

Mormonism and the Bible's Missing Books



Reachout Subject Guide

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The Mormon Church claims to have identified at least twenty books they think missing from the Bible. These are considered serious omissions and, listing these missing books in his seminal work *The Articles of Faith*, Mormon apostle James Talmage wrote:

“Those who oppose the doctrine of continual revelation between God and His Church, on the ground that the Bible is complete as a collection of sacred scriptures, and that alleged revelation not found therein must therefore be spurious, may profitably take note of the many books not included in the Bible, yet mentioned therein, generally in such a way as to leave no doubt that they were once regarded as authentic.” (Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 1960 ed.p.501)

Here is the list from Talmage's book:

1. The Book of the Covenant cited in Exodus 24:4-7
2. The Book of the Wars of the LORD cited in Numbers 21:14
3. The Book of Jasher cited in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18
4. The Book of Statutes cited in 1 Samuel 10:25
5. The Book of the Acts of Solomon cited in 1 Kings 11:41
6. The Books of Nathan and Gad cited in 1 Chronicles 29:29 and 2 Chronicles 9:29
7. The prophecy of Ahijah and the visions of Iddo cited in 2 Chronicles 9:29
8. The Book of Shemaiah cited in 2 Chronicles 12:15

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9. The Book of Jehu cited in 2 Chronicles 20:34
10. The Acts of Uzziah written by Isaiah cited in 2 Chronicles 26:22
11. The Saying of the Seers cited in 2 Chronicles 33:19
12. The missing letters of Paul cited in 1 Cor.5:9; Eph.3:3-4; Col.4:16
13. The missing letter of Jude cited Jude 3
14. The Prophecies of Enoch cited in Jude 14
15. The missing text quoted in Mt.2:23
16. A declaration of belief cited in Luke 1:1

Joseph Smith published his own Bible, *"an inspired revision of the Authorized Version."* (Title page, *The Holy Scriptures, Inspired Version*, Pub. Herald House) He was "commanded" in 1830 to produce a new version of the Scriptures *"even as they are in mine [God's] own bosom, to the salvation of mine elect"* (Doctrine and Covenants 35:20 [34:5 in RLDS version], December 1830). There is a distinct contrast between the incomplete, "as far as it is translated correctly" Bible and Mormon Scripture. The marks of this new dispensation are to be comprehensiveness and trustworthiness; fully the word of God as it is in the bosom of God.

The early Mormons were preoccupied with record keeping, from the 26 volume Journal of Discourses recording the sermons of Brigham Young and others to the personal journals diligently kept and still kept by Mormons today. The aim is a comprehensive and authoritative accounts of God's dealings with Mormons. If the absence of these books is serious enough then to cause Mormons to doubt the reliability of the Bible their absence is serious indeed. This makes their absence from the so-called Inspired Translation all the more puzzling.

How went the Wars of the Lord? What were the Acts of Solomon, or Uzziah? What did the Seers say and Ahijah prophesy? What did Iddo see in vision? What were the statutes that ruled the conduct of kings? We are not to know since the books whose absence Mormons insist fatally compromises our Bible are as absent from Mormon Scripture.

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Indeed, Joseph Smith, far from expanding the biblical record by restoring lost books, is one book short because he deleted the Song of Solomon, reducing our 66 books to 65 where he might have had 86! “Missing” books serve to discredit our Bible while failure to restore them conveniently removes any responsibility to account for them.

Define “Missing”

We were having a dinner party, my wife and I. Six guests were invited. Perhaps you know them: Bob and Carol, Ted and Alice and Dick and Dora. A splendid time was had by all, spoiled only by the absence of Bob, who was unwell and couldn't make it. During the evening someone asked where Dick and Dora were. I explained that they were abroad and so hadn't been invited. But I would be sure to include them another time.

You see, Bob was missing in the sense that he was meant to be there but was absent, while Dick and Dora were missing in the sense that they were not meant to be there.

Something is only missing in the way Mormons mean it if it is meant to be there in the first place. Just because something is mentioned in the Bible doesn't mean it is intended that it should be included in the Bible. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were included according to certain sound criteria while, based on those same criteria, other gospels were not. Mormons are doing is complaining that certain books didn't get invited to the party. But then neither have they been invited to the Mormon party!

Define Scripture

This idea of ongoing revelation and an exhaustive and comprehensive record raises a very important question; what exactly is Scripture?

Is the Bible intended to be an *exhaustive open record* to which further revelation is endlessly added? Or is it a closed canon that is nevertheless sufficient for life and godliness? Are we spiritually impoverished because we have no record of Jesus' childhood, or his life from the age of twelve until he was 30 years old? Or does the Bible give us only those things relevant to our salvation and our saved lives? The Bible favours the latter:

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"Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Jn.21:25 ESV)

The notion of an exhaustive account of God's dealings with man is problematic since the world would not be able to contain nor humanity be able to make use of such a record.

