



Mormonism: A Survey and Biblical Critique

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A Worldwide Presence

Originating in America, and now headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism) is one of the fastest growing pseudo-Christian religions in the world, with a presence in 140 nations and 21 territories and possessions.

As of December 31, 2001, the church claimed a worldwide membership of 11,394,522. The church also claimed:

- 60,850 full-time missionaries throughout the world
- 100 partial or complete translations of the Book of Mormon
- 107 temples in use, with 18 more planned or under construction around the world

Needless to say, Mormonism has grown from a small aberrant sect into the significance of a world religion.

The Founding

Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder and first prophet of the Mormon church, was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont. The Smith family migrated to western New York, near Palmyra, in 1816. It was there that Joseph spent his teenage years.

As Joseph recounted, when he was fourteen years old (1820), he became concerned as to which church to join. The different churches in his area were at odds with one another. each claiming to be the true church. After reading

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Be sure to visit our main page with more information about Mormon teaching, recommended resources, stories, and more.

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James 1:5--"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (KJV)--he went into the woods to prayerfully ask God which church he should join.

According to Joseph, while praying in the woods near his home, he received his "first vision" of God. As he was battling the powers of darkness, he was delivered when a pillar of light descended upon him. Two personages appeared in the pillar of light. Although they never explicitly identified themselves, Joseph described the personages as God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. He asked the Son which church he should join. Claimed Joseph, "I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong . . . that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt. . . ." (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith--History 1:19).

In September of 1823 Joseph allegedly received several visitations from the angel Moroni (reportedly, a resurrected prophet/warrior). According to Moroni, God had chosen Joseph to be the prophet of the restoration. He was to restore the power and authority of the priesthood, and translate a book containing an account of the origin and history of the former inhabitants of Central America. This book contained an alleged account of the resurrected Jesus visiting these people. But it was not until 1827 that Joseph was lead by the angel Moroni to unearh the golden plates, upon which was inscribed the text of the Book of Mormon in "Reformed Egyptian."

In May of 1829, while in the process of translating the golden plates, Joseph Smith and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, decided to pray and ask God about baptism and the authority to baptize (they had read of it in the Book of Mormon). As they prayed, a light engulfed them and John the Baptist allegedly appeared. He bestowed the Aaronic Priesthood upon both Joseph and Oliver—authorizing them to preach the gospel and to baptize and administer the sacraments. But this priesthood was only one of two priesthoods reportedly granted to Joseph. Being the lesser, it did not authorize the laying on of hands, nor did it authorize the reestablishment of the true church.

Sometime in 1829 or 1830, Joseph and Oliver prayed and were answered in another vision. This time, the apostles Peter, James and John are said to have appeared to bestow the Melchizedek Priesthood (the more authoritative priesthood) upon both Joseph and Oliver.

On April 6, 1830, the "Church of Christ" was established in Fayette, New York, and the new church quickly grew. (The current name of the church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—was adopted in 1834.) In 1831, the church began constructing its first temple in Kirkland, Ohio. But after a few years, opposition to the church grew strong, and in 1838 the church migrated to Independence, Missouri.

In 1839 the church established the city of Nauvoo, Illinois, which soon grew to be one of the largest cities in the state, second only to Chicago. It was here that Joseph's practice of polygamy became known to the public. Because of this practice, in addition to several doctrinal changes, opposition to Joseph and his church increased among members and non-members alike.

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After being excommunicated from the church for opposing Joseph's polygamy and unbiblical teachings (e.g. a plurality of gods), William Law, a citizen of Nauvoo, along with several associates, founded The Nauvoo Expositor (a newspaper exposing these doctrines and practices of the "fallen prophet"). Upon the newspaper's first issue, Joseph, as mayor of the city, declared the press a public nuisance. The city marshal, along with hundreds of Mormon men, destroyed the press and office of the Expositor. This event eventually led to Joseph's incarceration in Carthage, Illinois.

On June 27, 1844, an armed mob attacked the Carthage jail. Although Joseph shot three of the intruders (killing two) with a handgun that had been smuggled into the jail, both he and his brother, Hiram, were overwhelmed and killed.

Following Joseph's death, great confusion arose as to who would be his successor. Two factions gained significant control. One group, lead by Joseph's widow, Emma, and her son, Joseph Smith, III, parted and settled in Missouri. They are known today as The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The second and larger group was led by Brigham Young to the Utah Territory. It is known today as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormon Scriptures

Four books comprise the scriptures of the Mormon church; these are known as "The Standard Works": the Bible (King James Version), the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*.

