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## “None That Doeth Good”

### Early Evidence of the First Vision in JST Psalm 14

*Walker Wright and Don Bradley*

The First Vision has been a center of both faith and controversy. While millions of Latter-day Saints affirm it as the beginning of the Restoration,<sup>1</sup> others see it as an ever-growing fish tale. The multiple accounts of the First Vision vary in detail, with Joseph Smith's earliest written account (1832) lacking some of the elements found in his later accounts.<sup>2</sup> However, some of these elements—particularly the

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1. For the bicentennial celebration of the First Vision, the Church announced the official proclamation “The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/the-restoration-of-the-fulness-of-the-gospel-of-jesus-christ/a-bicentennial-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng>.

2. An earlier revelation seems to allude to the First Vision and the forgiveness of sins mentioned in his 1832 and 1835 accounts: “For after that it truly was manifested unto the first elder that he had received remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world, but after truly repenting, God visited him by an holy angel.” “Articles and Covenants, circa April 1830 [D&C 20],” [4], Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/articles-and-covenants-circa-april-1830-dc-20/1>. Some have argued that the earliest recorded reference to the First Vision occurs in the Book of Mormon. Much like Joseph Smith's “official” 1838 First Vision account would describe the Lord warning him that various sectarians “draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (JS-H 1:19), 2 Nephi 27:25 describes the Lord telling the unlearned man who would translate the Book of Mormon, “This people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men.” See S. Brent Farley, “Nephi, Isaiah, and the Latter-Day Restoration,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 227–40; *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, Maxwell Institute

appearance of God the Father as part of the First Vision experience—are laced throughout Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible. These historical threads ultimately culminate in his translation of Psalm 14, which weaves together many of the elements supposedly lacking in Smith’s earliest account of the First Vision.

But why bring these threads together in Psalm 14? What was its connection with his First Vision? A basic comparison of Psalm 14 with elements of the First Vision shows that elements of this psalm are found in the background of the vision, as Joseph Smith narrated it, and even in the words of Deity spoken within the vision itself.

When Alexander Neibaur recorded Smith’s telling of his First Vision in 1844, he recalled the divine answer to Smith’s question “Must I join the Methodist Church[?]” to be “No = they are not my People, all have *gone astray there is none that doeth good no not one*, but this is my Beloved son harken ye him.”<sup>3</sup> Over two decades later, Brigham Young offered a similar telling of Joseph Smith’s First Vision: “Joseph was naturally inclined to be religious, and being young, and surrounded with this excitement, no wonder that he became seriously impressed with the necessity of serving the Lord. But as the cry on every hand was, ‘Lo, here, is Christ,’ and ‘Lo, there!’ Said he, ‘Lord, teach me, that I may know for myself, who among these are right.’ And what was the answer? ‘They are all out of the way; they have *gone astray, and there is none that doeth good, no not one.*’”<sup>4</sup>

Both of these later, secondary accounts appear to capture a genuine feature of Smith’s first encounter with Deity. In Smith’s 1832 account, the Lord is said to declare to the young boy, “<behold> the world lieth in sin at this time and *none doeth good no not one they have turned asside* from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments.”<sup>5</sup> The italicized portions

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*Study Edition*, ed. Grant Hardy (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018), 119 n. g25. (Thanks to Tanner Johnson for making us aware of this connection and these resources.) Joseph Smith linked the “learned man” with Charles Anthon and the “not learned” man with himself. Isaiah 29:11–12; Joseph Smith–History 1:63–65; Larry E. Morris, “‘I Cannot Read a Sealed Book’—Martin Harris’s Venture to Eastern Scholars: February 1828,” *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 224–49.

3. “Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844, extract,” [23], Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/alexander-neibaur-journal-24-may-1844-extract/1>, emphasis added.

4. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 12:67 (June 23, 1867), emphasis added.

5. “History, circa Summer 1832,” 3, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/3>, emphasis added.

of these various sources are quoted from the King James Version (KJV) rendition of Psalm 14:3: “*They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> Earlier in the 1832 account, Smith paraphrases Psalm 14:1: “Well hath the wise man said <it is a> fool <that> saith in his heart there is no God.”<sup>7</sup> This psalm apparently had a significant impact on the way Smith recalled his first heavenly visitation.

