

4. Does God speak to his children in ways other than through the Bible?

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As stated previously, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes the Bible to be the word of God. Latter-day Saints love and study the Bible and attempt to live according to its teachings. They do not, however, believe that the Bible contains all of God's word to all people of all time.

Joseph Smith loved the Bible. It was through pondering certain verses in the Epistle of James that he felt directed to call upon God in prayer. Most of his sermons, writings, and letters are laced with quotations or summaries of biblical passages and precepts. He once remarked that one can “see God's own handwriting in the sacred volume: and he who reads it oftenest will like it best.”⁵

Is It Complete?

Joseph Smith did not believe, however, that the Bible was complete or that all religious difficulties could necessarily be handled by turning to the Old or New Testaments for help (see Joseph Smith—History 1:12). Nor did he believe in either the inerrancy or the infallibility of the Bible. “From sundry revelations which had been received,” he explained, “it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of men had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.”⁶ In like manner, members of the church restored through Joseph Smith today revere the Bible but do not believe that it is without fault or that it contains all of what God has to say to his children.

The ninth article of faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints states: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” For Latter-day Saints, what God *has* revealed includes the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. What he *does now* reveal is the current and ongoing inspired instruction given through those called to lead his church and kingdom on the earth—modern-day apostles and prophets (see D&C 68:1–4). And what he *will yet reveal* includes what he will in the future make known through his chosen leaders.

Other Scripture

The Bible is one of the books within the LDS standard works, and thus doctrines and practices of the Latter-day Saints are in harmony with the Bible. There are times, of course, when latter-day revelation provides clarification or enhancement of the intended meaning in the Bible. But adding to the canon is not the same as rejecting the canon. Supplementation is not the same as contradiction. All the prophets, and the Savior himself, brought new light and knowledge to the world; in many cases, new scripture came as a result of their ministries. That new scripture did not invalidate what went before, nor did it close the door to subsequent revelation.

Belief in other scriptures, including modern-day revelations, does not undermine Latter-day Saint belief in the Bible. Just as Isaiah could add his prophecies to join the books of Moses, and just as Peter's letters complement the writings of Paul, Joseph Smith could add his scriptural voice to that of Elijah, Jeremiah, and John—in each case without undermining faith in the previous scripture.

Likewise, belief that the Book of Mormon also contains the word of God does not diminish Latter-day Saint belief in doctrines found in the Bible. Latter-day Saints believe that both books of scripture go hand in hand, in every way possible. They read Ezekiel 37:15–17 as a biblical prophecy declaring that two holy books would become one in the hands of the righteous in the latter days. The words of LDS Church president Heber J. Grant illustrate the LDS perspective on the Bible: “All my life I have been finding additional evidences that the Bible is the Book of books, and that the Book of Mormon is the greatest witness for the truth of the Bible that has ever been published.”⁷

Latter-day Saints agree that the biblical canon is closed—that no new books should become part of the Bible. This does not mean, however, that all scripture is closed or that God, who opens and closes the heavens, cannot and will not continue to reveal his will.

Why More Scripture?

There are many needs for revelation beyond the Bible. For one thing, many facts remain unreported in the New Testament. For example, on the Mount of Transfiguration and for forty days after his resurrection, Jesus instructed his apostles (see Matthew 17:1–13; Acts 1:1–3). Although the Bible is silent on what happened during these events, Latter-day Saint revelations disclose that Jesus taught his apostles important principles, gave them priesthood authority, and endowed them with spiritual gifts on these occasions. Likewise, the Gospel of John reports that Jesus told the Jews that he had “other sheep” besides them and that these others would also “hear” his voice (see John 10:16). The Book of Mormon reveals how these words of Jesus were literally fulfilled (see 3 Nephi 15:11–24; 16:1–3).

Furthermore, Latter-day revelation provides answers to many practical and doctrinal questions that arise out of the biblical text. From the Bible, many views can be entertained concerning such matters as the nature of God, the purposes of life, the rules of marriage and divorce, and the possibilities for repentance and salvation after death. Complete answers to questions like these are not always found in the Bible alone. Without further revelation, answers to these and similar questions that have been asked over the years remain unsatisfactory.

In addition, Latter-day Saints can see that history has not always been kind to the records of Christianity. Certain plain and precious things have been lost. For example, the apostle Paul wrote other letters that no longer exist (see 1 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 3:3), and it is widely believed that Matthew, Mark, and Luke may have relied on an earlier, now missing documentary source as they wrote their Gospels. Latter-day Saints assume that these lost records would be of great value to all Christians. These losses can be attributed, at least in part, to the problems of apostasy and division described in the New Testament itself (see Acts 20:29; 1 Corinthians 11:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:3). Latter-day Saints believe that at least some of these losses have been compensated for by the word of God contained in scriptures brought forth in these latter days.

In the Book of Mormon, to the people known as the Nephites, the Lord said:

And because my words shall hiss forth—many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. . . .

Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. . . .

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and

in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? . . . And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. (2 Nephi 29:3, 6, 7–9)

Continual Revelation

The need for continual revelation in our day was taught by a former president of the LDS Church, John Taylor:

We require a living tree—a living fountain—living intelligence, proceeding from the living priesthood in heaven, through the living priesthood on earth. . . . And from the time that Adam first received a communication from God, to the time that John, on the Isle of Patmos, received his communication, or Joseph Smith had the heavens opened to him, it always required new revelations, adapted to the peculiar circumstances in which the churches or individuals were placed. Adam’s revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah’s revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. These all had revelations for themselves, and so had Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, and Joseph. And so must we, or we shall make a shipwreck.⁸

Those who appeal to Revelation 22:18–19 as evidence that there is to be no revelation beyond the Bible should keep in mind that those verses could not have been meant to refer to the Bible itself, because the Bible as we have it today was not yet compiled when John the Revelator wrote those words. Instead, John was proclaiming the eternal principle that no uninspired mortal is to “add unto” or “take away from” revelations from God; such revelations are to be accepted and obeyed as given. This same principle is taught in Deuteronomy 4:2, 3 Nephi 11:40, and Doctrine and Covenants 20:35.

God loves all his children and does not leave them without guidance. In addition to the official, canonized revelations we know as scripture, Latter-day Saints believe that God has made available to every individual a means by which his will can be known. There is a “power of God” called the “light of Christ” that “proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space” (D&C 88:7, 12, 13). This power “giveth light to every man that cometh into the world” and “enlighteneth every man . . . that hearkeneth” to it (D&C 84:46). The promise is that anyone who will listen to and obey the promptings of this power will be brought unto God and eventually led to the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (see D&C 84:47–48; Moroni 7:16–20). In addition, those who repent and are baptized are given an additional gift—the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift can bring personal revelation as well as all the other wonderful gifts of the Spirit spoken of in the scriptures.

Notes

5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 56.

6. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

7. *Improvement Era* 39 (November 1936): 660; see Victor L. Ludlow, "Bible," and Paul Hedengren, "Bible: LDS Beliefs in the Bible," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:104–8.

8. *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor*, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 34.