ZELOS, ZEnock, NEUM, and EZIAS); and writings from the New Testament apostle John (see D&C 7 and 93). Corrections to the biblical text include an expanded version of Matthew 24 and alternate readings in Isaiah.

Not only has modern revelation resulted in the restoration of ancient prophetic records and opened the canon in modern times, but the recovery of many ancient texts shows how open and diverse the canon was in earlier times. One ancient religious tradition, repeated in different settings and at different times, attests to two levels of sacred writings, one for public discourse and the other for more restricted use within the community of believers. One might note in this regard that a similar injunction to keep some writings within a restricted community is found in the book of Moses revealed to Joseph Smith: “Show these words not unto any except them that believe” (Moses 1:42; cf. 4:32). Some recently found texts bear the title “Apocryphon,” used in the ancient sense of secret or hidden writing. It was this “advanced” level of instruction that was rejected by the church fathers, and the negative meaning of “apocryphal” began to replace the positive or sacred sense. Because in ancient times many such writings were not made public by those who accepted them and because they were distorted and maligned by those who rejected them, scholars lack definitive methods by which to determine if these writings have been transmitted accurately.

In this large collection of writings, relating to both Old and New Testaments, many diverse subjects are discussed, and a few are found repeatedly. Revelation, in the form of APOCALYPTIC TEXTS, is perhaps the most common element: numerous apocryphal texts claim to contain the mysteries, or secrets, of heaven revealed to man. Testaments of patriarchs frequently occur in the Old Testament apocryphal writings; and instructions, eschatological warnings, ritual passages, and cosmic visions are transmitted by the resurrected Jesus to his disciples in many of the New Testament Apocrypha. The type of literature that encompasses these themes is often called Gnostic literature, and scholars generally view the gnosticism seen in apocryphal texts as a fusion of many diverse elements (Hellenism, Judaism, mystery religions, and Christianity, to name a few) into a complex and mystical religious movement. Considerable study will be necessary before all the questions relating to the origin, accuracy, meaning, and significance of apocryphal literature can be answered. Numerous versions of the fourteen books of the Old Testament Apocrypha known in Joseph Smith’s time are available, either in separate publications or in modern printings of the Bible, such as the Jerusalem Bible or the New English Bible.

Joseph Smith was well in advance of modern perceptions concerning the Apocrypha when he was given the revelation warning the Saints to seek spiritual guidance when reading such works, alerting them to truths to be obtained therein.

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APOSTASY

Latter-day Saints believe that apostasy occurs whenever an individual or community rejects the revelations and ordinances of God, changes the gospel of Jesus Christ, or rebels against the commandments of God, thereby losing the blessings of the Holy Ghost and of divine AUTHORITY. The rise of revelatory communities, apostasies, and restorations has happened cyclically throughout the history of mankind, in a series of DISPENSATIONS from the time of Adam and Enoch (Moses 7) to the present. Latter-day Saints see a historical “great apostasy” and subsequent loss of authority beginning in the New Testament era and spreading in the centuries immediately following that era. Though Latter-day Saints have not emphasized the great apostasy as much as they have the concept that the Church is a revelatory RESTORATION, the need of a restoration implies that something important was lost after the departure of the primitive Christian church.

The English word “apostasy” derives from the Greek apostasia or apóstasis (“defection, revolt”); used in a political sense by Herodotus and Thucyd-
ides); it is mentioned in a religious context in the Septuagint and the New Testament (e.g., Josh. 22:22 and 2 Chr. 29:19; 2 Thes. 2:3 states that an apostasia must come before the second coming of Christ). It can mean the intransitive “to stand away from,” or the active “to cause to stand away from.” Thus an apostasy can be an active, collective rebellion or a “falling away.”

Joseph Smith in his first Vision (1820) was told by Christ that all existing churches had gone astray, both in their teachings and in their practice, although they had “a form of godliness” (JS—H 1:18–19). Thus it was necessary for a “restoration” of the gospel to take place.

In addition, in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 11–14; 2 Ne. 28; cf. Morm. 8), the prophet Nephi had a vision of the early Christian church and its twelve apostles, against whom the “multitudes of the earth” and the house of Israel fought (1 Ne. 11:34–35). He foresaw a “great and abominable church” that persecuted true Christians and the poor, and whose members were motivated by such things as pride, clothing themselves in precious raiment, and indulging in sexual immorality (see great and abominable church). It altered the simplicity of the gospel insidiously, did away with covenants, excised important scriptures, and denied the existence of miracles. This apostasy can be linked, in the allegory of Zenos, with the scattering of Israel when all the trees in the Lord’s vineyard had become corrupt (Jacob 5:39–48), and it was paralleled by the calamitous apostasy of the Nephites in the New World (1 Ne. 12:15–19; 4 Ne. 1:24–46).

However, this “great church” was not any one specific church, according to Nephi; in his apocalyptic vision there are only two churches, and “whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church” (1 Ne. 14:10). It is typological, symbolic of many historical and social movements (2 Ne. 27:1); even nominal adherents to Christ’s church, if driven by pride, wealth, prestige, and their appurtenances, may find themselves members of that “great church” (cf. 1 Ne. 8:27–28).

