

Mormonism and Adding to the Bible

The last attack on the belief in the Bible as the supreme authority for deciding truth is seen in the Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints' (the Mormons or LDS) belief that The Book of Mormon along with other revelations should be considered Scripture alongside the Old and New Testament. We will see that human attempts to add to the Bible are always detrimental to the faith because the Canon of Scripture is closed and no more normative revelation is forthcoming. First, we will briefly review the Mormon view of Scripture. Next, we will look at the Christian belief that the Canon of Scripture is closed. Finally, we will put Joseph Smith and his revelations to the test given in Isaiah. We will observe that whether we add to the Scriptures by elevating tradition to equality with the Bible like the Medieval Jews and Roman Catholics, or by adding new books to the status of supreme revelation like the Muslims and Mormons, the addition always amounts to subtraction.

1. *The Mormon View of Scripture*

Though Mormonism claims to be Christian it strays from Christianity so far that it is barely recognizable; this is also true concerning its beliefs about the Bible. When Mormons use the word *Scripture* they are referring to all words inspired by God, not just the Bible. In Doctrine and Covenants 68:4 Joseph Smith is speaking to Orson Hyde, but presumably to all prophets, when he said, "And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation."¹ Bruce McConkie in his popular *Mormon Doctrine* explains, "Any message, whether written or spoken, that come from God to man by the power of the Holy Ghost is *scripture*."² In both Judaism and Christianity it is recognized that prophets both spoke and wrote down their revelations from God, but not every prophecy was written. Scripture only refers to the written revelation of the prophets. The Hebrew and Greek words translated *Scripture* both mean "writing." In Hebrew *kethav* (כֶּתָב) in Daniel 10:21 used for Scripture literally means writing or document. Throughout the New Testament *graphe* (γραφή) is translated "Scripture" and literally means "writing." This is a simple mistake made by Mormons since most do not know Greek or Hebrew, but Joseph Smith makes this mistake supposedly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a mistake the Holy Spirit would not have made. But most Mormons recognize four major works as Scripture in what they call the Standard Works, which include the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. McConkie states:

These four volumes of scripture are the standards, the measuring rods, the gauges by which all things are judged. Since they are the will, mind, word, and voice of the Lord (D. & C. 68:4), they are true; consequently, all doctrine, all philosophy, all history, and all matters of whatever nature with which they deal are truly and accurately presented. The truth of all things is measured by the scriptures. That which harmonizes with them should be accepted; that which is contrary to their teachings, however plausible it may seem for the moment, will not endure and should be rejected... Even the writings, teachings, and opinions of the prophets of God are acceptable only to the extent they are in harmony with what God has revealed and what is recorded in the standard works.

When the living oracles speak in the name of the Lord or as moved upon by the Holy

¹ *Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981), 126.

² Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 682.

Ghost, however, their utterances are then binding upon all who hear, and whatever is said will without any exception be found to be in harmony with the standard works. The Lord's house is a house of order, and one truth never contradicts another. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 3, pp. 203-204.)³

At first it appears that McConkie is advocating the four volumes as our supreme authority; all other "truths" are to be tested by these works. But this is hardly the case as we shall see. Mormons reject the first standard, the Bible, as being corrupt and therefore not trustworthy, and they elevate modern prophecies as equal to the four standards even though they hopelessly contradict each other.

The Mormons teach that the Bible is corrupt, similar to the position of the Muslims. In the Mormons' Articles of Faith verse 8 states, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." Joseph Smith elaborated declaring, "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors."⁴ 1 Nephi 13:28 indicts the Church stating, "Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God." The Mormons believe that large portions of Scripture were removed and other parts corrupted by the translators and transcribers. Orson Pratt, one of the original members of the Quorum of Apostles under Joseph Smith, queried, "Who knows that even one verse of the Bible has escaped pollution?"⁵ These are serious charges.