"As for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." 2 Tim.3:14-16 ESV)

Paul makes clear in his letter to Timothy that Scripture has the purpose of making people *"wise for salvation through faith in Christ...competent, equipped for every good work."* The question is not whether we have an open canon but of whether we are wise for salvation and competent, equipped for every good work because of the canon we have.

It doesn't take an encyclopaedic knowledge, just knowledge of Christ, to be saved, and an understanding of what we are to be in Christ to be equipped for every good work.

Timothy was wise for salvation because he knew from childhood the sacred writings (Old Testament) that pointed to Christ and knew the Christ to whom those Scriptures pointed.

He was equipped for every good work because he had the example of Paul to follow (2 Tim.3:10). We, too, have that example in the Bible that has been wonderfully preserved for us.

The 'Do Not Add' Verses

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." (Rev.22:18-19 ESV)

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Mormons are always quick to point out that this dread warning applies only to the Book of Revelation and not the whole Bible; they miss the point. Whether we consider this or similar warnings in Deut.4:2 and Deut.12:32, the offence is not in multiplying books but in adding to the established, sufficient word. We are not limiting God in having a closed canon but obeying God in recognising his purpose in having a sufficient message.

Does God speak today? Of course he does! We follow prophets who lead us, as they led Timothy, to being wise for salvation. We follow, as did Timothy, the examples of New Testament leaders like Paul, growing in competence, increasingly *"equipped for every good work."*

The Bible does speak today (Heb.4:12), the Spirit opens our understanding (Jn.16:13), and we, devoting ourselves to the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42-44), walk in his grace, living our faith before a watching world, and looking forward to that day when he will come for his own (Rev.22:20; 1 Cor.16:22)

What is Meant by 'Books'

The picture conjured in people's minds by "books" is of sizeable volumes, something the size of one of the Major Prophets or a gospel. When Mormonism produces additional and sizeable "books of scripture," such as the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, the inference that "books" means substantial volumes containing many key lost doctrines is reinforced. When twenty such missing books are identified it is an alarming revelation and feeds the popular idea among Mormons that the Bible is unreliable and incomplete. But when the Bible talks about "books" it is usually translating a word such as the Hebrew *sepher* or the Greek *biblia* which translate "writings" and can mean anything from a letter (Jude is just 1 chapter containing 25 verses), to a legal document (the "book" in 1 Samuel 10:25 is an example), to a lengthy chronicle (Chronicles and Kings). It is important then to not take too literally in the modern sense the word "books."

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We have already said that just because a book is mentioned in the Bible doesn't mean it was intended that it should be in the Bible. Of the twenty books listed by Mormons some certainly are mentioned but not included in Scripture while others are, curiously, included in the "missing" list - even though they are found in the Bible, or even don't exist at all.

Reporting, Recording, and Redacting – Six Source Books

The popular Mormon picture of prophets and of Scripture is Joseph Smith bent over his gold plates dictating to a scribe an "inspired" translation of the Book of Mormon. Of Smith getting messages directly from God, such as are found in the Doctrine and Covenants. Messages meant to read like the "Thus saith the LORD" sections of Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. When Mormons talk about the "fullness of the gospel" they have in mind not just a sufficient for salvation message, but an exhaustive record of revelation issued straight from the throne room of the Almighty untouched by profane hands.

God does indeed speak through prophets in the Bible, but much of the Bible is historical narrative, wisdom literature, songs and poetry, proverbs, laws and statutes, etc. the stuff of humanity. Scripture is not simply dictated by God. He works through men in the familiar process of transmitting oral tradition, making written chronicles - and redaction, or editing. This makes it no less the Word of God but it helps explain that many "books" are not so much lost as used as sources in the editing and transmission of works that *are* in the Bible. Six so-called "missing books" fall into this category of sources for the records we do have in the Bible. These six so-called "missing books" Nathan and Gad, Shemaiah, Jehu, Uzziah, and the Seers all relate to the monarchic period in Israel.

"The authors of Kings specifically claim to have access to written sources of information about the monarchic period, both for Israel and for Judah." (Study Note to 1 Kings 14:19, ESV Study Bible, 2008)

This was a period when literacy was widespread in and around Palestine and writing was employed in legal, business, literary and religious texts. In the period from 1200 BC to the fall of Judah in 587-586 writing has been described as pervasive.

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The picture we have is of writers and Chroniclers drawing on a vast store of royal archives, temple libraries and archives, as well as foreign annals and inscriptions to produce what has been carefully passed down to us. The writings of Nathan and Gad, of Shemaiah and Jehu, Isaiah's record of Uzziah and the Chronicles of the Seers were all used to supplement existing material in telling the story of Israel and Judah.

