



Type: Journal Article

---

## The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s

Author(s): Gordon Irving

Source: *BYU Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1973)

Published by: BYU Studies

Page(s): 473–488

---

**Abstract:** This article describes how the early Church members looked to the Bible for proof of their faith.



BYU Studies is collaborating with Scripture Central to preserve and extend access to BYU Studies and to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon and other Restoration scripture. Archived by permission of BYU Studies.

<http://byustudies.byu.edu/>

# The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s

Gordon Irving\*

One does not long study Mormon beginnings without realizing that the Bible held a special place in the hearts of the early Saints. Latter-day Saint use of its accounts and teachings greatly influenced the formulation of Mormon theology, and, in addition, helped the Saints find their personal and group identity in God's Kingdom. The deep commitment of early Mormon intellectuals to the ancient scriptures is suggested by the frequency and nature of biblical references in their writings. Three Church periodicals published between 1832 and 1838, *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Independence, Missouri, 1832-33, and Kirtland, Ohio, 1833-34), the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, 1834-37), and the *Elders' Journal* (Kirtland, 1837, and Far West, Missouri, 1838)<sup>1</sup> are the most important representative samples of the written expression of early Mormon thought, and serve in this investigation as indicators of the attitudes of the Saints towards the Bible, and their uses of its contents.<sup>2</sup> Let us begin by identifying two leading assumptions which governed Mormon biblical interpretation.

## THE MORMON VIEW OF HISTORY: GOSPEL UNIFORMITY

As Marvin S. Hill has noted, the Saints adopted "Christian primitivism," a restorationist view of history which looked to

\*Gordon Irving graduated with an Honors B.A. degree from the University of Utah in 1972, and is currently serving as an historical associate for the Historical Department of the Church.

<sup>1</sup>An excellent description of these periodicals appears in Peter Crawley's, "A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York, Ohio, and Missouri," *BYU Studies* 12:465-468, 474-477, 491-494, 518-520 (Summer 1972).

<sup>2</sup>This article is based upon the author's thesis, "Mormonism and the Bible, 1832-1838," honors B.A. thesis, University of Utah, 1972. Fuller development and more complete documentation of the ideas presented can be found in the larger work.

the New Testament church as the model for contemporary Church polity and doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Mormons were strongly impressed that God, being perfect and unchanging, had presented to man an organization and a plan of salvation that were invariable through all time. This interpretation was based not only on the assumption that God is unchanging but also in the belief that he is impartial. Since he is no respecter of persons, God has given and will continue to give the gospel scheme of salvation to all those willing to be instructed and to be obedient to the principles taught them.<sup>4</sup>

Holding these assumptions about God and gospel, Mormons naturally developed a view of the past which held that the gospel of Christ as presented in the New Testament had been preached to all men since the beginning of the world, and that whenever God's church had existed on earth, it had enjoyed the same gifts as the apostolic church. Mormon primitivism took on its own peculiar color when the order set up in Jesus's day was projected both backward to Adam and forward to the Mormons themselves.

As with many theories of history, the Saints' view of the past was employed to demonstrate the validity of contemporary Mormon ideas and practices and to give the Church a sense of community with the faithful of both the Old and New Testaments. Mormons often referred to the Old Testament to show that the gospel of apostolic times had also been preached prior to the birth of Christ. That being true, they reasoned, then the same gospel ought to be taught and accepted in modern times. The Saints worked hard to establish the concept of the unchangeability of the gospel, which in the context of Mormon periodical literature as a whole seems to have been mainly intended to win converts to Mormonism by showing that all other religions failed to believe this basic doctrine of the uniformity of the gospel in all dispensations and were hence "perverted gospels."

<sup>3</sup>Marvin S. Hill, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830-1844," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1968. See also Hill's article, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," *BYU Studies*, 9:351-352 (Spring 1969).

<sup>4</sup>Sidney Rigdon, "The Gospel. No. V," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1:71 (February 1835) hereafter cited as *MA*; Alexander Cheney, "The Gospel," *MA* 2:498 (May 1837); W. W. Phelps, "The Gospel," *The Evening and the Morning Star*, 1:82-83 (April 1833), hereafter cited as *EMS*; and many other references.