As mentioned above, Smith would further connect Psalm 14 with his First Vision through his inspired translation or revision of the Bible. Sometime between July 1832 and July 1833, Joseph Smith completed this inspired Bible revision.<sup>8</sup> It was during this period that he recorded both his 1832 account of the First Vision *and* his new rendition of Psalm 14 (see table 1).<sup>9</sup> The most probable dates of completion for the translation of Psalm 14 (January or February 1833) and the writing of the 1832 account (July–September 1832) put the two accounts within four to seven months of each other.<sup>10</sup> When the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of Psalm 14 is compared to the various First Vision accounts, it shows “a distinct overall affinity with the First Vision story.”<sup>11</sup>

6. William Smith makes a possible allusion to Psalm 14 in his recollection of his brother's First Vision: “While praying he saw a bright light, like the brightness of the sun. In that light he saw a personage; and that being pointed him out as the messenger to go forth and declare his truth to the world; for ‘*They had all gone astray; Every man was going his own way.*’” See “William B. Smith: Experience and Testimony,” in “Sketches of Conference Sermons, reported by Charles Derry,” *Saints' Herald* 30, no. 16 (June 16, 1883): 388, emphasis added. For more recollections from Joseph's family, see Kyle R. Walker, “Smith Family Recollections of Joseph Smith's First Vision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 47, no. 2 (2021): 1–22.

7. “History, circa Summer 1832,” 3. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” Psalms 14:1.

8. For the timeline of Joseph Smith's Bible translation project, see Kent P. Jackson, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2022), 2–6.

9. “Old Testament Revision 2,” 85, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-2/92>.

10. For the January–February 1833 dating of JST Psalm 14, see David A. LeFevre, “Give Me Right Word, O Lord’: The JST Changes in the Psalms,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. David Rolph Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 349–66, <https://rsc.byu.edu/ascending-mountain-lord/give-me-right-word-o-lord-jst-changes-psalms>. For the July–September 1832 dating of the 1832 account, see the historical introduction to “History, circa Summer 1832,” 1, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1#historical-intro>.

11. Matthew B. Brown, *A Pillar of Light: The History and Message of the First Vision* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2009), 193 n. 1.

Table 1. Joseph Smith’s Inspired Changes to KJV Psalm 14

Psalm 14:1–7 (KJV)	Psalm 14:1–7 (JST; changes are <b>bolded</b> )
1. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.	1. The fool hath said in his heart, <b>There is no man that hath seen God, because he sheweth him self not unto us, therefore</b> there is no God. <b>behold</b> they are corrupt; they have done abominable works, <b>and none of them</b> doeth good.
2. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.	2. <b>For</b> the Lord look down from heaven upon the children of men, <b>and by his voice said unto his servant, seek ye among the children of men,</b> to see if there <b>are</b> any that <b>do</b> understand God. <b>And he opened his mouth unto the Lord, and said; behold all these who say they are thine.</b>
3. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.	3. <b>The lord answered and said,</b> they are all gone aside, they are together become filthy. <b>Thou canst be hold none of these that are doing good,</b> no, not one;
4. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? Who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.	4. <b>&lt;all&gt; they have for there teachers, a &lt;are&gt; workers of eniquity, and there is no knowledge in them. They &lt;are they&gt;</b> who eat up my people, they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.
5. There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous.	5. <b>they are</b> in great fear, for God <b>dwells</b> in the generation of the righteous. <b>He is the counsel of the poor, because they are ashamed of the wicked, and flee unto the Lord for there reffuge.</b>
6. Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.	6. <b>Then &lt;they&gt; are ashamed of</b> the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge,
7. Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.	7. O that <b>Zion were established out of heaven,</b> the salvation of Israel. <b>O Lord, when wilt thou establish Zion?</b> When the lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, Isreal shall be glad.

JST text from “Old Testament Revision 2,” 85–86, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-2/92>.

David LeFevre similarly perceives the changes in JST Psalm 14 as “autobiographical expressions” of the First Vision.<sup>12</sup> He also notes the “subtle and appropriate shift in theology” in JST Psalm 14 relative to the KJV:

In the KJV, the Lord is the one looking down and seeking to know the current state of things while, in the Prophet’s revised psalm, the Lord is instructing his servant about what is happening. . . . First, the Lord asks his servant to consider if anyone around him understands God. The servant’s reply is that they all claim to speak for God, but it is a response of confusion and uncertainty, just as Joseph felt prior to his vision. Then the Lord states his position on these people: as Joseph can readily see, . . . they live in apostasy, work iniquity, and lack the knowledge of the truth.<sup>13</sup>

Such parallels have been explored in detail only between JST Psalm 14 and the 1832 First Vision account. Matthew Brown noted sixteen parallel phrases or concepts between these two texts,<sup>14</sup> but extensive comparison has yet to be made between this JST psalm and other accounts of the First Vision or between other, related, portions of the JST and the First Vision. Numerous elements found in later accounts appear in JST Psalm 14, indicating that the fundamental First Vision narrative remained far more consistent across time than has been assumed. Systematic comparison below will demonstrate several major parallels between JST Psalm 14 and the various primary and secondary accounts of the First Vision and also between other JST passages intertwined with Psalm 14 and the First Vision accounts.

