic genius."

30. Because some Latter-day Saints argue, on the basis of D&C 121:10, that the Book of Job is entirely historical, it is necessary to say a word about the historicity of the Book of Job. First, it should be noted that a mere mention of Job in a divine communication to Joseph Smith does not amount to a confirmation of historicity in any sense. Still more, the First Presidency, when asked about the historicity of Job in 1922, officially stated that the historicity of the Book of Job "is of little significance" next to "what is set forth therein." See Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 283. Though a good case can be made that there is a historical kernel behind the literary Book of Job, the reader is certainly not meant to believe a scribe sat near Job and his friends, copying down every poetic word. Whatever historical reality lies behind the Book of Job, the canonical text is largely the work of poetic invention. For a good, moderate Mormon take on Job's historicity, see John S. Tanner, "Why Latter-day Saints Should Read Job: An Exegesis on Suffering, Endurance, and Revelation," *Sunstone* 78 (August 1990): 38–47.

31. Only if Job actually said the words in Job 19:23–25 would there be any real gap between wish and fulfillment.

when he spoke of writing, to something other than mechanical transcription of what he otherwise communicated orally. That is, if we give real force both to Job's expressed desire and to the too-obvious fulfillment of the too-obvious interpretation of the meaning of that expressed desire, we might conclude that when Job says he desires his words to be written, he cannot mean that he desires to have his words written in the shape they appear in the Book of Job. There is, it is worth suggesting, *some other kind of writing* to which Job has reference, or at least *something more about the act of writing than mere transcription* that Job has in mind. Job might be said, given the emphatic "now" of his plea ("Who will give *now* . . .?"), to be gesturing not only toward a *redeemer* still-to-come, but just as much to a *writing* still-to-come. Job and the author (or authors) of the Book of Job are together in search of another writing, if not—to be a bit playful—in search of a writing of the other.³²

It might sound here as if I am transitioning to the language of "post-modern" thought—perhaps in particular that of Jacques Derrida—and thus preparing to mingle my reading of scripture with what is regarded as the most dangerous (or at least the silliest) of the philosophies of men. Actually, a Derridean reading of the text would be interesting and, I think, fruitful, but it is not one that I care to pursue here.³³ My aim, as I have been saying from the beginning, is to read Job's words in a distinctly Mormon way. Consequently, it seems to me necessary to read Job's "Who will give . . .?" against the commentators' grain, taking it as an indication not of Job's ineluctable despair, but of his unmistakable hope—hope in the possibility of a sort of writing still-to-come that will give his coming redeemer to redeem him.

In the first half of this paper I mentioned, but said nothing substantial about, the unique theology of writing that is not only to be found in the

32. Note that the redeemer is actually described in verse 25, in the Hebrew, as the *aharon*, quite literally "the other." (The word, quite problematically, is translated in the KJV as "latter day," a phrase that usually translates two words in Hebrew, one of them related to *aharon*, but neither reducible to it: *aharit hayammim*.)

33. Regarding Derrida, it is necessary to mention: James G. Williams, "On Job and Writing: Derrida, Girard, and the Remedy-Poison," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 7, no. 1 (1993): 32–50. In my opinion, Williams's piece is not very productive. Despite the fact that it does take the passage I am considering here as central to the Book of Job, it does so from the perspective of a certain interpretation of the work of René Girard, an interpretation that I think Girard himself finds problematic. I find the essay's conclusions less than persuasive.

Book of Mormon (and subsequently in the Doctrine and Covenants), but also seems to have guided Joseph Smith's work in translating the Bible. At this point all that becomes quite relevant. Making reference to one of the earliest texts Joseph Smith produced in his work on the Bible, Hugh Nibley connects a certain Mormon concept of writing with the theme of the gift toward which Job points with his "Who will give . . .?": "If Joseph Smith was right, books and writing are a gift to man from heaven, 'for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration' (Moses 6:5). The art of writing was a special dispensation, an inestimable boon."³⁴ To echo Job, the Restoration as Joseph Smith understood it was founded on the granting of just such a divinely bestowed gift of another writing. Everything began, in the words of (the original version of) an early revelation, with "a gift to translate the book," and Joseph was "commanded" to "pretend to no other gift," since God would "grant him no other gift."³⁵ Joseph began his work this way, and he never left off doing so. Indeed, by 1842 Joseph was speaking more radically of "a very bold doctrine," namely, the idea that there is in the priesthood "a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven," thus a coupling of "authority" with keeping "a proper and faithful record" such that the priesthood had the power to produce what would become "a law on earth and in heaven, and could not be annulled, according to the decrees of the great Jehovah" (D&C 128:9). These themes are more than relevant to Job 19:23–25a, but how exactly might they guide interpretation of that passage?

