

# What Nephi's Vision Teaches about the Bible and the Book of Mormon

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When Nephi's brothers were having a difficult time understanding their father's dream, Nephi pointedly asked them, "Have ye inquired of the Lord?" (1 Nephi 5:8). Nephi himself exemplified the process by which disciples of the Lord seek after and obtain personal revelation. After Lehi related his dream to his family, this righteous son declared, "I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things" (1 Nephi 10:17). Nephi knew that "he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them" (1 Nephi 10:19). As Nephi sought for this greater understanding, he "was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord" (1 Nephi 11:1) and was shown marvelous things.

Both the process and the content of the revelation in Nephi's vision help the reader understand many things about the scriptures. Nephi's vision makes numerous references to the Bible (i.e., the book that would proceed forth out of the mouth of a Jew) as well as to the Book of Mormon (i.e., the record of the seed of Nephi). These important teachings fall into three basic categories. First, Nephi's vision mentions elements of stories found in the Bible and acts

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as a confirming witness that the Bible is true. Second, Nephi's vision provides essential details that shed light on the nature of the Bible and the process by which it was transmitted over the centuries. Third, Nephi's vision teaches important truths concerning the role of the Bible and the Book of Mormon in the restoration of the gospel. Book of Mormon writers repeatedly testified that they wrote for future generations under the inspiration of God (see 1 Nephi 6:3–6; 19:6; 2 Nephi 33:10–15; Jacob 7:27; Mormon 8:35; Mormon 9:30–31; and Ether 8:26). It is therefore vital that Latter-day Saints understand what Nephi's vision teaches about the witness of the Bible, the nature of the Bible, and the role of both the Bible and Book of Mormon in the latter days.

### Confirming Witness of the Bible

In a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith in April 1830, the Lord testified that one of the important purposes of the Book of Mormon was to “prov[e] to the world that the holy scriptures are true” (D&C 20:11).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, one of the important reasons for the Book of Mormon is that it corroborates the events and teachings contained in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> This process is particularly true of the life and mission of the Savior Jesus Christ, which Nephi's vision clearly and repeatedly confirms. Before his family fled into the wilderness, Nephi had already heard his father preach to the inhabitants of Jerusalem concerning “the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world” (1 Nephi 1:19). Nephi's account of Lehi's vision, however, provides important details not included in his abridgment of his father's record and therefore confirms the veracity of these items mentioned in the Bible.

After relating the account of Lehi's dream, Nephi prophesied that “six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or in other words, a Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 10:4).<sup>3</sup> The word *Messiah* comes from the Hebrew language and means “anointed one.”<sup>4</sup> An equivalent word from the Greek language is *Christ*.<sup>5</sup> During the time of the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil and understood to be messiahs.<sup>6</sup> These important figures, however, were symbolic of the one true Messiah who was to come and who would be the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King.

During his mortal ministry, the Savior declared on special occasions that he was indeed the promised Messiah. One such instance was when a woman at Jacob's well in Samaria told Jesus, “I know that Messias cometh, which

is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). The Savior responded to her simply, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26).<sup>7</sup> Nephi’s vision therefore confirms one of the primary purposes of the Book of Mormon, which is “to the convincing of the Jew and the Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST” (title page), or in other words, that Jesus is the Messiah.

Nephi’s vision also confirms essential details concerning the nature of the Savior’s mortal birth. The Spirit of the Lord explained to Nephi that he would “behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God” (1 Nephi 11:7). The birth of the Savior was no ordinary birth. Jesus was not literally the son of Joseph the carpenter, but rather he was “the Son of the most high God” (1 Nephi 11:6). Nephi saw that the mother of the Savior was “a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins” (1 Nephi 11:15) who lived “in the city of Nazareth” (1 Nephi 11:13).<sup>8</sup> This young woman became “the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh” (1 Nephi 11:18) after she had been “carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time” (1 Nephi 11:19).<sup>9</sup>

The beginning of Nephi’s vision confirms these sacred elements as they are recorded in the New Testament. Luke’s Gospel testifies that Jesus would not be the paternal offspring of Joseph but that Mary’s son “shall be called the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32).<sup>10</sup> We are told in Luke’s account that Mary was “a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph” (Luke 1:27) and that she lived in “a city of Galilee, named Nazareth” (Luke 1:26). Before the conception and birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel instructed her, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).<sup>11</sup> The vision of Nephi confirms the reality of the Savior’s identity as the son of God.

