

Joseph Smith and the Gospel of Matthew

Robert L. Millet

Joseph Smith took seriously his divine charge to search and expound the scriptures, knowing the import of the Lord's words that "this generation shall have my word through you" (D&C 5:10). From his experience as a youth with James, chapter 1, to the time of his martyrdom, he was a man of deep spiritual insight, one who loved the Bible and delighted in making plain those passages which had particular relevance to Latter-day Saint doctrine. That he was one of the great biblical minds of his day is evident in his sermons, discourses frequently interspersed with biblical passages and built around the explication of biblical texts. The King Follett Sermon, delivered in April 1844, reveals the Prophet at the zenith of his ministry and gives us a glimpse of the depth of his understanding. This funeral address includes prophetic commentary on such passages as Genesis 1 (the creation of man), John 17:3 (what it means to attain eternal life), John 5:26 (the Son to have the power of the Father), Isaiah 33:14 (rising to dwell in everlasting burnings), Matthew 12:32 (the unpardonable sin), and John 14:1–2 (the "many mansions" of the Father). We are left to ponder the likelihood that only a fraction of Joseph's knowledge was ever given to the Church, largely because the people were not able to bear what Wilford Woodruff termed the veritable "flood of intelligence which God poured into his mind." President Woodruff spoke of Joseph's mind as being "opened by the visions of the Almighty," and explained that "the Lord taught him many things by vision and revelation that were never taught publicly in his days."¹ Much of what we *have* received from the Prophet, however, came as a result of his prayerful consideration of passages in the Bible.

JOSEPH SMITH'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

Robert J. Matthews has given us a clearer insight into the fact that Joseph Smith regarded his study and translation of the King James Bible

Robert L. Millet is an assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

¹*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855–56), 5:83–84.

as a “branch of his calling.” Further, Matthews has shown that the lengthy process from translation through reworking to final publication of Joseph’s work with the Bible was a key factor in the unfolding of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine:

Familiarity with the facts and the history of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible shows that it was the means by which many important doctrines of the gospel were revealed to the Prophet. He was translating the Bible, not because he already knew the answers and doctrines, but because by the process and experience of the translation he would learn things important for him to know.²

In a similar vein, George Q. Cannon observed:

Joseph did not live to give to the world an authoritative publication of these translations. But the labor was its own reward, bringing in the performance a special blessing of broadened comprehension to the Prophet and a general blessing of enlightenment to the people through his subsequent teachings.³

The earliest date of biblical translation given in any of Joseph Smith’s records is June 1830, when he commented on receiving “‘line upon line of knowledge—here a little and there a little,’ of which the following was a precious morsel.”⁴ Joseph then recorded the visions of Moses. In December the Prophet recorded the call, preparation, and ministry of Enoch. He continued working on the Old Testament until 7 March 1831, when he received what became chapter 48 of the *Book of Commandments* (compare D&C 45), instructing him to translate the New Testament before proceeding any further with the Old Testament. The manuscript of Joseph’s work with Matthew, chapter 1, is dated 8 March 1831. To that point, he had translated through Genesis 19:35. He and his scribe, Sidney Rigdon, worked on Matthew (1:1–9:2) and Genesis simultaneously until 5 April. From 7 April to 19 June, they concentrated their attention on Matthew (9:2–26:71a) and after a short break continued working into September, when the translation of the first Gospel was completed.⁵ In all, the Prophet changed 483 verses in Matthew, the most alterations he made in any book of the Bible except for Genesis (662) and Luke (563). The changes all seem to fall within the four categories suggested by Robert Matthews: (1) restoration of content once written by biblical authors but since deleted; (2) a record

²Robert Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, a History and Commentary* (Provo: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 1975), xxxi.

³George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972), 148.

⁴Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957–60), 1:98.

⁵Matthews, “A Plainer Translation,” 96.

of historical events not recorded before, or recorded but not included within the biblical collection; (3) inspired prophetic commentary, in which Joseph Smith enlarged, elaborated, or adapted passages to a latter-day situation; and (4) harmonization of doctrinal concepts revealed to the Prophet independently of the translation, by which he was able to recognize biblical inaccuracies.⁶