In presenting the idea that the gospel had been and must always be what it was in Christ's day, there was a need to back up Mormon claims with references to authoritative sources. Three tools for convincing the world of the uniformity of the gospel, as well as of other Mormon doctrines, were used: the Bible, a reasoned common sense, and the revelations given to Joseph Smith. Preference was given to the three in this same order. Reasoning based upon the Bible would have more effect on the non-Mormon reader than would arguments drawn from an unfamiliar and "suspicious" work like the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon might have been a favorite missionary tool, as has often been suggested, but Mormon writers certainly tended to favor arguments from the Bible when trying to deal with sectarian ideas. At least in that way both Mormon and non-Mormon could start from a common position.<sup>5</sup>

Not only were Latter-day Saints likely to draw their arguments from the Bible for pragmatic reasons; they had divine sanction for doing so. Note the following instruction to Sidney Rigdon in a revelation given by Joseph Smith in December 1830: ". . . thou shalt preach my gospel, and call on the holy prophets to prove his [Joseph's] words, as they shall be given him."<sup>6</sup>

Although for purposes of discussion the Mormons might choose to reason from the Bible, they also had revelations asserting that the gospel has always been the same, which were a good deal clearer than the Old Testament passages upon which they relied. Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible teaches at some length that Adam, Enoch, and Noah had the gospel and that it consisted of faith, repentance, baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, and the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>7</sup> However, it would seem that the Mormons would have been believers in the antiquity and uniformity of the gospel even without these explicit statements from Joseph Smith. Mormon writers were convinced of the

---

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., "The Atlas Article," *MA* 2:302 (April 1836); W. A. Cowdery to the editor, *EMS* 1:21 (November 1834).

<sup>6</sup>Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Latter Day Saints (Kirtland, 1835) *EMS*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup>See *Joseph Smith's "New Translation" of the Bible* (Independence, 1970), pp. 35-68. These passages from the Bible revision were published in the *EMS* during W. W. Phelps' editorship. *EMS* 1:18-19, 73-75, 81-83 (August 1832 and March 1833).

truth and plainness of the Bible. In line with their assumptions they expected the plan of salvation to be uniform—the Old and New Testaments ought to present the same message.

An interesting aspect of the Mormon idea of gospel uniformity is the way in which the lives and merits of certain biblical figures were often used to authoritatively demonstrate lasting gospel values. Mormons frequently cited writings of the prophets and apostles, but it was largely the Old Testament patriarchs who were chosen to personify gospel principles. The ten men most frequently discussed were Adam, Abel, Cain, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Elijah. Their experiences served to typify the following Mormon tenets: man receiving by revelation the divine gospel of Jesus Christ, the uniformity and antiquity of the gospel, the princely role of Adam, the offering in righteousness, the heritage of persecution, the treachery of apostates who rebel against the light of God, the perfectibility of man, the gathering of the elect in preparation for the Second Coming and the triumph of the Saints, the future millennial state to be enjoyed by the earth, the warning to be given the wicked prior to the great day of destruction, the importance of contemporary revelation and prophets, the necessity of possessing proper authority and priesthood in order to act for God, the importance of the covenant relationship of God with Israel, adoption into the seed of Abraham, the doctrine of the elect, the Book of Mormon as the record of Joseph, the penalty suffered for apostasy, and the sending of heavenly messengers to restore the truth to the earth. A better compendium of early Mormon doctrine can hardly be imagined, and the Mormon found all this taught and symbolized by the lives of ten figures from the Old Testament.

#### MORMON LITERALISM

The veneration for the Bible felt by Mormons led the Saints to put great stock in the scriptures. The Bible was to be understood literally. For Mormons of the 1830s the literal view of the scriptures involved several accepted assumptions: the meaning of the various books was both clear and consistent, historical accounts were accurate and factual, biblical prophecies were to be fulfilled exactly as written, and many parts of the Bible were of direct application to modern times.

There was thus no need to seek some hidden or allegorical meaning which might lie behind the words of the book; rather, the message of the Bible lay on the surface to be discovered and readily understood by any man possessed of an average amount of common sense.

