

Mormon Scripture—The Articles of Faith, Part XXIII

By Marvin W. Cowan

The tenth LDS Article of Faith *now* says, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.” But, it *originally* said, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the ten tribes; that Zion will be established upon *the western continent*; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth *a thousand years*; and that the earth will be renewed, and receive its paradisiacal glory.” Notice that several words have been added, deleted or changed. At least two of the changes were made in 1979, which was 135 years after Smith’s death. Even though the changes are minor, they illustrate that Smith’s writings have been altered while he is still called the author. The official seven-volume *History of the Church* was written in the first person and sounds like Joseph Smith wrote it, but 60% of it came from other men’s journals and not from Smith’s records. That raises serious questions about the accuracy of official Mormon writings.

Many non-Mormons don’t see any problem with this tenth Article of Faith except that it says Zion will be built upon the American continent. But in order to understand what this Article means, some words need to be defined. Such words as gathering, Israel, restoration, ten tribes, Zion, New Jerusalem, and paradisiacal glory have meanings that are unique to Mormonism.

As we have previously mentioned, Mormons have five sources which they consider to be God’s word. The Bible is the least important because they believe it contains many translation errors. So, their own three books of scripture and their living prophet define the words used. The first part of this Article of Faith says, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel.” *Gospel Principles*, a manual published by the LDS Church for new members, says on page 263, “The Israelites are to be gathered first spiritually and then physically. They are gathered spiritually when they join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints... Thousands of people all over the world are joining the Church each year. These *converts are Israelites* either by blood or adoption... The physical gathering of Israel means that the Israelites will be ‘gathered home to the *lands* of their inheritance, and established in *all their lands of promise*’ (see 2 Nephi 9:2). The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh will be gathered to the land of *America*. The tribe of Judah will be returned to the city of Jerusalem and the area surrounding it. The ten lost tribes will receive from the tribe of Ephraim (*in America*) their promised blessings (see *D. & C.* 133).” For a more detailed description of this doctrine see LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 305-308.

The above quotation says converts to Mormonism “are Israelites either by blood or adoption.” Mormon founder, Joseph Smith explained, “As the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence; while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a *Gentile* is to *purge out the old blood* and make him actually of the seed of Abraham” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 149-150). The quotation from *Gospel Principles* said that these “Israelites will be gathered home to the *lands* of their inheritance, and established in

all their lands of promise" (2 Nephi 9:2 in the *Book of Mormon*). It also said that the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh as well as the ten lost tribes would be gathered to the land of *America* while the tribe of Judah will be returned to *Jerusalem* and the area around it.

That is a very different picture from what the Bible says in Ezekiel 37:21-22 where God told Ezekiel, "I will take the children of Israel from among the nations to which they are gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into *their own land*. And I will make them *one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel*, and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be *no more two nations*, neither shall they be divided into *two kingdoms* any more at all." This text says that Israel will be brought to *their own land* (not lands). Beginning in Gen. 12:7 there are about 150 passages that promise Israel *the land of Canaan*, but no other land was ever promised to them in the Bible. Ezekiel 37 says that both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel will be gathered from among the nations and brought to their *own land upon the mountains of Israel* where they will be *one nation* with one king. When Mormonism says that the Northern tribes of Israel will be gathered to America while Judah will be gathered to Jerusalem, that is not one nation in one land with one king!

This Article of Faith next mentions "the restoration of the Ten Tribes." The ten Northern tribes of Israel were taken captive into Assyria about 721 B.C. "From thence they were led into the lands of the north and have been called the Lost Tribes because they are lost to the knowledge of other people" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 455). Mormons expect these "lost tribes" to return from the North because Joseph Smith said they would. On January 4, 1833, Smith said God commanded him to write the following: "And now I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that *not many years shall pass away* before the United States shall present such a scene of bloodshed as has not a parallel in the history of our nation: pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake will sweep the wicked of this generation from off the face of the land, to open and prepare the way for the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the north country...*there are those now living upon the earth whose eyes shall not be closed in death until they see all these things which I have spoken, fulfilled*" (*History of the Church* by Joseph Smith, vol. I, pp. 315-316). Smith's prophecy was made over 170 years ago, but all those who were alive in 1833 when he prophesied died long ago without seeing "all of these things fulfilled" as Smith said they would. So, the Ten Tribes still haven't been restored and Smith is shown to be a false prophet.

We will continue our discussion of the tenth Article of Faith next time. Those who want to read more on this subject from a Mormon perspective can do so in chapters 17 through 21 of *The Articles of Faith* by LDS Apostle James Talmage.