THE BIBLE

The eighth Article of Faith of the Mormon church reads, "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (emphasis added). Although Mormons believe the Bible is the word of God, they believe that the text has been corrupted by the errors of copyists and translators. They also believe that key doctrines, even entire books, have been omitted over the course of its transmission. As stated in the Book of Mormon, "Wherefore, thou seest that after the book [the Bible] hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 13:28). Thus they deny that the Bible is wholly trustworthy and reliable.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

First published in 1830, the Book of Mormon was given a new subtitle in 1972: "Another Testament of Jesus Christ." Supposedly translated from "reformed Egyptian" (an unverified language) inscribed on golden plates, this book alleges that the resurrected Jesus Christ visited the Americas. It also contains selections of the history of the inhabitants of the ancient Americas. Two groups are primary to the narrative: the Nephites, who were mainly faithful to God; and the Lamanites, who were enemies both of God and the Nephites. As these two groups battled, the Lamanites gained victory over the Nephites. One of the last living Nephites, Moroni (the angel who allegedly appeared to Joseph), buried golden plates in the hill Cumorah—located in upstate New York. These plates contained the Book of Mormon.

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While Mormons hold strong allegiance to the Book of Mormon, it is interesting to note that it contains very little distinctly Mormon doctrine. It does not teach a plurality of gods, that humans may progress to godhood, temple marriage, or baptism for the dead.

THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

First published in its present form in 1870, the Doctrine and Covenants is a compilation of modern revelations, primarily received by Joseph Smith. It consists of 138 "sections" (individual revelations), and two "Official Declarations" (one delivered in 1890 by the fourth President of the church, Wilford Woodruff, disallowing polygamous marriages, and one delivered in 1978 by the twelfth President, Spencer W. Kimball, allowing black males to hold the priesthoods of the church).

Unlike the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants presents several distinctively Mormon doctrines. For example, it teaches there are three levels of heaven (Section 76); the Word of Wisdom (Section 89); the practice of baptism for the dead (Sections 124, 127, 128); that God the Father has a body of flesh and bone just like humans (Section 130); the necessity of temple marriage (Celestial Marriage) for all eternity (Section 131); polygamy and godhood (Section 132); and missionary work in the spirit world (Section 138).

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

The Pearl of Great Price is a compilation of several different writings: selections from the Book of Moses (a reworking of Genesis); the Book of Abraham (allegedly translated by Joseph Smith from ancient papyri; also a reworking of Genesis, teaching a plurality of gods); a brief extract from Joseph Smith's "translation" of the Bible; Joseph Smith—History (which contains accounts of Joseph's alleged visions and early persecutions); and The Articles of Faith (a vague summary of Mormon beliefs).

The beliefs of the Mormon church are based primarily on the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the numerous teachings of church leaders. They are based little on the Book of Mormon, and only verbally on the Bible. Several contemporary leaders of the church speak and write about their doctrines—expounding upon them and developing them.

Mormon Beliefs

THE GREAT APOSTASY

The Mormon church teaches that the original apostles were given the charge of teaching the gospel and establishing Christ's church. But they were often opposed and persecuted, and many were killed. Other believers also were persecuted and killed, leaving only the less faithful who were carried away by false teachings and unrighteousness. Because of this, God took the priesthood authority from the earth, and neither the fullness of the gospel nor the authority of the true church remained. Since no church was directed by divine revelation, many have mistaken man-made doctrines for divine revelations. Mormons call this sad state of the church the *great apostasy*, and they believe this apostasy persisted until the time of the restoration.

THE RESTORATION

Mormons believe that through Joseph Smith, the true church has been restored to the earth. The priesthood authority, the fullness of the gospel, and the guidance of continuing revelation are again available in their fullness through the Mormon church.

GOD

The first Article of Faith of the Mormon church reads: "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." While this may sound Christian at first glance, upon further examination it is found to be radically different. The Mormon church explicitly rejects the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Said Joseph Smith, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and *three Gods*" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 370; emphasis added).

Our Father in Heaven

Mormons believe that our Father in heaven has not always been God, but was once a mortal man who progressed to godhood. Joseph Smith declared: "*God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. . . . I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. . . . [H]e was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. . .*" (Ibid., pp. 345, 346; italics in original).

Mormons also believe that God is *literally* the Father of our spirits, that he is married, and that with his wives he procreates spirit children: "Our Heavenly Father and mother [*sic*] live in an exalted state because they achieved a celestial marriage. As we achieve a like marriage we shall become as they are and begin the creation of worlds for our own spirit children" (*Achieving a Celestial Marriage*, p. 1). They also believe that all faithful members may become gods (or goddesses), just as our heavenly Father and Mother have.

Jesus Christ

Mormons believe that Jesus is literally our older brother, the firstborn of our Heavenly Parents, and that he progressed to godhood while in the preexistence—before he came to earth.

The church teaches that while still in the preexistence, both Jesus and Lucifer (the second-born of our heavenly parents) offered plans of salvation. Jesus' plan was accepted and Lucifer's was rejected. Lucifer rebelled, along with one-third of the spirits in heaven (who literally are our spirit-brothers and sisters), thus becoming Satan and the demons.

The Mormon church teaches that our Father in heaven, who has a body of flesh and bone like man (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 130), with Mary, procreated the human Jesus in a natural, human way. As Joseph Fielding Smith, a former prophet of the Mormon church, alludes, "Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of Man, and *that Man was God!*" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p. 18).

Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit

Mormon doctrine distinguishes between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit, even though there is no biblical distinction. (This teaching actually derives from the King James Version of the Bible. The translators translated the same Greek words [*hagios pneuma*] sometimes "Holy Spirit" and sometimes "Holy Ghost.") The Holy Ghost is a personal being, a god, although without a body of flesh and bone. The Holy Spirit is a force of God, the "power" or "presence" of God.

MANKIND

According to Mormon doctrine, all humans preexisted as spirit children of God before coming to earth. Even before we became spirits, we existed eternally as individual intelligences. Now that we have come to earth and have mortal bodies, we have the opportunity to become worthy to return to our Father in heaven and become gods. This is the core teaching of Mormonism and is called "the Law of Eternal Progression." (See, McConkie, pp. 589-590.)

The Fall of Mankind

The fall of Adam and Eve was a necessary and important event. According to Mormon teaching; it allowed for us to enter a mortal state where we can become worthy to return to our Father in heaven.

The Mormon church teaches that Adam and Eve were given two conflicting commands: 1) not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and 2) to multiply and fill the earth. Allegedly, Adam and Eve could not have children while in a state of innocence—an immortal, un-fallen state. Therefore, they could not procreate bodies for all the spirit children still in heaven. Adam and Eve had to make a choice between mortality and immortality, and Mormons believe the right choice was made when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. M. Russell Ballard, an apostle of the Mormon church, has written, "Indeed, we honor and respect Adam and Eve for their wisdom and foresight. Their lives in the Garden of Eden were blissful and pleasant; choosing to leave that behind so they and the entire human family could experience both the triumphs and travails of mortality must not have been easy. But we believe that they *did* choose mortality, and in so doing made it possible for all of us to participate in Heavenly Father's great eternal plan" (Ballard, 87).

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

The Mormon church's teaching on the plan of salvation is well-developed, and shows that their belief system is very different from biblical Christianity.

The Atonement of Christ

The Mormon church teaches that Jesus Christ made atonement for both Adam's sin and our sins. By *actually* making atonement for Adam's transgression, Jesus made resurrection sure for all men. By *hypothetically* making atonement for our sins, Jesus made it possible, *if* we repent, believe the Mormon gospel, and keep the commandments, to attain exaltation in the life hereafter (see Ballard, 12).

Peculiar to Mormon doctrine is the belief that the atonement of Jesus Christ took place in the Garden of Gethsemane, when "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). It was here that he achieved spiritual

redemption. Physical redemption was accomplished by Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection (see Ballard, 12).

General (Unconditional) Salvation

Mormons believe in two kinds of salvation: *general salvation* and *individual salvation*. General salvation is also called *immortality*. It is given to all mankind because of the atonement of Jesus Christ for Adam's transgression. This salvation is by grace alone—it is not conditioned upon any individual's faith or works. This salvation allows all mankind to be physically resurrected.

Individual (Conditional) Salvation

This salvation is also known as *exaltation* or *eternal life*, and can be achieved only by individual faith, repentance, and obedience to God's laws and ordinances. One is exalted based on one's worthiness. These laws include temple marriage, obeying the Word of Wisdom, proper tithing, faithful church attendance, and obeying the Mormon prophets (see *Gospel Principles*, 289-292; see also Ballard, 88).

If one gains exaltation, then one will attain ultimate salvation according to Mormonism: one will live forever in the presence of our Father in heaven, and one will become a god. Joseph Smith taught, "Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves. . . . *When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation*" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 346, 348; italics in original).

LIFE AFTER DEATH

According to Mormon doctrine, at death people either go to spirit prison or to paradise. Mormon spirits go to paradise where they will continue to progress toward godhood, and they also will have opportunities to present the Mormon gospel to the spirits in spirit prison. If the spirits in prison receive the Mormon gospel, they will also receive the benefit of proxy baptism—living Mormons will be baptized on their behalf (this is known as *baptism for the dead*).

With few exceptions, everyone will attain to one of three levels of heaven or heavenly kingdoms: the Celestial Kingdom, the Terrestrial Kingdom, and the Telestial Kingdom.

The Celestial Kingdom

Those who are faithful in the things of God—baptism, membership in the Mormon Church, keeping the Word of Wisdom, etc.—will live with Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost forever in the Celestial Kingdom, and will have their faithful family members with them (hence the Mormon commercials regarding "Families are Forever"). Those who attain the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom— by means of complete faithfulness, which includes temple marriage— will become gods: creators of their own planets, and procreators of their own spirit children. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:51-53, 62; 131:1-4)

The Terrestrial Kingdom

Those who did not receive the Mormon gospel while on earth but receive it in

spirit prison, and those who did receive the Mormon gospel but were not faithful, will inherit this level of heaven. Their family unit will not be retained, and they will be eternally single. Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost will visit them, but Heavenly Father will not. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:73-79; 131:1-4)

The Telestial Kingdom

This is the lowest of the heavenly kingdoms. The occupants did not receive the Mormon gospel either on earth or in spirit prison, and they suffer for their sins in hell, though only temporarily. They will be forever single, without their family members. Neither the Father nor Jesus Christ will visit them, but they will be visited by the Holy Ghost (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:81-86, 103-106).

