

## **But It Is Translated Correctly**

“Really, these passages are not difficult to understand, though many people find them difficult to believe.”

-Gordon Clark

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."

So says the 8th Article of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But what does this mean? Why do Latter-day Saints understand the 8th Article in so many different ways? Below we will examine this topic, and hopefully direct the reader to a proper understanding of the authority, inspiration, and accuracy of the Word of God, the Bible.

### **Biblical Teaching**

The Bible claims to be a very special book. In fact, the Apostle Peter, when describing the process whereby the Scriptures were written, said, "Knowing this first of all, that no Scriptural prophecy ever came about by the prophet's own personal explanation, for no prophecy ever was borne by the will of man; rather, while being carried along by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21). Peter was saying nothing new when he gave this high view of Scripture, for the prophets of the Old Testament, too, had presented their words not as the words of men, but the very words of God. The Apostle Paul summed up the entire Bible's teaching when he wrote, "All scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction, for training in righteousness, in order that the man of God might be complete, fully equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul taught that the Scriptures themselves were "God-breathed"; their very origin was to be found in God Himself. These are not just men's writings about God, but God's revelation to man. Since this is so, the Bible is able to make the man of God "complete, fully equipped for every good work." Nothing needs to be added to the Bible, nothing needs to be changed. The Scriptures come from God, and are sufficient to their task.

Yet, when discussing with LDS people the Bible's teaching that there is but one God, or that Jesus Christ's work on the cross brings about full and complete salvation outside of the works of man, often the conversation immediately turns to the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible. Why is this? What does the LDS Church teach about the inspiration of the Bible? Why do so many modern LDS distrust it?

## **"As far as it is translated correctly..."**

In commenting on this Article, Mormon scholar James Talmage said,

"The Latter-day Saints believe the original records to be the word of God unto man, and, as far as these records have been translated correctly, the translations are regarded as equally authentic. The English Bible professes to be a translation made through the wisdom of man; in its preparation the most scholarly men have been enlisted, yet not a version has been published in which errors are not admitted. However, an impartial investigator has cause to wonder more at the paucity of errors than that mistakes are to be found at all." (Articles of Faith, pp. 236-237).

A little later, however, Talmage makes this comment:

"The New Testament must be accepted for what it claims to be; and though, perhaps, many precious parts have been suppressed or lost, while some corruption of the texts may have crept in, and errors have been inadvertently introduced through the incapacity of translators, the volume as a whole must be admitted as authentic and credible, and as an essential part of the Holy Scriptures." (p. 248)

Most LDS people, when speaking of the Bible, are not as reserved as Dr. Talmage. Mormon missionaries have often been heard to say, "But, the Bible has been translated many times, and whole sections have been removed, so we don't know what it originally said!" Few can even begin to substantiate the claim that whole books have been removed from the Bible, yet the same thread runs throughout the common LDS view of the Bible: it is a good book, but not nearly as trustworthy as the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, or the Pearl of Great Price. When faced with a Biblical passage that contradicts Mormon teaching, it is very common to hear the 8th Article of Faith quoted along with some comment saying that the Bible is full of contradictions and has in some way been "changed" over time.

How are the above statements of Dr. Talmage, as well as the common beliefs of LDS people today, to be reconciled and understood? Is the English Bible, whether we speak of the King James Version or other more modern versions, full of errors? Do we know what the Bible originally said? Have whole sections been removed from Scripture? To answer these questions, a few definitions are required.

## Transmission Versus Translation

The 8th Article of Faith really only addresses the translation of the Bible. There is a very important difference between the translation of the Bible and the transmission of the text of the Bible over time. These two terms are often confused by LDS people. Translation is simply the rendering of a written word, sentence, or document, from one language into another. The Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, with a very small amount of Aramaic as well. When one translates the Bible, one simply takes the original Hebrew or Greek passage and renders it in English. For example, the citations of 2 Peter 1:20-21 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 above were not taken from an English text, but were translated directly from the Greek text. Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in the heavens." I did not read that passage from an English Bible, but rather translated it anew from the Hebrew text. Here is another passage, Matthew 24:35: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away." Again, this was translated from the original Greek language, not simply read from an English Bible. Hence, strictly, the Bible is translated hundreds of times every day by people who know the Biblical languages. Each English Bible, such as the King James Version, or the New American Standard Bible, is simply a different translation of the Greek and Hebrew texts. They are not, as many LDS seem to believe, "different Bibles." There is only one Bible, but many translations of that Bible into other languages.

