

10: The Bible and the LDS Scriptures

“We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God” (Articles of Faith 8).

“Consider the magnitude of our blessing to have the Holy Bible and some 900 additional pages of scripture, including the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price” (D. Todd Christofferson, “The Blessing of Scripture,” *Ensign*, May 2010 [general conference issue], 35).

The LDS Church accepts four collections of writings, known as the “standard works,” as scripture. The four standard works are the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Mormons also believe that the “inspired words” of the living prophet who leads the LDS Church “become scripture to us” ([Gospel Principles](#), 48). Since each of these scriptures merits far lengthier examination than we can provide here, our intent in this study is simply to introduce each of these topics and to offer a brief perspective on each of them.

The Bible

- *What is the LDS Church’s teaching as to the reason for the revisions to the Bible in the “Joseph Smith Translation”?*
- *Does the manuscript evidence show that material was **lost** from the books of the Bible, or **added** to those books?*

The LDS Church recognizes the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—as scripture. Mormons also believe a great deal of what the Bible teaches. In general, they accept the historical accounts of the Bible (for example, the events of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, or the miracles of Jesus) as reliable, factual accounts. They agree that “many prophecies in the Old Testament foretell the coming of a Savior and Redeemer” ([Gospel Principles](#), 46). Mormons also affirm some basic truths about Jesus that the New Testament reveals, such as that he lived a sinless life, suffered and died on the cross, rose bodily from the grave, and ascended into heaven. LDS ethical values also agree with the Bible on a number of watershed cultural issues in contemporary society. For example, Mormons are pro-life. They view homosexual activity as sinful and oppose same-sex marriage. For taking these ethical stands, the LDS Church has sometimes come under vicious attack. Thus, in both their teachings and their practical values, Mormons demonstrate their agreement with much of what the Bible says.

On the other hand, the LDS Church qualifies its acceptance of the Bible. The eighth Article of Faith of the LDS Church states that the Bible is “the word of God *as far as it is translated correctly*.” Most Mormons understand this qualification to mean that a significant problem with the Bible’s “translation” make it less reliable than their other scriptures. Thus, for example, the eighth Article affirms that the Book of Mormon is the word of God without this qualification, and Joseph Smith claimed in its introduction that the Book of Mormon is “the most correct of any book on earth” (quoted in [Gospel Principles](#), 46). Obviously, that means that the Book of Mormon is more correct than the Bible—indeed, that was Joseph’s whole point. The LDS Church teaches that much of what the Bible originally said was lost or altered in the process of copying and re-copying biblical

manuscripts down through the centuries. In particular, Mormons believe that “many plain and precious things” were “taken away from the book” of the Bible, as the Book of Mormon itself states (1 Nephi 13:28-29).

Joseph Smith addressed these alleged defects in the Bible as it has come down to us by producing his own revision to the Bible known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). *Gospel Principles* describes Joseph’s changes to the Bible as “inspired corrections” and explains, “The Lord inspired the Prophet Joseph to restore truths to the Bible that had been lost or changed since the original words were written” (46). This explanation agrees with the traditional Mormon understanding of the JST, which is that Joseph’s changes brought the Bible into agreement with the wording of the original manuscripts, at least in those places where he made such changes. Some Mormon apologists today suggest that the JST was not a restoration of the original text but instead a kind of inspired “commentary” on the Bible. However, this is not what *Gospel Principles* says, and it is not what Joseph claimed.

A simple example, one that Joseph Smith himself explained in some detail, will make the point clear. Hebrews 6:1 in the King James Version (KJV) reads, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.” Joseph thought this was one of those places in the Bible where copyists had made a mistake, and he claimed that God had inspired him as a prophet to correct such mistakes. Here is his explanation:

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. . . . Look at Heb. vi. 1 for contradictions—“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection.” If a man leaves the principles of the doctrine of Christ, how can he be saved in the principles? This is a contradiction. I don’t believe it. I will render it as it should be—“Therefore *not* leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works” (*History of the Church* [1950], 6:57, 58).

