

Prophets in Mormonism – Part 4

by Marvin W. Cowan

Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Our Lord’s true Church is established and founded upon revelation. Its identity as the true Church continues as long as revelation is received to direct its affairs.... No one but the President of the Church, who holds and exercises the fullness of the keys, can *announce revelation* to the Church” (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 648). He also said, “Any message, whether written or spoken, that comes from God to man by the power of the Holy Ghost is *scripture*. If it is written and accepted by the Church, it becomes part of the *scriptures or standard works*” (p. 682).

Early Mormon leaders often criticized other churches for not having current revelation and new scripture. LDS Apostle Orson Pratt said, “That the Romanists (Catholics) have continued in their *apostasy* until the present day is demonstrated from the fact that they have not added one single book to their canon (scripture) since they first formed it” (*Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, No. 3, p. 38, Dec. 1, 1850). On page 16, the editor of the weekly LDS “Church News” wrote on September 3, 1966,

One of the signs of the true Church of Jesus Christ is the presence of living prophets who direct its work under the guidance of heaven... Revelation therefore, is an essential part of the true Church, *constant, current* revelation... *With prophets and new revelations* for the current guidance of the people also *comes new scripture*; for as the divinely-given revelations are recorded *they are added to the existing volume of holy writ* and *in this way the body of scripture grows*... The powers thus given to Joseph Smith have been bestowed upon each of his successors, even to the present day. Each then has been the *prophet* of the Lord in very deed, *in the same sense as Moses, Elijah, Abraham, Isaiah and Ezekiel*.

The LDS “*standard works*” are their four books of scripture: The *Bible* (as far as it is translated correctly), *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine & Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price*. The *Bible*, *Book of Mormon* and “the Book of Abraham” in the *Pearl of Great Price* are “translations” of earlier records so they *are not* “current revelation”.

Joseph Smith claimed he received two small books by *revelation* in the *Pearl of Great Price* entitled “Moses” and “Joseph Smith—Matthew”. They are also part of his “inspired translation” of the Bible and are just revisions of biblical accounts so they aren’t current revelation either.

The Doctrine & Covenants contains all other “revelation” from God in LDS scripture. In it are 138 Sections or revelations. All Sections through Section 133 as well as Section 137 are by Joseph Smith who died in 1844. Section 134 is a statement about governments and laws that the LDS Church adopted on August 17, 1835. Section 135 was written by John Taylor about Smith’s death. Taylor was with Smith when he was killed and later became the third LDS President. In Section 136 Brigham Young told the LDS in January 1847 how to organize and live when they began their move to Utah. Section 137 says it was revealed to Joseph Smith on January 21, 1836, but it was not accepted as scripture until 1976, over 140 years later! Is that “current” revelation? Section 138 says it was revealed to Joseph F. Smith, the sixth LDS prophet on October 3, 1918, but it didn’t become a part of LDS scripture until 1976 which was 58 years later! And that is the *most recent revelation* added to LDS scripture!

There are two “Official Declarations” at the end of the *Doctrine & Covenants* that are statements by LDS Presidents but are *not revelations* themselves. President Wilford Woodruff gave Official Declaration-1 in 1890 which told the LDS to obey the law of the land and stop practicing polygamy even though they were *commanded to practice it by a revelation* recorded on July 12, 1843. That “revelation” is still in *Doctrine & Covenants* Section 132 and is the reason “Mormon fundamentalists” practice polygamy today. Official Declaration-2, made by LDS President Spencer Kimball in 1978, allowed the LDS Church to ordain black men to the LDS priesthood, which they had not done until then. This Official Declaration just says that *Kimball had a revelation about this matter*, but the revelation itself was never published.

Notice that the *last revelation added to LDS scripture was given in 1918*, which was 88 years ago! And the next most recent “revelation” in LDS scripture was Brigham Young’s instructions for the LDS move to Utah on January 14, 1847, nearly 160 years ago! Is that “*constant, current revelation*”?

Although Mormonism claims to have had 14 Prophets since Joseph Smith, only three have one section each in the *Doctrine & Covenants*, and two others have one Official Declaration each. Joseph Smith, who died in 1844, wrote everything else, so do the LDS have continuous revelation added to their “standard works”?

How much has the LDS “body of scripture” grown since Joseph Smith’s time? While Mormonism says that the Prophets words can be scripture without being written, the LDS leaders quoted in this article certainly indicated that some of those words will be added to their volume of *scripture* so that it “*grows*.” But, what “revelation” can be added to “scripture” that will improve on the message of what Jesus Christ did for mankind on the cross? Hebrews 7:25 declares that God is able to save them to the uttermost who come to God by Him (Christ). And Colossians 2:10 declares we are “complete in Him.”

We will continue our discussion of Prophets in Mormonism next time. Those who want to read more on this subject can do so in *Mormonism, Shadow or Reality*, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, published by Utah Lighthouse Ministry, P. O. Box 1884, Salt Lake City, UT 84110.