

Our Standard of Belief

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.—Psalm 19:7-14.

EVERY man, every church, every great religion, must have some standard of belief, some authority, some book of Scriptures by which moral, social, and ethical values are determined, and conduct regulated. For the Christian believer, the standard of values and conduct is the Bible.

THE BIBLE AS A STANDARD

Many people have erroneously believed that members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have repudiated and discarded the Bible or that we have substituted the Book of Mormon for the Bible. The Bible is still our first standard of belief, because it was

known to the world many centuries before the Book of Mormon was known, although some of the history of the two books is contemporary. The Bible contains an account of God's dealings with his very weak, erring human creation from Adam down until about the end of the first century after Christ. The men whose lives are depicted in its pages were not perfect. The men who wrote about those lives were not perfect. Their cultural and ethical and moral standards were not always what they should be. But there is never any attempt to excuse these men. The standards of *God*, as revealed in the Bible as a whole, are high standards, reasonable standards, safe standards on which to build a life, both for time and eternity. The Bible is a source book for rules of ethics and morality. It contains an indispensable testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Latter Day Saints would be the last to discard or displace the Bible.

It was to the Bible that Joseph Smith went when he was puzzled about which church to join. It was to the Bible that he was sent to find prophecies of a marvelous work and a wonder which was to come forth in the latter days. It was to the Bible that he was sent to find prophecies foretelling the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. It was to the Bible that he was sent to find the doctrines of Christ which he was to teach, and to find reason and justification for the form of organization in the church which he was commanded to organize and establish. It was to the Bible that he was sent to find the principles of salvation and the ordinances of the gospel which that church was to teach and practice and espouse.

Latter Day Saints believe the Bible more fully, more completely than many other peoples who conveniently ignore or overlook whatever does not agree with their hereditary doctrine and teaching. We believe the Bible not only on our own initiative, but we believe that *God has commanded* such belief. One of the revelations given to the church

through Joseph Smith, and found in Doctrine and Covenants says: "And again, the elders, priests, and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in which is the fullness of the gospel" (Doctrine and Covenants 42:5 a). Notice that the Bible was to come first, for the Bible was available before the Book of Mormon, and that in the two of them taken together is the fullness of the gospel. A little later in this same section we find this language: "Thou shalt take the things which thou hast received, which have been given unto thee in my Scriptures for a law, to *be* my law, to govern my church; and he that doeth according to these things, shall be saved, and he that doeth them not shall be damned, if he continues" (Doctrine and Covenants 42:16). We are commanded to take the Scriptures as God's law, and told that he who does not keep the law contained in those Scriptures shall be damned if he continues.

BIBLE CONTENT VARIES

How do we believe the Bible? There are many kinds and degrees of belief, some reasonable and enlightened, some unreasonable, ignorant, and superstitious. Some people make the categorical statement that the Bible *is* the inspired word of God, meaning that in their thinking every syllable, every verse indication, every punctuation mark is inspired, infallible, and perfect. That attitude is not held any more by intelligent people. All of the word of God is not contained in the Bible, neither is all of the Bible the word of God. It contains the words of God; but it also contains the words of men, of angels, of devils, of saints, of sinners. It contains the words of Paul who was sometimes careful to state that he was expressing only his own opinion for which he did not claim any inspiration. The Bible contains many kinds of writing: history, prophecy, tradition and folklore, pagan poetry (as in the Song of Solomon), genealogy, laws, epistles, and inspired teaching and preaching.

Not all portions of the Bible are equally inspiring, or equally inspired, or of equal worth and value. In any well-used Bible, there are certain chapters and pages which are well worn, well marked; and others which seem hardly to have been read at all, bearing witness to the fact that regardless of what men may *say* they believe, they *actually* believe that some parts of the Bible are better than others.

Most modern, intelligent people have long ago given up the idea that the Bible is inerrant, infallible in every word and syllable and punctuation mark. The Bible as we have it today is full of errors. There are obvious discrepancies in historical accounts. The Bible tells of one man who was two years older than his father (II Chronicles 21:20; 22:2); of another man who had neither father nor mother nor beginning of years or end of days (Hebrews 7:3). The Bible says that God can do no evil (James 1:13), but also says that God repented of the evil he had done (Exodus 32:14; Amos 7:6; I Samuel 15:11). The Bible says that an evil spirit from God troubled Saul (I Samuel 16:14-16, 23; 18:10; 19:9). The Bible says that the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness (Matthew 8:12). The Bible commands us to hate our father and mother (Luke 14:26). The Bible says that the Spirit of God led Jesus up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (Matthew 4:1). The Bible tells us that God deceives prophets (Ezekiel 14:9). The Bible advises us to leave the principles of the gospel of Christ, as we go on to perfection (Hebrews 6:1). These are only a few of the obvious and sometimes ludicrous mistakes to be found in the Authorized, or King James version of the Bible.