The 8th Articles of Faith says that the Bible is the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly." As far as that is understood correctly, we agree. That is, an obvious, gross, purposeful mistranslation of the Bible would not be binding upon someone as the word of God. If someone set out to change the message of Scripture by willfully and knowingly mistranslating the original tongues, the result of their work would not be the Word of God but a deception, a falsehood. An example of this is the Jehovah's Witnesses New World Translation. This "bible" is purposefully mistranslated so as to provide some basis for the Jehovah's Witnesses unique doctrines and teachings. It is not, therefore, truly "the Word of God." If this was all that most Mormons understood by the 8th Article of Faith, there would be little grounds for objection. But, sadly, most Mormons do not interpret it in that way. Most confuse the term translation with a totally different concept: that of transmission.

Transmission refers to the process whereby the text of the Bible, in Greek and Hebrew, has been preserved and passed down through the centuries to this present time. This process involved hand-copying the texts of the Bible up until the middle of the fifteenth century, when printing became available. Most of the time, when Mormons speak of the Bible being "changed" over time, or of its

being incorrectly "translated," they are referring not to translation but to an alleged error in the transmission of the text. That is, many LDS believe that the Bible, during those many centuries of hand-copied transmission, was corrupted by those who did the writing, either intentionally or by accident, so much so that today we do not know exactly what Paul or Peter actually wrote, let alone someone who lived much earlier, like Samuel or Moses. Therefore, for many LDS, the 8th Article of Faith is better understood, "we accept the Bible as the word of God as far as it's text has been transmitted correctly."

With these definitions in mind, let's examine some of the most common claims made by Mormons about the accuracy and integrity of the Bible.

### **There are many different Bibles, each contradicting the other!**

This is a very common belief of Mormon people. Since each translation of the Bible does not provide the exact same rendering of the English text word-for-word, then it is believed that no one knows what the Bible actually says. However, anyone who is the least but familiar with more than one language knows that this objection carries no weight at all. There is more than one way to translate a phrase from one language to another, and in the vast majority of the cases, the differences between one translation and another have to do with word-choice on the part of the translators themselves. Some translations are more "literal" than others. Let's look at some examples.

German speaking people have a saying that in German is, "Morgenstund hat Gold in Mund." Literally this is translated into English as "morning hours have gold in their mouths." But, this literal translation, while "accurate," does not say much to an English speaking person. Rather, the proper translation of the meaning of the phrase would involve using the English saying that corresponds to the German one, in this case, "the early bird catches the worm." Both translations are "accurate"--one is literal, but does not convey meaning well, the other is not literal, but conveys the meaning. Another example. The French say, "j'ai le cafard" which, if literally translated, means, "I have the cockroach." However, when a Frenchman utters this phrase, he is not referring to insects but to his mood. The phrase is an idiom that means, "I am depressed" or "I have the blues." A biblical example comes from Luke 9:44 where the literal Greek reads, "let these words sink down into your ears." Yet many modern translations have, Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you.

Many Mormons have asserted that the existence of different translations means that the Bible has been "changed." Yet, if they were to be shown two or three different translations of the Declaration of Independence in German, none of

which agreed word-for-word with the others, would they then conclude that the Declaration of Independence itself had been "changed"? Of course not. In the same way, just because there are numerous different translations of the Bible in English (and many other languages) does not mean that the Bible itself has been changed.

### **Many "plain and precious truths" have been removed from the Bible!**

Even the Book of Mormon makes this claim in 1 Nephi 13:26ff. The main objection of Mormons to the final authority of the Bible as the Word of God is their belief that parts are missing from the Bible, and that those parts that remains have been altered. As evidence of this, various references to written books that are not a part of the Bible are cited, such as the book of Nathan the prophet (2 Chronicles 9:29) or the book of Jasher (2 Samuel 1:18), etc. What of these references, and the claims made about changes in the Bible?

