
JOSEPH SMITH AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

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My topic is how the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith offer significant and insightful information about the New Testament. My approach to the subject is that of one who trusts the Prophet Joseph Smith's teachings as being correct and of eternal significance, and my conclusions are based on faith in the evidences brought forth by Joseph Smith.

I believe that the forces that caused the apostasy of the Lord's church and left the world without an adequate church also engaged in altering the manuscripts from which our present New Testament is translated. And since no originals are known to be in existence today, the world lacks an adequate collection of manuscripts. Concerning the original New Testament documents, the highly respected Sir Frederick Kenyon said: "The originals of the several books have long ago disappeared. They must have perished in the very infancy of the church; for no allusion is ever made to them by any Christian writer."¹ The loss of priesthood, doctrine, ordinances, covenants, and inspired prophets

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characterizes the great apostasy and also sets the stage for a great Restoration. If every essential that was lost is not made available, then we do not have a Restoration. We do not need the original manuscripts as much as we need the vital information they contained, much of which we have received by revelation to the Prophet Joseph without the manuscripts.

My view is that through the Restoration we have a pattern of doctrine and procedure showing that other dispensations functioned in a manner similar to the New Testament period and to the dispensation of the fulness of times. Indeed, Joseph Smith said as much when he stated, "Now the purpose in Himself in the winding up scene of the last dispensation is that all things pertaining to that dispensation should be conducted precisely in accordance with the preceding dispensations."² The Prophet said that the Lord wanted the ordinances to remain the same in every dispensation; "therefore He set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever, and set Adam to watch over them, to reveal them from heaven to man, or to send angels to reveal them."³ Joseph Smith's contributions provide meaningful information and patterns that are not available from any other known source.

In this chapter, I use the expression "Joseph Smith's teachings" to include all that came through him: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, the New Translation of the Bible, as well as the Prophet's personal writings and discourses.

JOSEPH SMITH'S CREDENTIALS

Latter-day Saints accept Joseph Smith's teachings as having a bearing on the writing and compilation of the New Testament. Several factors make using the Prophet's utterances not only legitimate but desirable and very rewarding.

The established order of the Lord's church and kingdom is that men do not appoint themselves but must be called of God by revelation, and they speak as moved by the Holy Ghost. Further, the nature of the heavenly plan is that it can be understood only through the aid of the Holy Ghost, and the ordinances of salvation can be administered only by the authority of the holy priesthood. New Testament Apostles and prophets had the necessary qualifications and were "insiders."

Joseph Smith had the same qualifications from the same Lord Jesus, and he was at least of the same stature as they. As such, he had an edge in relating to the New Testament writers, especially since he had been visited by some of them. He was an “insider.”

Among the qualifications to understand the scriptures, none is more necessary than inspiration from the Holy Ghost. Paul explained that since the “natural man” has not received the Holy Ghost, he cannot know the things of God “because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote: “If one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, [and] the tongue of the eloquent.”⁴ In other words, in gospel research, no other success can compensate for failure to have the help of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph Smith had practical experience with the operation of the Holy Ghost. After he and Oliver Cowdery were baptized and ordained by priesthood authority, they received the Holy Ghost and were able to better understand the scriptures: “We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation. Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of” (Joseph Smith—History 1:73–74).

Learning to use the Holy Ghost is a growth process. Elder Orson Pratt reported the following conversation he once had with Joseph Smith: “[Elder Pratt] mentioned that as Joseph used the Urim and Thummim in the translation of the Book of Mormon, he wondered why he did not use it in the translation of the New Testament. Joseph explained to him that the experience he had acquired while translating the Book of Mormon by the use of the Urim and Thummim had rendered him so well acquainted with the Spirit of Revelation and Prophecy, that in the translating of the New Testament he did not need the aid that was necessary in the 1st instance.”⁵

Joseph Smith was the greatest gospel restorer of all time, for the Lord had “given him the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed, even things which were from the foundation of the world”

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(D&C 35:18). As leader of the dispensation of the fulness of times, it was in the very nature of his calling to be able to discuss in authoritative detail the conditions and function of all previous dispensations, including the time of the New Testament. He understood the New Testament better than anyone since Peter, James, John, and Paul.

"ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM"

Joseph Smith declared emphatically that the fulness of the gospel, with a focus on Christ as Creator and Redeemer, accompanied by priesthood, ordinances, covenants, and callings, was instituted in heaven before the foundation of the world. This complete gospel plan was preached in the name of Christ in every dispensation beginning with Adam. Sacred records and histories were kept by the authorized servants of God in each dispensation. The New Testament dispensation was unique in that it included the Lord's birth, earthly life, death, and resurrection, but the doctrines and ordinances of salvation would of necessity be the same as in all other dispensations.

Joseph Smith taught, "All that were ever saved, were saved through the power of this great plan of redemption, as much before the coming of Christ as since; if not, God has had different plans in operation (if we may so express it), to bring men back to dwell with Himself; and this we cannot believe, since there has been no change in the constitution of man since he fell."⁶ And "the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same, and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same."⁷ It is evident, therefore, that Paul's concept of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5) is not confined to Paul's time only but should be seen as the prevailing rule throughout the entire scope of the gospel anywhere and anytime on earth and in heaven. This principle is not clearly taught in the Bible, although there are hints, but the facts are abundantly attested in the teachings of Joseph Smith. Inasmuch as all dispensations had the same plan of salvation, the records of those dispensations are able to make known some of the concepts not clearly stated in the New Testament record. As taught in 1 Nephi 13:32-40, much truth was lost from the New Testament.

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Without the Restoration and the Prophet Joseph Smith, we would not realize how incomplete the current New Testament record is.

Joseph Smith gave us a larger, wider, and more comprehensive view of the Lord's work on this earth than we could have imagined from the Bible alone. The scope of operations is worldwide rather than focused on the Near East as the Bible would suggest. Anyone who has read, understood, and believed the Book of Mormon can hardly avoid the wider view and can never again look at the New Testament in the same light. Revelations showing the wider activity of the Lord Jesus and his personal visits to several different groups in addition to the Jews in Palestine in no way denigrate the New Testament or the Holy Land of the Near East. Rather, they enlarge our view of an active and caring Savior who is God of the whole earth and not an absentee landlord to most of it. In light of Doctrine and Covenants 88:46–61, we see that Jesus is also Lord of the Universe, visiting the inhabitants of many worlds as their only Redeemer, with the same plan of salvation we know on this earth.

THE NEW TESTAMENT PORTRAYAL OF JESUS

Latter-day revelation informs us that the New Testament is a true account of the Lord Jesus Christ, although it is occasionally ambiguous and often incomplete. We may accept as sound doctrine and historical fact the New Testament messages that Jesus was the Son of God in the flesh, born of Mary, baptized by John the Baptist, and that He received the Holy Ghost and performed many miracles including casting out evil spirits and restoring the dead to life. He chose twelve Apostles and commissioned them to teach and baptize all nations. He promised to come again to the earth and establish a worldwide kingdom. He shed His blood in Gethsemane, died on a cross, atoned for the sins of mankind, rose from the dead with a body of flesh, and ascended into heaven. Furthermore, the witness of Christ given in the book of Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation of John is verified by Joseph Smith's teachings, including his revelatory translation of the Bible.

Every major concept regarding the mission of Jesus Christ can be verified by latter-day revelation very quickly by perusal of the Topical Guide in the appendix of the Latter-day Saint edition of the King

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James Version. For instance, under the heading “Jesus Christ” beginning on page 240, fifty-eight subheadings delineate various aspects of His ministry, presenting passages from the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. No better instrument exists on earth to show how marvelously latter-day revelation sustains the New Testament presentation of Jesus. The Topical Guide presents nineteen pages of scripture references to support the fifty-eight subheadings.

In addition to the Topical Guide, hundreds of statements about Jesus are on record as coming from Joseph Smith, of which the following is one example: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it. But in connection with these, we believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost, the power of faith, the enjoyment of the spiritual gifts according to the will of God, the restoration of the house of Israel, and the final triumph of truth.”⁸

A GROWING TREND OF UNBELIEF

For most of the past century, a growing trend has developed among many biblical scholars casting doubt on the historical accuracy of the New Testament. It is popular in some circles to make a distinction between “the Jesus of history” and “the Christ of faith,” alleging that the divine and atoning Christ who is worshiped and trusted by many faithful Christians never existed as such a person. This view has been the subject of many publications, but it is not especially shared by the majority of Christians. But I believe the trend is growing.⁹ The trend of skepticism was described as a warning by Elder Harold B. Lee:

