

# Mormons

## *Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements*

**Official Name:** The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)

**Founder:** Joseph Smith Jr., on April 6, 1830

**Current Leader:** Gordon B. Hinckley (b. 1910)

**Headquarters:** Salt Lake City, Utah

**Membership** (2000): Worldwide: 11 million in 25,915 wards and branches in 162 countries; United States: 5.1 million in all 50 states and D.C.; Canada: 156,575.

**Missionaries** (2000): 60,784

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded by Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844). Smith claimed to have had a visitation from God in 1820 in which God directed him to establish the true church. Consequently, he organized the Mormon Church on April 6, 1830, with six original members. Beginning with a few hundred followers, the church moved to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois before Smith's death at the hands of a mob at the Carthage, Ill., jail. Smith had been arrested for encouraging the destruction of the *Expositor*, a Nauvoo, Ill., newspaper. After Smith's death, Brigham Young was affirmed as president of the church by a majority of the church's leaders and led his followers to Utah where they established Salt Lake City in 1847. Joseph Smith's widow, Emma, resided in Illinois. Those who affirmed her son, Joseph Smith III, as the true successor of his father and as prophet of the church in the 1850s helped found the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now headquartered in Independence, Mo.

## Major Beliefs

### One True Church

The Mormon church claims to be the only true church. In God's supposed revelation to Joseph Smith, Jesus Christ told him to join no other church for "they were all wrong . . . their creeds were an abomination . . .

those professors [members] were all corrupt" (*The Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:19). Mormons teach that after the New Testament, all churches became heretical and no true saints existed until the "Church of the Latter-day Saints" was organized, hence their name. Non-Mormons are thus called "Gentiles." The new revelations given to Smith, the institution of the prophet and apostles in the church, the restoration of the divine priesthoods, and the temple ceremonies make the church authentic. True and full salvation or exaltation is found only in the LDS Church.

**Response:** The true church of Jesus Christ has had an ongoing presence and witness in the world since Pentecost. Jesus Christ promised that His church, *truly* baptized and regenerate believers, would not fail (see Matt. 16:17-18). The marks of a true church include faithfulness to the teaching of the first apostles (see Acts 2:42)—not the creation of new doctrines.

### Authority of the Prophet

The *president* or *prophet* of the Church is thought to be the sole spokesman and revelator of God. Joseph Smith was the initial prophet, but each successive president holds that position. Through him, God's will can be made known to the Church. All revelations are made scripture and no Mormon can attain godhood without accepting Joseph Smith as a true prophet. The Mormon scriptures state that Latter-day Saints "shalt give heed

unto all his [the prophet's] words and commandments . . . For his word ye shall receive as if from mine [God's] own mouth" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 21:4-5).

**Biblical Response:** Old and New Testament prophets were God's spokesmen. Their words were always consistent with the Bible and pointed to God's Son, Jesus Christ. A test of genuineness for prophets was that any prediction they proclaimed would come true (see Deut. 18:20-22). For example, Joseph Smith predicted that the temple of the church would be built in Independence, Mo., within his lifetime (*Doctrine and Covenants* 84:2-5). No temple has yet been built there. New Testament prophets spoke, along with teachers, pastors, and evangelists, in evangelizing and edifying the church (see Eph. 4:11-13).

### Mormon Scripture

Mormons accept four books as scripture and the word of God. The King James Version of the Bible is one of them, but only "as far as it is translated correctly"—seemingly allowing for possible questions about its authority. Joseph Smith made over 600 "corrections" to its text. Other "standard works" are the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrines and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. The Bible is missing "plain and precious parts" according to the *Book of Mormon* (1 Nephi 13:26) which the other three volumes complete. The *Book of Mormon* has "the fullness of the gospel" and tells the story of a supposed migration of Israelites in 600 B.C. to the American continent. These Israelites subsequently lapsed into apostasy although their story was preserved on golden plates written in Reformed Egyptian. Joseph Smith, it is said, translated the plates by the "gift and power of God" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 135:3). Reformed Egyptian does not exist as a language. The golden plates were returned to the angel Moroni after they were transcribed and Moroni returned them to heaven. *The Book of Mormon* does not contain explicit Mormon doctrine. *Doctrines and Covenants* contains the revelations of the Mormon prophets—138 in number along with two "declarations." Here, most of Mormon doctrine can be found including the priesthood, baptism for the dead, godhood, and polygamy. *The Pearl of Great Price* contains Smith's religious history, the Articles of Faith, the Book of Abraham, and the Book of Moses.

