

# **Latter-day Saints—(The Mormons)**

## **How Do Their Beliefs Regarding the Nature of God and Salvation compare with Biblical Christianity?**

by Dr. James Bjornstad

### **History**

What prompted Joseph Smith, Jr., to formulate the religion we know today as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or Mormonism)? According to Mormon history, Joseph Smith had a vision in 1820 in which he saw and heard the following:

**It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty....I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head.... When the light rested upon me I saw two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spoke unto me, calling me by name, and said, (pointing to the other), "This is my beloved Son, hear him".... I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right... I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight..." (Times 3: 728, 748).**

By April of 1844, when he preached at the funeral of Elder King Follet, Joseph Smith's theology was becoming clear. This is a portion of that message, which was heard by more than 18,000 people and recorded by four Mormon scribes:

**I want you all to know God, to be familiar with him....What sort of a being was God in the beginning? First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, is a man like unto one of yourselves....I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple and first principles of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another, and that God himself, the Father of us all dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did....Here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves... by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power... (Times August 15, 1844, 613-614).**

### **Theology**

Major points of Mormon theology may be summarized as follows:

#### **A. Ultimate Reality**

1. Matter and intelligences, the basic elements of all the worlds, are eternal (Doctrines 93:33; cf. Smith, Teachings 350-352).
2. There is an infinite regress of gods producing other [potential] gods. No divine first cause exists.

#### **B. God**

1. The God of Earth [Elohim], our heavenly Father, is an exalted man who has a tangible human body. He came to be God through what is called "eternal progression."

**Mormon prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. He became God—an exalted being—through obedience to the same eternal Gospel that we are given opportunity today to obey (Hunter, Gospel 104).**

2. God our heavenly Father is married to a multitude of wives, one of which is Jesus' heavenly Mother.
3. There are many gods in other planets and in other universes.

**If we should take a million of worlds like this and number their particles, we shall find that there are more gods than there are particles of matter in those worlds (Journal 2: 345).**

4. The Trinity [Father, Son, and Holy Ghost] consists of three separate and distinct gods.

**Three distinct personages and three gods (Smith, Teachings 370).**

5. The Holy Ghost is distinct from the Holy Spirit
  - a. The Holy Ghost is a spirit child of the heavenly Father and a heavenly Mother. He does not yet have a body.

**The Holy Ghost is yet a spiritual being and waiting to take to himself a body as the Savior did or as gods before them took bodies (Lundwall, Discourses 73).**

- b. The Holy Spirit is God's impersonal force by which he governs His dominions.

**The chief agent or agency by which the Holy Ghost accomplishes his work is usually spoken of as the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God. It is a universe-filling medium or influence (Widtsoe, Evidences 62).**

6. Man can become god.

**As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be (Talmage, Articles 430).**

### **C. Creation**

The gods counseled together and created the present world order *ex materia* [out of pre-existent matter].

### **D. Jesus Christ**

1. In heaven, Jesus was the firstborn spirit child of the heavenly Father and a heavenly mother. He is our elder brother. His name was Jehovah. He is also the brother of Lucifer, who became the devil. (Pearl, 4: 1-4).

**All men lived in a pre-existent estate before they were born into this world; all were born in pre-existence as the spirit children of the Father. Christ was the Firstborn Spirit Child (What the MORMONS think of CHRIST, 35-36).**

2. On earth, Jesus was the product of a sexual relationship between God and Mary.

**When the virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him... He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who was the Father? ...Jesus our eldest brother was begotten in the flesh by...our Father in heaven (Journal 1: 50-51).**

3. Conceivably, Jesus was married [to fulfill one of the requirements for exaltation] and had children.

**He was married “both to Mary and to Martha, whereby he could see his seed before he was crucified” (Hyde, Seer 159; cf. Journal 2: 82).**

4. Jesus’ death on the cross made it possible for all men of every age to be resurrected. It is not sufficient to pay the price for all sin.

**There is not a man or woman who violates covenants made with their God that will not be required to pay their debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out. Your own blood must atone for it; the judgments of the Almighty will come sooner or later, and every man and woman will have to atone for their covenant (Journal 3: 247; cf. 4: 219-220).**

5. Jesus was resurrected physically from the dead. He ascended visibly into heaven and will return visibly to earth one day.
6. Jesus is our prototype. What Jesus was, we were [spirits procreated by the heavenly Father and a heavenly Mother]. As Jesus became a god, so male Mormons can become gods.

