

# MORMON SCRIPTURE

## The Articles of Faith, Part III

by Marvin W. Cowan

Our last two articles showed that Joseph Smith wrote the “Articles of Faith” along with a short history of Mormonism as one article. In that short history, Smith claimed the Lord told him existing churches “were *all* wrong,” that “*all* their creeds (doctrines) were an abomination” and “that those professors (believers) were *all* corrupt” (see *Pearl of Great Price*, Jos. Smith-Hist. 1:19). That is the reason Joseph Smith and his successors claim that a “universal apostasy” took place shortly after the death of the Lord’s apostles and it lasted until Joseph Smith restored the truth on April 6, 1830. Therefore, even though Mormonism claims to be a Christian church, it would be a contradiction for Smith’s “Articles of Faith” to teach the same doctrines that Smith claims the Lord condemned in all of the false, apostate churches! We previously showed that the words in the first LDS “Article of Faith” mean something very different to Mormons than they do to historic or biblical Christians.

The second “Article of Faith” declares, “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.” But what does that mean? It infers that other churches teach that men are punished for “Adam’s transgression.” However, the Bible does not say that men will be punished for what Adam did, nor do Bible believing Christians teach that. That is a “straw man” that LDS leaders have set up so they could knock it down to show how wrong others are. But, Paul did write in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.” That text declares that sin came into the world through one man (Adam) and it brought death with it. As sons of Adam we all die because we are children of disobedience (Eph. 2:1-3) having inherited a nature that sins. Thus, the Bible says, “there is *none* righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10-12; Ps. 14:1-3) because “*all have sinned*” (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). That is why we need a Savior. Even before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angel said to Joseph, “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from *their sins*” (Matt. 1:21). Notice that the angel did *not* say, “He shall save His people from *Adam’s* sin.” Paul declared, “Christ died for *our sins*” (I Cor. 15:3). And Peter wrote, “(Christ) who His own self bore *our sins* in His own body on the tree...” (I Pet. 2:25). John also said, “And ye know that he (Christ) was manifested to take away *our sins*” (I John 3:5). Christ does take away *our sins* when we repent and believe that “his blood *cleanses us from all sin*” (I John 1:7). If we do not repent and put our trust in Christ, we will be punished for our own sins, but not Adam’s sin.

Mormons don’t believe Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden anyway. The 10<sup>th</sup> LDS Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, “I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin...It is true, the Lord warned Adam and Eve that to partake of the fruit they would transgress a law, and this happened. But it is not always a sin to transgress a law” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. I, p. 114). *Gospel Principles* is a manual for instructing new members of the LDS Church in their beliefs. It was published by the LDS Church and copyrighted by the LDS President and Prophet himself, so it is reliable information. It says, “Some people believe that Adam and Eve committed a serious sin when they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, latter-day scriptures help us under-

stand that their fall was a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing” (p. 31). The April 1990 *Ensign* magazine for LDS adults declares: “Adam and Eve’s transgression was not really a wrongful act of ‘sin’ as we usually understand that term. While their choice violated the command against partaking of the fruit, that same choice was *necessary* to enable their obedience to the command to have children. Their ‘transgression’ was thus a painful but *correct*, even *eternally glorious*, choice” (p. 9). LDS Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie also wrote, “It is possible to transgress a law without committing a sin, as in the case of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden” (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 804). But the Bible declares, “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Therefore, if Adam and Eve “transgressed a law,” they sinned! Furthermore, when Romans 5:12 declares, “by one man sin entered into the world,” the context says that “one man” was named “Adam” in verse 14. So, how could sin enter the world by Adam if he did not sin?

The second Article of Faith says Mormons believe that “men will be *punished* for their own sins....” However, that doesn’t mean they believe what the Bible teaches about “eternal punishment” even though the *Book of Mormon* teaches it in Alma 34:34-35; 42:16 etc. They simply explain it away like LDS Apostle James Talmage does in his book entitled *Articles of Faith*. He wrote, “True eternal punishment has been decreed as the lot of the wicked; but the meaning of this expression has been given by the Lord Himself: eternal punishment is God’s punishment; endless punishment is God’s punishment, for “Endless” and “Eternal” are among His *names* and the words are descriptive of His attributes. No soul shall be kept in prison or continued in torment beyond the time requisite to work the needed reformation and to vindicate justice, for which ends alone punishment is imposed...Upon all who reject the word of God in this life will fall the penalties provided; but after the debt has been paid the prison doors shall be opened, and the spirits once confined in suffering, then chastened and clean, shall come forth to partake of the glory provided for their class” (pp. 146-148). A pamphlet published by the LDS Church entitled *The Plan of Salvation* declares on page 29, “Eternal punishment is God’s punishment; everlasting punishment is God’s punishment; or in other words, it is the *name* of the punishment God inflicts, He being eternal in his nature. Whosoever, therefore receives God’s punishment, receives eternal punishment, whether it is endured one hour, one day, one week, one year, or an age.” But, “Eternal life, on the other hand, is the condition of life that those who live righteous lives will enjoy throughout the ages in the kingdom of God. In fact, it means exaltation. He who receives the greatest portion of eternal life becomes a God” (*The Gospel Through the Ages* by Milton R. Hunter, p. 11). Or, as *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:20 declares, “Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting...” Is that a consistent way to interpret eternal punishment and eternal life?

We will continue to discuss the Articles of Faith next month. Those wanting to read more about the Articles of Faith from a Mormon perspective can do so in the book by that title. From a Christian perspective my book, *Mormon Claims Answered* will be helpful.