

On the Foreknowledge of God

Time, Knowledge, Reality, Agency

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On the question of God's knowledge of future events, Old and New Testament authors respond in a motley chorus. Some biblical authors assume exhaustive divine foreknowledge of both individual lives and world historical events. Psalm 139 affirms that "your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:16).¹ The Apostle Peter declares that Christ's crucifixion was accomplished according to "God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). Other biblical accounts seem to show that God adjusts his intentions according to human behavior, implying that he does not or cannot know free human choice ahead of its realization. Of Israelite king Saul, for instance, biblical authors record the Lord's words to Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions" (1 Sam. 15:11).

Latter-day scripture offers little clarification on the question. Again, some passages assert a strong view of divine foreknowledge, such as Alma's teaching that God calls and prepares his high priests "from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things" (Alma 13:7), and God's own declaration, through Joseph Smith, that he "knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes" (D&C 38:1–2). Nephi's detailed vision of Christ's incarnation and the providential sweep of human history suggests that God knows, and can reveal to his prophets in advance, the course of future events crucial to

1. All Bible citations are from the New International Version.

the redemption of his people (1 Ne. 11–14). Other scriptures, however, suggest that God’s foreknowledge of events and his interaction with humans depend on the real-time unfolding of human behavior. In July 1831, for instance, the Lord revealed Independence, Missouri, to be the place “appointed and consecrated” for the building of the city of Zion in anticipation of the Lord’s return (D&C 57:1). In January 1841, however, after the faithful had endured years of conflict with neighboring Missourians, the Lord rescinded that command, explaining that when the wicked hinder the work of righteousness, “it behooveth me to require that work no more” (D&C 124:49).

If scriptural statements about God’s foreknowledge are internally inconclusive, with primary emphasis on experiential and practical concerns rather than on reasoned explanation, Latter-day Saint authoritative discourse over the past fifty or so years has plainly asserted God’s comprehensive knowledge. The Church’s website states succinctly that “[God] is perfect, has all power, and knows all things.”² Typically framed as a question of divine omniscience in general rather than foreknowledge as such, Latter-day Saint pastoral discussion of the question simply praises God’s perfect knowledge and power to save and affirms his responsiveness to human petition and human agency. For most believers, little intuitive conflict arises between God’s reassuring knowledge of the future and our genuine freedom of human agency. God sees, but does not predetermine, our thoughts and actions. In an important sense, then, the doctrine of God’s omniscience is settled in the present-day Church. What remains open, however, is the meaning of “omniscience” and, in particular, the status of foreknowledge of the future as a subset of all knowledge. Does God’s omniscience mean only he knows everything that can be known? Does it require that he know everything that will ever become knowable? Is divine omniscience contingent or absolute? Is God’s omniscience the same with respect to the past and the future? These questions, far from the immediate pastoral concerns of contemporary Latter-day Saint official discourse, remain open.

For Christian theology broadly, the question of divine foreknowledge has long been among the most contested and confounding. Influenced by Platonism, early Christian theists recognized a knotty logical conundrum in the reconciliation of exhaustive divine foreknowledge

2. “God the Father,” Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/god-the-father?lang=eng>.

with human free will. The problem for classical theism goes roughly as follows: because God, beyond time, is omniscient, immutable, and impassible, his simultaneous and unalterable knowledge of the future must exist logically prior to the creation of the world. Divine knowledge cannot respond to existing creation as it unfolds in time, because this would make God's knowledge subject to temporal change on the basis of events outside himself, thus violating divine immutability and impassibility. But if God's foreknowledge is absolute and logically prior to creation, then two troubling implications follow. First, perfect divine foreknowledge means that God cannot intervene providentially in the world by, for instance, responding to spontaneous petitionary prayer. If God has always known that today I will slip on the ice and sustain a head injury, he cannot grant my morning petition for safety without backwardly falsifying his knowledge. Counterintuitive as it seems, it is logically impossible for a perfectly foreknowing God to reach providentially into the temporal flow of human experience. Second, divine foreknowledge means that humans cannot act with libertarian free will, defined as the ability to choose otherwise than they do. If God has always known that I will visit a friend today, but I, exercising genuine freedom to choose otherwise in the moment of action, decide instead to go shopping, I will have brought it about that God knew something that he does not in fact know. For classical theism, this is a logical impossibility. Thus it appears that absolute divine foreknowledge logically implies some kind of causal determinism.

