

Book of Mormon Doctrines

This is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, bath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.—II John 1:6-11.

IN THE chapter on the Book of Mormon in Bible prophecy, we referred to the twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah and its prophecy of a book that was to speak out of the ground. The concluding verse of that chapter states the purpose of the book: "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (Isaiah 29:24). One of the purposes of the Book of Mormon, therefore, was to correct errors and bring about understanding of doctrine.

We have made it clear in Chapter 25 that we believe in the Bible as our first standard of faith, belief, practice, and doctrine. But we have also pointed out that each one of the 250 Christian denominations in America takes the Bible as its final authority on matters of doctrine. The Bible has not brought unity, but division. The Bible alone has not yet settled doctrinal differences, or brought about denominational unity, and it never will. Another book of Scripture, if it came

properly accredited, could do much to corroborate, clarify, unify, and establish the doctrines of the Bible.

We would be the first to agree that it would be dangerous to accept just *any* book which purported to be an authority on doctrine, particularly if it was a book of human origin. We do not want a *different* doctrine from that taught by Jesus and recorded in the Bible; we want to be assured what that doctrine was. We are commanded, "If there come any unto you, and bring not *this* doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (II John 1:10).

The Book of Mormon is not the product of human minds or human wisdom. You will remember that we have shown that it is foretold in Bible prophecy, that it was written by a branch of the house of Israel whom Jesus called his "other sheep," that the circumstances of its coming forth and translation were so unbelievable and miraculous as to constitute a testimony of its divine origin, that its historical statements of fact have been proved to be true in over four hundred specific instances, that its authenticity has been supported by eleven special witnesses who saw and handled and bore witness to the existence of the plates from which it was translated.

WHAT DOCTRINES ARE TAUGHT IN THE BOOK OF MORMON?

Obviously we shall not have time to do more than mention some of the prominent teachings, without much explanation or analysis.

The Book of Mormon teaches that there is one God, who is omnipotent, supreme over heavens and earth, God above all. This God is eternal, everlasting, the same yesterday, today, and forever, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is perfect, just, merciful. He is all-wise; he knows all things. He is a God who is still at work, whose work will never be finished, for he is eternal, and his course is one eternal round. This God is the creator of all things, both the heavens and the earth; he is the Father and Creator of

man. This creation was accomplished through the instrumentality of his Son, Jesus Christ, who for this reason is also called a Creator, and the Father of heaven and earth.

God is unchangeable; his decrees are unalterable. In him there is no variability, neither shadow of turning. His power is undiminished, and always will be; he is still a God of miracles, of might, of wonder, of power. He is impartial; he remembers all nations alike; he is mindful of every people, and every man is precious in his sight.

JESUS CHRIST

The Book of Mormon teaches that Christ is the Son of the Eternal Father, the Only Begotten, the Lamb of God, the Holy One of Israel, the Redeemer and Savior of the world. The Book of Mormon teaches even more strongly than the Bible the deity as well as the divinity of Christ, pointing him out as the God who made covenant with Israel, designating him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Eternal God, the Father of all things. The Book of Mormon teaches that God himself shall come down among the children of men, take upon himself human flesh, and redeem his people.

The Book of Mormon is even more emphatic than the Bible in stating over and over again that there is no other name given under heaven whereby men may be saved except the name of Jesus Christ; that there is no other way of salvation except faith on his name, repentance from sin, acceptance of his grace extended through the atonement, and obedience to the principles, laws, and ordinances of his gospel and his kingdom.

ATONEMENT

On the subject of the atonement, the teaching of the Book of Mormon is particularly full and rich and significant. The atonement was not, as it is so often pictured, an attempt to appease the wrath of an angry and offended God, and bring

him back to *man*, but a supreme and loving sacrifice by a God who loved man too much to let even man's rebellion and sin form a permanent and insurmountable barrier between man and his Maker. The purpose of the atonement was to bring *man* back to *God*.

The Book of Mormon explains that Adam and Eve fell by partaking of the forbidden fruit, and that by this fall all mankind became a lost and fallen people, banished from the presence of God who could not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Adam and Eve were shut out from God's presence; they could no longer endure his perfection and glory. In the Garden of Eden was another tree, the tree of life, which was not forbidden to Adam and Eve, but if they had been allowed to stay in the Garden and partake of the tree of life while they were in their sinful, fallen state, they would have lived forever, forever sinful, forever banished from God. To make this calamity impossible, God banished them from Eden. Banishment from God and from Eden was the first, or spiritual death. Man's physical life was continued for awhile as a probation in which man could repent and by wise choices prove his worthiness and acceptance of the atonement which God would make for his sins. Then came the death of the body which had been marred by sin. Man lost his dominion over his body, and it returned to the dust.

