

MORMON SCRIPTURE

The Articles of Faith

By Marvin W. Cowan

Drawing lines between numbered dots on a paper will create a picture that previously wasn't visible. In a similar way, when a questionable issue is connected to the historical events related to it, they help clarify it. For example, many who read the 13 "Articles of Faith" of the Mormon Church see no problem with the first Article which says, "*We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.*" Therefore, I want to connect some "dots" or events to that document that should help clarify it. In 1842 John Wentworth, the editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, asked Joseph Smith to write a brief *history and doctrinal statement of the Mormon Church* for Mr. Bastow who wanted to include it in the history of New Hampshire that he was writing. Smith wrote the article and on March 1, 1842 he also published it in *Times and Seasons*, a Mormon publication in Nauvoo, Illinois where the Mormon Church had its headquarters. "The Articles of Faith" was Smith's statement of Mormon beliefs in his letter to John Wentworth. They were later published in the first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* in 1851 and have been in every edition since then, which means that Mormons consider them to be scripture. The "Articles of Faith" are essentially the same today as they were when Smith first published them.

But what did Smith mean by the words he used in the first Article of Faith? Remember, Joseph Smith's letter to John Wentworth contained **both** Smith's history of Mormonism **and** his "Articles of Faith" and they were published together in the same edition of the *Times and Seasons* on March 1, 1842. The Wentworth letter in 1842 was the first time Smith published the story that he was about 14 years old when he had a vision of *two personages* who told him that "*all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom.*" Smith then said, "And I was expressly commanded 'to go not after them,' at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me."

In the next edition of the *Times and Seasons* on March 15, 1842, Joseph Smith notified his subscribers that, "This paper commences my editorial career, *I alone stand responsible for it*, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward." In this issue Smith began a series of articles that contained a more complete history of Mormonism. The official First Vision story in "Joseph Smith-History" in the *Pearl of Great Price* came from that series of articles. The "two personages" aren't identified in Smith's letter to John Wentworth, but in the official version, one personage pointed to the other and said, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him," which is the reason Mormons believe the Personages were God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. In the official version, Smith asked them which church to join and 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...*" (JS-Hist. 1:19). It is from Smith's "First Vision" story that Mormonism developed its doctrine of a "universal apostasy" which teaches no *true* church, gospel or Christians were on earth for many centuries until Smith restored them in 1830. If *all* of the creeds or beliefs of *all* other churches were an abomination in the sight of God, then surely Joseph Smith's first Article of Faith about God could not

mean that he believed the same thing as *all* the corrupt professors in the churches that were *all* wrong! It was the **same letter** to John Wentworth in which Smith said two Person-ages told him that all churches were teaching “incorrect doctrine” which also contained his “Articles of Faith.”

But there is more evidence that shows Joseph Smith’s first Article of Faith does not mean that Mormons believe what Christians believe about God. **The same edition** of the *Times and Seasons* that has Joseph Smith’s letter to John Wentworth in it also has a picture of Facsimile No. 1 from the “Book of Abraham” on the front page. The first article in that edition was entitled, “A Translation,” and was the first part of Smith’s “translation” of the “Book of Abraham.” The rest of the “Book of Abraham” was published in the next issue of *Times and Seasons* on March 15, 1842. The “translation” printed in those two editions of *Times and Seasons* is now published as the “Book of Abraham” in the *Pearl of Great Price* and is Mormon scripture. But, the “Book of Abraham” contains a very different view of God than what the Bible teaches.

The “Book of Abraham,” says in chapter 4:1-4, “And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth. 2. And the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth; and darkness reigned upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters. 3. And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light. 4. And they (the Gods) comprehended the light, for it was bright; and they divided the light, or caused it to be divided, from the darkness.” Nothing has been added or changed in this quotation. The **same edition** of the *Times and Seasons* that published the first half of the “Book of Abraham” also contained Smith’s letter to John Wentworth with his “Articles of Faith” and his statement that “all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines.” So, there is a direct link between Smith’s first “Article of Faith” and those “incorrect doctrines” of other churches as well as “the Gods” in the “Book of Abraham.”

We will continue our discussion of the “Articles of Faith” next month. For those who want to read more on this subject, *The Articles of Faith* by LDS Apostle James Talmage is published by the Mormon Church and elaborates on the subject. The Christian reader will see many things in that book that are not a part of Christianity.