**Response:** The Bible explicitly warns against adding to or detracting from its teaching (see Rev. 22:18-19; Deut. 4:2). The New Testament contains the inspired and totally accurate witness of contemporary disciples and followers of Jesus. It alone claims to be fully inspired of God and usable for the establishment of doctrine (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

### Establishment of Temples

The first Mormon temple was constructed in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836. Subsequently, a temple was constructed in Nauvoo, Ill., in 1846. Presently, there are at least 106

operating temples throughout the world including the one finished in Salt Lake City in 1893. The purpose and function of temples is for the practice of eternal ordinances including primarily baptism for the dead, endowments, and celestial marriages. Baptism in the Mormon church, for both the living and the dead, is essential for the fullness of salvation. The dead often are baptized by proxy which affords them after death the opportunity to become Mormons. Celestial marriage for "time and eternity" is also a temple ordinance. It is necessary for godhood and seals the marriage forever. Temples form an essential part of Mormon salvation. Only Mormons in possession of a "temple recommend" by their bishop may enter a temple.

**Response:** The temple of the Old Testament was a place of symbolic sacrifice prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ. Worship in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem was a practice of early Jewish believers (see Acts 2:46). Otherwise, there is no mention of any such practice in the New Testament. Never was the Jewish temple used for baptism for the dead, marriage, or other secret ceremonies. It was the place in the Old Testament where the glory of God occasionally dwelt. Today, individual believers are God's dwelling place and not a physical building (see 1 Cor. 3:16).

### God Is an Exalted Man

Elohim, the god of this universe, was previously a man in a prior existence. As a result of having kept the requirements of Mormonism, he was exalted to godhood and inherited his own universe. God is confined to a "body of flesh and bones" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22) and yet is thought to be omniscient and omnipotent. He obviously cannot be omnipresent. There are an infinite number of gods with their own worlds—these too were previously men. The Holy Ghost, Jesus Christ, and "Heavenly Father" comprise three separate and distinct gods. Heavenly Father sires spiritual children in heaven destined for human life on earth. All humans, as well as Jesus Christ and Lucifer, are god's heavenly children. (See *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22; God, Jesus, and the Spirit thus had beginnings.)

**Response:** God is spirit and is not confined to a physical body (see John 4:24). Jesus Christ was incarnated through a miraculous and nonphysical conception through the Virgin Mary. He was fully God from the beginning (John 1:1). Together with the Person of the Holy Spirit, they form the triune (three in one) eternal God.

### Jesus Is God's "Son"

Jesus was Heavenly Father's firstborn spirit child in heaven. He was begotten by God through Mary as in a "literal, full and complete sense" in the same "sense in which he is the son of Mary" (Bruce McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993], p. 67). These two elements of Jesus

being literally God's son from his uniqueness in Mormon theology. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as on the cross, Jesus atoned for Adam's sin and guaranteed all humankind resurrection and immortality. Jesus visited the Israelites or Indians of North America after his resurrection and established the true church among them. We are the spiritual, but literal, younger brothers and sisters of Christ. Some Mormon documents claim that Jesus was married at Cana in Galilee (see John 2) and had children himself.

**Response:** Jesus is viewed as God, the Word or Son, eternally existent with the Father and worthy of identity as God (see John 1:1-14). He was born of the Virgin Mary who had conceived him supernaturally by the Holy Spirit. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross for the sins of the world, and was raised from the dead. He will come again and reign as Lord of Lords.

### Humans Are Gods in Embryo

Every human being has the potential of becoming a god by keeping the requirements of Mormonism. A well-known statement within Mormonism is, "As man is god once was, as god is man may become." From a prior spirit existence in heaven, humans may be born on earth in order to exercise freedom to choose good or evil and to have a body for the resurrection. Basically, humans are good, but they will be punished for their sin. But by keeping Mormon teaching and obeying the Church and the Prophet, after the resurrection, worthy Mormon males may pass the celestial guards, bring their wives with them, and achieve a status similar to Elohim—the god of this world. The consequences of their sin are erased by their allegiance to the tenets of Mormonism. In resurrection, faithful Mormons receive exaltation to godhood and will exercise dominion over their world.

**Response:** Human beings are God's special creation. There is no evidence from Scripture of preexistence, rather God acknowledges that it was in the womb of our mothers that He formed us (see Isa. 44:2). A sinful nature is part of humanity's experience. Liberation from the power and presence of sin is experienced as a result of faith in Christ. At that point, God's image is begun to be remade in every Christian. While being transformed to Christlikeness, the Bible does not teach literal godhood as the inheritance of the saints (see Rom. 8:29; Rev. 1:5-6).

### Mormon Plan of Salvation

The Mormon plan of salvation is built on the idea that all people have eternal life, but only the most faithful Mormons have godhood or enter the celestial kingdom. In order to obtain this ultimate step, Mormons must exercise faith in the God of Mormonism, its Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; exercise repentance; and be baptized in the LDS Church. Additionally, Mormons must keep the "Word of Wisdom" by abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine; tithe to the church; attend weekly sacrament meetings; support

the Mormon prophet; do temple works; and be active in their support of the church.

