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Abstract Review of “Scripture” (1988), by Norman L. Geisler.

COIN OF THE REALM: BEWARE OF SPECIOUS SPECIE

Alma Allred

“This is the very coinage of your brain.”
(Gertrude, in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.5.137).¹

Introduction

My first experience with counterfeit money took place in a street market in Italy. I handed a merchant a 500-lira note. He politely explained that he couldn't accept the money because it was “*matto*.”

“*Matto*? What do you mean it's ‘*crazy*?’” I asked.

“It's counterfeit,” he said.

I was amazed. It looked good to me. It had the feel and look of Italian currency, so I asked him how he could be so certain it was fake. He took some other 500-lira bills from his cashbox and put them next to mine. They were all 25 percent larger than the one I had given him. I had been easily fooled because I was just learning about Italian currency, but once I learned more about the subject, I was less likely to be deceived.

Similarly, the authors of a recent book, *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, have compared their religion to the teachings of the

1. My thanks to Danel W. Bachman, who shared this with me.

Review of Norman L. Geisler. “Scripture.” In *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, 9–49. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1998. \$10.99.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Convinced that Mormonism bears the marks of a counterfeit gospel, they lay out their claims in a series of chapters dealing with a variety of LDS subjects. One author, Norman Geisler, offers a comparison between his view of scripture and his view of LDS scripture. Although he has authored and edited several scholarly works and earned a legitimate Ph.D. from an accredited university, this is not representative of Geisler's best work. His reliance upon Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, is so transparent that, at best, it qualifies as a rewrite of their material.² This review, however, will consider the portions of the book Geisler claims to have written—including the foreword, the chapter on scripture, and the concluding section entitled "A Word to Our Mormon Friends."³

Foreword

At the outset of the foreword, Geisler accuses Mormons of being deceptive, claiming that confusion related to Mormonism is "due to Mormonism's failure, especially in its proselytizing work, to be less than candid about its doctrines" (p. 6).⁴ Geisler's comments begin with the accusation that Mormons are less than honest in how they present Mormonism—therefore the responsibility to educate the world about what Mormons *really* believe falls to him and his colleagues. Apparently, they feel this responsibility rests on them because Latter-day Saints are part of a conspiracy to lie to the world in order to get converts and that new converts will, in turn, lie to others. Astonishing as it may seem, Geisler apparently believes this conspiracy theory. He is so convinced that he has a better grasp of LDS doctrine than do Latter-day Saints that he does not hesitate to cor-

2. See Danel W. Bachman's companion article to this review, "The Other Side of the Coin," pages 175–213.

3. Geisler claims to have been the general editor of the book, and since the foreword and concluding chapter appear without attribution, I have surmised that they were compiled by the editor, Norman Geisler. See the review of this last chapter by D. L. Barksdale, pages 335–53.

4. He accuses us of *failing* to be *less than candid*—which means that we have, in fact, been candid.

rect us and with a straight face say, "This is what you really believe." It reminds me of the late Walter Martin, who claimed to have invited LDS General Authorities and professors from Brigham Young University to a meeting in Salt Lake City where *he* would answer *their* questions about Mormonism!⁵

We have thousands of missionaries, an extensive seminary and institute program, and thousands of gospel doctrine classes devoted to teaching Mormonism, yet this self-appointed expert is certain he and his colleagues are uniquely qualified to explain what Mormons really believe.

In accusing us of dishonesty, Geisler suggests that Mormons misuse 1 Corinthians 3:2 when we teach that people need to be prepared with doctrinal basics before they are able to understand more difficult and complex doctrines. He does not say, however, *how* we have misused this passage; he merely asserts it as a fact without offering any supporting evidence. I would have been interested to see how this is a misuse of Paul's teaching, but he offers no such explanation. Instead, he asserts and moves on—the theological equivalent of a drive-by shooting.

Have Latter-day Saints misused this passage? In claiming that there is doctrine for which new converts may be unprepared, we find the support of Anglican scholar Adam Clarke, who comments on this passage:

I have instructed you in the *elements* of Christianity—in its *simplest* and *easiest* truths; because from the low state of your minds in religious knowledge, you were incapable of comprehending the higher truths of the Gospel: and in this state you will still continue.⁶

5. Quoting Walter Martin, "I did something a few years ago that hadn't been done before: I went to Salt Lake City and I invited the professors of Brigham Young University, along with the leaders of the Mormon church, to attend some meetings downtown at First Baptist Church. *I offered to answer any and all questions on Mormonism they might want to ask.* I was coming not as a Baptist minister, but as a full professor of comparative religions, with all the necessary credentials." Walter Martin and Jill Martin Rische, *Through the Windows of Heaven* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 127.

6. Adam Clarke, *A Commentary and Critical Notes: Designed as a Help to a Better*

Latter-day Saints understand 1 Corinthians 3:2 precisely as explained above. And so Geisler begins an examination that supplants logic and evidence with assertions and double standards.

Which Side of the Wide Divide?

Geisler suggests that *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* is a partial response to *How Wide the Divide?*—a 1997 book comparing Mormonism and evangelicalism by LDS professor Stephen Robinson and evangelical professor Craig Blomberg. In that book, Blomberg and Robinson each prepared papers on four topics. To make sure that each other's positions were accurately portrayed, these scholars exchanged preliminary drafts of their papers and sought input before issuing the final product. Geisler would have been wise to have sought out a similar exchange. Rather than being a response to *How Wide the Divide?* this book merely demonstrates the difference between dialogue and demagoguery. Robinson and Blomberg wrote about things *they* understood and succeeded in relaying that information to each other and to an audience of readers—many of whom acquired valuable information and insight from the exchange. The same cannot be said about *The Counterfeit Gospel*.

Chapter One—Scripture

Geisler begins this chapter by offering opinions on the origin of scripture, the role of a prophet, and certain other issues dealing with the canon. He claims, “the role of the biblical prophets was unique. They were the mouthpieces of God, commissioned to speak His words—nothing more and nothing less.” As evidence of this assertion, he continues: “God told Balaam, ‘Only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak’” (p. 10).

It is unlikely that this passage is meant to stipulate parameters for all prophetic utterances because Balaam said much more than

what had been dictated to him by the angel.⁷ The princes of Moab offered to pay him if he would consent to curse the children of Israel. Although the biblical account is sketchy, apparently Balaam was tempted by this offer. The Lord sent an angel to confront him, telling him, "Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." Geisler sees this as what must always occur rather than what God wanted to occur *in that instance*. Subsequent events show that this was a command given specifically to Balaam, which he chose to disregard, rather than a general proclamation on the words of prophets. The Bible clearly teaches that Balaam went far beyond the restriction imposed by God. Revelation 2:14 tells us that Balaam taught Balac to eat things sacrificed unto idols "and to commit fornication" (Revelation 2:14). Surely sacrilege and fornication weren't part of God's word to Balaam, and Geisler has therefore misinterpreted the meaning of this text. His misreading also conflicts with the accounts of other prophets in the Bible, whose commission extended beyond speaking God's words to judging Israel (see Exodus 18:13), anointing kings (see 1 Samuel 16:12), healing the sick (see 2 Kings 5:8–10), freeing Israel from bondage (see Exodus 3:10), and directing the labors of the church (see Acts 13:1).

