

# CIS Bulletin: Latter-day Saints Scriptures

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**T**he Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, popularly known as the Mormon or LDS Church, is a unique American religion. The Mormon Church claims to be Christian, but its doctrines place it completely outside the parameters of acceptable Christian beliefs.

The LDS Church has four scriptures: the King James Version of the Bible, *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price*.

## King James Version of the Bible

The Mormon Church accepts the Bible as scripture “as far as it is translated correctly” [Article 8 of the LDS Articles of Faith]. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church in 1830, began a “correction” of the biblical text two months after the church was organized. He made hundreds of additions, deletions, and changes to the biblical text through “inspiration,” including removing the Song of Songs (Solomon) from his new translation.

It has been published as the Inspired Version by the Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Mormons do not use the Inspired Version, allegedly because Smith did not complete the corrections to the text. However, Smith’s corrections to the biblical text are found in footnotes in the King James Version published by the LDS Church and in the *Pearl of Great Price*.

One example of a major change Smith made to the biblical text is John 1:1. While the words have not been changed in the text of the King James Version, a note at the bottom of the page refers readers to “JST John1:1-34 (Appendix). Smith’s translation of John 1:1 reads, “In the beginning was the gospel *preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.*” [Italicized words found in Appendix.]

Some of Smith’s changes are found at the bottom of the pages in the Bible. John 4:24 reads “God is a Spirit” [KJV]. In Smith’s translation, the verse read “*For unto such hath God promised his Spirit*” [Italicized words found in Appendix. This verse is John 4:26 in Smith’s translation since he added two verses earlier in the chapter.]

More lengthy changes made by Smith have been placed in the *Pearl of Great Price*, which we will discuss later.

## Book of Mormon

The *Book of Mormon* is the best known of the Mormon scriptures. It is advertised on television, given out by LDS missionaries, found in the rooms of all Marriott Hotels, and now sold commercially.

According to Smith, an angel named Moroni woke him in his home near Palmyria, New York, on 21 September 1823, to reveal the location of a long lost scripture written by Moroni’s father, Mormon. The scripture was written in “reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics” on “gold plates.” On 22 September, Smith went to the location, a hill called Cumorah in the Book of Mormon, where he found the plates in a stone box. However, Smith says he was not allowed to take the plates for four years, until 22 September 1827. Buried with the plates was “Urim and Thummim,” by which Smith could translate the plates. Several verses of this account have been found by historians.

Smith took the plates to his father-in-law’s home, where his wife, Emma Hale Smith, served as the first scribe. Later, Martin Harris agreed to help with the translation. Harris secured Smith’s permission to take 116 manuscript pages to show his wife, who was suspicious of Smith’s (and her husband’s) activities. The 116 pages of manuscript mysteriously disappeared and Harris was replaced by Oliver Cowdery. After the translation was completed, the gold plates were given to the angel Moroni and were never seen again. In 1830, 5,000 copies of the *Book of Mormon* were published.

## Summary of the Book of Mormon

Just before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity (c. 587/6), two Jewish families left Jerusalem, built a ship and sailed across the Indian and Pacific oceans to the western hemisphere. Two sons of one of the families rebelled against God and fell into wickedness and idolatry. God cursed them with a dark skin; he are ancestors of the American Indians, whom Mormons call “Lamanites,” after one of the two wicked sons. Much of the story centers around the faithful Nephites, named after a brother of the two sons, and the wicked Lamanites.

The *Book of Mormon* also tells of Christ’s visit to the western hemisphere after his resurrection. Christ started a church among the Nephites and Lamanites, taught baptism by immersion, instituted the Lord’s Supper, and appointed 12 apostles and ordained priests.

The Nephites and Lamanites later began fighting each other. The final battle occurred in what is now New York State. The Lamanites completely wiped out all of the lighter skinned Nephites. Before his death in the final battle, the Nephite general, Mormon, gave his writings to his son, Moroni, who buried them in about A.D. 400.

Another part of the *Book of Mormon* tells of another group of Jews who came to America in 2200 B.C. by using a peculiar sort of submarine.

