

Problems in Restoration History

Denver C. Snuffer Jr.

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Reconstructing a complete and accurate history for the restoration using available records is challenging if not outright impossible. Although there have been many histories written attempting to provide an accurate account, serious problems remain in understanding the restoration. There are two separate challenges. First, it is difficult to describe an accurate record of events. That is followed by the greater difficulty to decide how to interpret the events. History requires understanding how and why events are to be understood in an overall pattern. Determining that pattern is more challenging than sorting out the record.

Restoration history begins with Joseph Smith. He was a controversial figure and people who met him became noteworthy because of their association with him. Assuming they had something to say regarding their relationship with him, their opinions about him became important to historians. Opinions based on personal experience with someone noteworthy are considered important: even if their contact was passing and colored by their prejudices, limitations or ignorance. Hence, there are many contemporaneous opinions about Joseph Smith used by historians to reconstruct events.

Those unkindly disposed toward him, took the opportunity to speak poorly about him. Any event that reflected badly, or any negative embellishment of an event, became part of the record. The earliest adverse account was by Doctor Philastus Hulbut, who made it his mission to gather impugning affidavits about Joseph Smith. Eber D. Howe published that collection in the anti-Mormon book *Mormonism Unveiled*. There were also four derisive pamphlets antagonistic to Joseph Smith and the religion he was founding published in 1838. A flood of other unfavorable histories soon followed. Historians who want to portray Joseph in a negative light have a wealth of information from such sources with which to compose a contrary interpretation.

Followers and believers in Joseph's claims were disposed to tell, and oftentimes embellish, anything that held him in a positive light. Doting admirers wrote a great deal of laudatory material. Historians who want to portray Joseph in a heroic light also have a wealth of information from these sources with which to compose a positive interpretation.

Should the history of the restoration be composed relying only on Joseph's critics? Should it be written relying only on Joseph's admirers? Until recently, most of the histories written of the restoration chose one or the other. Recent histories attempt to walk a middle path and allow both sides to contribute to the story. However, both sides are prone to exaggeration and overstatement. Mixing them together is not

much better than leaving them apart. Sorting through the contradictions has made for interesting storytelling, but it does not give an accurate history.

After the first challenge is addressed by deciding what facts to trust, the second problem is how to interpret the facts. Is there a theme? Is there an overall narrative that accounts for the facts, smoothing them into a consistent tale that makes sense?

Assembling events into a sensible story is influenced by what kind of historian tells the tale. For example, the Annales School of historical materialism categorizes events into major trends over long periods of time. Demographic changes, economic crises, even geography are used to explain why events happened. Cultural historians look at anthropological and linguistic themes to develop their account of history. Psychohistorians attempt to uncover the inner motivations of individuals to explain why things happened. They attempt to use social sciences to determine the emotional origin behind events. There are dozens of different schools of historical thought. How each retells these events is based on framing the experiences to fit their view of how history should be told. Writing history is explaining how to interpret events.

People do not live interpreted lives. They pass through a sequence of adventures, sometimes wildly disconnected from any overall theme, day-by-day, inside common experiences. Even if you are in the place at the time something happens because all the world is at war with one another, and you have been brought to the battlefield by one of the great opposing powers, your day will begin by waking up and eating breakfast. President Roosevelt and Adolph Hitler are not part of your daily experience. Even Eisenhower, as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, is so distant from an infantryman as to hardly be noticed in daily life. If you ask the infantryman to tell his story about what happened on June 6, 1944, he will tell you of the violence, noise, injuries, and death he witnessed on 175 yards of a 3.6 mile-long beach code-named "Omaha." Life is experienced in a microcosm. History is told as if each microcosm fit into a narrative having sweep and breadth and height to give meaning and message for the microcosm.

During the leading edge of the attack, one Navy sailor who piloted a landing craft filled with Army Infantrymen to Omaha Beach was so frightened by the conflagration he sailed toward that he dropped the ramp too soon, exposing the troops aboard to incoming fire. The Infantrymen on his boat, including my father, jumped into the English Channel weighed down by approximately 80 pounds of gear and munitions. Because they had not yet reached the beach, my father and his companions faced drowning as the first threat in the battle. Years later he reflected, "if I had known the Navy pilot was a coward I would have shot him, commandeered the boat, and drove it ashore to save my friends. Everyone shorter than me drowned before they had a chance to fight."