Just before Nephi received his vision, Lehi prophesied in detail concerning John the Baptist, “a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord” (1 Nephi 10:7). Following this, Nephi saw the Messiah in vision and also “beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him” (1 Nephi 11:27). The details shared by both Lehi and Nephi confirm many important teachings from the New Testament Gospels about John the Baptist and the baptism of the Savior. For example, John was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, “the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway

for our God" (Isaiah 40:3).<sup>12</sup> John's testimony to his audience was that, unbeknownst to them, the Savior was standing among them and that because of the Savior's virtue the Baptist felt unworthy to even unlatch the Messiah's sandals.<sup>13</sup> Nephi clearly saw in his vision that John baptized "the Redeemer of the world" (1 Nephi 11:27). Lehi prophesied that John would "baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan" (1 Nephi 10:9).<sup>14</sup> Even though it is uncertain precisely where the ancient site of Bethabara is located today, Lehi's prophecy nonetheless confirms the location mentioned in John 1:28.<sup>15</sup>

Lehi also declared that after John baptized the Savior, he would then "bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 10:10).<sup>16</sup> This postbaptismal testimony is recorded in John 1:29.<sup>17</sup> Nephi saw in vision that following the baptism, the Holy Ghost would come down out of heaven "and abide upon him in the form of a dove" (1 Nephi 11:27). Although the word *form* can mean "shape or external appearance," when Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon it could also mean other things, such as "pattern" as well as "beauty; elegance, splendor; dignity."<sup>18</sup> These meanings of *form* would correspond better with the language and intent of the Gospel accounts: the Spirit descended "like a dove."<sup>19</sup>

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught the following about the dove's appearance at the baptism of Jesus:

Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the *sign* of the dove, in witness of that administration? The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the *form* of the dove, but in *sign* of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, according to the Prophet, an actual dove was present at the Savior's baptism, but the Holy Ghost was not transformed to look like a dove, nor was the Holy Ghost inside the dove. Rather, the dove at the baptism was a sign to John the Baptist that the Spirit was present and that John had indeed baptized the Lamb of God. Nephi's vision confirms the truth of the New

Testament accounts that the Holy Ghost descended like a dove and thereafter remained with the Savior.

Nephi also learned many things in his vision concerning the mortal ministry of Jesus. He saw “multitudes of people who were sick, and who were afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits. . . . And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out” (1 Nephi 11:31).<sup>21</sup> The New Testament is replete with examples of the Savior’s miracles, both “healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23) and also exorcising devils and unclean spirits.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Nephi saw that the Savior taught his gospel as “the multitudes were gathered together to hear him” (1 Nephi 11:28). The popularity of Jesus as a master teacher is clearly illustrated in the Gospels as “great multitudes were gathered together unto him” (Matthew 13:2) on numerous occasions in order to listen to his teachings.<sup>23</sup> Further, Nephi saw that many who came in contact with the Savior would “fall down at his feet and worship him” (1 Nephi 11:24), a response that was repeated multiple times during the Savior’s life (see, for example, Matthew 2:11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, 20:20, and 28:9).

The vision also provided Nephi with valuable information about the disciples of Christ. Nephi saw “twelve others following” the Savior (1 Nephi 11:29). The angel of the Lord called these twelve other followers by the name of “apostles” (1 Nephi 11:34). The English term *Apostle* comes from a Greek word that means “messenger” or “envoy.”<sup>24</sup> The Gospel accounts consistently relate that the Savior called his twelve special messengers by the name Apostle.<sup>25</sup> The angel also explained to Nephi that these Apostles “shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel” (1 Nephi 12:9), a sacred stewardship confirmed by the Savior during his mortal ministry.<sup>26</sup>

