

MORMON SCRIPTURE

The Pearl of Great Price—Part One

By Marvin W. Cowan

In a pamphlet entitled, *What the Mormons Think of Christ*, LDS Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie wrote on page 2, “Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (known informally by the nickname *Mormons*) believe the Bible. Indeed, so literally and completely do their beliefs and practices conform to the teachings of the Bible that it is not uncommon to hear informed persons say: ‘If all men believed the Bible, all would be Mormons.’ Bible doctrine is Mormon doctrine, and Mormon doctrine is Bible doctrine. They are one and the same.”

There is no real evidence to support such a claim even though Mormons claim they are Christians. In fact, McConkie himself declared, “By the *standard works* of the (LDS) Church is meant the following four volumes of scripture: The *Bible*, *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*. The Church uses the King James Version of the *Bible*, but acceptance of the *Bible* is coupled with a reservation that it is true only insofar as translated correctly (Eighth Article of Faith.) The other three, having been revealed in modern times in English, are accepted without qualification” (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 764). Notice that McConkie said the *Bible* is accepted “with a reservation that it is true only insofar as translated correctly” while the other three books “are accepted without qualification.” That is very different from his first quotation above.

In recent times the Mormon Church has offered to give free copies of the King James Version of the *Bible* to anyone who would write or call and ask for it. Mormon missionaries then have new contacts to try to proselyte. Mormons sometimes even give prospective converts copies of the *Book of Mormon*, but they rarely give them copies of the *Doctrine and Covenants* or *The Pearl of Great Price*. Those who have read these two books of Mormon scripture know why they aren’t given out like the *Bible* and *Book of Mormon*. The *Book of Mormon* has very little doctrine in it that Christians would object to even though they would probably reject the “American history” it contains. The other two books contain many doctrines and teachings that are heretical to Christians but which are essential to Mormonism. Our recent articles mentioned some of the problems in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, so we will now consider the *Pearl of Great Price*.

Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth LDS Prophet of the Mormon Church, declared, “Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. I, p. 188). That is quite a claim for a church that also claims “Mormon doctrine is *Bible* doctrine” because you certainly can’t find “the story of Joseph Smith” in the *Bible*. Nor will you find it in the *Book of Mormon* which Joseph Smith said was “the most correct of any book on earth and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 71). You can find bits and pieces of the Joseph Smith story scattered throughout the *Doctrine and Covenants*, but the account itself is found in the *Pearl of Great Price*, “Joseph Smith-History” and in the first six volumes of the *History of the Church* by Joseph Smith. It is an interesting fact that

the *Bible* and the *Book of Mormon* contain almost no unique Mormon teachings, yet they are the books mentioned in most of their advertising. But Mormon ads rarely mention the *Doctrine and Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price* and the teachings of the LDS Prophets which contain most of the teachings and practices of the LDS Church! Why do they do that? Are they ashamed of their teachings or is this an attempt to deceive people into thinking that Mormons believe the same as historic Christians?

The *Pearl of Great Price* is the smallest of the four volumes of LDS scripture and it contains four little books: Moses, Abraham, Joseph Smith-Matthew and Joseph Smith-History. It also contains thirteen brief creedal statements called the "Articles of Faith." Joseph Smith claimed that the book of Moses was revealed to him just like the revelations in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Mormons believe that it contains important information that was lost out of Moses' original writings in the Pentateuch. With the exception of the first chapter of Moses, the rest of the book is exactly the same as Genesis 1:1 through 8:18 in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (which is *not* a translation of anything, but an attempt by Smith to clarify Genesis). Smith also claimed that the book of Abraham came from some Egyptian papyri found in Egypt that were translated in the same way he translated the gold plates into the *Book of Mormon*. We will discuss Smith's translation of the book of Abraham more fully later. Joseph Smith-Matthew is basically the King James Version of Matthew 23:39 through chapter 24 which he rearranged and to which he added some of his own thoughts. Joseph Smith-History is Smith's story of how God and Christ visited him when he was fourteen and told him not to join any of the existing churches. Then it tells how the angel Moroni visited him and revealed the gold plates to him from which he translated the *Book of Mormon*. After that John the Baptist conferred the Aaronic Priesthood on him and Oliver Cowdery after which Peter, James and John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood on them. Then they claimed they had all the authority needed to reestablish the one true church on earth again. The thirteen Articles of Faith are also often seen on a small card with a picture of a Mormon temple on the reverse side. While these Articles contain considerable heresy many Christians don't see it or understand it because some of the language sounds quite Christian.

Our next article will discuss more of the problems in the *Pearl of Great Price*. For more information on this subject we suggest *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus* by Charles M. Larson and published by Institute for Religious Research in Grand Rapids, MI in 1992.