The period covered by **Nathan and Gad** is covered in Samuel. Chronicles covers the same period as Kings, and the Chroniclers' use of **Shemaiah and Iddo**, cited in 2 Chronicles 12:15, explains how they were able to supplement the material in Kings. The same might be said of **Jehu**, a source cited in 2 Chronicles 20:34, **Uzziah** cited in 2 Chronicles 26:22 and the **Chronicles of the Seers** cited in 2 Chronicles 33:19. This last expands on 2 Kings 21:17-18 in emphasising Manasseh's prayer and humble repentance as key to his reign.

The "missing books" were available to and drawn on by the Chroniclers whom God led to write as they did, and whose writings cover the same periods and events as contained in those "missing" documents, and therefore we can be confident that nothing is missing in the sense that it should have been there in the first place.

We have looked at six books absent from our Bibles that are identified as sources for the books we do have. Here are five books genuinely absent from the Bible but perhaps for good reason.

Old Testament

The Book of The Wars of The LORD, mentioned in Numbers 21:14, is thought to be a collection of victory songs, possibly a continuation of what was begun in Exodus 17:14 where a memorial was begun of the defeat of the Amalekites. It is quoted in Numbers because it is relevant to the events and the geography at that part of the story.

The Book of Jashar, mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18, is similarly thought to be poems or songs relating the deeds of heroes. Jashar may be related to the Hebrew words "sing" or "upright". Both Jashar and the Wars of The LORD are cited when a portion of their content relates to the part of the narrative in which they are cited.

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What is important here is the narrative, not the sources. Their relevance is to the story and not necessarily to the whole history of salvation (Tim.3:14-16) which would explain their absence from the Bible.

As to **the Acts of Solomon**, the reign and life of Solomon is described in 1 Kings chapters 1-11, but the Acts of Solomon, mentioned in 1 Kings 11:41, is unknown to us and neither is anything known about it.

But then much of the literary output of Solomon is unavailable to us today including most of *“three thousand proverbs and his songs [which] numbered a thousand and five.”* He is also reported to have *“described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.”* (1 Kings 4:32-33)

As we have discovered, not everything mentioned in the Bible is intended to be in the Bible. Some things are clearly not going to serve any practical purpose to us some three thousand years later and, given this list, aren't you glad?

New Testament

Mormons name seven missing New Testament records, three from Paul, two from Jude, a missing text quoted in Matthew and a “declaration of belief” alluded to in Luke's gospel. Only two from the seven can be said to be “missing”, both from Paul.

In 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul refers to an earlier letter in which he instructed Christians in Corinth to *“not to associate with sexually immoral people.”* In the letter we do have he goes on to expand on that instruction, qualifying his remarks and, no doubt, answering questions they raised on the subject. We know what Paul wrote about in that first letter insofar as he refers to issues of immorality and there is no reason to suspect that the missing letter covered ground essential to our understanding not covered in the two letters we have or in other New Testament texts.

In **Colossians 4:16** he refers to *“the letter from Laodicea.”* Letters of this kind were passed around the churches and, although we don't have this letter, there is no reason to think it covered material not covered in other “round-robin” letters such as Ephesians.

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It will not do to infer that the Bible is inadequate just because you identify writings that aren't contained within its pages. Talmage writes of, *"Those who oppose the doctrine of continual revelation between God and His Church, on the ground that the Bible is complete as a collection of sacred scriptures..."*

That "complete" is misleading in implying an unexpurgated text while the Christian Church speaks of a complete and closed canon in terms of a sufficient message. The difference is profound and important. Neither will it do to insist that writings are missing when, in fact, they are not missing, and indeed in some cases they are non-existent. So where are the "missing books" that aren't really missing at all?

Old Testament

The Book of the Covenant cited in Ex.24:4-7 is the earliest "missing book"; except it isn't missing. It is a record of the covenant between God and Israel. In this text the covenant is read out, *"And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.'"* (Ex.24:3) What is the covenant between God and Israel and where do we find the terms of the covenant? The covenant is initiated by God in these words: *"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* (Ex.19:4-6)

The Book of the Covenant is the Ten Commandments (Ex.20:1-21) and the commands and rules that follow (Ex.20:22-23:33). It describes how a covenant people live towards their God in light of what he has done in saving them.

The Book of Statutes cited in 1 Sam.10:25 is another form of covenant, this time between Israel and Israel's king. It is a legal agreement between people and king setting out how the king would conduct himself, describing the duties and prerogatives of the king. This rule was laid up before the LORD as had been the Book of the Covenant. These rules are described by God through his prophet in Deut.17:14-20 in anticipation of the people rejecting God and demanding an earthly king "like other nations."

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The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite cited in 2 Chr.9:29. The account of Ahijah is found in 1 Kings 11:29-40 where he prophesied taking the kingdom from Solomon, giving ten tribes to Jeroboam, but retaining Jerusalem for the sake of David.