Joseph’s explanation confirms the traditional understanding of what the JST was supposed to do (make corrections to the text where words had been lost or changed). It also gives us an opportunity to test his claim that God had inspired him to detect omissions or changes to the text and correct them. In the case of Hebrews 6:1, there is no contradiction in the KJV translation or in the Greek text on which it was based. “Leaving the principles” does not mean no longer believing them, but “leaving” the discussion of them to move on to more advanced subject matter, as when a teacher tells a class, “Today we’re going to leave addition and move on to subtraction.” The fact that Joseph did not understand this but thought the Bible was missing a word in Hebrews 1:6 shows that he was not divinely inspired in his “corrections” of the Bible.

When Joseph Smith produced his revisions to the Bible in the 1830s, it seemed quite plausible that scribes had either accidentally or deliberately omitted words, phrases, and even lengthy paragraphs from all of the surviving manuscripts. We now know this simply did not happen.

Consider first the Old Testament. In Joseph’s day, the earliest known manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible dated from about AD 900, roughly 1300 years after the close of the Old Testament era. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the late 1940s, included copies of almost all of the Old Testament books dating to the first century BC and first century AD—about a thousand years earlier than the medieval manuscripts on which scholars had been dependent. These Dead Sea Scroll biblical manuscripts show that only minute changes in the Old Testament had occurred in that thousand-year period. What minor differences the newly discovered scrolls reveal do not support Joseph Smith’s revisions to the Old Testament.

TABLE 1:

Some Significant Additions in the Joseph Smith Translation

(see also *Book of Moses* and *Joseph Smith—Matthew* in Pearl of Great Price)

<i>Reference (JST)</i>	<i>Summary/Quotation</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Genesis 14:25-40	Melchizedek was ordained a high priest under the covenant God made with Enoch, “after the order of the Son of God”; those holding this priesthood had miraculous powers and were translated into heaven.	This addition reflects Joseph’s belief that God’s people throughout history need “priesthood” as a source of spiritual power. See Hebrews 7:3 (below).
Genesis 50:24-38	The patriarch Joseph prophesies of the coming of Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, as well as a future prophet called Joseph, named after his father.	Here Joseph writes into the Bible a “prophecy” predicting that he, Joseph Smith Jr., will be a prophet of God.
John 1:1	“In the beginning was <i>the gospel preached through the Son</i> . And the gospel was the word, and the word was <i>with the Son</i> , and the Son was with God, and the Word Son was of God.”	Here Joseph Smith changes John 1:1 so that it no longer says that “the Word was God.”
John 4:24	“For God is a spirit” changed to say “For unto such hath God promised his Spirit.”	Here Joseph’s change reflects his developing belief that God was a corporeal being.
Romans 4:4-5	“Now to him that worketh <i>who is justified by the law of works</i> , is the reward reckoned, not of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not <i>seeketh not to be justified by the law of works</i> , but believeth on him that justifieth <i>not</i> the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”	Here Joseph adds the word “not” as part of a revision to avoid Romans saying that God justifies the ungodly—even though that is exactly what Paul was saying: God justifies those whose works are ungodly by his grace through their faith in Christ.
Romans 7:5-27	When he was living under the law, Paul was carnal and disobeyed God, but now he is spiritual and does what God commands him, with “the assistance of Christ.”	Here Joseph rewrites Romans 7 to eliminate the idea that a Christian could continue to experience struggle and failure in overcoming sin.
Hebrews 7:3	“For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was without father, without mother. . . . And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God. . . .”	Here Joseph rewrites Hebrews 7:3 to say that Melchizedek was a priest in a priestly order that went back to the Son of God at the beginning of history. What Hebrews actually says is that Melchizedek’s priesthood was a biblical type that prefigured the heavenly priesthood of Jesus, the Son of God.

As for the New Testament, in Joseph’s day scholars had enough Greek manuscripts to know that they all differed from one another in various ways but not enough to know with certainty how well or poorly the original wording of the New Testament books had survived. For example, during Joseph’s lifetime scholars had access to less than 24 codices (ancient books) from the first millennium AD that contained part or all of the Greek New Testament; we now have roughly 300 such codices. Constantin von Tischendorf’s *Greek New Testament*, published in 1849 (five years after Joseph Smith’s death), was the first scholarly work to establish the principles of textual criticism that New Testament scholars follow to this day. Tischendorf could cite only one New Testament papyrus (an older sheet of paper, often in a roll), a seventh-century papyrus that contained less than half of 1 Corinthians; scholars now have access to nearly 130 New Testament papyri, several dating from the

second century. The Oxyrhynchus papyri (found in the 1890s), the Chester Beatty papyri (1930s), and the Bodmer papyri (1952) are just some of the treasure troves of papyri discovered since the time of Joseph Smith. The manuscripts on which the KJV was based were almost exclusively minuscules, manuscripts on parchment or paper produced between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. During the years that Joseph Smith was working on his revisions to the KJV, the number of catalogued minuscule codices roughly doubled from over 200 to almost 400; today there are almost 3,000 catalogued.

