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Missing Scriptures of Old Testament Times

Author(s): Keith H. Meservy

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Abstract: This article discusses lost scriptures from the Old Testament.

MISSING SCRIPTURES OF OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

by Keith H. Meservy*

There are many books referred to in the Old Testament—the Book of Jasher, the Book of the Covenant, the Book of the Wars of the Lord, etc.—about which many questions are asked: Who wrote them? What are their contents? Where are they today? Unfortunately, little if anything can be said by way of positive answer; yet it is possible to discuss some aspects of the problem and to suggest some possible answers.

Why Some Scriptures Are Missing

In spite of the fact that they all shed some light on the Lord, his work, his children and their relationship to him, all scriptures are not equally important to all generations. For this reason individuals such as Mormon and Moroni were given the responsibility of editing the sacred records available to them and handing down whatever would be especially important to future readers. Unfortunately, we have no idea who filled such a role for the Old Testament scriptures; but without question many of those books which are “missing” to us were omitted by inspired record keepers. (See inside back cover chart, Sections C and D.)

Some books are missing from the divine library because the Lord himself withdrew them from circulation. Alma makes it clear that the extent and depth of the Lord’s revelations to his children is governed essentially by their faith and spiritual receptivity. (See Alma 12:9, 10.) It is this principle which was referred to when Book of Mormon writers indicated that they would have written or copied more into their records if the Holy Spirit had not stopped them from doing so. (Scriptures such as 2 Nephi 32:7; 3 Nephi 26:9, 11; and Ether 4, which deals with the circumstances under which the records of the brother of Jared were available or not available, illustrate this point.)

It is true that these examples do not deal with the Old Testament, but they help us to understand why we still do not have the fullness of Enoch’s record, which is to be testified of “in due time” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:57), and why John’s

record is still missing (Doctrine and Covenants 93:6, 18); and perhaps, also, why we do not have the fullness of Abraham’s and Joseph’s records, which were, at least in part, available to Joseph Smith. Regarding the importance of Joseph’s prophecies, we have Lehi’s valued judgment that “there are not many greater.” (2 Nephi 4:2.) (See chart, Section A.)

We suspect, though we cannot prove it, that some of the Old Testament records are missing as a consequence of scribal carelessness. We know that this accounts for some of the errors which the text has suffered. In this regard we might note that movable type, and therefore mechanical reduplication, was not invented until the 15th century A.D. Any copy of anything made during the thousands of years prior to this time was a hand copy (manuscript).

It is shocking to discover that some records have been lost or are missing because “designing” men have deliberately modified or omitted them to suit their own purposes. Moses learned that the day would come when his words would be taken from the book which he was in the process of writing. (See Moses 1:40, 41; 1:23.) Nephi learned that many “plain and most precious parts” of the Bible would be deliberately omitted or changed by unscrupulous individuals who had gained decisive control of the records, and that, as a result of alteration and subsequent loss, many Bible readers would stumble and wander in a state of confusion. (See 1 Nephi 13:26. See also parts of Section A and Section B of chart.)

Knowing this, Moses charged his followers to pass on his records in their integrity. (See Deuteronomy 4:2.) It is obvious, however, that neither his personal prestige nor the inherent truth and inspiration contained in the records, nor reverence for the Lord and his word, was able to prevent the records from being tampered with. By the time of Jeremiah, when living prophets were being slain or threatened with death (Jeremiah 26:20-24; 11:21; 1 Nephi 1:19, 20), the Jews had come to feel that they could

*Keith Hansen Meservy is an instructor of religion at Brigham Young University, where he received his B.A. in 1952. He also holds an M.A. from Johns Hopkins University. He served in the Northern States Mission from 1946-1948, has served in several bishoprics and worked widely in priesthood organizations. He and his wife, the former Arlene Bean, are members of the Pleasant View Ward, East Sharon (Utah) Stake, where he is presently a high councilor. They have four children.

(For Course 18, lessons of September 1 and 22, “The Standard Works” and “The Books of the Old Testament”; for Course 28, lesson of October 6, “Discern the Things of God”; for Course 30, lessons of October 13 and 20, “A New Witness for Christ” and “God Speaks to His Children”; and of general interest.)

hold to the written words of the dead prophets as contained in their Law, while rejecting the living word. Jeremiah, however, charged that their written Law was not the authority which they considered it to be, because, said he, "the false [lying] pen of the scribes has made it into a lie." (Jeremiah 8:8.)¹ This startling accusation is consistent with what the Lord told Moses and Nephi.

Knowing why some of the material is missing from the scriptures, we are partially prepared for some comments which Joseph Smith made regarding the Bible. In his statement explaining the circumstances surrounding the revelation of Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, he said: ". . . many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled."² Another time he expressed his belief regarding the Bible as follows: "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors."³

Will Evil Men Frustrate the Lord's Work?

