Are the Scriptures Perfect?

The standard works of the Church are the records we use to judge the truth of all mankind’s teachings, including the leaders of the Church. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 3:202-204; Harold B. Lee, “The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, & Revelator,” *Charge to Religious Educators* (pre-1982 edition), p. 111; Bruce R. McConkie, “Standard Works,” *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 765.) Yet the Brethren have indicated that the standard works are in themselves not perfect. Living prophets, seers, and revelators are more important to us than the standard works, yet the living prophets, seers, and revelators instruct us to judge what they say by the standard works. This collection of excerpts should assist in bringing understanding to the principles involved. See Chapter 4 in the CES *Teachings of the Living Prophets* manual (1982) for Religion 333 for further information.

Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.608 PROPHETS. With all their inspiration and greatness, prophets are yet mortal men with imperfections common to mankind in general. They have their opinions and prejudices and are left to work out their own problems without inspiration in many instances. Joseph Smith recorded that he “visited with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that ‘a prophet is always a prophet’; but I told them that a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such.” (*Teachings*, p. 278.) Thus the opinions and views even of prophets may contain error unless those opinions and views are inspired by the Spirit. Inspired statements are scripture and should be accepted as such. (D&C. 68:4.)

Joseph Smith (The Papers of Joseph Smith, ed. Dean C. Jessee [1989] 1:372). Many important points, touching the salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.

Joseph Smith (The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith, ed. Andrew F. Ehat & Lyndon W. Cook [1980], 211; spelling and capitalization modernized). [There are] ... many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelation of the Holy Ghost to me. Joseph Smith (*Ibid.*, 256). [I believe in the Bible] as it ought to be, as it came from the pen of the original writers.

Joseph Smith (History of the Church, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. 1957, 6:57). ... ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing or corrupt priests have committed many errors.

Joseph Smith, (Words of Joseph Smith, 191). God may correct the scripture by me if he choose.

Joseph Smith, (Words of Joseph Smith, 345). I have the oldest book in the world and the Holy Ghost. I thank God for the old book, but more for the Holy Ghost.

George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*, comp. Jerreld L. Newquist (SLC: Deseret Book Company, 1974), 1:323-324. SCRIPTURES AN INSUFFICIENT GUIDE. As Latter-day Saints, we need constantly the guidance of Jehovah. We have the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; but all these books, without the living oracles and a constant stream of revelation from the Lord, would not lead any people into the Celestial Kingdom of God. This may seem a strange declaration to make, but strange as it may sound, it is nevertheless true.

Of course, these records are all of infinite value. They cannot be too highly prized, nor can they be too closely studied. But in and of themselves, with all the light that they give, they are insufficient to guide the children of men and to lead them into the presence of God. To be thus led requires a living Priesthood and constant revelation from God to the people according to the circumstances in which they may be placed.

MANY REVELATIONS NOT SUITTED TO PRESENT CONDITIONS. A great many people fall into error very frequently by quoting and seeking to apply to present conditions revelations which were given to the Church in early days and which were especially adapted to the circumstances then existing. Of course, it is appropriate to quote from the revelations containing principle; but in many instances the revelations that are contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants are not, I may say—and I say it with some degree of care—suited to the circumstances and conditions in which we are placed. They were given to the Church at a time when just such revelations were required. Nor must we fall into the idea that the world has adopted, that the Bible is all that is necessary for man’s salvation.

Docs: Handouts: “Scriptures Perfect No” 2-Jul-10  Page 1 of 5
Times and Seasons, Vol.2, p.212; also published earlier in Messenger and Advocate (Nov 1834) Oliver Cowdery “Letter II,” p. 32. When looking over the sacred scriptures, we seem to forget that they were given through men of imperfections, and subject to passions. It is a general belief that the ancient prophets were perfect—that no stain, or blemish ever appeared upon their characters while on earth, to be brought forward by the opposer as an excuse for not believing. The same is said of the apostles; but James said that Elias (Elijah) was a man subject to like passions as themselves, and yet he had that power with God that in answer to his prayer it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and a half.

Evening and Morning Star (Jul 1833) William Phelps “Errors of the Bible,” p. 106. FALSIFICATION OF THE SCRIPUTURES. A reverend gentleman in England, named Curtis, has recently made some appalling disclosures in relation to the careless and iniquitous manner in which the University editions of the Holy Bible—published by the King’s Printer, are put forth to the world. Mr. Curtis has exposed some enormous errors, and variations from the original text, as given in King James time. Six hundred mistakes have been found in one book, & eight hundred in another; many of them most important, and all of them inexcusable. Some of the grosser ones, which would seem to have been concerted and intentional, have been rife for forty years. The true sense of Holy Writ, it is contended, has been greatly warped by these errors; and measures are in train to have them rectified, in all future editions of the Scriptures published in England. It is stated that the churches in America have long since adopted the edition in question, as a standard; -- if so, it is of the last importance, we should conceive to import one of the corrected copies, now preparing, at the earliest period. The writer remarks, with much sorrowful feeling, that such perversion of the Sacred Word has given rise to more scoffers and infidels, than could have been otherwise produced by any one cause. It is announced that Dr. Noah Webster, the lexicographer, is engaged in preparing for publication an edition of the Bible, in the common version, but with amendments of the language, chiefly in the following particulars—

1. The correction of errors in Grammar. 2. The omission of obsolete words and phrases, and the substitution of equivalent terms now in use. 3. The use of euphemisms for such indelicate words and phrases as are most offensive, and which cannot be uttered without pain both to the reader and hearer.