These manuscript discoveries and more than 150 years of scholarly textual criticism together demonstrate that the New Testament of Joseph Smith’s day suffered from **no omissions at all**. We now have so many New Testament manuscripts, and so many dating from the centuries immediately after the books were originally written, that we can now say definitively that there is no realistic possibility that whole sentences or passages—or even individual words like “not” in Hebrews 6:1—were lost from the text.

If there was a “problem” with the New Testament of Joseph’s day it was that it had just a bit *more* material than was original to those New Testament books. (Scribes almost never deleted anything from the manuscripts they copied, but they sometimes added words or phrases, often in the margins as explanations that later scribes copied as if they were part of the book.) The additional material is insignificant except in two places: the ending of Mark (16:9-20) and the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). The consensus of New Testament scholars is that these two passages of a dozen verses each were later additions to the Gospels. And here is something worth noting: in his revisions to the Bible, Joseph did not indicate that either of these two passages should be omitted. In fact, Joseph *added* some words to the passage about the adulterous woman (in John 8:6).

The LDS view of the “corruption” of the text of the Bible, then, has things exactly backwards. The original text of the books of the Bible has survived with no significant omissions. “Many plain and precious things” were not lost. Instead, scribes *added* words here or there, and in a couple of places short passages, that were not part of the original text. Joseph Smith’s revision to the Bible consists almost entirely of additions, several of them lengthy, that we can say with reasonable certainty were not part of the original books of the Bible. Furthermore, Joseph failed to identify those two major additions to the New Testament that did not belong.

The Book of Mormon

- *Is the way the Book of Mormon uses of whole chapters from the Bible compatible with its claim to be ancient scripture?*
- *Why does the Book of Mormon so directly address theological concerns and objections that were irrelevant in ancient times but burning issues in Joseph Smith’s day?*

Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon in 1830 just a month before he founded the LDS Church. He claimed that God inspired him to translate the Book of Mormon from some gold plates that the angel Moroni had shown him buried in a hill near his home in upstate New York. The main story line concerns the Nephites and Lamanites, two warring peoples descended from a family of Jews that had sailed from Arabia to the Americas six hundred years before Christ. The central event of the Book of Mormon is the appearance of Christ to the Nephites shortly after his ascension. The title “Book of Mormon” refers to a prophet named Mormon who wrote most of the book on the gold plates and entrusted them to Moroni (his son), who appended some final material to the plates and buried them in the hill about four hundred years after Christ.

The authenticity of the Book of Mormon is a much-debated subject. We will make no attempt to address most of the relevant issues on that subject here. Instead, we will focus on the relationship of the Book of Mormon to the Bible.

There is no question but that much of the Book of Mormon agrees doctrinally with the Bible. It could hardly be otherwise, since on average one of every ten chapters in the Book of Mormon is copied from the Bible! To be precise, 24 of the 239 chapters of the Book of Mormon are almost verbatim identical to chapters in the KJV, and other chapters draw heavily on the Bible (see Table 2).

The heavy use of the Bible in the Book of Mormon raises some difficult questions about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as a translation of ancient historical documents. For example, in 3 Nephi 12-14, the Book of Mormon presents Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount, no more than about a year after his resurrection, nearly verbatim as it appears in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5-7) in the KJV. This claim is historically awkward on several levels.

