

LDS Perspectives Podcast

Episode 52: The (Im)Patience of Job

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This is not a verbatim transcript.

The grammar and wording has been modified in places.

Sarah Hatch: Hi. This is Sarah Hatch from LDS Perspectives. I am here with Michael Austin to talk about the Book of Job and the topic of wisdom literature in the Old Testament. Michael Austin received his BA and MA in English Literature from BYU and his PhD in English Literature from the University of California at Santa Barbara. He is the author and editor of nine books, including the award-winning *Re-reading Job: Understanding the Ancient World's Greatest Poem*. Welcome.

Michael Austin: Thank you very much, Sarah.

Sarah Hatch: Let's start by discussing the wisdom school of Hebrew ancient thought as found in biblical literature. Wisdom literature was a new idea for me introduced in the book. Would you give our listeners a quick review?

Michael Austin: Probably the most important thing about wisdom literature for us to understand is that it was the internationalist literature of the Ancient Near East. There was wisdom literature in Egypt. There was wisdom literature in Babylon. There was wisdom literature in Syria. It look a lot alike. The writers were internationally outward facing. Hebrew wisdom literature looks a lot more like Egyptian wisdom literature than it does most other Hebrew literature. Wisdom literature is very practical. It's pragmatic. It focuses on how to live this life well. It tends not to be other-worldly like most of the prophetic literature is.

The wisdom books in the Bible, in the standard Protestant Bible, are Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs. Then they are in the Catholic Bible, what we call the Apocrypha. There is the Wisdom of Solomon and the Book of Sirach. Then there are about a dozen of the psalms that are considered wisdom psalms. There are some wisdom components to Jonah, Daniel,

and the Song of Solomon. All of these constitute the Hebrew contribution to the wisdom literature of the Ancient Near East.

One thing that is clear when you read wisdom literature — and it's sometimes a little bit disorienting — is that it doesn't really talk about the Jewish God much. It talks about God in a much more universalist sense. The wisdom literature in Proverbs matches very nicely with what's going on in Greece at the same time and some of the wisdom literature of the Mediterranean. You have characters who aren't necessarily Jewish. You have ideas that don't really connect as well as we'd sometimes like them to to the rest of the Bible because that wasn't the purpose of the wisdom writers. The wisdom writers were trying to connect outwards. They were trying to show that Hebrew literature was international; that it was in line with what all of the big kids, all the popular kids, were doing on the block at the time.

Sarah Hatch: You're starting to discuss the differences between maybe wisdom literature and the rest of the Bible. What are some of those differences?

Michael Austin: In the Old Testament, there are three strands of writings that we see coming through in the post-exilic period, or the period of the Babylonian exile. There is what we call the priestly literature and this is written by the priests. There is the prophetic literature written by the prophets. Then there is the wisdom literature, which is written by the sages. The priestly literature tends to be very concerned with ritual, with the kind of cult practices that were part of the temple worship. That, a lot about ritual purity, is what the priests were focusing on.

The prophetic literature is just mono-maniacally devoted to saying, "You must worship Yahweh. You can't worship false gods. And Israel is a Chosen Nation." Sometimes we call that Deuteronomistic literature that produced the Book of Deuteronomy and most of the books that we call "The Prophets." Then you have the wisdom literature, which is written by people that were called "sages." Solomon was the key figure that they looked back to. That literature is much less specifically religious and much more generally religious. There's no sense in the Book of Job that Job is Jewish. We don't get anything Jewish out of Job. Now, we know that the text was written by people or a person with excellent command of Hebrew. It was written by Jews.

But Job is not portrayed as specifically Jewish the way that say, Esther is specifically Jewish. If you look at the books of the Bible that are generally considered the literary masterpieces — the Psalms, Proverbs, Esther, and Job, of course — some of them focus inward to Jewish life and Jewish exceptionalism. Some of them focused outwards to what Jews have in common with everybody else. Wisdom literature almost always focuses outwards. Now, there are a variety of different forms of wisdom literature.

The Proverbs are short little, well, proverbs. Ecclesiastes is prose. Ecclesiastes is a very, “Eat, drink and be merry; that’s all that makes us happy,” kind of message, whereas Proverbs is much more, “Be a good person and serve God.” Job fits inbetween Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in its outlook. What they’re trying to do is the same. They’re trying to say, “Here’s how you live this life well,” not, “Here’s how you please God.” That’s a huge difference between the wisdom literature and the other literature of the Old Testament.