REMARKS ON THE ABOVE.—As to the errors in the bible, any man possessed of common understanding, knows, that both the old and new testaments are filled with errors, obscurities, italics and contradictions, which must be the work of men. As the church of Christ will soon have the scriptures, in their original purity, it may not be amiss for us to show a few of the gross errors, or, as they might be termed, contradictions.

It is said in the first chapter and 30th verse of Genesis, in our present King James’ translation, That to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every GREEN herb for meat.

But the Lord said thus: To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein I grant life, there shall be given every CLEAN herb for meat. It needs but little wisdom to discern the difference between green and clean. If the beasts and fowls were to eat of EVERY GREEN HERB, they would be very apt to eat some poison ones.

Again: In the king’s translation, in the sixth chapter and 6th verse of Genesis, it is said that the Lord repented: It is thus written: And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

The Lord never said that he repented as it is thus recorded in the present English bible: But it is thus: [Moses 8:25] And it repented Noah, and his heart was pained, that the Lord had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

Let one more sentence suffice for the present: King James translators made Paul say, in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, [Heb. 11:1] Now faith is the SUBSTANCE of things hoped for: But Paul said, [Heb. 11:1, see JST] Now faith is the ASSURANCE of things hoped for.

As to a new translation, by Dr. Webster, we think he is already superseded in one which follows; yea, with all the euphemisms he could collect from his Quarto dictionary, he could not destroy the sublimity of the scripture faster than Dr. Dickinson has. [From the Louisville Herald.]
NEW TRANSLATION OF THE TESTAMENT. A new translation of the Testament has been recently published by the Rev. Rodolphus Dickinson, a Presbyter of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, and Rector of St. Paul’s Parish, Pendleton District, S. Carolina. The avowed object of this translation, is “to furnish a work better adapted than the old translation to the advanced state of literature and refinement, and correct the errors in grammar and rhetoric, and the harsh and indecent expressions which are dispersed through the common version.” As a specimen of his improvement, we copy the following passages from the common version, and the improved translation of Mr. Dickinson:

COMMON VERSION [King James Version].

John 3:16. “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into this mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered and said, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”

NEW VERSION.

“Moreover, there was a Pharisee, whose name was Nicodemus, a senator of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Teacher, we know that thou art an instructor emanated from God; for no one can achieve these miracles which thou performest, unless God be with him. Jesus answered and said to him, Indeed, I assure you, that except a man be reproduced, he can not realize the reign of God. Nicodemus saith to him, how can a man be produced when he is mature? Can he again pass into a state of embryo, and be produced? Jesus replied, I most assuredly declare to you, that unless a man be produced of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter the kingdom of God. That which is produced from the body, is natural life, and that which is produced from the Spirit is spiritual life.”

Amos said, [Amos 8:11-12] Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and from to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.

With the old copy full of errors; with Dickinson’s and Webster’s polite translation, with Campbell’s improved, and many more from different persuasions, how will a person of common understanding know which is right without the gift of the Holy Spirit? Well might Amos prophesy of a famine to hear the words of the Lord, for it will be even so with thousands of our fellow-men.

It must be admitted by all who have any knowledge of the general state of society, at the present time, that it is very corrupt; and those who have a knowledge of things as they really are, and as they really will be, know that it does and will grow worse from year to year, and yet the bible, instead of the hearts of men, must be PURIFIED!

Now just at the close of this world, or more properly at the close of this wicked generation, the bible, after a period of hundreds of years, is found to be faulty and indecent. It has been translated and sent to almost all nations, and now, the whole work is full of errors, and unchaste expressions! Well may the saints of Christ’s kingdom, exclaim, like the Roman orator, “O the degeneracy of the times! O the corruptness of the manners!”

What better testimony needs the disciple of the humble Jesus, that satan rules in the same places, where the daughters of the Mother of abominations, are corrupting nations and holding vile commerce with the sons of men?

What a blessing, that the Lord will bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit, upon the meek and humble, whereby they can know of a surety, his words from the words of men! O that men would learn wisdom, and know that a house divided against itself can not stand! Verily, all flesh, as before the flood, has corrupted itself before the Lord. Iniquity abounds, and the love of men waxes cold. But the elect can not be deceived, for Israel knows the voice of God, and will obey it.

The Book of Mormon: The Most Correct, But Perfect?

Admission of possible error:

1. Title page of the Book of Mormon, end of the last paragraph.
History of the Church 4:494. “Saturday, 15 [January 1842] I commenced reading the Book of Mormon, at page 54, American stereotype edition (the previous pages having been corrected), for the purpose of correcting the stereotype plates of some errors which escaped notice in the first edition.”