First, I think it is necessary to pay attention to the connections between Job 19:23–25a and two other passages in the Book of Job, connections often noted by commentators. The first of these passages, Job 16:18–22, finds Job pleading in a vein similar to that of Job 19:23–25a: "O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place. Also now, behold, *my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high*. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour! When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return" (emphasis mine). Here, as in chapter 19, Job speaks of his words being written, but the phrasing makes clear that the record referred to in chapter 16 is *already* written ("my record *is* on high") and is to be found *in heaven* ("my record is *on high*"). The record referred to in chapter 16 is, then, ap-

34. Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond this Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 462.

35. See Book of Commandments 4:2; cf. D&C 5:2–4. See also Moses 6:7.

parently *already* in the hands of the redeemer or advocate later mentioned in chapter 19. Is it too much to suggest that when these two texts are read together, the implication is that in chapter 19 Job is actually asking for an *earthly* copy of the already existent *heavenly* text mentioned in chapter 16? Perhaps what Job desires in chapter 19 is less an earthly—and therefore necessarily fragmented—transcription of what has been said in the course of the dialogues than a kind of *translation* into earthly terms of a heavenly—and therefore necessarily complete—record of what has taken place. If this interpretation is not entirely amiss (and I confess that it is largely guided by what I am calling the Mormon theology of writing), then it seems that the anticipated advent of Job’s advocate, described in chapter 19, would mark as much the arrival of the heavenly record as of the person carrying it, upon which arrival Job could compare his earthly copy of the heavenly book with its original, thus being fully vindicated.

The second connection is with Job 31:35–36: “Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that *mine adversary had written a book*. Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, and bind it as a crown to me” (emphasis mine). At first, Job’s desire here appears to be the reversal of that expressed in 19:23–27. He says now that he wants not his *advocate* but his *adversary* to produce a full record of what has happened. But reflection clarifies the point. In the end, Job wants his advocate-to-come to have access *both* to his own earthly copy of what has already been written in heaven—a copy whose accuracy, Job avers, would be fully vindicated through comparison with the heavenly copy carried in hand by the arriving advocate—and to the corrupt accusation written up by his adversary, the corruption of which could be detected in an instant when it too is compared with the heavenly record brought in its purity. In a word, Job seems to desire that his advocate have full access to every earthly account of his sufferings, both that produced by the defense and that produced by the prosecution, in order to present them, side by side with the heavenly “original,” before the judge—before the judge who will sit at the last days when the earthly books will be opened to be compared with the singular, incorruptible book of life brought from heaven.³⁶

By bringing these two parallel texts from Job to the table, I am continuing the work of linking Job 19:23–25a with distinctly Mormon ideas. It is not difficult to see how Job’s desire might echo certain ideas in the Doctrine and Covenants (particularly sections 85 and 128), ideas con-

36. See Revelation 20:12–15 and commentary in D&C 128:2–7.

cerning the matching up of an infinite proliferation of conflicting records on earth with the single and complete book of life kept in heaven. *And* it is not difficult to see how Job’s desire might echo certain ideas in the Book of Mormon (particularly in 2 Nephi 25–30), ideas concerning the sudden appearance of an untainted record that changes the stakes of the religious situation drastically at a time when all the relevant records are brought together to formulate a single massive world history.³⁷ At any rate, I would like to suggest that Job 19:23–25a be read in light of the conviction, presented and developed at length in uniquely Mormon scripture, that an eschatological event yet lies on the horizon during which a kind of reconciliation of earthly and heavenly records is to be worked out, a kind of final “adjustment” that will ensure that everything actually *is* on earth as it is in heaven.

