

WHAT IS MORMONISM? WHAT DO MORMONS BELIEVE?

The Mormon religion (Mormonism), whose followers are known as Mormons and Latter-day Saints (LDS), was founded less than two hundred years ago by a man named Joseph Smith. He claimed to have received a personal visit from God the Father and Jesus Christ (Articles of Faith, p. 35) who told him that all churches and their creeds were an abomination (1 Nephi 13:28; Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith – History 1:18, 19). Joseph Smith then set out to "restore true Christianity" and claimed his church to be the "only true church on earth" (Mormon Doctrine, p. 670; 1 Nephi 14:10). The problem with Mormonism is that it contradicts, modifies, and expands on the Bible. Christians do not have a reason to believe that the Bible is untrue or inadequate. To truly believe in and trust God means to believe in His Word, and all Scripture is inspired by God, which means it comes from Him (2 Timothy 3:16).

Mormons believe that there are in fact four sources of divinely inspired words, not just one: 1) the Bible "as far as it is translated correctly" (8th Article of Faith). Which verses are considered incorrectly translated is not always made clear. 2) The Book of Mormon, which was "translated" by Smith and published in 1830. Smith claimed it is the "most correct book" on earth and that a person can get closer to God by following its precepts "than by any other book" (History of the Church 4:461). 3) Doctrine and Covenants, containing a collection of modern revelations regarding the "Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored." 4) The Pearl of Great Price, which is considered by Mormons to "clarify" doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible (Articles of Faith, p. 182–185) and adds its own information about the earth's creation.

Mormons believe the following about God: He has not always been the Supreme Being of the universe (Mormon Doctrine, p. 321) but attained that status through righteous living and persistent effort (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345). They believe God the Father has a "body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Brigham Young taught that Adam actually was God and the father of Jesus Christ—although this teaching has been abandoned by modern Mormon leaders.

In contrast, Christians know this about God: there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6–8). He always has existed and always will exist (Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17). He was not created but is the Creator (Genesis 1; Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 37:16). He is perfect, and no one else is equal to Him (Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 40:25). God the Father is not a man, nor was He ever (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hosea 11:9). He is Spirit (John 4:24), and Spirit is not made of flesh and bone (Luke 24:39).

Mormons believe that there are different levels or kingdoms in the afterlife: the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, the telestial kingdom, and outer darkness (Mormon Doctrine, p. 348). Where mankind will end up depends on what they believe and do in this life (2 Nephi 25:23; Articles of Faith, p.79).

In contrast, the Bible tells us that after death we go to heaven or hell based on whether or not we had faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. To be absent from our bodies means, as believers, we are with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6–8). Unbelievers are sent to hell or the place of the dead (Luke 16:22–23). When Jesus comes the second time, we will receive resurrected, glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50–54). There will be a new heaven and new earth for believers (Revelation 21:1), and unbelievers will be thrown into an everlasting lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15). There is no second chance for redemption after death (Hebrews 9:27).

Mormon leaders have taught that Jesus' incarnation was the result of a physical relationship between God the Father and Mary (Journal of Discourses, vol. 8, p. 115; Mormon Doctrine, p. 547). Mormons believe Jesus is a god, but that any human can also become a god (Doctrine and Covenants 132:20; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345–354). Mormonism teaches that salvation can be earned by a combination of faith and good works (LDS Bible Dictionary, p. 697).

Contrary to this, Christians historically have taught that no one can achieve the status of God—only He is holy (1 Samuel 2:2). We can only be made holy in God's sight through faith in Him (1 Corinthians 1:2). Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16), is the only one ever to have lived a sinless life, and now has the highest place of honor in heaven (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus and God are one in essence, Jesus being the only man who existed before physical birth (John 1:1–8; 8:56). Jesus gave Himself to us as a sacrifice, God raised Him from the dead, and one day everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:6–11). Jesus tells us it is impossible to get to heaven by our own works and that only by faith in Him is it possible (Matthew 19:26). We all deserve eternal punishment for our sins, but God's infinite love and grace have allowed us a way out. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Clearly, there is only one way to receive salvation and that is to know God and His Son, Jesus (John 17:3). Receiving salvation is not done by works but by faith (Romans 1:17; 3:28). We can receive this gift no matter who we are or what we have done (Romans 3:22). "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Although Mormons are usually friendly, loving, and kind people, they are deceived by a false religion that distorts the nature of God, the Person of Jesus Christ, and the means of salvation. (Editor's note: many of the references in our articles on Mormonism are Mormon publications, such as Mormon Doctrine, Articles of Faith, Doctrines of Salvation, History of the Church, Doctrine and Covenants, and so forth. Others are from the Book of Mormon itself, e.g., books such as 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and Alma.)

