

ANOTHER(?) TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST?

The apostle Paul once admonished, "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other Gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

Over our airwaves and down our sidewalks, there are those who freely advertise a book entitled, The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. In the face of such biblical admonitions as cited above, and in the face of the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ could be discovered in the renowned New Testament for at least 1,700 years before The Book of Mormon was published, the pertinent question for the one acquainted with the New Testament is, "What exactly does the term 'another' mean in this subtitle?"

In the introduction to the 1981 edition of The Book of Mormon, its initial paragraph declares, "The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It ... contains, as does the Bible, the fulness [sic] of the everlasting Gospel." These words immediately lead their reader to believe that by the word "another" the writer means "another of the same kind," such as in another piece of pie. However, since, as a casual perusal of the book confirms, it is obviously not another version or even a paraphrase of the Bible, then, as the apostle John demanded (First John 4:1-6), we must test it by comparing its teachings with those of the previously confirmed testament of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-20 & Hebrews 2:3-4)—the New Testament. Upon examination, a student may discover the following discrepancies. (If the reader does not have a copy of The Book of Mormon on hand in order to study along with this essay, you may obtain one for free by calling 1-800-453-2900.)

The Problem of Continued Revelation

Even though the author of the introduction conceded that the Bible contains the fullness of the everlasting Gospel, yet such seems to oppose one of the major teachings of The Book of Mormon itself. (Note: in the following examples, it's maintained that the quotes were written between 545 and 600 BC; see footnotes on each page in The Book of Mormon. These dates are very important when comparing this book to the Bible.)

One instance of the apparent contradiction between the first statement in the introduction and The Book of Mormon is in First Nephi where the story of how The Book of Mormon was formulated is recounted: Nephi wrote that Gentiles had "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.... The angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them" (First Nephi 13:26 & 40).

Another apparent contradiction is found in Second Nephi 29:1-12: "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.... Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? ... Because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another.... Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.... For ... out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world.... I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it." Does the Bible contain "the fulness of the ... Gospel" or not? Furthermore, since it's maintained that this passage was written about 550 BC, then who is to say that the New Testament (completed by AD 100) was not the fulfillment of this passage?

It is on this notion where practically every controversy that one will ever have in a study with a Mormon hinges. One may study with a Mormon on a hundred different subjects, but the Mormon will always return to continued revelation (in one form or another) as an answer to any dilemma: if he does not refer to a revelation by an apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, then he'll inevitably allude to a burning in his bosom for evidence of what he believes and teaches (see Moroni 10:3-7).

The problem with continued revelation is that the Bible, specifically the New Testament, does not endorse it; rather, it teaches that once all truth ("the faith") had been delivered to and confirmed through the apostles and prophets (John 16:13, Jude 3, Mark 16:17-20, Hebrews 2:1-4, & Ephesians 3:1-5), then any more direct revelation from God to any man was to be no more. Ephesians 4:7-16 is just one of many such proof-texts. In verses 7-13 Paul essentially taught that God distributed spiritual gifts to such men as the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the work of ministry and for the edifying of the church UNTIL a certain time—the time when the following four (perhaps even synonymous) events would simultaneously occur:

- when objective faith ("the" one faith of verse 5—the new covenant Scriptures—as opposed to subjective faith—our beliefs) would be regarded as a unit or finished;
- when the complete knowledge (epignosis—"complete knowledge"—as opposed to gnosis—"partial knowledge") of the Son of God would be manifest;
- when the stature of Christ's fullness would become manifest by which one could gauge his growth;
- when the church would be mature, having come out of its infancy.

(The same apostle provided a virtual parallel passage in First Corinthians 13:8-10.)

Ephesians 4:13 couldn't have reference to the coming of Christ (or some other such time) as most continuing revelation and modern-day miracle adherents maintain: the apostle implied in the following verses that, after the time referred to in verse 13, there would still be the chance for false teaching (verse 14), and there would still be truth spoken in love by which there would be growth in the church (verses 15-16). Will the church still exist in Heaven in a maturing condition? Will there still be false teaching in Heaven? God forbid! Since Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would reveal all truth to them (John 16:13), and since the apostles have been dead for nearly 2,000 years, then it follows that the time of verse 13 was in or around the first century. Consequently, since the purpose of miracles has been fulfilled, miracles have ceased to exist (Mark 16:20 & Hebrews 2:3-4). The Book of Mormon, of course, denies this truth as well (Mormon 9:7-8) which, in order to be consistent, is a necessity. (It must be remembered that the New Testament is complete [Jude 3].)