Hell

Mormons believe hell is a place where the future inhabitants of the Telestial Kingdom (the lowest heaven) will suffer for their own sins; though their punishment is not eternal in duration. As Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Those who live lives of wickedness may also be heirs of salvation, that is, they too shall be redeemed from death and from hell *eventually*. These, however, must suffer in hell the torments of the damned *until* they pay the price of their sinning, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, 133-134).

Outer Darkness

Those who received the Mormon gospel and the Holy Ghost but reject both will be cast into outer darkness. Like the biblical doctrine of an eternal hell, assignment here is for all eternity (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:28-35, 44-48).

TEMPLE WORK

The rites and rituals performed in Mormon temples are essential for individual salvation.

Endowment Ceremony

This is the initial ceremony of the temple. Through this ceremony individuals are believed to be endowed with divine power and special protection. One can participate in this ceremony either when embarking on a Mormon mission, or when seeking to obtain a celestial marriage.

Celestial Marriage

This is marriage for time *and all eternity*. Mormons believe this practice will allow them to live with their family members in the life hereafter. Celestial marriage is essential to attaining godhood. Worthy Mormons who attain exaltation (godhood) will, in this married state, be able to procreate spirit children to populate their own planetary system, just as their heavenly parents have.

Baptism for the Dead

This is a practice whereby living Mormons are baptized proxy for the spirits of the dead, who are in "spirit prison" (see above, under "**LIFE AFTER DEATH**"). Mormon youth often participate in this ceremony.

The practice of baptism for the dead is the driving force behind Mormon genealogical research, for which they are widely known. The purpose is to

gather the names of people who did not have an opportunity to become Mormons in their earthly lives, and to be baptized on their behalf.

THE WORD OF WISDOM

The Word of Wisdom is a set of dietary rules that faithful Mormons are expected to obey. These rules are commonly summarized as abstaining from caffeinated drinks, tobacco products, alcoholic drinks, and illegal drugs. Mormons, in order to achieve the celestial kingdom, are expected to abide by the Word of Wisdom. (The original revelation also allowed the consumption of meat only in the winter, and then only sparingly. Most Mormons take no heed of this and other elements of the Word of Wisdom.) (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 89).

Comparison Chart

MORMONISM	CHRISTIANITY
<p>Many Gods Joseph Smith taught, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and <i>three Gods</i>" (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, 370; emphasis added).</p>	<p>One Trinitarian God The Bible teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God (John 1:1; 20:28) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4); and that they are distinct Persons in the Godhead—not to be confused with one another (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6). There is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; 1 Corinthians 8:4).</p>
<p>God, Once a Man, Progressed to Godhood Joseph Smith taught, "<i>God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. . . . I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. . . . [H]e was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. . . .</i>" (Ibid., 345, 346; italics in original).</p>	<p>God Has Always Been God God has always been God (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40:28). God is spirit, not an exalted man with flesh and bone (John 4:24; Luke 24:39; Hosea 11:9; Numbers 23:19). God does not change (Malachi 3:6), nor does he grow in knowledge (Isaiah 40:13). There is none like him, he is unique, he is the only true God (Exodus 8:10; 2 Samuel 7:22; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 21-22; 46:9; 1 Corinthians 8:5). (Note that though Jesus, being God, did become human in his incarnation [John 1:1, 14], this is quite different from a man progressing to become a god.)</p>

<p>Humans <i>Can</i> Become Gods Joseph Smith taught, "Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you" (Ibid., 346).</p>	<p>Humans <i>Cannot</i> Become Gods Men cannot become gods (Isaiah 43:10). Man is a created being, unlike God—who has always been (Genesis 21:33). God will not share his glory with another (Isaiah 42:8).</p>
<p>Humans Were <i>Procreated</i> in the <i>Preexistence</i> M. Russell Ballard wrote, "Before the world was created, we all lived as the spirit children of our Heavenly Father [and Mother]. Through a natural process of inheritance we received in embryo the traits and attributes of our Heavenly Father" (Ballard, <i>Our Search for Happiness</i>, 70). Mormons also infer this from the preexistence of Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Humans Were <i>Created</i> Humans are created, not procreated, by God (Genesis 1:26; 2:7). Our existence begins in the womb of our mothers (Psalm 139:13). Humans cannot compare themselves to Jesus and his preexistence, for they are not deity by nature, as is Jesus. He preexisted because he is God (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1; 17:5; Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus alone is from heaven, we are from the earth (John 3:13, 31; 8:23-24).</p>
<p>A Complete Apostasy of the Church M. Russell Ballard wrote, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that God's full authority was lost from the earth for centuries following the mortal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . In short, the church Christ organized gradually disintegrated, and the fullness of the gospel was lost" (Ibid., 26, 31).</p>	<p>The Church Remains Forever In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declared, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Given that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, we can trust that this promise would not fail (Matthew 28:18). While there are several passages that refer to an apostasy, it is <i>never</i> said to be a universal or complete apostasy (e.g., Acts 20:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1). Rather, we know that God will be glorified in the Church throughout all ages (Ephesians 3:21), and that Christians have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28; cf. Daniel 2:44).</p>
<p>The Bible is <i>Corrupted</i> and <i>Incomplete</i> Gordon B. Hinckley wrote, "Latter-day Saints recognize that errors have crept into this sacred work because of the manner in which the book has come to us.</p>	<p>The Bible is <i>Reliable</i> and <i>Sufficient</i> God has promised that his word, the Bible, would stand forever (Isaiah 40:3). We know that his word is true (John 17:17), contains wisdom unto salvation. and</p>