TABLE 2: MAJOR BIBLE PASSAGES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON	
Book of Mormon	KJV Bible
1 Nephi 20-21	Isaiah 48-49
2 Nephi 6:13, 16-18	Isaiah 49:23-26
2 Nephi 7-8	Isaiah 50-52:2
2 Nephi 12-24	Isaiah 2-14
2 Nephi 27	Isaiah 29 (in part)
2 Nephi 30:11-15	Isaiah 11:4-9
Mosiah 12:21-24	Isaiah 52:7-10
Mosiah 12:34-36; 13:12-24	Exodus 20:2-4, 4-17 (Ten Commandments)
Mosiah 14	Isaiah 53 (the Suffering Servant)
3 Nephi 12-14	Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount)
3 Nephi 16:18-20	Isaiah 52:8-10
3 Nephi 20:32, 34-41, 43-45	Isaiah 52:8; 54:1; 52:1-3, 7, 11, 13-15
3 Nephi 24-25	Malachi 3-4

For one thing, supposing that Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount exactly as it appears in Matthew 5-7, it is highly unlikely that Jesus—a consummate communicator, to understate the matter—would preach the exact same sermon to people on a different continent with their own culture six centuries removed from that of the people of Galilee. Even merely human preachers like Billy Graham would tailor their sermons more specifically for different cultures and audiences than the Book of Mormon presents Jesus doing.

Another problem is that Matthew almost certainly arranged Jesus’ teaching material and edited it for his readers. To give a simple example, in the Sermon on the Mount as it appears in Matthew, Jesus uses the expression “the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21). But this precise expression occurs only in Matthew (over thirty times). In the other Gospels, including parallel passages in Luke, Jesus always uses the expression “kingdom of God” (compare, for example, Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:20). Biblical scholars unanimously agree that “kingdom of heaven” is Matthew’s paraphrase of what Jesus said, not his exact words (though of course the meaning is the same). So what is this phrase doing in the Book of Mormon? The obvious answer is that Joseph Smith copied the Sermon on the Mount into the Book of Mormon from the Gospel of Matthew.

Although the Book of Mormon makes heavy use of the Bible, it also calls into question the reliability of the Bible, as we have already noted. “The Bible” as such did not exist until after Jesus came, and no one used the term “the Bible” (in Greek, *ta biblia*) to refer to that collection of books until about AD 200. Yet the Book of Mormon reports Nephi, supposedly speaking about six centuries *before* Jesus died, criticizing Christians who view the Bible as the sufficient, complete canon of Scripture:

“And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from the Jews, mine ancient covenant people. . . . Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews? Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.” (2 Nephi 29:3-4, 6, 10)

The point of this passage is that when the Book of Mormon was published in the nineteenth century, “Gentiles” (that is, traditional Christians) would object to the claim that the Book of Mormon is scripture and insist that the Bible is the only scripture that we have or need. In other words, the Book of Mormon reports Nephi in the sixth century BC prophesying a rebuke against Christians twenty-five centuries later who question the claim that the Book of Mormon is scripture. This is just one of several statements in the Book of Mormon designed to deflect *modern* criticism of the book. Another example is the comment explaining that any defects or errors that might be found in the Book of Mormon resulted from the need to write in a (supposedly more compact) Egyptian script instead of Hebrew (Mormon 9:32-33).

The Book of Mormon addresses modern Christian concerns in other ways, notably in claiming to settle specific theological, pastoral, and cultural controversies that were raging among American Protestants in Joseph Smith’s day. Here are just a few examples:

- Confusion about what the Bible teaches is the result of many plain and precious things being lost or removed from the Bible, which resulted in widespread apostasy in Christianity (1 Nephi 13-14).
- Believers on earth before the time of Jesus were saved through faith in Jesus Christ, because the prophets spoke explicitly about Jesus by name (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:13-20).
- The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God (2 Nephi 31:21; Mormon 7:7).
- There is an intermediate state between death and resurrection in which righteous spirits are happy in paradise and the wicked are in outer darkness (Alma 40).
- America as a land of freedom is a fulfillment of prophecy (3 Nephi 21).
- God revealed the gospel in ancient times in both hemispheres, even sending Jesus to the Nephites to preach the gospel to them (3 Nephi 11-27).
- The time of miracles and revelations is not past (Mormon 9).
- Infants should not be baptized (Moroni 8:4-26).

The directness with which the Book of Mormon so frequently addresses modern Christians and their concerns (or objections) suggests that the Book of Mormon was not only “written for our day,” as LDS President Ezra Taft Benson said (*Gospel Principles*, 47), but it was also written *in* our day—in the nineteenth century.

Ironically, although the Book of Mormon addresses modern Christian theological and practical issues, it does not reveal many of the distinctive doctrines and practices of the LDS religion that separate it from traditional, historic Christianity. In fact, on some key issues, the Book of Mormon actually *contradicts* Joseph Smith’s later teachings. As just noted, the Book of Mormon affirms that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are “one God.” Yet Joseph Smith later taught explicitly that they were “three Gods” and even denied that they were or could be “one God” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 370; see our [response to chapter 7](#) of *Gospel Principles* on this point.)

