Mormons – Lesson 2

**Mormon Scriptures**

The Mormons have four books of scripture – *The Book of Mormon*, the *Bible*, the *Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. All of *The Book of Mormon* and the *Pearl of Great Price* were written (or dictated) by Joseph Smith. Smith also wrote most of *Doctrine and Covenants* (135 out of 140 parts). Smith also “wrote” his own version of the (KJV) Bible, called the *Inspired Version*. But the Mormon church does not use this *Inspired Version*, it uses an LDS published KJV with excerpts from Smith’s *Inspired Version* included as footnotes in various places. We’ll discuss why that is later in this lesson.

**The Book of Mormon**

This is their “main” book. Its full official title is *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. It is the first one Smith wrote (actually, supposedly dictated). It is supposedly a translation Smith made (with divine inspiration) from gold plates buried in the Hill Cumorah in Palmyra, NY. Smith is quoted as saying, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than any other book.” (Notice the similarity to the claim by the Jehovah’s Witnesses)

The Book of Mormon is an abridged account of God’s dealings with the original inhabitants of the American continent from about 2247 B.C. to A.D. 421. From the Introduction in the book itself:

The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God’s dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains the fullness [sic] of the everlasting gospel.

The book was written by many ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Their words, written on gold plates, were quoted and abridged by a prophet-historian named Mormon. The record gives an account of two great civilizations. One came from Jerusalem in 600 B.C., and afterward separated into two nations, known as the Nephites and the Lamanites. The other came much earlier when the Lord confounded the tongues at the Tower of Babel. This group is known as the Jaredites. After thousands of years, all were destroyed except the Lamanites, and they are among the ancestors of the American Indians.

Also from the Introduction:

The crowning event recorded in the Book of Mormon is the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after his resurrection. It puts forth the doctrines of the gospel, outlines the plan of salvation, and tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come.

After Mormon completed his writings, he delivered the account to his son Moroni, who added a few words of his own and hid up the plates in the hill Cumorah. On September 21, 1823, the same Moroni, then a glorified, resurrected being, appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and instructed him relative to the ancient record and its destined translation into the English language.

(An aside: given that this book seems to be as voluminous as the Bible, and that sheets of gold would have to be considerably thicker than the paper our Bible is printed on, then this “book” of plates would have to be huge. Yes the scale model shown doesn’t support that.)

True Scripture from our Bible against Joseph Smith and his “scriptures”:

**Deuteronomy 4:2**

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

**Deuteronomy 12:32**

Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

**Deuteronomy 18:20**

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.

**Revelation 22:18**

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book

Now some Mormons may try some twisted logic saying that if Deuteronomy 4:2 were taken literally, then the rest of the bible is prohibited and invalid. Of course we know that Deuteronomy 4:2, like the rest of these verses, is not forbidding further revelation from God. He was saying that we humans could not add anything on our own to His word.

**Isaiah 29:1-4**

1 Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped!
Add year to year; let the feasts run their round.
2 Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be moaning and lamentation,
   and she shall be to me like an Ariel.[a]
3 And I will encamp against you all around, and will besiege you with towers
   and I will raise siegeworks against you.
4 And you will be brought low; from the earth you shall speak,
   and from the dust your speech will be bowed down;
your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost,
   and from the dust your speech shall whisper.

***Footnotes:***

1. *Ariel* could mean *lion of God*, or *hero* (2 Samuel 23:20), or *altar hearth* (Ezekiel 43:15–16)

Mormons try to make this a prophecy about the ancient American civilizations and the Book of Mormon – that it was out of the ground and “breathed” by a “familiar spirit”.

Rebuttal: Ariel is “the city where David settled,” which is Jerusalem. Sennacherib’s (king of Assyria) siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. humbled the city so low so that their speech was “out of the ground” or “low out of the dust”. Also, everywhere “ghost” (or “familiar spirit” in KJV) is used in the bible (15 times) it refers to witchcraft or spiritism.

**Isaiah 29:11-12**

 11 And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” 12 And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot read.”

Mormons claim these verses refer to the gold plates from which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. Martin Harris, one of the alleged three witnesses to this translation by Smith, gave this testimony:

I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. . . . He asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said to me, 'Let me see that certificate.' . . . When he took it [he] tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, 'I cannot read a sealed book.'

*Testimony of Martin Harris in Joseph Smith - History*

Mormons therefore claim that Isaiah 29:11-12 was a prediction that the Book of Mormon would be taken to a “learned translator,” who would refuse to read it because he couldn’t read a “sealed book,” and that the book would then be given to the “illiterate” (in regard to translating) Joseph Smith.

The Mormon interpretation of these verses has several problems:

* First, the subject is a *vision* and not a *book*. The visions God gave to the prophets of that day had become as meaningless to the people as the words of a book that was sealed, or as a book would be to an illiterate person.
* An accomplished professor (as Harris implied) would not certifiably endorse a translation without examining the original source. Harris only brought him a copy that Smith had made. And the professor was only told that the original plates were sealed, again unverifiable.
* In the Isaiah passage, the book went to the literate man first, then to the illiterate one. But the Mormon story is that the plates were first delivered to the “illiterate” Smith, who copied some of the characters on a piece of paper, which was then carried to the “literate” professor, who never saw the actual “book”.