Sarah Hatch: Is Job a unique character in the scriptures?

Michael Austin: He’s unique in the sense that there’s nobody like him in the scriptures, but he’s not unique in the sense that the Book of Job that we have is not the only book from the Ancient Near East that has a character named Job or someone very similar to Job. We have a full text from Egypt that deals with a Job-like character with a very similar name. We have fragments from other Mesopotamian cultures. The character of Job was somebody who was known in the Near East and talked about a lot and used by different wisdom writers to prove different things.

If you look at the text we have of the Book of Job, what makes it such a difficult text to read is that it’s actually two texts. It’s two very different texts. It’s very difficult to see that in the King James Bible because the King James Bible elevates all of its language to the level of poetry, but prints everything as if it were prose. In other versions, you can see that the frame is very simple prose and the rest of it is very complex poetry. What you have with Job, it begins with a story. It starts with the Hebrew equivalent of “Once upon a time.” It tells the very basic story of Job, a man who loses everything and remains faithful and is rewarded at the end.

We have a pretty good sense that that’s what the story of Job was for the people across the Ancient Near East. Then this brilliant Hebrew poet inserts a 10,000-line poem that completely turns that narrative on its head.

The poem of Job is doing things with the story that everybody knew. That's what makes it so interesting.

Sarah Hatch: The Job figure is part of our LDS culture. So it may be not exactly easy to identify your first encounter with Job. When and why did you start to study Job?

Michael Austin: When I graduated from the University of California with my PhD and went out on the job market in 18th Century British Literature, there were about twelve jobs in the whole world that I could even apply for. Most of those were teaching one course in 18th Century British Literature and then a whole bunch of other stuff for the general education core. That's the exact sort of job I landed at Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

Half of my teaching assignment was in world literature, which was a sophomore-level general education, non-English major course. I had to teach everything from Plato to Nato; everything from Gilgamesh all the way through the modern period in a two-semester sequence. Job was on the required reading list. Everybody in every section of that class had to read the Book of Job. I had read the Book of Job a number of times as a seminary student, as a missionary, as an Old Testament student at BYU. My eyes had passed over the Book of Job many, many times. It's actually in the [Norton Anthology of World Literature](#), which was the text that I used to teach from.

At the time it was the King James Version. They have now switched to Norton's own publication, [Robert Alter's Book of Job](#). I had to stand up and lecture for two days on Job to a bunch of sophomore, non-English majors. I had to make it interesting. I had to read all the footnotes. When I did that, I had to understand it in a different way. That's the point at which I did as much research as I needed to do in order to not embarrass myself in my first teaching position. What I found was that what everybody else seemed to know about Job — I mean what was just in the footnotes and the scholarship — Job was a different character. When I actually started reading the middle portion of the Book of Job, I realized that I'd been had, that the middle portion of the Book of Job was not saying the same things as the first two chapters and the conclusion, which we call the frame.

It was directly positioning itself against the framing text. It was doing so in ways that I found absolutely fabulous. At that point, I said, "Someday

I'm going to write a book about Job." Everyone in my religious culture needs to understand what most people have understood about Job for hundreds of years, which is he was not a patient fellow. The patience of Job is a saying that originates from only reading the first two chapters of Job. The entire poem of Job is Job not being patient, complaining bitterly, calling himself a griever, challenging God to come down right now and explain things to him. So this "Patient Job" that I remembered was not Job. It was a Job that was based on a very shallow reading that the poem was intentionally trying to subvert. I just found that really interesting.

Sarah Hatch: You wrote that Job is probably the easiest book in the entire Bible to read badly.

Michael Austin: Absolutely.

Sarah Hatch: You continue that the big question in Job, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is the least interesting thing about it. Why do you think that?

Michael Austin: Well, I think it's the easiest book to read badly because of how it's set up. The first two chapters of Job and the last half of the last chapter are very easy to read. It's a child's story. It's a fable. This is a story about a man who's punished. He's righteous. He endures. He's rewarded. It makes great flannel board stories. Then after Chapter Two, you hit an extraordinarily complex poem that we're not used to reading in the King James Bible that we use. It looks exactly like the first two chapters, but it's not. It's really hard. What human beings do when they read hard things is their eyes glaze over and they just assume that the trajectory that begins with the first two chapters and ends in the ending is going to continue throughout.

So we read that, but it's hard. We frame it as something that we see must be a continuation of this story because that story is so easy to read, so we miss what's really going on. We miss the interplay between the frame that the narrative outside the first two chapters and the last part of the last chapter and the poem because the frame is easy and the poem is hard. We like easy things better than we like hard things.