It might seem that Latter-day Saint theology would enjoy a conceptual purchase on the problem that classical theism lacks. In LDS thought, God is progressive within time, responsive to human interaction, and co-eternal with free intelligent matter. There is no need to protect divine immutability and impassibility in the face of the unfolding realization of human free will. Yet serious questions, ontological and pastoral, remain. If God, material in some sense, exists within sequential time rather than in a privileged sphere of simultaneity, how is it that he can know the open future at all? If God cannot know and control future events except on the basis of prediction and persuasion, then on what basis can humans place trust in his power to carry out his plans or respond providentially to their petitionary prayers? Locating God in time and space, Latter-day Saints have discovered him to be responsive to human engagement, respectful of human freedom, and supremely relational in his divine workings. Yet this appealingly personal portrait of God calls into question the sovereignty of divine knowledge and power.

Historical Reckonings

Early Latter-day Saint reflection on God's foreknowledge flowed in several different directions, three streams which I will call *epistemic progression*, *informal absolutism*, and *inductive inference*. The headwaters of each are Joseph Smith's revelations, which conveyed heady intimations of a radical ontological materialism, a grounding plurality of co-eternal intelligence, and a temporal matrix embracing God himself in its dynamism. The revelations seeded various hermeneutic efforts to synthesize the revelations into coherent and often competing cosmological pictures. Among the best known of these theological wrestles is the debate between Orson and Parley Pratt and Brigham Young on the question of God's omniscience. In a well-documented conflict culminating in Young's 1860 *ex cathedra* denunciation of the Pratts' views, two competing theories of God's epistemic status emerged.³ For their parts, the Pratts argued in a theological vein that, while the person of God the Father may act within the dynamic flow of time, subject to the conditions of space-time, God *qua* Godhead possesses absolute omniscience.⁴ Thus, as a modern scholar summarizes, according to the Pratts, "God cannot progress in knowledge or ever learn anything which he did not previously know. . . . God knows all future events, including contingent acts of free agents."⁵ For Brigham Young, this position was intolerable for the apparent limit it places on God's potential for increase and, consequently, on human potential to develop in God's image. Young argued that "according to [Orson Pratt's] theory, God can progress no further in knowledge and power; but the God that I serve is progressing eternally, and so are his children: they will increase to all eternity, if they are faithful."⁶ Young seems to construe eternity as a

3. See Gary James Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict within the Quorums, 1853 to 1868," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13, no. 2 (1980): 7-49.

4. This argument enjoyed a minor revival in James R. Harris's article "Eternal Progression and the Foreknowledge of God," *BYU Studies* 8, no. 1 (1968): 37-46. Harris posits a comprehensive repository of communal knowledge to which the divine minds of the combined Godhead contribute and from which each member of the Godhead may draw. While each particular divine being continues to learn and grow through experience, he may at any moment draw upon the divine communal mind for any knowledge necessary. God is thus progressing in knowledge as the Father and effectively omniscient as the Godhead.

5. Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 87.

6. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855-86), 11:286 (January 13, 1867).

chronological sequence of endless duration, wherein the past closes and recedes while the future remains unformed and invisible; at any given moment, only present events actually exist. That God would remain epistemically immutable in the midst of this dynamic temporal cosmos was, for Young, not the stable ground of reality that it represented for classical theism but an enervating restriction of divine potential. Conversely, the implication that God, acting from within a chrono-temporal frame, necessarily lacks exhaustive foreknowledge does not, for Young, vitiate divine venerability or God's worthiness of worship based on his greatness. Rather, Young rejoices in a buoyant vision of endless knowledge. Surveying the world's vast scope of created forms and natural kingdoms, Young exults in the prospect of endless learning and improvement promised by "eternity . . . before us, and an inexhaustible fountain of intelligence for us to obtain."⁷

The Young-Pratt debate over God's epistemic progression bloomed a suite of issues that would shape subsequent Latter-day Saint explorations of divine foreknowledge. These issues include the question of God's venerability given the limiting ontological conditions of materiality and space-time; the nature of God's relationship to time, be it chronological-sequential, atemporal-simultaneous, or some other mode of temporality; the nature of epistemology and consequent notions of truth as a fixed canon of propositions or an unfolding creative process; and indeed the very meaning of salvation, as a function of epistemic growth or as some other process.