There are other reasons why it is dangerous and logically unwise to claim absolute infallibility and plenary inspiration for the Bible. First, its authors never claimed infallibility. Second, even if the Bible was letter perfect when first written, we do not have a single original manuscript of any book of the Bible, that is, the manuscript originally

written by the author's own hand. We have only copies. No one knows how many times these are removed from the original. Our oldest copies for the books of the Old Testament date back to about the second century after Christ, and for the New Testament to about the third century. There is no way of knowing whether the copies we have are in agreement with the originals.

Third, there is the problem of translation. No Bible translator has ever claimed infallibility for his translation. The Old Testament was written without vowels, without accent marks which are used in modern Hebrew, and without divisions between the words. Meanings often had to be guessed at or determined from the context, and often there would be difference of opinion among the translators of the King James Bible. That is the reason for marginal notes which often give an alternative reading for some disputed word or passage. Ofttimes the translators had to supply words which were not in the original in order to make good English idiom. Word order had to be determined. A good example of how word order can completely change the meaning of a sentence is supplied by one of the verses we have already used, from II Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" says the Authorized version. "Every Scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable" says the American Standard. The verb "is" does not appear at all in the original Greek, and had to be supplied by the translators and put at the place in the sentence where it would express a true meaning. As we have seen, different translators disagree as to the proper meaning.

THE WORD OF GOD

Latter Day Saints are cognizant of all these difficulties, and many more, yet we believe the Bible is coherently and succinctly expressed in these words: "We believe that in the Bible is contained the word of God, insofar as it is translated

correctly." Thus we are relieved of any seeming necessity for defending the obvious mistakes of the Bible, but are still committed to the great and eternal truths of salvation which the Bible contains. The mistakes in the Bible are the mistakes of men; the truth in the Bible is the word of God. "In the Bible *is contained* the word of God, insofar as it is translated correctly."

We are living in an age of many translations of the Bible. Within the last few years new manuscripts have come to light, which are most helpful in revising some of the old translations, and correcting many of the inaccuracies and obscure meanings. As language becomes obsolete and word meanings change, it will continue to be necessary to revise and re-translate the Bible from time to time. Good Bible students still find it necessary to consult several translations, plus marginal notes and commentaries, to arrive at an understanding of obscure verses, and even their comprehension may fall short of the ideal and the perfect.

It is a matter of some pride and satisfaction to Latter Day Saints that long before the multitude of modern translations become commonplace or popular, Joseph Smith was commanded to make a correction of the Scriptures. He was not a translator; he had no knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek sufficient to attempt a new translation of the Bible. He was not trained in the literary field either. But his claim was that under the inspiration of the same Spirit which moved the men who wrote the Bible in the beginning, he was able to correct many faults and errors, and to make clear many passages which had been a source of confusion and disagreement in the past. Many of his corrections anticipated by a hundred years the changes that have been made by modern translations of the Bible. The Inspired Version, as it is called, was begun in June of 1830, and completed on February 2, 1833, but because of persecution and forced moves of the church from place to place, and finally the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, the book was not published

The Bible Promises Other Scriptures

until 1867, under the direction of a committee of which the son of Joseph Smith was a prominent member. Though we frequently use the Authorized or King James translation, as well as modern translations, especially when talking with friends of other faiths, we frequently have recourse to the Inspired Version to clear up obscure passages, or to get further light on the meaning of seemingly contradictory phraseology. A detailed study of the hundreds of verses corrected would be interesting and profitable, but is impossible within the scope of this chapter. The opinion of one author and Bible student, not a member of our church, is expressed in the following quotation from P. M. Simms' book, *The Bible from the Beginning*, page 145: "This much, at least, may be said of the changed readings found in the Bible of the Reorganized Latter Day Saints: Its author had the courage deliberately to alter the text and make it say clearly what many Bible students succeed in getting only by theological legerdemain."

The Bible is, and will continue to be, our standard of belief, against which we check all doctrine, all church organization, all ritual, all morality and ethics. The Bible is and will continue to be the compass that points us to God, the manual which we follow in our striving and seeking for eternal life.

This is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. . . . And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, and for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren. His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasse.—Deuteronomy 33:1, 13-17.

ONE OF THE well-known atheists of the past century used to taunt his opponents in debate with the charge that the God who wrote the Bible was ignorant of the American continent until Columbus discovered it for him. It is inconceivable that God was ignorant of two of the great continents he had created; and if it be true that "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7), there should be something in the Bible about the American continents. It is the purpose of this chapter to show that the God of the Bible was not