Fifty years ago or more, when I was a missionary, our greatest responsibility was to defend the great truth that the Prophet Joseph Smith was divinely called and inspired and that the Book of Mormon was indeed the word of God. But even at that time there were the unmistakable evidences that there was coming into the religious world actually a question about the

Bible and the divine calling of the Master himself. Now, fifty years later, our greatest responsibility and anxiety is to defend the divine mission of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, for all about us, even among those who claim to be professors of the Christian faith, are those not willing to stand squarely in defense of the great truth that our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, was indeed the Son of God. So tonight it would seem to me that the most important thing I could say to you is to try to strengthen your faith and increase your courage and your understanding of the place of the Master in the great Plan of Salvation.¹⁰

When we realize that the Lord has known from the beginning that the modern world would in many instances reject divine revelation and be immersed in unbelief and that the Bible would be rejected by many, we begin to understand why the Lord prepared for such an emergency. We read in 1 Nephi 13 that soon after the time of Christ, “many plain and precious things” and “many covenants” would be deliberately taken out of the records of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb (see verses 27–28, 39–40). We read also that “because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb an exceedingly great many do stumble” (1 Nephi 13:29). The Lord, however, promised to correct this situation: “Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness, which thou beholdest they are in, because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church, whose formation thou hast seen” (verse 32).

As a remedy, the Lord brought forth the Book of Mormon and “other books” to convince Jews, Gentiles, and Lamanites “that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true” (1 Nephi 13:39). The angel of the Lord declared: “These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the

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world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved” (verse 40). Please note the emphasis on the New Testament and that it would be in need of some repair and restoration.

The tone of latter-day revelation, including the Prophet Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible, shows Jesus to be very straightforward in His speech. As an example, one notable ambiguity in the New Testament is when Pilate asks Jesus, “Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it” (Mark 15:2). This passage is vague both in the Greek manuscripts and in the King James translation. The Joseph Smith Translation is clear: “I am even as thou sayest.”¹¹

PHRASES AND DOCTRINAL CONCEPTS

Certain phraseology and doctrinal concepts which were unique to the New Testament when men had only the Bible are shown by latter-day revelation to be characteristic of other dispensations also. For many years I have noted that the Book of Mormon and the books of Moses and Abraham have phrases and ideas similar in word order and content to the New Testament. But until recently, I had not sensed the historical significance. The following examples will illustrate three different categories.

I. *Situations in which the Book of Mormon and the New Testament contain parallel passages after Jesus had personally ministered among the Jews and the Nephites.* In the first table on page 312, note the similar wording of the completely separate discourses by Paul and Mormon on the topics of faith, hope, and charity, each presumably unaware of the other’s treatise, and separated by three hundred years and about ten thousand miles.

Sidney B. Sperry’s conclusion was that Jesus probably had discoursed on charity to both the Jews and the Nephites, and it was in the writings or traditions of each church, and Paul and Mormon obtained the words independent of one another from those sources.¹² A second possibility is that both Paul and Mormon received the wording by direct inspiration from the Holy Ghost.

 FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

I CORINTHIANS 13:2, 4-8

[If I] have not charity, I am nothing. . . . Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth . . .

MORONI 7:44-46

He must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things; hopeth all things, endureth all things. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth.

Another example, but of different subject matter, is seen in the teachings of Mormon and John:

 SONS OF GOD

I JOHN 3:2-3

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

MORONI 7:48

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father . . . that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.

Yet another example can be seen by comparing Philippians 2:12 with Mormon 9:27.

2. *Situations in which the Book of Mormon passage was previous to Jesus' earthly mission, but the New Testament passage was during Jesus' earthly mission.* One example is Alma (about 83 BC) compared to John the Baptist (about AD 30).

Alma states that the Spirit told him what to say, and I am certain that John the Baptist was inspired by the same Spirit:

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THE AXE AT THE ROOT OF THE TREE

ALMA 5:52

The Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.

MATTHEW 3:10

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Note also the following statements of Nephi, son of Helaman (about 30 and 23 BC) as compared with Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee and again in Bountiful, about fifty years after Nephi had spoken.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

HELAMAN 5:8; 8:25

Do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; . . . instead of laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where nothing doth corrupt, and where nothing can come which is unclean.

MATTHEW 6:20
(ALSO 3 NEPHI 13:20)

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

Compare the teachings of Captain Moroni and Jesus:

FIRST CLEANSE THE INWARD VESSEL

ALMA 60:23

God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also.