Young's views on epistemic progression were eventually challenged themselves by informal absolutists during the next century. Yet progressivism's bracing appeal persisted, championed and nuanced by early twentieth-century Latter-day Saint intellectuals John A. Widtsoe and B. H. Roberts, among others. Roberts redefined omniscience within a defined chrono-temporal frame, acknowledging that God is omniscient only in the time-limited sense that "all the knowledge that is, all that exists, God knows. All that shall be he will know. . . . Much more is yet to be. God will know it as it 'becomes,' or as it unfolds."⁸ Insisting that God knows all that can be known in the present and will know all that may be known in the future, Roberts seems satisfied with God's venerability as the unsurpassed knower, if not the classically omniscient deity. While

7. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:8 (March 4, 1860).

8. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), 418.

retaining a sequential model of time, Roberts conceives of knowledge not as a fixed corpus of information but as an unfolding process of truth-making wherein the present bodies forth new realities into an open future, as much a matter of ontology as epistemology. In the late twentieth century, English professor Eugene England again advanced Young's notion of epistemic progression, attempting a reconciliation with conflicting absolutist positions. England argues for a leveled cosmos in which God, acting within time, masters the episteme of one level and thus commands absolute worship within that sphere, while continuing to gain knowledge in higher dimensions.⁹ Implicit in the compromise England works is the juxtaposition of an open future of potentiality, undetermined and undiscovered, against a fixed past, its potential exhausted in actuality, to be mastered absolutely by God's local perfection. It is toward the former that England's imagination strains. While God is absolute within our space-time-bounded realm, he argues, "the universe is ultimately open, an invitation to adventure and change, that the very divinity of God demands."¹⁰

A second doctrine on divine foreknowledge emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, framed explicitly as a corrective to epistemic progression. From the Church's beginning, some thinkers have layered traditional Christian theism over the theological innovations implied in Joseph Smith's revelations. The result is a kind of informal absolutism, an approach that projects some of the sovereign attributes of the God of classical theism—his omnipotence, omniscience, and immanence—onto the embodied God of latter-day revelation. Instances of this approach abound in official Church discourse. Hyrum Smith in 1844 declared in familiar absolutist language that "I would not serve a God that had not all wisdom and all power." Yet within a few seamless sentences, Hyrum draws on the bold cosmological monism of LDS revelation that placed God and humanity in a shared ontological stratum, declaring that "I can believe that man can go from planet to planet—a man gets so high in the mansions above."¹¹ The sovereign greatness of God seems to magnify and justify the greatness of human potential with a compelling intuitive force that brooks no ontological quibble. This strain of informal absolutism holds that a God lacking

9. Eugene England, "Perfection and Progression: Two Complementary Ways to Talk about God," *BYU Studies* 29, no. 3 (1989): 31–47.

10. England, "Perfection and Progression," 45.

11. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962), 6:300.

omniscient foreknowledge is not worthy of worship; such a God cannot command the saving faith of his children. The concern is evident as early as the 1835 Lectures on Faith, which frame the question of God's omniscience in terms of human faith: "If it were not for the idea existing in the minds of men, that God had all knowledge, it would be impossible for them to exercise faith in him."¹²

In the first half of the twentieth century, Joseph Fielding Smith, Church Apostle and grandson of Hyrum Smith, mounted a sustained defense of God's omniscience and omnipotence against the limitations of epistemic progression: "Do we believe that God has all 'wisdom'? If so, in that, he is absolute. . . . If he is lacking in 'wisdom' and in 'power' then he is not supreme and there must be something greater than he is, and this is absurd."¹³ Later, Elder Bruce R. McConkie followed this line of interpretation, maintaining that "eternal progression" implies only that God increases in dominion, not in knowledge: "It should be realized that God is not progressing in knowledge. . . . He has already gained these things in their fulness. But he is progressing in the sense that his creations increase, his dominions expand, his spirit offspring multiply, and more kingdoms are added to his domains."¹⁴ Though positioned against epistemic progression, McConkie's absolutist picture of eternal progression nevertheless resonates with B. H. Roberts's notion of future "becoming": both describe *ontological* processes of reality-making, rather than mere mastery of an extant body of knowledge.

