

## A Biblical Perspective on Mormonism

By Chuck May

- *Is Mormonism a Christian cult or a Christian denomination?*
- *What do Mormons believe about God and man?*
- *Do Mormons believe in Jesus?*

### The History of Mormonism

Mormonism, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), was founded by Joseph Smith in 1827 in New York State. According to Mr. Smith, he was given golden tablets by an angel and was assigned the task of translating these tablets. These would reveal the truth of Christianity because, according to the angels, all of the denominations at that time were thoroughly corrupt and should not be followed. The translation of these tablets is known today as the Book of Mormon (BOM). Because none of the denominations were to be trusted, Smith and his followers set out to form the true church of Jesus Christ, based on Smith's direct revelation from God. While living in the Midwest with his growing church, Smith was killed in Illinois by local townspeople who were disgusted with him and his new religion. Brigham Young became the new leader, who led the Mormons to Salt Lake City, Utah where they have grown greatly. Today, Mormonism is an extensive organization with tenacious missionary efforts, tremendous wealth and political influence.

### The Theology of Mormonism

#### Scripture/Authority

In contrast to biblical Christianity, Mormons believe there are four inspired books: the Bible, the BOM, Doctrine and Covenants (D&C), and The Pearl of Great Price (PGP). Mormons grant the highest authority to the BOM. The BOM is called the inerrant word of God in both its tablet form and the translation done by Smith. The Bible is also called inspired but only in its revised form. Smith said the Bible is, "the Word of God" when it is translated correctly. The only correct translation, according to the Mormons, is the one done by Joseph Smith. The Mormon teaching on the evangelicals' Bible is that it is neither accurate nor complete. In fact, Mormon leaders have proclaimed the Bible we possess to be completely corrupted in the essential elements of the Gospel, which they believe was restored in the BOM and other revelations by Smith. Because of the severe errors in the manuscripts of the Bible, Smith was commissioned by God to write an "inspired version" of the King James Bible. In this version, Smith makes hundreds of changes without the support of any Greek or Hebrew manuscript evidence. (On the basis of even the most liberal approach to translation, this is at best ad-libbing). A major problem Mormons have with their view of Scriptures is that in many places the BOM directly contradicts the "inspired" version of the Bible which Smith produced. This begs the question, If both of these books are inerrant, why do they contradict in what they teach? Besides the authoritative books, the Mormons believe that the presiding president of the Mormon Church receives revelation directly from God on an ongoing basis. This revelation is considered to be infallible.

#### The Doctrine of God

Because there are several doctrinal sources, it is difficult to determine precisely what the Mormons believe about God. For example, the BOM teaches a Judaic monotheism while the equally authoritative PGP teaches that more than one God exists and that these gods are finite. The LDS church currently teaches God is: (1) a contingent being who was at one time not God, (2) finite in power, knowledge and being, (3) one of many gods, (4) a bodily being who physically dwells in a specific place, (5) a being who is subject to the laws of a beginningless universe with an infinite number of entities in it, and (6) not a trinity. The contemporary Mormon concept of God is best understood by the Mormon world view. Mormonism teaches that God the Father is a resurrected (exalted) human being named Elohim who was at one time a mortal on another planet who attained godhood by obeying the precepts of the God of his planet. Likewise, we too, may become gods by obeying the God of this planet. The fifth president of the Mormon Church gave this formula, "As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become." All humans have the potential to become Gods and instructing humans to become God is the whole point of this cult.

## Christ

In Mormon theology, Christ is Jehovah, the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. Jehovah preexisted his incarnation as Jesus, but is not eternal. All other humans are also spirit children of Elohim; human souls also preexisted and are not eternal. In Mormon theology the difference between Jesus Christ and us is one of degree not of kind. The Mormon Church calls Jesus our elder brother. Also included among the sons of Elohim are the devil and the demons. We are all brothers. When Jesus came to Earth He was conceived, not by the Holy Spirit, but via a sexual union between Mary and one of two persons, Adam or Elohim--a debate exists among Mormon scholars as to which one it was. Jesus entered into polygamous marriage. This was absolutely necessary for him to achieve deity, as we will read later.

## Salvation

Christ's death and resurrection affects two different kinds of salvation.

(1) General salvation. By Jesus' death and resurrection He provided the basis for all mankind to be resurrected (re-enter spirit life). This is necessary because, when Adam and Eve sinned, they left their purely spiritual state and became physical beings. So all men, whether they want it or not, are released from mortality and live forever (not all in heaven). This General Salvation provides atonement for Adam's sin only, leaving us responsible for our own sins. The official Gospel Principles manual tells us that Jesus "became our savior and he did his part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to each of us to do our part and to become worthy of exaltation."

2) Individual Salvation. This is given to those who believe in Mormonism and are obedient to the commandments of the church. In this case, justification is based on works. Justification by faith has been called by Mormon theologians a "pernicious doctrine" (M&N, 195). There are different levels of salvation (heaven). The highest is attainment of godhood. You only get there by being super obedient to the commandments. This is called the celestial kingdom. The second highest level, called the terrestrial kingdom, is for those who were not quite good enough to be gods. These aren't necessarily Mormons. Any "good" person can be there. Inhabitants of this kingdom "will enjoy the presence of the son but not the fullness of the father" (M&N, 189) and exercise power over the third level of heaven. The third level, called the telestial kingdom, is a sort of purgatory until the people there achieve a higher level of heaven. The Mormons believe in hell. Hell is the place where Satan and his demons are. Also in hell are those who have left the Mormon Church. Because of this belief, it is far better to never join the LDS at all than to become a member and then leave.

## Differences between Biblical Christianity and Mormonism

Here is a list of things the Mormon church denies which classical Christianity affirms.

1. The singular authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16)
2. The spiritual nature and the transcendence and immutability of God (John 4:24; Malachi 3:6)
3. Ex-nihilo creation (Genesis 1)
4. The distinction between Creator and creature (the entire Bible)
5. The deity of Christ (John 6)
6. Monotheism (Deuteronomy 6)
7. Man's soul does not preexist his incarnation (Psalm 139)
8. Man shall not worship created beings (Romans 1:25)
9. Substitutionary atonement of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21)
10. Justification by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9)
11. The fall of man in sin (Genesis 3)
12. Original sin (Genesis 3)
13. Many more

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** *Is Mormonism a Christian cult or a Christian denomination?*

**A:** Mormonism denies and perverts every doctrine of classical Christianity. Therefore it can only be called a cult.

**Q:** *What do Mormons believe about God and man?*

**A:** As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.

**Q:** *Do Mormons believe in Jesus?*

**A:** They do believe in a Jesus, but he is nothing like the Jesus of the true Bible.

[Much of this material is taken from Mather & Nichols, "Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult."]