FOCUS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Latter-day Saints affirm that the author of the first Gospel was Matthew (Levi) the publican, chosen by Jesus as one of the original Twelve Apostles. His would have been in close association with the Master, and thus his recollections of events and sayings of Christ are of inestimable worth. His task was to record his testimony and frame it into what we have come to call a "Gospel." Donald Senior has reminded us that the Gospels

are not designed to be historical chronicles or a series of pages from a family album. Instead, they are a *testimony of faith* about the meaning of Jesus Christ for believers. This obviously does not negate the historical basis of the gospel story. Fundamental to Christian belief is the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth who lived and died is the same resurrected Jesus who is revealed to be the foundation of hope and life.⁷

Like any other writer, inspired or uninspired, Matthew has a particular message and style and format which characterize his work, and he may appropriately be studied in light of some of his more evident literary characteristics. Matthew's Gospel is shaped by such factors as his own background, the audience to which his work is primarily addressed, and the needs of the Church at that day. Recognition of these factors, however, should not lead us to interpretive extremes. It has become popular in recent years, with the rise of Redaction Criticism, to overemphasize the redactional (editorial) role of the Gospel writers. Many critics have gone to great lengths to depict Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as not only molding but also manipulating the tradition and history concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Such a position is both unsubstantiated and unnecessary. It is better, in my view, to assume that Matthew was preparing a literary document that was at the same time firmly grounded in historical fact.

Though a number of contributions are exclusively Matthean, this study will focus on the impact of Joseph Smith's translation (JST) on

⁶Ibid., 253.

⁷Donald Senior, *Matthew: A Gospel for the Church* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 13.

three major themes in the Gospel of Matthew: (1) Matthew as the Gospel of the Church, (2) Jesus' denunciation of Judaism, and (3) Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel.

MATTHEW AS THE GOSPEL OF THE CHURCH

Matthew's is the only Gospel in the New Testament to use the term *church* (Greek *ekklesia*) in referring to the organized community of believers. The key reference occurs in the account of Jesus' discussion with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi. When Peter testifies of Christ's divine Sonship, the Master replies that this knowledge is of divine origin and then goes on to speak of the Church and its leadership. The significance of Matthew's treatment of this event can be grasped by simply viewing the synoptics in parallel:

Matt. 16:16–20:

16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

20. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

Mark 8:29–30:

29. . . . And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

30. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

Luke 9:20–21:

20. . . . Peter answering said, The Christ of God.

21. And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing

The keys or right of presidency by which the Church of Jesus Christ was to be established, the means by which ordinances were to be performed, and the authorization to make converts and seal them into a family order were all received by the chief Apostles from Jesus and heavenly ministrants. It appears that on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah restored the keys of the gathering of Israel, as well as the sacred sealing power (Matt. 17:1–8; compare D&C 110). Matthew, chapter 18, contains further instructions for the regulation of the

Church: the need for conversion (verses 1–5), the importance of removing harmful elements from the members’ lives and thus from the Church (verses 7–9), member activation (verses 12–14), the resolving of differences between individual Saints (verses 15–17), and the need for genuine forgiveness (verses 21–35). The instructions regarding the resolution of differences between members (compare similar instructions in D&C 42:84–92) conclude with this matter of policy: “And if he [the accused] shall neglect to hear them [persons to assist or serve as witnesses], *tell it unto the church*: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” (Matt. 18:17; emphasis added).

There seemed to be no doubt in the mind of the Prophet Joseph Smith that Jesus had come to earth to do more than articulate ethical principles or even to reveal strong doctrine; the Master came as a legal administrator and reestablished the kingdom of God—the Church of Jesus Christ.⁸ This church (through the holy priesthood) administered the gospel and through the establishment of standards and commandments sought to structure the lives of the Saints in strait and narrow ways. The need for *commandments* within the community of Christians is an important insight and contribution of the Joseph Smith translation. Note the concluding verse of Matthew, chapter 5, in the Sermon on the Mount, as given in the JST: “Ye are therefore *commanded* to be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” Note also the following bit of counsel to the disciples during the same sermon:

Matt. 6:26, KJV:

26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Matt. 6:29–30, JST:

29. Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? *How much more will he not feed you?*

30. *Wherefore take no thought for these things, but keep my commandments wherewith I have commanded you.*

(Emphasis added.)

The occasion of the healing of the two blind men provides another opportunity for us to see the emergence of this theme in the Joseph Smith translation:

⁸See *History of the Church*, 5:258–59.

Matt. 9:29–30, KJV:

29. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

30. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

Matt. 9:35–36, JST:

35. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it unto you.

36. And their eyes were opened; and straitly he charged them, saying, *Keep my commandments, and see ye tell no man in this place, that no man know it.*

(Emphasis added.)