What my father saw, heard and felt that day was deeply personal and extremely local. His life that day, and every day thereafter, was experienced moment-to-moment with no overarching theme or school of interpretation guiding it. He lived it. It was his; and when he died after 86 years of those experiences he took them all with him.

How should his story be told? Hiding behind tank traps on the shoreline was necessary to survive the incoming machinegun and mortar fire. It was common sense. But after these men had been surrounded for a time by deafening death and dismemberment, pitiful cries from the dead and dying, paralyzing desperation turned to outrage and anger. That supreme moral indignation propelled first a few, and then a wave of men from behind the safety of the tank traps, mortar divots, and fallen comrades to charge their protected enemy above. These men hazarded their lives to end this outrage. The value of lives of their slaughtered friends deserved respect. It was because of their losses that they charged forward to stop this unmerciful hail of death.

Were there geopolitical issues involved? Not for my father and his companions on that morning. Was military history being written? Of course, but that was nothing to those men. They gave it no thought. A violent and merciless enemy, behind concrete and atop a bluff overlooking the beach, needed to be destroyed. Every instant these predators remained capable of inflicting death was an insult to the memory of slain friends. More friends would die in coming moments if those in the bunkers overhead were not destroyed.

Great moments, even the greatest of moments, are experienced only by individuals inside a very small sphere. This is true of the restoration. The great narratives that have been written about the restoration tell us nothing about what happened. Historians always interpret and massage an account no one experienced, no one lived, no one understood as it happened. Historians provide interpretations. They cannot tell us what individuals understood when they were writing letters or diaries. They cannot explain how personal conversations were interpreted, or how difficult events were framed in the lives of those who experienced them. Historians of the restoration can never explain what individuals understood and experienced who wrote the letters and diaries, who had the personal conversations, who lived through the difficult events. We are all denied access to the daily thoughts of those now long deceased. We do not know and those involved cannot tell us.

Perhaps it does not matter which school of history is used in retelling the story of the restoration. Maybe all of them will invariably be wrong. That seems to be what Nephi predicted. Nephi condemns using our carefully studied historical techniques, rather than inspiration from God:

[T]hey shall contend one with another, and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the holy ghost

which giveth utterance. And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel. And they say unto the people, Hearken unto us and hear ye our precept, ...there shall be many which shall teach after this manner false, and vain, and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord. And their works shall be in the dark, and the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.

Restoration history has been more or less composed using the 'learning of men', or recognized historical interpretive forms. If teaching with man's learning will cause us to accept false, vain and foolish ideas, then it is a mistake. True history should be informed by God's viewpoint. Do people believe the scriptures? I could not find a history written by someone who trusted scripture to provide the interpretation.

I wrote a history of the restoration. In it, instead of interpreting events from existing records, I used the scriptures to give the interpretation. The book assumes the prophecies found in the Book of Mormon and the revelations of Joseph Smith give to us the correct interpretation. Using the prophecies as the framework, I looked for support in the known events to see if the events met the predicted narrative. There is abundant proof. It is sobering.

For example, Christ prophesied the gentiles would reject the fullness of the gospel. He attributed the prophecy to His Father. The prophecy is unequivocal, and does not speak about gentile rejection as merely possible or uncertain, but declares it as an inevitable event to certainly occur:

At that day when the gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations, and if they shall do all these things, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, Behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them.

The question then is what would that have looked like? Was there anything in the events from 1820 to 1844 to suggest the gentiles did reject the fullness of Christ's gospel? Joseph Smith was driven out of Kirtland. In Missouri, the betrayal by church leaders, including the three witnesses and several apostles, resulted in his imprisonment. There is a detailed account of this treachery by the Mormons in a book about Joseph.

If Christ's prophecy is true, gentiles must at some point reject the fullness of the gospel. They must become extraordinarily lifted up in the pride of their hearts. How might this have already been accomplished? Does the claim they are the "only true church" and only they will be saved, while all others will be damned, fit the charge?

The Lord foretold of gentile pride that will be “above all nations and above all the people of the whole earth.” There is evidence to suggest this has happened, and is happening.