All of this, then, clarifies what I take to be the anticipated *gift* in Job’s plea. What, though, can be said about the giver in question? Job does not simply ask for a gift. He does not ask, “Will it be given, and my words are written?” Rather, he asks also and more directly about the *identity* of the giver: “Who will give now, and my words are written?” In whom is Job’s hope here? It seems clear, of course, that the giver of verses 23–24 is the redeemer or advocate of verses 25–27. But is it so clear who that redeemer or advocate is meant to be? I have already mentioned the traditional Christian interpretation that takes the redeemer in question to be Jesus Christ, as if Job were looking out from his sufferings to the enactor of every manifestation of grace. As I said before, that is not an entirely unjustified interpretation. I want, however, to suggest another way—a distinctly Mormon way—of making sense of Job’s words. In order to address the identity of the giver in question, though, it will be necessary to turn from the Nephite theology of writing to what I called above the unique messianic theology outlined by the same Nephites in the Book of Mormon. As before I had to say a bit more about the theology of writing, it is now necessary to say a bit more about Nephite messianism.

It has long been recognized that there is something strange about the Book of Mormon’s presentation of a fully Christian but nonetheless supposedly pre-Christian history. The specificity with which the Nephites anticipated the events of the Christian revelation is startling enough to lead rather straightforwardly to derision on the part of critics of the Book

37. See Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Book of Mormon in Early Mormon History,” in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 65–78.

of Mormon, and even to lead faithful readers of the Book of Mormon on occasion to produce theories of translation that leave substantially more of the final form of the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith than the strictly orthodox position has traditionally held to be the case.³⁸ On the other hand, most orthodox Latter-day Saints have taken the fully developed Christianity of the pre-Christian Nephites to be perfectly natural, just another manifestation of the straightforward plainness of the Book of Mormon vis-à-vis the relative obscurity of the Old Testament anticipations of Christ.

Both the critical (or semi-heterodox) and traditional reactions to the Book of Mormon, however, seem to me to miss the theological richness of what the Book of Mormon sets forth.³⁹ Working from a Pauline Christian theology several centuries before Paul was even born, let alone began his fateful journey on the road to Damascus, the Nephites—even before Christ came—arguably looked forward *from*, rather than looked forward *to*, the Messiah. Or, in more strictly Nephite language, the Nephites were taught “to *look forward unto the Messiah . . . as though he already was*” (Jarom 1:11; emphasis mine). King Benjamin puts it this way: “the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets . . . that thereby whosoever should believe that *Christ should come*, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, *even as though he had already come among them*” (Mosiah 3:13; emphases mine). And Abinadi was happy simply to speak of “things *to come* as though *they had already come*” (16:6, emphases mine).

Nephite messianism was thus, even before the coming of the Messiah, the messianism of a completed eschatology—of an *always already* completed eschatology. The Lamb was, for the Nephites, indeed slain from the foundation of the world. Nephite messianism—*Mormon* messianism—works forward from a projected-but-already-(in-some-sense)-ful-

38. The most frequently cited example of this position is, of course, Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 66–123. More recent and more developed, however, is Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

39. A very productive approach to this difficulty, though quite distinct from the one I set forth here, can be found in Adam Miller, “Messianic History: Walter Benjamin and the Book of Mormon,” in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities*, ed. James M. McLaughlan and Loyd Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 227–45.

filled-messianic-event, rather than, as in traditional messianism, toward a projected-but-always-mysteriously-deferred-messianic-event.

Now, coming back to Job, the question I would like to ask is whether it might be worth claiming that Job's plea-and-testimony issue from the conviction of a Nephite messianism, rather than from the conviction of a traditional messianism. And I want to suggest that what Job anticipates in the form of a redeemer or advocate is not, on a strictly Mormon reading, the Messiah. If what Job anticipates—as I have argued in this emphatically theological, speculative reading—is an event in which there is a kind of final adjustment of records, then it seems clear to me that he anticipates, not the arrival of the Messiah, but the arrival of *another* eschatological figure, the one the Doctrine and Covenants describes as “one mighty and strong”: the Ancient of Days, the oldest man, Adam or Michael.