It was not enough for the healed men to keep the miracle a secret; they had to *keep the commandments* to be a part of the community of believers.

Jesus enunciates the cost of discipleship in an important discourse to his followers, just after Peter's confession. The Lord here defines what it means for one to "take up his cross":

Matt. 16:24–26, KJV:

24. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Matt. 16:25–29, JST:

25. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.

26. *And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.*

27. *Break not my commandments for to save your lives;* for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it *in the world to come.*

28. And whosoever will lose his life *in this world*, for my sake, shall find it *in the world to come.*

29. *Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls;* for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? . . .

(Emphasis added.)

Keeping the commandments established by the Lord through the Church is also accomplished through submitting to the priesthood ordinances. The ordinances of salvation are channels by which the "power of godliness" is manifest unto men in the flesh (D&C 84:20–21). It is not enough for an individual to come to Christ through His teachings or example alone; one is expected to "subscribe

the articles of adoption” to be fully born again into the Church and kingdom of God.⁹ Note how the Savior begins the Sermon on the Mount in the Joseph Smith translation:

Matt. 5:1–2, KJV:

1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up unto a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Matt. 5:1–4, JST:

1. And *Jesus*, seeing the multitudes went up into a mountain; and when he was set *down*, his disciples came unto him:

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3. *Blessed are they who shall believe on me; and again, more blessed are they who shall believe on your words, when ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that I am.*

4. *Yea, blessed are they who shall believe on your words, and come down into the depth of humility, and be baptized in my name; for they shall be visited with fire and the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.*

(Emphasis added.)

This counsel to come unto Christ through ordinances as well as attitude is repeated by the Lord to his Nephite disciples after his resurrection (3 Ne. 12:1–2).

Tied with this principle is the doctrine of accountability, that “all men must repent and be baptized, and not only men, but women, and children who have arrived at the years of accountability” (D&C 18:42). The Joseph Smith translation makes it plain that Jesus considered little children to be spiritually whole from the foundation of the world and thus not in need of baptism or confirmation:

⁹Ibid., 6:58.

Matt. 18:10–11, KJV:

10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

11. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Matt. 18:10–11, JST:

10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.

11. For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost, *and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them.*

(Emphasis added.)

These words are consistent with the counsel in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 3:16; Moro. 8), the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 20:71; 29:46; 68:25–27), and also principles Joseph had learned about accountability while translating Genesis (Gen. 17:11, JST).

The Joseph Smith translation of Matthew makes it clear that those called to preach the gospel were expected to be far more than spiritual Paul Reveres, rushing through the streets screaming, “The kingdom is coming, the kingdom is coming!” Preparation for the Christ and his kingdom includes receiving his representatives and then submitting to the first principles. Further evidence of this is to be found in the verse added to the passage in the Sermon on the Mount in which the Lord is giving his disciples their charge: “Go ye into the world, saying unto all, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come nigh unto you*” (Matt. 7:9, JST; emphasis added).

Finally, the Joseph Smith translation makes it clear that the Church exists not only to administer the gospel through the ordinances but also to see to it that those within the Church live lives consistent with the high standards set by Christ. This is apparent in chapter 18:

Matt. 18:9, KJV:

9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Matt. 18:8–9, JST:

8. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

9. *And a man’s hand is his friend, and his foot, also; and a man’s eye, are they of his own household.*

(Emphasis added.)

These changes in Matthew mirror those in the Joseph Smith translation of Mark, which are even more dramatic:

Mark 9:40–44, JST:

40. Therefore, if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; or if thy brother offend thee and confess not and forsake not, he shall be cut off. . . .

42. And again, if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; for he that is thy standard, by whom thou walkest, if he become a transgressor, he shall be cut off. . . .

44. Therefore, let every man stand or fall, by himself, and not for another. . . .

The Prophet's changes define what it means to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand: excommunication or severance from the body of Christ was occasionally necessary to maintain the purity of the Church.