First of all, we have already seen that the Bible can be trusted and has been copied accurately, which is what we would expect from an omnipotent God.⁶ Joseph Smith philosophized that if there is a Creator of the universe, it makes sense that He would "inform us something of the hereafter."⁷ But if we "think for a moment the greatness of the Being who created the Universe" doesn't it make sense that this Being would not only reveal Himself and His plan for humanity, but also would preserve this revelation in such a way that people throughout the centuries could trust what it says? The god of the Mormons is an impotent god that lost control immediately after he wrote the New Testament until Joseph Smith came along in the 19th century. Nephi blamed the corruption of the Bible on the abominable church, but he should have charged it on the incompetent god of Mormonism. Much of the Book of Mormon consists of direct quotes from the King James Version of the Bible; should we suspect those verses as well? Or was Pratt wrong in claiming all verses have not escaped pollution? Here we

³ Ibid., 764-765.

⁴ Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 327. Smith goes on to explain one correction in Hebrews 6:1 which in the KJV says, "therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ..." Smith says, "If a man leaves the principles of the doctrines of Christ, how can he be saved in the principles?" Ibid., 328. He then changes the verse to read, "therefore not leaving the principles..." He corrects the text because he misunderstood the KJV language. By "leave" the writer of Hebrews did not mean to abandon or even to ignore, but rather he meant he wanted to move on to the next subject. Under the supposed inspiration of the Spirit Smith corrects the Bible because he misunderstood it; this is what happens when people place themselves above the authority of the Bible.

⁵ As quoted in Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 138.

⁶ Even BYU professor Dr. Richard Anderson admitted that all the ancient manuscripts of the Bible agree in 99% of what they record. James Spencer, *Have You Witnessed to a Mormon Lately?* (Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books, 1986), 107-108.

⁷ *Teachings*, 56.

have a conundrum; either we have to say the Book of Mormon is possibly corrupt or we have to reject Pratt, an apostle of Mormonism.

Second, if we cannot trust the Bible then how can it be one of the four major Standard Works? Usually the answer is something to the effect that if it agrees with the other books it is ok, but if it contradicts the other books it is suspect. Smith attempted to fix the problem by starting a revision of the KJV. We do not have a complete copy of his revisions today because Mormons tell us that it was never completed, even though according to Doctrine And Covenants 42:56-57 Smith would receive the translation “in full,” and in the Mormon *History of the Church* volume 1 page 368 it states that Smith “this day finished the translating of the Scriptures.”⁸ If God led him to write a new translation, why do we not have the translation outside of a few minor portions? Was the Mormon god not powerful enough to produce it? Or perhaps was it because the translation contradicts the Book of Mormon and official Mormon doctrine?⁹ A basic principle for testing new revelation is how well it accords with previous revelation. God would not contradict Himself; this is why the Bereans were commended for testing the teachings of Paul with the Old Testament (Acts 17:10-12). We will later see that the other three Standard Works fail this test, hopelessly contradicting the first and only necessary standard, the Bible.

2. *The Christian Belief that the Canon is Closed*

When theologians speak of the *canon* of Scripture they mean the official books of the Bible. The Mormon belief that the Canon is still open for new books to be added reveals a woeful ignorance of the supremacy of Christ and God’s plan for the world. As we have seen, the Old Testament canon was closed after the last book, Malachi, was added around 400 B.C.; this is because the Old Covenant was drawing to a close with the New Covenant about to be offered. The Old Covenant was preparatory and incomplete, awaiting the full revelation of God. The full revelation of God was given at the coming of Christ because Jesus is the full revelation of God. Hebrews 1:1-3 states:

Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. God has appointed Him heir of all things and made the universe through Him. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word.¹⁰

Carson elaborates:

The Son himself is the apex of revelation; to use the language of John, Jesus himself, as we have seen, is the ultimate “Word,” God’s self-expression, the Word incarnate. Thus, any notion of a New Testament canon immediately becomes tied to its relation to him.¹¹

The New Testament is the record and explanation of the full revelation of Jesus Christ from eyewitness accounts recorded by apostles and prophets. The passage above indicates that it is

⁸ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, 142.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John MacArthur comments, “Jesus Christ is the revelation of God climaxed. God fully expressed Himself in His Son. That affirms Christ as being more than just human. It makes Him infinitely superior to any created being, for He is God manifest in the flesh. He is the final and last revelation of God, in whom all God’s promises are fulfilled.” John MacArthur, *the MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 10.