This approach to the Bible, which in recent times has been labeled "fundamentalist," could be illustrated in terms of the Mormon view of the New Testament church, with reference to historical portions of the Old Testament, or in terms of the Saints' approach to biblical prophecies. Let me use the last of these three as an example. Four assumptions governed Mormon thought concerning the prophetic statements of the Bible: the prophets were inspired men who knew what they were talking about, prophetic language was clear enough to be understood, the prophecies were to be fulfilled literally, and much of what the prophets said in ancient times about the future was intended to refer to the nineteenth century. Other churches were frequently criticized for "spiritualizing" the prophecies by claiming that they were to be fulfilled in some figurative sense. Mormons argued that whatever was predicted would occur exactly as the prophet had said it would. Joseph Smith went so far as to say that the Mormons believed what the Bible foretold, while the sects of the day only held to "interpretations" of the book. The Mormons claimed to be so literal in their reading, and the Bible so clear in its meaning, that there was little room for error in their perception of God's plan for the future as revealed in Holy Writ.<sup>6</sup> Mormon preachers limited their assertions to those capable of support from the Bible, always striving to adhere to the text as closely as possible. The Saints invited their hearers to examine the passages cited, with full confidence that the "straight forward consistency" of the Bible could be counted on to sway the sincere mind.<sup>9</sup>

Many persons found this approach compelling. The jour-

<sup>6</sup>Sidney Rigdon, "Faith of the church of Christ," *EMS* 2:153 (May 1834); Joseph Smith, *Elders' Journal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* 1:42-43 (July 1838), hereafter cited as *EJ*.

<sup>9</sup>Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning . . .* (New York, 1837), Chapter 1: Cf. Rigdon, "Faith of church of Christ," *EMS* 2:145 (April 1834); W. W. Phelps, "Preach the Word," *EMS* 1:91 (May 1833); "Prophecy of Zephaniah," *EMS* 2:133, 140-141 (February and March 1834); W. A. Cowdery to the editor, "Letter no. 2," *MA* 1:113 (May 1835); synopsis of an address by Sidney Rigdon printed in the *Ohio Free Press*, *MA* 2:314 (May 1836); "Signs in the Heavens," *EMS* 2:116 (December 1833).

nals of many converts show that they were seeking a common-sense church which followed the New Testament pattern. A missionary reporting the success of his labors noted that whenever ministers of other faiths met him on "bible ground," their influence suffered.<sup>10</sup>

Periodical literature extant from the early days of the modern Church shows that the Saints made both doctrinal and "non-doctrinal" uses of biblical teachings and phraseology. Writers saw biblical situations being repeated in the Mormon experience and drew such analogies to the attention of their readers. Sidney Rigdon noted, for example, that John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ, had pointed to the Master who was to follow after him, and suggested that Alexander Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger* ought to point to something or other too. The image of the mob at Ephesus shouting "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" was used to typify the uproar caused by ministers of the various sects in response to the Mormon attack upon the ministerial livelihood. Parley P. Pratt, to present a final example, called a convert a "good old Cornelious."<sup>11</sup>

As can be seen, the Mormon writer was so familiar with the Bible that he often illustrated his points by referring to scripture. A parallel non-doctrinal use of the Bible resulted from the Mormon tendency to slip into biblical phraseology. Oliver Cowdery's remark to his brother that had certain men traveling with him in the East been as eager for the Kingdom of God as they were for dinner, they would "take it by force," illustrates the way in which the Bible could be cited without any intention of comparing the present to the biblical situation, simply because the words were both familiar and fortunate.<sup>12</sup>

#### ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL PASSAGES USED

But more significant than these more casual comparisons were the doctrinal explications based upon biblical passages. In order to determine which books of the Bible and which portions of them Latter-day Saints were fond of citing, the

<sup>10</sup>E.g., James Holt's journal in *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City, 1970), 13:469; John Gregg to the editor, *EMS* 2:192 (September 1834); Cf. extract from the *Brookville Enquirer* in *MA* 1:77 (February 1835).

<sup>11</sup>*EMS* 2:126-127 (January 1834); *MA* 3:396-397 (October 1836); *EJ* 1:8-9 (October 1837).

<sup>12</sup>*MA* 3:386ff (October 1836). The scripture cited is Matthew 11:12.

passages used in the Church periodicals between 1832 and 1838 to establish doctrine (as distinguished from other uses of the Bible just discussed) were identified as far as possible and tabulated. Table 1 gives the results of this tabulation for the three periodicals published during the period, each volume of the three journals being tabulated separately, followed by the total for the six year period. The first figure given represents the number of passages cited, while that below it shows this number as a percentage of the total number of passages tabulated in that particular column.

In view of the large number of articles of so many different kinds being considered, it might be useful for the reader to know how this tabulation compares with a similar analysis of a unified doctrinal work. Parley P. Pratt's *A Voice of Warning*, published in 1837, would seem to be suitable for this purpose and the scriptures used therein are tabulated in the last column on the right in Table 1.

#### NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

The early Latter-day Saints emphasized the New Testament during the period being considered. Some 762, or 63 percent

TABLE 1  
SOURCE OF BIBLE PASSAGES USED FOR DOCTRINAL  
PURPOSES IN MORMON PERIODICAL  
LITERATURE, 1832-1838

	EMS v. 1 '32-3	EMS v. 2 '33-4	MA v. 1 '34-5	MA v. 2 '35-6	MA v. 3 '36-7	EJ v. 1 '37-8	6 Year Total '32-8	Pratt '37
Genesis	6 3.1%	2 0.8%	17 4.8%	6 4.2%	5 2.6%	0 0%	36 3.0%	9 5.1%
Other Pentateuch	17 8.8%	7 2.8%	10 2.8%	5 3.5%	4 2.1%	0 1.3%	44 3.6%	2 1.1%
Historical Books	5 2.6%	4 1.6%	4 1.1%	2 1.4%	1 0.5%	0 0%	16 1.3%	11 6.2%
Writings	18 9.3%	8 3.3%	26 7.3%	7 4.9%	13 6.7%	2 2.5%	74 6.1%	7 3.9%
Major Prophets	48 24.8%	37 15.0%	40 11.2%	27 19.0%	26 13.5%	5 6.3%	183 15.1%	36 20.2%
Minor Prophets	23 11.9%	32 13.0%	22 6.2%	8 5.6%	8 4.1%	3 3.8%	96 7.9%	14 7.9%
Gospels and Acts	35 18.0%	64 26.0%	125 35.0%	40 28.2%	54 28.0%	27 34.2%	345 28.5%	49 27.5%
Paul's Letters	25 12.9%	61 24.8%	85 23.8%	38 26.8%	58 30.0%	33 41.8%	300 24.7%	35 19.7%
Other Letters	9 4.6%	18 7.3%	9 2.5%	4 2.8%	19 9.9%	4 5.1%	63 5.2%	6 3.4%
Revelation	8 4.1%	13 5.3%	19 3.5%	5 3.5%	5 2.6%	4 5.1%	54 4.5%	9 5.1%
Old Testament	117 60.3%	90 36.6%	119 33.3%	55 38.7%	57 29.6%	11 13.9%	449 37.0%	79 44.4%
New Testament	77 39.7%	156 63.4%	238 66.7%	87 61.3%	136 70.4%	68 86.1%	762 63.0%	99 55.6%
Other Scriptures	105	14	13	20	3	5	160	5



of the scriptures used in the periodicals were drawn from the New Testament. This reflects the desire to present the scriptural pattern for the gospel and the church of Christ, whose basis is to be found almost entirely in the New Testament. Pratt's *Voice of Warning* is useful in demonstrating that Mormon challenges to doctrines of other churches tended to center around New Testament passages. In a chapter contrasting Church and gospel scriptures with sectarian "perversions" of the same verses, all the passages cited, with one exception, came from the New Testament.

Table 2 shows which specific New Testament passages were cited most frequently. Eighteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books account for 94 percent of all New Testament passages. LDS writers drew from roughly three-quarters of the chapters of the New Testament. While that might imply a fairly even coverage of these books, this does not prove to be so. The fifty-nine specific passages listed as being most frequently used are drawn from only fifty-four chapters and yet account for more than half of all the New Testament passages used. Thus Mormon use of the New Testament was only superficially thorough; actually the Saints concentrated on certain key passages.

While the sources of Mormon scriptural references are of interest, more useful to the historian is the analysis of the content of those passages most frequently used. Table 3 breaks down the fifty-nine specific passages listed in Table 2 according to subject matter as seen by Mormons.

This tabulation shows that the New Testament passages used generally stress one or more of four themes:

(1) *Primitive Church Pattern*. Most often scripture was used to show the pattern for the proper organization and basic doctrines which characterize the church of Christ with special emphasis on the doctrines of faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, as well as the spiritual gifts which are bestowed upon the faithful. The scriptural pattern, as understood by the Latter-day Saints, was seen to be identical with their own church polity. Passages asserting that there is only one true pattern for church and gospel were used frequently to enhance the authority of Mormonism as well as to challenge other systems of Christianity.

