

MORMON SCRIPTURE: The Articles of Faith, Part XV

By Marvin W. Cowan

The first part of the eighth Article of Faith states: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God *as far as it is translated correctly...*” Mormon leaders have never officially identified what is mistranslated in the Bible so Mormons don’t all agree on what is or is not acceptable. But, because of official Mormon teaching, most Mormons don’t believe the Bible is as reliable as the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. Orson Pratt, one of the original Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church wrote,

Out of a thousand different manuscripts, differing in almost every text, who can select the true one? Indeed, there would be almost an infinite improbability as to any one copy being true. Now, it was from such a mass of contradictory Greek manuscripts that the New Testament was translated.... What shall we say then, concerning the Bible’s being a sufficient guide? Can we rely upon it in its present known *corrupt* state, as being a faithful record of God’s word? We all know that but a few of the inspired writing have descended to our times, which few quote the names of some twenty other books which are lost, and it is quite certain that there were many other inspired books that even the names have not reached us. What few have come down to our day, have been *mutilated, changed, and corrupted*, in such a shameful manner that no two manuscripts agree. Verses and even whole chapters have been added by unknown persons; and even we do not know the authors of some whole books; and we are not certain that all those which we do know, were *wrote* by inspiration. Add all this imperfection to the uncertainty of the translation, and who, in his right mind, could, for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? *Who knows that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original?* Who knows that even the ordinances and doctrine that seem to be set forth in the present English Bible are anything like the original? The Catholics and Protestants do not know, because tradition is too imperfect to give this knowledge. There can be no certainty as to the contents of the inspired writing until God shall inspire some one to re-write all those books over again, as he did Esdras in ancient times (*Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, No. 3, p. 47).

A more recent LDS Apostle, Mark E. Petersen, declared,

Copyists were not always accurate. In fact, often they were careless, as also were many printers and proofreaders of later times. Whole sections of the text were occasionally omitted, inadvertently it may have been, but left out nevertheless. Sometimes only a paragraph was missed, or a word here and there which could give an opposite meaning. At other times, copyists misunderstood a word, and put down a wrong one, thinking it was what was intended in the original. *Many insertions were made*, some of them “slanted” for selfish purposes, while at times *deliberate falsifications and fabrications* were perpetrated” (*As Translated Correctly*, p. 4).

Pratt and Petersen’s quotations make very serious charges against the Bible, the translators, the translation, and even the copyists and printers. They wrote like they were authorities on the Bible, but they weren’t and it would be impossible to substantiate their claims for the following reasons:

1. They would need to have been with the translators to see them inserting and omitting words and making other errors in the manuscripts, but they weren’t even born at that time!

2. They would also need to be proficient in Hebrew and Greek to *know* the translators mistranslated texts and corrupted the manuscripts. But there is no evidence that either LDS Apostle knew those languages.
3. Pratt and Petersen said that copyists and translators made “*deliberate falsifications and fabrications*” and mutilated, changed, and corrupted the original texts for “*selfish purposes*.” That implies that *they knew* what was *in the minds of the copyists and translators*, but that would be impossible to know! Therefore, their charges are bogus.

No reputable authority on the Bible supports the above claims of Pratt and Petersen. Yet, Mormons believe their Apostles even though no evidence supports such claims.

LDS authorities make such claims against the Bible to try to convince readers that it is not as reliable as the other three LDS books of scripture. LDS Apostle James Talmage said of the Bible, “There will be, there can be *no absolutely reliable translation* of these or other scriptures, unless it be effected through the gift of translation, as one of the endowments of the Holy Ghost.... Let the Bible then be read reverently and with prayerful care, the reader ever seeking the light of the Spirit that he may discern between truth and the errors of men” (*Articles of Faith*, p. 237). Talmage also spoke of the “superior clearness of the Nephite scripture” (*ibid.* p. 274). The “Nephite scripture” is the *Book of Mormon*.

Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie also wrote,

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 (LDS) 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 the difference in the way the Bible and the other LDS scriptures are accepted. But, there is no excuse for Mormons to have an unreliable Bible since every LDS Prophet has also had the official title of “Translator.” Yet, none of them, except the founder Joseph Smith, has tried to translate the Bible. Since Smith’s “inspired translation” is *not* their official Bible, they must not believe it is inspired. That leads us to conclude that LDS prophets do not have the gift of translation OR the Bible is accurately translated now, OR LDS leaders *want* an inferior Bible!

Next month we will continue our discussion of the Eighth Article of Faith. For those who want to read more about the difference between the LDS and Christian views of the Bible, we suggest the chapter on the Bible in my book, *Mormon Claims Answered*.