Nephi was given specific information about one of these Apostles. He saw someone who was “dressed in a white robe” (1 Nephi 14:19). The angel of the Lord explained that this man was “one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 14:20) and that his name was John.<sup>27</sup> The angel further explained that John would see the same things that Nephi had beheld in his vision and that “he shall see and write the remainder of these things, . . . and he shall also write concerning the end of the world” (1 Nephi 14:21–22; see also 1 Nephi 14:24–25). This is a very important identification for Latter-day Saints. The author of the book of Revelation identifies himself simply as

John (see Revelation 1:1, 4, 9). Many non-Latter-day Saint scholars, however, are unwilling to identify the author of the book of Revelation with John the Beloved, the Apostle of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> The Book of Mormon confirms that this special Apostle was indeed the author of the book of Revelation.<sup>29</sup>

Most importantly, Nephi's vision provides a confirming witness to the rejection, atonement, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nephi saw that after the Redeemer "went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; . . . they cast him out from among them" (1 Nephi 11:28). Nephi seems to have been shown in detail the events surrounding the death of the Messiah: "And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:32–33). Before this vision, Father Lehi had already testified to his sons that "after [the Messiah] had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles" (1 Nephi 10:11).

These sacred events are at the heart of the New Testament. The Savior was rejected many times by those who heard him teach (see, for example, Luke 4:16–30). This rejection culminated in being betrayed by his Apostle Judas Iscariot and taken by an armed guard to stand trial. Accounts of the arrest and trials—first before the Sanhedrin and then before Pontius Pilate the Roman governor—as well as the crucifixion itself are contained in the Gospels.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, however, Nephi understood from his vision that the purpose of the crucifixion of the Savior was expiatory: "for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:33). The crucial testimony declared by early Christian missionaries like the Apostle Paul, was precisely this: "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3; see also Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:28 and 10:12; 1 Peter 2:24). Additionally, the narratives contained in the Gospels and the book of Acts amply testify that the Messiah was raised from the dead and appeared to his chosen disciples (see Matthew 27; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21; and Acts 1:1–9; 9:1–9).

Again, however, Nephi taught an important detail from his vision, that the resurrected Savior would "make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles" (1 Nephi 10:11). When Christ appeared to the Nephites, he taught concerning the Gentiles, "I should not manifest myself unto them save

it were by the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 15:23). He further explained concerning his Jewish disciples that “the Gentiles should be converted through their preaching” (3 Nephi 15:22).<sup>31</sup> The example of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, confirms this process: a heavenly messenger appeared to Cornelius “in a vision” (Acts 10:3) and led him to the Apostle Peter. After being taught by the chief Apostle, “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44), including the Gentile Cornelius. Following this, Jewish members of the Church were amazed “because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45). The account of Nephi’s vision beautifully fulfills the purpose set forth by the Lord in Doctrine and Covenants 20: it demonstrates that the Bible is true, particularly the Gospels.

### The Nature of the Bible

The Bible as we know it today has undergone a long and complicated process of transmission.<sup>32</sup> Nephi’s vision teaches many important truths concerning this process and the nature of our Bible. Once Lehi’s family fled into the wilderness and camped in the valley of Lemuel, Nephi and his brothers were commanded to return to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates of Laban (see 1 Nephi 3:1–12). After Nephi brought the brass plates back to their camp in the wilderness, Lehi discovered that they contained “a genealogy of his fathers” (1 Nephi 5:14), as well as “the five books of Moses” (1 Nephi 5:11). They also contained “a record of the Jews” and “the prophecies of the holy prophets” from the time of Father Adam down to time of King Zedekiah of Judah, including many of the prophecies of Jeremiah (see 1 Nephi 5:12–13).

Nephi saw in his vision another book—the Bible—which also was “a record of the Jews” (1 Nephi 13:23). The angel told Nephi that this other book was “a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass” (1 Nephi 13:23). The angel also explained that the primary difference between the two records was that the Bible did not contain as many “prophecies of the holy prophets” (1 Nephi 13:23). Examples of prophets whose prophecies are on the brass plates but not in the Bible are Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias.<sup>33</sup> It is possible that the brass plates were a Northern Kingdom version of the scriptures—as opposed to the Bible, which was a Southern Kingdom version—and were brought south into the Kingdom of Judah by the ancestors of Laban and Lehi who fled from the invading Assyrian army around 722 BC.<sup>34</sup> Additional material would have continued to be added to the brass plates, in



particular many of the prophecies of Jeremiah, until Nephi obtained them. Regardless of exactly how the brass plates came into Laban's possession, they contained more pronouncements from the prophets of old than the Bible.