**Response:** Salvation, according to the Bible, is due to God's grace and love. He provided Jesus as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. It is through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus that we may be saved. Works are excluded (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 10:9-13; Eph. 2:8-9).

### Witnessing to Mormons

1. Have a basic and clear understanding of the Christian faith and the gospel.
2. Be aware of the unique Mormon doctrines as presented in this belief bulletin.
3. Remember, Mormons use Christian vocabulary (gospel, atonement, god), but radically redefine their meanings. Define clearly what you mean when you use biblical words.
4. Present a clear testimony of your faith in Christ alone for salvation.
5. Show your Mormon friend that the Bible teaches salvation alone through the cross of Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 10:4,10-13; Eph. 2:8-9).
6. Warn the Mormon about trusting in feelings (i.e., the burning in the bosom) for a validation of Mormonism's truth claim. Without historical, objective verification, feelings are useless.
7. When Mormons use a Bible verse, read carefully the verses before and afterward to make clear the exact meaning and purpose of the passage. Don't let them take Bible verses out of context. Read carefully the full reference in the Bible before deciding what any one verse means.
8. Keep the central doctrines of the faith as the focus of your discussion.
9. Share the plan of salvation with your Mormon friend. Emphasize that salvation is a gift to be received, not a merit to be earned.
10. Do the basics: pray, trust the Holy Spirit, and be loving, patient, and steadfast.

### Other Common LDS Terms

**Aaronic Priesthood:** The lesser of the two divisions of the LDS priesthood.

**Bishop:** Presiding high priest of a local LDS ward.

**Endowment:** Ceremony in LDS temples in which worthy members learn sacred (secret) details of the LDS plan of salvation.

**First Presidency:** Highest leadership and authority group in the LDS church. Normally consists of the president of the church and his two counselors.

**Gentiles:** All people who are either not Jewish or not members of the LDS church.

**Godhead:** According to LDS, is three separate divine entities (gods)—the Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. They are united in one purpose.

Gospel: The full system of LDS belief and practice.  
Holy Ghost: Divine entity in LDS godhead who is a personage of spirit.  
Melchizedek Priesthood: The higher of the two divisions of the LDS priesthood.  
Mission: The specific time and place in which a Mormon serves as an LDS missionary.  
Restoration: Refers to Heavenly Father's restoring true Christianity and the true church to the earth through Joseph Smith Jr. in the 1820s and 30s.  
Sacrament: Ordinance in which elements of bread and water are partaken by LDS members in weekly ward services.  
Sealing: Temple services uniting LDS husbands, wives, and children as a family unit for eternity.  
Testimony: A subjective experience that validates the LDS church and doctrine to the Mormon. It is sometimes described as a "burning in the bosom."  
Tithe: Payment of one-tenth of their annual income made by LDS members to the church.

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Phil Roberts, President, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

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# THE MORMON PUZZLE

## Comparison Chart— Mormonism and Christianity

### Introduction:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon church) professes to be a Christian church. However, a careful comparison of basic doctrinal positions of that church to those of historical, biblical Christianity reveal many radical differences. This pamphlet compares Mormon doctrines as stated in LDS authoritative primary sources to those of historic Christianity as derived solely from the Bible.

### The Doctrine of God

#### Historic Christianity

The one God is a spirit who is the personal, eternal, infinite Creator of all that exists. He is the *only* God and necessary for all other things to exist. He exists eternally as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8; Matt. 28:19; John 4:24; 17:3)

#### Mormonism

God (Heavenly Father) is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone. LDS founder Joseph Smith said, “If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345). The trinity is denied with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost seen as three separate entities. “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (Doctrine and Covenants [D&C] 130:22).

## The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

### Historic Christianity

Jesus Christ was the virgin-born God incarnate who existed in all time with the Father and Holy Spirit in the eternal Trinity. As a man He possessed two natures—human and divine. He lived a sinless life and willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sin of all humanity. (John 1:1-18; 8:56-59; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:13-22; Heb.1:3; 13:8)

### Mormonism

Jesus was the spiritual “first born” Son of God in the preexistence. “Every person who was ever born on earth was our spirit brother or sister in heaven. The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ, so he is literally our elder brother” (Gospel Principles [GP], p. 11). “And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn” (D&C 93:21). He is also the “only begotten” physical offspring of God by procreation on earth. “Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father. That is why he is called the Only Begotten Son” (GP, p. 64). His atonement (death and resurrection) provides immortality for all people regardless of their faith. “Christ thus overcame physical death. Because of his atonement, everyone born on this earth will be resurrected . . . This condition is called immortality. All people who ever lived will be resurrected, ‘both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous’ (The Book of Mormon [BOM], Alma 11:44)” (GP, p. 74). (See GP, pp. 11, 17-19, 61-77.)