**Ezekiel 37:16-17**

16 Son of man, take a stick and write on it, “For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him”; then take another stick and write on it, “For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.” 17 And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.

The Mormons argue that the ancient prophets wrote on papyrus or leather, then wound this on a stick to make a scroll – the equivalent of a book. Therefore this passage is speaking of the Bible (Judah) and the Book of Mormon (Joseph). Mormon apostle LeGrand Richards says, “Could this promise be fulfilled in a simpler and more perfect manner than it was through the coming forth of the Book of Mormon? . . . The two records have now been joined together, constituting a complete fulfillment of another great prophecy.” The Mormons believe the two books were to be joined together and accepted as Scripture as a whole.

This interpretation is clearly disproved by reading the rest of chapter 37 and using the principle of “Scripture interprets Scripture.” Verse 22 clearly identifies the sticks:

And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

Obviously the sticks are two nations or kingdoms, not two books (Bible and Book of Mormon). This is God’s visualization of the two kingdoms that had split and each taken into captivity, and He was now going to reunite His people as one nation.

Also, bible scholars agree that whenever scrolls were meant, they used the word for scrolls. Here the word was simply a stick.

**Changes in the Book of Mormon**

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.

*David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (1887).*

Following the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith said he heard a voice from out of a bright light above him that said, “These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.”

*Joseph Smith, from History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1973)*

According to Oliver B. Huntington, in 1881 Joseph F. Smith (who later became the 6th president of the Mormon church) taught that the Lord gave Joseph Smith the exact English wording and spelling that should be used in the Book of Mormons.

Plus, remember the statement earlier by Joseph Smith that the book is the “most correct of any book on earth.”

But contrary to all of these statements, the truth is that there have been more than 4000 changes to the Book of Mormon since Joseph Smith published it in 1830, as many as two hundred as late as 1981. Many of these changes were “minor” changes to correct typographical errors, misspellings, grammar, etc. But several changes are substantial, changing the very meaning of the text.

These changes not only hurt the credibility of the Mormon scriptures, but strike at the very foundation of how these scriptures were delivered to Joseph Smith. These changes are impossible to reconcile with the Mormon account of how the Book of Mormon was translated.

(see slide for examples of substantial changes)

**Plagiarisms**

He Book of Mormon is also undermined by the many plagiarisms it contains from the KJV. There are whole verses and chapters that have been taken directly from the KJV – some 27,000 words. (see book for many examples)

This is a very difficult problem for the Mormons: If the “historian-prophet” Mormon truly wrote it between 600 B.C. and A.D 421, how could it contain these extensive quotations from the A.D. 1611 KJV? A language wouldn’t even exist for hundreds of years. (Provided, of course, that Smith’s translation was flawless) Rhodes says that this is not a subject most Mormons like to talk about, but that you should tediously go through all of the examples cited. Even some of the italicized words from the KJV where plagiarized. This is particularly significant because, as noted in the preface of the KJV, the italicized words were not in the original languages, but were added by the King James translators to provide clarity.

**Archaeology**

Down through the years, Mormons have claimed that archaeological finds have proven the accuracy and reliability of the Book of Mormon. But no credible authority has ever confirmed any of these claims.

Keep in mind that according to Mormon scriptures, the Nephite and Lamanite nations had huge populations that lived in large, fortified cities. They waged large-scale wars for hundreds of years, culminating in a huge conflict near Hill Cumorah (Palmyra, NY) in A.D. 385, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of people killed.

So, if all of this were really true, there would have to be lots of archaeological evidence to support it. But no evidence has ever been discovered. In contrast, there’s plenty of archaeological evidence to support many things mentioned in the bible, much of which date earlier than most of the Mormon stories. But such evidence is nowhere to be found for the Mormon history.

Even the Smithsonian and National Geographic Society deny that any evidence has ever been scientifically verified to support the Mormon stories.

**Current Mormon Doctrine vs. the Book of Mormon**

Another problem with the Book of Mormon, the cornerstone of the Mormon religion, is that it contains very little of the Mormon doctrine as taught by the Mormon church today. The Book of Mormon mentions nothing about:

* Mormon church organization
* Aaronic priesthood
* “plurality of Gods” doctrine
* “God is an exalted man” doctrine
* the doctrine that men may become gods
* the doctrine of three degrees of glory, or three kingdoms
* “plurality of wives” doctrine
* “celestial marriage” doctrine with all the elaborate temple ceremonies and oaths
* baptism for the dead
* “word of wisdom” doctrine
* the doctrine of preexistence
* the doctrine of eternal progression

These doctrines will be explained in later lessons. But the point now is that these doctrines, all of them central to Mormon theology, are nowhere to be found in the Book of Mormon – this same book that Smith is quoted as saying “was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than any other book.” And also the introduction of the book itself states, “… [It] contains the **fullness** [sic] of the everlasting gospel” (emphasis added) and “it puts forth the doctrines of the gospel, outlines the plan of salvation, and tells men what they must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come.”