¹¹ D.A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 29.

Jesus Himself including His person, words and deeds that make up the full revelation of God. Jesus prepared His disciples to be ready to record His words and events of His life when the Spirit would bring to their remembrance what He said and did and their significance.¹² The authors of the New Testament were aware that they were writing supremely authoritative Scripture and recognized each other's writings as Scripture.¹³

Each New Testament writer was either an eyewitness or a prophet who received his information from an eyewitness. Matthew was an eyewitness and an apostle and wrote the Gospel of Matthew. Mark prophetically wrote the Gospel of Mark under the direction of Peter who was an eyewitness and apostle. Peter also personally wrote 1 and 2 Peter. Luke was a prophet who researched several eyewitnesses, probably including Mary the mother of Jesus and wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts. John was an apostle and eyewitness and wrote the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation. We are not sure of who the author of Hebrews was, but the leading contenders are Luke¹⁴ and Paul; whoever it was, he prophetically recorded the testimony of eyewitnesses according to Hebrews 2:3-4. James the brother of Jesus wrote James. Jude, the brother of Jesus wrote Jude. Thirteen letters were written by Paul who was an apostle and eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1). He records that he was the very last one to see Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:7-9. He states this appearance was "last of all, as to one abnormally born." His point was that it was as if he was too late because he didn't know Christ while He was in the flesh, but God in mercy revealed Himself to him as the very last person to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. Jesus warned His followers before He died that many would come claiming to be Him, but they were not to believe them because the next time anyone sees Him will be when He comes back (Matthew 24:4-5, 23-27). Jesus specifically says, "If anyone tells you then, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Over here!' do not believe it!" He describes His return: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

What we note from the declaration of Hebrews 1:1-3, the statements of Paul and the warnings of Jesus is very important in our consideration of the canon: First, the New Testament record of the full revelation of Jesus must have been from eyewitness accounts of an apostle or prophet. Later prophets who did not gain information from eyewitnesses would not have anything to add, because we already have the full revelation of Jesus in His incarnation, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection and post-resurrection appearances immediately following His resurrection. This does not necessarily mean there can no longer be any prophetic gifting, but it does mean that there can no longer be any additions to Scripture – How can you add to the full

¹² John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15. Carson correctly remarks concerning John 16:14, "*taking from what is mine and making it known to you* does not simply mean that the Paraclete passes on what Jesus declares, but that all the revelation bound up in Jesus' person and mission are pressed home on the disciples." He goes on to say, "Therefore if the Spirit takes *what is mine* and makes it known to the disciples, the content of *what is mine* is nothing less than the revelation of the Father himself, for Jesus declares, *All that belongs to the Father is mine* (v. 15)." D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 541. He goes on to reveal that in considering all three passages above (14:26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15) it becomes evident that they can only be referring to the original disciples because "in two of the other Paraclete passages, explicit reference is made to *reminding* the disciples of what Jesus said during the days of his flesh (14:26) or to the fact that they had been *with Jesus* from the beginning of his ministry (15:27)." Ibid.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 14:37 Paul sees his own writings as Scripture (also 1 Thessalonians 5:27). 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul recognized the Gospel of Luke as Scripture quoting Luke 10:7 and calling it Scripture. 2 Peter 3:15-16 Peter acknowledges Paul's writings as Scripture.