Even though the Bible which Nephi saw in vision included fewer prophetic books than the brass plates, the information it contained was nonetheless accurate and true. The angel of the Lord testified to Nephi that the Bible originally "contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord" (1 Nephi 13:24) and that when this record went from the Jews to the Gentiles—meaning from the original Jewish Apostles to the early Gentile members of the Church—it did so "in purity" (1 Nephi 13:25).<sup>35</sup> The angel later instructed Nephi, "At the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men" (1 Nephi 14:23). Unfortunately, after Nephi saw the early Christian Gentiles receive the Bible from the Apostles, he then saw the formation an organization that was "most abominable" (1 Nephi 13:26).<sup>36</sup> Nephi saw "many plain and precious things taken away" from the Bible by this group (1 Nephi 13:28).

The Prophet Joseph Smith also taught concerning the original pure condition of the Bible and its subsequent corruption. On one occasion the Prophet testified, "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers."<sup>37</sup> In addition, the Prophet also observed, "From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled."<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that Joseph Smith taught that the various corruptions of the Bible included both intentional (i.e., "taken from") as well as unintentional (i.e., "lost"). In an in-depth study of the differences in the manuscripts of the New Testament, Bart D. Ehrman concluded that "most of the changes were accidental, the result of scribal ineptitude, carelessness, or fatigue. Others were intentional, and reflect the controversial milieu within which they were produced."<sup>39</sup> Nephi's vision emphasizes the deliberate kinds of changes: "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" (1 Nephi 13:27). Whether intentional or unintentional, however, the changes certainly had a detrimental effect upon people, as the angel foresaw: "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" (1 Nephi 13:29).

The process of removing "plain and precious things" (1 Nephi 13:28) was probably more complicated than one might suppose. Nephi was taught by the angel of the Lord that "there are many plain and precious things taken away *from the book*" (1 Nephi 13:28; emphasis added) or "taken out of *the book*" (1 Nephi 13:29; emphasis added). Certainly there is ample evidence for this when one compares the early manuscripts of the New Testament, as Professor Ehrman has concluded: "Scribes sometimes changed their scriptural texts to make them *say* what they were already known to *mean*."<sup>40</sup> But for Latter-day Saints, the idea that scribes made changes to manuscripts in order to fit their theological views presupposes that these scribes were already functioning under some level of doctrinal corruption themselves before they actually corrupted the manuscripts of the Bible.

Nephi's heavenly guide may have had this phenomenon in mind when he taught Nephi concerning that great and abominable group: "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" (1 Nephi 13:26; emphasis added). Further, the angel testified 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; emphasis added).<sup>41</sup> Concerning what it may mean to take away plain and precious truths *from the gospel*, rather than merely *from the manuscripts*, Richard L. Anderson has written: "In recent centuries, rationalism rather than changes in manuscripts has led the attack on Christ's gospel and divinity. Although there certainly were changes in documents, as Nephi pointed out in his prophecy (see 1 Nephi 13:28), the greater losses came as the gospel and its ceremonies were changed. By ignoring major parts of the scriptures, various Christian theologies have either explained away or changed vital covenants and rites still mentioned in the Bible."<sup>42</sup> Thus original doctrinal corruption may have eventually led to ceremonial and covenantal corruption, as well as changes in manuscripts. The various processes may have, over time, fed off one another in a vicious cycle. Regardless of the precise process of events, however, Nephi's vision testifies that the Bible as we know it today is not in its original pristine condition. In addition, it is important to note, as I will demonstrate below, that the Lord has provided

Latter-day Saints with abundant testimony concerning the great worth of the Bible despite its current imperfect state.