ARE MORMONS CHRISTIANS? ARE MORMONS SAVED?

Although Mormons profess to be Christians and say they believe the Word of God, there are many of their beliefs that contradict Christianity. In fact, Mormonism can be referred to as a cult, which can be defined as “a religious group that denies one or more of the fundamentals of biblical truth.” Mormons say they are Christians, but because they reject foundational truths from God’s Word, they are not.

Joseph Smith, who referred to himself as “The Prophet,” founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the mid-1800s. He claimed to have seen a vision of God the Father and God the Son, in which they denounced modern Christianity and appointed Smith to reveal and restore “true” Christianity (Articles of Faith, p. 182–185). Three years later, Smith alleged that the angel Moroni told him about some golden plates on which the Book of Mormon was written. In spite of Smith’s questionable background and proclivity toward bending the truth (see *The Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, New York, 1861; and *Mormonism Unveiled*, Painesville, Ohio, 1834), many believed Smith, and a new “religion” was born. Today, the members of the Mormon Church number in the millions.

The Book of Mormon is purported to be a new revelation, one that Mormons say is part of the new covenant to Israel and “another witness” to the truth of the Bible (History of the Church 4:461, 8th Article of Faith). Aside from the many theological conflicts with the Bible and historical and archeological fact, the writing of the Book of Mormon was shrouded in mystery and false claims. For example, Joseph Smith and his associates asserted that one Professor Charles Anthon of Columbia University verified the Egyptian characters on the golden plates. However, this same professor wrote a rebuttal letter soon after, saying that he never did any such thing and had, in fact, found the characters to be a hoax. In addition, many verses in the Mormon scriptures have been changed over the years, as the church leaders attempt to cover up something embarrassing in their past and to defend themselves against criticism (see <http://mit.irr.org/changes-latter-day-scripture>). These facts alone are enough to cast much doubt on the veracity of the Book of Mormon.

One of the many areas in which Mormons fall short of saving faith is their belief that God is merely an exalted man who earned his position by good works (Mormon Doctrine, p. 321; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345). This directly contradicts the Bible, which states that God has existed in His position as God of the universe from eternity past (Revelation 1:8; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15–16; Psalm 102:24–27). God was never a man (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hosea 11:9) and is the holy and powerful Creator of all things (Genesis 1; Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 37:16). Mormons also believe that they themselves can attain the status of gods in the afterlife through their works here on earth (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345–354). However, no man can ever become like God (1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 43:10–11; 44:6; 45:21–22), despite what the serpent told Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:5).

Mormons also believe that Jesus was a god, but not God Himself (Mormon Doctrine, p. 547; Articles of Faith, p. 35; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 372). It is essential to Christian faith that Jesus is one with God and that He is God's only begotten Son who became flesh (John 1:1, 14; John 3:16). Only Jesus' oneness with God would have allowed Him to live a sinless, blameless life (Hebrews 7:26). And only Jesus Christ was able to pay the price for our sins by His death on the cross (Romans 4:25; Acts 4:12).

Those who follow the Mormon faith also believe that they can attain heaven through works (Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43; 2 Nephi 9:23–24; Alma 34:30–35; Articles of Faith, p.92). While they claim faith in Christ, they also rely on following the commandments of the Mormon Church (Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 1, p 188; Mormon Doctrine, p. 670) and practicing good works (2 Nephi 25:23; Alma 11:37) in order to achieve salvation. The Bible is very clear on this point, stating that good works can never earn the way to heaven (Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5) and that faith in Jesus Christ alone is the only way to salvation (John 10:9; 11:25; 14:6; Acts 4:12). Salvation by grace is incompatible with salvation by human works (Romans 11:6).