Section 85 of the Doctrine and Covenants—in which the reference to the “one mighty and strong” appears—has a rather turbulent history of interpretation.⁴⁰ But despite all of the wildly speculative identifications of the “one mighty and strong,” it does not seem difficult to me to figure out who Joseph Smith understood him to be. The mighty and strong one who is going to show up eschatologically to fix the records concerning Zion is none other than Adam, and the event thus predicted is what Joseph Smith consistently referred to as Adam-ondi-Ahman.⁴¹ It is Adam or Michael who will, according to Joseph, come to set in order the inheritances in Zion, whose appearance is described as being the occasion for a balancing of the earthly records with the heavenly record. It thus seems to me quite possible to suggest—from an irremediably Mormon perspective—that Job not only looked out from his sufferings to an event not unlike Adam-ondi-Ahman as Joseph Smith understood it, but more specifically that he placed his hopes for *vindication* in such an appearance of Father Adam, whose task it would be to assume the responsibility for all the translated “books of the dead” as he brought with him the “book of life.” This reading is unmistakably speculative, but it is so, I hope, in the way that Joseph Smith's readings of biblical texts were unmistakably speculative.

40. See Brian C. Hales, “John T. Clark: The ‘One Mighty and Strong,’” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 46–63.

41. The best single source on what Joseph took to be at stake in Adam-ondi-Ahman is the discourse to be found in Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 8–12. In addition, however, it is necessary to take up close readings of D&C 27, D&C 85, and D&C 128.

What, though, of the Messiah? Has Christ not simply been displaced from the center of the gospel in this interpretation, as the ready accusation of certain of Mormonism's critics might well point out? Actually, I believe that Christ has not been simply excised from Job 19:23–25a in this interpretation, though he does assume a rather different position in the world set forth by the text. Christ is, on the reading I am offering here, no longer the Always-Anticipated, the Ever-Still-To-Come. But perhaps precisely for that reason he is all the more present in Job's sufferings, no longer indefinitely delayed but already present in the flesh, always already making possible the experience of life as such. Though the event in which every wrong will be righted, in which the books will finally be corrected and every deserved vindication will be granted, remains on the horizon, the sufferer experiences the grace of a present made possible precisely by the always already accomplished event of the Atonement. Whether one lives before or after the actual advent of the Messiah in the flesh, life trumps death at every moment because of the universal effects of the resurrection, and it is, according to the longest-standing Mormon interpretation of Job's words, precisely the resurrection that ultimately gives Job whatever confidence he has in his vindication to come.

Perhaps still more radically, Christ is anything but excised in this interpretation from the text of the Book of Job because the point of the book is to bring Job to recognize that he was there when Christ—along with Adam—laid the foundations of the earth. According to yet another longstanding Mormon interpretation of the Book of Job, the purpose of the divine speeches issuing from the whirlwind, with which the book concludes, is to help Job to see that he was among “all the sons of God” who “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). “Where were you, Job, when the world was created? Don't you know,” goes the Mormon reading, “that you were there? Don't you know that you were there with Adam and Eve and all their children not only to assist in the work of creation, but also to witness the slaying of the Lamb, the event that marked the laying of the very cornerstone on which the foundations of the earth were laid?” Though the event to which Job looks forward becomes, on a profoundly Mormon reading, not the event of the Messiah's coming, Christ is all the more central to the text of the Book of Job than he is in any other reading of which I am aware.

Such, at any rate, is my overdetermined and clearly speculative theological reading. But if it is overdetermined, I can only hope that it is overdetermined in more or less the same way that Joseph Smith's inter-

pretations of scripture were generally overdetermined. I might also hope, while I am at it, that Latter-day Saint interpreters of scripture today can attempt to translate the Bible with more dedicated rigor and less apologetic creativity than they have done in recent years. Sterling McMurrin could unfortunately have been speaking about the past couple of decades when he lamented almost fifty years ago that “yesterday [Mormon theology] was vigorous, prophetic, and creative” while “today it is timid and academic and prefers scholastic rationalization to the adventure of ideas.”⁴² I see no reason, however, why a rebirth of Mormon theology in the most robust sense could not take place. If it is to do so, I believe it will have to begin—as Joseph Smith began—with an attempt to make real, theological sense of scripture.

42. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 112.

