

Argument 10: Canon Was Closed – No New Scripture Allowed

| Introduction

The claim that the biblical canon is permanently closed – that no new scripture can ever be added to the Bible – is one of the most frequently deployed arguments against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Critics assert that Revelation 22:18-19 functions as a divine seal on the entire Bible, that the early church councils definitively settled which books are canonical, and that any new scripture claims (the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price) are inherently illegitimate additions that "open the door to unlimited human invention." This argument sounds authoritative but collapses under historical, textual, and theological scrutiny.

| The Criticism (Steelmanned)

The strongest version of this argument:

Revelation 22:18-19 states: "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." This is God's final warning: the canon is closed. The early church councils (Laodicea, Hippo, Carthage) carefully and prayerfully discerned which books were divinely inspired, and that process is complete. The 66 books of the Protestant Bible (or 73 of the Catholic Bible) represent the full and final revelation of God. Any claim to new scripture – the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price – undermines the authority and sufficiency of the Bible and opens the door to anyone claiming divine revelation. If we accept new scripture, there is no principled way to reject the Quran, the Book of Mormon, or any other text that claims divine origin.

| Biblical Response

Revelation 22:18-19 Refers to the Book of Revelation, Not the Entire Bible

This is the single most important point in this entire debate, and it is textually indisputable:

1. **"This book" means the Book of Revelation.** The phrase "the words of the prophecy of this book" refers to the Apocalypse of John – the document John was writing. It does not refer to the Bible as a whole because *the Bible as a whole did not exist when John wrote these*

words.

2. **The New Testament was not compiled as a single volume until centuries later.**

When John wrote Revelation (c. 95 AD), there was no "Bible" to add to or take from. The 27 books of the New Testament were individual scrolls and codices circulating independently among various churches. They were not gathered into a single canon until the late 4th century.

3. **The order of the New Testament books is not the order in which they were**

written. Revelation is placed last in our modern Bibles, but many scholars believe several epistles (2 Peter, possibly 2-3 John) were written after Revelation. If Revelation 22:18-19 closes the canon, these later books violate the closure.

4. **Moses made an identical statement — and it did not close the Old Testament**

canon. Deuteronomy 4:2: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it." Deuteronomy 12:32: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." If these verses closed the canon, every book after Deuteronomy — Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, the Psalms, Proverbs, and the entire New Testament — is an illegitimate addition. **The critic's argument, applied consistently, destroys the Bible itself.**

5. **Proverbs 30:5-6** says: "Every word of God is pure... Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." This was written centuries before the New Testament. If it closes the canon, the New Testament is illegitimate.

The "adding to the book" warnings in scripture prohibit *human tampering with divine revelation* — altering, corrupting, or distorting God's words. They do not prohibit God Himself from speaking again.

The Bible Contains Internal Evidence That More Scripture Was Expected

- **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 himself acknowledges that the written record is incomplete.
- **1 Corinthians 5:9** — "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to mix with fornicators." Paul references a *previous letter to the Corinthians* that is not in our Bible. This is lost scripture — a canonical author's inspired writing that did not survive.
- **Colossians 4:16** — "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." Paul's epistle to the Laodiceans is lost — another piece of inspired writing not preserved in the canon.
- **Jude 14-15** quotes the Book of Enoch — a text not included in the Protestant or Catholic canons (though it is canonical in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church). A canonical author treated a non-canonical book as authoritative and prophetic.
- **Numbers 21:14** references "the book of the wars of the LORD" — a lost scripture.

- **Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18** reference "the book of Jasher" — another lost scripture.
- **1 Chronicles 29:29** references "the book of Samuel the seer," "the book of Nathan the prophet," and "the book of Gad the seer" — all lost.
- **2 Chronicles 9:29** references "the book of Nathan the prophet," "the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite," and "the visions of Iddo the seer" — all lost.

The Bible itself testifies that inspired writings existed beyond its current contents. If God inspired these writings once, He can inspire new ones.