JESUS' DENUNCIATION OF JUDAISM

Judaism as it existed from the time of Lehi to the days of Christ was described in a masterful way by a Book of Mormon prophet. "The Jews," wrote Jacob, "were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand" (Jacob 4:14). The tendency of Jewish leaders to engage in the esoteric and to joy in the mysterious was perhaps not unrelated to their omission of what the Lord called the "weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matt. 23:23). They had perverted the law of Moses through confusing tokens with covenants, ritual with religion, means with ends. Jesus came as the pure fulfillment of the Law and sought to heal the spiritual blindness which had come from "looking beyond the mark" (Jacob 4:14). In the words of one student of the New Testament, Christ "demanded a righteousness that exceeded the standard of Jewish legalism, for it was inward not outward; spontaneous, not legalistic; gauged by a person, and not by a code."¹⁰ Jesus was a Jew, and he certainly knew and taught that the Jews were the children of promise. "But," as one Roman Catholic scholar has pointed out, "this awareness of Israel's special status as the chosen people is coupled with an uncompromising critique that scores Israel's rejection of Jesus and its consequent loss of the promise."¹¹

¹⁰Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 146.

¹¹Senior, *Matthew*, 72; for a more detailed study of the role of the JST in unveiling the Jews of Christ's day, see Robert L. Millet, "Looking beyond the Mark: Insights from the JST into First Century Judaism," in Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet, eds., *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things* (Provo: Brigham Young Univ. Religious Studies Center, 1985), 201–14.

In the eighth chapter of Matthew is found the story of the healing of a centurion's son. Here was a Gentile who demonstrated a faith greater than any manifest among the children of Israel at the time of the Master. Jesus closes this episode by stating that "many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but *the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness*: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:11-12; emphasis added; compare the account in Luke 7:1-10 and note the different context). In the scathing parable of the wicked husbandman, Matthew departs from the other synoptic Gospels in his addition of one verse which makes explicit the point of the parable: "Therefore say I unto you, *The kingdom of God shall be taken from you*, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43; emphasis added; compare Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18).

Chapter 23 of Matthew is one entire sermon denouncing the ostentation and pretense of the Pharisees and scribes. More than in any other place in the New Testament record, the Savior here unleashes his righteous indignation upon a works-righteous assembly of Jewish leaders possessed of a perverted piety, calling them *hypocrites* (seven times), *fools*, *blind guides*, *whited sepulchres*, *serpents*, and *a generation of vipers*.

The Joseph Smith translation is even more clear that Jesus challenged the Jewish intellectuals of his day with a call to a higher righteousness. In addition, he questioned their authority, their right to teach and guide the masses in accordance with their narrow interpretation of the Law. The Jewish leaders were deeply schooled in the commentaries of the Law but lacked the animation that comes with the Spirit of God. Consequently they misinterpreted the "signs of the times" and failed to recognize him by whom the Law had been given anciently. Their preaching, therefore, was empty, their impact on the soul fleeting. Jesus was different. He "taught them *as one having authority from God, and not as having authority from the Scribes*" (Matt. 7:28, JST; emphasis added).

Some of the most important alterations made by the Prophet are in the Sermon on the Mount. The section on judging righteously, in chapter 7, is followed by a denunciation of the scribes, Pharisees, priests, and Levites:

Matt. 7:4–5, KJV:

4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Matt. 7:5–8, JST:

5. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and *canst not* behold a beam in thine own eye?

6. *And Jesus said unto his disciples, Beholdest thou the Scribes, and the Pharisees, and the Priests, and the Levites? They teach in their synagogues, but do not observe the law, nor the commandments; and all have gone out of the way, and are under sin.*

7. *Go thou and say unto them, Why teach ye men the law and the commandments, when ye yourselves are the children of corruption?*

8. *Say unto them, Ye hypocrites, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

(Emphasis added.)

Here we learn that the experts in the Law were also the greatest offenders of the Law. Joseph Smith made a similar insertion later in the same chapter:

Matt. 7:7-9, KJV:

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Matt. 7:12-18, JST:

12. *Say unto them, Ask of God; ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

13. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and *unto* him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

14. *And then said his disciples unto him, they will say unto us, We ourselves are righteous, and need not that any man should teach us. God, we know, heard Moses and some of the prophets; but us he will not hear.*

15. *And they will say, We have the law for our salvation, and that is sufficient for us.*

16. *Then Jesus answered, and said unto his disciples, thus shall ye say unto them,*

17. *What man among you, having a son, and he shall be standing out, and shall say, Father, open thy house that I may come in and sup with thee, will not say, Come in, my son; for mine is thine, and thine is mine?*

18. Or what man is there among you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone?

(Emphasis added.)