(2) *Apostasy and Restoration*. The New Testament was

TABLE 2  
THE SELECTIVITY OF MORMON SCRIPTURE USE:  
EIGHTEEN NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS  
MOST FREQUENTLY CITED

	Times Used <sup>a</sup>	Chapters in Book	Chapters Used		Specific Passages Used Frequently	Times Used
Matthew	106	28	23	Mt.	5:5 7:7-8 7:15-16 28:18-20 23:34-38 24 25:21-23 25:34 16:15-19	3 3 3 9 [54] 3 19 5 3 6
Mark	25	16	9	Mk.	16:14-19	14 [14]
Luke	32	24	13	Lk.	1:32-33 21:24-27 24:39-50	3 5 9 [17]
John	69	21	17	Jn.	3:5 14:11-19 15:22-26 16:6-16 17:10-24	4 6 5 7 7 [29]
Acts	94	31	20	Acts	1:1-8 1:9-11 2:14-22 2:33-39 3:19-25 8:17-18 10:44-48 19:1-6 20:28-30	4 7 5 12 10 5 3 5 3 [54]
Romans	44	16	12	Rom.	1:16 10 11:19-28 15:4	5 5 12 4 [26]
I Corinthians	57	16	12	I Cor.	1:25-27 2:6-10 12 13 14:33 15:1-8	3 6 11 10 3 4 [37]
Galatians	32	6	3	Gal.	1:6-12 3:6-9 3:26-28	14 8 4 [26]
Ephesians	35	6	6	Eph.	1:3-11 4:11-17	9 13 [22]
Colossians	8	4	3	Col.	2:8-9	3 [3]
I Thessalonians	8	5	4	I Th.	4:13-17	3 [3]
II Thessalonians	9	3	2	II Th.	2	7 [7]
II Timothy	26	4	4	II Tim.	1:9-10 3:1-5 4:1-7	3 8 9 [20]
Hebrews	46	13	11	Heb.	11	16 [16]
James	15	5	3	Jas.	1:15-17 1:27	6 4 [10]
II Peter	21	3	3	II P	1:20-21 2:1-7 3:1-7	6 7 5 [18]
Jude	8	1	1	Jude	14-15	7 [7]
Revelation	52	22	17	Rev.	14:6-7 19:10 20 22:17-19	3 3 6 3 [15]
	687	221	162			378

<sup>a</sup>Where identifiable by chapter.

TABLE 3  
CLASSIFICATION OF NEW TESTAMENT  
PASSAGES FREQUENTLY USED

	Passages	Times Used
1. The true church		
First principles	10	73
Redemption through Christ	2	12
Only one gospel—any other doctrine not of God	7	31
Spiritual gifts given to faithful	8	53
Pattern for church organization	3	30
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Subtotal:	30	199
2. The gospel and the world		
Apostasy		
Mankind to forsake true gospel	4	29
Faithful to be hated and persecuted	2	8
False prophets to come	3	13
Warning against "vain philosophies"	1	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Partial subtotal:	10	53
Restoration of gospel	3	17
Saints called to preach gospel	5	35
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Subtotal:	18	105
3. Millennialism – Eschatological doctrines		
Second coming of Christ	8	62
Resurrection and immortality	6	33
Judgment	4	25
Reward of the faithful	4	17
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Subtotal:	22	137
4. Uniformity of the gospel—Links be- tween Old and New Testaments		
God does not vary	1	6
Fulfillment of inspired prophecy	4	30
Gospel and the patriarchs	4	38
Faithful adopted into Israel	6	43
Christ to reign over Israel	1	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Subtotal:	16	120
5. Christian living	2	14
6. Scripture	3	13
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Grand total: <sup>a</sup>	91	588

<sup>a</sup>Totals are higher than Table 2 figures as many passages fit several categories.

employed to show that an apostasy from the true church of Christ and a subsequent restoration of the gospel to mankind had been foreseen by Jesus and his apostles. The greater emphasis was placed on the theme of apostasy, as it provided the *raison d'être* for Mormon restorationism. The New Testament was also seen as calling members of the true church to take the message of the restored gospel to all peoples, as well as predicting that they could expect to be hated and persecuted for doing so.

(3) *Millennialism*. Mormons also used frequently those New Testament passages dealing with the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. Not only were the "signs of the times" referred to, but Mormon editors, especially W. W. Phelps, often cited contemporary news stories as evidence that the signs foretold by Jesus had appeared. Passages relating to the resurrection and the respective rewards of the wicked and the faithful were also often cited.

