

TO ADD TO OR TO TAKE FROM

by Scott Gordon

For many people the whole concept of Mormonism can be summarily dismissed with a single scripture. It says in Revelation 22:18–19.

18 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:

19 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.¹

For some, this scripture is the “silver bullet” that shoots down Mormonism. The Mormons have the Book of Mormon. This counts as additional scripture. That means they add to the Bible which violates what is written in Revelation 22:18–19.

This concept is clearly stated by noted anti-Mormon Walter Martin, author of many books including the best-selling *Kingdom of the Cults* and *Through the Maze of Mormonism*. In speaking of Joseph Smith he states:

Smith apparently was either oblivious to the expressed warning against adding to or subtracting from the Word of God, or willfully disobedient to it (see Rev. 22:18, 19). At any rate he clearly transgressed God’s revealed will and all loyal Mormons who follow his example continue in his transgression.²

So why do Mormons continue in this “transgression?” Is Walter Martin right? Does this one scripture prove Mormonism to be a false gospel?

THE QUICK ANSWER

The quick and easy answer for this can be found in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 4:2 where it says:

2 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 command you.

Additionally in Proverbs 30:6 it states:

6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Since these two verses appear in the Old Testament, if we apply Walter Martin’s interpretation of the scripture in Revelation, we must then discard the entire New Testament and all other scripture written after these verses were penned. Obviously these verses did not mean no additional scripture would be given. There must be another interpretation or else your Bible should only contain the five books of Moses.³

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

To have a better understanding of the scriptures in Deuteronomy and Proverbs as well as the scripture in Revelation, it is important to understand what the Bible really is. Edgar J. Goodspeed, best known for his translation of the Bible,⁴ also wrote a short book about the Bible titled *How Came the Bible*. In this book he wrote:

We must remember that an ancient book was in form a roll—as the Jews made them, scrolls of skin, finished smooth on one side to be written on. These might be of most inconvenient length; Jesus in the synagogue was handed “the roll of the prophet Isaiah,” and he “found the place where it was written”—a difficult thing to do in the long series of columns of that book, which amounts in print to 125 large pages and must have made at least that many columns of Hebrew, with no chapter-numbers, capitals, or column numbers (there were no pages) to aid the reader in his search.



The Hebrew Bible—the Old Testament—as Jesus knew it, consisted of from twelve to twenty such scrolls of different sizes. They were never united into what we would call one “book” until the invention of printing made that possible, in the fifteenth century⁵. Indeed, the sacred scriptures preserved in the arks of Jewish synagogues today are still scrolls, not leaf-books of the ordinary modern fashion.

So a “Bible” as we know it, even a Hebrew Bible, containing the Old Testament by itself, was unknown among the Jews of ancient times. The books that belonged to it were not physically united as they are with us; they existed in separate rolls or scrolls, one containing the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament; another, Isaiah (Luke 4. 17); another, the Minor Prophets (mentioned in Acts 7. 42); another, Ezekiel; another, the Psalms (referred to in Luke 20. 42, and in Acts 1. 20), and so on.⁶

The Bible is not a single book, but a collection of various writings. The collection of various Old Testament writings was the Bible for the Jews; it was the Bible for Jesus, and it was also the Bible for the early Christians. The books of the New Testament were added later. The first letters of Paul seem to have been written between 52 A.D. and 60 A.D.,⁷ and the earliest gospels were penned between 70 A.D. and 90 A.D.⁸ Early in the second century, about 110 A.D., the Gospel of John was written.⁹ Interestingly enough, the Revelation of John was written prior to that. It was written while Domitian was still emperor (81–96 A.D.)¹⁰

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Unlike the books of the Old Testament, which were written in Hebrew, the book of Revelation, as well as the other books in the New Testament, was written in Greek. Edgar Goodspeed says the following:

The Greeks made their rolls of papyrus, cutting the pith of that Egyptian water-plant into narrow strips and gluing these together into strips and these into sheets, which could then be glued together to make rolls of any length. But the Greeks had found that twenty-five to thirty feet was the length most convenient for ordinary use. Such a papyrus roll they called a *biblion*, from *biblos*, “papyrus.” This is the word used of the Revelation, in Revelation 22. 18, 19, where it refers, of course, to the roll containing the Revelation alone. If it had referred to the whole New Testament (some books of which had not yet been written) it would have been plural, *biblia*.