12. LeFevre, “Give Me Right Word, O Lord,” 349.

13. LeFevre, “Give Me Right Word, O Lord,” 357–58.

14. “(1) ‘The fool hath said in his heart . . . “There is no God”’ / ‘it is a fool that saith in his heart, “There is no God,”’ (2) ‘There is no man that hath seen God’ / ‘I could find none that would believe the heavenly vision,’ (3) ‘they are corrupt’ / ‘they . . . keep not my commandments . . . their hearts are far from me,’ (4) ‘abominable works’ / ‘abominations,’ (5) ‘none of them doeth good’ / ‘none doeth good,’ (6) ‘the Lord looked down from heaven’ / ‘the Lord opened the heavens,’ (7) ‘the children of men’ / ‘the inhabitants of the earth,’ (8) ‘His voice said unto His servant’ / ‘the Lord . . . spake unto me saying . . . my son,’ (9) ‘see if there are any that do understand God’ / ‘the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind,’ (10) ‘all these who say they are thine’ / ‘those of different denominations,’ (11) ‘they are all gone aside’ / ‘they have turned aside,’ (12) ‘they are together become filthy’ / ‘the world lieth in sin,’ (13) ‘workers of iniquity’ / ‘wickedness . . . ungodliness,’ (14) ‘there is no knowledge in them’ / ‘they had apostatized from the true and living faith,’ (15) ‘they who eat up my people’ / ‘contentions and divisions,’ (16) ‘call not upon the Lord’ / ‘I cried unto the Lord.’” Brown, *Pillar of Light*, 193–94.

**“There is no man that hath seen God” (JST Ps. 14:1)**

- **King James Version:** “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.”
- **Joseph Smith Translation (1832/33):** “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no man that hath seen God, because he sheweth him self not unto us, therefore there is no God.”<sup>15</sup>
- **Smith, 1832:** “I . . . could find none that would believe the hevnlly vision.”<sup>16</sup>
- **Smith, 1838/39:** “He treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them” (JS–H 1:21).
- **Neibaur, 1844:** “The Methodist priest . . . said this was not a age for God to Reveal himself in Vision[.] Revelation has . . . ceased with the New Testament.”<sup>17</sup>

By making a small expansion to Psalm 14’s opening passage that introduces the idea of theophany, and of its rejection, Joseph Smith resituates the entire psalm, implicitly placing the psalm’s subsequent dialogue between the Lord and his servant in the context of a theophany and making the immediate matter of dispute not whether God exists but whether God appears to human beings. Smith’s revision connects the biblical “fool’s” denial of God with the “fool’s” lack of experience of God and with his rejection of *anyone* having seen God. Consequently, those who reject the occurrence of theophanies *become* the “fool” in question.

Smith himself reported encountering such persons when he initially attempted to share his First Vision. While others’ rejection of Joseph’s vision is briefly acknowledged in the 1832 account, it is described in greater detail in his 1838/39 history. After describing the vision to “one of the Methodist preachers” (JS–H 1:21)—possibly George Lane<sup>18</sup>—Smith was taken aback by the minister’s vehement a priori rejection of his

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15. “Old Testament Revision 2,” 85.

16. “History, circa Summer 1832,” 3.

17. “Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844, extract,” [24].

18. Larry C. Porter, “Reverend George Lane—Good ‘Gifts,’ Much ‘Grace,’ and Marked ‘Usefulness,’” 199–226; and Richard L. Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Accuracy on the First Vision Setting: The Pivotal 1818 Palmyra Camp Meeting,” in *Exploring the First Vision*, ed. Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 91–170.

theophany. Joseph similarly told Alexander Neibaur of such a ministerial rejection in 1844. So when Smith expands Psalm 14:1 to incorporate the rejection of theophanies, this expansion makes the psalm more accurately reflect his own experience after the First Vision.<sup>19</sup>

Joseph first changes Psalm 14 by importing into it a statement from elsewhere in the Bible, one he had already encountered twice in his work on the JST—“No man hath seen God” (John 1:18; 1 Jn. 4:12). While Joseph did not report what prooftexts the Methodist minister who criticized his vision employed, the statement “No man hath seen God” provided perhaps the readiest prooftext a biblically literate listener could invoke to justify rejecting Smith’s theophany.

