
The Articles of Faith — Thirteen Sentences, the Open Canon, and Why We Read the Old Books

The Articles of Faith: thirteen statements of Latter-day Saint belief written by Joseph Smith in the Wentworth Letter (March 1, 1842), in response to a Chicago editor's request for a sketch of the faith. Later canonized in the Pearl of Great Price. The closing text of the book — and the natural place to gather what this whole study has shown.

The Pearl of Great Price ends not with a vision but with a list — thirteen short sentences a thirty-six-year-old Joseph Smith dashed off in an 1842 letter to a Chicago editor. They were never meant to be a complete theology, but two of them are the doctrinal warrant for everything this whole study has done: reading the old apocryphal books alongside the restored scripture.

Insights

- 1. Articles 1-3 — the foundation.** The Godhead (three distinct beings, the First Vision's truth); the Atonement; and the quiet correction of Article 2 — "men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression" — undoing centuries of inherited-guilt theology.
- 2. Articles 4-7 — the living Church.** First principles and ordinances; authority "by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority" (no self-appointment); the primitive Church's organization and spiritual gifts restored, not reinvented.
- 3. Article 8 — a recoverable text.** *The Bible... as far as it is translated correctly.* Not a slight on scripture — an honest acknowledgment that things get lost in transmission (1 Ne. 13:28-29), exactly what the Book of Moses recovers: the lost prologue, the agent of creation, the council.
- 4. Article 9 — the open canon.** *He will yet reveal many great and important things.* The heavens are not closed. A church that believes this cannot treat scripture as a sealed museum — it expects more.
- 5. Article 13 — the seeking heart.** *If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.* The disposition that began the Restoration — a boy who SOUGHT — and the spirit of this whole study: keep the gems, leave the dross, keep seeking.

Word Studies

"as far as it is translated correctly" (cf. 1 Ne. 13:28-29; Moses 1:41; D&C; 91) — **the principle of a recoverable, open canon Articles 8-9.** The phrase "as far as it is translated correctly" is doing more theological work than its plainness suggests. It assumes three things at once. First, that the Bible is genuinely the word of God — Article 8 affirms it without hedging. Second, that transmission is fallible — Nephi was shown that "plain and precious things" would be "taken away" from the biblical record as it passed through the centuries (1 Ne. 13:28-29), and the Book of Moses is a worked example of exactly that loss and recovery. Third, and most importantly for how we've read these chapters, that the loss can be *detected and partly repaired* — by revelation (the Joseph Smith Translation), and, more modestly, by comparing scripture against the other ancient writings that survived. This is the warrant. If the canon is open (Article 9) and the received text is incomplete (Article 8), then reading the apocrypha for the "plain and precious things" it may have preserved is not a liberty — it's a method the Articles of Faith authorize. And the Lord gave the rule for it directly: read the old books by the Spirit, "for the Spirit manifesteth truth," keeping the true and leaving the rest (D&C 91). Article 8, Article 9, and D&C 91 together are the charter of everything this study has done.

Apocryphal & Ancient Correlations

The convergences gathered — STRONG. Where Joseph had no access: Mahijah/Mahaway in the Book of Giants (buried until 1948); the heavenly ascent of the Apocalypse of Abraham (no English until 1918); Eden-as-temple in Jubilees (no English until 1888). Hard to explain by an unlettered farm boy's imagination.

RESONANCE and CORRECTION. Where he COULD have known: 1 Enoch (Laurence 1821), the Apocrypha in his Bible — flagged as resonance, used not concealed. Where the famous reading was WRONG: Moses 8 keeps the giants but rejects 1 Enoch's angels-breeding-monsters. Discrimination, not borrowing.

NO PARALLEL — pure gift. The weeping God of Moses 7 has no ancient parallel at all. Flagged openly as something the restored text simply gives that the old world had forgotten. Not every gem needs a witness.

Article 8 (a recoverable text) + Article 9 (an open canon) + D&C 91 (read the old books by the Spirit, keep the true) ARE the charter of this whole study. Canon is binding; the Church's position is marked; the old books are illuminating witnesses, never authority — the

Church takes no official stand on them.

Where the threads lead

The warrant. Articles 8-9; 1 Nephi 13:28-29 (plain and precious things taken away); 2 Nephi 29:7-10 (the Lord speaks to all nations); D&C 91 (how to read the Apocrypha).

The book comes full circle. Article 13 (“we seek after these things”); Moses 1:39 (the work and the glory); James 1:5 (ask) — the Pearl of Great Price opens with a prophet shown the cosmos and closes with a seeking heart.

Punished for our own sins. Article 2; Moses 6:54 (the Son atones, “the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children”); 2 Nephi 2:25 (the Fall as a step toward joy) — the Restoration’s optimistic anthropology.

Authority, not self-appointment. Article 5; Hebrews 5:4 (“no man taketh this honour unto himself”); Joseph Smith—History 1:68-69 (John the Baptist confers the priesthood) — called of God by the laying on of hands.

How the chapter changes the reader

The book closes where it opened. Moses 1 began with a prophet on a mountain told “this is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” The Articles of Faith end with thirteen plain sentences and a seeking heart. Between them stands the whole restored story — Creation and Fall, Enoch’s weeping God and Abraham’s council, the boy in the grove — and through all of it the old buried books quietly nodding along. The Pearl of Great Price asks only what Article 13 asks: keep seeking the things that are true and lovely and of good report. The seeking is the discipleship; and the God who gives liberally is still on the other side of the question.