Indeed, it was this plural which passed into Latin as a singular, *Biblia*, and came to mean the Bible. Etymologically, it means the papyrus rolls.¹¹

ANTI-MORMONS WEIGH IN

Some anti-Mormons seem to agree with this interpretation. Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, authors of *Questions to Ask your Mormon Friend* and *Mormonism 101* write:

In an attempt to place all LDS extrabiblical teachings, some Christians have felt that quoting Revelation 22:18–19 solves the matter. The passage warns about adding or taking away the words of “this book.” Most evangelical commentators believe John was giving a straightforward warning to the readers about the Book of Revelation, and not the Bible as a whole. Since the Bible had not been compiled the time of John’s writing, it would be wrong to assume the he was speaking about books other than his own. John’s warning, therefore, should not be used in any other context.¹²

Anti-Mormons David Reed and John Farkas also agree with this. They write:

The problem, of course, is due to misunderstanding of these verses in Revelation and Deuteronomy. Revelation 22:18 does not prohibit additional inspired writings; it is simply an injunction against adding to or subtracting from the Book of Revelation. It was perfectly proper for John to go on to write his Gospel and his epistles afterwards.¹³

END OF THE STORY?

It would leave a false impression if we left the discussion at this point. While many critics of Mormonism admit the Book of Mormon does not violate the scripture in Revelation 22:18–19, that doesn’t mean that they completely concede on this issue.

McKeever and Johnson go on to say:

This does not mean that Christians should be any more inclined to accept the validity of Mormon scriptures. In the Bible, God warns those who pretend to speak for Him when they are not authorized to so. Moses admonished the Is-

raelites in Deuteronomy 4:2 that they were not to add to, or subtract from, the commands of God.¹⁴

David Reed and John Farkas also write:

Deuteronomy 4:2, on the other hand, is a general injunction against adding to or subtracting from “the word which I command you,” not thereby limiting God’s expanding Scripture through additional inspired writings but telling us not to tamper with whatever God does provide in the way of Scripture.

While Revelation 18:22 does not relate directly to the Book of Mormon, Deuteronomy 4:2 does. Claiming divine inspiration for a volume that is actually the work of a man would amount to adding to the Word of God.¹⁵

They also make the specific argument:

But it was not proper for Joseph Smith to make changes throughout the book of Revelation, as he did in the Joseph Smith Translation.¹⁶

Therein lies the difficulty. If the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible, or other LDS scripture is the work of man, it would indeed be adding to the Word of God. However, if Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and these words were divinely inspired then he not only had a right but a divine mandate to add to the cannon of scripture. We must acknowledge that God holds the power to decide whether to add to or clarify scripture through his prophets.

DOES GOD ADD SCRIPTURE THROUGH PROPHETS?

It is presumptuous for us to limit God. There is a specific example in the Bible where God added to earlier scripture through a current prophet. In Jeremiah 36:27–32, Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, burned a book of scripture. Under the command of God, Jeremiah took a new scroll and wrote out the words of scripture again and added “many like words” to that book. As you read the following verses, pay special attention to verses 27, 28 and 32.

27 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying,

28 Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned.

29 And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast?

30 Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.

31 And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.

32 Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: **and there were added besides unto them many like words.** (Emphasis added.)

At this point one either has to claim that Jeremiah violated God’s will, or that prophets have a right to add to scripture when moved upon by God.

Working through prophets has been God’s pattern from the beginning. God has always used men to write his words and to reveal his will. As it says in Amos 3:7:

7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

PROPHETS AFTER JESUS?

While many will concede that there were prophets in the Old Testament, they will often make the claim that the era of prophets came to an end with Jesus, thereby ending any claim that prophets could add to scripture. How can prophets add to scripture when there are no longer prophets? To support the argument, they frequently cite Hebrews 1:1–2 which says:

1 GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

This sounds like one of those “silver bullet” scriptures again. Some will cite this scripture and claim it means there will be no more prophets authorized to write scripture after Jesus Christ. Since Mormonism has additional scripture, some of it coming after Christ, Mormonism is a false gospel: case closed.

Once again, one needs to be cautioned about taking a single verse and building a doctrine around it. We have just observed how this doesn’t work with the verses in Revelation 22:18–19 and we should be cautious about falling into that same trap.