Joseph Smith's observations, and the revelations to Moses and Nephi which indicate that the Bible is faulty, are disturbing. One would think that the Lord would consider his word so important that regardless of human carelessness or evil intentions it would be kept inviolate. It is obvious, however, that this is not so. An experience from another context might help us to understand why: The missionaries, Alma and Amulek, were not allowed to use the power of God to save innocent victims from suffering death by fire. Alma indicated that he had been restrained by the Spirit of the Lord from doing this very thing. The Lord had allowed the persecutors to exercise their free agency, "that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just." (Alma 14:11.)

However, regardless of what men of evil intentions do, the Lord will not allow them to frustrate his work. This is illustrated by many examples regarding the scriptures: Moses was advised that wicked men would take parts of his words out of his record; but the Lord promised him that he would raise up another inspired man, and Moses' words would again, in that day, be had among those who believed; Nephi saw that plain and precious parts would be taken from the Bible, but also that the records of his own people would come forth to

confirm those truths which remained in the Bible; Martin Harris could lose 116 pages of translated scriptures, but the Lord would anticipate the problem and provide substitute material ahead of time to fill the otherwise obvious gap. (See Words of Mormon 2-7; 1 Nephi 9:5, 6; 19:3; Doctrine and Covenants 10.) Thus human agency is respected, but divine work is not frustrated because of it.

A Faulty Bible as a Standard?

If the Bible has been changed, how can we use it with confidence that what we are reading is true—especially if some of the changes were made deliberately to pervert the truth and lead people astray? What kinds of controls are available to us to assure us that we will not build upon a sandy foundation if we use it? In this regard the answers are reassuring; the problem can be resolved.

1. Nephi learned that the records of his people would come forth in the latter days to convince the Gentiles and the Israelites "that the records of the prophets and the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true . . . and . . . [to] make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them." (1 Nephi 13:39, 40.) The implications are: (1) the Bible is not to be superseded by the Book of Mormon but is to be confirmed by its pure testimony, and (2) a Bible student is not through with his work until he has studied the relevant material in the Book of Mormon; for these two records are to "grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace. . . ." (2 Nephi 3:12.)

2. In addition to other purposes, the Lord raised up Joseph Smith to revise the Bible under inspiration. His work was not completed, but what he did do is precious. One of our "pearls" of great price, the Book of Moses, is the product of this work, and it is only a portion of the work which Joseph Smith did to restore the "missing" parts of the Bible.

3. Modern prophets have been given special spiritual blessings which, among other things, help them to interpret and understand the Bible correctly.

4. Modern revelations are of inestimable value in correcting erroneous ideas and expanding true ones. "The Vision" (Doctrine and Covenants 76) is a choice example of this.

5. Ultimately, however, each person is personally responsible to himself and the Lord to accept only that which is true and to reject that which is false; for every person who comes into the world has the means by which he can do this—the inspiration of the light of Christ. Whoever responds adequately to this light will be led to the Father, from

(Concluded on following page.)

¹From the Revised Standard Version, a correct translation of the Hebrew text. The King James Version reads, "The pen of the scribes is in vain."

²Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*; Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1951; pages 9-11.

³Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*; page 327; see also page 310.

whom, by one means or another, he will learn about the restored gospel. And through obedience to this gospel he will be entitled to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Doctrine and Covenants 84:46-48.) With such a resource he is in the position to receive the word of truth as it is written or spoken under the inspiration of our Father in heaven. (Doctrine and Covenants 50:19-22; 91.) Such a student will not interpret scripture privately but will do it as he is moved upon by the Lord. Only then is he in the position to act upon the truths contained in them with a conviction of their eternal validity. To such a one, through the living witness of the Holy Spirit, the dead words of the Bible become a source of life.

In summary, the Bible does have "missing" scriptures: some have been omitted by inspired record keepers because they would not be relevant to later generations; some have been withdrawn by the Lord until men are prepared to receive them;

and some have been removed as a result of carelessness or because of deliberate efforts to pervert the word of the Lord.

Brigham Young was aware of the shortcomings of the Bible, but he also expressed himself regarding its positive value:

The Bible is true. It may not all have been translated aright and many precious things may have been rejected in the compilation and translation of the Bible. . . . and yet . . . [it] is one of the simplest books in the world, for, as far as it is translated correctly, it is nothing but truth, and in truth there is no mystery save to the ignorant. The revelations of the Lord to his creatures are adapted to the lowest capacity, and they bring life and salvation to all who are willing to receive them. . . .

. . . I believe the doctrines concerning salvation contained in that book are true, and that their observance will elevate any people, nation or family that dwells on the face of the earth.⁴

⁴Discourses of Brigham Young, compiled by John A. Widtsoe; Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1954; pages 124, 125. Library File Reference: SCRIPTURES.

THE CHALLENGE (Concluded from page 333.)

