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## The Interpretation of Scripture

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**Abstract:** Peter teaches that prophecy is not to be interpreted privately. In spite of this counsel many have done so causing discord and contention. The Book of Mormon says that many of the plain and precious truths have been taken out of the Bible. A comparison of scriptures will provide an accurate understanding of difficult passages.

## THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 1887.

### THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter i, 20).

It would appear from the writings of this chief Apostle, Peter, that even in his day there had arisen difficulties about the interpretation of the Scriptures; for in addition to the text we have quoted at the head of this article from his second epistle, he says:

“Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter iii, 15, 16).

And from the days of Peter to the present, there have been men who have continued this pernicious practice of wresting the Scriptures, not only to their own destruction, but to the confusion of thousands who have fallen under their influence. It is because of the different interpretations given to the Scriptures that we see the professed followers of Christ split up into hundreds of different sects, one crying “lo, here is Christ;” and another saying, “nay, but lo, here is Christ;” and thus division is multiplied, uncertainty increases, and humanity distracted with the cries of discordant sects contending over their creeds, while unbelief is sapping the foundations of faith.

The Elders of Israel are called to labor in the midst of this confusion occasioned by the variety of interpretations given to Scripture, and it is highly necessary that they should be able to rightly divide the word of truth, and intelligently expound the Scriptures to the understanding of the honest enquirer. In this part of their work the Elders will be greatly assisted by keeping in mind the following facts:

I. The collection of sacred books known as the Bible does not contain all the scriptures written by the inspired prophets and apostles of God, nor all the teachings of Jesus Christ. We know that from the fact that there are many books and revelations spoken of in the books of the Bible which cannot be found in it. For instance, in Galatians we read:



"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham" (Galatians iii, 8).

Here we learn that there was Scripture in the days of Abraham, who lived some three hundred years before Moses, who is the writer of the most ancient Scripture in our possession, and whom some learned writer has called "God's first pen." Yet there was Scripture in existence at least three hundred years before he wrote, and from it Abraham learned that the heathen would be justified through faith. But we have none of that Scripture which Abraham had in his day. Turning to the book of Jude, where that "servant of Christ" speaks of certain characters that were like "clouds without rain," he says:

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his Saints, to execute judgment upon all," etc. (Jude, 14, 15).

It is evident from this that Jude had in his possession some of the prophecies of Enoch which foretold events not even yet fulfilled, as they relate to the glorious coming of the Lord Jesus accompanied by thousands of His Saints; and doubtless these prophecies formed part of the Scripture which Abraham read.

This same Jude says in the 3rd verse of his epistle:

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the Saints."

This is a plain statement that Jude had written to the Saints a previous epistle to the one from which we have just quoted. Yet we have but the one epistle in the Bible from the pen of Jude. That former letter to which he himself refers was an exposition of a very important doctrine, "the common salvation;" and Jude had given "all diligence" in writing it. What a flood of light might it not throw upon the subject of man's salvation if we only had it! So we might continue to point out references both in the New Testament and the Old which speak of sacred books and revelations that are not in the Bible, and which, if they were, might explain away many of the difficulties that now perplex mankind. It will be remembered in this connection that the Book of Mormon informs us that many plain and precious things had been taken away from the Gospel of the Lamb, and also many covenants of the Lord by a certain abominable church described as the "whore of the whole earth." And,

"Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book [meaning the Bible], which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God; because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceeding great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that satan hath great power over them" (1 Nephi xiii. 29).

Here we have a plain statement why it is there is so much in the Scriptures that is difficult to understand; much that was plain and precious has been taken away, for the want of which considerable of that which remains is mysterious, and some of it even contradictory.