God's Word Is Not Confined to a Single Book

- **Amos 3:7** — "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." No time limit. No canon closure.
- **Isaiah 29:11-14** — Prophecies a sealed book that will come forth and a "marvellous work and a wonder." Latter-day Saints identify this with the Book of Mormon.
- **Ezekiel 37:16-17** — "Take thee one stick... for Judah... and one stick... for Joseph... and they shall become one in thine hand." Latter-day Saints understand this as the Bible (Judah's record) and the Book of Mormon (Joseph's record) joined together.
- **2 Nephi 29:3-10** — The Lord directly addresses the "closed canon" mentality: "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible... Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea?"

| Early Christian and Historical Evidence

The Canon Was Not Settled Until the Late 4th Century

The process of canonization was long, contested, and decidedly human:

Timeline:

- **c. 140 AD** — Marcion created the first known "canon" — a truncated version of Luke and ten Pauline epistles. The Church rejected it.
- **c. 170 AD** — The Muratorian Fragment lists most NT books but includes the Apocalypse of Peter and the Wisdom of Solomon while omitting Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, and 3 John.
- **c. 200-300 AD** — Origen distinguished between "acknowledged," "disputed," and "false" books. He acknowledged that 2 Peter, 2-3 John, James, and Jude were disputed.
- **325 AD** — Eusebius of Caesarea categorized NT books as "recognized," "disputed," and "spurious." He placed Revelation in *both* the recognized and spurious categories.
- **367 AD** — Athanasius's 39th Festal Letter is the first known list matching the modern 27-book NT canon.

- **393 AD** — Council of Hippo affirmed the 27-book canon (including the OT Apocrypha/Deuterocanon).

- **397 AD** — Council of Carthage confirmed the list.

Critical observations:

1. **Christians lived and thrived for nearly 400 years without a settled canon.** If a closed canon were essential to Christianity, the faith could not have survived its first four centuries.
2. **The councils did not claim divine revelation in selecting the canon.** They applied criteria (apostolic authorship, orthodoxy, widespread use) that were human judgments, not prophetic declarations.
3. **Christians still disagree on the canon.** Protestants: 66 books. Catholics: 73 (adding Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1-2 Maccabees, and additions to Esther and Daniel). Ethiopian Orthodox: 81 books (adding 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and others). If the canon were divinely and permanently closed, why can Christians not agree on what is in it?

Early Christians Expected Ongoing Revelation

- **The Didache (c. 50-120 AD):** Provides instructions for receiving and testing prophets — presupposing that prophetic revelation continued.
- **Papias (c. 60-130 AD):** "I did not think that information from books would help me as much as information from a living and surviving voice" (*Fragments of Papias*, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4). Early Christians valued living prophetic witness over written texts.
- **Irenaeus (c. 130-202 AD):** While defending the four-Gospel canon, he did not argue that *all* revelation had ceased.
- **Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD):** "The prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 82).

The Reformation Reopened the Canon Question

Martin Luther's questioning of James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation demonstrates that even within Protestantism, the canon has not been as "settled" as critics claim. If Luther — the father of the Reformation — could question whether James belonged in the Bible, the canon is not as self-evidently closed as the argument assumes.

| LDS Doctrinal Position

1. **The Latter-day Saint canon is open.** This is not a weakness — it is a feature. An open canon means God can still speak. A closed canon means God has gone silent. Which is more consistent with the nature of a loving Father?

2. **Additional scripture does not replace the Bible.** The Book of Mormon is subtitled "Another Testament of Jesus Christ." The Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price supplement and confirm biblical teaching. They do not compete with the Bible; they witness it.
3. **Article of Faith 8:** "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."
4. **Article of Faith 9:** "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."
5. **2 Nephi 29:3-10** provides the Lord's own response to closed-canon thinking: He has spoken to many nations and will continue to speak. To limit God to one book is to deny His sovereignty.

