

Mormonism

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In 2008, Mitt Romney was a potential Republican candidate for president. He is a highly successful businessman with traditional conservative values. To many Christians, he was an appealing candidate because of his values and business success. He is also a Mormon. As the Republican National Convention approached, newspaper articles were published claiming Mormonism was just another branch of the Christian church. What do you think?¹

In 1992, the Mormons published a book called, Are Mormons Christians? in which they boldly claim they are just another Christian denomination. Even today at the mormon.org homepage, the church's official website, they boldly claim they are just another Christian denomination. Is this true? This morning, we will find the answer.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are in a series of studies called *Alternatives to Christianity*. We are looking at world religions and alternative belief systems to see how they stack up against biblical Christianity. In previous weeks, we looked at Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. This week, we move closer to home. We are examining an alternative belief system that sprouted on American soil — the Mormon church. We will end our study by letting you answer the pressing question of the 2008 Republican National Convention — is the Mormon church just another Christian denomination?

¹ <http://www.mormonthink.com/christian.htm>

How did the Mormon church begin?

The founder of the Mormon church is Joseph Smith. He was born in Sharon, Vermont, in 1805. His father wasn't the best influence. Joseph Smith's father spent much of his time looking for buried treasure, specifically one called Captain Kid's Plunder. He was also caught counterfeiting money. Joseph Smith accompanied his father on many of his treasure hunting expeditions where they made use of divining rods and pecking stones to search for treasure. Both of these devices have their roots in the occult and are used for channeling the spirit world.

The family moved to Palmyra, New York. In 1820, Christian revival broke out in their community. Many people came to Christ. Joseph Smith's mother, sister and two brothers joined the local Presbyterian church. At age 14, Joseph Smith said he leaned Methodist but he didn't know which one was the right church so he went to the woods to pray. He claims that in the woods he had a vision where God the Father and God the Son both appeared to him in human form to tell him all churches were abominations and he would restore the true gospel to the world.

Three years later, in 1823, when he was 17, Joseph Smith claims the angel Moroni appeared to him telling him about golden plates he would later discover and translate. Smith claims he uncovered the plates in 1827, near Palmyra, New York. A special set of golden glasses were given to him called the Urim and Thummin that would allow him to translate the golden plates into English because they were written in Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics.

He was not allowed to show the plates to anyone except a few select individuals. After two years of translation, in 1830, Joseph Smith published his work in the local Palmyra bookstore. It was called, "The Book of Mormon."

Joseph Smith claimed many other visions and visitations from people other than this mysterious angel named Moroni. He claimed that in 1829 John the Baptist appeared to him and gave him the Aaronic priesthood. He also claimed Peter, James and John appeared to him and gave him the Melchizedekian priesthood.

Since Joseph Smith was told all churches were false, he set out to start the one true church. The Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter-day Saints began in Fayette, New York, in 1830 with only five members. As his church grew, so did public opposition to Smith's claims of unique prophetic status from God. Joseph Smith later claimed he received a special revelation from God to move the church to Ohio and Missouri to escape opposition. Within months of arriving in these new cities, the church was accused of a number of crimes. Tensions between the Mormons and the non-Mormons in the area were so high because of the Mormon disregard for the law that Governor Boggs of the state of Missouri issued this proclamation.

...the attitude of open and avowed defiance of the laws, and of having made open war upon the people of this state ... the Mormons must be treated as enemies and exterminated or driven from this state." - History of the Church 3:175

To avoid further conflict, the Mormons moved to Illinois and built a city Joseph Smith called Nauvoo. He claimed Nauvoo meant "beautiful place" in Hebrew; that is not true. This is also where Joseph Smith began the practice of

polygamy. He eventually married 49 wives; a number of them were adulterous wives he took from his disciples. This ultimately led to his downfall and death.

In Nauvoo, four former Mormons were so disillusioned with the church because of Smith's mishandling of church funds and his adulterous lifestyle that they began a newspaper called *the Nauvoo Expositor*. They used it to reveal Smith's colorful private life. They only published one issue. In an act of revenge, Mormons destroyed the offices of the newspaper that published against them. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. The government cracked down on the Mormons and had Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum jailed in Carthage, Illinois, on charges of treason. While they were awaiting trial, in an act of mob justice, the citizens of the area stormed the jail, killing both Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum.