II. *It must be remembered that in many of the epistles, which form a large part of the New Testament, we have but one side of a correspondence by which to judge of all the doctrines referred to therein.*



This of itself is sufficient to explain how it is that so much of the writings of the apostles is difficult to understand. A number of Paul's letters are written in answer to letters from the churches making inquiry about certain points of doctrine, and when the writings of Paul were collected, only his side of the correspondence was given, so we cannot always judge of the circumstances under which his advice and instruction and exposition of doctrine were given, something quite necessary to the full comprehension of that which he wrote. If one side of a correspondence in modern days should be thrown into our hands, very much of what was contained in the letters would not be understood by us, unless we had the letters which called out those that had fallen into our hands. So it is with many of the epistles of the New Testament.

Moreover, we must interpretate what are, by some, considered difficult and apparently contradictory passages of Scripture, and that appear arbitrary, and which not unfrequently are quoted to support erroneous doctrines—by all the circumstances—so far as they can be gathered—under which the passage was written, and regard it in the light of the spirit of the Gospel and right reason. For example, it is written in St. Luke:

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke xiv, 26).

Is any one so lost to reason as to insist that a man must absolutely *hate* his kindred, using the word hate in its usual signification? We think not. He would remember at once that that idea was not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel. He would call to mind that Jesus had said:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said: Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemies, but I say unto you, love your enemies bless them that curse you,” etc.

Indeed the whole spirit of the Gospel is love, not hate. And if one is required by the Gospel law to love even his enemies, is it reasonable to conclude that that law requires him to hate the father who protected him in his weakness, or the mother whose anxious heart yearned over him from infancy to manhood, or the wife of his bosom bound to him by the most sacred ties of affection known to humanity? Nay, none will subscribe to a doctrine so revolting to reason—so monstrously absurd—so at variance with the whole spirit of the Gospel. When looked at in connection with the spirit of the general teachings of Jesus, and the same doctrine stated by other writers who give it—“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”—the meaning of the passage under consideration is readily understood, and means that a man must love his kindred and friends less than he does his Lord, but is not required to hate them.

So with the passage so often quoted to support the idea that men are saved by grace alone, and without any acts of obedience to God—

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians ii. 8, 9).

But in connection with this passage others should be considered, such for example as,

“Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be



ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James i, 21, 22).

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only, . . . for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James ii, 24, 26).

And again, where the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, in speaking of Christ, says:

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews v, 9).

And furthermore, it should be remembered that so far as the New Testament gives the history of conversions, it tells us of acts of obedience rendered by the converts to the ordinances of the Gospel, which is in keeping with the instruction given by Jesus to His apostles:

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

And,

"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not [and consequently would not be baptized or perform any other act of obedience] shall be damned."

From these passages it is evident that a person is not only required to believe the Gospel, but is also required to obey its ordinances and its laws, and there is no escaping the conclusion. Well, then, how are we to understand Paul's doctrine of being saved by grace and not by works? It stands thus: Through disobedience to God's law man became lost—fallen. Was subject to the power of sin and death; and from the thralldom of these evils he was powerless to invent any means of escape. No works that he could perform of himself would redeem him. But God in His mercy had devised a plan for man's redemption, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and He has ordained that those who believe that Gospel and obey it shall be saved—is it not then the gift of God? was it not an act of His grace that devised the means of redemption? and if so, are we not saved by grace, and not by any works that we ourselves devise? Most assuredly. Who will say that it is not by the grace of God that we have our food and our raiment, and that these things are the gifts of God? Yet, in order to enjoy the advantages of these gifts of God, or to make it apply to us, we have to plow the land, sow the seed, and gather the harvest in the season thereof, and convert the grain into flour and so to bread. Likewise by acts of industry we have to shear the wool from the sheep, and pick the cotton from the plant's bursting bolls, and convert them into fabrics to cover our bodies, and the shining thread of the silk worm must be woven into silks and ribbons for articles of adornment—yet all these things are gifts of God, by His grace are they placed within our reach, but industry and labor on our part is essential to make this grace available to us:—so with the plan for man's redemption—it is the gift of God, and by His grace was it founded, and by that grace are we saved; but to make that grace of any value to us, requires obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

Such, then, is the manner in which the Scriptures should be interpreted—taking into consideration all the circumstances under which the passage was written—and viewing it in the light of the whole spirit of the Gospel. R.