As for lying and deceiving, the LDS church appears to have adopted dishonesty as a policy to deal with troubling historical issues. The institution’s history of deceit is not difficult to uncover. Because of this historic lack of honesty, the LDS Historian’s Office is now publishing essays on church history to address this lack of candor. The essays attempt to explain First Vision Accounts, Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo, Race and the Priesthood, Book of Mormon Translation, Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith’s Teachings about Priesthood, Temple and Women, and others. The LDS church recently published a new version of the restoration history using heterodox sources for the first time.

An example of some historical hypocrisy is evident in looking at the part the Mormons played in alienating their neighbors in Missouri and Illinois. The Missourians were rough, but Mormons were equally terrible neighbors. It was the July 4th “Salt Sermon” given by Sidney Rigdon that first threatened to “exterminate” the Missourians. However, when Mormons retell the events, they express outrage and contempt over Governor Lilburn Boggs’ Extermination Order, as if he originated the idea of “extermination.” Even when Mormons were the aggressors they portray themselves as victims and all others as their unjust persecutors. Sometimes Missourians were scared by threats from the Mormons. Sometimes Mormons shot first. Sometimes Mormons raided and burned farms first.

These are not happy things. There is no celebrating the gentile rejection of the fullness. But it is more harmful to ignore that rejection than to acknowledge it. There can be no attempt to fix the failure until there is an admission that it has happened. The fullness was rejected. Mormonism lapsed into apostasy.

Mormon warned the gentiles about polluting the holy church of God by loving wealth more than the suffering and needy:

O ye wicked, and perverse, and stiffnecked people, why have you built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye transfigured the holy word of God that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God, for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled. Behold, the Lord hath shewn unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come at that day when these things shall come forth among you. Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shewn you unto me, and I know your doing, and I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts. And there are none, save a few only, who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquity. And your churches, yea,

even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts. For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies? Because of the praise of the world? Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick, and the afflicted to pass by you and notice them not?

There is proof this has happened among the gentiles who believe the Book of Mormon. The LDS church-owned Deseret News helped advance a program to discourage the public from noticing and contributing to beggars. Billboards in Salt Lake proclaimed: "Support panhandlers, and you support drug trafficking." "Support panhandlers, and you support crime." "Support panhandlers, and you support alcoholism." LDS church owned KSL did an expose titled, Business of Begging: The real stories behind Utah panhandling, in which every story they reported showed the panhandlers were engaged in fraud and criminality. There is compelling evidence, or at least some reason, to conclude the gentiles, in their pride, suffer the needy and hungry to pass by unnoticed.

In addition to advocating that people suffer the hungry and needy to pass by unnoticed, the LDS church has also accumulated great wealth. The Salt Lake television station, KUTV, reported that at the end of 2017 the LDS church had stock investments totaling \$32,769,914,000.00. The LDS church invested in excess of \$2 billion in a shopping mall across from Temple Square in Salt Lake City. In November 2013, the LDS church purchased 382,834 acres in the Florida panhandle for \$565,000,000. The Christian Science Monitor reported this purchase, added to the previous holdings, which include Deseret Ranches, near Orlando, Florida, made the LDS church the largest landowner in Florida.

The LDS church does not make its financial information public. The total value of its land, banking, printing, radio, television, universities, and other non-religious holdings likely dwarf the total value of its extensive chapel, temple and church administration properties. Consider for a moment the present value of the LDS church against the words of Mormon that "ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted." There is compelling proof, or at least some reason to conclude, that "the holy church of God" has been polluted by the gentiles. Why not at least consider the possibility that prophecy has been fulfilled?

If Mormon has given us the correct interpretation, the gentiles have lifted themselves up in pride, and love money and substance in a way that pollutes their church and offends God. This should awaken people. It is time to face an awful

situation. Nothing can be done to improve this bleak outlook until the failures are acknowledged.

In a January 1841 revelation, the gentiles were commanded to build a temple. God offered to visit that temple and restore again the fullness. However, God's offer was conditional, and the required temple was to be built within "sufficient time" to meet His command:

But I command you, all you my saints, to build a house unto me, and I grant unto you a sufficient time to build a house unto me, and during this time your baptisms shall be acceptable unto me. But behold, at the end of this appointment, your baptisms for your dead shall not be acceptable unto me. And if you do not these things, at the end of the appointment, you shall be rejected as a church, with your dead, says the Lord your God. For verily I say unto you that after you have had sufficient time to build a house unto me, wherein the ordinance of baptizing for the dead belongs, and for which the same was instituted from before the foundation of the world, your baptisms for your dead cannot be acceptable unto me, for therein are the keys of the Holy Priesthood ordained that you may receive honor and glory.