<p>which the book has come to us. Moreover, they regard it as not being complete as a guide" (Hinckley, <i>What of the Mormons?</i>, 26).</p>	<p>wisdom unto salvation, and thoroughly equips God's people for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17). God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:2).</p>
<p>Works Necessary to Live with God Forever (Salvation) M Russell Ballard wrote, "Jesus Christ accomplished two incomparable feats through His atoning sacrifice. First, He conquered death, and as a result all people will have the privilege of everlasting life with a resurrected body. Second, He suffered the burden and pains of our sins so that we might have the privilege of eternal life in the presence of God if we have faith in Christ as our Savior and choose to repent of our sins and keep His commandments" (Ballard, <i>Our Search for Happiness</i>, 88).</p>	<p>Salvation is Based on the Righteousness of Christ The Bible never interprets mere resurrection as salvation (John 5:29). Those who receive Jesus will have eternal life, but the wrath of God remains on those who reject him (John 3:36). While Christians are called to keep God's commandments (e.g. John 14:15), salvation is in no way based on our own righteous deeds (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8). It is through the atonement of Christ that we are made perfect (Hebrews 10:13-18). The atonement took place, not in the Garden of Gethsemane but through his blood shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20; 1 Peter 2:24).</p>
<p>Heaven (s) There are three heavenly kingdoms: the celestial, terrestrial and telestial. Mormons argue for this belief from 1 Corinthians 15:40-41 and 2 Corinthians 12:2 (where the apostle Paul says he was caught up to the "third heaven"). See "Three Levels of Heaven" under "The Beliefs of Mormonism" above.</p>	<p>Heaven The context of 1 Corinthians 15:40-41 is the contrast between resurrection (celestial or heavenly) and pre-resurrection (terrestrial or earthly) bodies, not heavenly kingdoms. The Bible does speak of three heavens: the atmospheric heaven, where birds fly and from which the rains fall (Genesis 7:23;8:2); the astronomic heaven, where the stars and planets reside (Genesis 1:14, 15; 22:17); and the third heaven, the throne of God (Matthew 6:9; Revelation 4:2).</p>
<p>Hell Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Those who live lives of wickedness may also be heirs of salvation, that is, they too shall be redeemed from death and from hell <i>eventually</i>. These, however, must suffer in hell the torments of</p>	<p>Hell One's abode in hell is as eternal as one's abode in heaven (Matthew 25:46). There is no second chance after death (Hebrews 9:27). At the final judgment, men either receive the resurrection of life or the resurrection of condemnation</p>

must suffer in hell the torments of the damned *until* they pay the price of their sinning, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them" (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, 133-134).

resurrection of condemnation (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29)—they are assigned either to heaven or hell.

Preparing to Witness

WHERE ARE YOU?

In order to be equipped to witness to our Mormon friends we need to know what we believe. It is one thing to focus our attention on what Mormons believe, it is quite another to understand clearly what the Bible teaches. In light of this, it is important that you, as a Christian, are in a habit of studying God's word, attending a strongly biblical church, and praying for God to grant you wisdom in your witnessing opportunities.

YOUR MESSAGE AND DELIVERY

It is easy for Christians to become overly defensive and negative toward Mormons and their claims. But this temptation must be avoided. Second Timothy 2:24-26 provides clear guidelines for us: "And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (New American Standard Version; see also, Colossians 4:5-6.).

DEFINING YOUR TERMS

Mormonism, like other pseudo-Christian religions, uses Christian vocabulary but does not use a biblical dictionary. For this reason, confusion can arise while witnessing. Always be prepared to ask, "What do you mean by that?" Christian also need to be able to explain what they mean by what they say. It has been said, that if a Mormon continually agrees with you, either they do not know what their church teaches or you have not defined your terms. Clear definitions of terms are essential for good communication. (Look at the accompanying chart to see some of the definitional differences between Mormonism and Christianity.)

ASKING QUESTIONS

An important skill in witnessing is asking probing and insightful questions. By asking questions you can find out if an individual Mormon agrees strictly with the church's teaching or if he has a personal twist on Mormon doctrine. Also, because Mormons often feel persecuted, it is important to avoid blunt or direct statements as much as possible. These will only cause them to become more defensive. Finally, by asking questions you help Mormons arrive at their own conclusions, rather than forcing conclusions at which you have arrived. We'll list some questions in the text below.

SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THEM

Seek to understand Mormon culture: the importance of family, church authority, and personal perfection. It is important as you witness to Mormons that you seek to understand what they believe, why they believe it, and exactly how they believe it. It is best to simply ask individual Mormons about their beliefs. For example, find out how he or she became a Mormon, if their family members are Mormons, how they determine truth, and if they understand the differences between Christian doctrine and Mormon doctrine.

Answering Objections

THE GREAT APOSTASY

Was there really a great apostasy? Did the true Church die out so we now need a restoration—the Mormon Church being the true Church restored? The biblical response is clear. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declared, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Ask them, "Does this sound to you like Jesus thought there would be a total apostasy? Could Jesus have been wrong?" Keep in mind, in your conversation, that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, how could he fail? (See also, Ephesians 3:21; Hebrews 12:28; and Daniel 2:44.)

Mormons will use a variety of passages to support their belief in a complete apostasy (e.g., Acts 20:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1). But none of these actually teaches a universal apostasy; they only teach a limited falling away. Make sure you read these passages aloud when Mormons refer to them.

PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

What about the Mormon priesthood authority? Is it biblical? Not at all. The Aaronic priesthood was to be held only by those of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:5-10). This priesthood was fulfilled by the atonement of Christ (Hebrews 7:11-28; 10:8-18); thus, making this priesthood no longer valid or necessary.

In the Old Testament, there was generally only one high priest. What the book of Hebrews teaches is that Jesus has fulfilled the Aaronic priesthood (meaning it is no longer in effect), and that he has permanently taken the position of high priest. Since he will never die, he will have no successors (Hebrews 7). Thus he is of the order of Melchizedek, without beginning or end of days. Therefore, his priesthood is "unchangeable" (v. 24; the Greek word is *aparabatos*, which literally means "untransferable"). We need no other high priest—no other mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

So where do Christians get their authority? Directly from God. John 1:12 teaches that those who receive Christ are given authority (*exousia*, the same word used of Christ in Matthew 28:18). We have been adopted as God's children, therefore we are co-heirs with Christ.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

Since Mormons do not believe the Bible is fully trustworthy, you may encounter some trouble using the Bible. But you should never stop using the Bible, simply because of their unbelief. In spite of their unbelief, the Bible is still the word of God; and it is true (John 17:17) and reliable (Isaiah 40:3).

Remember, the word of God contains wisdom unto salvation, and thoroughly equips God's people for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

If you use a modern translation of the Bible (e.g., NIV, NASB), you may want to have a King James Version available while witnessing to Mormons. This way, you can compare translations.

There are several books that show the reliability of the Bible: F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*; *Evidence That Demands a Verdict I and II*, by Josh McDowell; or Norman Geisler and William Nix's *From God to Us*. If a Mormon is willing to read this type of information, then find some for them to read.

Many Mormons point to alleged contradictions in the Bible to undermine its trustworthiness. While there are certainly hard passages in the Bible, there are no real contradictions (note, 2 Peter 3:16-17). Gleason Archer's *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* is an excellent study aid regarding hard passages in the Bible.

When using the Bible with Mormons, often they will respond to your use of a passage with, "Well, that's just your interpretation." Simply respond by having them look closely at what the passage says. You may also refer to cross-references to aid in your presentation. Pray that God would open their eyes, that they may come to a knowledge of the truth. Finally, keep in mind that one carefully explained verse or passage may be more effective than a dozen passages simply thrown at your Mormon friend.

Misplaced Trust

Important in witnessing to Mormons is showing that they have placed their trust in something truly untrustworthy. Here are a few areas on which you may focus.

THE GODS OF MORMONISM

Mormonism teaches that God has not always been God, but that through obeying the laws and ordinances of the Gospel he was able to progress to deity. Therefore, the god of Mormonism is a changing being. He was once a man, who then became a god. His knowledge, wisdom and power have thus increased. Mormons believe that all faithful Mormons will also progress to become deities.

In contrast to Mormonism, the Bible reveals a distinctly different and wonderful God. The true God does not change (Malachi 3:6), nor does he grow in knowledge (Isaiah 40:13). There is none like him, he is unique, he is the only true God (Isaiah 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 21-22; 46:9; 1 Corinthians 8:5). He has always been God (Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40:28). God is spirit, not an exalted man with flesh and bone (John 4:24; Luke 24:39; Hosea 11:9; Numbers 23:19). (Note that though Jesus, being God, did become human in his incarnation, this is quite different than saying that a man became a god.)

Despite the teachings of Mormonism, men cannot become gods (Isaiah 43:10). Man was created, unlike God, and therefore has not existed from

eternity (1 Corinthians 15:46). Mormons cannot compare themselves to Jesus and his preexistence, for they are not deity by nature, as is Jesus. He preexisted because he is God (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1; 17:5; Philippians 2:6-7).