Infallible, Inerrant, *and* without Error

In *How Wide the Divide?* authors Blomberg and Robinson agreed that inerrancy of scripture extended only to the original manuscripts.⁸ In contrast, Geisler affirms that the "final product" is infallible, inerrant, and "without error whatsoever." From that beginning, he makes the claim that the Bible is "without error in whatever it affirms, not only on spiritual matters but also on those of science" (p. 11). Without question, that premise is far removed from the LDS paradigm concerning scripture. It also conflicts with the perceptions

7. Contrary to Geisler's assertion that this was God speaking, the text notes that it was an angel.

8. See Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 35–36.

of many evangelicals. Most Latter-day Saints and many evangelicals are willing to concede the fact that hares do not chew their cud even though Deuteronomy 14:7 and Leviticus 11:6 say they do. In embracing the scientific fact that hares are not ruminants, we are not denigrating the Bible nor questioning its inspiration; we are merely making allowances for the human elements and perceptions involved in writing scripture. Brigham Young explained this LDS perspective on scripture, both ancient and modern:

I do not even believe that there is a single revelation, among the many God has given to the Church, that is perfect in its fulness. The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle, so far as they go; but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low, grovelling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections.⁹

This view, however, is not far from that articulated by evangelical scholar Donald Bloesch, who wrote:

Calvin, too, upheld biblical infallibility and inerrancy without falling into the delusion that this means that everything that the Bible says must be taken at face value. He felt remarkably free to exercise critical judgment when dealing with textual problems. He tells us, for example, that Jeremiah's name somehow crept into Matthew 27:9 "by mistake," and no reference is made to the autographs as a way out of this difficulty. . . .

We are not willing to abandon the doctrine of inerrancy, but we must take the Scripture's own understanding of this concept instead of imposing on Scripture a view of inerrancy drawn from modern empirical philosophy and science. Berkouwer perceptively reminds us that inerrancy in the biblical sense means unswerving fidelity to the truth, a trustworthy and enduring witness to the truth of divine revelation. It connotes not impeccability, but indeceivability, which

9. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:314 (8 July 1855).

means being free from lying and fraud. He warns us that we must not identify the precision of journalistic reporting with the trustworthiness of the Gospel records. The man of faith must not be surprised by what Abraham Kuyper has termed "innocent inaccuracies" in Scripture. The Scriptures do not lie in their witness to the heavenly truth which God revealed to the prophets and apostles, not only the truth of salvation but also the truth of creation; yet this does not mean that everything reported in the Scriptures is factually accurate in the modern historical sense. Nor does such a judgment detract in the slightest from the full inspiration of the Scriptures.¹⁰

Even though the above sentiment is precisely mirrored in LDS belief, Geisler tries to demonstrate that Mormon scripture does not qualify as scripture—not because it fails to measure up to biblical standards but because it does not coincide with his subjective and inconsistent paradigm of what scripture ought to be. Consider, for example, these assertions made by Geisler: "Further, what the Bible claims about its own origin in general is also claimed for sections and books of the Bible in particular" (p. 11). But the Bible never refers to itself or its own origin as a collection. The most that can be said is that Bible passages refer to other Bible passages as authoritative. The Bible also refers to *scripture* and *the word of God*, but Geisler is begging the question when he assumes from the outset that those terms are synonymous with *the Bible*.

Geisler writes, "Jesus referred to the 'Law' and the 'Prophets' as God's indestructible Word, saying, 'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill'" (p. 11). When Jesus said he had not come to destroy the law, that does not necessarily make *the law* indestructible. If that were so, using Geisler's standard, we might also conclude that men's lives were indestructible because Jesus said he had not come to destroy them: "For

10. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 1:66–67.

the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56). Geisler's comments here betray a tendency to read more into scripture than it actually says—and to ignore obvious exceptions to his proposed rules of exegesis. He gives the impression that he thinks he is the lone player on the basketball court and that any approach to the basket will be uncontested. However, the rules he stipulates are not consistently applied, and he hasn't given adequate thought to the consequences of the evidence he presents. In order to be compelling, evidence needs to fall within certain parameters. (1) Samples of the applications of his "rules" should be reasonably numerous; (2) they should be truly typical; (3) exceptions should be explainable and demonstrably not typical; and most important, (4) the rules must be consistently applied. On these counts, Geisler has simply failed to provide compelling evidence that is consistent with reality.

No Occult Means

Geisler claims that "God's servants were forbidden to use physical objects to 'divine' things." As evidence, he cites passages forbidding the practices of witches, soothsayers, sorcerers, mediums, spiritists, and interpreters of omens and conjurers, or making children pass through fire. None of these restrictions mentions physical objects—nor do they apply to any of the practices of Mormonism or Joseph Smith. This is because God's servants *have*, in fact, used physical objects to obtain the word of God. The clearest example comes from Genesis, where Joseph—a man who previously had given inspired interpretations of dreams—instructed his servant to tell his brothers that he used a silver cup for divination (see Genesis 44:4–5). Geisler discounts this in a footnote (see p. 48 n. 3), concluding that Joseph lied as part of a ruse to trap his brothers, or, alternatively, that if he had used the cup, he too would stand condemned by God. But Geisler's effort results in the unhappy conclusion that Joseph of Egypt was either an occultist or a liar. In leveling this accusation, Geisler should recall that the scripture tells us, "the Lord was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:21). Joseph's cup, however, is not the only bibli-

cal example of a physical object used in obtaining the words of God. Gideon used a fleece to determine the will of God (see Judges 6), and God's high priests used the Urim and Thummim—the same objects Joseph Smith claimed to use to receive revelation. Additionally, the apostle Paul used handkerchiefs and aprons to heal the sick (see Acts 19:12).

The Urim and Thummim (Luck Be a Lady Tonight)

Geisler offers several opinions about the Urim and Thummim, based largely on popular tradition rather than scriptural exegesis. He writes that "the Urim and Thummim were used by the high priest alone (Exodus 28:30)" (p. 12). The passage cited by Geisler makes no such restriction; it merely says it shall be used by Aaron. He claims that these items "were not occult objects like seer stones, crystal balls, or the like" (p. 12). However, given the fact that Mormons have consistently used the terms *seer stone* and *Urim and Thummim* synonymously, they would reject the conclusion that either the Urim and Thummim or a seer stone could legitimately be classified with crystal balls "or the like." Geisler intones the most popular theory regarding these objects—equating them with a type of holy dice: "The Urim and Thummim were used only for getting 'Yes' or 'No' answers from God" (p. 12). That idea is derived from a rendition of the Septuagint where Saul asked the people to cast lots to determine if his son Jonathan should die:

Therefore Saul said, "O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken. (1 Samuel 14:41 RSV)

It is important to note, however, that this translation is based on the assumption that the Urim and Thummim were "lot oracles" rather than instruments of revelation. The Hebrew manuscripts of

this passage make no mention of either the Urim or Thummim. The same is true of Geisler's citation of Proverbs 16:33. Both passages refer to casting lots and have only been associated with the Urim and Thummim through tradition. There is no necessary connection between "casting lots" and the Urim and Thummim, even if one begins from the assumption that answers from the Urim and Thummim were obtained in a fashion similar to throwing dice.

The exact nature of revelation through the Urim and Thummim has long been debated, and the most recent scholarly treatment of the subject concludes that revelation through this source could not have been limited to "Yes" or "No":

It is of interest to note that 1 Sam 14:41 (LXX) mentions the UT and equates it with a lot oracle. For many, this text settles the question. 1 Sam 14:41 (LXX) is a problematic passage, however, and needs to be studied very carefully. The passage is not decisive. Indeed, when all relevant evidence is considered, making the UT equivalent to a lot oracle is *not a defensible conclusion*.¹¹

An Everlasting Priesthood Dissolved?

