

Argument 7: Biblical Inerrancy and Sufficiency

| Introduction

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy — the claim that the Bible is entirely without error in its original manuscripts and is wholly sufficient as the sole rule of faith — is a relatively modern theological development that has become a cornerstone of evangelical Protestant criticism against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Critics assert that if the Bible is perfect, complete, and self-sufficient, then additional scripture such as the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price are not merely unnecessary but positively dangerous. This argument deserves careful, honest engagement because it touches on foundational questions about the nature of scripture, revelation, and God's relationship with humanity.

| The Criticism (Steelmanned)

The strongest version of this argument runs as follows:

The Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. 2 Timothy 3:16 declares that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." A perfect, omnipotent God would not produce an imperfect text. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), signed by nearly 300 evangelical scholars, represents the mature consensus of Protestant scholarship: the Bible is "without error or fault in all its teaching" in its original autographs. Since the Bible is sufficient for salvation and godly living (2 Timothy 3:17 — "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"), any additional scripture is superfluous at best and heretical at worst. The LDS claim of additional revelation implicitly denies the perfection and completeness of God's word.

This is a serious argument because it appeals to deeply held convictions about God's character, the authority of scripture, and the historical consensus of Christian theology.

| Biblical Response

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Does Not Teach What Inerrancy Advocates Claim

The passage most frequently cited — 2 Timothy 3:16-17 — actually undermines the inerrancy position when read carefully:

1. **"All Scripture" at the time of writing referred to the Old Testament.** When Paul wrote to Timothy, the New Testament canon did not exist. If this verse means scripture is complete and sufficient, it would exclude the very New Testament books inerrancy advocates wish to defend. Paul's own letter to Timothy would be excluded from the "sufficient" canon.
2. **"Profitable" does not mean "exclusive."** Paul says scripture is *profitable* (Greek: *ophelimos* — useful, beneficial) for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. He does not say it is the *only* source of these things. A hammer is profitable for building a house; that does not mean you need no other tools.
3. **"Complete" (Greek: *artios*) means "fitted" or "capable."** The claim that the man of God is "complete" does not mean no further revelation is possible — it means scripture equips believers for good works. A medical degree makes a doctor "complete" for practice; that does not mean medical knowledge ceased at graduation.

The Bible Itself Does Not Claim to Be Inerrant

Nowhere does the Bible assert its own inerrancy in the way the Chicago Statement defines it. The concept of inerrancy as applied to original autographs (which no longer exist) is a theological construct imposed on the text, not derived from it.

- **The Bible contains internal tensions.** Compare 2 Samuel 24:1 ("the LORD moved David") with 1 Chronicles 21:1 ("Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David") — the same event attributed to two different agents. Compare the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Compare the accounts of Judas's death in Matthew 27:5 (hanging) and Acts 1:18 (falling and bursting open).
- **Jesus corrected and expanded Old Testament teaching.** In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48), Jesus repeatedly said, "You have heard that it was said... but I say unto you." If the Old Testament text were inerrant and sufficient, why did Christ Himself add to and reinterpret it?
- **Paul distinguished between his own opinion and the Lord's command.** In 1 Corinthians 7:12, Paul writes, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord." In 7:25, "I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment." This is an inspired author explicitly acknowledging that not everything he writes carries the same authority.

The Bible Repeatedly Points Beyond Itself

Scripture consistently teaches that God's word is not confined to a single book:

- **John 21:25** — "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."
- **John 16:12-13** — "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth."

- **Amos 3:7** — "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."
- **Numbers 11:29** — Moses said, "Would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!"
- **Revelation 11:3** — Even the book of Revelation itself prophesies *future* prophets: "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy."

| Early Christian and Historical Evidence

Inerrancy Is a Modern Doctrine

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy was drafted in 1978. While Christians have always held scripture in high regard, the specific doctrine of inerrancy as defined by modern evangelicals is a product of the 19th and 20th century battles against modernism and higher criticism.

- **Origen (c. 185-254)** freely acknowledged difficulties in the biblical text and employed allegorical interpretation precisely because he recognized that the literal text sometimes presented problems. (*De Principiis* 4.1.16)
- **Augustine (354-430)**, often cited by inerrancy advocates, actually wrote to Jerome: "I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error." Yet Augustine also acknowledged apparent contradictions and devoted significant effort to harmonizing them — an effort unnecessary if the text were self-evidently inerrant. (*Epistle 82*)
- **John Calvin** did not hold to inerrancy in the modern sense. He acknowledged that Matthew 27:9 incorrectly attributes a quote to Jeremiah that comes from Zechariah, calling it a scribal error that was permitted by God's providence.

The Text Has Changed Over Time

The doctrine of inerrancy applies to "original autographs" — manuscripts that no longer exist. This is a critical admission:

- We possess over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and no two are exactly alike. Textual critic Bart Ehrman has catalogued more textual variants than there are words in the New Testament (though most are minor).
- The ending of Mark (16:9-20) is absent from the earliest manuscripts. The story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) is not found in the oldest manuscripts.
- 1 John 5:7 (the Johannine Comma, a key Trinitarian proof text) was not in the original text and was added centuries later.

If God intended an inerrant, sufficient text, why did He not preserve it inerrantly? The Latter-day Saint answer is straightforward: God works through imperfect human instruments and compensates through ongoing revelation.