The next leader of the Mormons was a man named Brigham Young. In 1847, to escape further conflict, he led the Mormons southwest from Missouri to the Salt Lake Valley in Utah. Like Joseph Smith, he practiced and encouraged polygamy and kept a harem of 25 wives.

How did a group with such a colorful past become a church with a membership of more than 8 million today? That story is more than we can discuss this morning.

The Mormon church is not like other churches. It is not just a denomination, it is a corporation. It takes in an estimated \$4.7 billion a year in mandatory offerings and tithes from its members. It also controls at least 100 companies which provide an additional \$4 billion in revenue a year giving the

church a combined annual revenue of more than \$8 billion, making it one of the largest corporations west of the Mississippi and giving them an income profile the size of Union Carbide.

As I thought about Joseph Smith's life, his adulterous relationships and his general disregard for the law, I couldn't help but see a huge difference from Joseph Smith to Jesus. The Mormons revere Joseph Smith over Jesus. I couldn't help but see a complete difference in their lives. I think you do too.

What books do the Mormons claim as authoritative?

The Mormons claim they believe in the Bible but only in the 1611 King James Version as it is correctly translated, which means the Book of Mormon supersedes and corrects the Bible. We will dive into the Mormon understanding of the Bible in a moment but we need to know the Mormons place three books over the Bible. They are The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. What are these books?

The Book of Mormon

Joseph Smith said,

["I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than any other book."](#) — Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1973), 4:461.

The Book of Mormon is the book Joseph Smith supposedly translated from golden plates using special spectacles given to him by the angel Moroni. He claims it was written in Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics. It was supposedly written between 600 B.C. to 428 A.D. It tells the story of the migration of an

ancient people from the tower of Babel to Central America called the Jaredites. It also tells the story of the migration of a group of Jews God supposedly told to flee Jerusalem before the Babylonian captivity. They came to America and divided into two opposing groups called the Nephites and the Lamanites. The book tells how the Lamanites were cursed with dark skin because of their sin. dark skin is an evidence of God's curse. Supposedly Jesus visited this group in South America. Before they were annihilated in battle in 428 A.D., Mormon and his son, Moroni, wrote this history down on golden plates and hid the golden plates in Cumorah, New York. The same Moroni, as a glorified being, supposedly appeared to Joseph Smith 1,400 years later, instructing him where to find the golden plates, translate them and restore the true gospel to the world.

If the Book of Mormon is true, it would be a fascinating discovery that would reveal information about a vast civilization in the Americas and amazing information about God. A little investigation of the book reveals some serious difficulties.

Problems with the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon has problems with the witnesses. There are more than 24,000 ancient manuscripts of full or partial copies of the New Testament in existence dating back to antiquity in existence today. They are available for anyone to see in museums around the world so we can know the Bible is a true representation of what was written. In addition there are 86,000 quotations of the New Testament by early church fathers from the beginning of the church. We could reconstruct the entire New Testament just by looking at ancient quotations.

How does the Book of Mormon compare? The Book of Mormon is unverifiable. Only Joseph Smith, a man of highly questionable character, did the translating. In addition, he claims the angel Moroni took the golden plates back to heaven so nobody can see them or prove they existed. To bolster his claim, Joseph Smith claims there were witnesses to the golden plates besides himself. In Mormon theology they are called the group of three and the group of eight. The group of three are Oliver Cowdry, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, who were all his friends and church members, who had a vested interest in his success. They didn't stay that way. Joseph Smith later called them all men of low character. In addition, their stories about the golden plates do not agree. Martin Harris later admitted he only saw the plates by the eyes of faith, not with his own eyes.

The next group, called the group of eight, has an extreme case of nepotism. Four of the eight were part of David Whitmer's family, part of the inner circle. One was married to a Whitmer and the remaining three were part of Joseph Smith's family. Later in the Mormon history, Joseph Smith, expelled all the Whitmers from the church, calling them all apostates. *That leaves no witnesses to the existence of the golden plates besides Joseph Smith.* He was a man of questionable character who was charged with treason and disregard for the law. This is a stark contrast to the Bible with its thousands of ancient copies that anyone can examine for proof that the Bible is based on fact not fiction.