Geisler claims, "The Aaronic priesthood was dissolved by the work of Christ (Hebrews 7,8). The writer of Hebrews says explicitly that '*the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law*' (Hebrews 7:12)" (p. 12). Protestants have for years concluded that the word *changed* in that passage should be interpreted as *dissolved*—not because that is the meaning of the word but because interpreting it as *changed* leaves them in the uncomfortable position of having to concede that the Catholics have a biblical position abandoned by Protestants. There are, however, significant problems with interpreting *changed* as *dissolved*. The passage simply does not say that the priesthood was dissolved or done away; it says it was

11. Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 4, emphasis added.

changed. Perfectly good words exist in Greek to convey the meaning "dissolve," "abrogate," or "abolish." The inspired writer did not use any of those words; instead, he used *metatithemi*—a word that means "to place differently" or "to change."¹² The same word appears in Acts 7:16 when Stephen tells the Jews that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph were *transferred* from Egypt to Sychem (Sechem). The highly regarded Greek lexicon of Walter Bauer defines the word as "change" or "alter" and provides Hebrews 7:12 as an example, "when the priesthood is changed, i.e. passed on to another." In addition, Bauer cites Josephus as having used *metatithemi* to describe "the transfer of the office of high priest to another person."¹³ LDS doctrine and practice is consistent with all these legitimate interpretations that have been rejected by Geisler.

Geisler's interpretation can also be faulted because God promised in Exodus that the Aaronic priesthood would be everlasting throughout the generations of Aaron: "And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood *throughout their generations*" (Exodus 40:15). A priesthood that was dissolved can hardly be considered "everlasting."

Prophecy Never Faileth?

In his discussion on the Urim and Thummim, Geisler offered a conclusion about the product of revelation that conflicts with the teachings of the apostle Paul. In teaching the eternal nature of the love of God (called *charity* in the KJV), Paul points out that prophecy *can* fail: "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, *they shall fail*" (1 Corinthians 13:8). In contrast to this biblical concept, Geisler maintains that revelation through the Urim and Thummim "never produced false results, since God speaks only

12. See W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with Their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revel, 1952), 180.

13. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), s.v. "metatithemi."

truth” (p. 12). Obviously God only speaks the truth, but Geisler rejects the idea that these were instances of God speaking—they were only a metaphorical thumbs up or down. However, the larger question of whether or not prophets can prophesy in the name of God and that thing not come to pass is clearly answered in the Bible. Consider, for example, the occasion when King Hezekiah had a terminal illness and the prophet Isaiah told him, “Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah immediately prayed to God for mercy, asking to be spared. As a result of this pleading, the Lord sent Isaiah right back to Hezekiah, where he spoke in the name of the Lord and promised Hezekiah fifteen more years of life. Someone critical of the Bible might claim that Isaiah’s first statement was a false prophecy. An unfriendly interpreter might say that if God knows the future, he would have known beforehand that Hezekiah was going to ask and receive additional time, and consequently Isaiah gave a false prophecy. A believer in the inspiration of the Bible—say, for example, a Latter-day Saint—would not be troubled by this account, for he would grant that the prophet’s statement was conditional upon the as-yet-undetermined actions of the recipient of the prophecy.

No Tampering with the Text

Next, Geisler makes a claim that is nothing short of amazing. It demonstrates how much thought went into his chapter. He relates a version of Jeremiah 36 as though it taught that biblical prophecy is immune from tampering. Geisler writes: “When King Jehoiakim cut out a section from the Word of God, Jeremiah was told: ‘Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll.’ *No one was to add to or take away from what God had said*” (p. 12, emphasis added). Geisler would have been well served to have read more of the account, particularly the next three verses. Were he aware of what this specific account teaches, it is doubtful he would have used it as an example for an immutable text. Jehoiakim not only cut out a portion of Jeremiah’s prophecy, but he also burned the whole scroll. Whereupon Jeremiah took another scroll and had his

scribe record what had been written on the one destroyed by Jehoiakim. But note this detail left out of Geisler's account: He "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*" (Jeremiah 36:32, emphasis added). Surprisingly, this is the account Geisler uses to demonstrate that "prophets were forbidden to tamper with the text" (p. 12). Jeremiah restored all the words destroyed by the king and added to them—demonstrating that at least one prophet could and did revise the text of scripture.

The Bible—Sum Total or Subtotal of Inspiration?

Geisler next takes up the claim that the Protestant English Bible contains "all the inspired books that God intended to be in the Bible" (p. 15). Such a claim is hard to refute, but so is the claim that the Book of Mormon contains everything God intended to be in it—or that everything I had for breakfast was what God intended I should have. Doesn't the Catholic Bible also contain everything God wanted in the Catholic Bible? But Geisler goes beyond this to conclude that if something is not in the Bible that he prefers, it cannot be inspired. As evidence of his conclusion, he uses some surprising arguments. He points to the fact that Judaism believed in a closed canon *as evidence* that the Old Testament is complete. He neglects to consider the fact that the Jews did not merely believe in a completed Old Testament—they condemned *all* new revelation, including the inspiration of the apostles and the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

He next points to early Christians, claiming they shared a concept limiting scripture to a specific list. He agrees that New Testament authors quoted extracanonical sources but assures his readers that these sources were not inspired. The problem with this, of course, is Jude's citation of the words of Enoch *as a prophecy*: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, *prophesied of these*, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 1:14). Some might see a distinction between *prophecy* and *inspiration* but that entails little more than special pleading. It is a fact that Jude

referred to an extracanonical source *as prophecy*, a source that is rejected by Geisler as “uninspired.”

Geisler claims that the teachings of the Savior also limit scripture to the specific books now in the possession of Protestant Christianity. He writes: “[Jesus] never cited any book other than one of the 24 (39) canonical books of the Jewish Old Testament” (p. 17). But this too is false. On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus told the Jews, “He that believeth on me, *as the scripture hath said*, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Here Jesus refers to a passage of scripture unknown to the world outside of this quotation. It is clearly classified as scripture because the Lord calls it “the scripture.” Equally clearly, the original passage is not found in the Protestant Old or New Testaments, in any of the pseudepigraphic works known to exist, or anywhere else.

Geisler also tries to limit the canon by citing the words of Jesus: “‘from the blood of the righteous Abel . . . to the blood of Zechariah . . .’ (Matthew 23:35)” (p. 17). He claims that this verse defined the limits of the entire Old Testament, understood by Jews to end at 2 Chronicles where the murder of one Zacharias is recounted. This, however, simply muddies the waters on the concept of inerrancy because Jesus referred to Zacharias, the son of *Barachias*. The Zacharias referred to in 2 Chronicles 24:20 was the son of *Jehoiada*. But remember that Geisler uses this passage to support a closed canon—which would also place the New Testament outside the limits of scripture. It is likely that the Lord’s quotation referred *not* to the Zacharias of 2 Chronicles, but to another Zacharias who lived much later and had been killed by the Jews in Jesus’ time. The Lord accused the Jews in his audience of being the murderers of Zacharias by saying, “whom ye slew between the temple and the altar” (Matthew 23:35). If those Jews were the murderers, the Lord’s comments cannot apply as Geisler has contended.

Geisler cites the words of the Lord to his disciples that they would be guided into all truth and then concludes from that statement that if the apostles did not teach completed revelation, “then Jesus was wrong” (p. 19). But he has created a false dichotomy. There

is no connection between being led into all truth and having written down all truth. He falls into the common logical fallacy of concluding that there are only two possible solutions to a particular question. The idea that every question has only two sides—an *either* and an *or*—is not valid. Questions often have more than two sides. It is entirely reasonable to believe that the apostles were led into all truth by the Holy Spirit *and* that many of those truths were never recorded in the Bible or anywhere else. Paul illustrates such a condition in referring to “unspeakable words” revealed to a man (2 Corinthians 12:4). If they were unspeakable, it is likely they wouldn’t be written either.