If there were no more prophets authorized to write scripture after Jesus, how did we get the New Testament? Jesus didn’t write any part of it; other men did. Additionally, much of the New Testament records things that happened after Jesus had been caught up into heaven.

Jesus himself talked of future prophets when he said in Matthew 7:15:

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Jesus warns us here to beware of false prophets, certainly an important caution, but in doing so he acknowledges there will be legitimate prophets. If Jesus meant to teach there would be no prophets succeeding Him, he would have stated “Beware of prophets because there won’t be any after me.” But instead he asks us to discriminate and not to follow the false prophets. This means there will be true prophets that we should follow.

Examining this further, we see that Jesus taught that there would be prophets until we come to a unity of the faith. In Ephesians 4:11–14 it states:

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

We also read in Ephesians 3:5:

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

How could it *now be revealed* unto his holy apostles and prophets if there are not any prophets after Christ?

Additional New Testament scriptures also speak of prophets. In 1 Corinthians 12:27–28 it says:

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Again we read in Ephesians 2:20:

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

There are those who make the claim that as the foundation, apostles and prophets gave us the Bible and are no longer needed. To make this claim, one would have to ignore the other New Testament scriptures we have quoted as well as the following scriptures.

In Acts 15:32 it says:

32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

In Acts 21:10 it says:

10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

Clearly, just as the work of Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone of the foundation, continues, the need for the work of the rest of the foundation, the apostles and prophets, also continues.

NOT TO TAKE FROM

In all of our discussions, critics of Mormonism seem to focus on the principle of not adding to the word of God. Forgotten here seems to be the other half of the scripture where it says “neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it.” (Deuteronomy 4:2). Those who refuse to accept the word, which God is currently giving to the children of men, are violating the second part of this scripture. One must give pause and realize that nowhere in the Bible does it say that God will stop sending His word as long as He has a people willing to receive it.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed several points about adding to scripture.

- The Greek word for book in Revelation 22:18–19 is *biblion* which means singular scroll. Clearly John was referring only to this particular scroll when he said not to add. (He did not use the plural term *biblia*, which is where the word Bible comes from)
- God can add to his scripture and revelation and has done so in the past.
- God has always given us scripture through the writings of his apostles and prophets.
- Jesus said that he gave us apostles and prophets until we come to a unity of the faith. That certainly hasn’t happened.
- Apostles and prophets continued on the earth after Jesus was taken up.
- We should investigate and accept all scripture past and current that comes from God.

This author has clearly shown that Revelation 22:18–19 is not the “silver bullet” scripture that shoots down Mormonism. Not only that, but there can and will be legitimate additional scripture given from God. Whether or not specific books are inspired by God is outside the scope of this paper, and is something each person will have to decide for himself or herself with the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

FURTHER READING

Goodspeed, Edgar J. *How Came the Bible*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1940.

NOTES

1 All scriptural citations come from the King James Version of the Bible.

2 Walter Martin, *Mormonism* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 29.

3 This was the very position of the Sadduces in Jesus’ day; they held that only the first five books were authoritative. To this day the Samaritans hold to this limited canon of scripture called the “Samaritan Pentateuch.”

4 Goodspeed’s translations are “The Bible: An American Translation,” published by the University of Chicago Press in 1931 and “The Apocrypha: An American Translation,” published by Random House in 1959.

5 There were some books put together prior to the time of the printing press. These books are each referred to as a “Codex,” but they are very rare and were made several hundred years after Christ. One of the more famous of these books would be the Leningrad Codex. It is the oldest known manuscript that contains the whole Bible and was written about 1010 A.D.

6 Edgar J. Goodspeed, *How Came the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1940), 10–11.

7 The date each New Testament book was written is subject to vigorous scholarly debate with various schools of thought. This makes it impossible to speak with absolute certainty on the exact date each book was written.

8 Goodspeed, *How Came the Bible*, 59.

9 *Ibid.*, 64.

10 *Ibid.*, 62.

11 *Ibid.*, 11–12.

12 Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, “Pinning Down Mormon Doctrine,” *Christian Research Journal* 23:4, 11.

13 David A. Reed and John R. Farkas, *Mormons: Answered Verse by Verse* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 103.

14 McKeever and Johnson, “Pinning Down Mormon Doctrine,” 11.

15 Reed and Farkas, *Mormons: Answered Verse by Verse*, 103.

16 *Ibid.*

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