

Sola Scriptura Is Not Biblical: A Latter-day Saint Defense

| Introduction

The doctrine of Sola Scriptura — that the Bible alone is the sole, sufficient authority for Christian faith and practice — is the foundational principle of Protestant theology. It is also the primary weapon used against the Latter-day Saint claim of additional scripture (the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price) and living prophets. The argument seems powerful at first glance: if the Bible is enough, then anything added to it is by definition either redundant or heretical. But Sola Scriptura has a fatal problem. It is not taught in the Bible. It contradicts the Bible's own description of how God governs His church. And it produces the very fragmentation and doctrinal chaos it claims to prevent. The Latter-day Saint position — that God speaks through living prophets and additional scripture as He has always done — is the consistently biblical model.

| The Criticism (Steelmanned)

The strongest version of the Sola Scriptura argument goes like this: 2 Timothy 3:16-17 declares that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." If scripture makes a person "thoroughly furnished," then no additional authority is needed. Revelation 22:18-19 warns against adding to or taking away from the words of "this book." The Protestant Reformation was correct to identify that the accumulation of human traditions — papal authority, councils, extra-biblical doctrines — had corrupted pure biblical Christianity. The solution was to strip away those additions and return to scripture alone. Any claim to additional scripture or prophetic authority reopens the door to the very corruptions the Reformation corrected. This is a principled argument. It deserves a careful, thorough response.

| Biblical Response

2 Timothy 3:16-17 Does Not Teach Sola Scriptura

This is the single most cited proof-text for Sola Scriptura, and it does not say what its proponents claim.

First, the passage says scripture is "profitable" (*ophelimos* in Greek) — useful, beneficial. It does not say scripture is "sufficient" or "sole." A hammer is profitable for building a house. That does not make it the only tool needed. Paul is commending Timothy for knowing the scriptures from childhood (v. 15) — which, critically, refers to the Old Testament, since the New Testament did not yet exist as a

completed canon when Paul wrote this letter. If 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches Sola Scriptura, it teaches Sola *Old Testament* Scriptura, which would exclude the very New Testament epistles that contain this verse.

Second, "thoroughly furnished" (*exartizo*) means equipped or prepared — not that no other equipping is necessary. In the same letter, Paul urges Timothy to hold to the oral teachings he received: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me" (2 Timothy 1:13). "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul explicitly commands oral transmission of teaching alongside scripture. This is the opposite of Sola Scriptura.

Third, Paul never says "scripture alone." He says scripture is inspired and profitable. Latter-day Saints agree completely. We love the Bible, study it, and preach from it. The question is whether God has spoken *only* through the Bible, and Paul does not make that claim here.

Revelation 22:18-19 Does Not Close the Canon

"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."

This is a warning about adding to or taking from "this book" — the Book of Revelation, not the entire Bible. When John wrote this, the New Testament had not been compiled. The books of the New Testament circulated as separate letters and documents. The New Testament canon was not formally settled until the councils of the late fourth century (Council of Hippo, 393 AD; Third Council of Carthage, 397 AD). John could not have been referring to a collection that did not yet exist.

Moreover, an identical warning appears in Deuteronomy 4:2: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it." If this kind of warning closes the canon, then everything after Deuteronomy — including the Psalms, the Prophets, and the entire New Testament — is illegitimate addition. No Christian accepts that conclusion. The warning is about not tampering with the specific revelation given, not about prohibiting future revelation from God.

The Bible Itself Teaches the Necessity of Prophets and Additional Revelation

The biblical model of authority is not "one book for all time." It is a living God who speaks through prophets in every dispensation.

- **Amos 3:7** — "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." God's pattern is to work through prophets. If He is still working, He is still revealing.
- **Ephesians 2:19-20** — The church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Apostles and prophets are foundational to the church — not optional extras to be discarded once a book is compiled.

- **Ephesians 4:11-14** — Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers "for the perfecting of the saints...till we all come in the unity of the faith." These offices continue until the church achieves perfect unity — which has manifestly not happened.
- **Acts 2:17** — Peter, quoting Joel, declares that in the last days "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...and I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Prophecy is a hallmark of the last days, not a relic of the past.
- **1 Corinthians 12:28** — "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets..." These are offices God placed in His church. Who authorized their removal?
- **Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10-11** — The New Testament church had living prophets who received and delivered new revelation. This was normal, expected, and authoritative.

