

STATEMENT: DM550

THE BASICS OF MORMONISM

by Hank Hanegraaff

The saga of Mormonism began in 1820, when a young man named Joseph Smith, Jr., purportedly experienced a spectacular vision. Two celestial personages appeared to him, claiming *all* existing churches were wrong, *all* their creeds were an abomination, and *all* their professors were corrupt.¹ These beings made it clear to Joseph that he had been chosen to *restore*, rather than *reform* a church that had disappeared from the face of the earth.

In 1823 the angel Moroni was said to have visited young Joseph and divulged the location of gold plates containing the “fullness of the everlasting gospel.” These plates — abridged by Moroni and his father, Mormon,² fourteen hundred years earlier — were written in “reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics.” Smith supposedly found, buried along with the plates, a pair of magical eyeglasses³ that he used to translate the cryptic writing into English. The result was a new revelation called the Book of Mormon⁴ and a new religion called Mormonism.

Organizationally, Mormonism began when John the Baptist allegedly ordained Smith and Oliver Cowdery (a schoolteacher who assisted Smith by transcribing the inscriptions on the gold plates) to the Aaronic priesthood. Subsequent to the appearance of John the Baptist, the apostles Peter, James, and John were said to have conferred the Melchizedek priesthood and apostleship on Smith and Cowdery, giving them the authority to act on behalf of Jesus Christ in this last dispensation.⁵ On April 6, 1830, the Mormon church was officially launched.

Revelations in Mormonism are not relegated to personal appearances by angels like Moroni⁶ or apostles like Peter. However, the Mormon church claims three volumes of Scripture, or “standard works,” in addition to the Bible. The foremost of these revelations is the Book of Mormon, purportedly “*the record of God’s dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas*” which “*contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel.*”⁷ Mormons believe the prophet Ezekiel was talking about the Book of Mormon when he alluded to the stick of Joseph (Ezek. 37:16ff).⁸

How millions can take the Book of Mormon seriously is almost beyond comprehension. While Smith referred to it as “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion,”⁹ its flaws run the gamut from the *serious* to the *silly*. In the category of serious we find that Ether 3:14 (“Behold, I am Jesus Christ, I am the Father and the

Son”) is modalistic and militates against Trinitarian theology, while Alma 11:44 (“Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God”) is basically consistent with the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

In the category of silly is the account in Alma 44 of a man who becomes irate after being scalped and stirs up his soldiers to fight “more powerfully.” And in Ether 15 we read of a man who struggles to catch his breath after having his head cut off. The Book of Mormon has now been altered over 4,000 times to compensate for Smith’s poor command of English, as well as for the numerous errors and inconsistencies it presented.

Doctrine and Covenants — a compilation of alleged divine revelations given to the Mormon church— is equally problematic. Among the far-fetched revelations it has foisted on humanity is the doctrine of polygamy. It was not until the Mormons were threatened with exile that their president, Wilford Woodruff, received a revelation relegating polygamy to the afterlife.

The third extra-biblical revelation in the Mormon Canon— namely, the Pearl of Great Price — is no less troubling. It was used for years by Mormons to prevent African-Americans from entering their priesthood and consequently from being exalted to godhood in the system’s celestial kingdom. Mormon prophet Brigham Young went so far as to declare that the reason “Negroes” have a “flat nose and black skin” is because God had put a curse on them.¹⁰ While these and other aberrations pose a serious threat to Mormon credibility, it is the organization’s deviations from essential Christian doctrine which ultimately define it as a non-Christian cult. Major Mormon theological travesties begin with the denial of Christ’s deity. In fact, Christ, according to Mormon theology, has the dubious distinction of being Lucifer’s spirit brother. In addition, Mormonism denies:

- the doctrine of original sin, teaching instead that men and women are, in reality, gods in embryo;
- Christ’s preservation of His church, teaching instead that the true church vanished from the earth after the death of the apostles, and that Joseph Smith had to restore it with his “*latter-day saints*;”
- the Trinity, affirming instead that God the Father and Jesus have bodies of “*flesh and bone*,” that the Holy Spirit is “*a personage of Spirit*,”¹¹ and that the Trinity is pagan in origin;
- the inerrancy of Scripture, teaching instead that the Bible can be trusted only as far it is translated correctly;¹²
- Christ was begotten by the Holy Ghost in His incarnation, teaching instead that God the Father sex with Mary,¹³ “instead letting any other man do it;”¹⁴
- the immutability of God, affirming instead that God was “perhaps once child, and mortal like we ourselves;”¹⁵

- the biblical concept of hell, teaching that all can be rescued, except for “sons of perdition” — those who, like the author of this volume, are apostate Mormons.

Oath-taking is yet another problem with Mormonism. Temple Mormons, for example, once swore never to reveal their secret rituals on penalty that our throats be cut from ear to ear and our tongues torn out by their roots.” Although this and other violent oaths were altered during the first half of the twentieth century, and removed from the ritual just recently, they are an enduring reminder of the ferocious secrecy in which Mormon temple rituals are shrouded.

The “new and everlasting covenant” of plural marriage is perhaps the best example of Mormon equivocation. In 1890, under threat of exile to Mexico, Mormons officially abolished polygamy in the earthly realm. However, in secret temple ceremonies, Mormon males continue to be sealed to multiple wives — in the heavenly realm.¹⁶ Thus, the earthly practice of polygamy, publicly promoted by Brigham Young (who personally had 27 wives and 52 children), is now promised to those who attain the highest level of the celestial kingdom. Like their Heavenly Father, Mormon males may hope to one day, too, rule their own personal planets and enjoy endless, celestial sex with multiple goddess wives.

Even this cursory overview of Mormon history and theology should make it abundantly clear that while Mormons use Christian terminology, both the roots and fruits of their religion are decidedly unbiblical. It is crucial that Christians learn to scale the Mormon language barrier. It is my prayer that, in the process, you will become so familiar with the truth that when counterfeits loom on the horizon you will be able to recognize them instantaneously.

— Hank Hanegraaff

- Adapted from the foreword to *Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism* (Harvest House, 1995). Used by permission.

NOTES

- 1 The Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith— History 1:18-19.
- 2 According to Joseph Smith, the word Mormon “means, literally, more good.” Smith wrote that “mor” is simply a contraction of the word “more” and that “mon” is the Egyptian word for “good.” Quoted in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 276. Cf. Joseph Smith, Jr. *History of the Church*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978; reprint), 5:400.
- 3 Described as two stones in silver bows called the Urim and Thummim in the Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith — History 1:35; cf. v. 62.
- 4 The Book of Mormon contains an apocryphal account of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas. They were divided into three groups: the Jaredites, the Nephites, and the Lamanites. The Lamanites are purportedly the principal ancestors of the American Indians.

- 5 Doctrine and Covenants 27:12-13.
- 6 It should be noted that Moroni, for some inexplicable reason, did *not* achieve godhood, but had merely become a resurrected angel.
- 7 The Book of Mormon, introduction.
- 8 According to Mormonism, the “stick of Judah” is the Bible and the “stick of Joseph” the Book of Mormon. The joining of these “sticks” symbolizes the joining of the two writings.
- 9 Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461. Cf. The Book of Mormon, introduction.
- 10 See, for example, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290-91.
- 11 Doctrine and Covenants, 130:22.
- 12 8th Article of Faith.
- 13 See Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 547.
- 14 Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:218.
- 15 Orson Hyde in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:123.
- 16 Recent Mormon President Howard W. Hunter for example, was sealed to both of his wives, but not while both were living.