Geisler asserts that since the resurrection occurred in the first century and an apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrection, “anyone who lived after that time was a ‘false apostle’” (p. 19). Presumably he means to say that one who claimed to be an apostle after the first century (rather than anyone who lived after that period) would be a false apostle, but that too is unreasonably narrow. There is no record of any individual witnessing the resurrection of Christ. Many were eyewitnesses that he was indeed resurrected, but none were witnesses of Jesus actually rising from the dead. Consequently, eyewitnesses of his resurrection needed to know for a certainty that Jesus was a living, resurrected being. They did not need to be present at the resurrection itself. That is, by the way, how Paul qualified as an apostle. Consequently, if Jesus appeared to other men as he did to Paul and Joseph Smith, they could reasonably qualify as apostles. Geisler points out that Paul claimed to have been the “last” to have “seen” the resurrected Christ (see p. 19). It is true that when he wrote that, he was the last, but you are only the last until someone else follows you, and then that person becomes the last. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery bore witness to having seen the Savior, also using the word *last* to refer to themselves: “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!” (D&C 76:22). *Last* is often used to mean the most recent in a series rather than the conclusion to a series. Consequently, apostles wrote about *these last days* (see Hebrews 1:2). Similarly the *last* game of the NBA finals refers to the

most recent of a repeating series, and I can tell my son that his sister got my *last* dollar and he can walk away disappointed but not despondent because he believes that we are bankrupt as a family.

Geisler suggests that substantial evidence supports the claim that all the inspired writing of the apostles was preserved and compiled into the Bible. This alleged evidence consists of the premise that since God is great and God is good, we can not only thank him for our food, but “it follows” that he would not inspire books for believers through the centuries without also preserving them (see p. 20). Clearly, this does not follow any more than the idea that God’s goodness will send everyone to heaven. The preservation of *some* scripture through God’s providence does not demand the preservation of *all* scripture.

Although it is apparent that Geisler did not expect his chapter to be dissected by Mormons, he might have planned for such a contingency. In appealing to the idea that “every major branch of Christendom . . . [has] accepted” (p. 22) a closed canon, he has missed the proverbial boat. The LDS premise of an apostasy and restoration takes for granted that the rest of Christianity would be united against our beliefs—it practically demands such a position. Consequently, the fact that every branch of Christianity except Mormonism agrees on this position counts as evidence only for the fact that they all disagree with us. We shouldn’t expect any other position. More important, the popularity of a particular view is not evidence that the view is correct or true; it is just more popular.

Geisler dismisses all too briefly the fact that scripture cites books currently not found in the Bible. While he does mention some of the books referred to by the Bible, he offers a sanitized list, and two books that prove problematic to his thesis receive no mention. While it is possible that historical books such as Jasher and the Wars of the Lord (which Geisler mentions) were not inspired by God, references to *prophecies* and *visions* recorded elsewhere surely suggest that those communications were inspired. Perhaps that is why the *prophecy* of Ahijah and the *visions* of Iddo the seer are not mentioned by Geisler.

Even more interesting is Geisler’s attempt to dismiss references to other books or epistles as though they have different names in to-

day's Bible. He offers the plausible position that the historical books of Chronicles and Samuel contain the writings of Nathan and Elijah, but his certainty quickly evaporates with the wonderful weasel words *probably* and *may* as he discusses "inspired books mentioned by another name," including:

the contents of . . . "Gad the Seer," which parallel that of 1 and 2 Samuel; 3) the "vision of Isaiah the prophet," . . . *probably* the same as the book of Isaiah; 4) the other accounts of the life of Christ, which *may* refer to Matthew and Mark; 5) the "epistle from Laodicea," which is *probably* Ephesians, for it was written at the same time and had not yet reached there; and 6) the letter to the Corinthians, which *may* refer to 1 Corinthians itself by a device known as an 'epistolary aorist,' which stressed the urgency of the message, a device Paul used elsewhere in the same letter. *There is simply no evidence that any inspired apostolic work is missing from the New Testament.*" (p. 23, emphasis added)

Geisler accepts "no evidence" for missing scripture because he is unwilling to consider any. Such selective use of sources, however, is best illustrated in his comparison of the Bible with the Book of Mormon. He asserts that the Bible alone has been supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God. How has that occurred? He says that the "supernatural confirmation" of the Bible comes from Bible stories recounting supernatural events. That is, the claim in Acts that the apostles performed miracles is actually *evidence* that the apostles performed miracles. But this is not all. According to Geisler, the stories about miracles also constitute "supernatural" evidence validating the entire Bible! However, this is not evidence; it is crooked thinking. In the first place, such self-referential logic is question-begging at its worst. Second, Geisler will not allow his standard for evidence to be applied to anything other than the Bible. If, according to Geisler, the Bible validates itself because it claims to report actual miracles, do the miracles recounted in the Book of Mormon validate that book as scripture? Of course not. He has one standard for the Bible and another for everything else. If he were consistent in his standards, his

reasons for accepting the Bible would not only validate the Book of Mormon and its miracles, but every other account of “supernatural” activity—including Elvis sightings from the *National Enquirer*.

Geisler does not explain how he arrived at the conclusion that miracles validate the entire Bible; he simply asserts it as a given—even though the entire collection known as the Bible is never referred to as a unity in any account of these supernatural occurrences. In contrast, miraculous events subsequent to the production of the Book of Mormon refer specifically to the Book of Mormon, yet these are dismissed by Geisler with a dogmatic wave of the hand: “Of all the world religious leaders, neither Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad, nor Joseph Smith was confirmed by miracles that were verified by contemporary and credible witnesses” (p. 24).

Geisler Declares the Mormon View of Scriptures

The author points out that, as one of the drafters of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) Statement on Inerrancy, he can say with authority that “there is a great gulf between what evangelicals affirmed in this statement and what the Mormon Church teaches.” An appeal to authority may be helpful in resolving philosophical disputes: when someone quotes Einstein, people pay attention—provided, of course, the discussion deals with physics rather than Sanskrit. If it deals with Sanskrit, a reasonable question is: “What did Einstein know about Sanskrit?” Similarly, Geisler may be very qualified to explain the philosophical underpinnings of the ICBI Statement on Inerrancy, but the fact that he has a copy of *The Changing World of Mormonism* hardly qualifies him to explain what “the Mormon Church teaches.” He begins this section by making an outrageous and false claim: “Latter-day Saints [*sic*] teaching has consistently affirmed that our present translations of the Bible are neither accurate nor complete” (p. 25). As evidence, he cites the writings of Orson Pratt—the man who holds the dubious distinction of being the only apostle ever condemned for false doctrine by proclamation of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles.¹⁴ He does point out that

14. See the “Proclamation of the First Presidency and Twelve,” 21 October 1865, in

Brigham Young disagreed with Pratt's stance, but in doing so, he unwittingly advertises that much of his "research" consists of rewriting selections from Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book, *The Changing World of Mormonism*. Note below how Geisler revises the Tanners' material from chapter 12 and changes Orson Pratt's supposed *attack* on the Bible to a full-fledged *rejection*:

Changing World: "Even Brigham Young felt that Apostle Pratt went too far in his attack on the Bible (see *Journal of Discourses*, vol.3, p.116)."¹⁵

Geisler's *Counterfeit*: "Joseph Smith's successor, Brigham Young, agreed (JD 3:116) that Apostle Pratt went too far in rejecting the Bible" (see p. 26).