The first three or four times I read Job, I read the first two chapters. I thought I understood it. Then my eyes passed over the rest of the book, but I didn't really understand it. Then I got to the end. I understood it. This is

just how we read. When we understand something, big stuff we don't understand and then an end part that we do understand, we fill in that middle and just assume that the trajectory is the same. In Job, it's not.

Sarah Hatch: What are some common misconceptions about Job?

Michael Austin: Probably the biggest misconception about Job is that he was patient, that he did not criticize or curse God, and that he was tested extremely. He lost his property. He lost his children. He lost all of his wealth. He was diseased. He was sick. Satan kept hammering away at him. He remained faithful. He didn't curse God. Then he was rewarded. Thus, we see that if you just endure, you will be rewarded in the end.

That's the story of the frame. That's the story of Job that was common in the Ancient Near East. It was a morality tale. It was about how you should be patient and obedient. That's the story, and the writer of the poem wanted to say, "That's a bad story." The writer of the poem wanted to say this is a ridiculous story. It misunderstands God. It misunderstands human nature. It's a nice story to tell children, but it gets it all wrong because ultimately if we believe that, if we believe that Job is about a patient man being rewarded, then Satan is right all along. We really do only obey God because of the rewards or the fear of punishment.

The poet was intentionally subverting the story. What we have is that story that everybody knew, now is the story that everybody seems to know about Job. Then we have the rebuttal to that story which is contained in that middle portion. Here's the example that I developed when I was teaching it. I said, "Okay. Let's pretend that you're watching Cinderella, the Disney version. You see the first part of Cinderella." You see Cinderella. She goes to the ball.

Then all of a sudden, the movie stops and a feminist scholar poet steps onto the stage and reads a poem called "Cinderella's Lament" in which she says, "You think I was happy going to the ball? Are you crazy? I live in this culture where all women are supposed to do is get married and the prince looks at me. He falls in love with me. Then he can't even remember what I look like, so he has women try on shoes. Have you ever thought about how ridiculous this is? I mean, if he loves me, he should be able to see my face. He shouldn't need to try on the slipper in order to see what my feet look like. What is going on here?" Then back to the happily ever after ending. Well, what we see is that the Disney version has framed a

rebuttal poem. That frame doesn't make sense anymore to us after we'd listened to the rebuttal poem. ... That's Job.

Sarah Hatch: Before we talk about unlearning the misconceptions, let's discuss the tension between literary Job and historical Job. Is Job historical?

Michael Austin: That's a really hard question. I was thinking about that on the way over here. How will I answer the question, "Is Job historical?" As I read it, there are three possible questions that that can mean. I'm going to try to answer each one of those possible questions. Hopefully, we'll get to an answer. The first way you can read that question is, "Was there actually a human being named Job who suffered greatly and complained about it?" We have no way to answer that question. It's very possible. There probably was a Gilgamesh.

We know there was a Richard III. We know that there was a Roland, if you've read the "Song of Roland," that actually was with Charlemagne at Roncevaux. We also know that he probably didn't kill 250 armed Saracens single-handedly like the "Song of Roland" says. So was there a person named Job? From a historical perspective, that's an unanswerable question. There was certainly a fable of Job that was well-known in the Middle East. Those fables are very often based on somebody. It's a question that there's no way we can get enough evidence to answer. The second way you can read that question is, "Does the Book of Job represent an actual conversation?" Is this history? Is this a historical document? Was there some great poet sitting in the corner of the tent listening to the comforters and Job writing this all down? Did Job actually spoke in perfect parallel poetry?

The answer to that one is, "No." This is a work of literature that was initially written to be a work of literature and was understood by its audiences for hundreds of years to be a work of literature. There is just no conceivable way that we actually can read that as the actual conversation between Job and his comforters. People just don't talk like that. Who would have been writing all of this down? What would they have been using because there wasn't paper? You'd have to imagine somebody chiseling away on a rock. It's very possible that there was a Job.

We know that there really are enough stories that a lot of people, not just Jews, but a lot of people believe there to be a historical figure named Job. We know that this is a work of literature that was intentionally written as

literature and understood as that. The third question is, “Does it matter whether or not there is a historical person named Job?” This is probably where most of the debate comes. I’m going to answer very strongly on the side that God can use literature as much as God can use history to teach us lessons. There’s no reason on earth that a work of literature can’t be inspired, that it can’t be revelation, that it can’t be one of the ways that God speaks to human beings. If I didn’t believe that, I would not have spent my career studying literature. Ultimately, the value of Job, in my opinion — and I believe this very strongly — does not depend on any historical quality. That’s a position that denies the value of literature in a spiritual sense.

