

MORMON SCRIPTURE

Doctrine and Covenants, Part VIII

By Marvin W. Cowan

Most Mormons know about the *Word of Wisdom*. But many don't know it is recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 89 as a "revelation," nor do they know what it really teaches. It is called the *Word of Wisdom* because it promises those who obey it shall "find *wisdom* and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures" (v. 19). It is too long to quote all of it, so we will discuss only its key elements. LDS Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie, said, "Three types of things are prohibited to man by the *Word of Wisdom*—tobacco, strong drinks, and hot drinks. Then he said, "the *Word of Wisdom* is a command to abstain from *tea, coffee, tobacco and liquor*.... When decisions are made relative to the granting of temple recommends or approving brethren for church positions or ordinations, inquiry is made relative to *these four items*" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 845). While the *Word of Wisdom* does prohibit the use of tobacco, strong drinks and hot drinks, *it does not even mention liquor, tea or coffee!* But McConkie explained on page 845, "By *strong drinks* is meant alcoholic beverages." The dictionary defines a *beverage* as something to *drink*. But this "revelation" says, "*strong drinks* are not for the belly, but *for the washing of your bodies*" (v. 7). Do Mormons actually wash their bodies with "alcoholic beverages?" Mormons claim their prophet reveals God's messages in clarity instead of in the confused way the Bible reveals them. Therefore, this "revelation" shouldn't need interpretation. The only mention of tobacco is in verse 8, which says, "Tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill." Latter Day Saints claim that Smith's statement that tobacco was "not good for man," proves he was a true prophet. But the rest of that sentence says that tobacco "is an herb *for bruises* and *all sick cattle*." Do Mormons use tobacco for "bruises" and for "all sick cattle?" If the *Word of Wisdom* is a "revelation from God," Mormons can't just pick what they want to believe and ignore the rest.

Verse nine declares, "And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly." That is 100% of what this "revelation" says about *tea and coffee!* But, McConkie expanded the meaning of this verse when he wrote, "Certainly the partaking of *cola drinks*, though not included within the measuring standard here set out, is a violation of the spirit of the *Word of Wisdom*" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 845). On the next page he said, "There is no prohibition in Section 89, for instance, as to the eating of white bread, using white flour, white sugar, *cocoa*, chocolate, eggs, milk, *meat*, or anything else except items classified under the headings, tea, coffee, tobacco, and liquor." While verse 9 only mentions "hot drinks," Mormons usually interpret that to mean "*caffeine*," but they are very inconsistent in how they interpret it. For example, because cola drinks have caffeine in them, McConkie said, "partaking of *cola drinks* (which are *cold*)—is a violation of the spirit of the *Word of Wisdom* (hot drinks!). But he also said that *cocoa is not prohibited* by Section 89. Yet, *cocoa* is a *hot drink* with more caffeine in it than coffee!

Verse eleven says, "Every herb *in the season thereof*, and every fruit *in the season thereof*, all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving." That certainly sounds like fruits and vegetables are to be used *fresh*, just like many Mormon writers interpret it. But Mormons probably use more *canned, dried, and frozen* fruits and vegetables than other

people because, to avoid spoilage, they eat and replace the year's supply of food they are instructed to keep for emergencies. Although McConkie said Section 89 does not prohibit the eating of meat, verse 12 declares, flesh of beasts and of fowls "are to be used *sparingly*." And verse 13 continues, "And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used only in times of *winter*, or of *cold*, or *famine*." Verse 14 again mentions "beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven and all wild animals that run or creep on the earth." Then verse 15 says, "And these hath God made for the use of man *only in times of famine and excess of hunger*." But Utah, which is 76% Mormon, abounds with restaurants serving all kinds of meat in summer as well as winter. Grocery stores also carry a wide selection of meat all year. So, Mormons seem to be following McConkie's teachings rather than the "revelation" of their founding Prophet! There are probably a few vegetarian Mormons, but they are a tiny minority. Verse 17 says that, "Wheat is for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and barley for all useful animals and for *mild drinks*, as also other grain." Strict adherence to this verse would mean that Latter Day Saints can't eat Cheerios, corn flakes, oatmeal, rye bread and many other things! But they can make "mild drinks" from barley. Such drinks are usually called "beer!"

Verses 18-21 declare, "And all saints who remember to keep and do these saying... shall receive *health in their navel and marrow to their bones*; and shall find *wisdom* and great treasures of *knowledge*, even hidden treasures.... And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the *destroying angel shall pass by them*, as the children of Israel, and *not slay them*." In these verses, the Lord promises those who keep this *Word of Wisdom*, healthy lives, wisdom and knowledge, and escape from death like the children of Israel in Egypt. But, records show that many LDS Apostles and other leaders, got sick and died while relatively young, even though they claimed they kept the *Word of Wisdom*. Keeping the *Word of Wisdom* involves much more than abstaining from tea, coffee, tobacco and liquor. But even those who try to live by everything in it don't reap the promised rewards. So, was God really the Author of this "revelation?"

Our next article will discuss the *Pearl of Great Price*, one of the four LDS books of scripture. More about the *Word of Wisdom* can be found in our book, *Mormon Claims Answered*.