

Mormonism

All material taken from Josh McDowell & Don Stewart's Handbook of Today's Religions, Fritz Ridenour's So What's the Difference?, & the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention's *Interfaith Evangelism Belief Bulletin*

Miscellany

- Worldwide: 11 million in 25,915 wards & branches in 162 countries; United States: 5.1 million
- Official Name: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)
- Founder: Joseph Smith Jr., on April 6, 1830
- Headquarters: Salt Lake City, Utah

History

- Joseph Smith, Jr. b. 1805 in Sharon, VT
- Family moved to Palmyra, NY 1817
- Most family members joined Presbyterian Church, but Joseph undecided
- Disenchantment w/denominational divisions

The First Vision

- 1820 Christian revival in Palmyra
- Some vying for Methodism, some for Presbyterianism, & some for Baptist faith
- Smith sought the Lord's help re: which denomination was the right one
- God's alleged answer: none of them; all of the creeds an abomination, & those who profess them are corrupt

The Second Vision

- September 21, 1823
- Moroni appears
- Prophecy of Smith's role & name
- Hidden stone box in Palmyra
 - Book on gold plates: account of former inhabitants; fullness of the Gospel as delivered by Jesus to the ancient inhabitants
 - Breastplate & Urim & Thummim
 - can't access them for 4 yrs.; meet w/Moroni 1x/yr.

History

- Moved to father-in-law's house, Harmony, PA
- Began to copy characters off the plate w/ supposed divine help
- Told his financier that writing was “reformed Egyptian”
- Translation completed & placed on sale March 26, 1830

History

- April 6, 1830: “the church of Christ” officially organized in Fayette, NY w/6 members
- Name eventually changed to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, numbers increased rapidly, & group moved to Kirtland, OH, where Joseph supervised 1st printing of revelations he had received
 - *Book of Commandments*; after many revisions, now called *Doctrine and Covenants*
 - Revised (w/“divine aid”) KJV

History

- Move westward & accompanying strife
- Imprisonment in Far West, MS
- Escape & move to Nauvoo, IL
 - Organization of small army w/Smith as Lieutenant-General
 - Building of temple & evangelism
 - Destruction of *Nauvoo Expositor*
 - Smith's arrest & death (June 27, 1844)

History

- Leadership went to Brigham Young, the President of the Twelve Apostles
- Convinced many he was the rightful successor
- Journey westward & accompanying strife
- Arrival at Salt Lake Valley, UT, July 24, 1847
- Headquarters ever since
- Young died in 1877, with numbers around 150,000 members

Claims of Mormonism

- Not Protestant or Catholic, but restoration of the true Church of Jesus Christ
- Only true Church: “If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation outside of the [LDS]”
- “No salvation without accepting Joseph Smith...If Joseph Smith was verily a prophet, and if he told the truth...then this knowledge is of the most vital importance to the entire world. No man can reject that testimony without incurring the most dreadful consequences, for he can not enter the Kingdom of God.”

Sources of Authority: The Bible

- Mormon articles of faith: “We believe the Bible to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly...”
- Correct translation impossible b/c RC Church has taken away from the Word; open door for non-biblical teaching
 - “...many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away...that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26b, 27).
- Orson Pratt, early Mormon apostle: “Who knows that even one verse of the Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original?”
- More trust in other, “non-polluted” sacred books

Sources of Authority: The Book of Mormon

- Considered to be inspired of God: “We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the Word of God” (*Articles of Faith*, Section Eight)
- Supposedly an account of the original inhabitants of America to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection
- Historicity of the claims simply not valid in any way, shape, or form; contrast w/Scripture & archaeology

Sources of Authority: Doctrine and Covenants & The Pearl of Great Price

- *D & C* is a record of 138 revelations that give us some of Mormonism's distinctive doctrines such as baptism for the dead & celestial marriage
- *The Pearl* contains...
 - *The Book of Moses*, which is roughly equivalent to the 1st 6 chapters of Genesis
 - *The Book of Abraham*, a translation of an Egyptian Papyrus, which was later proved to be fraudulent; also teaches black people are cursed
 - An extract from Smith's translation of the Bible
 - Extracts from his autobiography, the *History of Joseph Smith*
 - the *Articles of Faith*

Sources of Authority: The Living Prophets

- Head of the Church: “[M]ore vital to [Mormons] than the standard works.”
- “Any [LDS] who denounces or opposes, whether actively or otherwise, any plan or doctrine advocated by the prophets, seers, and revelators of the Church is cultivating the spirit of apostasy...Lucifer...wins a great victory when he can get members of the Church to speak against their leaders and to do their own thinking...When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan—it is God’s plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give directions, it should mark the end of the controversy.”