First, there have never been books that were a part of the "Bible" as we know it that are now "lost." There were a small number of writings, such as the Epistle of Clement or the book of Barnabas, that were considered by a minority of Christians at one time or another to be part of the Bible. These books are not "lost" as they still exist and can be readily consulted and read. We know of no Mormons who believe that these, or other books such as the Apocryphal books accepted by Roman Catholics as part of the Bible, should in fact be in the canon (list) of Scripture. So where are these other books that were supposedly "removed"?

What of other book of Jasher or the others mentioned in the Old Testament? Where are they? Are they not "missing" from the Bible? We may not have all of these books, but we must ask why anyone thinks that they were part of the Bible in the first place. Why is it that the Bible cannot even mention the existence of any other written record without automatically making those records Scripture? Is there anything in the Bible that should convince us that the book of Jasher was Scripture? The Bible does not say it was. So why consider it "missing"? God has promised many times that His Word would never pass away (Isaiah 40:8). Either God has made an error in "losing" these books, or they were never a part of Scripture in the first place.

Some Mormons are utterly convinced that the Roman Catholic Church has somehow "edited" or "changed" the Bible to suit their own doctrines and beliefs. The fact is, nothing of the sort has taken place, nor could it have. Why? Because of the massive number of manuscripts of the Bible that we have. No one man, or group of men, could have possibly changed all those manuscripts that were scattered all across the known world. It is simply an impossible task. Wholesale

changes in the text of the Bible never took place. Books, chapters, verses, etc., are not missing, are not "lost" as so many people have been taught. The facts simply do not support such an idea.

**"But the Bible must have been changed, since it now contradicts itself!"**

Surely one of the most common allegations against the inerrancy and accuracy of the Bible is that of supposed contradictions. When in a discussion of those issues that separate Mormonism from historic Christian faith, one often hears the LDS person say, "but, what you have just quoted is contradictory to other statements in the Bible, so you need some other source of revelation to know for certain." These allegations normally fall into two categories: supposed contradictions in teaching and supposed contradictions of historical fact, etc. In response to the first category, we might point out that an all-too-clear reason for thinking the teaching of one passage to be contradictory with another might just be that the person making the allegation does not properly understand the teaching of one or both of the passages. For example, many Mormons find James' teaching in James 2:20-24 to be "contradictory" to Paul's teaching in Romans 3:24 and Ephesians 2:8-10. Yet, a close examination of these passages reveals this thinking to be in error, for James is speaking to Christians about the results of true and living faith, while Paul is speaking of how a man is to be justified before God. In each instance where a supposed contradiction in teaching is presented, a close examination of the next reveals that no contradiction exists.

The second category, that of alleged contradictions of fact, history, etc., requires more in-depth study of the issues to properly address. Obviously, in this short space, we cannot even begin to address each and every "contradiction" that has been proposed through the ages. History shows that many of those "flaws" in the Bible that men have touted at one time or another have fallen before further archeological or textual study; many "pet problems" with the Bible are based upon ignorance rather than upon fact. Be that as it may, we can truly say, having examined entire volumes of these supposed "contradictions," that we have yet to find one that could be proven beyond question to be a contradiction in the original manuscripts of the Bible. If you honestly feel that you know of such a contradiction, and this contradiction keeps you from truly believing in the accuracy and authority of the message of the Bible, please write and allow us to correspond with you on the subject. If God has truly spoken in His Word, the Bible, we feel there is no reason to hesitate to examine any objection that could be raised to His Word. We do not claim to have all the answers, of course, but we offer to be of assistance to you if we possibly can.

Why did we write this? We feel that if any honest Mormon would examine the full and complete teachings of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, they would find that its teachings are very far removed from those of the LDS Church. They would find that there is but one God who draws men to Himself, having provided salvation through Jesus Christ solely on the basis of His grace and mercy, not upon any actions of man. We hope you will "search the Scriptures" as the Bereans of old (Acts 17:11) and "prove all things" as the Scriptures command (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

-James White  
Scholar in Residence, College of Christian Studies,  
Grand Canyon University; Adjunct Professor, Golden  
Gate Baptist Theological Seminary