Sometimes she has come just to visit, to bring a homemade card, a goodie or small gift for my birthday or Mother's Day. It isn't that she spends a lot of time with me, or that she is big enough to get a lot of work done, or even that she brings expensive presents. It's that she makes me feel as if she cares for me and enjoys coming, *as if she likes me*. How important that feeling is!"⁵

"Dis-le au Poêle"

Perhaps we can squeeze in one more story. It is about a 13-year-old girl living in a small community in France. Henriette is a product of the space age and good Christian upbringing. She and her mother have a favorite expression: "Dis-le au poêle," which means "Tell it to the stove." Henriette will simply not tolerate anyone's saying unkind things to her about someone else. "Tell it to the stove. I don't want to listen," she will say.

Regardless of the target of another's fault finding—"those terrible Americans in Vietnam," "the crooked men in government," "that mean policeman," "the boring speaker in church," "the dirty milkman," "the selfish boy next door," "the barking dog," Henriette's response is always the same:

"Dis-le au poêle. I don't want to listen." The result is that people just don't say unkind things about others anymore—at least not around Henriette.⁶

"He's My Brother"

I haven't begun to give you all of the examples about young people and brotherly love collected by my children in response to a challenge. Perhaps this short verse⁷ will summarize the rest of them.

*I met a little maid,
a rosy burden bearing;
"Is he not heavy?" I said,
as past me she was hurrying.
She looked at me with grave, sweet eyes,
this fragile little mother;
And answered me in swift surprise:
"Oh, no, sir; he's my brother!"*

"My brother" is everyman. And no one is too young or too old to practice the art of brotherly love in its many forms and expressions. To do so is an urgent challenge to all of us in this age of space.

⁶Family collection.
⁷(Adapted; author unknown.) See J. A. Chesley, *Stories for Talks with Boys and Girls*; Association Press, New York, 1958; page 299. Library File Reference: LOVE.

⁵Bernice Hodson, May, 1968.

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Referred To, Quoted, or Used By

Contents

Book

A. Earliest Records

Book	Contents	Referred To, Quoted, or Used By
1. Book of Remembrance	Plan of salvation, prophecies, genealogies	Enoch (Moses 6:5, 8, 45-46)
2. Book of Enoch	His ministry and prophecies, great meeting in Adam-ondi-Ahman	Moses (?) (Moses 6 and 7; Doctrine and Covenants 107:56, 57; Jude 14, 15; DHC 1:132, 133)
3. Sources not stated	From Adam and his posterity to the time of Babel	Moroni (Ether 1:3)
4. Records of the patriarchs	Creation, astronomy, priesthood records	Abraham (Abraham 1:28-31)
5. Abraham's records	God and his creation, principles of the priesthood, etc.	Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (See Book of Abraham, Facsimiles 2 and 3; William Frye letter.*)
6. Joseph's records	Moses, Israel, latter days	Lehi (2 Nephi 3; 4:2; DHC 2:348; Frye letter*)

B. Prophecies From Early Israelite Times (From Brass Plates; assume originally in Old Testament. Compare 1 Nephi 5:10-16.)

1. Zenos	Mission of Christ, scattering and gathering of Israel	Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Nephi son of Helaman, and Mormon (1 Nephi 19:10-16; Jacob 5; Helaman 8:19; 15:11; 3 Nephi 10:16)
2. Zenock	Mission of Christ	Nephi, Alma, Nephi, Moroni (See references above.)
3. Neum	Mission of Christ	Nephi (1 Nephi 19:10-16)
4. Ezias	Mission of Christ	Nephi son of Helaman (Helaman 8:20)

C. Other Early Sources

1. Book of the Covenant	Covenant at Sinai	Moses (Exodus 24:4, 7)
2. Book of the Wars of the Lord	Mighty deeds of the Lord for Israel	Moses (Numbers 21:14)
3. "A Book" (In Hebrew, "The Book")	Data and charge regarding Amalek	Moses (Exodus 17:14)
4. Book of Jasher	a. Israel's victory over Amorites	Author of Joshua (Joshua 10:13)
	b. David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan	David (2 Samuel 1:18)
5. Book of the Law of God	Israel's special covenant with the Lord	Author of Joshua (Joshua 24:25)
6. "A Book" (In Hebrew, "The Book")	Duties of kings	Author of Samuel (1 Samuel 10:25)

D. Chronicles of the Prophets (Not Old Testament books of Chronicles; perhaps like Nephi's small plates? Compare 1 Nephi 9 and 19. 2 Chronicles 33:18-20.)

Records made by various prophets: Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, Iddo, Shemaiah, Jehu, Isaiah, etc.	Acts of the various kings, beginning with David	The chronicler (1 Chronicles 29:29, 30; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 20:34; 13:22; 26:22)
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E. Records of the Kings (Not Old Testament books of Kings; perhaps like Nephi's large plates? Compare 1 Nephi 9 and 19; 2 Chronicles 33:18-20.)

Book of the kings of Israel and Judah	Genealogical records of Israel and acts of the kings	The chronicler (1 Chronicles 9:1) The chronicler (2 Chronicles 16:11; 24:27; 25:26; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18; 35:27; 36:8)
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*Frye letter: see James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price*; Salt Lake City, Bookcraft Company, 1955; pages 96, 97.