The revelation does not explain how long the "appointment" would last. It did not set a limit on "sufficient time" for the command to be accomplished. But the Lord does make it very clear that if the commandment was not obeyed, the gentiles faced the risk of being rejected as a church with their kindred dead. Accordingly, this revelation set a requirement that put the gentiles in peril.

Although there was no set time, there was a sign given. The sign would make it possible to determine whether the time expired and the gentiles were rejected. Here is the sign:

If you labor with all your mights, I will consecrate that spot that it shall be made holy. And if my people will hearken unto my voice and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, They shall not be moved out of their place. And it shall come to pass that if you build a house unto my name and do not do the things that I say, I will not perform the oath which I make unto you, neither fulfill the promises which you expect at my hands, says the Lord. For instead of blessings, you, by your own works, bring cursings, wrath, indignation, and judgments upon your own heads, by your follies and by all your abominations which you practice before me, says the Lord.

The "appointment" that granted "sufficient time" would either be accomplished or the gentiles would be rejected. The sign of accomplishing the commandment would be, "They shall not be moved out of their place." This could either mean the servants "appointed to lead" (Joseph and Hyrum) would not be moved out of their place. Or,

it could refer to the gentiles that would not be moved out of Nauvoo. Either meaning was fulfilled by the sign of gentile rejection. Joseph and Hyrum were slain three-and-a-half years later on June 27, 1844. At that time the Nauvoo Temple had only been completed up to the second floor. So the servants were removed. Then in the winter of 1846 the gentiles were forcibly evicted from Nauvoo under threat of attack. Both the Lord's chosen servants and the proud Nauvoo gentiles themselves were moved out of their place. Either way, the events comport with the promised sign and testify that God rejected the gentiles.

The second part of the sign foretold what would happen thereafter. Instead of securing the blessings God offered them, the gentiles would inherit "cursings, wrath, indignation, and judgments upon [their] own heads, by [their] follies and by all [their] abominations." The history of the gentile suffering in their westward exile to live on a salt flat is well documented. Nauvoo was located beside the largest river in North America. The gentiles relocated to a desert where they struggled for generations to survive.

Like Mormon, Nephi also foretold of the gentile failure to receive and obey when given the opportunity. He identified it as a problem caused by gentile leadership:

Yea, they have all gone out of the way, they have become corrupted; because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride, they are puffed up. They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing, and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart because in their pride they are puffed up. They wear stiff necks and high heads, yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray, save it be a few who are the humble followers of Christ. Nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men.

This description by Nephi, though slightly different, contains the same message as Mormon's. Corrupt leaders who teach false doctrine would lead the gentiles. As though they already had all truth that would save them, they would urge and condone pride in their religion. Again the theme of robbing the poor by aggregating religious wealth describes the gentile rejection of the truth. Nephi states bluntly, "They have all gone astray." There is no "true church" but only prideful false ones that proclaim corrupt and false doctrine. "All" have "gone astray"—except only some "few who are the humble followers of Christ." It was to those I dedicated the first book I wrote.

Although the gentiles were destined to reject the fullness, they nevertheless kept the Book of Mormon in print for over a century-and-a-half. The Book of Mormon contains the guidance necessary to recover the fullness. And the Book of Mormon

also predicts that, despite their failure, some few gentiles could yet become covenant people.

Christ gave a sign to watch for as evidence the covenants made with the Father were about to be fulfilled. At some point following the gentile rejection of the fullness, some few gentiles would accept a covenant. When they accept the covenant they become numbered with the remnant. These covenant gentiles, numbered with the remnant, will build the last days Zion.

[T]he gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, that they may repent, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel — and when these things come to pass, that thy seed shall begin to know these things, it shall be a sign unto them that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel. And when that day shall come, it shall come to pass that kings shall shut their mouths, for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

This happened on September 3, 2017 in Boise, Idaho when the Lord renewed a covenant with the gentiles. Some of the gentiles are now numbered among the Lord's people as part of the House of Israel. They have the right, if they continue faithfully, to establish Zion. To do so, the lusts, strife and contentions that doomed the gentiles in Joseph Smith's day must be avoided.