Beliefs about God

- “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost” (*Pearl & Articles of Faith*)
- Impression they are Trinitarians, but incorrect
- Belief in many gods (Mormon males who have attained this status)
- Belief that God the Father was once a man
- Smith: “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.”—*contrast Jn. 17:3*

Beliefs about God

- Smith: “In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create and populate the world and people it.”
- Smith: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.”
- Smith: “As Man is, God was...As God is, Man may become.”
- Contrast w/Is. 43:10 (only One God) & 1 Cor. 8:4 (all idols are useless & false)

Beliefs about Jesus Christ

- Was a preexistent spirit like the rest of us
- All people are literally brothers & sisters of Jesus, though He is set apart as the firstborn of God's spirit-children:
 - “And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn; and all those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn. Ye were also in the beginning with the Father” (*D & C*).

Beliefs about Jesus Christ

- Not the unique Son of God, but a manifestation of the Divine (i.e. He had a spark of Deity, and we do, too):
 - “His humanity is to be recognized as real and ordinary —whatever happened to Him may happen to any one of us.”
- Visited the Israelites or Indians of North America after his resurrection & established the true church among them

Beliefs about Humanity

- Humans are preexistent souls who take body at birth
- “Man is a spirit clothed with a tabernacle. The intelligent part of which was never created or made, but existed eternally—man was also in the beginning with God.”
- “He [man] existed before he came to earth: He was with God ‘in the beginning.’ Man’s destiny is divine. Man is an eternal being. He also is ‘everlasting to everlasting.’”
- Contrast w/John 1:14 & Colossians 1:15: Jesus as unique Son of God
- Mormon teaching is blasphemous & idolatrous (cf. Rom. 1:22-25)

Beliefs about Salvation

- Articles 2 & 3, *Mormon Articles of Faith*:
 - No. 2: “We believe that men shall be punished for their own sins and not for Adam’s transgression.” Sin = acts only, not nature
 - No. 3: “We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”
- Extent of the Atonement is universal, leading to a general salvation for all humanity & an individual salvation for each person
- No such thing as heaven or hell

Beliefs about Salvation

- Everyone eventually goes to 1 of 3 levels of glory:
 - Celestial kingdom: for Melchizedek priesthood members who will become gods
 - Terrestrial kingdom: for those who failed the requirements of exaltation
 - Telestial kingdom: for those who do not believe in Christ
- “Believe in God, believe in Jesus, and believe in Joseph his prophet, and Brigham his successor...you shall be saved.”
- Contrast w/Eph. 2:8-10 (free gift w/good works the natural outflow of salvation) & Jn. 6:28-29 (“work of God” = *believing* in Jesus)

Beliefs about Salvation

- One must exercise repentance & be baptized in the LDS Church
- Mormons must keep the “Word of Wisdom” by abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine
- Mormons must tithe to the church, attend weekly sacrament (bread & water) meetings, support the Mormon prophet, do temple works, & be active in their support of the church

Changes in the Book of Mormon

- Smith re: *BOM*: “the most correct book on earth.”
- However, “most” correct book has, from 1830 edition to modern edition, undergone 3,000+ changes
- Why change something that was supposedly translated by the power of God & is the “most” correct book on earth?

The Book of Mormon & Archaeology

- No *BOM* cities located
- No *BOM* names found in New World inscriptions
- No genuine inscriptions in Hebrew found in America
- No genuine inscriptions in Egyptian or anything similar to Egyptian (corresponding to Smith's "reformed Egyptian") found in America
- No ancient copies of *BOM* scriptures found

The Book of Mormon & Archaeology

- No ancient inscriptions of any kind, which indicate ancient inhabitants had Hebrew or Christian beliefs, found in America
- No mention of *BOM* persons, nations, or places found
- No artifact of any kind found that demonstrates veracity of *BOM*
- Rather than finding supporting evidence, Mormon scholars have been forced to retreat from traditional interpretations of *BOM* statements

The Book of Mormon & Archaeology

- 1 Nephi 2:5-8 & Laman river emptying into Red Sea
- 2 Nephi 5
 - vv. 5-6, 21: families of Lehi, Ishmael, & Zoram left in Jerusalem in 600 B.C. to migrate to New World. Moreover, 20 total people = adults plus 3 or 4 girls
 - v. 28: in less than 30 yrs. they had multiplied so much that they divided up into 2 nations! After arriving in America in 589 B.C., they built a temple like Solomon's in 19 yrs.
 - Contrast w/1 Ki. 5:13, 15; 6:1, 38; 9:20, 21; 2 Ch. 2:2, 17, 18: temple required 153,000 workers & 30,000 overseers, taking 7.5 yrs. Hard to believe children could do this. Also, where did the iron, brass, gold, silver, etc. come from in 6th c. B.C. America?