The Book of Mormon was written in King James English. While the Book of Mormon was supposedly written between 600 B.C. and 428 A.D., it contains

25,000 words, phrases and sentence copied verbatim from the 1611 King James Bible. The Book of Mormon was written in a language that didn't exist for 1,000 -2,000 years into the future. The words of Christ, Peter, Paul, John and others are placed in the mouths of people who supposedly lived centuries before Christ. Everyone in the Book of Mormon speaks in a wordy version of 17th century English, no matter when they lived. This is a huge problem. What makes it even worse is Joseph Smith claimed he translated the Book of Mormon as a word-for-word translation from the mysterious golden plates. Do you really think people spoke 17th century English 1,000-2,000 years before the language was in use? I smell a massive case of plagiarism.

The Book of Mormon contains factual and historical errors. The Book of

Mormon is filled with factual and historical errors. For example, the Book of Mormon claims the American Indians are of Jewish descent. Scientists tell us they are of Mongoloid extract. The Book of Mormon describes vast cities, mountains, civilizations and coinages that supposedly existed in the Americas. There is absolutely no historical evidence to back any of it up. It is pure fiction. The

Smithsonian Institution has gone on record stating they have no scientific evidence to back up any of the claims of the Book of Mormon to the existence of



a vast civilization in the Americas.² To quote directly from the Smithsonian letter...

The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see no direct connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book. — <http://mit.irr.org/smithsonian-institution-statement-on-book-of-mormon>

When you talk to the Mormons on this issue they say the lack of historical evidence doesn't trouble them. They take the Book of Mormon by faith, just like we take our Bible by faith. That isn't a fair comparison. They take the Book of Mormon by blind faith. There is no history to back it up. We don't take the Bible on blind faith. Archaeology backs up the Bible. The late renowned archaeologist Nelson Gluck said, "There has never been an archaeological discovery that has controverted the Bible." We can go to the city of Ephesus. We can go to cities and churches talked about in the Bible. We know they existed. It is a matter of proven fact. Secular historians in the ancient world, like Josephus, talked openly of Christ and his miracles. We do not have a blind faith. We have reasonable



² <http://mit.irr.org/smithsonian-institution-statement-on-book-of-mormon>

faith. There is a ton of extra-biblical evidence to back up the Bible. Josh McDowell wrote a massive book on this evidence called More Evidence that Demands a Verdict. It is 760 pages in small print.

The Book of Mormon has more than 4,000 corrections from the original 1830 edition. These are not small corrections. They are large corrections that actually change the meaning of the original. They are grammatical corrections, factual correction and false prophecy corrections. What makes this so shocking is how Joseph Smith claimed the way he translated the Book of Mormon would disallow any possibility of errors of any time, even grammar and spelling errors. David Whitmer, one of the supposed witness of the plates, described the translation process this way.

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. — David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Concord, CA: Pacific Publishing Co., 1976, reprint).

Oliver Huntington, who later became the sixth president of the Mormon church, taught that the Lord gave Joseph Smith the exact English wording and spelling that should be used in the Book of Mormon.

Joseph did not render the writing on the gold plates into the English language in his own style of language as many people believe, but every word and every letter was given to him by the gift and power of God. . . . The Lord caused each word spelled as it is in the book to appear on the stones in short sentences or words, and when Joseph had uttered the sentence or word before him and the scribe had written it properly, that sentence would disappear and another appear.

And if there was a word wrongly written or even a letter incorrect the writing on the stones would remain there. . . . and when corrected the sentence would disappear as usual. — Journal of Oliver B. Huntington,” p. 168 of typed copy at Utah State Historical Society; in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Major Problems of Mormonism (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1989), p. 161.

If that is the case, why has the Mormon church made more than 4,000 corrections to the book?

There is no such thing as Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics. Martin Harris, one of Joseph Smith’s friends, supposedly took a copy of some of the characters of the golden plates, wrote them down and brought them and their translation to Professor Charles Anthon who was a professor of languages. Dr. Anthon supposedly gave a certificate to Martin Harris testifying that the language was Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics and the translation was correct. The problem is the Smithsonian Institution tells us Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics never existed in the Americas, in fact it doesn’t exist anywhere in the world. It is a fictional language.³

The Book of Mormon is an expansion of the book Romance Found. Most researchers agree that the Book of Mormon is actually Joseph Smith’s plagiaristic expansion of a book called “Romance Found,” written by a retired minister named Samuel Spaulding. Smith plagiarized the whole thing.