Thus in "smouching"¹⁶ the Tanners' work, Geisler's revision manufactures a falsehood. Pratt's hyperbole against the Bible was too strong for Brigham Young's comfort, but there is no justification for claiming that Pratt rejected the Bible. "Oh, what a tangled web we weave . . ."

Geisler alleges that Latter-day Saints believe the Bible is inaccurate, unreliable, and riddled with errors. Although he cites our claim in the eighth Article of Faith indicating that "we believe the Bible to be the word of God," he immediately dismisses that statement as a ruse, reiterating that what we say is not what we *really* believe. As evidence for his allegation, he poses a question that reveals a great deal about why he does not understand LDS belief. He asks, if the Bible is the word of God, "then why did God command Joseph Smith to make an 'inspired translation' of the Bible?" (p. 26).

Messages of the First Presidency (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:235. "Whenever brother Orson Pratt has written upon that which he knows, and has confined himself to doctrines which he understands, his arguments are convincing and unanswerable; but, when he has indulged in hypotheses and theories, he has launched forth on an endless sea of speculation to which there is no horizon" (p. 238).

15. See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 367.

16. I am indebted to Mark Twain for this verb, who claimed it from Milton. See Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1913), pt. 1:119.

New Paradigm Time

Geisler looks at scripture and inspiration in a certain way. He sees through lenses with fixed focal points that filter out all shades of gray. For him, truth exists in a system of absolutes, *yes* or *no*, *inspired* or *false*, *perfect* or *unreliable*. But these are false standards. The fallacy of equivocation occurs when words are allowed an illogical shift of meaning in the same argument. In the list of terms above, only *yes* and *no* are opposites; the others are inappropriately juxtaposed. An imperfect book is not necessarily unreliable or uninspired. Neither is an inspired book necessarily either perfect or sufficient. But Geisler's standards rely on this very subtle placement of words against each other. Yet the ability to recognize these distinctions is at the heart of understanding Mormonism. Unfortunately, Geisler does not seem to be able to perceive the danger of such confused terminology. He is standing at the top of the ladder of his evangelical perceptions, unaware that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. Helping him to move the ladder, however, is an unlikely solution, since it is inhibited by our response to anti-Mormonism and its response to us.

Critics approach Mormonism, as does Geisler, with accusations of error in LDS scripture. We respond, thinking that we are attacking their *perception* of scripture, by showing them errors in the Bible. This has no effect on their view of scripture, but it convinces them that we do not *really believe* the Bible because *we* do not think of it the same way they do. We protest their paradigm, showing them more reasons why they shouldn't believe that the Bible is perfect, and they interpret that as an assault on the Bible. This basic misunderstanding fuels Geisler's attack on the LDS view of scripture.

JST vs. KJV

Geisler provides a historical background for the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible. Unfortunately, he misread *The Changing World of Mormonism* where it points out that the RLDS Church obtained the manuscript in 1866 and published the work the

following year.¹⁷ Geisler writes that the RLDS obtained the manuscript in 1886 and published it in 1887—claiming that the 1887 edition is currently sold at Deseret Book. The 1867 edition was available in LDS bookstores until it was replaced by the RLDS 1944 edition. An 1887 edition was never published.

Geisler asserts that the “Inspired Version” has “been an embarrassment to the Mormon Church” (p. 28). As evidence of this claim, he points out that it has never been officially published by the church, is sold in the LDS Church–owned Deseret bookstore, and is cited by Mormon scholars. How this might indicate embarrassment is not exactly clear and instead seems the opposite of what Geisler alleges. If we were embarrassed by it, why are we selling it in church-owned bookstores and why do our scholars quote from it? In reality, the church values the information found in the JST and has printed selections from it since 1851. The LDS Church published an LDS Bible in 1979 and included much of the JST in that edition. These actions simply do not indicate any Mormon embarrassment over the JST and demonstrate that this quotation—also borrowed from the Tanners—is false.¹⁸

Geisler points out several circumstances that he feels are fatal to the Mormon system. They can be distilled as follows: Joseph Smith was commanded by God to go through the Bible and make inspired revisions. He did so and completed the project. However, Mormons “admit” that it still contains errors. Ergo, it cannot be complete because it is not perfect.

He calls this the “Mormon dilemma,” but it is only a “Geisler dilemma.” His perception of scripture and prophets requires Joseph Smith to produce a perfect book, absolutely error free—but that’s *his* faith, not ours. Earlier, I cited Brigham Young’s statement that he did not believe that any revelation from God came to the church in perfection. On another occasion, he explained that revelation is adapted

17. See Tanner and Tanner, *Changing World*, 383.

18. See *ibid.*

to the understanding of those who receive it and that if God would now cause the Bible or the Book of Mormon to be retranslated, they would be different:

Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation.¹⁹

If Geisler really expects to make inroads into Mormonism, he needs to demonstrate through the use of logic and valid evidence that the acceptance of fallible prophets and scripture violates the teachings of the Bible. Until he does, Latter-day Saints are not likely to be perplexed at the fact that their scriptures do not measure up to impossible standards. Mormons are not dismayed that Joseph Smith felt at liberty to revise the wording of the Book of Mormon or the Bible. They are not troubled that Joseph Smith could notice that the Book of Mormon spoke of Benjamin when it should have been Mosiah and that it was a small thing to cross out the wrong word and correct it. Similarly, if he felt phrases could be clearer, he did not hesitate to revise them. The first edition listed Joseph Smith as the “author” because he could not very well obtain the copyright for either Mormon or Moroni. That and lots of other situations were rectified in subsequent editions, and they give faithful Latter-day Saints no reason to wring their hands, weep, or lose sleep over it. That is an element of our faith, understood almost by instinct among Mormons. But among our critics, it is a precept that appears to be beyond their grasp.

Confirmation of LDS Scriptures

Geisler proposes that only the Bible enjoys the distinction of having had witnesses supported by supernatural events. In this, however, he is mistaken. If he is reluctant to believe the accounts of

19. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:311.

miracles found in the pages of LDS history, he might consider the findings of the late Walter R. Martin—prominent anti-Mormon of the seventies and eighties—who concluded that Mormons did indeed experience supernatural events:

Smith claimed to have supernatural powers, *and there is evidence that he exercised the power to heal when the Mormons were plagued by disease in Nauvoo. Joseph passed through the people, laying hands on them and praying for them, and a great many of them were restored.* The early Mormons also claimed the gifts of the Holy Spirit as recorded in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and they particularly emphasized the capacity to speak in tongues, prophesy, discern spirits, interpret tongues, and work miracles.²⁰

Geisler tries to dismiss the fact that there were indeed supernatural events as part of the restoration of the gospel. He uses the time-worn allegations that the Three Witnesses were probably deceived or only believed that they saw “angel-like beings,” or that they later denied their testimonies. It sounds like the defense attorney backed into a corner who is forced to argue alternatives: “My client couldn’t be guilty; he was somewhere else. And even if he was not, he does not own a gun. Even if that’s his gun, he did not fire it—but if he did, he’s crazy.” Like the desperate attorney, Geisler wants his readers to pick any of several options except the one that makes the most sense: Three credible men—including a school teacher, a farmer, and a businessman—declared in words of soberness that an angel of God descended from heaven and showed them the plates that had been translated by Joseph Smith. They further declared that the voice of God spoke to them and bore witness that the Book of Mormon was true.

Allegations made by others about the witnesses are irrelevant because, to their dying day, each man affirmed a testimony that withstood ridicule from others and alienation from Joseph Smith—who

20. Walter R. Martin, *The Maze of Mormonism* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1978), 218–19, emphasis added.

essentially defied them to recant what they affirmed, knowing that they could not do so without bringing the judgment of God upon them.

