

# Mormonism

The Mormons represent one of the most successful of the new religious movements of the 19th century. Today they are divided into two main groups, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, organized from Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, based in Independence, Missouri. In addition to these major groups a number of smaller "Mormon" groups exists. Today the Utah church claims over 3 million members, while the reorganized Mormon claims about 600,000 adherents.

The Mormons was first organized on April 6, 1830, at Fayette, New York, by Joseph Smith. Soon after its formation, members moved to Kirtland, Ohio, and then to Jackson County, Missouri, as a result of the intense opposition they have encountered. They finally settled at a place they called Nauvoo on the Mississippi River in Illinois. Here they have prospered and built a thriving city.

On July 12, 1843, Smith received a revelation allowing for polygamy, which caused four disillusioned converts to start an anti-Mormon newspaper. Smith was denounced on June 7, 1844, in this paper, the Nauvoo Expositor, in its single publication. For that the Mormons burned down the newspaper office. As a result Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were placed in Carthage jail, where on June 27, 1844, they were brutally murdered when a mob stormed the jail.

Following the assassination of Joseph Smith the majority of Mormons accepted the leadership of Brigham Young. A minority rallied around Joseph's legal wife and family to form the Reorganized Church. Under the leadership of Young the Mormons left Nauvoo in 1847 and trekked westward to Utah. Here for more than thirty years Brigham Young ruled the Mormon Church and laid the foundation of its present strength.

Mormonism has a dual foundation. The first is the claim of Joseph Smith to have received golden plates upon which ancient scriptures are alleged to have been written. Smith claimed to have translated these plates and subsequently published them in 1830 as The Book of Mormon. The second foundation is Smith's claim to have had an encounter with the living Jesus and subsequently to receive continuing revelations from God.

The substance of these continuing revelations is to be found in the Mormon publication The Doctrine and Covenants, while an account of Joseph Smith's encounter with Jesus and the discovery of The Book of Mormon are to be found in The Pearl of Great Price. The Pearl of Great Price also contains the text of two Egyptian papyri which Joseph Smith claimed to have translated plus his some mistranslated portion of the Bible, together with the man-made books such as the following:

The Book of Mormons, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price form the basis of the Mormon continuing revelation. Since the death of Smith these revelations have been supplemented by what the Mormons claims to be further revelations given to their leaders.

According to the Articles of Faith of the Mormon Church and to the theology of the Book of Mormon, Mormonism is essentially Christian. Mormonism teaches that God the Father has a body and that man's destiny is to evolve to Godhood. This teaching is summed up in the popular Mormon saying, "As man is, God once was: as God is, man may become." This belief includes the notion of preexisting souls who has gained a body on earth and become human as part of the probationary experience which determines their future heavenly existence.

Mormon theology teaches that if Adam had not eaten the forbidden fruit, he would never have children. Therefore, to propagate the race and fulfill his heavenly destiny Adam had to disobey God. Thus, in a very real sense it is the fall of man which saved man. This doctrine is built into an evolutionary view of eternal progression which reflects popular thinking and scientific speculation at the time of Joseph Smith.

In keeping with the idea of a probationary state the doctrine of justification by faith is rejected in Mormon theology in favor of salvation by works as the basis of determining one's future mode of existence. The Mormon Church claims that it is the only true church because its leaders continue to receive revelation from God. In addition, it claims to possess the powers of the priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek into which its male members are expected to be initiated. Mormons are expected to participate in what is known as "temple work." This involves proxy baptism for deceased ancestors and "celestial marriage." Mormons believe that in addition to

temporal marriages church members may be sealed to their families "for time and eternity" through a process known as celestial marriage. During the 1960s the Mormon community was troubled by its denial of the priesthood to blacks but later changed their stand.

Mormon theology teaches that if Adam had not eaten the forbidden fruit, he would never have children. Therefore, to propagate the race and fulfill his heavenly destiny Adam had to disobey God. Thus, in a very real sense it is the fall of man which saved man.

In keeping with the idea of a probationary state the doctrine of justification by faith is rejected in Mormon theology in favor of salvation by works as the basis of determining one's future mode of existence. The purpose of Christ's atonement is then said to be the assurance that humans will be raised from the dead.

The Mormon Church claims that it is the only true church because its leaders continue to receive revelation from God. In addition, it claims to possess the powers of the priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek into which its male members are expected to be initiated.

