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## The Standard Works of the Church

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**Abstract:** The Book of Mormon is one of the four standard scriptural works of the Church. It was translated by Joseph Smith, is the “keystone of our religion,” and the world will be judged by its contents.

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■ In her request for an “article . . . on the Standard Works of the Church,” the editor of this Relief Society Magazine said, “The sisters would appreciate a discussion of these sacred books . . .”

—meaning, we assume, the Bible, The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

#### THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

The Doctrine and Covenants is a book of modern scripture. It was first accepted by the Church as one of our standard works, August 17, 1835. Forty-one years later, in the 1876 edition of the book, twenty-six sections were added. Four years later, in the semi-annual conference of October 1880, President George Q. Cannon said:

I hold in my hand the Book of Doctrine and Covenants and also the book The Pearl of Great Price, which books contain revelations of God. In Kirtland, the Doctrine and Covenants in its original form, as first printed, was submitted to the officers of the Church and the members of the Church to vote upon. As there have been additions made to it by the publishing of revelations which were not contained in the original edition, it has been deemed wise to submit these books with their contents to the Conference, to see whether the Conference will vote to accept the books and their contents as from God, and binding upon us as a people and as a church.

President Joseph F. Smith said:

I move that we receive and accept the revelations contained in these books, as revelations from God to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and to all the world.

The motion was seconded and sustained by unanimous vote of the whole

# The Standard Works of the Church

*Elder Marion G. Romney*  
of the Council of the Twelve

Conference. (*Conference Reports*, October 10, 1880)

Ten years later, October 6, 1890, in like procedure, the Church adopted the Manifesto.

In this manner, the Doctrine and Covenants, with its present content, became and now is one of the standard works of the Church.

By the October 10th, 1880 action, the saints also accepted the contents of the Pearl of Great Price as revelations from God and binding upon them as a people and as a Church.

During the next twenty-two years, under the direction of the Presidency of the Church, the content of the book was somewhat revised. Consequently, in October 1902, President Joseph



F. Smith, then president of the Church, said to the saints in conference assembled:

I hold in my hand a copy of the revised edition of the Pearl of Great Price. The Pearl of Great Price as it originally existed, was presented before the General Conference and accepted as one of the standard works of the Church. Since then the book has undergone a revision; that is to say, all the revelations that it formerly contained which were also in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, have been eliminated from it. . . . We now present this book in its revised form—the original matter being preserved as it was before, only divided into chapters and verses—for your acceptance as a standard work of the church.

It was moved and seconded that the book be accepted as a standard work of the church, and the motion carried unanimously. (*Conference Reports*, October 6, 1902, page 82.)

The Pearl of Great Price contains:

(a) Visions of Moses as revealed to Joseph Smith the Prophet, in June 1830.

(b) “The Writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus,” as translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

(c) The following writings of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

1. His translation of the last verse of the 23rd chapter, and the 24th chapter of Matthew. (King James version.)

2. “Extracts from the History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet.” These extracts deal principally with events incident to the First Vision and the coming forth of The Book of Mormon.

3. The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

#### THE BIBLE

The Bible is a book which contains that part of the word of God revealed to men in ancient and New Testament times, which has been preserved in writing. It consists of the Old and New Testaments. We believe it “to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.” (8th Article of Faith.) We do not, however, believe that it contains all the Lord revealed to his people in ancient times.

From what we can draw from the scriptures relative to the teachings of heaven, we are induced to think that much instruction has been given to man since the beginning which we do not possess now. . . . We have what we have, and the Bible contains what it does contain . . . through the kind providence of our Father a portion of His word which He delivered to His ancient saints, has fallen into our hands, is presented to us with a promise of reward if obeyed, and with a penalty if disobeyed. (DHC Vol. 2, page 18.)

## THE BOOK OF MORMON

The first thing revealed in this dispensation about The Book of Mormon, was spoken by Moroni on his first appearance to the Prophet Joseph on the night of September 21, 1823.

He [Moroni] said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants. (Joseph Smith 2:34.)

After the Prophet obtained and translated the record and published the book, the Lord himself said that he, the Prophet, was given "power to translate" it "through the mercy" and "power of God" and that it contains ". . . a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also," and that "as your Lord and your God liveth it is true." (D&C 1:29; 20:9; 17:6.)

In November of 1841, some twelve years after its publication, the Prophet Joseph said:

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book. (DHC Vol. 4, page 461.)

Of all men, Joseph Smith was best qualified to make this appraisal. No other person comprehended the content of The Book of Mormon as did he. As he translated, the Holy Ghost enlightened his mind and quickened his understanding. As the glorious teachings contained in the record were revealed to him, they made

an everlasting impression upon his mind and soul.

The Book of Mormon was for Joseph Smith a handbook from which he first learned the fundamental principles of the gospel.

The King James version of the Bible, and The Book of Mormon, were both available to the Church at the time of its organization, April 6, 1830. They were then and ever since have been used by the Church as standard works. As early as February 9, 1831, the Lord, in the revelation "embracing the law of the Church," gave this instruction:

. . . the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel." (D&C 42:12.)

As quoted above, the Prophet Joseph declared The Book of Mormon to be "the keystone of our religion."