¹⁴ David Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B and H, 2010), passim.

revelation of God? We have all we need as far as normative revelation is concerned.¹⁵ Therefore, any later writings (including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants or the Pearl of Great Price) claiming to be Scripture must be abandoned. Second, Paul was the very last eyewitness of Jesus and so any claim by Mormon or anyone else must be rejected as spurious. Third it would be sin to believe the testimony of the Book of Mormon because Jesus told us that if anyone claimed to see the Messiah we are not to believe it. A possible response to this from a Mormon might be that the Book of Mormon was an eyewitness testimony of the appearance of Jesus in America shortly after His resurrection. We will see several serious problems with accepting the Book of Mormon as Scripture later, but this argument does not answer how the other two “Standards” could be considered Scripture. There are also other reasons for believing the canon is closed.

How did we get our present day canon? Mormon apologist Bruce McConkie claims, “Canonizing is generally considered as complete when some formal council, convention, or other official church assemblage officially adopts a particular work.”¹⁶ The Mormon view is similar to the Roman Catholic understanding, but there is a serious problem with this perspective. If a church council deliberates which books are considered Scripture, then human councils become authoritative over God’s word. The Protestant view is that the books of the Bible were declared Scripture by the author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and they were recognized as Scripture by the church. The church did not decide the Bible was the Bible, God did. The books of the New Testament were recognized as Scripture immediately (see footnote 13 above) and the canon was embraced as the church saw that each book was either written by an apostle or sanctioned by an apostle, conformed to the orthodox faith, and “enjoyed widespread and continuous usage by the churches.”¹⁷

There are several warnings in Scripture about adding to Scripture. Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:5-6 and Revelation 22:18-19 remind us of the serious nature of these warnings. These warnings do not mean that no further revelation is possible because there was more revelation after Deuteronomy and Proverbs. Proverbs 30:5-6 is a general warning and Deuteronomy 4:2 is a specific warning not to add to the Old Covenant Law, which is why it is found in the last book of the Torah. The rest of the Old Testament books are explanations and progressive revelational understanding of the Old Covenant, description of God and His plan, as well as prediction of a New Covenant to come. Revelation 22:18-19 in its immediate context is referring to the book of Revelation and its apocalyptic predictions, but its place in the canon is not simply coincidence. It states:

I testify to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of this prophetic book, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city, written in this book.

In the book of Revelation, as the climax of normative revelation, Jesus reveals the end of time. This book was written by the last apostle and probably the last eyewitness alive approximately

¹⁵ By “normative revelation” I mean revelation from a prophet that is written down and applicable to all Christians as their absolute authority. Personal words from God or impressions from the Holy Spirit would not be considered normative revelation.

¹⁶ Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 111.

¹⁷ D.A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 30.

95 A.D. The book begins by declaring it to be “The revelation of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ This phrase uses a plenary genitive meaning the revelation comes from Christ and is about Christ; it is both subjective and objective. The book ends with the warning to not add or subtract from this revelation. It is interesting that Joseph Smith, in his revision of the New Testament, changes some of the words in the book of Revelation (e.g. Revelation 5:6), which makes him guilty of adding and subtracting from the revelation. The book is placed at the end of the New Testament canon because it was the last book written and records what the end of the world will be like. The warning is primarily referring to the individual book of Revelation, but its place in the canon and the words being the last words of the canon, is a fitting insinuation that it also refers to any new books supposed to be considered Scripture. The canon is closed. But even if some are not convinced that the canon is closed, any book claiming canonical status can be put to the test I have discussed found in Isaiah 41 – does it record the past accurately, predict the future in detail and have verifiable miracles surrounding it?