### The Role of the Book of Mormon and the Bible

Nephi's vision reveals important truths concerning the sacred role of the Bible and the Book of Mormon in the latter days. When originally written, the Bible contained "the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 13:23). As mentioned above, the great and abominable group tampered with the Bible and the gospel, removing "many covenants of the Lord" (1 Nephi 13:26), and as a result "an exceedingly great many do stumble" (1 Nephi 13:29).<sup>43</sup> But the angel testified to Nephi that the Lord would not "suffer that the Gentles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness" (1 Nephi 13:32). He would mercifully provide a way to overcome the stumbling blocks of a corrupted Bible and an incomplete gospel. This would be part of "a great and a marvelous work" (1 Nephi 14:7) which the Lord designed to accomplish in the latter days. The Lord testified through his heavenly messenger to Nephi, "I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them, in mine own power, much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious" (1 Nephi 13:34; see also Moses 1:41).

The Lord, through the angelic guide, explained to Nephi the process by which this restoration of truth would be accomplished: "I will manifest myself unto thy seed, that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious" (1 Nephi 13:35). After Nephi's descendants recorded these sacred items, "these things shall be hid up, to come forth unto the Gentiles, by the gift and power of God" (1 Nephi 13:35). This record is the Book of Mormon, which contains a number of statements declaring the inspiration by which it was written, preserved, and brought forth.<sup>44</sup> For example, the title page of the Book of Mormon testifies that this record was "written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared concerning his role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon, "I translated the record by the gift and power of God."<sup>46</sup>

Nephi was told by the angel that these two scriptural records—the Bible and the Book of Mormon—would “be established in one,” and as a result “the words of the Lamb shall be made known” (1 Nephi 13:41). The record of the Jews and the record of the Nephites were to work together in sacred partnership in order to further the work of God.<sup>47</sup> This association of two books of scripture was to serve important purposes. First, as Nephi saw, the “other books” of scripture came forth in order to testify of the Bible, specifically to convince people “that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true” (1 Nephi 13:39).<sup>48</sup> In his final testimony to the future readers of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Mormon testified that this special relationship was intended to flow both ways: “This [Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible]; and if ye believe that [the Bible] ye will believe this [the Book of Mormon] also” (Mormon 7:8). Second, the angel of the Lord declared to Nephi that a primary purpose for the Book of Mormon was to “make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away” (1 Nephi 13:40). The angel further specified important truths that the Book of Mormon would restore to the world, “that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved” (1 Nephi 13:40).<sup>49</sup> Nephi’s vision gives Latter-day Saints hope that through the instrumentality of modern prophets and scripture, the corruptions of the Bible will not stand as a stumbling block to the work of God.

### Conclusion

The details of Nephi’s vision have been preserved for us so that we might learn from them. Modern prophets have emphasized this reality. For example, Ezra Taft Benson testified: “The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . . We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?’”<sup>50</sup> When we ask those important questions of the Book of Mormon’s account of Nephi’s vision, several answers beautifully testify of God’s love for his children.

First, Latter-day Saints not only need to have a testimony of modern prophets and latter-day scripture but should also appreciate the truth of the Bible. The Lord prophesied to Joseph of Egypt that one of the gifts of the future seer, Joseph Smith, would be not only to “bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins”—referring to the Book of Mormon—but also “to the convincing of them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them” (2 Nephi 3:11). As our fourth Article of Faith teaches, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly” (Articles of Faith 1:8). More specifically, we should have a greater appreciation of the Bible precisely because the Book of Mormon, the latter-day word of God, testifies of its truthfulness.

Second, Latter-day Saints understand that the Bible does not currently contain all the truths that it did when it was originally written. This highlights not only the need for additional revealed truth to supplement and correct that which was incomplete or incorrect but also the love God has for his children by providing these things in the latter days. The word *translated* in the Article of Faith phrase “as far as it is translated correctly” implies more than merely transforming from one language to another. As Robert J. Matthews explained, “Joseph Smith often used the words ‘translated’ and ‘translation,’ not in the narrow sense alone of rendering a text from one language into another, but in the wider senses of ‘transmission,’ having reference to copying, editing, adding to, taking from, rephrasing, and interpreting. This is substantially beyond the usual meaning of ‘translation.’”<sup>51</sup> Thus Latter-day Saints also believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it has been transmitted over time correctly.

