

MORMONS HAVE A “PRIVATE INTERPRETATION”

2 Peter 1:20-21 — *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ...For holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

2 Timothy 3:16 — *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

SCRIPTURE: BACKBONE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Scripture is God’s word, not man’s, and, as Peter wrote, understanding that is a top priority (“Knowing this first”). Paul, too, writing to Timothy, noted the source of scripture and its all-important role in matters of Christian doctrine and life. When conversing about matters of faith with Mormons (or anyone, for that matter), Christians must stick with the Bible, the backbone of Christian faith.

The backbone of Mormon religion is elastic: an ill-defined and ever-expanding collection of scriptures and ever-changing interpretations of scripture. The Bible is part of that collection, but it is eclipsed by the Book of Mormon.

AN OVERVIEW OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

From the Mormon perspective:

1. *“Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none.”* — official Mormon church web site¹
2. *“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts four books of scripture: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. These books are called the standard works of the Church. ...In addition...the words of our living prophets become scripture to us.”*²
3. *“...the doctrines and teachings of the Church...were received by direct revelation from God [apart from the Bible].”* —Mormon missionary training text³
4. *“...additional scripture has continued to come, including the numerous and vital revelations flowing in a never-ending stream from God to his prophets on earth. ...the vaults and files of the Church contain these revelations which come month to month and day to day....”* —Mormon authority in a worldwide address⁴

Additional perspective: In the Mormon church’s 176 years it has altered all of its “standard works,” including the Bible. It considers “the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly”⁵ — but has changed it, not by better translation, but by “private interpretation,” or self-claimed inspiration and revelation to the men leading the church. It considers its other scriptures to be without error, but subject to change when leaders may be inspired.

As for the words of living Mormon prophets that have “become scripture”: No one knows which prophets and which words; there is no documentation.

—On page 2: “Observations” and “Want to Help Mormons? Try This.”—

BIBLE’S WORDS OF CAUTION

Even as he pointed to “the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (3:15), Paul warned about the “canker” (ulcerous sores) of unsound doctrine and error (2 Timothy 2: 17-18; 3:15; 4:2).

Peter, too, warned about (among many other things) “false prophets” with “damnable heresies” (2 Peter 2:1) and those who “wrest the scriptures” (3:16).

OBSERVATIONS

1. Good Mormons “follow the living prophet,” the church president. Doctrines of dead prophets — even dead Mormon prophets — may no longer be valid.⁶
2. Mormons respect the Bible but think essential gospel truths were lost or deliberately eliminated over the centuries; thus, the need for a living prophet to correct and interpret the Bible and to reveal new scriptures.
3. Generally Mormons are pleased with what they think to be their restored form of true Christian faith. They will use the words of the Bible and universal doctrines of Christian faith, but change, deny, or ignore their clear meaning.
4. Nothing is more important for a Mormon than a “testimony” — a private, climactic experience — considered to be a direct revelation from God that the Mormon church, prophets, and scriptures are true.
5. When they have a “testimony” Mormons generally say they “know,” not merely believe, such-and-such, because they can feel it.⁷ They “strengthen” their testimony by repeating it (or “bearing” it) at every opportunity. If everything else falls apart they still “know this church is true and Joseph Smith is a true prophet.”
6. The Book of Mormon is a missionary lure, especially to nominal Christians and in native American and Pacific cultures. It contains little detail about Mormon religion, but is promoted as “another testament of Jesus Christ” and an account of the resurrected Christ visiting His “other sheep” in the ancient Americas.⁸

WANT TO HELP MORMONS? TRY THIS

Consider Acts 17. The Apostle Paul went to the Jews in one town and “reasoned with them out of the scriptures.” In another town he did the same, and the Jews “searched the scriptures daily.” And in Athens he “disputed...in the synagogue with the Jews,” and with others “in the market daily” (verses 1-4, 10-11, 16-17).

Surely Paul heard men debating and worshipping as he observed their altars, read their inscriptions, and became familiar with their “own poets.” He saw and heard devout, religious people; they took their religion seriously (verses 22-28).

Mormon religion is not Jewish, of course, nor are Mormons idolators in the conventional sense. But, religious and devout as they are, as reasonable and attractive as their religion may seem, they err in their knowledge of God and Christ. Their religion — their doctrines, good works, and sacred rites — does not address adequately, among many things, the nature of God and Christ, justification by faith alone, and the sufficiency of Christ’s righteousness imputed to unworthy men.

The solution is scripture, the Bible. Christians can visit “Athens,” observe the “altars” of Mormonism, and read the words of Mormon “poets.” Christians can seek out Mormons, tell them the Good News found in the Bible, and challenge them to “search the scriptures” (most Mormons will have the King James Version of the Bible published by their church). Don’t chase down every false “idol.”

Disproving Mormonism is unnecessary; as a Mormon discovers biblical truth, the false history and doctrines will be evident. Some will believe and be saved.

NOTES: 1. *josephsmith.net*. 2. Gospel Principles, pp.52,55. 3. A Marvelous Work and a Wonder, p. 1. 4. The Ensign, Nov. '98, p.82. * 5. Pearl of Great Price, p.60. * 6. The Ensign, Nov. '98, p.83. * 7. See an example at The Ensign, Apr. '06, p.63. * 8. Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi 15-16; The Ensign, Jan. '99, pp.25-26. *
* - Denotes material also available at the Mormon church web site, *lds.org*.