Sadly, many in the Mormon Church are unaware of the religion's shady past, amended scriptures, and even the full doctrine of their church. Many Mormons who have discovered these things have left the church and come to a true saving faith in Jesus Christ. As Christians, we must treat Mormons with love and understand that they are among those deceived by Satan himself (1 Peter 5:8). Satan's goal is to distort the truth, produce false assurance of salvation, and extend a deceptive hope of godhood (2 Corinthians 4:4).

WITNESSING TO MORMONS - WHAT IS THE KEY?

As a preface to this answer, please see our article on Mormonism and what Mormons believe. As Christians, we always want to use the Bible and its timeless truths as our primary tool in witnessing the love of God and salvation through Christ. One of the problems with trying to witness to Mormons is that they believe that the Bible was hopelessly corrupted through the years and is no longer reliable. Although we can say with confidence that the Scriptures are most certainly not corrupted—due to the manuscript evidence in the form of the Dead Sea Scrolls, several codices of the various portions of the biblical text, and thousands of other manuscripts—Mormons are most likely not going to agree to that. Therefore, approaching Mormons from another direction is more effective.

It is important to understand that Mormons use many of the terms that Christians use, such as salvation, justification, heaven, and others. But their definitions are quite different from the biblical definitions we are familiar with. For instance, Mormons say they believe in salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But their idea of salvation is inclusive—everyone has been saved

by Christ so that they will live eternally, but it is each person's works that will determine where they will spend eternity and the extent of their eternal blessings (Articles of Faith, p. 78–79; Mormon Doctrine, p. 348). Clearly, salvation as the Bible explains it is not the same as the Mormon idea of salvation. This is why arguing doctrine with a Mormon is rarely successful.

The key to reaching the heart of Mormons is to understand that, while they may appear confident and self-assured on the outside, internally many are filled with stress and doubt because they are continually striving for perfection. This is partly driven by Mormon doctrine and partly by family pressures. Family is extremely important to Mormons, and living up to both family and church standards is a motivating factor to many Mormons. Deep down inside most Mormons is the fear of not being good enough, of not measuring up. The question in every Mormon's mind is, "Am I worthy enough?" The best thing to do is to reinforce that doubt. Show them that by their own efforts, they are not even close to being worthy to stand before a holy God. This is the bad news that has to precede the good news. Show them from the Scriptures that all their "righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), that "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law" (Romans 3:20), and that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). If the Mormon will admit to these truths, he/she should be open for the good news of the true gospel of Jesus Christ, that real righteousness only comes at the cross, where God exchanged our sin for the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). No other righteousness can stand before God on Judgment Day. Once a Mormon, or anyone else for that matter, admits these truths, he/she is well on the way to understanding true salvation.

While it is important for us to be diligent in our proclamation of truth, it is also important for us to put the results of witnessing in the hands of our God, who is able to "save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25). We can rest assured that, ultimately, it falls upon the Spirit to sway the hearts of those who are lost and open their eyes to Truth. Our job is to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15), trusting God with the words that we are to say, praying diligently for the souls of those we witness to, and leaving the results to Him.

WHO WAS JOSEPH SMITH?

Joseph Smith is widely known as the founder of the Mormon Church, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Joseph Smith from an early age was thought to have certain occult powers. He was known at a young age as a seer and reportedly used a seer stone to tell him where he could find such precious metals as silver. Both he and his father were known "treasure seekers" and used divination and magic to carry out treasure-seeking excursions. This, of course, brought him a name and a reputation. To this day, he is considered by some a saint and by others a complete charlatan.

Joseph Smith grew up during a time of spiritual revival in America known as restorationism. It was at this time, 1820, that Joseph Smith claimed to have received a marvelous vision in which God the Father and God the Son materialized and spoke to him as he was praying in the woods. The account of the vision has changed dozens of times, and it is unclear whether it was Jesus, there were two angels, one angel, or the Father and the Son that appeared to Joseph. He reportedly said that the two “personages” took a rather dim view of the Christian church and, for that matter, the world at large and announced that a restoration of Christianity was needed and that Smith had been chosen to launch the new dispensation. Since its beginnings until the present day, the Mormon Church holds the position that they alone represent true Christianity (Mormon Doctrine, p. 670).