In his attempt to impugn the testimony of the witnesses, Geisler claims that by uniting in prayer to God to provide them this witness, they created “almost classic conditions for a hallucination” (p. 37). It would be interesting to see what empirical evidence Geisler has for such a conclusion. Perhaps he could provide historical examples of hallucinations where all present experienced the same manifestation and steadfastly affirmed throughout their lives that they had been in the presence of an angel of God. These tired old arguments have been fully answered for over twenty years, but since Geisler’s primary source is that old, perhaps we should not expect him to be aware of that fact.²¹

Geisler points out that the Book of Mormon “anachronistically had people speaking in 1611 English more than 2000 years before the KJV was written” (pp. 37–38). Is it really necessary to point out to him that the Book of Mormon claims to be a *translation*? His comment illustrates the same mental incisiveness as the one claiming the Nephites spoke French because Joseph Smith included the word “adieu” in his *translation* of Jacob. Does Geisler also think that the New International Version of the Bible has people in Jerusalem anachronistically speaking twentieth-century English?

The Problem of Plagiarism

Geisler only includes one paragraph on this subject, noting that the Book of Mormon has thousands of words taken from the 1611 version of the KJV Bible. He is wrong. The words are actually taken from the 1769 Oxford edition of the King James Translation. But these passages are *quotations* of the Bible. Why should Joseph Smith translate anew passages that were already extant and in a prose style far superior to his own? More important, has Geisler leveled the same charge against the authors of the New Testament, who copied

21. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).

verbatim from the Greek Bible available to them? Is he at all concerned about the angel of Revelation 2:27, who "plagiarized" the Septuagint version of Psalm 2:9? Perhaps he feels there should be one standard for Joseph Smith and another for himself? The irony of this claim in this section of this particular book is rich indeed.

Alleged False Prophecies

Geisler lists three instances from LDS Church history that he feels are false prophecies on the part of Joseph Smith. The first is an account reported by David Whitmer, in which Whitmer claimed that in 1830 Joseph Smith instructed men to go to Toronto, Canada, where they "should" sell the copyright for the Book of Mormon in Canada. Whitmer claims they took the journey and returned without success. Geisler points out that B. H. Roberts admitted that this was a false revelation, but in this case he is taking liberty with the facts. Roberts asks *if* the "alleged" account by Whitmer is authentic, is it possible to still accept Joseph Smith as a true prophet? Roberts replies affirmatively to that hypothetical "what if."

Roberts felt that it was necessary to meet the claim of Whitmer and answer it as if it were a prophecy. I do not share his concern for several reasons: Whitmer divorced himself from the Latter-day Saints fifty years before recording his recollection of this event. Time has a tendency to color our perceptions and our memory; unless an event is recorded soon after the experience, our own minds will replace forgotten elements so that the story retains consistency for us. It is not uncommon to hear people say, "That's not how I remember it," because the distance of time and space makes things unsure. While it is probable that Joseph Smith received a revelation about sending people to Canada to try to sell the copyright, Whitmer's deep conviction to justify his own actions may have allowed his memory of the event to become distorted. Joseph Smith may have received permission to send men to Canada to sell the copyright, which Whitmer interpreted as a prophecy. But Whitmer should have known "first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). His recollection of this event is certainly a "private interpretation" of something that was not a prophecy.

He Should, He Would, He Might, He Will

Geisler turns his attention to an account found in the *History of the Church* in which Joseph Smith is reported to have said that the coming of the Lord was “nigh—even fifty-six years should wind up the scene.”²² Recognizing that this accusation shows up in practically every anti-Mormon potboiler published in this century and that it has been adequately and repeatedly addressed by LDS authors, it is disappointing to see that Geisler does not appear to have the slightest idea about any LDS responses. A few minutes on the Internet could have provided him with abundant resources responding to this staple but ignorant criticism.²³

Geisler also points to the promise that a temple would be built in Missouri “in this generation” and concludes that Joseph Smith spoke falsely. However, twenty-six hundred years ago, the prophet Jeremiah established an important ground rule for prophecy. He pointed out that God’s promises to build up a people or a nation or, conversely, to destroy them depended on the righteousness or wickedness of that people or nation. Jeremiah said that if God promised to establish a people and they became wicked, he would revoke that promise:

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. (Jeremiah 18:6–10)

22. *History of the Church*, 11:182.

23. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith and the Millenarian Time Table,” *BYU Studies* 3/3 (1961): 55. See also Malin L. Jacobs, “The Alleged Fifty-Six Year Second-Coming Prophecy of Joseph Smith: An Analysis,” at shields-research.org/56_Year.htm.

Consequently, Jonah was not a false prophet when he promised that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days (see Jonah 3:4) because the Ninevites repented and the city was not destroyed. Joseph Smith sent several reminders to the Saints in Missouri warning them that their conduct was going to bring the judgments of God upon them. In a letter written in 1833, Joseph Smith warned, "I say to you (and what I say to you I say to all,) hear the warning voice of God, lest Zion fall, and the Lord swear in His wrath the inhabitants of Zion shall not enter into His rest."²⁴ The Mormons in Missouri did not repent, and the promise to establish them was revoked:

Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now. But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them; And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom; And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself. And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer. (D&C 105:2–6)

Consistent with the parameters established by Jeremiah, and the warnings of Joseph Smith, the Latter-day Saints forfeited the promises for their generation.

Geisler's next criticism of Joseph Smith's "prophecy on war" suffers from a sort of theological dyslexia. In this case, he misquotes the prophecy and interprets it based on his misreading. In 1832 Joseph Smith made a prophecy on war that included a reference to the United States Civil War. Following the specific reference that the Northern States would be divided against the Southern States, Joseph

24. *History of the Church*, 1:316.

predicted, "And the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations beginning at this place" (D&C 87:2). Geisler's quotation of this passage inserts the definite article *the*, changing the meaning from war in general to the Civil War itself: "And the time will come that *the* war will be poured out upon all nations." Geisler offers four reasons why this prophecy cannot be considered a supernatural circumstance, concluding that the most significant reason was because "the war was not poured out on all nations" (p. 40). Obviously, the prophecy never said *the* war would be poured out; consequently, his criticism is moot.

"First of all," as he gives his *second* reason, "it was never published during Joseph Smith's lifetime. It first appeared in 1851, seven years after his death" (p. 40). Well then, what are we to do with the prophecies of Jesus? Not one of them was published during his lifetime either. What relevance the publication date of a prophecy may have to its validity escapes me. Perhaps Geisler thinks that it was manufactured after Joseph Smith's death to give him credibility. If that were true, it does not remove the difficulty because the prophecy was still published ten years before the war began.

"Second," he complains, "over 300 words were deleted in the first two editions of the *History of the Church*" (p. 40). In reality, both editions of the *History of the Church* contain the entire revelation—a total of only 293 words. If "over 300 words" have been deleted, what were they deleted from? The answer to this senseless charge turns up in *The Changing World of Mormonism*. In it, the Tanners claim this prophecy was "suppressed" because it was not included in the first serialized church histories published in newspapers in Nauvoo and England.

Joseph Smith's revelation concerning the Civil War was never published during his lifetime, and although it is included in the handwritten manuscript of the *History of the Church*, it was suppressed the first two times that Joseph Smith's history was printed (see *Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, p.688; also *Millennial Star*, vol. 14, pp.296, 305). It is obvious that this

was a deliberate omission on the part of the Mormon historians, for over 300 words were deleted without any indication!²⁵

Apparently, Geisler thought that various histories published in newspapers and the *History of the Church* are synonymous. In assuming so, he levels a false charge against the church, based on his misreading of the Tanners' tortuous logic. This prophecy was not deleted from any church publication; it simply was not included in all accounts of the church's history.

