

No Man Shall Add to or Take Away

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No Man Shall Add to or Take Away

Elder Howard W. Hunter

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Recently a young friend in the mission field wrote a letter to me regarding a question that had been asked of him concerning the concluding verses of the Bible and how they apply to the Book of Mormon. We remember that at the end of the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, the author, John, issues a warning and a curse upon any man who adds to or takes away from the book. Specifically, these are the words he wrote:

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Rev. 22:18–19.)

These verses of scripture have been cited repeatedly by those attempting to discredit the Book of Mormon, claiming that God’s revelation to man is closed. Nothing more is to be added and nothing is to be taken away. They assert that the Book of Mormon is an attempt to add to the words of the Bible. These claims were made when the Book of Mormon was first published and have continued to be made, and are made today. Is there any validity to such assertions?

The answer to this query is really very simple. A careful reading of the words makes it clear that the warning against adding to or taking away does not refer to the whole Bible or even to the New Testament, but to use John’s words, only to the words of “the book of this prophecy.” That is, the prophecy contained in the book of Revelation. This is substantiated by the fact that some of the books of the New Testament had not yet been written when John wrote the book of Revelation, and even those that had been written and were in existence at that time had not yet been gathered into one compilation.

The collection of writings consisting of the sixty-six books we know as the Bible were brought together and compiled into one volume long after John wrote the prophetic book that has been placed at the end of the collection. It is clear,

therefore, that the terrible judgments pronounced upon those who add to the book could not possibly apply to the whole of the Bible or even to the New Testament, but only to the book of Revelation.

Secondly, the warning uses the words “the prophecy of this book” and also “the words of the book of this prophecy.” The word *book* in both instances is singular and could only refer to the book of prophecy written by John which is titled, in the King James Version, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine” and is often referred to as the Apocalypse—a Greek word which means revealed. Of necessity the word *book* would have been in the singular because when written it was not associated with any other book or books, and it was after many years and many ecclesiastical debates that it was added to the collection that became known as the new canon of scripture or the New Testament.

It is also interesting to note that John himself added to scripture after writing the book of Revelation, which is generally conceded to have been written while he was on the Isle of Patmos. It was long after John left Patmos that he wrote his first epistle. This fact standing alone would be sufficient to defeat the claim that revelation was closed and that man was enjoined from adding to scripture. This adds cumulative evidence that John had reference to the book of Revelation only.

In the Old Testament also are found similar vigorous denunciations and commands that there shall not be taken away or added to the words that were written. The first is found in Deuteronomy, written at the time Moses was exhorting Israel to live the law of the Lord. The Torah was oral law and had not been reduced to writing prior to the time of the codification of the law in Deuteronomy. Now that it had been reduced to writing by Moses prior to his death and assumed to be complete, Moses wrote:

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” (Deut. 4:2.)

Later in this same book of the law, Moses repeated the admonition in similar words. He said,

“What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” (Deut. 12:32.)

In the minds of some, these admonitions in the Old Testament raise the same question as to the Book of Mormon being an attempted addition to scripture as does the injunction and warning at the end of the book of Revelation. In effect, these passages contain the same injunction as the one at the close of the Apocalypse; and if the same interpretation and argument was applied to them as is applied to the closing verses of the book of Revelation, there would be no scripture after the writings of Moses. Such an absurdity would result in discarding the greater part of the Old Testament and all of the books of the New Testament.

A careful reading of each of these admonitions makes it clear that *man* is not to make changes in the revelations of the Lord: *man* is not to add to or take from the words of God. There is no indication or intimation that God could not, or would not, add to or take from; nor would any reasonable person with a belief in the divine powers of God consciously believe that God would be so restricted. Without question he would have the right and power to give additional revelation for the guidance of his children in any age and to add additional scripture.

A study of the revelations of the Lord in holy writ confirms the fact that it is continuous revelation that guides prophets and the Church in any age. Were it not for continuous revelation, Noah would not have been prepared for the deluge that encompassed the earth. Abraham would not have been guided from Haran to Hebron, the Land of Promise. Continuous revelation led the children of Israel from bondage back to their promised land. Revelation through prophets guided missionary efforts, directed the rebuilding of Solomon's temple, and denounced the infiltration of pagan practices among the Israelites.

Before the ascension of Christ, he promised the remaining eleven apostles, "lo, I am with you alway, Even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:20.) Following his ascension, he guided the Church by revelation until the death of the Apostles and subsequent apostasy of the Church of Jesus Christ.

A distinctive sign of the last days that will precede the eventual second coming of the Lord was seen in vision by that same Apostle who recorded the book of Revelation. He said:

"I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." (Rev. 14:6.)

The fact that John saw a messenger from God reveal anew a lost gospel negates the argument that further revelation could not be added to the Bible.

We testify to all the world that heavenly ministers have already appeared in our age, bringing authority from heaven and restoring truths lost through corrupted teachings and practices. God has spoken anew and continues to provide guidance for all his children through a living prophet today. We declare that he, as promised, is with his servants always and directs the affairs of his Church throughout the world. As in times past, revelation directs missionary labors, the building of temples, the calling of priesthood officers, and warns against the evils of society that may deny salvation to our Father's children.

In a revelation to a modern oracle, Joseph Smith, the Lord said:

"For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.

"And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst." (D&C 1:35–36.)

The Savior is reigning in the midst of the Saints today through continuous revelation. I testify that he is with his servants in this day and will be until the end of the earth.

May our vision not be so narrow that we would relegate revelation to only the ancients. God is merciful and loves his children in all ages and has revealed himself to this time in history. Of this I solemnly testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.