(4) *Uniformity of the Gospel*. While Mormon logic dictated that the existence of a church set up by the Son of God meant that such a church should be the pattern for Christ's church through all time, other elements of the New Testament were also emphasized to demonstrate that the gospel had always been the same. The Latter-day Saints were fond of using Pauline passages which suggest that the Christian faithful are adopted into the Old Testament House of Israel, and that Christ will reign over Israel. Passages implying that Old Testament prophets and patriarchs knew of Jesus Christ and his gospel were often quoted, as were others asserting that the Church had fulfilled the messianic predictions of the Hebrew prophets.

Three of these four themes were polemical tools in the Mormon struggle to win converts away from the "perverted" forms of Christianity found in other churches. The idea that there was a set form that Christianity should follow, that mankind had deviated from that pattern, and that the gospel in past times had followed the New Testament norm prescribed by Mormon writers were all scriptural defenses of the Mormon claim to be the true church of Christ and the only earthly vehicle of salvation. Mormons aimed these New Testament arguments at a world deeply impressed by the authority of the Bible. That the challenge to other religions was a power-

ful one is indicated in part by the conversion of so many Bible-reading Americans to Mormonism, as well as by the violent opposition to the new church on the part of many American Protestants.

#### OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES

Table 1 shows that only 37 percent of the biblical passages used by Mormons were drawn from the Old Testament. Yet the fact that the Old Testament was in a way overshadowed by the New should not lead one to think it unimportant in Mormon thought. For example, one volume of *The Evening and the Morning Star* used more Old Testament passages than New Testament references. Published on the Missouri frontier, away from the "learned men" of the East and debates with other churches, the *Star* in its first year gave special emphasis to millennial themes. Most of the documentation for articles dealing with the gathering, the Second Coming, and similar themes came from the Old Testament and from the new revelations given the Church through Joseph Smith. Pratt's book also cited a higher percentage of Old Testament passages than did the Mormon periodicals over the period. This also resulted from the writer's special emphasis on millennial themes. The Old Testament throughout the period served, if not as the source, then at least as a reinforcement of Mormon millennialism.

Table 4 shows which passages from the Old Testament were cited most often. Fifteen of the thirty-nine Old Testament books provided 93 percent of all identifiable Old Testament passages used. Fewer than one in six Old Testament chapters were drawn upon by Mormon writers, indicating that the Saints were more selective with regard to the Old Testament than they were with the New. This impression is strengthened by noting that the fifty-three specific passages listed, which account for roughly one-half of all Old Testament passages used, were drawn from only five percent of the book's chapters. The Saints limited their total use of the Old Testament to a small fraction of the volume, while those passages seen as important enough to be used repeatedly were drawn from an even more limited portion of the work.

Table 5 categorizes the fifty-three specific passages listed in Table 4 according to subject matter as perceived by the Mormons. Three major themes recur:

TABLE 4  
THE SELECTIVITY OF MORMON SCRIPTURE USE:  
FIFTEEN OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS  
MOST FREQUENTLY USED

	Times Used <sup>a</sup>	Chapters in Book	Chapters Used	Specific Used	Passages Used Frequently	Times Used
Genesis	31	50	18	Gen.	6:9	2
					17	4
					48,49	6 [12]
Exodus	8	40	6	Ex.	19:5-6	2
					20	2 [4]
Deuteronomy	26	34	12	Dt.	4:27-34	3
					18:15-19	5
					28-33	15 [23]
Job	10	42	3	Job	19:23-29	8 [8]
Psalms	52	150	34	Ps.	2:7	2
					14:2-3	3
					50:3-5	2
					85:11-12	2
					105:6-10	2
					144	4 [15]
Isaiah	116	66	38	Isa.	1	2
					2:1-4	7
					4:2-6	2
					7:14	2
					11:11-16	9
					18	2
					24:16-23	6
					28:8-23	3
					29:4-14	3
					35:1-10	7
					43:6	3
					45:4	2
					52:7-8	4
					53:3-10	4
					59:19-20	3
					60:2	4
					62:17	5
					66:18-20	2 [70]
Jeremiah	28	48	11	Jer.	3:12-18	2
					16:14-19	4
					23:7-8	5
					31:1-20	4
					31:33-34	2 [17]
Ezekiel	18	48	7	Ezek.	37	8 [8]
Daniel	17	12	4	Dan.	2:44-45	6
					7:9-13	4
Joel	17	3	2	Jl.	12:1	2 [12]
					2:28-32	12
					3:16-21	2 [14]
Amos	6	9	3	Amos	3:7	4 [4]
Micah	9	7	3	Mic.	4:1-7	5
					5:1-2	3 [8]
Zephaniah	5	3	3	Zeph.	3:8-20	5 [5]
Zechariah	15	14	6	Zech.	10:5-12	4
					14:2-5	5 [9]
Malachi	10	4	2	Mal.	3:6	3
					3:8-12	2
					4:1	2 [7]
	368	530	150			

<sup>a</sup>Passage identifiable by chapter.

