

Is the Bible Reliable?

The *real* Bible would condemn everything Joseph Smith was planning. Knowing this, Smith performed a preemptive strike by first smearing the Bible itself. By convincing his followers that the Bible itself was corrupt and unreliable, Joseph was free to come up with a variety of competing scriptures of his own, which seriously contradict the Bible and establish his own doctrine and theology.

This “low view” of the Bible is aptly expressed in this 1833 excerpt from the church’s official paper.

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... (*“Errors of the Bible,”* Evening and Morning Star, vol. 2, no. 14., [Independence, Missouri: July 1833], p. 106)

This unthinkable sentiment was fostered by statements Smith had already made in his 1830 Book of Mormon.

And the angel of the Lord said unto me, Thou hast beheld that the book [Bible] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the plainness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God: Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God: And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the foundation of a *great and abominable church*, which is most abominable above all other churches; For behold, *they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; And also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.* (1 Nephi 3:165–169)

Joseph Smith taught that the Bible was systematically altered by “a great and abominable church,” and was no longer reliable, being “filled with errors, obscurities, italics and contradictions.”

Smith’s accusations imply that the Biblical text was tightly controlled by an evil, highly centralized church leadership which mandated substantial alterations. This theory, however, amounts to nothing more than naïve superstition, and bears no resemblance at all to real history.

In reality, the Bible is the most widely attested book in the history of the world. There are over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament alone (24,000 if you include fragments). These manuscripts blanketed the entire Mediterranean world, clustered around the several major centers of Christian influence, some of the manuscripts dating to the second century. We would ordinarily expect to find wide-ranging discrepancies and variances among documents as old as the thousands of New Testament manuscripts. *But this is not the case at all.* According to Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce, “The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice.”

The sheer volume and age of manuscript evidence eliminates any possibility of systematic corruption. It would have been virtually impossible to systematically alter 5,000 manuscripts flung across the entire Mediterranean world. It is logistically ludicrous. On the contrary, the stunning agreement of these ancient manuscripts demonstrates that care was taken to faithfully copy the documents. This strong desire to have faithful and accurate copies kept textual variances to a minimum. The large

number of ancient manuscripts and their close agreement is probably the strongest argument in support of the reliability of the Bible. Joseph Smith's accusation that the Bible was systematically altered flies in the face of real, documented history; it simply doesn't make any logical sense whatsoever.

History also tells us that there were several centers of church influence — which continues to this very day! Students of church history also know that there was a certain level of tension among these centers. Yet despite this tension, their manuscript families retained remarkable agreement. The fact that there were several major centers of church influence absolutely rules out centralized control over the text. Church history is careful to tell about all kinds of controversies which troubled these early centers of Christianity. It's silly to think that these diverse leaders would — or could — conspire together to systematically alter all of their manuscripts. Once again, Joseph Smith's assumptions are embarrassingly naïve.

It is clear that Joseph Smith would not allow himself to be judged *by* the Bible. Quite the contrary, he himself would stand in judgment *upon* the Bible. And so it is today with the followers of Joseph Smith. Whether knowingly or ignorantly, they disparage the Bible as an inferior document in favor of Joseph Smith's own "revelations" which they feel are far superior. This rejection of Biblical authority is a major part of their dilemma, and stops them from hearing and understanding the real Jesus and the real gospel. 🙏

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