Here are some of the distinctive LDS doctrines that the Book of Mormon does not mention:

- Plurality of gods
- God the Father having a physical body

- Heavenly mother
- Humans preexisted as spirits in heaven
- Eternal progression
- Celestial marriage
- Baptism for the dead
- Three heavenly kingdoms or degrees of glory

The significance of the Book of Mormon within the larger context of LDS religion is that it establishes for Mormons three key claims: that the text of the Bible is corrupt, making it an insufficient guide to the Christian faith; that Christianity by Joseph Smith’s day was essentially apostate; and that God called Joseph Smith to be the prophet of the Restoration. The second and third claims rest on the foundation of the first claim regarding the trustworthiness of the text of the Bible. As we have seen, Joseph Smith’s understanding of this issue was simply wrong.

Doctrine and Covenants

- *If continuing revelation is essential to LDS faith, why were new scriptural revelations produced so frequently by Joseph Smith while almost none has been produced since his death?*
- *Are Joseph Smith’s revelations in Doctrine and Covenants consistent with the Bible?*

Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) is a collection of texts, mostly from Joseph Smith, that Mormons regard as modern revelations for the benefit of the restored Church. It is divided into 138 “sections,” with two “Official Declarations” (OD) appearing at the end as appendices. We may summarize the sections of D&C as follows (using the LDS Church’s own dating in D&C):

- Harmony, PA and Fayette/Manchester, NY period, 1823-January 1831 (D&C 1-40, 133)
- Kirtland, OH period, 1831-1837 (D&C 41-112, 134, 137)
- Far West, MO/Nauvoo, IL period, 1838-1843 (D&C 113-32)
- After Joseph Smith (D&C 135, 136, 138, OD 1, OD 2)

Joseph Smith is credited as the sole author of all of the sections from the first three periods with two exceptions: D&C 102 consists of council minutes written by Oliver Cowdery in 1834 and edited by Joseph; Cowdery wrote D&C 134 in 1835. The items from the post-Joseph Smith era are credited to John Taylor (135, his eulogy of Joseph in 1844), Brigham Young (136, regarding the Saints moving west in 1847), Joseph F. Smith (138, a vision of paradise in 1918), Wilford Woodruff (OD 1, regarding polygamy in 1890), and Spencer W. Kimball (OD 2, regarding admitting people of color to the LDS priesthood in 1978).

TABLE 3: NUMERICAL DISTRIBUTION OF REVELATIONS IN D&C

	Joseph Smith					Others	
Years	1828	1829-33	1834-38	1839-43	1844-48	1849-present	
D&C	2	99	21	12	2	3	

The most striking thing about the history of these revelations in D&C is the disparity between the flood of new revelations that Joseph Smith received, especially in the first five years or so of his work as the LDS prophet, and the drought of new revelations incorporated into the LDS scriptures after Joseph’s death. Table 3 gives a chronological overview of the distribution of the revelations published in D&C, using five-year increments except for 1828 (when Joseph was just getting started) and for 1849 to the present. (D&C 2, which the LDS Church dates to 1823 but was unknown before about 1839, is omitted.) We include OD 1 and 2 in the table even

though there are reasons to question whether these can be described as revelations (as suggested by the fact that the LDS Church appends them to D&C as “official declarations” and not as regular sections).

Mormons emphatically insist that what separates their religion from other forms of Christianity is their belief in continuing revelation. Recall their statement in chapter 9 of *Gospel Principles*, “Many people find it easy to believe in the prophets of the past. But it is much greater to believe in and follow the living prophet” (42). The truth is that Mormonism is essentially a religion that follows a prophet from the past, Joseph Smith. For example, although Brigham Young ruled the LDS Church as President for more than twice as long as Joseph Smith did (1847-1877), he contributed only one short revelation to the LDS scriptures, basically giving the Mormons instructions for their westward trek (D&C 136). This is not because Brigham had nothing to say about doctrinal matters—he expounded on them constantly and had many original things to say. Yet none of his theological ideas made their way into the LDS scriptures and Mormons today generally ignore what he taught.