MATTHEW 23:26

Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

It is to be noted that Captain Moroni states that he is quoting what "God has said," which gives an impression that the passage might already have been in the Nephite scriptures.

An interesting situation is seen in the use of the words *jot* and *tittle*. Jesus used these words in His Sermon on the Mount among the Jews

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and also in the similar sermon in Bountiful. Surprisingly, they appear twice before that time, even as early as 74 BC by Amulek, suggesting that they may have been in use among the Nephites at that time.

JOT AND TITTLE

ALMA 34:13	3 NEPHI 1:25	MATTHEW 5:18
<p>Then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away.</p>	<p>The law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit; yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled; yea, that one jot or tittle should not pass away till it should all be fulfilled.</p>	<p>For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.</p>

3. *Situations in which the Book of Mormon passage is prior to Jesus' earthly ministry, but the New Testament passage is after Jesus' earthly ministry; that is, from the books of Acts through Revelation.* Note the words of Peter as compared to the words of Nephi (545 BC) and King Benjamin (124 BC), each independently speaking about Christ:

NO OTHER NAME FOR SALVATION¹⁵

2 NEPHI 31:21	MOSIAH 3:17	ACTS 4:12
<p>This is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.</p>	<p>There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.</p>	<p>Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.</p>

Another example is Helaman and Pahoran (about 57 BC) writing about the liberty given by Christ. Compare Paul's similar statement more than a hundred years later.

STAND FAST IN THE LIBERTY OF CHRIST¹⁴

ALMA 58:40	ALMA 61:9, 21	GALATIANS 5:1
They stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them free.	My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free. . . . God will deliver them, yea, and also all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free.	Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

How widespread is parallel phraseology in the scriptures? How many parallels are there, and where do they occur? I found at least seventy-five examples distributed widely throughout the scriptures. My analysis shows they occur in at least nineteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books, with Matthew, I Corinthians, and Hebrews having the greatest number. At least eleven of the fifteen books in the Book of Mormon have passages parallel to the New Testament. I did not include the Doctrine and Covenants or the Pearl of Great Price in the analysis. Parallel passages occur in the words of all the authors of the books of the New Testament plus John the Baptist and Jesus. Book of Mormon personalities include Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma the Elder, Amulek, Captain Moroni, Alma the Younger, Nephi son of Helaman, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, Moroni, and Jesus.

It is also my observation that parallel or near-parallel passages occur most frequently in preaching or revelatory situations in which the Holy Ghost is involved or when a prophet is citing what an angel had told him. Aside from Jesus, individuals probably were not aware that their utterances closely resemble what others in a different hemisphere and time had said or would yet say.

EVIDENCES OF A DIVINE PATTERN

Earlier in this chapter, I made the point that the complete gospel plan was in place before the foundation of the world and that the gospel has been the same in every dispensation. I propose that revelations from heaven in every dispensation would follow the preordained

pattern. There is a sequence and a fixed order to the principles and ordinances of the gospel, and they were very probably revealed in clusters or patterns, like a formula, in every dispensation. Nephi, Jacob, Benjamin, Amulek, Alma, and Samuel the Lamanite said they were repeating what an angel had told them. Ministering angels would know the fixed, preordained plan and would reveal the gospel in the proper order and cluster.

Order and sequence are demonstrated in a variety of situations. Jesus declared a priority when he said that “the first and great commandment” is “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . soul, . . . and mind” and that “the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). The same priority occurs in the Ten Commandments: the first four pertain to a person’s relationship to God; the remaining six to relationships with other people (see Exodus 20:1–17). Additional meaning is manifested when we recognize not ten unrelated statements but a wholeness and intelligent order.

The same pattern occurs in the Beatitudes, especially as presented in 3 Nephi 12. The earlier Beatitudes speak of faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, and a remission of sins (see 3 Nephi 12:1–6). The others speak more specifically of relationships between people—being a peacemaker, what to do when you are persecuted, and so forth (see verses 7–11). It is noticeable that the Beatitudes in the New Testament lack the early statements about faith, repentance, baptism, Holy Ghost, and remission of sins (see Matthew 5) and thus do not fit the established pattern that is so well given in 3 Nephi by the same Jesus. Fortunately, the complete list is restored to Matthew 5 in the Joseph Smith Translation.¹⁵

The pattern thus displayed in a wide selection of scriptures is supported by the words of God to Nephi: “I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another” (2 Nephi 29:8).