**Jesus became a God and reached His great state of understanding through consistent effort and continuous obedience to all the Gospel truths and universal laws (Hunter, Gospel 51).**

## **E. Salvation**

1. LDS salvation can be divided into two categories:

- a. Unconditional or general salvation = Resurrection.

All, with the exception of the sons of perdition, will be physically resurrected.

- b. Conditional or personal salvation = Exaltation.

The requirements for exaltation include:

(1) Faith in Jesus Christ.

(2) Repentance.

(3) Baptism—The beginning of the process of moving toward godhood; when one is born again.

(4) Laying on of hands—The ceremony for conferring the priesthood, indicating a transfer of authority and power.

(5) Church membership—One cannot be saved [attain exaltation] outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

(6) Keeping the commandments (Ten Commandments, Word of Wisdom, tithing, gaining knowledge, being fruitful and multiplying, doing good works in general, and obeying all commands and directives given by the leaders of the Mormon Church).

(7) Accepting Joseph Smith, Jr. and his successors as “God’s mouthpiece.”

(8) Temple work—Marriage, genealogical work, and saving ordinances (proxy baptism, sealings, ordination, and endowments).

2. Upon death, Mormon salvation provides admittance, through resurrection, into one of three kingdoms:

- a. Telestial kingdom—The lowest of the three kingdoms where an endless host of people will dwell, including murderers, adulterers, and thieves

- b. Terrestrial kingdom—The second of the kingdoms where those who were “honorable” people, but who did not accept the Mormon gospel in this life, will dwell.

- c. Celestial—The highest of the three kingdoms is reserved for Mormons in good standing. There are three levels in this kingdom and only those who have been completely

obedient to Mormon teaching, including marriage in a Mormon temple, may have part in the highest heaven. They will enter it in family units and become gods.

## **Witnessing**

When you have opportunity to witness to a Mormon, these tips and Scriptures should be helpful to you:

### A. Some helpful hints

1. Begin with a positive witness for Christ.
2. If Mormons say they believe like you, ask them to define or explain their statements.
3. Let Mormons see your loving concern for their eternal welfare. Your attitude can often make more of an impact than your scriptural expertise.
4. Use the Bible for your study with Mormons. If challenged, consider the following response: If Mormonism is a “restoration” of Christ’s church [as Mormonism claims], it will agree with the Bible.

### B. Theological focus

#### *1. Focus on God*

- a. There is only one true God (Deut. 6:4; Isaiah 43:10; 44:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22; 1 Cor. 8:4-6).
- b. God was never a man (Psalm 90:2; Hosea 11:9).
- c. God is Spirit. He does not have a physical body (John 4:24; cf. Luke 24:39).
- d. God is Triune.

#### *2. Focus on Jesus Christ*

- a. Jesus is not a man who earned godhood, but God who became man (John 1:1, 14).
- b. Jesus did not come primarily to provide resurrection, but to save sinners (Mark 10:45; John 10:11, 14, 18).

#### *3. Focus on salvation*

- a. Every person is lost, alienated from God (Rom 5:12; 3:23, 26).
- b. No person can save himself (Isaiah 64:6; Gal 2:16; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5).
- c. Salvation is a gift from God to be received by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

#### *4. An example of how to present the Gospel to a Mormon:*

- a. Ask a Mormon what he believes about God. E.g. does he accept the statement “As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become?” Or, is God a physical being? Is He married? Is there more than one God?
- b. Ask “What if I could show you that the Bible does not teach what you [and the Mormon Church] believe about God?” For example, regarding the Mormon claim that there are many gods:

(1) God Himself says that there is only one God (e.g. Isa 43:10; 44:8; 45:5).

(2) Men may make gods out of angels, wood, stone, metal and flesh, but these are not God by nature (1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 4:8), only mere counterfeits of Him Who is the Original or, as Jesus Christ put it, “the one and only God” (John 5:44).

- c. If necessary, ask “What if I could show you that the Book of Mormon does not teach what you [and the Mormon Church] believe about God?” For example, regarding Mormon claims that there are many gods, that God was once a man, and that God has a physical body:

(1) There is only one true God (Alma 11:28-29, 38-39).

(2) God is unchanging (Mormon 9:9-11, 19; Moroni 7:22; 8:18).

(3) God is Spirit (Alma 18:24-28, 33-34; 22:9-11).

(4) God is Triune (2 Nephi 31:21; cf. also the last sentence of “The Testimony of Three Witnesses” in the Book of Mormon).

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### **B. Tracts**

Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, St. Louis, MO 63136

Mormonism Research Ministry, P.O. Box 20705, El Cajon, CA 92021-0955

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