It is also interesting to note that D&C actually contains far *less* material than it did a century ago. From 1835 to 1921, D&C included the *Lectures on Faith*, a series of seven theology lectures with catechism-like questions and answers. These lectures, which ran some seventy pages, were part of LDS scripture during the terms of the first six presidents of the LDS Church. Indeed, they *were* the “doctrine” portion of Doctrine and Covenants. They were removed early in the term of the seventh president, Heber J. Grant, the first LDS president to have been born after the death of Joseph Smith. A major factor in the decision to drop Lectures on Faith was undoubtedly the fact that it did not agree doctrinally with Joseph Smith’s later teachings. Specifically, the Lectures taught that God was a personage of Spirit, Christ was a personage with a physical body, and the Holy Spirit was the mind or spirit that the Father and the Son shared. This doctrine clearly did not agree with the later view that the Father and the Son both had physical bodies and that the Holy Ghost was a third personage (of spirit). (We discussed these differences briefly in our [response to chapter 7](#) of *Gospel Principles* on the Holy Spirit.)

It is in the revelations found in Doctrine and Covenants that Joseph Smith really began taking the LDS Church outside the pale of historic Christianity. Table 4 lists just a few of Joseph’s more notable revelations in D&C and offers some brief comments on them.

D&C	Summary	Comment
1 (1831)	Christianity had become apostate, so the Lord called Joseph Smith to translate the Book of Mormon and establish “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.”	The teaching that Christianity had become completely apostate so that the church would need to be restored contradicts Jesus’ promises to be with the church he founded until the end of the age (Matt. 16:18; 28:20; see also Jude 3).
10 (1828)	116 pages of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon had been lost. Joseph claimed that the Lord revealed to him that evil people planned to alter the translation and then produce it after Joseph re-translated the same material in order to make it appear he was a false prophet. To circumvent this danger, the Lord told Joseph to translate a different set of gold plates that happened to have a parallel version of the same material he had first translated.	Joseph’s claim that the Lord told him to translate a different set of plates to avoid being exposed as a false prophet contrasts with what happened to Jeremiah when a scroll containing his prophecies was burned. Jeremiah confidently dictated the entire contents of the lost scroll to his scribe (see Jeremiah 36:22-32). Of course, the claim that a set of plates with an alternative account of the same events as the lost manuscript pages seems awfully convenient.

<p>19 (1830)</p>	<p>Joseph revealed that “endless” or “eternal” punishment does not mean punishment that never ends, because “Endless” and “Eternal” are names for God; thus, these terms mean “God’s punishment.”</p>	<p>In the Bible, “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46) means punishment in the “eternal fire” (verse 41) where the devil, his angels, and unrepentant people will go and never come out, also called “outer darkness” (verse 30). This is “the lake of fire” where the wicked will suffer torment “day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).</p>
<p>49 (1831)</p>	<p>Joseph rejected the claims of the Shakers, to which some Mormons were attracted, and stated that a man “should have one wife, and the twain shall be one flesh.”</p>	<p>Joseph’s affirmation of monogamy (a man having “one wife”) contrasts with his own practice, which began soon after this revelation, of plural marriage (polygamy).</p>
<p>76 (1832)</p>	<p>Joseph revealed that everyone will be raised from the dead and go to one of four destinations: everlasting punishment with the devil for the “sons of perdition”; faithful believers to “celestial” glory; the “terrestrial world” for those who were honorable people but not faithful believers; and the “telestial” glory where vast numbers will live forever separated from God and Christ.</p>	<p>The Bible consistently teaches two destinations for all people: either eternal punishment in the “outer darkness” or “lake of fire” for all the unrepentant wicked, or the “new heavens and new earth” for those who are right with God through the redemption provided by Jesus Christ (Matt. 25:30-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:10-21:9).</p>
<p>84 (1832)</p>	<p>Joseph predicted that a temple would be built in Jackson County, MO, “in this generation,” before that generation would “all pass away.”</p>	<p>Nearly 170 years later, there is still no temple in Jackson County, MO. Mormons have come up with several explanations for this failed prophecy, none of them adequate.</p>
<p>87 (1832)</p>	<p>Joseph predicted that there would be a war between the Northern and Southern U.S. states, “beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina.” Mormons often cite this section as a fulfilled prophecy (the Civil War began in 1861 from South Carolina).</p>	<p>Newspaper editorials in 1832 were also speculating that such a war would come. In his prophecy, Joseph predicted three times that this war would involve “all nations”—which did <i>not</i> happen.</p>
<p>93 (1833)</p>	<p>Joseph offered a revelation that paraphrases what John 1:1-18 says about Jesus, including this statement: “Man was also in the beginning with God.”</p>	<p>God is the only being who existed in the beginning of creation (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 44:24) and the only human being who existed before his human life was Jesus Christ (John 3:31).</p>
<p>107 (1835)</p>	<p>Joseph revealed that the LDS Church is to have two restored priesthood orders: the higher Melchizedek Priesthood authorized to serve in higher offices, and the lesser Aaronic Priesthood authorized for various ministry functions.</p>	<p>The Aaronic priesthood was a function of the Mosaic covenant with Israel, a covenant superseded by the new covenant in which Christ <i>alone</i> serves as our priest “after the order of Melchizedek,” that is, in a way that Melchizedek had typified or foreshadowed (Hebrews 6:20-8:13).</p>
<p>124 (1841)</p>	<p>Joseph revealed that the LDS were to perform baptisms for the dead in the temple, as well as other rituals (see also D&C 127, 128).</p>	<p>The only reference in the Bible to baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29) refers to it as a practice of heretics <i>who denied the resurrection of the dead</i>. It is not a biblically authorized practice.</p>
<p>129 (1843)</p>	<p>Angels are “resurrected personages” with “bodies of flesh and bone.” You can tell whether an angel is from God by shaking his hand (if you feel it, he’s an angel; if you don’t feel it, he’s the devil).</p>	<p>Angels are spirit beings that God created separately from humans; they do not have physical bodies (see Hebrews 1:7, 14). The idea of shaking hands with a supernatural messenger to determine if he is angel or devil is as foreign to the Bible as it is silly.</p>