Key Scriptures

Reference	Point
Rev 22:18-19	Refers to "this book" (Revelation), not the entire Bible
Deut 4:2; 12:32	Identical "do not add" language — did not close the OT canon
Prov 30:5-6	"Add not unto his words" — written centuries before the NT
John 21:25	Not everything Jesus did is recorded
1 Cor 5:9	Paul's lost letter to the Corinthians
Col 4:16	Paul's lost letter to the Laodiceans
Jude 14-15	Jude quotes the non-canonical Book of Enoch
Num 21:14	"Book of the wars of the LORD" — lost scripture
Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18	"Book of Jasher" — lost scripture
1 Chr 29:29	Books of Samuel, Nathan, Gad — all lost
Isa 29:11-14	Sealed book and marvelous work to come forth
Ezek 37:16-17	Stick of Judah and stick of Joseph joined
Amos 3:7	God reveals through prophets — no expiration
2 Nephi 29:3-10	The Lord's direct response to "A Bible! We have a Bible!"

| Responses to Common Objections

"Revelation 22:18-19 closes the canon!"

"This book" means the Book of Revelation. The Bible did not exist as a compiled volume when John wrote those words. If this logic applied, Deuteronomy 4:2 ("ye shall not add unto the word which I command you") would eliminate everything after Deuteronomy — including the Psalms, the Prophets, and the entire New Testament.

"The early church councils settled the canon."

They did — after nearly 400 years of disagreement, using human judgment, and Christians *still* disagree on which books are canonical (66, 73, or 81 books depending on tradition). If the canon were divinely and permanently closed, God did a remarkably poor job of communicating which books are in it.

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

The same argument could have been used against every prophetic book in the Old Testament. When Isaiah prophesied, the Torah existed — should Israel have rejected Isaiah? When Daniel prophesied, Isaiah existed — should they have rejected Daniel? God has always provided new revelation through new prophets, and He has always provided means to test them (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; 1 John 4:1).

"The Bible is sufficient — we don't need more."

The Bible itself references numerous inspired writings that are *not in the Bible* (Paul's lost letters, the Book of Jasher, the Book of the Wars of the Lord, the prophecies of Nathan and Gad). The Bible testifies to its own incompleteness. Moreover, "sufficient" for what? Forty-five thousand denominations interpreting the same "sufficient" Bible differently is evidence that the Bible alone, without prophetic interpretation, has not been sufficient to maintain doctrinal unity.

"The Book of Mormon contradicts the Bible!"

The Book of Mormon is remarkably consistent with biblical theology. It testifies of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Atonement, faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, and the resurrection. It confirms and supplements the biblical record. Critics who make this claim rarely provide specific examples — because the Book of Mormon's theology is deeply biblical.

"If we accept the Book of Mormon, we have to accept the Quran too."

Not at all. Each text must be evaluated on its own merits: internal consistency, historical claims, theological content, the circumstances of its production, and spiritual witness. The Book of Mormon invites this evaluation directly (Moroni 10:3-5). The claim that accepting any new revelation means accepting all claimed revelation is a logical fallacy — it is like saying that if you accept one doctor's diagnosis, you must accept every diagnosis from every person who claims to be a doctor.

| Conclusion

The claim that the biblical canon is permanently closed is not taught in the Bible, was not held by the earliest Christians, and is contradicted by the history of canonization itself. The warnings against "adding to" scripture in Revelation, Deuteronomy, and Proverbs prohibit human tampering with God's word — they do not prohibit God from speaking again. The Bible itself references lost scriptures, acknowledges that the written record is incomplete, and prophesies future revelation. The Latter-day Saint position — that God has spoken, does speak, and will yet speak — is more consistent with the biblical pattern than the claim that God permanently silenced Himself in the first century. An open canon is not a threat to biblical authority; it is a testament to a God who loves His children enough to keep talking to them.

| Resources

- [FAIR: The Closed Canon](#)
- [FAIR: Revelation 22:18-19](#)
- [FAIR: Lost Scripture](#)
- [Church: Book of Mormon](#)
- [Church: Scriptures](#)
- F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (InterVarsity Press, 1988)
- Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Baker Academic, 2007)

| Addresses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/arguments/Canon-Was-Closed-and-No-New-Scripture-Allowed|Argument: Canon Was Closed and No New Scripture Allowed\]\]](#)

| 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 \(Cheat Sheet\)\]\]](#)
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