All through their history, Latter-day Saints have written and theorized about historical events involved in the “great apostasy,” a theme discussed in several Restorationist writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (see restorationism, protestant). In 1833, referring to Mark 16:17–18 and 1 Corinthians 12, Joseph Smith stated: “By the foregoing testimonies we may look at the Christian world and see [that] the apostasy there has been from the apostolic platform” (TPJS, p. 15). Oliver Cowdery wrote on the apostasy in the first issue of the Messenger and Advocate (1834). In 1840 Orson Pratt spoke of “a general and awful apostasy from the religion of the New Testament” (Listen to the Voice of Truth, 1:1). He particularly emphasized a lack of binding ordinances because of the absence of priesthood authority; baptism was a key example. In Pratt’s view all churches before the Restoration were wrong in some ways, doctrinally and ritually, even though they might be right in others. Benjamin Winchester, an early LDS pamphleteer, wrote an extensive treatise using New Testament sources to demonstrate that an apostasy had been prophesied (A History of Priesthood, Philadelphia, 1843, pp. 72–96). In the 1850s and 1860s many references were made to “the great apostasy” (O. Pratt, JD 12:247) and “the great falling away” (W. Woodruff, JD 8:262) in Latter-day Saint sermons.

This idea—breaking off from established religion because it seems out of tune with New Testament Christianity—has obvious Protestant overtones, but the LDS view differs from typical Protestant attitudes in its emphasis on the loss and restoration of exclusive, clear-cut priesthood authority, correct ordinances, and continuing revelation. In contrast, Protestants typically rely primarily on biblical reinterpretation.

In 1909 James E. Talmage wrote The Great Apostasy, in which he gathered New Testament passages that Latter-day Saints have cited to show that a great apostasy was predicted by Jesus Christ, Paul, and other apostles and prophets (esp. Matt. 24:4–13, 23–26; Acts 20:29–30; Gal. 1; 2 Thes. 2:7–8; 1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:1–6; 4:1–4; Jude 1:3–4; Rev. 13:4–9; 14:6–7; and in the Old Testament, Amos 8:11–12). Talmage also chronicled the persecution of early Christians that hastened the Apostasy and described the primitive Church as changing internally in several respects. He argued that the simple principles of the gospel were mixed with the pagan philosophical systems of the day (Trinitarianism, resulting in the Nicene Creed; false opposition of body and spirit, creating excessive asceticism); that rituals were changed and added to in unauthorized ways (simple early Christian rites were replaced by complex pagan-influenced ceremonies; baptism by immersion was lost; the baptism of infants was introduced [cf. Moro. 8];
communion was changed); and that church organization was altered (the apostles and prophets, the necessary foundation of the church of Christ, were martyred, leaving a void that could not be filled by bishops; thus the medieval church showed little similarity to the organization or practices of the New Testament church).

LDS teachings on the early Christian apostasy have received additional support in the twentieth century as some scholars have argued that the primitive Church began as a centralized Judaic organization, was faced with the challenge of a Hellenized/Oriental, ascetic Gnostic Christianity, and became like its enemy in order to compete. The very idea of a centralized Christianity has given way to a picture of diverse and fragmented early Christianity, where it is hard to determine what is orthodox and what is heretical, what is Gnostic and what is “mainstream.” For instance, Peter Brown and William Phipps argue that Augustinian’s influential doctrine of ORIGINAL SIN, with its concomitant ritual, INFANT BAPTISM, was derived from his Gnostic background and was, in reality, heretical, while Pelagian opposition to these ideas was orthodox. But Augustine’s doctrines prevailed, and continue to influence Western theology and culture. Another early Christian doctrine that did not survive in Western Christianity was DEIFICATION, though it remained central to Eastern Christianity.

A complex religious and cultural milieu both nurtured and transformed early Christianity. Many factors must be taken into consideration in analyzing this transformation of Christianity. For example, some have put the blame exclusively on Greek philosophy and the influence of philosophy on Gnosticism for the rise of the great apostasy. But asceticism (i.e., hatred of the body, of sexuality, of the physical world) played a major role in the apostasy of the early church, and extreme asceticism is characteristically Oriental. Moreover, much of Greek philosophy has been found to be consistent with the gospel; Elder Orson F. Whitney referred to Plato and Socrates as “servants of the Lord,” although in a “lesser sense” than the prophets (CR [April 1921]:33).

The concept of a historical apostasy from early Christianity can present a barrier between Latter-day Saints and others concerned with INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS. But Latter-day Saints do not view these events judgmentally; much of spiritual value happened during the Middle Ages and in other Christian churches. Brigham Young emphasized that good men before the restoration had “the spirit of revelation” and stated that John Wesley was as good a man “as ever walked on this earth” (JD 7:5: 6:170; 11:126). President Young held that all churches and religions have “more or less truth” (JD 7:283), and he admonished the Saints to seek and accept truths wherever they might be found. In conference talks, General Authorities, including President Spencer W. Kimball and President Thomas S. Monson, have quoted or praised such luminaries as Billy Graham and Mother Teresa.

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