So far as I am advised, the nearest the Church has come to accepting the Bible and Book of Mormon by formal vote was in the General Conference October 6, 1902, when it accepted the Pearl of Great Price as one of the standard works of the Church. The Pearl of Great Price then contained, as it now does, the eighth article of faith, which reads:

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.

Although the revelations recorded in these four "sacred books" were given in different dispensations, "Yet," in the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, "all things which God communi-

cated to His people were calculated to teach them to rely upon God alone as the author of their salvation. . . ." (DHC, Vol. 2, page 17.)

Set forth in these "standard works" is the law of heaven, which "guarantees to all who obey it a reward far beyond any earthly consideration." (Joseph Smith, DHC, Vol. 2, page 7.) It guarantees eternal life in the celestial kingdom of God.

A distinguishing provision of this divine law, not common in the law of earthly governments, makes it "necessary for men to receive an understanding concerning the laws of the heavenly kingdom, before they are permitted to enter it. . . ." (*ibid.* page 8.) It is this provision which makes the standard works of first importance. Surely, all who "acknowledge their divine authenticity" must have a deep interest in their content.

The editor of *The Relief Society Magazine* spoke wisely when she characterized the "subject" of this article as "one which is vital to Latter-day Saint women in regard to their receiving instruction and inspiration for daily living." (Letter to me from Marianne C. Sharp, January 15, 1969.)

I can think of no surer way to seek "instruction and inspiration for daily living," than daily to read and prayerfully contemplate a chapter or so in these sacred standard works, which contain the law of heaven. To do so has ever been the counsel of the Lord.

In his farewell address to Israel, Moses reviewed the events and experiences of their "wan-

derings in the wilderness" and exhorted them "to gratitude, obedience, and loyalty to Jehovah." (Dummelow, *One Volume Commentary*, page 12.)

Over and over again, he declared that their survival, happiness, and success, depended upon their remembering the Lord and obeying the laws he had given them.

After reviewing some of these laws, including the Ten Commandments, Moses continued:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. (Deut. 6:4-9.)

In these instructions and many more, Moses stressed as the strongest bulwark against apostasy, and the most faith-promoting practice, constant consideration of the laws of God.

And it shall be [said he] on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones. . . . And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly. (Deut. 27:2,8.)

And. . . when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, [he]

. . . commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying,

Take this book of the law, and put

it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee. (Deut. 31:24-26.)

That is to say, ancient Israel was to be judged by their compliance or noncompliance with the content of "The Book of the Law." By the same token, modern Israel will be judged by their compliance or noncompliance with the law of heaven contained in our "standard works."

When Joshua, succeeding Moses, was to lead Israel over Jordan into the Promised Land, the first instruction he received from the Lord included a solemn charge to give constant attention and strict obedience to the law contained in the books written by Moses, their standard works.

. . . be thou strong [said the Lord] and very courageous that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:7-8.)

During his earthly ministry, Jesus charged the "Jews" who disputed his Sonship, to study the scriptures—to which they looked for eternal life—to learn of him.

Search the scriptures, he said, for . . . they are they which testify of me. (John 5:39.)

Nephi, the son of Lehi, thus expressed his attitude towards the standard works available to him:

. . . upon these [plates] I write the

things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children. (2 Nephi 4:15.)

Jacob associates the searching of the scriptures with the establishment of peace and love among the people and their ability to recognize and resist false doctrine.

And it came to pass [he said] that peace and the love of God was restored again among the people; and they searched the scriptures, and hearkened no more to the words of this wicked man. (Jacob 7:23.)

King Benjamin emphasized to his sons the importance of sacred records and their continual use, as

. . . he . . . taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.

For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.

I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief, and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do not believe them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are not correct.

O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, which contain the records and the sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now, and they are true; and we can know of their surety because we have them before our eyes.

And now, my sons, I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby . . . (Mosiah 1:3-7.)

The missionary prowess of the sons of Mosiah was in part due to the fact that “they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.” (Alma 17:2.)

The Savior himself thus spoke to the Nephites concerning the writings of the Old Testament prophets:

And now, behold, I say unto you, that ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah.

For surely he spake as touching all things concerning my people which are of the house of Israel; therefore it must needs be that he must speak also to the Gentiles.

And all things that he spake have

been and shall be, even according to the words which he spake.

Therefore give heed to my words; write the things which I have told you; and according to the time and the will of the Father they shall go forth unto the Gentiles.

And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things. (3 Nephi 23:1-5.)

No one of our standard works is of more importance to us than the Doctrine and Covenants. The revelations there recorded were specifically given for our guidance. The degree to which we conform to the law of heaven prescribed therein, will determine our place in the heavenly kingdom. Under these circumstances, it would seem that Relief Society sisters, and every other believing Church member, would desire to follow the Lord’s directions to:

Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled. (D&C 1:37.)

Treasure these things up in your hearts, and let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds. (D&C 43:34.)

#### IDENTITY

Who am I? Only my Heavenly Father knows,  
For he created my spirit, and knew my intelligence.

What am I? Again, he alone knows, now;  
But he desires that I learn  
To comprehend myself. This requires eternity.  
I could become a unique source  
Of infinite responses to truth.

Why am I? A prism needed  
Through which truth may shine  
In numberless hues,  
That beauty and joy may be embodied.

—Margaret B. Jorgensen