As you dialog with your Mormon friend, show them the greatness of the God of the Bible, the true God. Pray that they will see how wonderful and great God is. Who should trust in gods who change? Why trust in a mere man who has become a god? Are you not still trusting in a man (Jeremiah 17:5-8)?

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Mormons believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God—like the Bible. But when one compares the two books, one can see that they are not in the same category. For example, while many Mormons believe that there is archaeological evidence supporting the Book of Mormon, in fact, there is none. No cities unique to the Book of Mormon have ever been located. While Mormons may insist that cities have been found, the fact that the Book of Mormon contains no maps is one indication that the alleged cities have never been located. Ask them, "If the Book of Mormon is a record of real history, like the Bible, why hasn't the Mormon church published any maps?" (Note that while individual Mormons may have published maps, the church itself has never authorized an official map of Book of Mormon lands.)

Mormons will many times side-step the question of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon for experiential "proof" that the book is true. In Moroni 10:4-5 (a book in the Book of Mormon) we are instructed to pray about the Book of Mormon to find out if it is true. Generally, the answer expected by Mormons is a "burning in the bosom," a heart-felt emotional experience.

The biblical approach to truth is clear. Though we are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), the Bible nowhere teaches that prayer is a test for truth. We cannot trust the feelings of our hearts (Proverbs 14:12; 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9), nor can we trust every spiritual witness (1 John 4:1-6). Rather, we are called to be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, who searched the Scriptures to test even what the apostle Paul was preaching. They are therefore said to be more noble than the Thessalonians. The biblical test for truth focuses on the word of God as our standard (2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 17:17). And the witness of the Holy Spirit will never contradict the word he inspired—the Bible (2 Peter 1:21). (In light of this, if Joseph Smith really did encounter an angel in his first vision, then it was surely an angel of light [2 Corinthians 11:14].)

You should ask your Mormon friend, "How do you know that witness is the Holy Ghost?" They may respond that an unholy spirit would not bear witness to such a good and moral religious system. You may want to point them to the Jehovah's Witnesses as an example of something they believe is of the devil, but that is also something that teaches good morals. It is important to show them that their test for truth is simply unreliable.

PERFECTIONISM

Mormon perfectionism stands in sharp contrast to the biblical Gospel of grace. Many Mormons are weighted down spiritually, psychologically, and physically as they seek to live according to their church's teachings. In seeking to present the biblical Gospel to a Mormon, it is important that you first present

the weightiness of the Law of God and our falling short of it.

Matthew 5:48 reads, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (KJV). This is a very important verse—one with which Mormons are very familiar. With this in mind, you may ask them if they are in fact perfect—now. The command "be perfect" is in the present imperative tense. It does not say "become perfect," but be perfect. Emphasize that according to God's law, we are to be perfect now.

You may then ask them whether they have ever sinned. (I have actually had some Mormons tell me they haven't sinned. In that case, have them read Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8, 10.) To show the gravity of our sin, have them read James 2:10. If they have sinned at any point in their lives, they are guilty of breaking the whole law of God.

Then, once a Mormon, through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, recognizes his or her sinfulness it is time to present the biblical Gospel of grace. Emphasize that salvation comes only by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), it is not based on our righteous works (Titus 3:3-5). In fact, if we could attain salvation by obeying the law, then Christ died in vain (Galatians 2:21). Show them that we can be righteous before God only on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Though Christ was without sin, he paid the penalty due our sin so that we would be declared righteous before God (2 Corinthians 5:21; see also, Ephesians 2:1-5).

With specific reference to the idea of perfection, you should familiarize yourself with Hebrews 10:10-18. In this passage we read that we have been made perfect through the atonement of Christ (v.13). Therefore, God no longer remembers our sins (v. 17). What good news!

JOSEPH SMITH

We don't recommend that you initially focus on Joseph Smith. Mormons can become very defensive when their prophet is critiqued. But, after you have built a relationship with them, you may raise some of the following issues.

The Bible presents clear tests for those who claim to be prophets. In Deuteronomy 18:20-21 we are told that a prophet of God will never have false prophecies and will never teach false gods. We have already seen that Joseph taught false gods. But he also proclaimed several false prophecies. Keep in mind that it only takes one false prophecy to make one a false prophet.

Here is just one false prophecy. In Doctrine and Covenants section 84, Joseph prophesied that the city of New Jerusalem would be erected within his generation—"in the Western boundaries of the State of Missouri." But to this day, the Mormon Church has failed to erect it. In fact, the Mormon Church does not even own that land on which Joseph said the city would be built. This clearly is a false prophecy. How could Joseph be a prophet of God?

Misuse of the Bible

Because so many Bible passages are distorted by the teachings of

Mormonism, we will only be able to look at a few of the more common distortions. Keep in mind that if you take the context of a verse into account, you will see that it does not teach Mormon doctrine. Their interpretation is read into the text.

ARE WE SAVED BY WORKS?

Mormons, when attempting to prove the necessity of works for individual salvation, will often reference James 2:17, "faith without works is dead." In order to answer this misuse of the Scripture, you must become familiar with the teachings of James.