## Origin of the *Book of Mormon*

Many books were published prior to the *Book of Mormon* which popularized the idea between the American Indians and the Hebrews, particularly the Ten Lost Tribes. Among them were:

- ◆ James Adair's *History of the American Indian* (1775)
- ◆ Charles Crawford's *Essay Upon the Propagation of the Gospel*, in which there are facts to prove that many of the Indians in America are descended from the Ten Tribes (1799)
- ◆ Elias Boudinot's *A Star in the West, or, a Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Ten Tribes of Israel* (1816)
- ◆ Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (1823)

Fawn Brodie, a Mormon, wrote in her classic, *No Man Knows My History*, that she has found 27,000 words out of the 275,000 words in the *Book of Mormon* are quoted directly from the Bible. They include the Ten Commandments, 21 chapters from Isaiah, Malachi 3-4, Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), and 1 Corinthians 12-13.

Gerald and Sandra Tanner, former Mormons and now owners of Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Inc., have listed 200 examples of New Testament phrases and verses used in the *Book of Mormon* supposedly spoken or written before the birth of Christ. For example:

- ◆ Matt. 25:41 found in Mosiah 26:27 and supposedly spoken between 120 and 100 B.C.
- ◆ Mark 10:47 found in Alma 36:18 and supposedly spoken in 73 B.C.
- ◆ John 14:2 found in Enos 1:27 and supposedly spoken between 544 and 421 B.C.

Stories from the Bible were allegedly revised and placed in the *Book of Mormon*. For example, the daughter of Herodias danced before King Herod and asked for the head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:22-27). In Ether 8:10-12, the daughter of Jared danced before Akish and Jared promised his daughter to Akish as his wife if Akish would bring him the head of King Omer.

Some scholars count more than 100 of the 350 names in the *Book of Mormon* are biblical names; others are biblical names with slight spelling changes. For example, Sariah is a variant of Sarah or Sarai. Other scholars claim some of the names in the *Book of Mormon* are the names of people Smith knew.

The *Book of Mormon* is written in King James English. No archaeological documentation has been found in the western hemisphere to support the story of the *Book of Mormon*. It does not contain many of the most unique Mormon teachings, for example, polygamy and eternal or celestial marriage. It has been described as a "bridge" between the Christian faith and the Mormon faith.

## *Doctrine and Covenants*

The *Doctrine and Covenants* is a book of 138 revelations received primarily by Joseph Smith and two "declarations."

Many of the revelations dealt with issues Smith faced and for which a revelation from God carried the required weight.

Other revelations are more theologically important. They include:

- ◆ D&C 19:4-12 — Hell is not endless.
- ◆ D&C 57, 84 — Independence, Missouri, is the new City of Zion and the New Jerusalem where a temple will be built before Christ's return.
- ◆ D&C 89 — The Word of Wisdom prohibits the use of "hot drinks" [interpreted today as caffeine drinks], "strong drinks" or alcohol and tobacco.
- ◆ D&C 93 — Because man is spirit, he was in the beginning with God, not created.
- ◆ D&C 132 — Reveals that polygamy is "a new and an everlasting covenant."

Two "declarations" appear at the end of the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

In the first, LDS President Wilford Woodruff stated, "I now publicly declare that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the law" (Salt Lake City, 06 October 1890). This declaration came as a result of laws passed by Congress outlawing polygamy and the arrest and threatened arrests of LDS Church leaders. The revelation (D&C 132) permitting polygamy remains a part of Mormon scripture.

The second declaration was announced on 30 September 1987 and permitted "every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood." Prior to this declaration, members of African descent could not receive ordination as priests in the LDS Church.

## *Pearl of Great Price*

This small scripture is generally found in the same cover as the *Doctrine and Covenants*. It consists of several parts:

- ◆ "Selections from the Book of Moses," which are Smith's changes to the opening seven chapters of the Book of Genesis. Smith's changes, for example, establish Moses as the author of Genesis (1:1). It states that God has established many worlds for future Mormon men who become gods (1:33-37). It also teaches that Adam and Eve's fall was a part of God's plan (5:10-12), and that Adam was forgiven and baptized "by the Spirit of the Lord" (6:48-65).
- ◆ "The Book of Abraham," from a papyrus purchased by Smith and which he claimed was a long lost book of the Bible written by Abraham. It teaches a plurality of gods.
- ◆ "Joseph Smith — Matthew," which is Smith's translation of Matthew 23:39 through chapter 24.
- ◆ "Joseph Smith — History," which is the official version of Smith's first revelation when God and Jesus Christ appeared to him to warn him not to join any church because they were all wrong. Several versions were apparently written.
- ◆ "The Articles of Faith," of which there are thirteen.