## The Doctrine of Scriptures and Authority

### Historic Christianity

The Bible (Old and New Testaments) is the unique, revealed, and inspired Word of God. It is the sole authority for faith and practice for Christians. (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21)

### Mormonism

Recognizes the LDS Four Standard Works as authoritative. These include the Bible “as far as it is translated correctly” (Articles of Faith 1:8). It also includes The Book of Mormon (BOM) which Joseph Smith declared is “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 by any other book” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 194).

The church also regards The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) as scripture. It “is a collection of modern revelations . . . regarding The Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored in these last days” (GP, p. 54).

The Pearl of the Great Price (PGP) is the fourth book believed to be inspired. “It clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives added information concerning the creation of the earth” (GP, p. 54).

The church’s President is regarded as “a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet” (D&C 107:91-92).

## The Doctrine of Humanity

### Historic Christianity

Human beings are created in God's image, meaning they have personal qualities similar to God's. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity and worth. (Gen. 1:26-27)

### Mormonism

People are the preexisted spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father and Mother. "All men and women are . . . literally the sons and daughters of Deity . . . Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal (physical) body" (Joseph F. Smith, "The Origin of Man," Improvement Era, Nov. 1909, pp. 78,80, as quoted in GP, p. 11). They are born basically good and are "gods in embryo." A commonly quoted Mormon aphorism (attributed to fifth LDS president Lorenzo Snow) says "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

## The Doctrine of Sin

### Historic Christianity

Human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting his nature and pursuing life opposed to his essential character and revealed law. (Rom. 3:23; 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8-10)

### Mormonism

People sin by disobedience to God's laws. Adam's fall, a part of Heavenly Father's plan, caused a loss of immortality, which was necessary for mankind to advance, (see GP, pp. 31-34). As Eve declared according to LDS scripture, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have . . . known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (PGP, Moses 5:11; see also BOM, 2 Nephi 2:22-25). Each person is responsible for his or her own sin.

## The Doctrine of Salvation

### Historic Christianity

Salvation is release from the guilt and power of sin through God's gift of grace. It is provided through Christ's atonement and received by personal faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. (Rom. 3:20; 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-10)

### Mormonism

Jesus' atonement provided immortality for all people. Exaltation (godhood) is available only to Mormons through obedience to LDS teachings: faith, baptism, endowments, celestial marriage, and tithing. "Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—Wherefore, all things are theirs" (D&C, 76:58-59).

These are some of the blessings given to exalted people:

1. They will live eternally in the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (see D&C, 76).
2. They will become gods.
3. They will have their righteous family members with them and will be able to have spirit children also. These spirit children will have the same relationship to them as we do to our Heavenly Father. They will be an eternal family.
4. They will receive a fulness of joy.
5. They will have everything that our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have—all power, glory, dominion, and knowledge (See GP, p. 302).

Baptism for the dead provides post-mortem salvation for non-Mormons, and is "by immersion performed by a living person for one who is dead. This ordinance is performed in temples" (GP, p. 375). (See also GP, chapters 18-23.)

## The Doctrine of Life after Death

<b>Historic Christianity</b>	<b>Mormonism</b>
<p>Eternal life in heaven with God for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ. Eternal separation from God's presence in hell for the unsaved. (Matt. 5:12-30; 25:41; Rev. 20-22)</p>	<p>One of three levels of glory:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom for faithful Mormons where people may become gods or angels; "Then shall they be gods" (D&amp;C 132:20).</li> <li>2. Terrestrial Kingdom for righteous non-Mormons; "These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness" (D&amp;C 76:75-76).</li> <li>3. Telestial Kingdom for wicked and ungodly (not hell); "These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers . . . who suffer the wrath of God on earth" (D&amp;C 76:103-104). (See also D&amp;C 76:57-119; 131:1-4.)</li> </ol>

## The Doctrine of the Church

<b>Historic Christianity</b>	<b>Mormonism</b>
<p>Christians congregate together in local bodies and along denominational lines sharing distinctive doctrinal and ecclesiastical concepts. There is no organization or denomination that can claim exclusive designation as the "one true church." The universal church consists of all the redeemed in Jesus Christ in all of the ages. (Matt. 16:15-19; 1 Cor. 1:12-14; Eph. 2:19; 4:11-12).</p>	<p>Asserts that the LDS is the one true church on the face of the earth. Joseph Smith claimed Jesus Christ told him to join none of the existing denominations because "they were all wrong . . . that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt" (PGP: Joseph Smith—History 1:19-20). Mormons claim only the LDS possesses the divine authority of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood as restored by God to Joseph Smith in 1829. (D&amp;C 13; 27:8-13; 107:1-20; PGP: Joseph Smith—History 1:68-73)</p>

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