These two latter-day perspectives on the Bible are not incompatible. In spite of having been transmitted to us in an incomplete and corrupted state, the Bible is still true—it is the word of God. For example, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. taught: “Notwithstanding the corruptions themselves, the Good Old Book stands as a record of God’s dealings with and commandments and promises to his children, in their days of righteousness and in their generations of sin. It still, though corrupted, points out the way of righteousness to the man of faith seeking to serve God. It contains some of God’s counsel to his children.”<sup>52</sup> Latter-day Saints should be a Bible-believing and a Bible-loving people.

Finally, just as people more fully value the Atonement of Christ once they realize the reality of their fallen condition, so also acknowledgement of the limitations of the Bible should help Latter-day Saints more fully appreciate the need for the Restoration of the gospel, specifically the need for modern prophets and latter-day scripture, such as the Book of Mormon. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, “While we accept the Bible as the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we believe that this generation has as much, if not more, of a need for God’s guidance and direction than generations of former times. Our belief that our Heavenly Father has sent prophets and apostles and has given us additional scripture for our day and time is a manifestation of His great love and concern for His children.”<sup>53</sup> This love, which God has demonstrated toward us by providing additional revelation and scripture, is the central feature of Nephi’s vision, represented by the tree of life. In the words of Nephi, “it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:22).

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## Notes

1. The phrase “holy scriptures” is clearly a reference to the Bible. See, for example, D&C 20:35 and 33:16.

2. See Monte S. Nyman, “Restoring ‘Plain and Precious Parts’: The Role of Latter-day Scriptures in Helping us Understand the Bible,” *Ensign*, December 1981, 19–25.

3. Lehi also called the Messiah “the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 10:10). This identification of the Lamb of God as the Messiah is repeated by the angel in 1 Nephi 12:18.

4. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 603.

5. Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 122.

6. For references from the Old Testament, see Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, April 1991, 53.

7. For other New Testament references in which Jesus confirmed his identity as Messiah, see Matthew 16:13–20 and Mark 14:60–62.

8. King Benjamin later prophesied that “his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:8; see also Alma 7:10).

9. Four times in Nephi’s vision, Jesus was originally identified as “God” (1 Nephi 11:18), “the Eternal Father” (1 Nephi 11:21 and 13:40), and “the everlasting God” (1 Nephi 11:32). The Prophet Joseph Smith later added the phrase “the son of” to each of those four references so readers would not mistakenly identify Jesus as God the Father. Nephi and the Spirit of the Lord clearly identify Jesus as “the son of God” earlier in

the section (1 Nephi 10:17; 11:7). See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004), 220. Jesus, of course, was Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament (see 3 Nephi 15:4–5). This is likely the understanding that was originally intended in the previous references. Abinadi was eventually executed for similarly claiming that “God himself should come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 17:8). On these issues, see Jared T. Parker, “Abinadi on the Father and the Son: Interpretation and Application,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 136–50.

10. The original wording of 1 Nephi 11:6 identified the Savior as “the Son of the Most High,” omitting the word “God.” See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 220. This wording corresponds even more closely with the King James Version rendering of Luke 1:32: “the Son of the Highest.”

11. Similarly, Matthew's Gospel testifies that before she married Joseph, Mary “was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:18).

12. Compare 1 Nephi 10:7–8 with Matthew 3:1–3, Mark 1:2–4, Luke 3:3–6, and John 1:23.

13. Compare 1 Nephi 10:8 with John 1:26–27; see also Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7, and Luke 3:16.

14. The phrase “beyond Jordan” normally refers to the east side of the Jordan River (see John 10:40). The earliest extant manuscripts containing John 1:28 actually read “Bethany” rather than “Bethabara.” The early Church fathers Origen and John Chrysostom, however, claimed that most early and accurate manuscripts, which apparently have not survived to the present day, contained the reading “Bethabara.” On this, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 171. It is possible that Origen and Chrysostom were correct and that the Book of Mormon confirms that “Bethabara” is the original reading. Or it is possible that the original reading is “Bethany” and that, because the two names are spelled so similarly in Greek, the word “Bethabara” was eventually written by mistake as a corruption of the name “Bethany.” If this is the case, it may be that Joseph Smith simply relied upon his knowledge of the wording in the King James Version of the Bible when translating 1 Nephi 10:9. In the end, whether one prefers the name Bethany or Bethabara, Lehi's prophecy confirms John's account of the location where John the Baptist performed baptisms, *even though it is uncertain precisely where that location is today*. For a recent study of a possible location for the place where John baptized on the east side of the Jordan River, see Rami Khouri, “Where Jesus Baptized: Bethany Beyond the Jordan,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 31, no. 1 (January/February 2005): 34–43.