No single individual ever experienced the history of the restoration. After the church historian left the faith and absconded with the records he had maintained, Joseph Smith wrote down his recollection of events in 1838. Joseph could only tell what he knew. Thereafter, histories have been written by weaving together excerpts from here and there, never attempting to see if the results mirrored the story scripture foretold. Even excerpts from here and there are not the full pictures. Mark Twain observed:

What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head and is known to none but himself. All day long, and every day, the mill of his brain is grinding, and his thoughts, not those other things, are his history. His acts and his words are merely the visible, thin crust of his world, with its scattered snow summits and its vacant wastes of water—and they are so trifling a part of his bulk! A mere skin enveloping it. The mass of him is hidden—it and its volcanic fires that toss and boil, and never rest, night nor day. These are his life, and they are not written, and cannot be written. Every day would make a whole book of eighty thousand words—three hundred and sixty-five books a year. Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man—the biography of the man himself cannot be written.

There are many histories of D-Day. The code name for that invasion was "Operation Overlord." The plan was intended to spread soldiers across sites on the shores of Normandy codenamed Utah, Sword, Gold, Juno and Omaha beaches. The hope was for some or all to break through the shoreline defenses and establish an Allied base of operations to invade Europe.

My father rarely spoke of Omaha Beach. He never used his role in D-Day as a credential. For him it was just an experience, not something to boast about. Most of those who met him after WWII were unaware of his experience. He did not want it to define him.

My mother said for a long time after the war he would have a recurring nightmare. He dreamt he was in a foxhole that was overrun by Nazis. When he tried to shoot the soldier in front of him his gun fell apart. His enemy took advantage of his defenselessness and bayoneted my father, at which point he would awaken in a jump, sometimes letting out a yell. After some years the nightmares ended.

My father was reluctant to talk about the war. When we could coax something from him it would be a sentence, not a paragraph. He mentioned on one occasion the English Channel looked that morning as if it "was made of GI blood."

I was with him the night before he died. It was the first time he raised the subject of that battle. He said it puzzled him why his life had been spared when so many of his friends had died that morning. I gave him no answer, but know that without his survival I would not have been born. He was as healthy and well on the morning of June 7th as he had been before wading ashore on June 6th. Although his mind was perplexed by the kindness of providence watching over him, and heaven allowing others to be injured or slaughtered that day, he lived gratefully and fully for nearly a half-century. His history was not written. In all the accounts that have explained D-Day, none of them can be complete if they do not address why providence spared some and took others. Of course, that is an answer only God can provide.

God has not written histories for most of this world's events. But God did give an account of the restoration in scripture. That account was composed as prophecy, foretelling how the gentiles would first fail, and later some few would covenant with Him and be numbered with Israel.

The history of the restoration is incomplete and still being written. Its conclusion will be years in the future, and there is tremendous work left to complete. Until everything returns and God has gathered again in one all of His revelations, restored the religion taught to Adam in the beginning, established Zion, and opened the veil between heaven and earth so that God, men and angels again mingle with one another, the restoration is not finished.

When the earth is full of the knowledge of God as the seas are filled with water, the restoration will be completed. At that future time no one will need to say to another, "know the Lord" because everyone will know Him.

Until then there is a great task remaining. If you do not realize the work remains undone, then you do not believe the Book of Mormon.

There is no reason to think us specially favored by God. But there is good reason to think us challenged by God to do much more than has been done by the gentiles. There is every reason to fear failure because of the prior gentile failures. Even while a great and wealthy gentile church proclaims that it is the Lord's, and it is the only true church, and it cannot lead any astray, all need to awaken and arise from the deep slumber that has overtaken the restoration. We have been misled. We have fallen from the truth. We have rejected the fullness. And we must repent and return, or as the Book of Mormon warns, "awake and arise" from this awful situation.

There have been many casualties. We may miss those who are taken in by the many false claims exploding all around us. But the objective is clear: Rise up to occupy that raised bluff where Zion is to be built. The battle rages all around. All must charge forward to engage the battle, and hasten to the sound of that conflict. There must be success where others have failed.