The Bible Refers to Scriptures We Do Not Have

The Bible itself references books that are not in the biblical canon, treating them as authoritative:

- **The Book of Jasher** (Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18)
- **The Book of the Wars of the Lord** (Numbers 21:14)
- **The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite and the Visions of Iddo the Seer** (2 Chronicles 9:29)
- **An epistle of Paul to the Corinthians** prior to 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9)
- **An epistle to the Laodiceans** (Colossians 4:16)
- **A letter from Jude referencing the prophecy of Enoch** (Jude 1:14-15)

If the Bible is the complete and sole word of God, then these lost scriptures should trouble every Sola Scriptura advocate. God's word was clearly not limited to the 66 books of the Protestant canon. The idea that God spoke volumes of scripture that were simply allowed to be lost — while simultaneously forbidding any future scripture — has no biblical support.

| Early Christian Evidence

The Early Church Did Not Practice Sola Scriptura

The earliest Christians operated under the authority of living apostles and prophets, not a closed canon.

Clement of Rome (c. 96 AD) wrote to the Corinthians with apostolic authority, issuing commands and corrections. His letter was read in churches alongside scripture for centuries.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110 AD) wrote: "Follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles" (*Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 8). Authority was vested in living leaders, not solely in texts.

Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) argued against heretics by appealing to the oral tradition passed down through the bishops from the apostles: "The tradition of the apostles, manifested throughout the whole world, is a thing which all who wish to see facts can clearly perceive in every church" (*Against Heresies*, 3.3.1). His argument was that living tradition AND scripture together preserved truth.

Papias (c. 125 AD) explicitly stated his preference: "I did not think that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice" (quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.4).

The New Testament canon was not settled for centuries. Christians in the second and third centuries disagreed about which books were authoritative. The Muratorian Fragment (c. 170 AD) includes the Wisdom of Solomon and the Apocalypse of Peter but excludes Hebrews, James, and 1-2 Peter. If Sola Scriptura was the rule, the early Christians did not know which *scriptura* was *sola*.

Who Decided the Canon?

This is perhaps the most devastating question for the Sola Scriptura position: Who determined which books belong in the Bible? The answer is: church councils and bishops, guided (they claimed) by the Holy Spirit. The canon was settled by the authority of the institutional church — the very kind of authority that Sola Scriptura rejects. If the church had authority to determine the canon, then it had authority beyond the canon. If it did not have such authority, then the canon itself is unreliable. Either way, Sola Scriptura is self-undermining.

| LDS Doctrinal Position

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches:

1. **The Bible is the word of God** — we accept it as scripture, study it, and preach from it (Articles of Faith 1:8).
2. **God has spoken and continues to speak** through living prophets and additional scripture, consistent with the biblical pattern (Articles of Faith 1:9).
3. **The Book of Mormon is "another testament of Jesus Christ"** — a second witness that supports and clarifies biblical truths, not a replacement for the Bible.
4. **Living apostles and prophets lead the church today**, as they did in the New Testament church (Articles of Faith 1:5, 1:6).
5. **We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly** (Articles of Faith 1:8) — a recognition that the Bible's transmission history includes copying errors, translation choices, and the loss of plain and precious truths (1 Nephi 13:26-29).
6. **Continuing revelation does not contradict prior scripture** — it clarifies, expands, and applies it. Just as the New Testament did not cancel the Old Testament but fulfilled and expanded it, additional scripture builds on the biblical foundation.

| Key Scriptures

Scripture	Point
2 Tim. 3:16-17	Says scripture is "profitable," not "sufficient" or "sole." Refers to the OT.
2 Tim. 1:13	Paul commands Timothy to hold to oral teachings — not scripture alone
2 Tim. 2:2	Paul commands oral transmission of teaching to faithful men
Rev. 22:18-19	Warning about the Book of Revelation specifically, not the entire Bible
Deut. 4:2	Same type of warning — if it closes the canon, it closes it at Deuteronomy
Amos 3:7	God works through prophets — His established pattern
Eph. 2:19-20	Church built on apostles AND prophets
Eph. 4:11-14	Apostles and prophets given until the church achieves unity of faith
1 Cor. 12:28	God set apostles and prophets in the church
Acts 2:17	Prophecy is a hallmark of the last days
John 10:16	"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold" — other peoples receiving God's word
Isaiah 29:4, 11-14	A sealed book, a voice from the dust, a marvelous work and a wonder
Ezekiel 37:16-17	The stick of Judah (Bible) and the stick of Joseph (Book of Mormon) joined together

| Responses to Common Objections

Objection: "Revelation 22:18 says not to add to scripture — the Book of Mormon is an addition."