For early- and mid-century proponents of omniscience, God's knowledge *of the future* is merely implied. In the later decades of the twentieth century, however, Elder Neal A. Maxwell brought foreknowledge to the fore of what we might call his neo-absolutist position. Building on earlier notions of the qualities God must possess to command worship, Maxwell brought a new theological dimension to the question of temporality, citing sixth-century philosopher Boethius and arguing that God occupies a meta-temporal dimension that Maxwell calls "the eternal now": "We may be surprised at the turn of events, but God in His omniscience *never* is. He sees the beginning from the end because all things are, in a way which we do not understand, present before

12. "Lecture Fourth: Of Faith," 47, Doctrine and Covenants, 1835, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/transcript/doctrine-and-covenants-1835?print=true>.

13. Bruce R. McConkie, comp., *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:5.

14. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 239.

Him simultaneously in an ‘eternal now.’”¹⁵ The opening phrase of this passage signals Maxwell’s primary pastoral intent to reassure readers of God’s loving power to shepherd them through affliction. Nevertheless, his remarks bring a renewed theological focus to the question of time and divine omniscience. Maxwell declines to comment on whether God is capable of experiencing surprise—that is, whether God’s nature is possible in such a way that he can feel the delight, horror, or strangeness of the unforeseen. Whether or not God *can be* surprised, Maxwell asserts that he never *is*, because he possesses a simultaneous awareness of all things. Interestingly, Maxwell specifically attributes to God only knowledge of “the beginning from the end,” the type of backward-facing past-knowledge of which the human mind is also capable. Comprehensive foreknowledge, one presumes, would allow God to know the end from the beginning, as God claims in Isaiah 46:10. Nevertheless, it’s clear that Maxwell intends to affirm God’s foreknowledge as the consequence of God’s privileged position within the metatemporal “eternal now.” Yet, as we have seen, this move undermines the coherence of human free will. Maxwell is aware of the theological debate around foreknowledge and free will and asserts simply that God sees our actions but does not determine them. “Some find the doctrines of the omniscience and foreknowledge of God troubling because these seem, in some way, to constrict their individual agency. . . . God’s ‘seeing’ is not the same thing as His ‘causing’ something to happen.”¹⁶ So long as humans, situated in a chronological present, approach their own choices with no knowledge of future outcomes, Maxwell argues, their free will is not compromised by God’s foreknowledge.

A third route, inductive inference, attempts to chart a middle way between epistemic progression and informal absolutism. James E. Talmage, Church Apostle and intellectual in the early twentieth century, suggested an inductive process by which God observes creation through time and, based on this cumulative understanding, infers its probable future. Aware of the logical problems besetting classical theism, Talmage rests his argument not on an impassible God whose foreknowledge logically precedes creation but, on the contrary, on a responsive intimacy between God and creation. “Our Heavenly Father has a full knowledge of the nature and disposition of each of His children. . . .

15. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 37, emphasis in original.