Significantly, several months before Smith’s circa–January/February 1833 revision of Psalm 14, he had already revised the Johannine passages he would import *into* the psalm—John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12—transforming them from potential prooftexts against his theophany into passages *supporting* it. In its KJV form, John 1:18 reads, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Smith’s revision (in the handwriting of Sidney Rigdon) adds a condition on which the Father can be seen: “<And> no man hath seen God at any time, *except he hath born record of the son*. For except it is through him no man can be saved.”<sup>20</sup> In Smith’s rendition, God the Father can be seen, with the proviso that he always bears record of the Son to those privileged to see him. This, as Smith would describe it in later First Vision accounts, is precisely what occurred in

19. For background on the similarities and differences between the First Vision and other contemporary visionary accounts, see Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Visionary World of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–98): 183–204; Christopher C. Jones, “The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (2011): 88–114; Jeremy Talmage, “‘Effusions of an Enthusiastic Brain’: Joseph Smith’s First Vision and the Limits of Experiential Religion,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2020): 25–48. A distinction between Smith’s reported vision and many contemporaneous visions was its very literal sensory and corporeal character, which may have also contributed to its rejection.

20. “New Testament Revision 2,” 105–6 (second numbering), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/new-testament-revision-2/164>, emphasis added. The statement in KJV John 1:18, “He hath declared him,” carries some ambiguity regarding the referents of “he” and “him.” While the statement is most naturally read to indicate that the Son has declared the Father, it can also be read to say that the Father has declared the Son. Joseph’s revision to the passage indicates that he understood it to carry the second meaning and saw this as offering a proviso on which the Father can be seen—when he declares the Son. Joseph therefore reorganized the passage to make this its clear reading.



his own theophany when he saw two personages, one of them attesting to the identity of the other, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (JS–H 1:17). In an exact echo of John 1:18, the KJV of 1 John 4:12 reads, “No man hath seen God at any time.” Smith again qualifies this with a proviso in his translation: “except them who beleive [*sic*].”<sup>21</sup> In both alterations—made, respectively, between fall 1831 and February 16, 1832, and between February 16 and March 24, 1832, several months *before* Smith’s earliest recorded account of the First Vision,<sup>22</sup> God the Father is made visible. And in each alteration, a condition is presented on which the Father *can* be seen—a condition *met* by Smith in his First Vision: before he saw the Father, he exercised faith and became one of “them who believe,” meeting the condition specified in JST 1 John 4:12; and he heard the Father bear “record of the Son,” meeting the condition specified in JST John 1:18.

Given Smith’s changes to these passages—in each case qualifying the apparent absoluteness of the statement “No man hath seen God”—it is intriguing that he imports this very phrase into the beginning of his revised Psalm 14. Having revised the two Johannine passages to stipulate conditions on which human beings can see God the Father, he puts any objection to his own theophany based on the unrevised passages on the lips of the “fool” who denies God in Psalm 14:1.

Joseph thus wrestles with the Johannine phrase “No man hath seen God” *three* times in his 1832–1833 Bible revision, each time in a way that seems to relate to his First Vision and that possibly serves to defend it against any who would use this phrasing to refute it. In his third engagement with the phrase, in Psalm 14, he adapts the psalm to change the “fool” from a village atheist<sup>23</sup> to (as we will see in the succeeding verses) a “teacher” who claims to be part of the Lord’s people, but who, in denying God’s power to show himself, effectively denies God’s existence.<sup>24</sup>

21. “New Testament Revision 2,” 148 (second numbering).

22. Historical introduction to “New Testament Revision 2.”

23. Though often read this way, the psalm in its ancient context was likely not describing atheism in the modern sense. As Robert Alter notes, “The thrust of this line is more moral than theological. The concern is not a philosophical question of God’s existence but the scoundrel’s [fool’s] lack of conscience, his feeling that he can act with impunity, because he thinks he need not fear divine retribution.” *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 40 n. 1.

24. The reasoning here, in Joseph’s revision of Psalm 14:1, is similar to Nephi’s in his exposition of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 28, where Nephi says that churches that claim to be the Lord’s yet deny his continuing power in the world in effect deny his continued existence: “For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord’s; and the others

Fascinatingly, it appears Joseph began this implicit defense of the First Vision in his Bible revision even before he recorded any formal accounts of the First Vision. His changes to the KJV of John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12 attest that he had already shared the vision before these fall 1831–spring 1832 JST revisions—and had it rejected by critics employing these biblical prooftexts.