Mormon leaders have consistently taught that, after the death of the apostles, true Christianity had fallen into complete apostasy, making a “restoration” necessary (1 Nephi 13:28, Articles of Faith, p. 182-185). But, even after the supposed heavenly visitation, Joseph Smith and friends continued to dig for treasure using occult methods. These methods were illegal in that day, and Smith was convicted of “glasslooking” in 1826. But, before that conviction in Chenango County, New York, the new “prophet of the Lord” continued to stir up controversy with yet another amazing close encounter with heaven. In 1823, Smith claimed to have been contacted by an angel named Moroni, who revealed that there were golden plates at a certain location near Palmyra, New York. On the golden plates was a history of an ancient man named Mormon and his fabled ancient Hebrew tribe. These plates were said to be a new revelation, “another witness” to the truth of the Christian gospel. It is recorded in Mormon historical documents that the angel provided Smith with special spectacles needed to help him translate the writings from the golden plates. It was also reported that during the translation, the man who was helping him had the privilege of having John the Baptist, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, come to Pennsylvania on that day of May 15, 1829, to confer upon the men the “Aaronic Priesthood.” These and other amazing stories are recorded in Smith’s book Pearl of Great Price.

Joseph Smith claimed to have special visions and an incredible opening up of heaven to him (Joseph Smith – History 1:17). But a statement signed by sixty-two residents of Palmyra, New York, who wanted others to know that they had known him, his family, his beliefs, and his occult excursions to find treasure, declared him to be “entirely destitute of moral character and addicted to vicious habits.” Yet Smith claimed to be God’s mouthpiece, and, when he spoke, he claimed that God was speaking. This powerful position was taken seriously by many followers, and, when Smith had a vision it was to be taken seriously, no matter if it flew in the face of Christian moral standards. His new “revelation from God” on polygamy is but one example.

Popular or not, Smith’s pronouncements “from God” took him quite a ways for quite a few years. His highly imaginative stories always read like science fiction, mixing and twisting biblical truth with imagination. He was always careful to imitate biblical truth, and many times

he rewrites the Bible. To many, his theology is a twisted mirror image of real theology. It tempts by using a smattering of the real thing, the things that people know as Bible truth.

Joseph Smith met his end at the hands of an angry mob. Having attempted to quiet the polygamy issue after the church had settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, Smith and his followers destroyed an anti-Mormon newspaper building and consequently were arrested and in a jail awaiting trial. The jail was stormed by an angry mob of two hundred people and Joseph Smith and his brother were murdered. After his untimely death, there was a split in the "church." The church Smith established remains centralized today both in Missouri (the Community of Christ – RLDS) and in Utah, where many Mormons had followed their new leader, Brigham Young.

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS VIEW THE BOOK OF MORMON?

When Mormon missionaries (properly called Latter Day Saints or simply "LDS") come to your door, they will often offer a free copy of the Book of Mormon and tell you about its author, Joseph Smith. Smith, they will say, translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates he dug up in a hill in New York in the early 1800s. This is supposed to confirm his calling from God as the new prophet on the earth in these latter days. Further, they will tell you that the Holy Ghost will confirm the truth of the Book of Mormon by producing good feelings in you. Next will come the invitation to "read the Book of Mormon, pray, and ask God to show you it is true." Of course you must do this with sincerity, or it won't work.

Before you fall to your knees, there are some things you need to know that they are not telling you (and won't unless you ask). The first concerns many LDS beliefs that separate them from historical, orthodox Christianity. These are not found in the Book of Mormon. In fact, there is really very little in that book that is doctrinally disagreeable to orthodox Christians. The real meat of Mormonism is found in their other scriptures, The Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price. These books, however, Mormons do not hand out at the door—and for good reason. If people knew up front what they were really going to be asked to believe (things such as God once being a man, denial of the Trinity, Satan being Jesus' brother, pre-existence of souls, etc.), they may not be quite so willing to put aside their skepticism.

The second thing to realize is that in accepting the Book of Mormon, one is, in fact, accepting Joseph Smith as a prophet. So what about this test of a prophet? Isn't it legitimate to "give this question up to God?" No, it isn't. This is because God has already revealed His test for would-be prophets, and it has nothing to do with prayer or feelings, and God has no obligation to answer prayers that He has already answered! We do not have to ask God whether or not we should rob a bank or murder someone. Rather, James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it will be given to him." Wisdom is applied knowledge, not lack of it.