Associated with the notion of revelation is the certainty with which the New Testament asserts its authenticity—there's no doubt in its claim: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (Second Timothy 3:16-17).

However, compare the tone of uncertainty by the writers of The Book of Mormon: Nephi: "I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old..." (First Nephi 19:6). Jacob: "I have written according to the best of my knowledge..." (7:26). Mormon: "Condemn me not because of mine imperfection.... We have written this record according to our knowledge.... If we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have no imperfection in our record" (9:31-33). (Also compare such passages as Ether 12:23-25 with First Corinthians 2:9-14 & Moroni 10:1 with First Corinthians 14:37.) So...

There's a definite discrepancy between The Book of Mormon and the Bible, because the former holds to continued revelation from God to man until the end of time, while the latter claims that revelation has once once for all been given.

The Problem of Dates

As mentioned earlier, the dates entered in The Book of Mormon for its original writings are very "telling," to say the least. The following paragraphs cite five discrepancies concerning periods of time.

According to The Book of Mormon, the disciples of Christ were being called "Christians" 73 years before Christ was born (Alma 46:15). The New Testament teaches that they weren't called by this God-given name (Isaiah 62:2) until around AD 45: "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

According to The Book of Mormon, the church was in existence at least 180 years before Jesus died for her (Mosiah 18:17). The New Testament teaches that the church didn't commence its existence until AD 33 after Jesus ascended back to the Father (Acts 1—2, esp. 2:47). When Jesus was on Earth, He mentioned that He was going (future tense) to build His church (Matthew 16:18).

According to The Book of Mormon, people were receiving forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ at least 157 years before Christ shed His blood (Mosiah 4:2). The New Testament teaches that forgiveness couldn't be obtained until the blood was shed (Hebrews 9:22 & Luke 24:47).

According to The Book of Mormon, the Holy Spirit came upon some people 156 years before He was given (Mosiah 4:3). The New Testament clearly states that around AD 32 "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). Jesus told His apostles that once He had ascended back to the Father (i.e., when He was glorified) He would send a replacement, the comforter (John 14:26, 15:26, & 16:13). Luke wrote concerning that event in Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8, and 2:1-4.

According to The Book of Mormon, the mysteries of the kingdom (the church) had begun to be unfolded by around 590 BC (First Nephi 10:19). In fact, in some passages, the prophecies are in no way enshrouded, but are uttered in detail (see Alma 33:22 & Mosiah 3:5-12)! The New Testament teaches that the mysteries weren't unfolded until after the Holy Spirit was sent to the apostles in order to reveal such (Matthew 13:17, First Peter 1:6-12, & Ephesians 3:3-5). These passages teach that even angels and those who did the prophesying didn't understand what the men of The Book of Mormon claimed to have understood 150 years before the Holy Spirit was sent to Earth. The apostle Paul wrote of "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations," and how that it "has now [about AD 62] been revealed to His saints" (Colossians 1:26).

Alexander Campbell (who lived during the time Mormonism was just getting started) said, "The great charge is this, [The Book of Mormon] anticipates the Christian religion, practises its precepts, ordinances, and teaches its doctrine and worship five or six hundred years before Christ. Such a thing would have been just as illegal as to practise the Jewish religion now; or, by the blood of bulls and goats, to make atonement for the sins of the soul. God has never had two systems of salvation in operation at the same time. [See Romans 2:11.] If the Jewish system of salvation was of God, it was in full force, was the only legal system of salvation, until abrogated by divine authority. No human being ever did, or ever will foresee, nor dare he, anticipate and practise beforehand the religion of a future dispensation" (*The Millennial Harbinger* 34:148).

About three years earlier, brother Campbell also similarly wrote, "Malachi, the last of the Jewish prophets, commanded Israel to regard the law of Moses till the Messiah came. And Moses commanded them to regard him till the Great Prophet came. But Nephi and Smith's prophets institute ordinances and observances for the Jews subversive of Moses 500 years before the Great Prophet came" (*The Millennial Harbinger* 31:92-93).

The Problem of Baptism

When a Christian studies with a Mormon concerning God's plan of salvation, he may quickly conclude that Mormons believe and teach the same plan that members of the Lord's church believe and teach, but such is an erroneous conclusion.