Sarah Hatch: You mentioned that the literary structure of the book of Job is central to why we misunderstand the book, but also how we can begin to ask more interesting questions about Job’s story.

Michael Austin: The literary structure of a framed poem. That’s a very complicated literary structure. It allows us to understand that there is an inner play going on. There are two Job stories talking to each other here. There is an author who is using a Job poem, speaking from Job’s own mouth because we don’t really hear much from Job in the first two chapters. We hear, “Naked came I into the world, naked will I leave it. God is good. Worship God.” We don’t hear what’s going on.

When we read that story, if we’re human beings, we see that here’s a person who has just had ten children killed and all he’s saying is, “Naked came I into the world. God is good. Praise God.” We’re going to wonder what’s the matter with that person? I mean, what does he think? We have this text saying that he just took this all in stride. That’s not human nature. When we read the story, what we should be thinking is not how wonderful it is that Job is patient, it’s what’s the matter with this guy who doesn’t get upset when all of his children die?

That’s what the poet is doing. The poet is saying, “Come on. You don’t really believe that somebody just sat there and shrugged his shoulders when all of these happened. That’s not how human beings act. Let’s look at what Job was really thinking.” Then that’s the poem that is put into the mouth of Job and his comforters.

Sarah Hatch: Tell us about our characters in the poem.

Michael Austin:

Okay. Well, your first characters are God and Satan. This is a really crucial point. Satan in the book of Job is not who we think of as Satan. He's not even Satan. He's the *satan*, lower case. It's an office. It is not the father of all lies or the prince of evil or the prince of darkness. This is one of the ways we can date the poem because the *satan*, which just means the adversary, matches to a very specific figure in history that we can identify. If you read Herodotus, the Greek historian, he travels to the Persian Empire. He tells us that the Persian king had an office that was called "The Eyes and Ears of the King."

He was a person who went throughout the kingdom, talking to the satraps, who were the local governors, and trying to see if they were loyal. He would test them. He would try to enter into treasonous conversations. Then if he found a satrap who was willing to be disloyal, he would tell the king. The king would have the guy killed. That is in the Persian Empire. Remember, the Persians controlled Babylon for most of the time of the Jewish exile. The Jews quite liked the Persians because Cyrus is the one who let them go back to build the temple. He paid for it out of his own treasury.

Cyrus is very much a hero. Persian culture influences Jewish culture much more than Babylonian culture does because they hated the Babylonians. Here you have this roving *suborner* of treason whose job is to root out treason by tempting people to disobey. But he's a loyal member of the court. That's who *satan* is, that's who the *satan* is in Job. He is modeled on this "Eyes and Ears of the King." His job is to try to trick people into committing treason. You see that that's exactly what Satan is trying to do. He's trying to get Job into denying God.

The *satan* and God enter into this relationship where the *satan* is going to try to get Job to deny God. That's what sets up this whole thing. If we read *satan* as what we now think of as Satan, we're going to miss everything about Job. Well, not everything, but most things about Job. We're going to read it very badly.

Then our next characters are Job and his comforters. In the story, the comforters don't say a word. They just listen for seven days, which I think is a wonderful example of how you ought to deal with people who are suffering. They don't try to explain it. They don't even try to comfort him. They just hug him, and cry with him, and sit there, and rip their clothes.

Then when you break into the poem portion of Job, the comforters become what we would now call “mansplainers.” They become people who are trying to explain Job’s suffering to him. They are not comforters. The word “comforter” is completely ironic once you get to the poem portion, because Job threatens them in an existential way. Job threatens the foundation of their belief system, which is that God can be predicted and controlled. If you’re just righteous enough, you will control what happens to you; living a certain way and obeying a certain set of rules is going to produce happiness in life. That’s the proposition that Job the poem is testing.

Job himself, simply by existing, is an affront to that worldview. Just by being a righteous man who has suffered greatly, Job invalidates the premise upon which the comforters have built their lives, so they’ve got to talk him out of it. They have got to show that Job is at fault or else their worldview was wrong. They’re going to have to change their mind in a substantial way. The debate then, it’s a form of literature called the “wisdom dialogue.” The wisdom dialogue is somewhat related to the Socratic dialogue, which is what most of Plato’s work comes in, except in the Socratic dialogue you have one figure who is rhetorically superior to everybody else and leads them in a certain direction.