15. Although John 3:23 indicates that John “was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim,” John clearly states concerning the baptism of Jesus that “these things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing” (John 1:28). The reference to Salim is simply an alternative location in which John was also performing baptisms after he baptized the Savior (see John 10:40: “beyond the Jordan into the place where John at first baptized” [emphasis added]). On this, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 1:151. The Joseph Smith Translation



(JST) confirms the location of Bethabara, but moves the reference to the end of John 1:34. For a comprehensive collection of the JST in the New Testament, see Thomas A. Wayment, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

16. Similarly, Nephi was instructed by the Spirit of the Lord that when he witnessed the Savior in vision, he was to “bear record that it is the Son of God” (1 Nephi 11:7).

17. The Joseph Smith Translation confirms that John the Baptist bore testimony of the Savior multiple times and more explicitly than is recorded in the preserved text of the Gospels, both before (see JST, Matthew 3:11–12, JST, Mark 1:11, and JST, John 1:27) and following the baptism (see JST, John 1:30).

18. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), “form.”

19. See Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10 and John 1:32. The King James translation of Luke’s account reads, somewhat ambiguously, “The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove” (Luke 3:22). The phrase “in a bodily shape” could technically, in the Greek, refer to the body of the dove or the visible shape or appearance of the personage of the Holy Ghost. On this, see François Bovon, *Luke 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 129. It is more likely, however, that the phrase “in a bodily form” refers to the visible shape or appearance of the Holy Ghost. In my view, the JST confirms this interpretation by removing the indefinite article “a” before the phrase “bodily shape.” Thus “the Holy Ghost descended in bodily form like a dove” (JST, Luke 3:22). Wayment, *Complete Joseph Smith Translation*. Joseph Smith taught that “the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit” (D&C 130:22). Further, the Book of Mormon clearly teaches that spirits have a bodily shape and look like physical bodies (see Ether 3:16–17).

20. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 275–76; emphasis in original. See also Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 202.

21. Compare King Benjamin’s prophecy that the Son of God would “go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (Mosiah 3:5).

22. See, for example, Matthew 8:16 and 10:1. For a collection of the miracles of the Savior, see E. Keith Howick, *The Miracles of Jesus the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985).

23. See also Mark 4:1 and Luke 12:1. For collections of the teachings of the Savior, see E. Keith Howick, *The Parables of Jesus the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986) and E. Keith Howick, *The Sermons of Jesus the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987).

24. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1091.

25. See, for example, Matthew 10:2, Mark 6:30, and Luke 6:13.

26. See, for example, Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30. For more information about the Apostles, see S. Kent Brown, “The Twelve,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzappel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 98–124.



27. See 1 Nephi 14:27. There are two men by the name of John in the New Testament. One is John the Baptist. The other is known by a number of nicknames: John the Beloved, John the Disciple, John the Apostle, John the Revelator, John the Evangelist, John the brother of James, and so forth. Nephi saw the second of these two men. For more information about this John, see Jonn D. Claybaugh, "What the Latter-day Scriptures Teach about John the Beloved," in *The Testimony of John the Beloved*, ed. Daniel K. Judd, Craig J. Ostler, and Richard D. Draper (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 16–35.

28. See, for example, Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 5–8.

29. On the complex issues of the authorship of the New Testament books, see Frank F. Judd Jr., "Who Really Wrote the Gospels? A Study of Traditional Authorship," in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 123–40, and Lincoln H. Blumell, "Scribes and Ancient Letters: Implications for the Pauline Epistles," in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, 208–26.

30. See Matthew 26:47 through 27:24; Mark 14:43 through 15:15; Luke 22:47 through 23:25; and John 18:2 through 19:16.

31. Jesus may have been alluding to the role the disciples would play in this process when he testified to them, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

32. For more information, see the studies of Ellis R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), and Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

33. We know about these prophets because they are mentioned elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (see 1 Nephi 19:10 and Helaman 8:19–20). There also seems to have been more information on the brass plates about Jacob's prophecy concerning the garment of his son Joseph (see Alma 46:24 and 3 Nephi 10:17).

