

Is the Bible Complete?

One of the standard charges of many anti-Mormons is that the Bible constitutes a closed-set of scriptures; that the Bible is complete and infallible (perfect) and that no other scriptures can be added to the Word of God. Proponents of this claim often cite Revelation 22:18–19:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Most scholars date the *Revelation* of John to around 95–97 A.D., about the same time (or perhaps prior) to other New Testament books such as James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, and the gospel of John.¹ Many scholars believe that 3 John was written *after* the book of Revelation.² Since the Bible was not compiled until approximately 200 A.D., it seems logical that John was warning against adding contents to his *Revelation*, not to the Bible as a whole. It is more likely that John was concerned with the manipulation of his writings by others, and warned against such alterations. He was referring to *his* book, *not* the New Testament. Protestant professor Dr. Craig L. Blomberg, of the Denver Seminary, agrees that “John’s words at the end of Revelation refer to that book only.”³ Even if, however, John were referring to the (as yet) un-compiled Bible, his warning is against “man” adding to the book, not God—which He surely could do by way of a prophet. As Dr. Nibley notes, some non-LDS scholars find evidence that “until the third century the Christians had no objection whatever to the idea ‘that someone might still add revelations to the writings of the Gospel.’”⁴

In Deuteronomy 4:2 we read a passage similar to the one in *Revelation*:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I commanded you.

By the logic of our critics, we should conclude that no scripture was to be added after Deuteronomy. Another scripture often used by those who wish to confine God is Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:16.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The phrase “all scripture is given” is used to argue that there can be no more scripture except the Bible. When Paul wrote this, however, what were the scriptures? There was no “Bible” (as we know it) in Paul’s day, and the Jewish canon was

unfixed. During this period in Jewish history, there was no universal agreement on which books were scriptural.⁵ What Paul says is that “all scripture is given by the inspiration of God,” a statement with which Mormons agree. And even if Paul was claiming that “all scripture” had already been given, what does that do to the rest of the New Testament written after Paul made this statement?

In about 200 A.D. the church at Rome began to compile writings that church leaders deemed as authentic scripture. Many of the books today contained in our King James Bible were included in that first New Testament. Others, however, were excluded. Some of the books found in our New Testament today, were not included in this first New Testament. *Hebrews*, *1* and *2 Peter*, and *3 John* were not in the first Roman New Testament, for example, while books such as the *Revelation of Peter* and the *Wisdom of Solomon* were. Many books were the subject of debate. The emerging church was often unsure which books should be included as scripture and which should not.

About fifty years later in Alexandria, Egypt, Origen was using yet a different version of the New Testament, which excluded the *Revelation of Peter* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, but also excluded *James*, *Jude*, and *2 John* (as well as those disputed by Rome) while adding *1 Peter*. It wasn’t until 367 A.D., after the Council of Nicea, that our current New Testament was established, adding *Hebrews*, *James*, *1* and *2 Peter*, *1*, *2*, and *3 John*, and *Jude*, while rejecting the *Revelation of Peter*, and the *Wisdom of Solomon* which were included in the earlier version.⁶ The Bible also makes mention of several books which are no longer available, including an earlier epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9), an epistle to the Church at Laodicea (Col. 4:16), and possibly an earlier epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 3:3).

Dr. Peterson and Dr. Ricks note that the New Testament itself suggests an expanded canon by drawing on books not included within the Bible.

The Epistle of Jude, for instance, draws heavily on non-canonical books such as *1 Enoch* and the *Assumption of Moses*. Indeed, as an eminent contemporary scholar says of *1 Enoch*, “it influenced Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 John, Jude (which quotes it directly), and Revelation (with numerous points of contact). There is little doubt that 1 Enoch was influential in molding New Testament doctrines concerning the nature of the Messiah, the Son of Man, the messianic kingdom, demonology, the future, resurrection, the final judgement, the whole eschatological theater, and symbolism.” When Matthew the evangelist says (at 2:23) that Jesus “came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled

which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called Nazarene,” he is citing a prophetic text unknown to the Bible as we have it. When, at Acts 20:35, the apostle Paul exhorts the elders of the Ephesian branch “to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, I t is more blessed to give than to receive,” he is pointing their minds toward a famous statement that does not occur in the New Testament books that we posses today. To put it bluntly, both Matthew and Paul seem to accept a canon of scriptural materials broader than that accepted today by the critics of Latter-day Saints. This hardly bothers the Mormons, but it should give real pause to our detractors. How can they denounce us for receiving scriptures beyond their limited canon without simultaneously condemning Jude, Matthew, and Paul?”⁷

Even Martin Luther did not accept every book of the New Testament as fully inspired. Luther particularly disliked the Epistle of James, which he called a “‘an epistle of straw’ having ‘no gospel quality to’” for disagreeing with his teaching of justification by faith alone. He denied that James’ Epistle had apostolic authorship and claimed that it was “‘worthless.’” Luther declared: “‘I hold that some Jew wrote it who probably had heard about Christians but had never run into any.’” Neither did Luther trust the Revelation of John.⁸ If Luther, Matthew, Paul, Jude, and other early Christians could accept more of less of the Bible (as we know it) and still be “Christian,” then Latter-day Saints are certainly in good company.



For more details on this topic see
<http://www.mormonfortress.com> or
<http://www.fairlds.org>

Written by Michael R. Ash for the Foundation for
Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR),
Copyright © 2004. www.fairlds.org

¹ Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 46.

² See http://www.errantskeptics.org/Dating_the_NT.htm

³ Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 39.

⁴ Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 278.

⁵ Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Sustaining and Defending the Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 42.

⁶ See <http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZ45.HTM>

⁷ Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), 121–122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 125–126.