Geisler claims that pretty much anyone could have guessed back in 1832 that the Civil War would begin with the rebellion in South Carolina and so Joseph Smith's prediction simply mirrored the common view of the times. Wouldn't that also negate the Lord's prophecy that his disciples would be hated and driven from city to city, since that was the common view of the time? That future civil war was not common knowledge of the day can be ascertained by the reaction of those who became aware of this prophecy during the Civil War. Under the heading "A Mormon Prophecy," the *Philadelphia Sunday Mercury* on 5 May 1861 reported that it had a copy of Joseph Smith's prophecy published in England in 1851. "In view of our present troubles, this prediction seems to be in progress of fulfilment, whether Joe Smith was a humbug or not." There follows the entire revelation and this concluding comment: "Have we not had a prophet among us?"

An additional historical note is appropriate at this juncture since Geisler joins most critics of Mormonism in taking the narrow view that this prophecy was limited to the Civil War rather than to war in general. Leaders of the LDS Church after Joseph Smith felt that they possessed holy pearls that were to be guarded from the public at large. Occasionally, they would mention one of these items—possibly unintentionally. Had not Franklin D. Richards published the prophecy on war while in England, it is possible the world might not have learned of it. In 1860, apostle Orson Hyde spoke to the

25. Tanner and Tanner, *Changing World*, 428.

Saints and mentioned the prophecy on war. He thought it had been published in the Doctrine and Covenants but could not locate it. Brigham Young explained,

Brother Hyde spoke of a revelation which he tried to find in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. That revelation was reserved at the time the compilation for that book was made by Oliver Cowdery and others, in Kirtland. It was not wisdom to publish it to the world, and it remained in the private *escritoire* [emphasis in original]. Brother Joseph had that revelation concerning this nation at a time when the brethren were reflecting and reasoning with regard to African slavery on this continent, *and the slavery of the children of men throughout the world*. There are other revelations, besides this one, not yet published to the world.²⁶

Brigham Young's comments show that this prophecy had wider application than allowed by Geisler. Further evidence of this comes from Orson Hyde, who explained more of Joseph Smith's prophetic insight in comments about the Civil War. In the late 1850s, Hyde prophesied in a public discourse in Salt Lake City that war was about to divide the nation. Mocking reports of his prediction appeared in eastern newspapers. After his comments had been vindicated by the Civil War, Orson Hyde wrote an "I told you so" letter to the editor of the *Springfield Missouri Republican*. His comments indicate that Joseph Smith's prophecy extended far beyond the Civil War and included an additional, chilling detail of events yet future:

You have scarcely yet read the preface of your national troubles. Many nations will be drawn into the American maelstrom that now whirls through our land; and after many days, when the demon of war shall have exhausted his strength and madness upon American soil, by the destruction of all that can court or provoke opposition, excite cupidity, inspire revenge, or feed ambition, *he will remove his headquarters to the banks of the Rhine.*²⁷

26. *Journal of Discourses*, 8:58, emphasis added.

27. *Millennial Star* 24 (3 May 1862): 274–75, emphasis added.

Thus the maelstrom was war itself, rather than solely the American Civil War. Hyde pointed out that the strength of this particular war in America would dissipate and cease, to be followed by a new headquarters of war based in Germany.

If, according to Geisler, war between the North and South was a foregone conclusion, one wonders why these newspapers were so out of touch with common views that they would ridicule Orson Hyde for espousing the same view only a year or two before its fulfillment? Where are the others who recognized and published similar claims? If this were such a common understanding, might not Joseph Smith's critics be on firmer ground if they had even one instance of a similar prediction?

Changes in Revelation

Geisler reiterates his erroneous claim that biblical prophets were forbidden to make changes in their revelations, citing the standard passages warning against adding or taking away from the word of God. He points out that "by contrast, Joseph Smith made thousands of changes" (p. 41). The account of Jeremiah, however, establishes the fact that prophets can make changes; consequently, the *number* of changes is irrelevant, as long as they were made by a prophet rather than an unauthorized meddler. History clearly shows that Joseph Smith did not hesitate to make changes in items that he valued as scripture. This state of affairs is consistent with the worldview of Latter-day Saints and gives them no discomfiture. It is not problematic because Mormons believe that the scriptures were dictated by inspired but fallible men rather than directly by God. In an effort to overcome this perception, Geisler quotes a recollection of "Olive[r] B. Huntington," who claimed he heard Joseph F. Smith stipulate the Protestant view of scripture in relation to the translation of the Book of Mormon (p. 41). However, for Joseph F. Smith to have adopted this paradigm, he had to be ignorant of elementary doctrines of Mormonism and its history. The premise that scripture comes in man's language rather than God's was well-known to Joseph F. Smith, who was one of the LDS Church's leading theologians. He was well aware that the Book of Mormon teaches that the Lord "speaketh

unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3). A more likely interpretation of Huntington’s journal entry is that Oliver Huntington misunderstood Joseph F. Smith’s comments.

In September 1878, Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt traveled to Richmond, Missouri, where they spoke at length with David Whitmer. Nine years later, Whitmer published *An Address to All Believers in Christ*. In this pamphlet, Whitmer claimed that the translation of the Book of Mormon was given to Joseph Smith simply to read. “When it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear.”²⁸ This language is practically identical to that recorded in Huntington’s journal, cited by Geisler. The source of Huntington’s account, therefore, is clearly David Whitmer. It seems unlikely that Joseph F. Smith would have embraced this interpretation, given his view of revelation generally and a willingness to question Whitmer’s recollection in other areas.²⁹ It is more likely that Huntington only heard part of the discussion, the part quoting Whitmer—not necessarily Smith’s own perception.

Misunderstood Miscellany

Geisler notes that it is difficult to understand how Joseph Fielding Smith could deny the virgin birth in light of the Book of Mormon claim in Alma 7:10 that the Lord would be born of a virgin. Unfortunately, his confusion is the result of an incorrect assumption. Joseph Fielding Smith did not reject the virgin birth; he rejected the idea that the Holy Ghost rather than the Father begot Jesus. Geisler

28. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: Whitmer, 1887), 12.

29. Joseph F. Smith noted in his journal that Whitmer erroneously thought he had possession of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. “Now herein he is evidently mistaken, as Joseph Smith expressly states in his history that before the Ms. was sent to the printers an exact copy was made and it is my belief that this is that copy and not the original.” Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 246.

has jumped to the conclusion that Mary could only be a virgin if Jesus were the son of the Holy Ghost rather than the son of the Father. In this he fails to perceive that in Mormon theology, the Father has as much power as does the Holy Ghost. If Geisler allows that the third member of the Godhead has the power to beget a son while preserving Mary's virginity, why does he assume that this is beyond the Father's power? Latter-day Saint authors have never denied that Mary was a virgin; they have simply concluded that even though the power of the Holy Spirit came upon her, the power of the Highest—the Father—caused Mary to conceive the Savior. President Ezra Taft Benson affirmed that Mary was a virgin after the birth of the Savior by citing the Book of Mormon: "He was the Only Begotten Son of our Heavenly Father in the flesh—the only child whose mortal body was begotten by our Heavenly Father. His mortal mother, Mary, was called a virgin, both before and after she gave birth. (See 1 Ne. 11:20.)"³⁰

Under the heading, "The changeableness of God," Geisler concludes that it follows that if gods are begotten as we are "that they change as we do" (p. 43). That no more "follows" than the premise that if gods eat as we do they must change as we do. We share many of our Father in Heaven's attributes because we are his children. We do not share many of his attributes because we are mortal and sinful and he is not. However, he has promised to make us partakers of his divine nature, and when that comes to pass, we will be unchangeable in the same way that he is unchangeable. The fact that God is *now* unchangeable does not at all preclude the idea that he *arrived* at that status. Aside from that perspective, Geisler seems to have adopted an idea about the unchangeableness of God that is not entirely scriptural. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever (see Hebrews 13:8), even though he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). The Lord experienced other changes that indicate that his unchangeableness consists in his relationship to righteousness and truth, not in

30. Ezra Taft Benson, "Joy in Christ," *Ensign*, March 1986, 3–4.

whether he was born or died sometime in the past—for these circumstances indicate a wide variety of change and were all experienced by the Savior.