God never tells us to pray about what is true. When we want to know how tall a wall is, we don't pray about it; we get something that we know is true (a ruler) and compare it to the wall.

The Bible, God's Word, is true. That is our measuring stick for truth. See Acts 17:11, for example, which describes a group of people who were considered noble because when Paul came to them with the Christian message they "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."

Feelings are unreliable because they are subjective, easy to produce, and are not meant to discover facts but to tell us how we feel about facts. Psychological persuasion techniques, intensity, eye contact, or mere desire can produce feelings that feel real because they are real! But real feelings are still just letting us know how we are reacting to something, not the truthfulness of that thing. The Mormon missionary handbook specifically details these techniques, and missionaries go through training on how to persuade people before they ever leave the house.

What are the biblical tests for a prophet? They are in God's Word: Deuteronomy 18:21-22 says, "You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him." Did Joseph Smith ever claim "in the name of the LORD" that something would happen when it did not? Yes—many times, in fact.

Joseph Smith prophesied that New York would be destroyed if they rejected the [Mormon] gospel (D&C 84:114-115). He also prophesied that the rebellion of South Carolina and the War Between the States would result in war being poured out upon all nations; slaves would revolt; the inhabitants of the earth would mourn; famine, plague, earthquake, thunder, lightning, and a full end of all nations would result (D&C 87). Oddly, this prophecy is the one most often cited by Mormons to prove Joseph Smith's prophetic power!

Further, Deuteronomy 13:5 says that "if a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul." Did Joseph Smith lead his followers to other gods? Yes.

Joseph Smith was a polytheist. History of the Church 6:474 records Smith stating, "I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods." Joseph Smith declared that "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 345). This is clearly not the biblical God.

Galatians 1:6-7 says that people may be "turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all . . . trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." And Paul pronounced a curse upon

them for doing so. In Romans 1:16 Paul tells us that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation"—that's pretty important. Did Joseph Smith teach a "different gospel"? Yes.

Mormons believe that the Book of Mormon contains the "fullness of the gospel." The Book of Mormon says so itself in its introduction (see also Doctrines and Covenants 20:9; 27:5; 42:12; and 135:3). So what is the gospel according to Mormonism? It's a tough question for many LDS to answer. According to Mormon apostle Bruce McConkie, author of the book *Mormon Doctrine*, the gospel is "the plan of salvation [that] embraces all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers, authorities, and keys necessary to save and exalt men." In other words, the whole of Mormon theology. In the Mormon gospel we see belief + repentance + baptism + laying on of hands + temple work + mission work + church ministry + tithing + ceasing from sin + abstaining from the use of intoxicants and strong drinks and tobacco and caffeine + confessing Joseph Smith as Prophet + temple marriage + baptism for the dead + genealogy research . . . the list could go on and on and on. Only upon completion of all these things may Mormons attain to the third and highest level of heaven, thus achieving the ultimate goal of the Mormon gospel—godhood (see McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* 116-117; Book of Mormon [3 Nephi 27:13-21]; Doctrines of Salvation 1:268; 18:213; The 4th Article of Faith; Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* pg. 107; Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 3:93; 3:247; 9:312; *Gospel Principles* 290; Doctrines and Covenants 39:5-6; 132:19-20). In essence, Christ's death means nothing more to a Mormon than the gaining of the ability to be resurrected so that his works may be judged.

While we cannot judge another person's motives, we can and must judge what a person does or says. Joseph Smith, and hence the Book of Mormon, fails the twin tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. God takes false prophets very seriously. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 says, "That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God...; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you." Deuteronomy 18:19-21 says, "If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death..." And Galatians 1:8-9 says, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

The gospel is God's power to bring us to Him. He will not stand for those who pervert it. He has given us the ability and the responsibility to discern whether or not the gospel is being tampered with. We must carefully investigate the claims of the LDS if we are to follow what God has commanded. In fact, Mormons invite non-Mormons to examine their claims: "Convince us of our errors of doctrine, if we have any" (LDS Apostle Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, p.15).