The Book of Mormon and the Mormons themselves acknowledge that baptism is necessary for salvation (Mormon 7:10), yet, according to the same book, people can procure a new covenant relationship with God prior to complying with the induction step of baptism (Mosiah 18:10-13) and that through prayer (Mosiah 4:2-3). As with various previous passages noted, these Mosiah passages involve a date-dilemma. Mosiah has Alma preaching concerning the new covenant and the possibility of becoming part

of it nearly two hundred years preceding its establishment!

The Book of Mormon teaches that for it to be well with one on the day of judgment, he must be baptized in fire (Mormon 7:10), while the New Testament never links the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11-12) with one's salvation; only the baptism in water is so linked (see Acts 8:36-38). Furthermore, by around AD 62, Paul said that there was only one baptism (Ephesians 4:5).

Miscellaneous Problems

The Book of Mormon has Jesus' nativity in Jerusalem (Alma 7:10), while the New Testament has it in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7).

The Book of Mormon teaches the observance of the Sabbath day under the new covenant dispensation (Mosiah 18:23), while the New Testament protests such (Colossians 2:16-17).

The Book of Mormon teaches to resist evil (Alma 61:14), while the New Testament through its author, Jesus, teaches just the opposite (Matthew 5:39). Ironically, even The Book of Mormon records this teaching of Jesus (Third Nephi 12:39).

The Book of Mormon teaches that the seer was greater than the prophet (Mosiah 8:15), while the Bible teaches that the term "seer" simply replaced the term "prophet" (First Samuel 9:9).

The Book of Mormon teaches that Melchizedek had a father (Alma 13:18), while the New Testament teaches he had no father (Hebrews 7:3).

The Book of Mormon prophesied that it would be dark during the three days between Jesus' death and His resurrection (Helaman 14:20), while the New Testament teaches that it was only dark for three hours at His death (Matthew 27:45).

The Book of Mormon teaches that the firstlings were to be sacrificed (Mosiah 2:3), while the Bible teaches that since they belonged to the priests they were not to be sacrificed (Exodus 13:2, 12, 22:29-30, Numbers 3:13, & 18:15-18).

The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus came back to Earth before the general resurrection (Third Nephi 10:18-19 & chapters 11—26), while the New Testament teaches that He would not come back to Earth until the general resurrection (First Corinthians 15:23-26).

The Book of Mormon teaches that Lehi, a high priest in the Mormon lineage, was of the tribe of Joseph (First Nephi 5:14), while the Bible teaches that a priest could only come from the tribe of Aaron (Numbers 3:10, 18:4-7, & Hebrews 7:14). Another problem is that this comes from a book which insists that miracles have not ceased, because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Mormon 9:7-9). Relative to consistency, why is it that this argument is thought to be ironclad with reference to miracles, yet it is prohibited with reference to the priesthood?

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Nephites (a clan of the Jews) left for another promised land (viz., America), and such was sanctioned by God (First Nephi 17—18), while the Bible teaches that God desired all His Old Testament people to remain together in the promised land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 12:1-14). Indirectly related to this, one might ask, "If there really were Jews in America at the time of Acts 2, as the Mormons claim, then why were they not represented? Subsequent to Luke's statement that there were men in Jerusalem at Pentecost "from every nation under heaven," he carefully enumerated the territories that they represented, but America is not found among the countries listed in Acts 2:5-11.

Conclusion

These are only a few of the many discrepancies or contradictions between the Bible and The Book of Mormon. However, just with these before one's eyes, he can see that by the word "another," as used in

the subtitle of The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ which claims to be comparable to the Bible in its teachings, the truth is that instead of it meaning "another of the same kind," as is obviously intended per the initial sentence in the introduction, it actually means "another of a different kind." It is, therefore, "another gospel" per Galatians 1:8-9 which should, therefore, be classified as that which is accursed.

When studying with Mormons, it appears that the only (or perhaps the most) fruitful manner in which to do so is from the only common ground there is—the Bible. (The adjective "common" is employed loosely here since Mormons have less faith in the Bible than they do in The Book of Mormon: they gauge the authenticity of the Bible by The Book of Mormon.) Perhaps the most productive way in which to study the Bible with Mormons is from the standpoint of whether or not God meant for there to be any more revelation following the completion of the New Testament, for everything seems to come back to that point. More specifically, the study might center around the question, "To whom did Jesus mean for the 'all truth' statement of John 16:13 to apply?"

[Tony E. Denton, October 1996.]