In a brief mention of plural marriage, Geisler falls prey to the malady that is endemic among critics of the LDS faith. He interprets our scriptures and history as if he *really knew* what they contain. He claims that the Book of Mormon “never approved anything but monogamy” (p. 44), oblivious to the fact that the chapter he cites contains the word of God that polygamy can be authorized. In Jacob 2:27, the Lord commands the Nephites to abide by two specific commandments: “For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none.” This was the standing law given to Lehi and his posterity and is the standing law of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith taught that God may command exceptions to this rule. This exception is explained in verse 30: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.”

After pointing out some of the instances of editing apparent in LDS scripture, Geisler concludes that this constitutes evidence that God could not have had a hand in Mormonism. Although he realizes that manuscripts of the Bible have endured revisions, he does not seem to allow the same latitude for LDS scripture. In his parting shot, Geisler brings up Wesley Walters’s discovery of a bill of costs for an 1826 trial at Bainbridge, New York. He claims that this bill proves that Joseph Smith was a money-digger. But this document does not prove any such thing; it only proves that Joseph Smith was tried before a justice of the peace in 1826—rather old news for Latter-day Saints. Oliver Cowdery commented on Joseph Smith’s trial way back in 1835:

On the private character of our brother I need add nothing further, at present, previous to his obtaining the records of the Nephites, only that while in that country, some very officious person complained of him as a disorderly person, and

brought him before the authorities of the county; but there being no cause of action he was honorably acquitted.³¹

Joseph Smith publicly acknowledged that he had been a money-digger in his youth, and that he had to give it up because it paid so very little.³² Geisler's use of this material, however, presents a distorted picture that fudges the facts a bit. He mentions Walters's 1971 discovery of court documents and follows this immediately with what he implies Hugh Nibley was forced to "admit." In addition to using the time-honored practice of propaganda that has your own side *defending* and *affirming* while your opponents merely *apologize* and *admit*, Geisler places a quotation of Nibley in such a way as to imply that Nibley was trying to question the court documents found by Walters. Immediately following reference to Walters's discovery, Geisler quotes Nibley: "If the authenticity of the court record could be established it would be the most devastating blow to Smith ever delivered" (p. 46). It is impossible for this quotation to refer to the Walters discovery because it comes from a book published ten years before the event. Nibley's statement referred to two alleged accounts of the trial—one very late and another that disappeared before it could be examined by competent witnesses. There is still good reason to question the provenance of the accounts challenged by Nibley.³³

At the conclusion of his chapter on scripture, Geisler produces a self-serving chart in which he purports to compare and contrast the "evangelical and Mormon views of Scriptures" (p. 47). In reality, the chart merely shows a comparison between his view of the Bible and his interpretation of LDS scripture. It certainly does not reflect LDS perception, and in a couple of instances his chart goes beyond

31. Oliver Cowdery, "Letter 8," *Messenger and Advocate* (October 1835): 201, spelling modernized. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 52–80.

32. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 120.

33. See Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1960), 1:423.

laughable to truly insulting. He would certainly be hard-pressed to find believing Latter-day Saints who also believe that our scriptures were produced through “occultic” means or that they are “unreliable.” He did get one item right in his chart: his chart shows that he believes in a closed canon and we do not. Perhaps he should be commended for understanding that much about our faith.

With Friends Like These . . .

The final chapter of *The Counterfeit Gospel* is entitled, “A Word to Our Mormon Friends.” Adding irony to this title, the author opines, “Throughout this book we have spoken the truth as we know it based on God’s Word” (p. 233). As the book opened by charging Mormons with dishonesty, it now closes by affirming the probity of its authors.

Geisler begins by pointing out that God requires perfection of the Latter-day Saint. He quotes Matthew 5:48 and then misquotes its companion passage in 3 Nephi 12:48. There follows a discussion that illustrates that “apart from faith” (p. 237), it is impossible to please God. Where on earth did he get the idea that any Latter-day Saint expects anything “apart from faith”? Did he perhaps skip over the fourth Article of Faith that begins, “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: *first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*” (emphasis added)? Does he assume, because the Bible teaches that Zacharias and Elisabeth were “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6), that they too had done this “apart from faith”? Clearly, his view of LDS doctrine is the counterfeit to watch out for. But amidst all this “speaking the truth in love,” I find an appalling misrepresentation of an LDS source. In his discussion about striving for perfection, Geisler quotes the Melchizedek Priesthood Study Guide from 1989. He writes:

All informed Mormons know what meeting the standards for perfection entails. The following list is taken from the priesthood manual, *To Make Thee a Minister and a Witness* (p. 59). Being perfect includes: 1) personal prayers, 2) regular

family prayer, 3) regular family home evening, 4) home storage, 5) regular Scripture study, 6) strict personal worthiness, 7) support of church leaders, 8) tender concern for one's wife and family members, 9) keeping the family history, 10) having patience and love, 11) honest work and integrity in one's occupation, 12) exemplary grooming and dress, 13) regular attendance at church meetings and activities, 14) regular temple attendance, 15) keeping the Word of Wisdom, and 16) having purity of thought. (p. 234)

When I read that quote, I *knew* it was a distortion. There was no question in my mind but that the author of this chapter had misused the study guide. The quote comes from lesson 15, titled "What It Means to Receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost." The lesson manual then asks this question, offering the above list as discussion points: "In which of these suggested areas of personal growth do you feel you are making progress in obeying God's laws?" Why is it that anti-Mormons resort so consistently to falsification in their work against us? Do they know who the father of lies is and whom they serve when using his tools? Perhaps Geisler does not believe that the truth is a strong enough weapon.

This chapter approaches Mormonism from the perspective that efforts to be obedient to God's commandments will be frustrating, depressing, and endless and that the correct path is to merely accept the free gift of salvation: "All that remains for us to do is to believe." Certain it is that man cannot bring about his own salvation or exaltation and that he is wholly dependent on the mercy and grace and merits of Jesus Christ. It is equally certain, however, that the Holy Spirit is given to those who *obey* God (see Acts 5:32) and that those who believe in God are not automatically his sons; they are given power to become such: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). In the final analysis, it won't be mere believers who shall finally be saved; it will be *obedient* believers, because Jesus is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey him*" (Hebrews 5:9, emphasis added).

Twenty years ago, there was a serious shortage of coins in Italy. The larger grocery stores offered plastic tokens redeemable at their stores in lieu of the real thing. It did not do any good to protest the fake change because you got it whether you wanted it or not. Everyone knew it was bogus, and it was simply an irritation that everyone had to live with. Similarly, the “love” and “truth” found within the pages of *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* are the plastic tokens of true Christianity. I prefer the real coin of the realm.