

3. Do Latter-day Saints believe in the Bible and biblical Christianity?

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts and honors the Bible as the word of God. Latter-day Saints treasure its inspired accounts of the Savior's life and earthly ministry. They read the Bible regularly and accept both the Old and New Testaments among the standard works of the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

Latter-day Saints believe in and strive to live according to the same religion that existed in the church established two thousand years ago by Jesus Christ. They believe that the LDS Church is the restoration of that Church of Christ, restored by the Savior himself. They believe that it teaches all of the doctrines, promotes the virtues, participates in the essential ordinances (sacraments), and is organized according to the principles taught by Jesus and his apostles in the New Testament.

Why do Latter-day Saints believe the Bible? There are many answers to this question. They love the Bible for its own sake. It is a divine witness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It contains the words of prophets who spoke of the Savior's coming and his atoning sacrifice. It records the teachings, doctrines, laws, ordinances, and covenants given by God to people over many centuries. Mormons also believe the Bible because the Book of Mormon and other modern revelations affirm that it is true (see Mormon 7:9; D&C 20:11).

Interpretation

Latter-day Saints believe that the guidance of the Holy Ghost is necessary in order to correctly understand the scriptures. This requirement applies equally to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and modern revelations.

Every Bible-believing Christian church, whether Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical, or Latter-day Saint, interprets the biblical text differently. In interpreting the Bible, some churches rely heavily on tradition; others draw on logic, semantics, philosophy, theory, or history. Members of the restored church believe truth can be found in all of the world's religions but that God has called modern prophets beginning with Joseph Smith and given them revelations to help people understand his word found in the Bible and other sacred writings. In interpreting the Bible, Latter-day Saints strive to rely primarily on the Holy Ghost and the spirit of prophecy and revelation.

Latter-day Saints recognize that the Bible must be translated correctly in order for it to be understood properly in our day, for Jesus did not speak English, either modern or Elizabethan, or any of the other languages found in today's popular Bible translations. This recognition, however, does not hinder Latter-day Saint belief in the Bible, for divine guidance again provides answers in important situations. While the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible affirms and adopts most of the traditional readings of the King James translation, it also restores explanations and nuances of meaning.

Use of the Bible

Some people do not know how pervasive the Bible is in the LDS faith and way of life. For example, Latter-day Saints believe in the divinity of Christ, the miracle of grace as taught by Paul (see Ephesians 2:8–10; 2 Nephi 25:23), the necessity of works as taught by James (see James 2:19–20; Alma 9:28), the majesty of love as

witnessed by John (see 1 John 3:1–2; Moroni 7:45–48), the resurrection of the dead through the Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15; Helaman 14:15–18), and many other doctrines that are taught in the Bible. Much of the language in the LDS Articles of Faith is drawn from the words of the apostle Paul and other New Testament texts. Several revelations received by Joseph Smith were stimulated by his desire to understand the meaning of passages in the Bible. For example, after reading John 5:29, Joseph Smith asked the Lord concerning the meaning of Jesus' reference to "the resurrection of damnation," and in response Joseph received a resplendent revelation of the three degrees of glory in the world to come (see D&C 76).

The organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints follows the model found in the New Testament. The church is led by "apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20), a presidency of three (compare Peter, James, and John), and quorums of seventy to take the gospel to the world (see Luke 10:1). It also contains other offices such as elders, bishops, teachers, deacons, evangelists, and so forth (see Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:7).

Many LDS practices are also found in the Bible. Latter-day Saints perform the ordinances of the New Testament—the baptism of believers by full immersion in water (see John 3:23; D&C 20:73–74), the laying on of hands to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Acts 8:14–17; Moroni 2), the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:23–25; D&C 20:75–79), and the laying on of hands to confer the priesthood (see 1 Timothy 4:14; Moroni 3), as well as the clearly mentioned but widely misunderstood ordinance of baptism on behalf of people who have died (see 1 Corinthians 15:29; D&C 127–28).

Moreover, Latter-day Saints pay tithing (see Malachi 3:8; Matthew 23:23; D&C 119), call the elders to anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord (see James 5:14; D&C 42:43–51), and fast and pray often (see Matthew 6:17–18; Alma 6:6). Even plural marriage (see D&C 132) and the sharing of property in a united order, which were practiced at one time in Mormon history as instructed by God (see D&C 42; 51; 83; 104), find obvious parallels in the Bible (see Genesis 16:1–3; Deuteronomy 21:15; Acts 2:44). In many ways such as these, Latter-day Saints show their belief in the Bible, not only in word or thought but also in deed and action.

Latter-day Saints believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost (see Articles of Faith 1:1). They join the apostle Paul in confessing God: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12–14). Latter-day Saints praise "God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:3–6). They salute all the world, hoping that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost" will be with everyone (2 Corinthians 13:14). Such confessions from the Bible are fully embraced by Latter-day Saints.

The Creeds

Latter-day Saints believe, however, that the creeds of the later Christian councils did not accurately preserve the biblical doctrine of God. Members of the restored Church of Christ do not recognize the authority of these councils to issue binding formulations of doctrine. Moreover, Latter-day Saints believe that the creeds are not consistent with each other, each becoming more removed from biblical teachings and doctrine as time went by. The earliest form of the Old Roman Creed (from the second century) is fairly simple and close to the Bible. Later forms, however, move step by step away from the Bible. The Caesarean Creed (late third century) and the

received form of the Apostles' Creed confess God the Father—instead of Jesus Christ, as taught in the Bible (see John 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2)—as the “Creator of all things” or “Maker of heaven and earth.” The Nicene Creed (fourth century) began to speak of Jesus as being “from the substance of the Father” and “of one substance with the Father,” introducing these nonbiblical expressions into the credal formulas. Eventually, the so-called Athanasian Creed (about the seventh century) added notions such as “one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity” and dictated that to be saved a person “must think in this way of the Trinity.”⁴ Latter-day Saints find certain aspects of these formal creeds to be unbiblical and spiritually limiting. They prefer the testimonies given in the Bible and in modern revelation to the formulations fashioned by councils or synods, however astute they may have been.

Note

4. See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Harper & Row, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1985); and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay Co., 1972).