WRITTEN BY COMMANDMENT

Latter-day revelation infers that the New Testament authors wrote by command of the Lord. This may support earlier compilation and

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lend credence more to traditional authorship than is asserted by those scholars who base their conclusions on literary analysis.

From Adam to the present, the Lord has commanded his prophets to write and preserve scripture. Adam and his immediate family kept a “book of remembrance . . . , in the which was recorded in the language of Adam” things that were given “by the spirit of inspiration. And by them their children were taught to read and write” a “language which was pure and undefiled” (see Moses 6:4–6). Years later, Enoch used this “book of remembrance” in his ministry (see Moses 6:45–46).

The Book of Mormon is our strongest source for declaring that the Lord wants certain things to be written and preserved. It also tells why the Lord wants such records available to the people. The whole of 2 Nephi 29 dwells on this subject and contains words of the Lord declaring that “the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God,” and “I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another . . . and I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever” (verses 8–9). Furthermore, the Lord has said, “I command all men . . . that they shall write the words which I shall speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world” (2 Nephi 29:11). The Lord says still more: “I shall speak unto the Jews” and “to the Nephites,” and “to the other tribes of Israel,” and “they shall write it.” Eventually, each shall have the books of the others (see 2 Nephi 29:12–14).

With such strong declaration and affirmation, it is strange that of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, only the Revelation of John contains any statement of a command to write (see Revelation 1:11, 19, and fourteen other instances, all in Revelation). In my view, it is unlikely that the Lord would command only one of the New Testament Apostles to write when commandments to write are so prominent in the other dispensations. Why would it not be so in the New Testament? It is my opinion that the Lord did command the Apostles to write and the fact that the command does not appear in our New Testament is evidence of the leanness and inadequacy of the record. It is a glaring omission, conspicuous by its absence.

Jacob, son of Lehi, made an informative observation that writing on metal was limited “because of the difficulty of engraving,” but metal was

durable and would remain, whereas what was written on other materials would “perish and vanish away” (see Jacob 4:1–2). Since the Lord knew long beforehand that the New Testament books would be altered and shortened, with the loss of “plain and precious things” and also “many covenants,” we see the Lord’s wisdom in having the Nephites write on metal and bury the record in the ground out of the reach of men. This way it would remain unchanged and could testify of Christ and of the original truth of the New Testament and also supply doctrinal concepts missing from the New Testament manuscripts (see 1 Nephi 13:32–40).

The Lord’s sensitivity to written records was shown when He noticed that the fulfillment of a particular prophecy spoken by Samuel the Lamanite was not included in the official Nephite record. The Lord commanded that it be included (see 3 Nephi 23:7–13). Among other purposes of the written scripture, it has “enlarged the memory of this people” (Alma 37:8), and it keeps the “commandments always before our eyes” (Mosiah 1:5; compare Mosiah 1:4).¹⁶

I assume that since the Lord commanded the twelve Apostles to write, they surely would have done so, and thus the books of the New Testament, especially Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, would have been composed earlier than some scholars think. The Joseph Smith Translation might offer some help when it changes the titles from “The Gospel according to . . .” to “The Testimony of . . .” in the case of Matthew and John. Such a change is at least an affirmation of authorship, and it is consistent with Doctrine and Covenants 88:141, in which the Lord refers to the “thirteenth chapter of John’s testimony concerning me.” It seems probable that each “testimony” began with the words of the original author, but through the years unauthorized changes were made so that current copies vary from the originals and are neither as accurate in detail nor as complete as the originals. There seems an ever-present tendency for some persons to alter the word of the Lord, for there are at least seventeen scripture references with warnings against alteration, citing both intentional and unintentional variants.¹⁷

Perhaps some feel that since the Prophet Joseph was not a textual critic in the current usage of the term, having not studied the biblical documents, that he might not have been aware of questions of

