

# MORMON SCRIPTURE:

## The Articles of Faith, Part II

By Marvin W. Cowan

In our last article we said that the 13 Articles of Faith are Mormon scripture in the *Pearl of Great Price*. The first Article declares, “*We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.*” While the words sound like a Christian statement, the Mormon interpretation is quite different because of the historical setting from which they came as well as because of what Mormon scripture and Mormon prophets have taught. Keep in mind that Mormons have four books of scripture called the “Standard Works,” plus a living prophet, who according to Ezra Taft Benson, the 13<sup>th</sup> LDS prophet, “is more important to us than the Standard Works” (*Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets*, p. 2). Mormonism has other books of scripture and a living prophet because they believe and teach things that are not in the Bible!

We previously mentioned that Joseph Smith wrote a letter to John Wentworth which included both the Articles of Faith and his “First Vision” story where he claimed that two heavenly personages appeared to him and told him that “all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines.” He published that letter in the LDS *Times and Seasons* newspaper in Nauvoo, IL on March 1, 1842. In the next issue of that newspaper on March 15, 1842, Smith published an expanded version of his First Vision in which he said he asked the two personages which church he should join. He said, “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all of their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt....” That is now Mormon scripture in the *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith-History 1:19.

Mormons teach that God the Father and Jesus Christ were the two Personages who told Smith that “all the churches were wrong and all their creeds (doctrines) were an abomination.” Therefore, it would be a contradiction for the Articles of Faith to contain the same doctrines that were condemned by the Lord in Joseph Smith’s First Vision! Another thing that shows that the first Article of Faith was not meant to teach the same concept about God that other churches had is that the same two issues of the *Times and Seasons* mentioned above also contained Smith’s complete “translation” of the Book of Abraham, which is now Mormon scripture in the *Pearl of Great Price*. Abraham, chapters 4 and 5 teach that “the Gods” created the earth and everything in it. Thus, when the first Article of Faith says, “We believe in God the Eternal Father” it must be understood in that historical context.

But the meaning of the first Article of Faith is stated quite clearly by Mormon scripture and Mormon prophets. *Doctrine and Covenants* Sec. 130:22 declares, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.” Why does Mormon scripture teach that God the Father has a tangible body of flesh and bones? It is because of what Joseph Smith, the founding prophet, taught. He said, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!... I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil so that you may see... he was once a man like us, yea, God himself the Father of us all,

dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did and I will show it from the Bible” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 345-346). From this teaching of Joseph Smith, Lorenzo Snow, the 5<sup>th</sup> LDS prophet, formed the familiar LDS couplet: “As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.” On page 29 of the 1998-99 LDS Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society study guide entitled, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church, Brigham Young*, Brigham also taught that “God, the Father, was once a man on another planet who passed through the ordeals we are now passing through....” That should raise questions like, “If God was once a man on an earth, was there another ‘God the Father’ while he was a man?” According to Joseph Smith, there was! He said, “If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John (the apostle) discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also” (Ibid. p. 373). If that is true, what does the first Article of Faith mean when it says, “We believe in *God the Eternal Father*?”

Mormon scripture and their leaders interpret the words they use in such a way that they don’t see contradictions. They see no problem in teaching that God the “Eternal Father” was once a man because “Eternal” is one of the names of God. LDS Apostle, James Talmage wrote, “Endless and Eternal are among His (God’s) names...” (*Articles of Faith*, p. 146). And Joseph Smith declared, “We say that God himself is a self-existing being.... Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? Man does exist upon the same principles...The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal with God himself.... There never was a time when there were not spirits; for they are co-equal (co-eternal) with our Father in heaven” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 352-353). Milton R. Hunter, under the direction of the LDS General Authorities, also wrote, “...the center of the personality of man is an uncreated, eternally existent, indestructible entity. He—for that entity is a person—...is eternal as God is; co-existent, in fact, with God” (*The Gospel Through the Ages*, p. 126). *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:29 says much the same thing: “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” Thus, Mormonism teaches: God became God the same way good Mormons can become Gods; “Eternal” is one of the names of God and He is eternal in the same way that man is eternal; and He is called “Father” because He is the personal Father of the spirits of all men in the pre-mortal spirit world as LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote in *Mormon Doctrine* on pages 84 and 236. Now you can read the first Article of Faith with real understanding!

We will continue our discussion of the Articles of Faith next time. For those who want to read more on this subject we recommend our book *Mormon Claims Answered*. Most of the chapters begin by quoting one or more of the Articles of Faith and then discusses the meaning.