Joseph's 1832 changes to these Johannine texts and his related 1833 changes to Psalm 14 also enhance the existing evidence for elements of Joseph Smith's First Vision that appear in later accounts. Smith's 1832 account does not (1) describe Smith seeing God the Father, (2) narrate the voice of the Father declaring the Son, or (3) discuss Smith sharing his theophany with a Protestant minister who rejected it, yet Smith does include these elements in his 1838 account. However, evidence for the Father's involvement in the First Vision occurs first in the 1832 account itself, when Smith describes "receiving the testamony from on high" at his First Vision.<sup>25</sup> The phrase "the testimony on high" was often used in the nineteenth century to refer to testimony borne by the Father of the Son, such as at the Mount of Transfiguration, when a voice (identified explicitly as God the Father in 2 Peter 1:17–18) testified of Jesus from heaven—"This is My Beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5).<sup>26</sup> In line with such evidence in Joseph Smith's 1832 account of the First Vision, Smith's revisions to the Bible discussed here evidence that all three of the supposedly late-developed elements of the First Vision actually *predate* even this "earliest" First Vision account. His fall 1831–spring 1832 revisions of the Johannine passages on seeing God the Father add conditions on which the Father may be seen, allowing for *Joseph* to have seen the Father as part of the

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shall say: I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord—And they shall contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance. And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold *there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work*, and he hath given his power unto men" (2 Ne. 28:3–5, emphasis added). Notably, the phrasing in 2 Nephi 28:5, "There is no God," likely also comes from Psalm 14. The phrase, used in the sense of denying the continuing power of a Supreme Being, appears in the King James Bible only in Psalm 14:1 and in its echo in Psalm 53:1.

25. "History, circa Summer 1832," 1.

26. See Gregory Smith, "More Testimony from on High? A Note on the Presence of God the Father in Joseph Smith's 1832 First Vision Account," unpublished manuscript, in authors' possession. Also see James B. Allen and John W. Welch, "Analysis of Joseph Smith's Accounts of His First Vision," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestation, 1820–1844*, ed. John Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo: BYU Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 36–77.

First Vision on those conditions, including the condition of the Father declaring his Beloved Son. And his 1832–1833 revision of Psalm 14:1 reinforces that God can be seen and puts contrary use of the Johannine passages on the lips of a sectarian “fool.” These early 1830s revisions preserve one side of a largely lost conversation, a conversation in which a sectarian critic had once rejected Smith’s theophany, and which Joseph later responded to repeatedly and forcefully. Indeed, Smith would identify that conversation explicitly in his 1838/39 account of the First Vision as a conversation with “one of the Methodist preachers” (JS–H 1:21).

Steven Harper concludes that Joseph’s “1832 and 1838/39 memories are best read as responses to the Methodist minister.”<sup>27</sup> This is also the best way to read the consistent pattern of changes Joseph made involving the phrase “no man hath seen God” in the JST of 1 John 1:18, 1 John 4:32, and Psalm 14:1.

#### “Behold they are corrupt” (JST Psalm 14:1)

- **King James Version:** “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.”
- **Joseph Smith Translation (1832/33):** “Behold they are corrupt; they have done abominable works, and none of them doeth good.”<sup>28</sup>
- **Smith, 1832:** “I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind the contentions and divi[s]ions the wicke[d]ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind.”<sup>29</sup>
- **Smith, 1838/39:** “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt” (JS–H 1:19).
- **Smith, 1842:** “They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom.”<sup>30</sup>

27. Steven C. Harper, *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 32.

28. “Old Testament Revision 2,” 85.

29. “History, circa Summer 1832,” 2.

30. “‘Church History,’ 1 March 1842,” 707, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2>.

- **Richards, 1843:** “received for answer that none of them were right, that they were all wrong, & that the Everlasting cove[n]t was broken.”<sup>31</sup>
- **White, 1843:** “I then, addressed this second person, saying, ‘O Lord, what Church shall I join,’ He replied, ‘don’t join any of them, they are all corrupt.’ . . . When I went home and told the people that I had a revelation, and that all the churches were corrupt, they persecuted me, and they have persecuted me ever since.”<sup>32</sup>

The 1832 account seems to describe a general prevalence of apostasy and wickedness, while the later accounts are more specific regarding the Christian churches of the day. This portion of the JST falls more in line with the 1832 account. However, this verse is more of an introduction by the psalmist than speech from the Lord himself. Similar language, however, is attributed to the Lord in verses 3 and 4 (which are addressed in greater detail below).