Joseph Smith and His Revelations Put to the Test of Isaiah

Was Joseph Smith a prophet and are his books equal to Scripture? Joseph Smith and Mormonism have several characteristics that are like Islam and Mohammad. They both claim that the Bible is corrupt, which we have seen to be untrue. They both claim to have received revelation from an angel, when both Joseph and Mohammad should have heeded the warning in Galatians 1:8-9: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! As we have said before, I now say again; If anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!” Incidentally both angels proclaimed a different gospel than what Paul preached in Romans and Galatians. They both claimed to author revelation that supplements and explains what was confusing or lost in the past revelation of the Bible. We saw how the Koran and Mohammad gave a test for their authenticity but failed in that the test was not valid and they failed the test anyway. We also saw how the Koran and Mohammad failed the test of Isaiah, whereas the Bible past the test. The Book of Mormon also gives a test in its introduction similarly found in Moroni 10:3-5:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Is this a valid test and does the Book of Mormon pass the test? First of all it is very subjective. The Holy Spirit could reveal the answer to the sincere enquirer but how do we know God has given us this test? The test is also very vague; what does it mean that we will gain a testimony? Do we hear a voice? Do we have a feeling? I have heard some describe it as a burning in the bosom, but that could come from spicy food just as well as the Holy Spirit; it could also come from the devil.

It appears that the Book of Mormon, like the Koran, gives a test that is not a very good test, and like the Koran, it does not pass its own test. Edwin Firmage Jr. was a devout Mormon and was given the opportunity to teach the Book of Mormon in a class at Berkeley. He states:

¹⁸ Revelation 1:1

I welcomed the opportunity, as it would give me a chance to delve deeper into the book. By any standard, my wife and I were faithful Mormons who attended church, visited the temple, and prayed together. I expected my study of the Book of Mormon to result in an increase of faith as it had on my mission. But within six months, I no longer believed the Book of Mormon to be an ancient text. . . . One thing is certain: it was a close reading of the Book of Mormon that provoked this change. How ironic, I thought, that after doing precisely what Elder Ezra Taft Benson had been admonishing us to do – study the Book of Mormon – I now found myself regarding it as a work of historical fiction.¹⁹

I am sure that many Mormons will simply state that Edwin was not sincere, but how can we judge his heart? He claims to be sincere, and unless we have good evidence to the contrary we dare not judge his motives or heart lest we break the command of Jesus who said, “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged.”²⁰ If we say that the very fact that he did not embrace the Book of Mormon proves his heart was not sincere, then we negate the test, because it becomes a form of circular reasoning. Mormons also claim that the testimony of the three witnesses and the testimony of the eight witnesses give concrete evidence that Smith did not fabricate the plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon, but there is so much discrepancy concerning these witnesses they do not give any kind of firm evidence and certainly no miraculous evidence proving the supernatural nature of the book.²¹

How does the Book of Mormon fair when subjected to the test in Isaiah 41? First of all, it does not describe the past accurately. It has been accused of looking much more like a product of nineteenth century New England than an ancient record of the Americas. Ross Anderson notes:

The Book of Mormon reflects nineteenth-century American theological and political themes. It offers guidance on democracy, the practice of capitalism, and various Protestant controversies. Some scholars see parallels between the Book of Mormon’s secret societies – the Gadianton robbers – and contemporary concerns about Freemasonry. Many see the warning in 1 Nephi 13 about a “great abominable church” as a close parallel to anti-Catholic propaganda in the 1830s. Sermons by Nephite prophets echo the form and language of nineteenth-century evangelists. The conversion experiences described in the Book of Mormon are similar to spiritual awakenings commonly reported in the American revival movement of the early 1800s. Why are the contents of an ancient work so closely tied to the concerns of one American generation?²²

The multitude of nineteenth century anachronisms led the editors Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe to name their book *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*. I want to focus on four areas that reveal the Book of Mormon was a product of the nineteenth century rather than an ancient book inspired by God.

¹⁹ Edwin Firmage Jr., “Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter” in Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalf, editors, *American Apocrypha* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2003), 1-2.

²⁰ Matthew 7:1

²¹ Dan Vogel, “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies” in Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalf, editors, *American Apocrypha*, 79-121.

²² Ross Anderson, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 76-77.