34. On this issue, see Robert L. Millet, "Plates of brass," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 643. Laban and Lehi were both descendants of Joseph (see 1 Nephi 5:14–16).

35. The angel said that the Bible went "forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles" (1 Nephi 13:26).

36. The parameters of this paper do not permit a comprehensive study in order to identify the "great and abominable church." For more information on this, see Stephen E. Robinson, "Nephi's 'Great and Abominable Church,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, no. 1 (1998): 32–39.

37. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 327. Although Joseph Smith certainly taught concerning the corruption of the Bible, the statement "Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors" seems to have been added by an editor. Compare the original quote in Andrew F. Ehat and

Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 256.

38. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 9–11. See also Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, 74.

39. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 275.

40. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, xii; emphasis in original. Whether one accepts Ehrman's proposals concerning the most likely original reading or the reasons for the changes, the fact that there are alternative readings among the manuscripts demonstrates the reality of these corruptions.

41. Similarly, the angel later clarified that the Lord would be merciful to his children "because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back" (1 Nephi 13:32; emphasis added).

42. Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Restoration of the Sacrament, Part 1: Loss and Christian Reformations," *Ensign*, January 1992, 40.

43. The angel later intensified that assessment, declaring that "the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly" (1 Nephi 13:34; emphasis added).

44. See, for example, 2 Nephi 27:6–12; 30:3–5, and Mormon 5:12–13. When Nephi saw the Bible coming forth to his descendants, he also saw "other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb" (1 Nephi 13:39). Certainly these "other books" include the Book of Mormon as well as other latter-day books of scripture.

45. On the authorship of the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, see Daniel H. Ludlow, "The Title Page," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 19–33.

46. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 4:537.

47. The Lord had earlier declared to Joseph of Egypt that these two books of scripture "shall grow together" (2 Nephi 3:12). Later, the Lord told Ezekiel that these two records "shall become one in thine hand" (Ezekiel 37:17). When the new edition of the scriptures were published, Elder Boyd K. Packer testified: "The stick or record of Judah—the Old Testament and the New Testament—and the stick or record of Ephraim—the Book of Mormon, which is another testament of Jesus Christ—are now woven together in such a way that as you pore over one you are drawn to the other; as you learn from one you are enlightened by the other. They are indeed one in our hands." See Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1982, 75.

48. The angel also said that the record of the Nephites "shall establish the truth of the first [i.e. the Bible], which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (1 Nephi 13:40). Compare the statement of Spencer W. Kimball: "We declare that the Book of Mormon was brought forth by the gift and power of God and that it stands beside the Bible as another witness of Jesus the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. Together they testify of his divine sonship." See First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Proclamation," *Ensign*, May 1980, 52.

49. Similarly, when Nephi later explained the meaning of his father's dream to his brothers, he taught them in detail that when "the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah" (1 Nephi 15:13) would be restored in the latter-days to their descendants through the Nephite record, these descendants would "know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved" (1 Nephi 15:14).

50. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 19–20.

51. Robert J. Matthews, "Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST)," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:764. Professor Matthews further concluded: "Of course, Joseph Smith also stated that the Bible had not been preserved in its original purity: 'We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly' (Articles of Faith 8). The word *translated* as it is used here must be understood to include the idea of *transmission* (italics in original). That is, error has occurred not only in the translation from one language to another, but also in the transcription of the text from manuscript to manuscript, even in the same language." Robert J. Matthews, "The Bible and Its Role in the Restoration," *Ensign* (July 1979): 41.

52. J. Reuben Clark, *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 210. Note also the statement of Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin: "The fragmentary nature of the biblical record and the errors in it, resulting from multiple transcriptions, translations, and interpretations, do not diminish our belief in it as the word of God 'as far as it is translated correctly.' We read and study the Bible, we teach and preach from it, and we strive to live according to the eternal truths it contains. We love this collection of holy writ." Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Christians in Belief and Action," *Ensign*, November 1996, 71.

53. M. Russell Ballard, "Building Bridges of Understanding," *Ensign*, June 1998, 64.