#### “Behold all these who say they are thine” (JST Psalm 14:2)

- **King James Version:** “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.”
- **Joseph Smith Translation (1832/33):** “For the Lord look down from heaven upon the children of men, and by his voice said unto his servant, seek ye among the children of men, to see if there are any that do understand God. And he opened his mouth unto the Lord, and said; behold, all these who say they are thine.”<sup>33</sup>

31. “Levi Richards, Journal, 11 June 1843, extract,” 16, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/levi-richards-journal-11-june-1843-extract/2>. An 1831 revelation to Smith declares, “Wherefore I the Lord knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the Earth called upon my Servents Joseph & spake unto him from heaven . . . that faith also might increase in the Earth that mine everlasting Covenant might be established.” See “Revelation, 1 November 1831–B [D&C 1],” 126, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-1-november-1831-b-dc-1/2>.

32. “Interview, 29 August 1843, extract,” 3, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/interview-29-august-1843-extract/1>.

33. “Old Testament Revision 2,” 85. The claims by those who “say they are thine” yet are not the Lord’s parallel closely the contending sectarians in Nephi’s commentary on Isaiah 29: “For it shall come to pass in that day that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, *when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord’s; and the*

- **Smith, 1835:** “Being wrought up in my mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking <at> the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and considering it of the first importance that I should be right.”<sup>34</sup>
- **Smith, 1838/39:** “My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. . . . I asked the Personages . . . which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered my heart that all were wrong)—and which I should join” (JS–H 1:18).<sup>35</sup>
- **Smith, 1842:** “I found that there was a great clash in religious sentiment; if I went to one society they referred me to one plan, and another to another; each one pointing to his own particular creed as the summum bonum of perfection: considering that all could not be right, and that God could not be the author of so much confusion I determined to investigate the subject more fully.”<sup>36</sup>
- **Richards, 1843:** “Pres. J. Smith bore testimony to the same— saying that when he was a youth he began to think about these these things but could not find out which of all the sects were right— he went into the grove & enquired of the Lord which of all the sects were right.”<sup>37</sup>
- **White, 1843:** “There was a reformation among the different religious denominations in the neighborhood where I lived, and I became serious, and was desirous to know what Church to join.

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*others shall say: I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord*” (2 Ne. 28:3). We observed in note 24 that this section of 2 Nephi also paralleled Joseph Smith's revision of Psalm 14 in the idea that to deny God's ability to manifest himself is tantamount to denying his existence. Along with his First Vision, Joseph Smith may have had 2 Nephi 28 in mind as he revised Psalm 14.

34. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 23, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/24>.

35. Earlier in the same account, however, Smith recalls, “In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together?” (JS–H 1:10). For important context regarding this supposed discrepancy, see J. B. Haws, “Reconciling Joseph Smith—History 1:10 and 1:18–19,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013): 97–105. It has been asserted that, according to his 1832 account, Smith “had *already* concluded, prior to praying, that none of the churches was correct.” Gregory A. Prince, “Joseph Smith's First Vision in Historical Context: How a Historical Narrative Became Theological,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 4, (2015): 83. JST Psalm 14:2 seems to fit with the 1838/39 account.

36. “Church History,” 1 March 1842,” 706.

37. “Levi Richards, Journal, 11 June 1843, extract,” 16.

. . . I kneeled down, and prayed, saying, ‘O Lord, what Church shall I join.’”<sup>38</sup>

- **Neibaur, 1844:** “Mr Smith then asked must I join the Methodist Church.”<sup>39</sup>
- **Brigham Young, 1867:** “Joseph was naturally inclined to be religious, and being young, and surrounded with this excitement, no wonder that he became seriously impressed with the necessity of serving the Lord. But as the cry on every hand was, ‘Lo, here is Christ,’ and ‘Lo, there!’”<sup>40</sup>

Rather than determining *before* the heavenly encounter that all people had “gone aside,” the servant (Smith) offers “all these who say they are thine” as examples of those who “understand God” (JST Ps. 14:3). The servant is under the impression that at least *someone* among those claiming to be the Lord’s is legitimate. While the 1832 account may give the impression that Smith had his mind made up before entering the grove, the 1832/33 JST translation and later First Vision accounts indicate that he still assumed a divinely authorized people or church was in existence somewhere.

#### “Workers of eniquity” (JST Ps. 14:4)

- **King James Version:** “Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.”
- **Old Testament Revision 2 (1832/33):** “<All> they have for there teachers, <are> workers of eniquity, and there is no knowledge in them. They <are they> who eat up my people, they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.”<sup>41</sup>
- **Smith, 1838/39:** “The Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt” (JS–H 1:19).

While the 1832 account focuses on a kind of general apostasy and wickedness, the 1838/39 account is more pointed and focused with its blame. Harper argues that by this time, Smith “remembered to reject and

38. “Interview, 29 August 1843, extract,” 3.

39. “Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844, extract,” [23].

40. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:67 (June 23, 1867).

41. “Old Testament Revision 2,” 85.

replace the minister and the authority he represented. Smith's 1838/39 perspective is enlarged and institutional. From that point of view the vision was not simply another manifestation of Christ to a born-again soul. It was an indictment of apostate churches and their creeds—not simply the marvelous acts of Joseph Smith but the story of 'the rise and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.'"<sup>42</sup>

However, this rejection and replacement of the Methodist minister is found in JST Psalm 14. The "corrupt" professors the Lord rejects in the 1838/39 account (or the "corrupt" churches of White's interview<sup>43</sup>) parallel and appear to be reflected in the "teachers" the Lord rejects as "workers of eniquity" in the revised Psalm 14. The divine condemnation of other churches and their leaders found in the 1838/39 account is thus already present in Smith's 1832/33 translation of Psalm 14.<sup>44</sup>

### "O Lord, when wilt thou establish Zion?" (JST Ps. 14:7)

- **King James Version:** "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."
- **Old Testament Revision 2 (1832/33):** "O that Zion were established out of heaven, the salvation of Israel. O Lord, when wilt thou establish Zion? When the lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, Isreal shall be glad."<sup>45</sup>
- **Revelation through Joseph Smith, April 6, 1830 (D&C 21):** "Him [Joseph Smith] have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in Mighty

42. Harper, *First Vision*, 32.

43. "Interview, 29 August 1843, extract," 3.

44. It is arguably even earlier in Smith's revelations. See "Revelation, October 1830–B [D&C 33]," 44, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-october-1830-b-dc-33/1>. This revelation features the Lord saying, "My vineyard has become corrupted evry whit & there is none that doeth good save it is a few only <& they err in many instances because of Priest crafts> all having corrupt minds." In this revelation, not only is Psalm 14:3 once again quoted ("none that doeth good"), but it is done in conjunction with a description of the Lord's vineyard being corrupted by priestcraft. Priestcraft was understood to be "the stratagems and frauds of priests; fraud or imposition in religious concerns; management of selfish and ambitious priests to gain wealth and power, or to impose on the credulity of others." Dictionary of the English Language, 1828, s.v. "priestcraft," <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/priestcraft>. This shows that the targeting of religious authorities using Psalm 14:3 goes back to at least 1830 and continues in an explicit way in Smith's 1832/33 translation.

45. "Old Testament Revision 2," 85–86.



power for good & his dilligence I know & his prayers I have heard yea his weeping for Zion I have seen & I will cause that He shall mourn for her no longer for his days of rejoicing are come.”<sup>46</sup>

- **Smith, 1842:** “I was expressly commanded to ‘go not after them,’ at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”<sup>47</sup>
- **Orson Pratt, 1840:** “[Smith] was expressly commanded, to go not after them; and he received a promise that the true doctrine—the fulness of the gospel, should, at some future time, be made known to him.”<sup>48</sup>
- **Orson Hyde, 1842:** “He was also told that he should not join any of the religious sects or denominations, because all of them erred in doctrine and none was recognized by God as his church and kingdom. He was further commanded, to wait patiently until some future time, when the true doctrine of Christ and the complete truth of the gospel would be revealed to him.”<sup>49</sup>

Smith’s inspired additions regarding Zion seem to have in mind this promise of the future restoration of God’s Church and kingdom on earth. Yet this connection of the Lord’s servant’s longing for Zion in JST Psalm 14 and Joseph Smith’s seeking after the restored Church are not obvious until the key is provided by the revelation Joseph received when his quest for that Church was fulfilled. On April 6, 1830, the day the long-promised Church was established, this revelation (D&C 21) equated Joseph’s longing for *the restored Church* with his longing for *Zion*.<sup>50</sup> The

46. “Revelation, 6 April 1830 [D&C 21],” 28–29, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-6-april-1830-dc-21/1>.

47. “‘Church History,’ 1 March 1842,” 707.

48. “Appendix: Orson Pratt, A[n] *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*, 1840,” 5, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-orson-pratt-an-interesting-account-of-several-remarkable-visions-1840/5>.

49. “Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* (A Cry out of the Wilderness), 1842, extract, English translation,” Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/orson-hyde-ein-ruf-aus-der-wste-a-cry-out-of-the-wilderness-1842-extract-english-translation/1>.

