

# **In Quest of the Real Jesus:** *Contrasting the Mormons with Christianity*

## *Overview*

**The LDS Church:** A religious sect founded on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1830

**The Founder:** Joseph Smith Jr. December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1805-June 27<sup>th</sup> 1844 (died 38 years old)

**The First Presidency:** The president and two other counselors (all considered apostles)

**The Quorum of Apostles:** The term usually refers to those second in rank; the other apostles. In Mormon theology; modern-day apostles have the same status and authority as the Biblical Apostles

**Source of Authority:** The Bible as correctly interpreted. The Book of Mormon. (The Doctrine of the Covenants. The Pearl of Great Price).

**Their Trademark:** Missionary Stints: Elders and Sisters: Aggressive door-to-door proselytizing

- a. The Missionaries: The Elders and the Sisters
- b. Don't drink caffeine or alcohol
- c. Don't wear crosses or have them on their buildings
- d. Emphasis on the family
- e. Temple Marriages / Baptism of the dead
- f. The Undergarments

**Emphasis on the Priesthood:** Aaronic and Melchizedek (Apostles)

**Organizational Structure:** The President / Apostle (Thomas A. Monson). He selects 2 other counselors and they form the first presidency. Twelve other apostles form the Quorum, the second highest governing body. Together, the First Presidency and the Twelve oversee the entire Church. Leaders called seventies — another office — assist the Twelve Apostles and serve in various locations throughout the world.

Local congregations are run by the bishop. A group of wards forms a stake, and the leader of a stake is a stake president. Stake presidents and bishops are the leaders most commonly encountered by the broad membership of the Church. These leaders are unsalaried and have a significant amount of local autonomy.

## **The Tip of the Iceberg: What the Mormon would say to a Christian**

1. We are Christians
2. We believe in the teachings of the Bible
3. We believe in God the Father
4. We believe Jesus is our Savior
5. We believe that Christians will go to heaven.

## The Middle of the Iceberg: What the Mormon really means

1. The Mormon believes that like Protestants and Catholics—they are Christians. However the LDS church believes they are privy to the “whole” truth. It is their belief that when the apostles passed away—the church became corrupt and lost sight of the whole gospel. Through a series of visions from God the Father and Jesus Christ (also the angel Moroni, the apostles, Peter, James, and John), the true gospel has been “restored” to the church through Joseph Smith Jr.
2. The Mormons believe in the teachings of the Bible as “correctly translated.” The book of Mormon fills in the “gaps” when it comes to interpretation. The Bible is viewed through the lenses of the Book of Mormon.
3. The Mormons believe in God the Father, also known as Elohim. However, unlike the God of the Bible, Elohim was once a man and obtained Godhood by obedience to Mormon doctrine. Elohim’s celestial throne is near a far away star called Kolob. This is where Elohim and his many wives bore spirit children. Once earth was made these spirit children were sent to inhabit human bodies, which occurs through human birth. The hope is for the Mormon to become a God like Elohim.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . 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. . . . He was once a man like us; yea that God himself, the Father dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret . p. 321 .

4. The Mormons believe Jesus died for humanity and that he is our savior. However, the death and resurrection of Christ cannot guarantee which level of heaven one achieves. In order to achieve the highest level one has to add works and adherence to Mormon doctrine. Thus, Jesus is our savior with an asterisk.
5. The Mormons believe Christians will go to heaven. However, the real question is which one. According to their theology there are three levels of heaven.
  - a. The Celestial Kingdom
    1. Can attain Exaltation: i.e. Attain godhood
    2. Those married in temple / followed Mormon Teachings
    3. One is always in the presence of God the Father and Jesus
    4. Glory compared to the sun
  - b. The Terrestrial Kingdom
    1. For honorable people who didn’t accept Mormonism
    2. For Mormons who weren’t valiant in their testimonies of Jesus
    3. Enjoy the presence of Jesus, but not God the Father
    4. Glory compared to the moon
  - c. The Telestial Kingdom
    1. For wicked people of the world who rejected the gospel
    2. People here suffer the wrath of God on earth
    3. Holy Ghost: No Jesus; no God the Father
    4. Glory compared to the stars

## The Foundation of the Iceberg: The True Heart of the Matter

1. The book of Mormon reveals the restored gospel and is on par with the Bible and should be read side by side to properly interpret the Scriptures.

When holy men of God write or speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words "shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (Doctrine & Covenants 68:4).