³ Natural Museum of Natural History—Smithsonian Statement on the Book of Mormon #8.

The Pearl of Great Price

This is a book Smith claims he translated from fragments of papyrus wrapped around a mummy he bought from a traveling showman. Supposedly the sheets contained the writing of Abraham.

Doctrines and Covenants

This is a book that contains lectures by Joseph Smith on basic Mormon doctrine.

The Bible

The Mormons believe that because of poor transmission, large portions of the Bible were lost throughout the centuries. They also believe that the portions of the Bible that survived have become corrupt through faulty handling. Orson Pratt, an early Mormon church leader, went so far as to say that not one verse of the Bible has escaped corruption.

Joseph Smith claimed he translated a specially-inspired version of the King James Version of the Bible which was corrected for Mormons. Smith did not come up with a new translation but he took the King James Version and added to and subtracted from it. His corrections of the King James Version were not based on examining ancient manuscripts but by claiming divine inspiration. He made thousands of changes to the Bible.

While it took a large group of the world's greatest Hebrew and Greek scholars years to finish their work and create the King James translation in 1611 using the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, it took Smith a mere three years to do his work by himself, without any knowledge of Greek and Hebrew or

having any of the ancient manuscripts. Joseph Smith even added a passage in Genesis 50 that predicted his own coming.

Was Joseph Smith a false prophet?

In addition to Joseph Smith's sordid history and flaky writings, he had scores of flaky prophecies. Let me share just two.

Jesus will return within 56 years.

"President Smith then stated that the meeting had been called, because God had commanded it; and it was made known to him by vision and by the Holy Spirit... go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, for the coming of the Lord, which was nigh—even fifty-six years should wind up the scene." (History of the Church, vol. 2, p. 189).

Jesus did not return 56 years later in 1891.

All nations will be involved in the American Civil War.

For behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and then war shall be poured out upon all nations." (Doctrine and Covenants 87:1-3)

All nations did not get involved in the American Civil War!

What do Mormons believe?

While Mormons claim to believe the Bible, they have a very different understanding of the Bible than the rest of us.

God

They believe salvation is a progression to becoming a god. When one attains godhood, he is able to populate a world of his own, and the process continues forever. Joseph Smith's famous statement is,

"God was once as we are now, and is an exalted man." (History of the Church, Vol. 6, Ch. 14, p. 305-6)

God was not always God but developed into his present state. They believe God has a body of flesh and blood. Mormons teach that all men have the potential to become gods and populate planets with their spirit children from their many celestial wives. As you can see, this is a long way from biblical Christianity.

Jesus

Mormons teach the gods produce spirit children and they need to wait for bodies to inhabit. They teach Christ was one of God's spirit children and his brother was Lucifer. They claim the only difference between Jesus and ourselves is not nature, in that Jesus is a god in the flesh and we are not, but the only difference is time. Given enough time we can become a god, just like Jesus.

Most Mormons believe that Jesus is the actual sexual offspring between Mary and the Adam-God of our world, so much for the virgin birth!

"The birth of the Savior was as natural as the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood—was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers." - Brigham Young (Journal of Discourses, vol. 8, p. 115)

They also believe Christ was a polygamist and had multiple wives, because every good Mormon man does. They believe Mary and Martha were his wives and, while the Bible doesn't tell us, they believe Jesus had children through them because if he didn't have children, he could not be exalted to the highest level of deity.

The Fall

Mormons deny the doctrine of original sin and teach the fall of man was a good and necessary thing. They believe that if man had not disobeyed and eaten the forbidden fruit, man would not have been able to procreate. In

addition, they do not believe in inherited sin but believe all children are born in a state of innocence until they learn to sin. Anybody who has a child knows inherited sin is a reality. Children are not born perfect. The first word every child learns is “No!”

The Afterlife

The Mormons are universalists and believe that almost everybody goes to heaven. They believe in three different heavens.

1. Telestial heaven is where unbelievers go.
2. Terrestrial heaven is where religious non-Mormons go.
3. Celestial heaven is where good Mormons go.

