

CHAPTER 5

THE BIBLE

In its eighth Article of Faith the Church declares: "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."

This statement has led critics of the Book of Mormon, who were not correctly informed regarding the attitude of the Church, to conclude that the Bible is not unreservedly accepted "as the guide by which our lives and conduct should be governed," but has been supplanted by the Book of Mormon, so frequently referred to as "Joseph Smith's Golden Bible."

The words, "So far as it has been translated correctly," are the basis for this criticism.

The word Bible, in medieval Latin and in English, is treated as a singular noun. In the original Greek, the language in which many of the manuscripts which make up the Bible were written, it is treated in the plural number, and in reality means a collection of sacred writings, by different independent writers, collected and compiled in a single volume.

The Bible is divided in two parts, or divisions, the first known as the Old Testament (or Covenant) and the second as the New Testament. The former contains the account of the dealings of God our Father with his earthly children from the creation to the

birth of Christ our Lord, covering a period of about four thousand years, according to the chronology given in the Oxford edition of King James translation, while the New Testament covers a period from the birth of Christ to A. D. 96.

Prior to the time when the books which compose both the Old and New Testaments were collected and compiled, the original manuscripts from which the compilation was selected had been in use, some of them written in Latin, some in Greek, and others in Hebrew. It will be noted that at the time of the compilation of our present Bible there was not a single manuscript available which made any claim of originality. They were all copies of translations which had been made from other copies.

At an early date an effort was made by different groups of people to collect and unify these old manuscripts and compile them in a single volume. These various compilations are referred to as versions among the earliest of which is the Septuagint, or version of the seventy Hebrew scholars who were ordered, it is said, to undertake a compilation of the scriptures by Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, about two hundred years before Christ.

We are told that while there were many good renderings of this version, and that a large section of the Christian Church long depended directly or indirectly upon it, "that errors in translation were so numerous that the right understanding was in many instances entirely shut out."

The oldest and most treasured of authorized versions of the Bible are the Vatican, which is in possession of the Catholic Church at Rome, the Sinatic with the Greek Catholic Church at St. Petersburg, and the Alexandrian which is the property of Protestant England, and is kept in the manuscript room of the British Museum.

It is a well known fact that these three oldest versions of the Holy Scripture differ materially in the text, and that this difference is largely due to the fact that the various translators through whose hands they have passed do not agree in their interpretation of the meaning of words translated from languages other than their own, and written under circumstances with which the translator was entirely ignorant.

It is generally conceded that John Wiclif, or Wycliff, A. D., 1380, translated and made into book form the first Bible to be produced in the English language. This book was written by hand as were all books until William Tyndale, about A. D., 1520, produced his printed issue of the book.

Wiclif, because of his offense in assuming to produce the scripture and make it possible for common people to become familiar with its contents, was anathematized by the church, and stripped of all priestly honors. He denounced the doctrine of transubstantiation, asserting that it was false to teach that the bread and wine which served in the administration of the eucharist was actually changed to the flesh and blood of Christ.

He also declared that the right to control or govern in either ecclesiastical or civil capacity could not rightfully be exercised by a sinful person, and that the church must be submissive to the civil law in temporal affairs.

He died from palsy, but his remains were not permitted to rest in peace. His body was disinterred, and by order of the church, burned and the ashes scattered in the river Swift, to be carried into the ocean.

William Tyndale, who gave us the first printed English Bible, was brought before the church after having been betrayed by a supposed friend, strangled, and then burned at the stake. Such has been the fate of many martyrs who have dared declare the truth to a bigoted and unbelieving world.

It is a well known historical fact that from about 400 to 800 A. D., a period known as the Dark Ages, a period during which the Roman Empire was crumbling, and finally fell to the invading armies of Northern Europe, there was a retrocession in the civilization of the Old World.

Schools became almost extinct, war was continuous, literature was forgotten, priceless records were wilfully destroyed, a chaotic condition pervaded the civilized world.

Both the church and state were drunken with debauchery, licentiousness and unbridled ambition.

During these centuries of confusion many differ-

ent religious organizations, each professing to be the Church of Christ, had their origin.

This confused condition continued until the period of the Renaissance, or Rebirth of Europe, under Henry I of Saxony, first of the Saxon kings.

During this long period of confusion Christianity could only be taught from handwritten manuscripts, which had been translated and laboriously copied from other languages than those with which the translator was familiar. It is unreasonable to suppose that at a much later period these manuscripts could be collected together, again translated and written by hand into our own language without error, or deviation from the original.

All students know that the standard Bibles which are in use by present day Christian denominations do not agree in detail. The position of the Church is therefore stronger today than it was a century ago when Joseph Smith said: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly," a statement which, a century ago, was akin to heresy.

The foregoing review does not detract in the slightest degree from the reverential esteem in which the members of the Mormon Church regard the Holy Scripture, or their faith in the fulfilment of the words spoken by the ancient prophets who speak to them through the Old Testament or the divine message which the New Testament brings to them through Christ our Lord and His chosen Apostles.

Every member of the Church, from childhood to

old age, is taught not only reverence to the Bible but that he should make it "the guide to his life and conduct."

It is quite possible that certain members of the Church in their extreme zeal, may have spoken words which imply that the Church does not hold the Bible in the same high esteem that it holds the Book of Mormon, just as extreme assertions have been made by Church members regarding the right relationship of the Church to the state or the proper exercise of the authority of the priesthood. Such statements, if made, have been without the sanction or approval of the Church, and are not binding upon it unless approval has been given by its members.

The following extracts, all of which are from the public utterances of Brigham Young, president of the Church and successor to Joseph Smith, reflect the true attitude of the Mormon people toward the Bible:

"With us the Bible is the first book, the Book of Mormon comes next, then the revelations in the book of Doctrine and Covenants, then the teachings of the living oracles. The book of Doctrine and Covenants is given for the Latter-day Saints, especially for their every day walk and actions."

"In the Bible are the words of life and salvation. We are believers in the Bible, and to our unshaken faith in its precepts, doctrine and prophecy may be attributed the strangeness of our course, and the unwarrantable conduct of many toward this people."

"We believe in the New Testament, and consequently to be consistent we must believe in revelations, visions, angels, in all the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and in the promises contained in these books."

"We have a holy reverence for, and belief in the Bible. The Bible is true. It may not all have been translated aright, and

many precious things may have been rejected in the compilation and translation of the Bible. Take the Bible just as it stands, and if it be translated incorrectly, and if there is a scholar on the earth who professes to be a Christian, and he can translate it any better than the King James translators did, he is under obligation to do so."

"I have heard ministers of the Gospel say that they believe every word in the Bible is the word of God. I have said to them, 'You believe more than I do. I believe the words of God are there; I believe that the words of men and the words of angels are there. I believe the words of the Bible are just what they are; but aside from that I believe that the doctrines concerning salvation contained in that book are true, and that their observance will elevate any people, nation or family that dwells upon the face of the earth.'"

"Follow out the doctrines of the Bible and men will make splendid husbands, women excellent wives, and children will be obedient. They will make families happy, the nations wealthy."