In a wisdom dialogue, you have equal participants who are all partially right and partially wrong. They try to tease out the truth in that way. It’s a much more inclusive version of the kinds of Socratic dialogues that we read in Plato. The comforters keep trying to explain why Job is suffering. Every time one of them makes a speech, Job gives a rebuttal. You’ve got speech, rebuttal, speech, rebuttal. Most of Job’s rebuttals aren’t even to his comforters. They are to God because Job accepts this view, too. Job believes that God has mistakenly convicted him for doing something wrong.

The whole message that Job gives is, “I didn’t do it, God. I didn’t do what you think I did. Give me a chance to explain myself. Come down here right now. Give me a chance to explain what you think I did. Make this a trial. I will present my evidence. I will prove to you that I am innocent and, therefore, that I deserve not to suffer.” Then God comes back in the world but a very different God than we see in the preamble or in the preface. This God comes down and for four chapters, He just asks Job a series of rhetorical questions.

“Can you make a world? Do you know how long elephants gestate? Can you capture the Leviathan? Can you wrap up a hippopotamus in a bridal bower?” I mean, there are some kind of weird questions. But the rhetorical effect of all of those questions is for Job to understand the piousness of his own perspective. God is saying to Job, “You are making the formulation that because you are unhappy, I am unjust. That’s not how it works because you don’t have my perspective and you never will. The fact that your life is not going like you planned for it to go has nothing to do with my justice. It has to do with your lack of understanding.”

Then God does a really interesting thing. He rewards Job. I think we have to read that ironically. But he justifies Job. He says, “Job has been right. The comforters, you’ve all been wrong.” Those comforters were defending God. The comforters were the ones who were saying, “God would never be unjust.” Job was saying, “God is unjust.” God says, “Job, you’re wrong. But you are righter than the comforters who were defending God because they had your perspective too, and they were trying to explain me without understanding me when really they should’ve just shut up and been your friend.”

Sarah Hatch: What of the character of the Redeemer?

Michael Austin: That’s an interesting question. That appears in Job 25, from the very earliest Christian writings. Pope Gregory wrote in about the 5th century AD a book called *Morals and Job* and identified this as a reference to Christ. It probably isn’t a reference to Christ or a reference to the Messiah or the Redeemer. Job is listing all of the people that God has caused to turn against him either because God’s killed them or because he’s poor, and he’s dirty, and he smells.

All of his relatives don’t want anything to do with him anymore. In the Hebrew understanding, and largely in the Ancient Near Eastern understanding, there is a figure called the *Goel*. That is sometimes translated as “Redeemer.” But, this is the person who is responsible for either rectifying your life or your name after you’ve died, who is responsible for proving your reputation. Probably the most famous Goel story is Ruth and Boaz. Boaz was the Goel or the redeemer of Ruth’s husband, except there was one other person that had that relationship first. Then Boaz was next in line. So there is this passage in Ruth where Boaz goes to this other relative and says, “Will you redeem?”

The relative says, “No, I don’t want to redeem.” What that means is, “Will you marry Ruth? You’ll get all of her property, but you’ll have to be her husband.” He says, “No.” Boaz says, “Then I will redeem. I am the kinsman who has that responsibility to marry my brother’s wife and raise children to him.” What Job is saying is, “Everybody who is related to me in any way has turned against me. But I know that somewhere out there is my Goel. Somewhere out there is the redeemer who will clear my name if you kill me.” Difficult to read that in context and get a Christ metaphor or a Christ-type out of that though there are certainly a lot of songs in almost all religious traditions that say otherwise.

Sarah Hatch: If you were to write down a list of Job-inspired proverbs, what might they include?

Michael Austin: Well, you know, I actually did. Let me just read a few because I think Job is about deriving some proverbs. It depends on whose perspective you take. If you’re looking at Satan’s perspective, I think the proverb is, “Don’t argue with your boss.” It’s just a bad idea especially if your boss is omnipotent because you’ll probably lose.

From Job’s perspective, here are some of the things that I think that he is telling us:

- Just because you don’t understand the reason for something doesn’t mean there isn’t a reason for it. It just means that your understanding is limited.
- Don’t get so offended when people try to give you well-meaning advice, even if it’s completely appropriate. They’re doing the best they can.
- Just because you are unhappy doesn’t mean that the universe is flawed.
- It’s not the universe’s job to make you happy.
- Don’t look to other people for comfort. Ultimately, you have to learn how to do it yourself.