Mormons are expected to participate in what is known as "temple work." This involves proxy baptism for deceased ancestors and "celestial marriage." Mormons believe that in addition to temporal marriages church members may be sealed to their families "for time and eternity" through a process known as celestial marriage. During the 1960s the Mormon community was troubled by its denial of the priesthood to blacks but later changed their stand.

**Rejection of the Bible:** Mormonism teaches that the canon of Scripture was not closed when the Bible was completed. They have three sources in addition to the Bible, all of which they believe contain God's revelations -- the Book of Mormon 2 (changed in more than 4,000 places since 1830), Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. (The Maze of Mormonism, p. 131). Bible is rejected as the infallible Word of God. (Articles of Faith No. 8, Ensign, January 1989, pp. 25, 27).

**Many Gods:** Mormonism teaches polytheism (versus monotheism taught in the Bible), believing that the universe is inhabited by many gods who produce spirit children.

Joseph Smith declared, "I will preach on the plurality of Gods." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 370). Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie spoke about the Godhead in this way, "Plurality of Gods: (Mormon Doctrine, pp. 576-577).

**God was once a man:** In Mormon theology, the god of our planet is believed to have once been a man on another planet, who through self-effort and the help of his own father-god, was appointed by a counsel of gods in the heavens to his high position as the god of planet Earth, and now has a physical, resurrected, glorified body. Mormonism teaches that through the atonement of Christ and by their good deeds and "holy" living, men can one day become gods, and with their multiplicity of "goddess wives," populate their own planets.

**Christ is the brother of Satan:** Mormonism acknowledges the divinity of Christ, but as noted above, Mormon doctrine on what constitutes divinity falls seriously short of the Biblical standard. Mormonism teaches that Jesus, Lucifer, and all the demons, as well as all mankind, are actually all spirit brothers and sisters, born in the spirit world as spirit babies to our man-god Heavenly Father and his goddess wives.

**God has sex with Mary:** Mormon leaders have consistently taught that God the Father ("Adam-god") had sexual relations on earth with Mary (his own spirit daughter), to produce the physical body of Jesus. Early Mormon apostles also asserted that Christ was a polygamist, and that His wives included Mary and Martha (the sisters of Lazarus) and Mary Magdalene.<sup>4</sup>

**The Holy Spirit is not a person:** The sixth LDS prophet, Joseph F. Smith, explains that the Holy Spirit is not a person but rather an impersonal force: "You may call it the Spirit of God, you may call it the influence of God's intelligence, you may call it the substance of his power; no matter what it is called, it is the spirit of intelligence that permeates the universe" (Mormon Doctrine, McConkie, pp. 752-753).

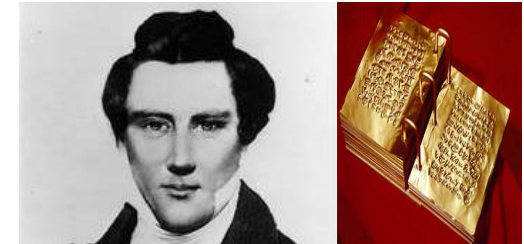
**Men will be punished for their own sins:** Concerning the transmission of sin to Adam's posterity, Mormons take a negative position -- they believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

Having rejected the doctrine of the imputation of the guilt of sin, Latter-Day Saints likewise repudiate the transmission of inherent corruption or original sin.

**A different Atonement:** Mormon theology teaches that the atonement of Christ was essential to our salvation and eternal life with God, but that it is not sufficient. Christ's shed blood on the cross provides for universal resurrection of all people, but does not pay for personal sins; according to Mormonism, only Christ's blood shed in the Garden of Gethsemane atones for personal sin.

**Baptism is required for salvation:** Mormonism also teaches that one must be baptized in water to be saved (baptismal regeneration), and that salvation will also be available in the next world for those "missing-out" in this one. Therefore, Mormons avidly pursue genealogy and practice baptism for the dead.<sup>7</sup>

**Heaven and Hell:** Mormonism teaches that there are three degrees of glory: Celestial (for good Mormons able to cease sinning in this lifetime. Terrestrial (for good people who do not comply with all the teachings of Mormonism), and Telestial (for those who have lived unclean earthly lives). (See also Mormon Doctrines, p. 348.) Mormonism teaches that there is a hell, but only for the "sons of perdition," a very small number of souls that cannot be redeemed.



## MORMONISM