50. Earlier work on his Genesis translation also placed Zion front and center in Smith’s theology. JST Psalm 14:7 mentions Zion being “established out of heaven,” echoing the anticipated return of Enoch’s Zion (see Moses 7:62–64). Richard Bushman explains, “Though modeled after Enoch’s Zion, Joseph’s New Jerusalem was not to follow Enoch’s ‘City of Holiness’ into heaven. Quite the reverse. In Enoch’s vision, latter-day



cry of the servant in JST Psalm 14:7, who elsewhere parallels Joseph, thus mirrors Joseph's own "weeping for Zion," and the rejoicing that accompanies Zion's coming in this passage mirrors Joseph's rejoicing when Zion's day has come.<sup>51</sup>

JST Psalm 14 connects the concept of Zion with the First Vision narrative, making the ending of the servant's theophany brim with anticipation of Zion's establishment. Thus, as early as 1832/33, Smith associated his first encounter with Deity with the future hope of Zion: "a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me."<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

After comparing Joseph Smith's First Vision with the divine encounter experienced by the Lord's servant in JST Psalm 14, it is difficult to disagree with Joseph Fielding McConkie's judgment: "The JST rendering of this Psalm reads like another account of the First Vision."<sup>53</sup> The several parallels between JST Psalm 14 and the various First Vision accounts provide potentially fruitful avenues of historical and theological exploration. If, as the evidence signifies, Joseph Smith modeled JST Psalm 14 after his First Vision experience, this offers insights into the nature of the Joseph Smith Translation; and the new translation, in turn, opens

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people gather from all over the earth into a holy city, 'called ZION, a New Jerusalem.' Rather than rising, this city stays put, and Enoch's city descends from heaven to meet the people of the New Jerusalem on earth. . . . The millennium begins in a happy union of two holy peoples on a cleansed earth." Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 141.

51. JST Psalm 14's identification of Smith's quest for Christ's church with the longing for Zion again evokes 2 Nephi 28, which, as seen in the footnotes above, has sectarians quote Psalm 14:1—"There is no God"—and parallels JST Psalm 14:2—"Behold all these who say they are thine"—in having the various sectarian churches all declare, "I am the Lord's." The misguided sectarian churches of 2 Nephi 28 also proclaim that "all is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well," which in context is equivalent to declaring, "I am the Lord's"—that is, denying that there has been an apostasy (2 Ne. 28:21).

52. "Church History," 1 March 1842," 707.

53. Joseph F. McConkie, "Joseph Smith and the Poetic Writings," in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Monte S. Nyman (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 111. It is worth noting that McConkie's father, Bruce R. McConkie, recommended in 1980 that JST Psalm 14 be canonized in the Pearl of Great Price. Stephen O. Smoot, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Study Edition for Latter-day Saints* (Springville, Utah: Book of Mormon Central, 2022), 162–63.

a window onto how he understood his vision in 1832–1833.<sup>54</sup> Already by 1831–1832, Joseph Smith’s translation of John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12 intimates that he connected his First Vision with the idea of seeing God the Father and of God the Father bearing witness: “This is My Beloved Son” (JS–H 1:17). In his 1832/33 translation of Psalm 14, Joseph reinforces that God the Father was part of the First Vision and weaves in further elements of the First Vision that will not appear in his formal accounts thereof for several years.

All of this attests to a much more consistent First Vision narrative than is often assumed. John Welch and James Allen have observed, “There is . . . striking consistency throughout the [First Vision] narratives; they combine impressively to give a consistent and coherent picture. A high percentage of the elements . . . sporadically appear in multiple accounts, both early and late, showing a high degree of independent, cumulative, concurrent corroboration among these accounts.”<sup>55</sup>

This observation holds even beyond the formal accounts of the First Vision. From Joseph Smith’s inspired 1831/32 translation of John 1:18 to his private 1844 testimony to Alexander Neibaur, Joseph’s words give evidence that the Father had borne witness of the Son. And from his 1832/33 translation of Psalm 14 to that same testimony to Neibaur shortly before the martyrdom (and even Brigham Young’s recollection after the martyrdom), he affirms that the Son told him, “All are gone aside,” and none were doing good, “no, not one.” Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible thus bears witness that he was consistent in attesting to these events from the beginning of his prophetic career to the end.

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54. For recent work on the JST, see Thomas A. Wayment, “Intertextuality and the Purpose of Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible,” in *Foundational Texts of Mormonism: Examining Major Early Sources*, ed. Mark Ashurst-McGee, Robin Jensen, and Sharalyn D. Howcroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 74–100; Thomas A. Wayment and Haley Wilson-Lemmon, “A Recovered Resource: The Use of Adam Clarke’s Bible Commentary in Joseph Smith’s Bible Translation,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith’s Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020), 262–84; Kent P. Jackson, “Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60.

55. Allen and Welch, “Analysis of Joseph Smith’s Accounts of His First Vision,” 72.

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