The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon came forth in this dispensation by the will of the Lord. Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon is "the keystone of our religion, and a man [will] get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book" (introduction to the Book of Mormon). LDS official website LDS.ORG

2. Joseph Smith Jr. was second only to Jesus because he restored the gospel.

"Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it" (D&C 135:3).

3. The Apostles for the LDS Church have been assigned through apostolic succession—which began with the twelve disciples. Consequently revelation from God continues today.

4. The gospel of Jesus was lost—but has been revealed to Joseph Smith

- a. Jesus himself revealed it (along with God the Father) to Joseph Smith
- b. It involves faith in Christ, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, temple marriage, obedience to Mormon Doctrine, and works.
- c. The highest pursuit is to attain godhood and govern a planet with spirit wives, and populate it through eternal childbearing with spirit children
- d. Baptism of the dead is available to those who do not respond to Mormon teaching in this life. Preaching here occurs in the spirit world.
- e. Joseph Smith (along with Jesus and Elohim) will give his consent on who goes to what level in heaven.

"...no man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith." (*Journal of Discourses, Vol. 7, p. 289*).

- f. In the end, there are three levels of heaven available

There are three kingdoms of glory: the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, and the telestial kingdom. The glory we inherit will depend on the depth of our conversion, expressed by our obedience to the Lord's commandments. It will depend on the manner in which we have "received the testimony of Jesus" (D&C 76:51; see also D&C 76:74, 79, 101).

"the new and everlasting covenant of marriage" and be true to that covenant. In other words, temple marriage is a requirement for obtaining the highest degree of celestial glory. (See D&C 131:1–4.)

5. Jesus is not a part of the Godhead (Trinity) but did attain Godhood. He and God are united as one.

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God [anyhow]--three in one and one in three. . . It is curious organization... All are crammed into one God according to sectarianism (Christian faith). It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God--he would be a giant or a monster. (Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 372)

"There are three Gods--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." He further explains that, "[T]hree separate personages--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a god, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of gods exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only gods we worship." McConkie, 317 & 376

## The Christian Response

1. **The biblical depiction of Jesus cannot be supplemented (Galatians 1:8; Revelation 22:18).**

Paul is very clear that if he or an angel above (i.e. Moroni) preaches a different Gospel than what he preached, they are to be anathema. Features of Paul's gospel included such things as faith alone in Christ regarding salvation and the insistence that no individual works can make a contribution to one's salvation because there is no room to boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

2. **Joseph Smith was a False Teacher / Prophet**

Joseph Smith taught unbiblical doctrines such as the restoration of the priestly service, the need for temple service, three heavenly realms, and exaltation to name a few. Regarding exaltation, to insist that we have the ability to become a god and govern our own planet is an example of the original sin of Adam and Eve who in the same way were guilty of wanting to be like God (Genesis 3). Instead of being humble like Christ—who did not consider equality something to be grasped (Philippians 2:6)—Joseph sought equality with God and taught it was possible for all mankind providing one believed in his version of Christ, got married in the temple, and follow Mormon doctrine. Furthermore, to teach others that God was once a man is the ultimate form of ignorance and irreverence when it comes to worshipping the *one* true God. God was never a man, nor is He to be equated with having flesh and bones; Jesus made it clear that God is Spirit (John 4:24). He is the great I am, which is acute to being the self-sufficient one. Finally, as politically incorrect as it may sound there is no other choice but to conclude that Joseph Smith falls in the category of one who was a false teacher / prophet (2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1-2) because his teaching was not in line with the Scriptures.

3. **There is no precedent for apostolic succession.**

It should be noted when James of Zebedee was killed by Herod during the beginning of the early church he was not replaced (Acts 12:2).

4. **The gospel was not lost:**

The apostles testify to its truth. We are saved by faith alone (Romans 10:8-9 Galatians 1:8, 3:5-7; Ephesians 2:8-9). Furthermore, the early church fathers of the first century, some who were contemporaries of Christ, validate the gospel claims made in the New Testament.

5. **Jesus claimed to be God Himself**

Mormon's teach that Jesus was a god, but this does not line up with the NT gospels which attribute Jesus as *God Himself* (John 1:1). *It must be noted the very reason* why the Jewish leaders wanted to put him to death was because they recognized this fundamental teaching. (John 5:18; 14:8-9).

## Tips for Witnessing to Mormons

1. Pray for them daily
2. Establish a relationship: Let them see you love Jesus
3. Know their doctrine and explain it to them: This is what you believe, right?
4. Don't become defensive. Laugh with a good spirit at obvious differences
5. Be patient: This will be a long process because in many cases they will be ostracized by the Mormon Church and possibly family members.