When one carefully examines this verse in its context, one can see that it does not teach a works-based salvation. The context: people claiming to have faith in Christ but not showing this in their everyday lives (1:19-2:13). James's "justification" (v. 24) is in reference to men, not God. His point is that men can only see that your claim to faith is true by how it is expressed in your life. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works" (v. 18). Your works prove your claim to faith to those who cannot see your heart. Christians are called to live up to their claims. (It will be good, at this point, to study the fourth chapter of Romans to see how Paul presents his case for justification.)

Mormons many times believe that if one believes he can be saved without works, then he believes he can sin freely. In other words, that a Gospel of grace is a license to sin. At this point it is important to note what the apostle Paul said in response to the same argument. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. . . . What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (Romans 6:1-2, 15).

ARE THE TWO STICKS OF EZEKIEL THE BIBLE AND THE BOOK OF MORMON?

Mormons often refer to Ezekiel 37:16, 17 as a prophecy of the Book of Mormon. But is this really the point of the prophecy? As always, it is important to read the context. Ask your Mormon friend to read verses 15-22. God explains the meaning of the prophecy to Ezekiel, so that he can in turn explain it to his countrymen. It says nothing about the Book of Mormon. Once they have read the passage, then ask them, "How does God explain this prophecy to Ezekiel? Don't you think we should believe God's interpretation?"

You may also want to note that Ezekiel is told to write on some sticks, but the Book of Mormon was allegedly written on golden plates. After noting this you can ask, "Wasn't the Book of Mormon written on golden plates? But Ezekiel is told to write on sticks, not golden plates. Could you be reading something into this passage that is not there?"

Finally, you may want to ask them what Ezekiel was to write on the sticks (v. 16). Then ask them, "Does it say to write 'Bible' and 'Book of Mormon?'" They will answer "No." Then ask, "Do you think that might be because this prophecy is not about books but about tribes?"

WERE THE "OTHER SHEEP" IN THE AMERICAS?

Mormons use John 10:16—"I have sheep which are not of this fold"—to argue

that Jesus needed to visit his people in the Americas. Who are these "other sheep" according to the Bible? Several passages clearly teach that these "other sheep" are the Gentiles. Study the following passages yourself. John 11:51-52; Acts 10:45; 11:18; 13:46; 14:27; 15:3-23; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-19; 3:3-6. Choose one or two to have your Mormon friend read aloud. Ask them what the passages say, and to whom they refer.

ARE THERE THREE HEAVENS?

Mormons most often refer to 1 Corinthians 15:40-41 as proof that there are different levels of heaven: "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory." But these verses teach nothing of the Mormon concept of the three degrees of glory.

First, you should note that the word "telestial" does not occur in verse 40; in fact, it does not occur anywhere in the Bible. Secondly, in order to understand what the apostle Paul was saying, you must look closely at the context. The whole context of 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection of the dead. At this point in the chapter, Paul is answering the question about what resurrected bodies will be like (v. 35). So he explains that it is quite different from our earthy bodies. Simply read verses 42-44 and you will see the contrast between resurrected and pre-resurrected bodies. There is nothing in the context which speaks of different levels of heaven.

SHOULD WE BAPTIZE FOR THE DEAD?

The primary verse used by Mormons to support their practice of baptism for the dead is 1 Corinthians 15:29, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all, why are they baptized for the dead?" Again, one must take the context into account.

In this chapter, the apostle Paul was countering those in Corinth who denied the resurrection of both Christ and believers (vv. 12-19). When he comes to verse 29, he is showing the inconsistency of those who deny the resurrection of believers—for these same people were doing baptism for the dead. But it is clear that Paul is not referring to either himself or the believers in Corinth in general. Rather, he was referring to the "some" of verse 12. In light of these false teachers, he uses different pronouns in verse 29. Notice he does not say, "Why do we baptize for the dead?" but "Why do they baptize for the dead?" Note the pronouns Paul uses in verses 12-19 and 30 as compared to verse 29. And keep in mind that there is nothing in the context about different heavenly kingdoms. Carefully, and prayerfully show these facts to your Mormon friends.

In Conclusion

BE PRAYERFUL We are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Pray that God would grant you the wisdom you need to clearly and carefully communicate the truth to your Mormon friends (James 1:5).

BE PREPARED While there is no need to try to know everything about

Mormon beliefs, history and culture, it can only help if you know some of the basics. This way you can anticipate what they might say. It is even more important for you to know what the Bible teaches. You must spend much time studying the Bible so you may be able to respond to the Mormon distortions and appeals to it.

BE PATIENT As you seek to witness to your Mormon friends, don't try to cover too much territory in one sitting. This can lead to a strong defensive attitude and minimal communication. Take your time. Remember 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

BE PERSISTENT Don't give up. We are in this for the long term. If you get frustrated, take some time off. Pray and ask God to help you in your preparation and understanding. Pray too that he will give your Mormon friend eyes to see and ears to hear the truth of who God is, their need for his salvation, and his provision of the Gospel of grace.