First, the Book of Mormon reflects the prejudices of the U.S.A. in the 1800's. Before 1978 Mormon black males were not allowed to participate in the priesthood. This racist doctrine came from the teachings of the Book of Mormon. 2 Nephi 5:21 states:

And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

The Bible never reveals any prejudice due to skin color and certainly does not call dark skin a curse. This reference in 2 Nephi is clearly a product of nineteenth century American prejudice.²³ When the United States was arguing for and against the issue of slavery many attempted to prove their case by appealing to the Bible, saying the curse of Ham in Genesis 9 referred to the Africans. In actuality the curse Noah pronounced was on Ham's son Canaan whose descendents were the Canaanites, not Africans. What we see is that Joseph Smith embraced the nineteenth century prejudice against blacks and put it into his writings. Though there is no excuse for prejudice, we can sympathize with Joseph Smith in that he was a product of his age, but the fact that he included his prejudices in the Book of Mormon that is supposed to be the very Word of God reveals the Book of Mormon is not inspired by God, but rather is inspired by nineteenth century American prejudice. This single verse disproves the purported supernatural origin of the book. 3 Nephi 2:15 gives the reverse that when a group of Lamanites were converted "their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites." Here we see the provincial prejudice of nineteenth century American Caucasians. The LDS church is to be commended in their rejection of prejudice by allowing blacks to be priests in 1978. The Mormon church is attempting to wash away this stain on their history. When visiting the Hill Cumorah historic site recently, I viewed a movie presentation of Joseph Smith. My good friend, Bible scholar and African American female Brenda Collier, looked over at me with the same surprise that I experienced when we saw Joseph Smith hugging black families and picking up their children. We knew that this never actually happened in history, but was a rewriting of history to make Mormonism more palatable to twenty-first century tastes. We are glad the Mormon church is changing, but the prejudice reflected in the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price indicates their human rather than divine derivation.

The second clue for a nineteenth century origin is the plagiarism found in the Book of Mormon. Ron Rhodes describes this problem:

Now, here is a thorny problem for Mormons: The Book of Mormon has some 27,000 words that were taken directly from the King James Version of the Bible. There are whole verses lifted right out of the King James Version. The problem, then, is this: If the Book of Mormon was first penned between 600 B.C. and A.D. 421, as claimed, how could it contain such extensive quotations from the A.D. 1611 King James Version, which was not written for another 1200 to 2000 years?²⁴

²³ See also Moses 7:8 in the Pearl of Great Price.

²⁴ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning From the Scriptures with the Mormons*, 121.

Not only that, but when the Book of Mormon plagiarized the King James Version it even included the italicized words which we know were not in the original Hebrew and Greek but were added by the KJV translators for clarity. Anyone who has done any translating knows that there are a variety of ways one can translate any given passage, which is why the differing English versions of the Bible agree in substance but not in exact wording. For the Book of Mormon to be translated from the supposed Reformed Egyptian and be identical to the King James Version of the Bible translated from Hebrew and Greek is evidence of plagiarism. One might ask why Smith translated the Egyptian into Elizabethan English of seventeenth century England rather than in his own native tongue. Also we must be aware that even though the Book of Mormon claims to be perfectly translated our modern versions have over 4000 changes from the original. If it was perfectly translated why would there be a need for any change?

A third evidence of the Book of Mormon being a product of nineteenth century New England is its occultic beginnings. Joseph Smith translated the gold plates he found at the Hill Cumorah with a magic seer stone he had used previously to hunt for buried treasure. Many people at that time embarked in superstitious practices and Smith himself was actually arrested in 1826 and taken to court “for being a disorderly person and an imposter, based on this treasure-seeking activity.”²⁵ Later Smith admitted to his youthful foolishness, but the question still must be asked, “How did a magical implement used for occult purposes suddenly become a tool of divine revelation?”²⁶ Smith was a storyteller and had a great imagination as his mother reported. It appears that he simply made up the stories while dictating. Anderson surmises,

The process of dictation that we may find difficult today was probably easier in a culture adept at oral communication, where storytelling was a common skill. In fact, as I read the Book of Mormon, I see marks of an oral style. Sentences are long and rambling and filled with repetition – as one might expect if the author was speaking extemporaneously.²⁷

However Smith wrote the Book of Mormon we know that God did not sanction the use of occultic practices to write a book.