This is an unusual passage. The disciples seem hesitant to approach a people who are content with their lives centered in and bound to the Law. But the disciples have a message to deliver, a message of spiritual import, to be understood and received only by the Spirit through prayer. Jesus thus explains to the disciples (as modern missionaries would be taught today) that investigators must ask of God to know the truthfulness of the divine message. Evidently the Jews of the first century had fallen into a pathetic state of blindness (compare

Jacob 4:14) perfectly characterized by the attitude: “God, we know, heard Moses and some of the prophets; but *us he will not hear*.” Jesus had to instruct his devoted followers to remember that the Eternal Father is infinitely more willing to give and to speak than the greatest mortal. Interestingly enough, the JST also provides a smoother transition between verses six (“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs”) and seven (“Ask, and it shall be given you”) than we find in the KJV.

Jesus not only condemned the Pharisees and scribes for their myopic mindset, but he also demanded with the introduction of the New and Everlasting Covenant of the gospel that *all* persons enter into the true Church through an *authorized* baptism:

Matt. 9:15–16, KJV:

15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.
16. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

Matt. 9:16–22, JST:

16. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?
17. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.
18. *Then said the Pharisees unto him, Why will ye not receive us with our baptism, seeing we keep the whole law?*
19. *But Jesus said unto them, Ye keep not the law. If ye had kept the law, ye would have received me, for I am he who gave the law.*
20. *I receive not you with your baptism, because it profiteth you nothing.*
21. *For when that which is new is come, the old is ready to be put away.*
22. For no man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up, taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

(Emphasis added.)

The Joseph Smith translation provides a fascinating background for the Savior’s otherwise abstruse words concerning cloth and bottles. A similar resistance was encountered by Joseph Smith at the time of the organization of the latter-day Church. The Lord’s message was as timely in A.D. 30 as in 1830:

Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing, for *you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the law of Moses, neither by your dead works. For it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old.* Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God. (D&C 22:2-4; emphasis added.)

JESUS AS THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO ISRAEL

The Gospel of Matthew was written by a man intent on building a bridge between the old covenant and the new, or between what we call the two Testaments. Like the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, he testified that "none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ" (Jacob 7:11). Merrill C. Tenney in his discussion of Matthew points out how the book is developed in such a way as to demonstrate that the person of Jesus of Nazareth is the total and complete fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets:

The Gospel of Matthew was written to show how Jesus of Nazareth enlarged and explained the revelation which had been begun in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Although it is strongly Jewish in its character, it was written also for the benefit of Gentiles, since the final commission enjoined the Twelve to make disciples "of all the nations" (28:19). If it were originally composed for the benefit of the church at Antioch, where Gentile converts first came together in large numbers, the reason for its character would be plain. Matthew was seeking to show to these converts the meaning of Jesus' ministry in terms of the Old Testament which their Jewish colleagues believed, and from which they themselves had been taught.¹²

One of the most important Matthean stylistic peculiarities is the use of what are called "formula citations" of scripture, such as "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying . . . "; or "for thus it is written by the prophet . . . "; or "then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet. . . ." Matthew uses this method of relating the Old and New Testaments as many as fourteen times in his Gospel, eight of which are citations of the prophet Isaiah. Although there was continual reference during the years of early Christianity to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies, no other Gospel writer applies this device as insistently as

¹²Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, 150.

does Matthew. John uses nine formulas, but five of them speak in very broad terms concerning “the fulfillment of scripture.”¹³

Matthew no doubt used these formulas to attract the attention of Jews who still awaited a Messiah. He sought to declare with boldness that the Messiah had come and that they should “believe the gospel, and look not for a Messiah to come who has already come” (D&C 19:27). For the most part, however, as Raymond E. Brown maintains, the formula citations had a “didactic purpose, informing the Christian readers and giving support to their faith. Some of the citations are attached to the minutiae of Jesus’ career, as if to emphasize that the whole of Jesus’ life, down to the least detail, lay within God’s foreordained plan.”¹⁴

As with the other themes we have been examining, the Joseph Smith translation gives additional emphasis to this one as well. According to the JST, Jesus spoke clearly and directly to Simon and Andrew when he called them to their ministry: “*I am he of whom it is written by the prophets; follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matt. 4:18, JST; emphasis added; compare Matt. 11:3, JST). Here is an explicit witness of the fact that the Christ of whom the prophets had written was now among the people.

In the narrative of Jesus’ infancy, the JST attests to the place of Jesus as the Messiah, as well as the King. The wise men have come from the East seeking to behold the great theophany at hand. They ask, “Where is the child that is born the *Messiah* of the Jews?” (Matt. 3:2, JST; emphasis added). The Messiah (literally the “anointed one”) in many Old Testament passages *is* the King (as in the KJV), the descendant of David who will reign everlastingly (see 2 Sam. 7:12–13).