16. Maxwell, *All These Things*, 20.

By reason of that surpassing knowledge, God reads the future . . . ; He knows what each will do under given conditions, and sees the end from the beginning.”¹⁷ Like epistemic progressivists, Talmage places God with creation in a chronological mode of time, but, unlike progressivists, he nevertheless affords God a privileged insight into the future. God’s inductive foreknowledge arises from a subjunctive apprehension of what his free creatures *would* do if placed in any given condition and a reasoned extrapolation of “the end from the beginning” based on these subjunctive conditions. For Talmage, inductive foreknowledge provides a satisfactory account of human free will while preserving divine venerability. “[God’s] foreknowledge is based on intelligence and reason. He foresees the future as a state which naturally and surely will be; not as one which must be because He has arbitrarily willed that it shall be.”¹⁸ While Talmage’s argument for God’s probabilistic inductive foreknowledge has not endured as a rigorous theological reckoning, his portrait of God as a loving parent who rationally infers his children’s future and providentially directs history has remained prominent in Latter-day Saint discourse. Elder Russell M. Nelson preached in 2013, “Your Heavenly Father has known you for a very long time. You, as His son or daughter, were chosen by Him to come to earth at this precise time, to be a leader in His great work on earth.”¹⁹ In pastoral contexts, human agency is *confirmed* by God’s intimate knowledge of his children and their destiny, not compromised. Knotty logical discrepancy between free will and divine foreknowledge melts away in the warmth of the familial intimacy binding creature to creator.

Contemporary Reckonings

Among contemporary thinkers engaging the issue of divine foreknowledge in Latter-day Saint teaching, Blake Ostler offers the only extensive systematic treatment. Disputing various Christian theologies of foreknowledge, Ostler rests his own argument on the principles of God’s faith-worthiness as a responsive personal being, the reality of libertarian free will, and a chronological-sequential model of divine time required, in his view, by Church teachings on God’s progression. In

17. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to Holy Scriptures Both Ancient and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 29.

18. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 29.

19. Russell M. Nelson, “Decisions for Eternity,” *Ensign* 43, no. 11 (November 2013): 107.

language akin to B. H. Roberts's, Ostler argues for "contingent omniscience," the belief "that God knows all that can be known but that future, free acts of persons cannot be infallibly foreknown." God is "maximally knowing," not "all knowing."²⁰ God's knowledge of the future is limited to knowledge of his own *intention* to act providentially in the future; he does not determine nor can he foresee the future free acts of other agents, because the future is open, knowable only in the moment of emergence. God may possess full knowledge of every possible eventuality and may plan his own response to every contingency, but he may not predetermine nor foreknow the free choices of individuals. Ostler attempts to reconcile contingent omniscience with scripture that implies full divine foreknowledge. Any scripture that seems to link God's providential works to his foreknowledge must be interpreted to indicate merely contingent foreknowledge, he argues, because full foreknowledge logically forecloses God's intervention in time. Nephi's panoramic vision forecasting a detailed history of the Christian salvation of nations, for instance, should be understood only as "expressions of what God himself intends to bring about rather than what will occur through free acts of humans, for it is God himself who came down among men."²¹ Yet Ostler's notion of contingent foreknowledge can account for Nephi's prophetic vision of the mother of Christ only by effacing female agency: if Mary assented freely to the divine commission to bear and nurture the corporeal God, then her assent could not have been foreknown. In the end, Ostler seems to acknowledge that some scriptural passages cannot be reconciled with a limited form of divine foreknowledge but argues that such passages should not be understood as "definitions of omniscience, for the writers of scripture nowhere attempt such definitions. Their beliefs arise out of experience and not out of philosophical thought or rational examination."²² For this most technical of Latter-day Saint theologians no less than for other LDS thinkers, theology begins and ends with an experiential apprehension of God's beckoning love.

Ostler's treatment broadly chimes with several other contemporary LDS explorations of divine foreknowledge. Philosopher David Paulsen offers an account of limited foreknowledge based on Church

20. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 297, 295, 62.

21. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 302.

22. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 304.