TABLE 5  
CLASSIFICATION OF OLD TESTAMENT  
PASSAGES FREQUENTLY USED

	Passages	Times Used
1. Millennial prophecies		
Gathering of Israel	11	44
Kingdom of God to be established	2	9
Israel to be purified	2	4
Spirit to be poured out in last days	1	12
Apostasy of mankind in last days	2	7
Destruction of wicked	5	19
Ancient of Days to come	2	6
Second coming of Christ	4	19
Restoration of Jerusalem	1	5
Conditions during Millennium	7	27
	Subtotal:	37      152
2. Uniformity of the gospel		
Predictions about Christ	10	43
Patriarchs	4	13
Necessity of having prophets	1	4
Invariability of God	1	3
	Subtotal:	16      63
3. Israel		
Covenant—called to be holy nation	7	19
Blessings given Israel <sup>a</sup>	2	21
	Subtotal:	9      40
4. Book of Mormon foreseen	3	13
5. Miscellaneous		
Beauty of message of salvation	1	4
Ten Commandments	1	2
Tithes and offerings	1	2
	Grand total: <sup>b</sup>	68      276

<sup>a</sup>Passages also seen as having millennial overtones.

<sup>b</sup>Totals are higher than in Table 4 as some passages fit more than one category.

(1) *Millennialism.* The greatest number of passages used were prophecies dealing with the events to precede the day of the Lord. These were cited to inform the world and the Church membership of the gathering of Israel, to be followed by the destruction of the wicked, the second coming of Christ, and the Savior's millennial reign on earth.

(2) *Gospel Uniformity*. Many passages were used to show that the prophets knew of Christ long before his birth. Other passages cited were seen to indicate or imply that the patriarchs were also aware of Christianity prior to the Christian era.

(3) *Special Role of Israel*. A third class of passages were cited to explain the place that Israel had in history as God's chosen people. The covenants made by God with the patriarchs were emphasized, as were the blessings to be enjoyed by Israel if faithful.

Aside from the predictions regarding the Messiah to come, the selection of Old Testament passages reflects the Mormons' interest in the last days rising out of their belief that their day would see the fulfillment of the millennial prophecies of the Old Testament. God was about to "set his hand a second time" to fulfill the covenant made with his chosen people Israel and to carry out the promises made through his prophets. In the Old Testament the Mormons saw as clear a picture of their own times and of their immediate future as though it were one of the revelations of their own prophet.

#### REINFORCING EFFECT OF OTHER MORMON SCRIPTURES

Also important is the way in which the new volumes of scriptures produced through Joseph Smith reinforced Mormon interpretations of the Bible. The Book of Mormon and the revelations of Joseph Smith are based upon the same assumptions about the scriptures, the gospel, and the Church as those which governed the thoughts of Joseph Smith, his fellow Mormons, and indeed many other evangelical Christians of the time. Mormon extra-biblical scriptures emphasize millennialist themes, accept the uniformity of church and gospel through all periods of history, and persuade the reader to interpret the scriptures literally. Whatever the source of Joseph Smith's writings, once in print the new Mormon scriptures reinforced LDS interpretations of the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Not only did the content of the new Mormon scriptures reinforce Mormon views, but analysis of the passages cited from them by the Saints in their periodical literature shows that they appreciated this fact. The Book of Mormon and the portion of Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible now known



as the Book of Moses were frequently used to show that the gospel had always been the same as that preached by the Mormons, while the Doctrine and Covenants, used also for this purpose, served dramatically to strengthen Mormon millennialist emphases.

Whether the frequent use of biblical passages should be viewed as the effort of early LDS leaders to reassure themselves and the world, *post facto*, as to the validity of Mormon doctrines, or whether the Bible should be seen as the primary source of Latter-day Saint ideas, is a point which deserves further examination. Whichever alternative is true, it cannot be disputed that the Bible was the prime authority to which Mormons looked for affirmation of their doctrinal assertions in the first decade of Mormon intellectual history.