The Canon Itself Was Determined by Human Councils

The 27-book New Testament canon was not settled until the late 4th century (Council of Carthage, 397 AD). Before that:

- The Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Didache were considered scripture by some early Christians.
- 2 Peter, James, Jude, 2-3 John, and Revelation were disputed for centuries.
- Martin Luther questioned the canonicity of James ("an epistle of straw"), Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation.

If the Bible is self-authenticating and self-evidently inerrant, why did it take nearly 400 years for Christians to agree on its contents — and why have they continued to disagree (Protestants have 66 books; Catholics have 73; Ethiopian Orthodox have 81)?

| LDS Doctrinal Position

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds a nuanced position on scripture:

1. **The Bible is scripture.** Article of Faith 8: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly." This is not a dismissal of the Bible — it is an honest acknowledgment of the textual and translation realities that all biblical scholars recognize.
2. **God is not limited to one book.** 2 Nephi 29:3-10 directly addresses the objection "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there is no need for any more Bible." The Lord responds: "Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men... and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?"
3. **Additional scripture does not replace the Bible; it witnesses it.** The Book of Mormon's subtitle is "Another Testament of Jesus Christ." It confirms, clarifies, and supplements the Bible — it does not supersede it.
4. **Ongoing revelation is the pattern of God's dealings with humanity.** From Adam to Malachi, from Christ to John on Patmos, God has always spoken through prophets. The claim that He stopped is the innovation, not the claim that He continues.

| Key Scriptures

Reference	Point
2 Timothy 3:16-17	"All Scripture" referred to the OT; says scripture is "profitable," not exclusive
John 21:25	Not everything Jesus did or said is recorded

Reference	Point
John 16:12-13	Jesus promised future revelation through the Spirit
Amos 3:7	God reveals His secrets through prophets — no time limit given
Isaiah 29:11-14	A sealed book and a marvelous work to come forth
Ezekiel 37:16-17	The stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph joined together
2 Nephi 29:3-10	The Lord will speak to all nations and produce scripture beyond the Bible
Revelation 11:3	Future prophets are prophesied even in the last book of the Bible
1 Corinthians 7:12, 25	Paul distinguishes his opinion from the Lord's command
Matthew 5:21-48	Jesus expanded and corrected Old Testament teaching

| Responses to Common Objections

"But 2 Timothy 3:16 says ALL scripture is God-breathed!"

Yes — and "all scripture" at that time meant the Old Testament. If this verse proves the Bible is complete and sufficient, it proves the *Old Testament alone* is complete and sufficient, making the New Testament unnecessary by the critic's own logic.

"The Chicago Statement represents scholarly consensus."

The Chicago Statement represents the consensus of *evangelical* scholars — one subset of Christianity. Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and many mainline Protestant scholars do not affirm it. The Statement was a 20th-century response to specific theological debates, not a recovery of ancient Christian teaching.

"If the Bible has errors, we can't trust anything."

This is a false dilemma. A document can be inspired, powerful, and authoritative without being inerrant in every detail. Latter-day Saints trust the Bible *and* acknowledge that scribes, translators, and editors have introduced variations over millennia. Trust is strengthened, not weakened, by honesty about the text's history.

"Additional scripture opens the door to anyone claiming revelation."

The same argument could have been made against every new prophetic book in biblical history. When Isaiah prophesied, the Torah already existed — should Israel have rejected Isaiah because Moses was sufficient? When Paul wrote his epistles, the Gospels were not yet compiled — should the

early church have rejected Paul? God has always provided means to test prophets (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Matthew 7:15-20), and He continues to do so.

"A perfect God would produce a perfect text."

A perfect God works through imperfect human beings. The Bible was written by human authors in human languages, copied by human scribes, translated by human translators, and compiled by human councils. God's perfection does not eliminate human agency — it works through it. This is precisely why ongoing prophetic guidance is necessary.

| Conclusion

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy, while sincerely held by many devoted Christians, is not taught by the Bible itself, was not held by the earliest Christians in its modern form, and is contradicted by the textual evidence. The Bible is a powerful, inspired witness of God's dealings with His children — but it was never intended to be God's final word to humanity. The Latter-day Saint position — that God continues to speak through prophets and that additional scripture confirms and supplements the Bible — is more consistent with the biblical pattern than the claim that God fell silent after the apostolic age. The real question is not whether God *can* speak again, but whether we are willing to listen.

| Resources

- [FAIR: Biblical Inerrancy](#)
- [FAIR: Bible Sufficiency](#)
- [Church of Jesus Christ: The Bible](#)
- [Church of Jesus Christ: Articles of Faith](#)
- [FAIR: Alleged Biblical Contradictions](#)

| Addresses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/arguments/Biblical-Inerrancy-and-Sufficiency|Argument: Biblical Inerrancy and Sufficiency\]\]](#)

| Related Defenses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/sola-scriptura-bible-sole-authority-full|Sola Scriptura Defense \(Full\)\]\]](#)
- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/sola-scriptura-bible-sole-authority-cheatsheet|Sola Scriptura Defense \(Cheat Sheet\)\]\]](#)

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/canon-closed-no-new-scripture-full|Canon Closed Defense \(Full\)\]\]](#)
- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/canon-closed-no-new-scripture-cheatsheet|Canon Closed Defense \(Cheat Sheet\)\]\]](#)