It is also interesting that some of the teachings found in the Book of Mormon are not followed in present-day Mormonism (read chart from book, pg. 132) Rhodes states that Mormons don’t like to talk about this either.

**The Mormon take on the Bible**

Rhodes states, “By bringing up the issues we’ve discussed [so far] on the Book of Mormons, you may succeed in undermining the Mormon’s faith in it. But don’t stop there. You will also want to show the Mormon why he or she should trust the Bible.”

The Mormons’ eighth “Article of Faith” affirms, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God, as far as it is translated correctly.” Mormons will allude to “poor transmission,” believing that large portions of the Bible have been either lost or become corrupted through the centuries because of copying and recopying.

They do believe that the original manuscripts, written by the biblical authors themselves, were the uncorrupted Word of God. But they don’t think the original message has survived to today.

And what source of proof do they use? Well, the Book of Mormon, of course!

24 And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God.

25 Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

27 And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.

28 **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.**

29 And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest—because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them.

*I Nephi 13:24-29, Book of Mormon*

(Also note the extensive repetition through this whole passage, especially verse 29)

Since Mormons believe that the Book of Mormon is the Word of God, personally revealed to and translated by the prophet Joseph Smith, they give the implication that the Book of Mormon is more reliable than the Bible.

As to when these “plain and precious things” were taken out of the Bible, BYU (read Mormon) professor Robert J. Matthews says the corruption took place before the end of the first century. His interpretation of this section of Mormon scripture:

That is telling us that soon after the New Testament was written there were persons among the Gentiles who systematically, with wicked motives and evil intent, removed portions of the sacred word, and took from the Bible much very important doctrinal information. . . . In order to do this effectively two things were necessary: (1) It had to be done early, before there were multiple copies of the various books; and (2) It had to be accomplished by someone near the source who had access to the originals or earliest copies. . . In others words, the process began early, by the end of the first century, and continued into the second and third centuries after Christ.

Mormon apostle Mark E. Petersen tells us: “Many insertions were made, some of them ‘slanted’ for selfish purposes, while at times deliberate falsifications and fabrications were perpetrated.” And he also stated, “The Bible as we know it is a different volume from what it was – and would have been – had it not been changed so much by those with selfish interests.”
Sound familiar? (Hint: Joseph Smith’s insertions into various “scriptures” – Book of Mormon, D&C, and his Inspired Version of the bible)

In the late 1800s, Mormon apostle Orson Pratt wrote:

The Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible from which translations have been made, are evidently very much corrupted…. The learned are under the necessity of translating from such mutilated, imperfect, and, in very many instances, contradictory copies as still exist. This uncertainty, combined with the imperfections of uninspired translators, renders the Bibles of all languages, at the present day, emphatically the words of men, instead of the pure word of God.

Pratt even went so far as to ask, “Who, in his right mind, could, for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? Who knows that even one verse of the Bible has escaped pollution?”

Behind this is one of the main reasons why Mormons believe modern revelation – the Book of Mormon in particular – is so necessary. Robert J. Matthews stated, “Many important concepts once in the Bible but now missing from it have been restored through the Book of Mormon and other Later-day revelations.”

All of these statements about the reliability of our Bible contain a fatal flaw:

1. BoM contains hundreds of quotes (or plagiarisms) from the Bible
2. In almost all cases, these verses carry the same meaning as they do in the Bible.
3. So you can’t discredit the entire Bible without doing likewise to the BoM

Wesley Walters had a great strategy that he picked up from missionary Ira Ransom: If a Mormon objects to the use of “our” Bible, ask him to cite specific verses that are “corrupt”, and agree that you’ll not use those in your witnessing arguments. There’s plenty of other convincing scripture to make your points.

Some Mormons also try to point out that there are “missing” books that are not in our Bible. For example, Luke 1:1 says “many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us…” And there are references to the book of Jasher in Joshua and 2 Samuel, and the “Book of the Wars of the Lord” in Numbers. Mormons conclude that these are lost books of the Bible. But there is no evidence that these books were ever intended to become part of Scripture (the Bible). Simply because a book is cited in the Bible does not mean that the book belongs in the Bible.

You can counter the Mormon by pointing out that if these books belonged in the Bible, then why didn’t God instruct Joseph to restore them while he was “correcting” the Bible in his Inspired Version?

Now, we’ve mentioned the Inspired Version of the Bible that Joseph Smith wrote. Actually, he didn’t write it or even come up with a new translation. He did not examine ancient manuscripts or do any type of biblical study. He merely took the King James Version and randomly added and subtracted verses that he got from “divine inspiration”. He made thousands of changes to the KJV. (example: the additional verses he added at the end of Genesis 50, which predicts he own coming)

Note that not even Christ Himself claimed to have the power to alter the Word of God (See Matthew 5:18).

I mentioned before that the Mormon church doesn’t even use Smith’s version of the Bible in their services. They only insert some of his verses into their KJV as footnotes or asides. Smith’s version presents too many contradictions to both the Book of Mormon and current Mormon doctrine. They try to explain this by saying Smith died (in 1844) before he could finish his work on the Bible. But in a letter dated July 2, 1833, Smith wrote “this day finished the translating of the Scriptures”.