The Visions of Iddo the seer cited in 2 Chr.9:29. Iddo is traditionally identified with the unknown Prophet, "the man of God", in 1 Kings 13. As stated in 2 Chr., the vision of this man of God from Judah concerned Jeroboam.

New Testament

The "missing text" referenced in **Mt.2:23** isn't missing at all. It is not a reference to a particular Old Testament prophecy but clearly states, *"And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the **prophets** might be fulfilled: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"* It is *prophets* plural not prophet singular. The phrase *"He shall be called a Nazarene"* is not simply a reference to his place of origin but a term of derision, as in Nathaniel's dismissive *"can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* (Jn.1:46 cf Jn.1:41; Jn.1:52)

"To be called a Nazarene, was to be called a despicable man, a man from whom no good was to be expected, and to whom no respect was to be paid. The devil first fastened this name upon Christ, to render him mean, and prejudice people against him, and it stuck as a nickname to him and his followers." (Matthew Henry)

Like Nazareth he will be despised (Is. 49:7; Is.53:3)

Paul's *"revelation, as I have written briefly"* in **Eph.3:3-4** is not a reference to a lost writing but to a passage earlier in the same Ephesian letter (Eph.1:9; Eph.1:17). Having alluded to this revelation earlier in his letter he proceeds to elaborate on it from chapter 3 verse 6 *"This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel..."*

The so-called "Declaration of Belief" Mormons insist is referenced in **Lk.1:1** is Luke's allusion to other writings *"undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us...concerning the things you have been taught."* (Lk.1:1-4)

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These other writings we have in the other gospels and other writings of the New Testament. There may well have been still other writings covering the same ground, eyewitness reports etc. but there is no reason at all to believe that we don't have all we need to exercise saving faith. We come back to the question of whether the Bible is intended to be complete in the sense of an exhaustive account or complete in the sense of a sufficient account.

Jude 3 reads *"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."* Mormons read into this a "missing letter" but Jude's *"was very eager..."* and *"I found it necessary..."* is not a reference to a previous letter but to a previous intent aborted by pressing circumstances. It was in this letter that he *"was very eager to write to you about our common faith"*, and it was in this present letter that he had to change his mind and *"found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith."*

Jude set out to rejoice with the saints of God but found he instead had to warn the saints that *"certain people have crept in unnoticed...ungodly people..."* It is this letter that carries that warning, a description of false teachers and their false teachings and a description of their motives methods and certain end, and a clear teaching on how to deal with them.

In Jude 14 there is a quote from **Enoch** 1:9 concerning the Second Advent and the judgement of the wicked. 1 Peter 3:19-20, a text familiar to Mormons, and about spirits in prison, also has parallels in **Enoch** 21:6. The Book of Enoch has an interesting history, from long being thought lost to being discovered in the 17th century in the Ethiopian language. It is a mystical text that has never been considered canonical by Jews or Christians, except in the Ethiopian Church where it was discovered.

It was apparently well known in the early church, but the fact of its being quoted does not mean its being accepted as canonical any more than Paul's quoting a Cretan proverb in Titus 1:12 or a Greek poet in Acts 17:28 canonises Greek or Cretan literature.

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The Flawed Mormon Approach

Our overview of this list of books, considered by Mormons to be missing, gives an insight into the Mormon approach to Scripture. In the Old Testament much of what they regard as missing is historical by nature and so it comes down to whether we have a reliable historical record, not whether we have a collection of exhaustive accounts from any number of viewpoints.

The writers of Israel's history drew on many sources to compile their Chronicles, a process that, by its nature, makes these sources superfluous once the history the writers wish to relate is told. Mormons don't really understand how we got our Bible, what process produced it, how it has been transmitted and the relationship of human and divine authorship.

Then there are those books that are not missing. The Book of the Covenant is fundamental to understanding the history of God's relationship with his people and yet Mormons, who claim to be God's covenant people in these "latter days", are at a loss to know what or where it is. The serious Bible student might have told them.

Finally, there are those books that have never existed. The determination of Mormons to find fault with the Bible is so visceral that it overrides reason and the rules of plain English. Jude, writing of his original intent to rejoice with the saints and his revised purpose in writing instead as he does, is so plainly a reference to the same letter that it is embarrassing to have missed it. Yet, to a Mormon prophet, neither reason nor logic will turn him from his determined course to cast doubt on the Bible and promote the message of Mormonism as the only safe haven in a sea of apostasy.

But the Word of God has always been a safe harbour, and careful attention will show that you can trust your Bible for it has been wonderfully kept down the ages.

*"Defend the Bible? I would just as soon defend a lion. Just turn the Bible loose.
It will defend itself."*

Charles Spurgeon