The Book of Mormon & Archaeology

- Alma 7:10: Jesus to be born in Jerusalem, not Bethlehem
- Alma 46:15: believers called “Christians” in 73 B.C. Acts 11:26 teaches this didn’t occur until Antioch. How are people called Christ-ians decades before Christ was born?
- Citation & date discrepancies of Mormon scriptures supposedly in possession of Nephites in 600 B.C.:
 - Numerous quotes from or allusions to exilic or post-exilic books
 - Parallels or word-for-word quotes from New Testament

The Book of Mormon & Archaeology

- Exposed fraud of the Book of Abraham from *The Pearl of Great Price*:
 - Supposedly translated from an ancient Egyptian papyrus found in mummy wrappings; Smith subsequently purchased mummies
 - Smith believed he had divinely received gift of interpreting ancient Egyptian. Soon “realized” Abraham wrote one of the rolls, even signing it himself
 - Published writings & accompanying drawings in 1842
 - present-day Egyptologists say not a single word by Smith bears any resemblance to the Egyptian words actually on the scrolls
 - Pix & vocab from Ptolemaic period, & same genre as the Book of the Dead

False Prophecies

- Jews will never be back in their land until they believe in Christ. 1947 proves that to be false.
- A temple would be built in Zion (i.e. Jackson, MS) during his generation. 150 yrs. after his generation & still no temple
- Smith prophesied falsely; God never prophecies falsely
- 2 tests for a self-proclaimed prophet (Deut. 13:1-4; 18:18-22):
 - Deut. 13: all prophets must point us toward Yahweh
 - Deut. 18: prophecies must be true *100%* of the time

Common LDS Terms

- **Aaronic Priesthood:** The lesser of the two divisions of the LDS priesthood.
- **Adam:** Said to be the God of this earth. Taught by Brigham Young, but now denied by LDS church
- **Apostles:** In Mormonism, there are twelve apostles in the Melchizedek priesthood, who are subordinate to the President of the Mormon Church.
- **Atonement:** Jesus' atonement is not sufficient to cleanse all sins. Some sins must be atoned for by the individual. Early LDS teachings said one's own blood was to be spilt.

Common LDS Terms

- **Baptism for the Dead:** LDS believes baptism is necessary for salvation, so even the dead must be baptized by proxy, performed by living relatives.
- **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 & authority group in the LDS church. Normally consists of the president of the church & his two counselors.
- **Gentiles:** All people who are either not Jewish or not members of the LDS church.

Common LDS Terms

- **Godhead:** According to LDS, is three separate divine entities (gods)—the Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, & the Holy Ghost. They are united in one purpose.
- **Gospel:** The full system of LDS belief & practice.
- **High Priests:** In Mormonism, the 4th level of the Melchizedek priesthood, consisting of Mormon stake presidents
- **Holy Ghost:** Divine entity in LDS godhead who is a personage of spirit.
- **Lamanites:** According to the *BOM*, the ancestors of the Native Americans & their spiritual activities
- **Lucifer:** According to Mormonism, spirit-brother of Jesus & the second-born creature of God after Jesus

Common LDS Terms

- **Manuscript Found:** a novel (1812-1814) by Solomon Spaulding which many believe was later plagiarized by Joseph Smith to form the *BOM*
- **Melchizedek Priesthood:** The higher of the two divisions of the LDS priesthood.
- **Mission:** The specific time & place in which a Mormon serves as an LDS missionary.
- **Nephites:** One of the groups of people who came to America from the Middle East
- **Restoration:** Refers to Heavenly Father's restoring true Christianity and the true church to the earth through Joseph Smith Jr. in the 1820s & 30s.

Common LDS Terms

- Sealing: Temple services uniting LDS husbands, wives, & 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.

Evangelism

- Have a basic & clear understanding of the Christian faith & the gospel.
- Be aware of the unique Mormon doctrines
- Remember, Mormons use Christian vocabulary (gospel, atonement, god), but radically redefine their meanings. Define clearly what you mean when you use biblical words.
- Present a clear testimony of your faith in *Christ alone* for salvation.
- 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).

Evangelism

- Warn your Mormon friend about trusting in feelings (i.e., the burning in the bosom) for a validation of any truth claim. Without historical, objective verification, feelings are useless.
- When Mormons use a Bible verse, read carefully the verses before & afterward to make clear the exact meaning & purpose of the passage. Don't let them take Bible verses out of context.
- Keep the central doctrines of the faith as the focus of your discussion.
- Share the plan of salvation, emphasizing that salvation is a gift to be received, not a merit to be earned.
- Pray, trust the Holy Spirit, & be loving, patient, & steadfast.