Response: Revelation 22:18 refers to the Book of Revelation, not the entire Bible. The same warning in Deuteronomy 4:2 would exclude everything after Deuteronomy — including the rest of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament. The Book of Mormon is not an addition *to* the Bible; it is an independent witness of Jesus Christ, brought forth by the same God who gave the Bible.

Objection: "The canon is closed — God is no longer giving new revelation."

Response: Where does the Bible say this? Chapter and verse. The Bible says the opposite: that God works through prophets (Amos 3:7), that apostles and prophets are foundational to the church (Eph. 2:20), that these offices continue until the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13), and that the last days will feature prophesying (Acts 2:17). The claim that the canon is closed is a tradition of men, not a biblical doctrine.

Objection: "Sola Scriptura has preserved the truth — look at how the Reformation corrected Rome's errors."

Response: Sola Scriptura has produced over 40,000 denominations that disagree on baptism, salvation, the Eucharist, church governance, eschatology, and virtually every other doctrine. If the Bible alone is a sufficient guide, why has it produced such radical disagreement among sincere, intelligent readers? The Reformation correctly identified that the medieval church had departed from biblical truth. But the solution was not to remove all authority outside the Bible — it was to restore the biblical pattern of living prophets and apostles who receive revelation from God.

Objection: "The early Christians had the Bible and didn't need prophets."

Response: The early Christians were LED by prophets. The New Testament church had prophets in every congregation (Acts 13:1, 15:32, 1 Cor. 12:28, 14:29). Paul said to "despise not prophesyings" (1 Thess. 5:20). The Bible was written BY prophets. Removing prophets from the church is like removing the engine from a car and insisting the manual is sufficient.

Objection: "If you accept new revelation, how do you know it's not false revelation?"

Response: The same way biblical believers always discerned true from false revelation: by its consistency with prior scripture, by its fruits (Matt. 7:15-20), and by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Moroni 10:3-5, John 16:13). The existence of counterfeits does not mean all new revelation is false — it means discernment is needed. Jesus warned of false prophets (Matt. 24:11), which presupposes that true prophets would also exist. You don't warn about counterfeit currency in a world where no real currency exists.

Objection: "2 Timothy 3:16-17 says scripture makes us 'complete' — that means sufficient."

Response: The word *exartizo* means equipped or fitted out, not "nothing else is needed." By this logic, James 1:4 — "let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" — means patience alone is sufficient for all spiritual needs and nothing else (including scripture) is necessary. The argument proves too much. Paul is saying scripture is a powerful tool that equips believers, not that it is the only tool God provides.

| Conclusion

Sola Scriptura is not a biblical doctrine. It is a sixteenth-century Protestant tradition that has been elevated to the status of scripture — which is precisely the kind of error it claims to correct. The Bible consistently teaches that God speaks through living prophets, that apostles and prophets are foundational to His church, and that His word is not limited to a single volume. The Latter-day Saint position — that God has spoken through the Bible AND through additional scripture and living prophets — is the biblical position. The question is not whether we add to the Bible. The question is whether we believe God is still speaking. Latter-day Saints answer with the prophets and apostles of every age: He is.

| Sources and Further Reading

- [FAIR: Bible — Sole Authority](#)
- [FAIR: Book of Mormon — Revelation 22:18](#)
- [Church of Jesus Christ: Scriptures](#)
- [Church of Jesus Christ: Prophets](#)
- Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985)
- Tad R. Callister, *The Inevitable Apostasy and the Promised Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006)
- Robert L. Millet, *Getting at the Truth: Responding to Difficult Questions about LDS Beliefs* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004)

| Addresses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/arguments/Sola-Scriptura-Bible-Is-the-Sole-Authority|Argument: Sola Scriptura: Bible Is the Sole Authority\]\]](#)

| Related Defenses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/biblical-inerrancy-sufficiency-full|Biblical Inerrancy Defense \(Full\)\]\]](#)
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