One last clue of the Book of Mormon’s derivation is the abundance of information given about Jesus before His coming. People might initially think this is wonderful prophecy fulfilled, but when further reviewed it counts against the authenticity of the supposed prophecy. Anderson explains:

Yet perhaps the Book of Mormon tells us too much about Jesus. It strikes me as odd that the Nephites understood a full-blown New Testament type of gospel, hundreds of years in advance, compared to the patchwork picture revealed to the Old Testament prophets. For instance, when Lehi left Jerusalem, he knew that Jesus would be baptized by John and even foretold specific words that John would say. He understood that the Savior would die and rise from the dead (1 Nephi 10:4-11). Certainly God could have revealed all this in advance if he chose. But it doesn’t seem consistent that he would disclose so much detail to the Nephites but not to the biblical prophets.²⁸

²⁵ Ross Anderson, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 37-38.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

The beauty of the Old Testament is that it predicts in detail events that would come to pass hundreds of years later, but not in the kind of detail that looks like it was predicted after the events took place. When I reviewed the Koran we saw that Mohammad claimed Egyptians practiced crucifixion and we saw that this was simply not true; he was reading his own time back into the ancient times. Smith is doing the same by almost quoting the New Testament concerning John the Baptist. He is supposedly writing 600 years before Christ and mentions baptism when it was not even practiced at that time and was first practiced by the Qumran community much later. These blatant anachronisms reveal that the Book of Mormon originated with Joseph Smith, not Nephi.

As a product of nineteenth century New England, the Book of Mormon also makes several archaeological blunders. Archaeology would not see its heyday until later on in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, therefore Smith had no idea that the things he recorded could be checked out. We have seen that the Bible passes the archaeological test with flying colors, making no errors in its content, but the Book of Mormon does not fair so well. It was popular for Mormon missionaries to claim that the Smithsonian Institute and the National Geographic Society have used the Book of Mormon to help them in their archaeological discoveries. Both of these groups have denied ever using the Book of Mormon for these purposes.²⁹ The huge populations of Nephites and Lamanites living in fortified cities for hundreds of years “culminating in a conflict in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed in A.D. 385 near Hill Cumorah in present-day New York State (see Mormon 6:9-15)”³⁰ would demand some remains to be found eventually, yet “Archaeologists have not found any evidence that the Nephites or Jaredites ever existed.”³¹ Not only are there no positive instances of Archaeology verifying the Book of Mormon, there are several negative examples that reveal the book is a hoax. Anderson asks us to consider some examples:

The Book of Mormon peoples are described using gold, silver, iron, brass, and copper. The mining, smelting, and casting of metal ores require special tools and complex processes that leave traces in the archaeological record. But scholars generally agree that metallurgy was not introduced into Mesoamerica until several centuries after the Book of Mormon story ends. What’s more, the Book of Mormon mentions the use of steel swords. But metal swords were not known in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest. The Book of Mormon also speaks of many different kinds of animals, mostly those familiar in the Old World, like cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. But none of these have been found in any archaeological setting that dates to Book of Mormon times. Unlike the deer, jaguar, peccary, tapir, and other native species, the horse has never been found depicted in any of thousands of samples of Mesoamerican art – in spite of its impressive appearance.³²

The Book of Mormon mentions synagogues twenty five times, but synagogues did not exist at the time of Lehi. Chariots, scimitars, elephants and steel swords were all invented by Smith

²⁹ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1969), 1-6.

³⁰ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning From the Scriptures with the Mormons*, 125.

³¹ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, 9.