¹³Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 97, n.2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 98.

A similar clarification occurs in the account of Herod's inquiries into the rumored birth:

Matt. 2:4–6, KJV:

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6. And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Matt. 3:4–6, JST:

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests, and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, saying, *Where is the place that is written of by the prophets, in which Christ should be born? For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets.*

5. And they said unto him, *It is written by the prophets, that he should be born in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus they have said,*

6. *The word of the Lord came unto us, saying, And thou, Bethlehem, which lieth in the land of Judea, in thee shall be born a prince, which art not the least among the princes of Judea; for out of thee shall come the Messiah, who shall save my people Israel.*

(Emphasis added.)

In commenting on the above alteration, Robert J. Matthews writes:

As presented in the JST, it is not Bethlehem, but Jesus who is the prince; and he is not simply a Governor come to rule, but the Messiah come to save Israel. Surely it was Jesus (and not Bethlehem) who was the prince, for he (and not the whole village) was to inherit the throne of David and rule Israel "with judgment and with justice . . . for ever," as recorded in Isaiah 9:6–7.¹⁵

In a passage that does not occur in the KJV, the Joseph Smith translation also gives us a remarkable insight into the childhood and early training of Christ:

Matt. 3:22–27, JST (compare Matt. 2:22–3:1, KJV):

22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the stead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; but, notwithstanding, being warned of God in a *vision*, he went into the *eastern part* of Galilee;

23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

24. *And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come.*

¹⁵Robert J. Matthews, "A Greater Portrayal of the Master," *Ensign* 13 (March 1983): 9.

25. *And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.*

26. *And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh.*

27. *And in those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea. . . .*

(Emphasis added.)

These verses not only supply an excellent transition between Christ's infancy and the beginning of John's ministry (note the lack of transition in the KJV from Matt. 2:23 to 3:1), but they also point up the fact that the Lord received instructions from the heavens as well as from mortal teachers. This suggests one of the reasons Jesus, at age twelve, was spiritually adept and insightful enough to be found in the temple teaching the doctors of the Law (see Luke 2:46–47, JST).

At the close of chapter 23, the JST adds a brief section which further attests to Jesus' divine Sonship:

Matt. 23:37–39, KJV:

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Matt. 23:37–41, JST:

37. O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! *Ye who will kill the prophets, and will stone them who are sent unto you; how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.*

38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!

39. For I say unto you, that ye shall not see me henceforth, *and know that I am he of whom it is written by the prophets, until ye shall say,*

40. Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord, *in the clouds of heaven, and all the holy angels with him.*

41. *Then understood his disciples that he should come again on the earth, after that he was glorified and crowned on the right hand of God.*

(Emphasis added.)

Finally, it is only fitting that the Christ should bear witness of himself before his enemies, as the Gospel draws to a close. As Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor asked him a direct question: "Art thou the King of the Jews?" The Master answered directly: "Thou sayest truly; *for thus it is written of me*" (Matt. 27:11–12, JST). What more

could be said? Both by deed and by word, the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth had been borne: the light had shone in the darkness, and the darkness had comprehended it not.

CONCLUSION

Joseph Smith was called of God as a *translator*, as well as a prophet, seer, and revelator (D&C 21:1; 107:92; 124:125). His divine appointment gave him the right not only to declare new scripture but also the “key of knowledge,” the access to the “fulness of the scriptures” (Luke 11:53, JST). Joseph the Seer had power to interpret ancient scripture by the same Spirit that had moved upon the prophets and Apostles of earlier dispensations.¹⁶ It is often difficult for us to know when a particular alteration in the King James Version represents a restoration of lost textual material or events or when it represents inspired prophetic commentary. We should be grateful, nevertheless, that Joseph the Translator sought to restore “plain and precious things,” whether that be content, intent, or meaning. The Lord himself placed the Prophet’s work with the Bible in perspective in a modern revelation given in 1830 to Sidney Rigdon: “And a commandment I give unto thee—that thou shalt 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; emphasis added).

¹⁶For a broader treatment of the JST’s accentuation of the areas of stress in all three of the synoptic Gospels, see Robert L. Millet, “The JST and the Synoptic Gospels: Literary Style,” in Nyman and Millet, *The Joseph Smith Translation*, 147–62.