teachings of ontological materialism, primordial agency, and a passible God. In conversation with an evangelical theology known as “open theism,” Paulsen affirms that God is open and responsive to significant relation with his creatures and that the future is genuinely open to the free actions of individuals. Consequently, divine foreknowledge in an open theism is limited to “all that can be known.” Evangelicals understand God to *voluntarily* self-limit in a gracious invitation to humanity, whereas Latter-day Saints, according to Paulsen, understand God’s foreknowledge to be limited by ontological and not merely logical necessity or goodwill. Acknowledging the diversity of LDS positions on the topic, Paulsen concludes that any treatment of divine foreknowledge must, minimally, (1) acknowledge libertarian free will, (2) deny causal determinism, and (3) hold that “God’s knowledge, like God’s power, is maximally efficacious” within the ontological conditions described above.²³ In similar fashion, Terryl Givens explores divine foreknowledge briefly, limning the historical controversies and concluding that Church teaching requires only the affirmation that “God is possessed of all the knowledge there is” without compromising human agency.²⁴ Beyond these minimal commitments, he argues, Latter-day Saint dogma does not prescribe a particular view. Ostler, Paulsen, and Givens, heirs of early epistemic progressivism, represent a loose consensus around a parsimonious account of contingent foreknowledge, committed to human agency and attendant to the ontological implications of Latter-day Saint metaphysics.

Conclusion

The conversation among Latter-day Saint thinkers about God’s foreknowledge is certain to evolve, likely along the four axes that structure the issue: time, knowledge, reality, and agency. New voices may challenge the dominant account of agency as libertarian free will. They may further probe the contours of metaphysical materialism or propose new accounts of transcendence. They may object to the positivist epistemology

23. David L. Paulsen, “Response to Professor Pinnock,” in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. David L. Paulsen and Donald W. Musser (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2007), 532; see also Clark H. Pinnock and David L. Paulsen, “A Dialogue on Openness Theology,” in *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 489–553.

24. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 101.

that lingers in some accounts of eternal progression. Indeed, these conversations are already ongoing, though they have yet to be cashed out on the particular issue of divine foreknowledge.

In this respect, one emerging strand of Latter-day Saint thought is worth noting as a concluding nod to the future. In conversation with contemporary continental philosophy, philosophers Joseph Spencer and Adam Miller have explored a “messianic temporality,” a model of time that opens up the chronological-sequential model underlying the ideas of epistemic progression and limited foreknowledge discussed above. Messianic time, a term drawn from philosophical reflections on biblical promises of the future coming of a Messiah, critiques both classical theism and the causal closure of purely secularist naturalism, while offering an alternative to the opposed temporal models of timelessness and chronology. As a theoretical tool, then, it is a good fit for LDS thought’s twin projects to vex both secularism and classical theism with its conjoined sacramentalism and materialism. The messianic perspective shares with classical theism the insight that there must be some metatemporal seedbed from which chronological time emanates or is produced and dismay at the prospect of a closed past, a locked future, and a present exhausted in the actual. Yet as a species of materialism, messianicity cannot countenance a Platonic realm of timeless, transcendent simultaneity, where time does not exist at all as a divine reality. Rather, messianic time is an immanent matrix of potential that *performs* or produces time, a kind of subtemporality that itself gives birth to chronological time and infuses it with grace, creation, potentiality, and freedom, “simultaneously disrupting and composing it from within.”²⁵ Every moment may be, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “the ‘small door through which the Messiah enters.’”²⁶ Elder Neal Maxwell might hear echoes of his “eternal now” in the claim that messianic time “experiences history’s point of origin as located in an open *present* rather than in a closed past.”²⁷ But, like the God of neoplatonic theology, Maxwell’s grounding “eternal now” achieves metatemporal simultaneity because, lacking any sense of chronological before and after, it is necessarily fulfilled and unchangeable, actualized once and for all. The “open

25. Adam S. Miller, *Future Mormon: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 39. See also Joseph M. Spencer, *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).

26. Miller, *Future Mormon*, 42.

27. Miller, *Future Mormon*, 41, emphasis added.

present” of messianic time is, by contrast, radically unrealized, existing solely as *potential* for time and actuality that remains unexpressed and withdrawn behind the actual events of linear time—what we might call “paratemporal” rather than “metatemporal.” Messianic time, then, bears a kinship to Maxwell’s theology of time and divine foreknowledge—and to the Church’s unique development of materialism generally—while it offers new theoretical tools for theologians. In particular, the model of messianic time seems pregnant with insight into the question of divine foreknowledge, but Latter-day Saint thinkers have not yet explored the question specifically. It remains to be seen whether a fruitful messianic account will emerge to join the ongoing debate in Latter-day Saint theology about God, time, knowledge, reality, and agency.

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