<p>130 (1843)</p>	<p>The Father and the Son cannot dwell in our hearts, because they both have bodies of flesh and bones; the Holy Ghost can dwell in our hearts because he is a personage of Spirit.</p>	<p>The Father does not have a physical body, but is spirit (John 4:24); the Son became human as an act of humility for our salvation (Philippians 2:6-8), yet as God he can still dwell in our hearts (Ephesians 3:17).</p>
<p>132 (1843)</p>	<p>Joseph claimed that the Lord revealed to him that plural marriage (polygamy) was “a new and everlasting covenant” essential to exaltation to the highest glory in which men may become gods.</p>	<p>Polygamy was at best tolerated under the Mosaic covenant and was certainly never part of a path to becoming gods! Under the new covenant, Christian men are expected to be monogamous (1 Timothy 3:2, 12).</p>

The Pearl of Great Price

- *What should we think about the way that the Book of Moses presents Old Testament figures like Enoch preaching explicitly Christian messages in New Testament language?*
- *Can one believe both the Book of Genesis and the Book of Abraham?*

The Pearl of Great Price is an assortment of short LDS scriptures, all of them produced by Joseph Smith between 1830 and 1843. *Joseph Smith—History* is an account that Joseph produced in 1839 about how he came to become the prophet of the Restoration, focusing especially on how he came into possession of the gold plates of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith wrote the *Articles of Faith* in an 1842 letter to summarize what Mormons believed. In this study, we will look at the other three books in Pearl of Great Price, all of which claim to have a close relationship to the Bible.

The **Book of Moses** is an excerpt from the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) that Joseph produced in 1830 and 1831. After an opening chapter about God revealing himself to Moses, the book consists of a revision and expansion of Genesis 1:1-6:13 (Moses 2-8). The largest section of new material focuses on Enoch (Moses 6:21-7:69). The main point of the Book of Moses is to revise the early chapters of Genesis to make them more explicitly Christian. Recall that Joseph Smith held that the prophets who lived before Jesus came knew about Jesus by name and taught explicitly the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection for the salvation of the world. This is one of the main themes of the Book of Mormon. Since the Old Testament writings do not refer to Jesus or his redemptive acts in this explicit way, Joseph set about revising the Old Testament to make it consistent with the Book of Mormon.

For example, in the Book of Moses, Enoch gives a speech in which he quotes God as saying:

“If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you” (Moses 6:52).