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authorship and dating and simply spoke in the traditional context of the day when he discussed the New Testament. However, Joseph Smith did engage in a number of activities characteristic of a deep comprehension of textual backgrounds. (1) He translated an original parchment written and hidden up by John. This is now Doctrine and Covenants section 7. (2) He raised questions about the accuracy of the translation of the Bible, as in the eighth Article of Faith. (3) He was fully aware of 1 Nephi 13, saying the New Testament has suffered many losses of precious material. (4) He judged the Song of Solomon to be not inspired.¹⁸ (5) He spoke of the Apocrypha as being partly correct (see D&C 91:2). (6) He wrote that the Jewish rulers had taken away the fulness of the scriptures before Jesus' day (see JST, Luke 11:53). (7) He wrote that many words were taken out of the writings of Moses (see Moses 1:41). (8) He said that "many points touching the salvation of men, had been taken out from the Bible or lost before it was compiled."¹⁹ (9) He took issue with details in the books of Daniel and Revelation.²⁰ (10) And he said the Bible did not always agree with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to him.²¹

But Joseph Smith never, so far as I have seen, made even a suggestion that would cast doubt on the authorship of any of the books of the New Testament. My feeling is that the Prophet's calling as seer and translator far outweighs his possible lack of formal training with manuscripts. I think that if the original manuscripts and other documents of the early Church were available today, we would see that they would support the Prophet's decisions in every particular and that the question of doubt raised by some scholarly research is the consequence of imperfect manuscripts and also not having the divine calling that the Prophet Joseph had. Who can match the high level of a seer? A greater spiritual gift "can no man have" (Mosiah 8:16).

NOTES

1. Frederick Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 155.
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 168.
3. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 168.

4. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 205.
5. Minutes of the School of the Prophets, Salt Lake City, January 14, 1871. Manuscript in the Historical Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; in Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985), 40.
6. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 59–60.
7. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 264; see also 308, 320, 324.
8. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 121.
9. A 1929 study of Protestant clergy showed that younger ministers were less accepting of traditional beliefs than older ministers (see George Herbert Betts, *The Beliefs of Seven Hundred Ministers* [Chicago: Abingdon, 1929]). The so-called "Jesus Seminar" of the 1980s and 1990s concluded that only 18 percent of the sayings of Jesus were actually from Jesus, that Jesus did not think of Himself as the Messiah, that He did not promise to return to earth in glory to set up a world kingdom, nor that He commissioned His disciples to convert and baptize the world or establish a church. The Gospel of John was branded the least authentic of all the records. The report casts doubt on Jesus' miracles, His bodily resurrection, and His Atonement for the sins of the world (see Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* [New York: Macmillan, 1993]).
10. Harold B. Lee, LDS Student Association fireside, Institute of Religion, Logan, Utah, October 10, 1971, unpublished typescript in author's possession; in Robert J. Matthews, *Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 375.
11. New Testament Manuscript 2, folio 2, page 42. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 355.
12. Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1968), 487–88.
13. See Moses 6:51 for a similar statement originally spoken by God to Adam after he was cast out of the garden of Eden.
14. For additional examples on a different subject, compare 1 Corinthians 15:55 with Mosiah 16:8 and Alma 22:14. Also Philippians 4:13 with Alma 26:12–13.
15. The pattern is further displayed in the Articles of Faith. The earlier articles pertain to the Godhead, the Atonement, and the first principles of the gospel. Remaining articles deal with Church polity and relationships between people, governments, doing good to all men, and so forth. The pattern is also seen inasmuch as the Lord launched the dispensation of the fulness of times with the First Vision, with a visit from the Father and the Son. A specific sequence of principles and ordinances is given in the fourth article of faith: first, faith in Jesus Christ; second, repentance; third, baptism; fourth, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Not surprisingly this is the order given to Adam (Moses 6:52) and taught

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by Noah (Moses 8:23–24), Nephi (2 Nephi 31:4–17), Peter (Acts 2:37–39; 8:14–17), and Paul (Acts 19:1–6).

16. Our present dispensation has also received the charge to keep an accurate sacred record, as given in Doctrine and Covenants 21:1; 47:1–4; 69:1–8; 76:28; 85:1–11; 127:6–7; 128:1–7.

17. *Do not add to or take from*: Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5–6; Revelation 22:18–19; Doctrine and Covenants 20:35. *Intentional removal of material*: 1 Nephi 13:20–41; 14:20–27; Moses 1:23, 40–41; Jeremiah 36:1–32; JST, Luke 11:53; Doctrine and Covenants 6:27. *Other intentional alterations*: 2 Corinthians 2:17; Mormon 8:3; Doctrine and Covenants 3 and 10. *An unintentional omission*: 3 Nephi 23:6–13.

18. See Old Testament Manuscript 2, page 97; Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 785.

19. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 10–11.

20. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 290–91.

21. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 310.