They also believe in a place called, the Outer Darkness, which is closest to the biblical understanding of Hell. They believe nobody will be there eternally, just until their deserved punishment is paid.

...no soul shall be kept in prison or continued in torment beyond the time requisite to work the needed reformation and vindicate justice for which ends alone punishment is imposed. — James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977), pp. 146–47.

Atonement

Atonement is just a fancy word for saying, “What does it take to get things right between me and God?” The Bible tells us it is all about Jesus. He died in our places for our sins. If we ask God to have Jesus’ death on the cross pay for our sins, they are paid in full and we are brought back into a relationship with God, completely as a gift of God’s love. The Mormons see things very differently.

They believe Christ's death only removes the guilt of our past sins, not the guilt of the sins we commit in the future. As a Mormon, you have to earn your way to heaven. Brigham Young said it clearly.

"There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it . . . " (Journal of Discourses, vol. 3, p. 247; see also, vol. 4, p. 53-54, 219-220).

What works does a Mormon need to do to be saved? Salvation involves faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, obedience to the teachings of the Mormon church and good works. You never know if you have done enough.

What are some of the strange Mormon practices?

Polygamy

Mormons are famous for polygamy. Joseph Smith had 49 wives, including some he took from other men. Brigham Young had 25 wives. It was Joseph Smith's adulterous advances that led four disillusioned converts to start *the Nauvoo Expositor*, the newspaper that led to Smith's downfall. Brigham Young stated the Mormon position on polygamy plainly.

"Now if any of you will deny the plurality of wives, and continue to do so, I promise that you will be damned," (Journal of Discourses, vol. 3, p. 266). Also, "The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy..." (Journal of Discourses, vol. 11, p. 269)

Polygamy was standard Mormon practice for years. Why do they believe in it? They believe that earthly marriages carry into the future. With your wife, you will create spirit children to populate other planets. The more wives, the more children. (*By the way, in Matthew 22:30, Jesus clearly says that marriages*

do not exist in heaven and neither do we have children in heaven.) Mormons believe procreation now and in eternity are essential.

Polygamy, as an official practice of the church, came to an end in 1890 when Wilford Woodruff, the fourth president of the Mormon church, declared that Mormons should give it up. Instead they substituted something called “celestial marriage” where a man can seal up for himself extra wives for eternity in a celestial marriage ceremony in a Mormon tabernacle.

Why did they finally give up on polygamy? Pressure! Huge pressure. In 1890, when Wilford Woodruff officially discouraged polygamy, the church’s leaders were in jail or in hiding for the practice, the U.S. government was threatening to confiscate their land and Utah had no chance of gaining statehood if the practice continued.

That being said, polygamy is still practiced by some Mormons today. There is even a program on TLC called *Sister Wives* which is about one Mormon man married to four Mormon women.

Baptism for the Dead

Maybe you have seen the commercials for Ancestry.com. It is the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world. As of December 2013, it held records on 12.7 billion people. It is headquartered in Provo, Utah, and was begun by two Mormon graduates of Brigham Young University. Why are the Mormons interested in your dead relatives? Since the Mormons believe baptism by immersion in the Mormon church is necessary for salvation, they compile

elaborate genealogies of their “Gentile” ancestors and baptize them by proxy. Millions of the dead have been “baptized” and assured of salvation.

Conclusion

I will go back to the question we began with that everyone was asking in the 2008 Republican National Convention. Is Mormonism just another Christian denomination? What do you think?

- The Mormon faith denies just about every essential Christian doctrine.
- The Mormon faith exalts Joseph Smith and his writings over Jesus and the Bible.
- The Mormon faith denies our relationship with God is about Jesus paying for all of the sins of our past, present and future. They replace it with a system of works-based righteousness where they claim we can only be saved if we follow Mormon doctrine and practices.

The scariest part is they claim we can become God. That has an eerie ring to it. It sounds just like Satan’s word in Genesis 3:5 where he tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, “don’t you know, you can become like God?”

When it comes to your conversations with Mormons, remember most Mormons have not read the Bible. As we have seen, the Word of God does the work of God. When people read it, it leads to spiritual life. I encourage you to get into discussions with Mormons. Avoid their writings and stick to the Bible. Mormons are people that matter to God.



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