³² Ross Anderson, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 69-70.

because there is no evidence any of these existed in America in Pre-Columbian days.³³ The Book of Mormon describes a 200 year utopia after Jesus arrived in America, where everyone lived for Christ without exception, yet there is no evidence of this utopia. The Book of Mormon fails Isaiah 41's first test of being able to describe the past accurately and indicates Smith is the author, not God.

The second test of Isaiah was that the true God would be able to predict the future in detail with no mistakes. The Book of Mormon claims to predict the future, but we have no copies of the book before Smith's time so we have no way of proving that these were actually predictions before the fact. With the Bible we have ancient copies that date to before the time of the prediction's fulfillment so the Bible passes the test, but this is not the case for the Book of Mormon. One would expect to find copies of this book if it is ancient or at least some of the names mentioned in the book, but in fact none of the names or places are ever inscribed on any artifact.

Joseph Smith and other early apostles of Mormonism have made several prophecies that did not come true. Jerald Tanner documents numerous prophecies that we now know were false prophecies.³⁴ Like others of his time, Smith stated there were inhabitants on the moon, but unlike the others he stated it as a vision he saw from God. Smith received a revelation from God that some of the brethren were to take the copyright of the Book of Mormon and sell it in Toronto. When the men returned failing in their pursuit Smith then explained concerning his revelation, "Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil."³⁵ Once again we see similarities of Joseph Smith and Mohammad, who also had revelations that he later claimed were from Satan. Smith also predicted Jesus would return within 56 years of his prophecy in 1835; needless to say he was wrong. Ezekiel 13:1-3, 8 states:

The Word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: Hear the word of the LORD! This is what the lord GOD says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing.... Therefore, this is what the Lord GOD says: I am against you because you have spoken falsely and had lying visions."

The way in which we tell if someone is a false prophet or not is whether his or her predictions come true or not. If they prophecy their own imagination and it does not come true it reveals that they are a false prophet and despised by God; God is against them. Joseph Smith falls into the category of false prophet.

³³ James Spencer notes, "The Book of Mormon mentions shipbuilding, sailing, the use of the magnetic compass, wheeled vehicles (drawn by horses), tent manufacture, and linen manufacture. Archeologists unanimously agree that none of these activities took place in the New World before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers." James Spencer, *Have You Witnessed to a Mormon Lately?* (Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books, 1986), 126.

³⁴ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism Volume 3* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1971), 129-142.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130 as stated by David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

The last test in Isaiah is that of the miraculous surrounding the writing of the book. The ultimate miracle of the Bible is the resurrection of Jesus and we have seen several other miracles as well, but what about the Book of Mormon? One might claim the miraculous nature of the gold tablets, but they have been conveniently taken away by an angel. We do have some of the papyrus scrolls in Egyptian that Smith translated as the Book of Abraham. Anderson explains:

The story of the Book of Abraham took an interesting twist in 1966. The papyrus scrolls had been lost after Joseph Smith's death until parts of the collection turned up in New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. A portion of the scroll that Smith supposedly translated was identified by comparing it to his notes and drawings. Yet when modern scholars analyzed the papyrus, they found it to be a funeral text commonly buried with mummies. The papyrus dated from at least fifteen hundred years after the time of Abraham. In fact, the contents had nothing to do with Abraham and bore no resemblance to Joseph Smith's translation.³⁶

There is no hard substantiation of the miraculous to back up the Book of Mormon and evidence to the contrary in the Egyptian text that reveals Smith made up his translation.

Conclusion

Mormonism claims a new book should be added to the canon of Scripture (actually three books). The Book of Mormon has been tested and found wanting. The idea that God was not able to preserve His word until Joseph Smith came along is illogical and goes against the evidence we do have. The Book of Mormon reads like a nineteenth century American work of fiction and reveals hopeless anachronisms. There is absolutely no archaeological evidence to back it up, when at least some should have been unearthed by now, and much evidence to the contrary. Joseph Smith has made several false prophecies and therefore should not be followed as a prophet of God.

³⁶ Ross Anderson, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 55-56.