Here the Book of Moses weaves together statements from at least five verses from the New Testament in a speech that Enoch supposedly gave thousands of years before Jesus even came:

- “Repent, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38)
- “the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14)

- “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)
- “Whatsoever ye shall ask...in my name, he will give you” (John 16:23)
- “Ask, and it shall be given you” (Matthew 7:7)

This rather obvious Christianization of Genesis in the Book of Moses not only shows an obvious dependence on the New Testament, it ignores the clear evidence that the Old Testament revealed the coming of the Messiah in a gradual, progressive unfolding of truth through its long history (see our [response to chapter 9](#) of *Gospel Principles* for more on this point).

The Book of Moses also teaches some doctrine at variance with the Bible, notably in matters pertaining to the fall of Adam and Eve. Two points stand out here. First, the Book of Moses claims that Satan and the “Only Begotten” both offered to become the Savior of the world, and when Satan’s offer was rebuffed he rebelled and became the devil (Moses 4:1-4). Second, the Book of Moses claims that Adam and Eve’s decision to eat of the forbidden fruit was actually a good thing because it made it possible for them to have children and attain eternal life (Moses 5:10-12). Neither of these doctrines is compatible with the Bible’s teaching (see our responses to [chapter 3](#) and [chapter 6](#) of *Gospel Principles*).

Joseph Smith—Matthew, produced in 1831, is another early excerpt from the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. It is a revision of Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the end of the age in Matthew 23:39-24:51.

Joseph’s revisions on the whole are not particularly remarkable or significant. Joseph makes more explicit that the “great tribulation” of which Jesus spoke would pertain to the Jews (JS-M 1:18, 21). He also adds to Jesus’ famous statement, “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled,” a gloss to explain that “this generation” means the one “in which these things shall be shown forth” (JS-M 1:34). Apparently, Joseph felt that this addition cleared up a possible false prophecy by Jesus. However, what Jesus meant in context was that his generation would not all pass before the Jerusalem temple was destroyed—and that prediction was literally fulfilled when the Romans destroyed the temple in AD 70.

The *Book of Abraham* is the most controversial book in the Pearl of Great Price. It is a short book that Joseph claimed he had translated from Egyptian papyri. Joseph did his initial translation in 1835 and revised it in 1842. The core of the book is another revision of the first two chapters of Genesis (Abraham 4-5) along with a revision of Genesis 12 (Abraham 2). The completely new chapters describe Abraham in Chaldea (Abraham 1) and God’s revelations to him concerning heavenly bodies and the preexistent spirits of human beings (Abraham 5).

The papyri, which Joseph claimed contained the Book of Abraham and other untranslated Egyptian writings of the patriarchs, disappeared for almost a century until fragments of the papyri that had survived the Chicago fire of 1871 resurfaced in 1966 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Notoriously, the surviving portions of the papyri turned out to be pagan Egyptian texts called the Book of Breathing and the Book of the Dead, dating from about the first century BC, and contained no text that corresponded to the Book of Abraham or anything that might have come from one of the patriarchs.

Our focus in this study, though, is again on the relationship between this LDS scripture and the Bible. Frankly, one cannot believe the creation accounts in both Genesis and the Book of Abraham; you can choose to believe one or the other, but not both. This is because the Book of Abraham teaches an explicit polytheistic account of creation:

“And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth. And the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth; and darkness reigned upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters. And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light” (Abraham 4:1-3).

As we explained in some detail in our [response to chapter 5](#) of *Gospel Principles*, this teaching that “the Gods” organized the universe cannot be reconciled with Genesis—or with the Book of Mormon, for that matter. For Christians who take seriously the belief that God’s revelations will be consistent with one another, this fact alone should be enough reason to reject the claim that the Book of Abraham is a restoration of a lost book of scripture.

For further study:

[LDS Doctrine and the Bible Page](#). We have gathered together a wealth of resources here on the Bible and LDS teaching, including some articles on the Joseph Smith Translation.

[Book of Mormon Page](#). All of our resources on the Book of Mormon may be found here.

[Book of Abraham Page](#). You can find here all of our resources on this controversial book, including IRR’s award-winning documentary *The Lost Book of Abraham*.

[Joseph Smith’s Missouri Temple Prophecy](#). This detailed study examines all of the many explanations that LDS apologists have offered for Joseph’s failed prediction about a temple being built in Jackson County in his generation.