History of the Church 4:495. “After transacting a variety of business, sleeping an hour from bodily infirmities, I read for correction in the Book of Mormon, and debated in the evening with the major [JC Bennett] concerning the Lamanites and Negroes.”

See Paul R. Chessman, The Keystone of Mormonism, pp. 92 ff., for further information regarding corrections that still could be made in the Book of Mormon (prior to the current edition—and some corrections may yet need to be made in the current edition, e.g., moving the closing parenthesis in Moroni 3:3).

Joseph Fielding McConkie, Seeking the Spirit, p. 37. “Brigham Young opined that if the Book of Mormon were to be ‘rewritten, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation.’” [See Journal of Discourses 9:311.]

Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 40. “... 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, groveling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections. He has to speak to us in a manner to meet the extent of our capacities ...”

Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses 20:70-71. Here, then, were greater things made manifest than those in the Book of Mormon, or those in the Bible. Who so receives this record and shall not condemn it because of imperfections, the same shall know of greater things. “But,” says one, “what imperfections could there be in the writings of an inspired man?”

I will tell you. Imperfections may creep in through the printing press, unless there was some expert person to examine the printing of the Book. There might be imperfections creep in through the persons that recorded these things Moroni and the various prophets that preceded him who wrote upon the plates.

Imperfections might occur through the omission of some words....

Probably the individual in reading the first edition of the Book of Mormon from the hands of the printer, knew of no error so far as the printing was concerned. But when we came to examine the first edition, and even all the editions, we found some few little imperfections that were introduced chiefly [not solely] of a typographical nature. Well, those who will not condemn the work of God because of such little things, have the promise that they shall know of greater things than these.”

George Q. Cannon, Life of Joseph Smith, page 142 (old edition) [see also B. H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church 1:247- 248]. “We have heard President Brigham Young state that the Prophet, before his death, had spoken to him about going through the translation of the scriptures again and perfecting it upon points of doctrine which the Lord had restrained him from giving in plainness and fulness at the time of which we write.”

Bruce R. McConkie, “The Bible - A Sealed Book,” (BYU, CES publication, 1984, p. 5). The Joseph Smith Translation, or Inspired Version, is a thousand times over the best Bible now existing on earth. It contains all that the King James Version does, plus pages of additions and corrections and an occasional deletion. It was made by the spirit of revelation, and the changes and additions are the equivalent of the revealed word in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

... the Sermon on the Mount in the Book of Mormon preserves, with a few improvements, the language of the King James Version of the Bible. But later, the Joseph Smith Translation renders much of this sermon in a way that excels even the Book of Mormon.

(From the N.Y. Prophet).

REGULATIONS FOR THE PUBLISHING DEPARTMENT OF THE LATTER - DAY SAINTS IN THE EAST

[Times and Seasons, Vol.6, p. 778.] (Dear Brethren): -- Are you not all aware that very many, if not all, of our men, women and children are turning authors, and publishing works purporting to be illustrative of the doctrine of the saints. Some of them are badly written, and some of them are mixed with error, and very many of them which are true and useful are borrowed, in part or in full, from our standard works which are already extant, and therefore, these new vamped pieces or tracts...
are not particularly needed; besides, there is another consideration—vast sums are expended by men who have but little experience in publishing, and perhaps pay double for the paper and printing, and all this into the hands of those who feel no interest in our cause.

In this way thousands of dollars are drawn from the saints and from the elders, while the temple cause is neglected. All these things are out of order and must come to an end; or also those men who have experience, and whose business it is to write and publish the truth; will have to cease and have no more to do with publishing, for they, and the others too, cannot find support in the business so as to make the works pay for themselves.

We have now three departments, duly appointed by the presidency of the church, viz: the Nauvoo office, under the management of Mr. J. Taylor, the English department, under Brother W. Woodruff, and the New York publishing department, now committed to my charge.

These three great emporiums of light, truth, and news, are quite sufficient until the work enlarges and other similar establishments are appointed by the Twelve.

The church, therefore, is hereby instructed not to patronize, purchase, or support any publication pertaining to our cause, except they emanate from one of these three offices, and under the sanction and authority of those who are appointed to manage this matter.

Let the books, tracts, periodicals, pamphlets, &c. of Mr. B. Winchester and others no longer be patronized by the saints. Let the 'Times and Seasons,' 'Neighbor,' 'Millennial Star,' and 'Prophet' be well supported, together with the standard Hymn Book, Book of Mormon, and such other works as are, or may be, published by authority as approved standards; and this will be all the church is able to do at present. Considering the tithings for the temples and the duties of charity and hospitality which are required of them.

The public are also cautioned that no works will be considered as a standard by the saints concerning their principles except they are published by the authorities above named.

P. P. PRATT.

New York, Jan. 1st, 1845. We shall second the "regulations" of Elder Pratt: there is nothing like order in the kingdom of God.