Then this is one that may be controversial but I believe it’s there.

- It’s okay with God if you complained about stuff. God can handle it. He’s not offended by your complaints.
- Finally, don’t scrape. It just makes things worse.

Sarah Hatch: Clever.

Michael Austin: Because he scrapes the pottery, scrapes his back with potsherds.

Sarah Hatch: That's so funny.

Michael Austin: But I think the people we're supposed to identify within Job is not Job — it's the comforters; it's the advice-givers. This is where I think some of the really important messages go. Here is my list of proverbs for the comforters:

- If you don't understand what somebody is going through, don't try to explain it. Just listen to them and love them.
- You don't have to worry about protecting God. God can protect himself. Your responsibility is to protect the people who can't protect themselves.
- Every effect has a cause, but not every effect has a cause that you are capable of understanding.
- Sometimes being a good friend means doing things that will make you religiously or ideologically uncomfortable — be a good friend anyway.
- Sometimes people bring their own suffering on themselves and sometimes they don't. You don't have to decide. You just have to love them.
- Nobody likes a suck up, not even God.

Sarah Hatch: What do we learn from Job that we can apply in our lives today?

Michael Austin: Job is about two very important things: how we relate to God and how we relate to each other. Job's relationship to God is very complicated, but I think that one thing Job tells us is like I said in the proverbs, "You don't have to worry about hurting God's feelings. You can complain to God. You can even complain about God to God." My kids complain about me to me all the time. I understand, and I want to hear from them anyway. I think that sometimes we have this idea that God is sitting up there with a lightning bolt waiting to zap us if we say the wrong thing. God comes to Job at the end and loved Job at the end and even validates Job in the end even though Job spends the whole poem complaining about God.

I think that that's important, that sometimes we're afraid to hurt God's feelings. I don't think we have to worry about that. Job is also about how we relate to each other. The comforters in the frame do a wonderful job of comforting. They don't say a word. Job talks to us about how we should

relate to each other. I think the most important thing that the Book of Job says is that other people aren't there to confirm our worldview. There are a lot of people in the world whose existence might make us uncomfortable because they represent things that we are religiously uncomfortable with. I think that the great message of the comforters, the failure of the comforters, is they cannot overcome their religious discomfort enough to love a friend.

They are so concerned with the fact that if Job says he is innocent, then that means that he is blaming God and blaspheming. They refuse to comfort him because to do so, they enter a zone where they are ideologically uncomfortable. The Book of Job tells us at the end with God rebuking the comforters that they were bad comforters. They cared more about not hurting God's feelings than they did about comforting their friend who had been through horrible things. There's a real message in that for us, I think.

Sarah Hatch: I have to say, this book surprised me. It's a page-turner. Who'd have thought for Job? To conclude, would you sum up why you consider Job to be the world's greatest poem?

Michael Austin: I think it's the world's greatest poem or actually I said the ancient world's greatest poem — there are some modern things like maybe "Paradise Lost" that might give it a run for its money. It's the ancient world's greatest poem because at a very early time in human history, it deals profoundly with the two most important things we as human beings have to do. That is how do you love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength and also love your neighbor as yourself? How do you love and interact with God? How do you love and interact with each other?

Job gives us some surprising answers to those questions; answers that 3,000 years later are still relevant. Answers that 3,000 years later still can make people religiously uncomfortable. A poem that can do that for 3,000 years has got a really good claim to being the greatest thing ever written.

Sarah Hatch: What's next for Michael Austin?

Michael Austin: Right now, Ardis Parshall and I are working on a series of books for the Greg Kofford Press that reprints texts about Mormons, literary works about Mormons. I'm actually right now working on an annotated edition of Orson F. Whitney's poem, "Elias," which will merge the 1904 and the

1914 edition with lots of footnotes. I also, with a couple of other friends of mine who blog at *By Common Consent*, we just started our own press, the BCC Press. I've become a niche publisher in a very niche Mormon market. We are busy promoting three books right now that we just published. We'll hopefully be publishing some more.

Then I'm working on a book. By working on a book, I mean I'm thinking about a book, but I have written a few chapters already, called *How the Book of Mormon Reads the Bible*, which is about how the Book of Mormon reads the Bible. How does the Book of Mormon ask us to engage with both the Old and the New Testaments? That's my next couple years' of projects.

Sarah Hatch: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

Michael Austin: Well, thank you very much. I had a great time.

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