The atonement was designed to accomplish two things: first, to reunite man's spirit and body so that the spirit might have implementation and the body might have life. This new body was to be a body free from the curse of sin, free from pain, from weakness, from sickness, from disease, a body which could abide and endure the glory of the presence of God. The second purpose of the atonement was to restore man in this perfected body to God's presence. Christ's atonement broke the power of sin and death; it made it possible for man to regain dominion over the elements that composed his body. Christ was clothed in a human body; he was subject to all the temptations of the flesh but remained without sin; there-

fore death had no claim upon him. He did not *have* to die, but he gave his life willingly because that was the only way he could pay the price for man's sin and break the power of sin and death and the grave. Then, by his almighty power, he took up his body again, offering that same power to any man who would have faith in him, claim his grace by reason of the atonement, repent of sin, and be spiritually reborn through his Spirit. By this power all men who choose to accept his salvation will be clothed again in a perfect, immortal body and restored to the presence of God for all eternity.

This atonement was an infinite and eternal sacrifice, according to the Book of Mormon. "That great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God; yea, infinite and eternal; and thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name" (Alma 16:215). It was to be efficacious for all who died in ignorance, not knowing the law nor having heard of Christ and his gospel, "For behold, . . . his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died, not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned" (Mosiah 1:107). "But wo unto him that has the law given; yea, that has all the commandments of God . . . and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation; for awful is his state" (II Nephi 6:56). This infinite atonement was efficacious for little children who died before the years of accountability. "Little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them" (Moroni 8:9). Therefore, baptizing little children as if they had sins to be remitted is declared by the Book of Mormon to be "mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works" (Moroni 8:27).

IMMORTALITY

The Book of Mormon teaches that man is composed of body and spirit; that physical death brings about the separation of body and spirit; that the spirit of man is deathless, not to be annihilated; that the spirit of man may exist independently of the body and that it has consciousness after death; that the body will be resurrected and that the resurrection of the body, united in perfection with the spirit, constitutes the real immortality of the soul; that the quality of character that we build into life during our period of probation in the flesh will determine our destiny for eternity.

The Book of Mormon teaches that man, by reason of the fall, is an enemy of God; that he is by nature carnal, sensual, devilish, rebellious against God, and inclined to be forgetful of him. But man was created that he might have joy; and there are also within him great potentialities which, if developed through a spiritual rebirth and proper choices, can make man godlike. God's great longing and desire, and the object of his atonement, is that man might have immortality and eternal life and joy in God's presence.

BAPTISM

Bible proof texts are conveniently used or ignored by the proponents of immersion, sprinkling, and pouring, and by those who say that baptism is not necessary at all. But there can be no argument about the teaching of the Book of Mormon with respect to baptism. It is to be preceded by repentance and a life that manifests that repentance is genuine. It is to be administered by one having authority, who is to go down with the candidate into the water and then, standing in the water, is to baptize by immersion.

The Book of Mormon teaches that men will be saved by their acceptance of God's grace, as extended through Christ's atonement. But like the Bible, it teaches that man will be judged and then rewarded or punished according to the works

done in the flesh. We are saved by grace but we earn our own reward.

The Book of Mormon teaches that at death the spirits of the righteous are taken home to God who gave them, and received into a state of happiness which is called paradise, a state of rest and peace. The spirits of the wicked shall be cast into outer darkness, where they fearfully await the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them. There is a space between death and the resurrection during which the soul is in happiness or in misery until the time of resurrection which resurrection shall restore soul to body and body to soul. Every joint and limb and every hair of the head shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.

The Book of Mormon contains some beautiful teachings about faith in God and in Christ. It counsels prayer under all the circumstances and vicissitudes of life. It teaches that God gave man his agency in the beginning, that he brought about the atonement so that man might again have the choice between life and death which was lost in the fall; that no man or set of men in political or ecclesiastical organization has the right to deprive any man of his right of free agency and choice.

The doctrines of the Book of Mormon are the doctrines of the Bible but in many cases the Book of Mormon amplifies and clarifies doctrines which the Bible leaves doubtful or obscure or incomplete. Those who are not blinded by pride, by tradition, by dogma, or by prejudice will find the Book of Mormon a powerful ally for the Bible and a powerful witness to the divinity of Christ and to his saving mission among men.

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Spiritual and Ethical Levels of the Book of Mormon

That which is of God, inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. Wherefore take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God, to be of the devil. For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that they may know good from evil; wherefore I shew unto you the way to judge: for everything which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge, it is of God; but whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil, for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no not one; neither doth his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.—Moroni 7:11-16.

IN OUR Scripture we have already laid down a principle which will be our test or thesis: that whatever persuades, exhorts, and entices men to do good, to love and serve God, and to serve his fellowman, is of God. Perhaps this principle needs some qualification or limitation, but it is essentially true. Sometimes a perfectly good act, done from evil motivation and for evil purposes, is evil. The devil may entice man to do what *seems* to be good, and what, if done