

# WHAT DO MORMONS BELIEVE?

## I. About Joseph Smith?

### A. *Mormon perspective.*

1. There are two opposite conclusions re Joseph according to Mormons.

- a) "Joseph Smith was either a true prophet or a conscious fraud or villain." B.H. Roberts (1907), Mormon apologist, First Council of the Seventy. B.H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* (SLC: *Deseret News*, 1986), p. 82, vol. 1, p. 59.
- b) Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (SLC: Deseret Book Co., 1977), pp. 345-46: "Joseph Smith must be accepted either as a prophet of God or else as a charlatan."
- c) Mormons clearly take the first view.

(1) *Joseph Smith is said to be the first prophet ordained by God in our modern era.*

(a) His revelations and extrabiblical writings, therefore, are the source of most LDS beliefs.

(b) His three doctrinal works are the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

i) Doctrine and Covenants is primarily a collection of revelations. It also contains a revelation to Brigham Young, a vision received by LDS president Joseph Fielding Smith, the 1890 LDS Manifesto banning polygamy, and the 1978 LDS policy change that allowed blacks to hold the Mormon priesthood.

ii) Pearl of Great Price is a compilation of several works, including the official narrative detailing Smith's First Vision, Smith's tale about Moroni, and the story involving the gold plates. It also contains selections from the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, a retranslation of Matthew 23:39 and Matthew 24, and The Articles of Faith (13 basic LDS doctrines).

iii) Mormon statements re these writings.

a. *George Albert Smith, LDS apostle, 1917 -- "The Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price do not contain the wisdom of men alone, but of God."*

b. *M. Russell Ballard, LDS apostle, 1998 -- "Through revelation we have received the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, which contain the words of God to us."*

c. *Russell M. Nelson, LDS apostle, 2003 -- [God] provided a guide--a spiritual roadmap--to help us achieve success in our journey. We call that guide the standard works. . .the holy bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price--[they] constitute the standard by which we should live."*

**(c) History of Doctrine and Covenants.**

i) Smith's early revelations were first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, an LDS periodical first printed in Missouri (June 1832 to July 1833). After being arranged and edited by Smith for accuracy, they were printed as *A Book of Commandments*.

ii) Very few of the books were published; thus it was unavailable to most Mormons. In 1835 LDS leaders republished the revelations, but by that time they were showing their age. Many contained outdated information. Some included erroneous statements. Others presented abandoned doctrines. A few simply revealed too much about LDS beliefs which in turn had caused critics to respond negatively.

- iii) Smith's solution was simple; he rewrote the revelations so that they would conform to his needs and those of the church. Karl F. Best, "Changes in the Revelations, 1833-1835," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1992), vol. 25, no. 1, p. 90. The texts were extensively edited without regard for earlier documents. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text & Commentary*, p. 17. Key phrases were altered, crucial words were deleted, and never before seen text was added in such a way as to make it seem as if the new verbiage had always been part of the divine messages received by Smith some years earlier.
  
- iv) These revisions were first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star* (a reprint of the earlier newspaper). Soon after they were collected and published in a new book of doctrine titled *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835). The degree of text alteration was highlighted by Melvin Petersen: 703 words changed, 1656 words added, and 453 words deleted. "A Study of the Nature and the Significance of the Changes in the Revelations as Found in a Comparison of the Book of Commandments and Subsequent Editions of the Doctrine and Covenants," BYU Thesis, MS, 1955, typed copy, p. 118. Mormons have no problem with the changes; they contend that as a prophet Smith had absolute authority to revise, update, change, or expand any revelation.

**(d) Contents of the Pearl of Great Price.**

- i) Two of its books are especially interesting--the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham. Both of these books contain teachings that are radically opposed to traditional Christianity, but they are crucial to Mormonism.
  
- ii) The Book of Moses is a rewrite of the first several chapters of Genesis, which, according to Smith, needed rewriting because the biblical text had been so corrupted. This project began after God himself directed Smith to correct Genesis. His revisions, allegedly revealed to him by God, not only deleted "mistakes," but also inserted a great deal of material that had supposedly been deleted by evil men.

iii) The Book of Abraham is supposedly the "translation" of some ancient Egyptians records that Smith obtained in 1835. They came into Smith's possession when a traveling exhibitor came through Kirtland, Ohio, with four mummies and several ancient papyrus scrolls. Smith's followers purchased the entire exhibit. Smith said that the scrolls contained knowledge directly traceable to Abraham and Joseph. So important were these scrolls and their teaching and interpreted by Smith, that he put illustrations from them into his new Book of Abraham, first published in 1842. After being republished and distributed in 1851 and 1878, the Book of Abraham was canonized in 1880 and placed in the Pearl of Great Price. It is now known that Smith's papyri were common Egyptian funerary texts. Rather than being composed during Abraham's era, they date back only to about 100 B.C. Nevertheless, Mormons have continued to accept the Book of Abraham as proof of Smith's powers to translate. They argue that whatever scrolls Smith used, he did not translate them in the same way "university scholars" translate texts. He relied on divine revelation to understand them. Gordon,  
[www.meridianmagazine.com/ideas/030528anti.html](http://www.meridianmagazine.com/ideas/030528anti.html).

## **2. Will the real Joseph Smith please stand up?**

**a) History records that Joseph Smith had many good qualities.**

***(1) He was kind and sensitive, but could be harsh and violent.***

***(2) He could be both humble and haughty.***

***(3) He possessed a keen wit, charm, and charisma; he was a natural speaker as well as handsome and athletic.***

***(4) He had an indomitable spirit, was politically savvy, and had religious zeal.***

(5) *Most important, however, he had a facile mind that could absorb, process, and utilize new information almost instantaneously.*

b) Other aspects of his life were not so respectable.

(1) *Some non-Mormons describe him as at best a "holy fraud" - one who engages in fraudulent activities while at the same time believing that he had been called of God to preach repentance in the most effective way possible.*

(2) *Smith and other LDS leaders often used deception to conceal their activities.*

(a) For example, polygamy was instituted in 1832 or 1833 when Smith took a second wife. He took a third wife in 1838 or 1839, and three more wives in 1841. Smith then received a revelation on July 12, 1843, commanding his first wife, Emma, to accept polygamy.

(b) Yet, in public, Smith and other Mormons denied polygamy. And 1843 issue of his *Times and Seasons* periodical, for instance declared, "We are charged with advocating a plurality of wives. . . . [T]his is as false as the many other ridiculous charges which are brought against us. No sect has a greater reverence for the law of matrimony or the rights of private property, and we do what others do not, practice what we preach."

(3) *Mormons have always accepted Smith as a modern-day Moses, above serious criticism.*

(a) LDS apostle Wilford Woodruff (1807 - 1898) noted in his diary that there was "not a greater man than Joseph Smith."

(b) LDS apostle Herbert C. Kimball (1801 - 1868) predicted that this world would some day see Joseph "as a God."

(c) Brigham Young actually applied to Joseph Smith one of the most popular bible verses about Jesus (1 John 4:3).

(d) Today, Mormons still place Joseph Smith second only to Christ in religious importance; he may change Christ's message if Christ tells him to.

3. The validity of Mormonism depends on the accuracy of this evaluation of Joseph Smith, a man whose reputation and activities were questionable at best. From his first vision came LDS beliefs about God. From his revelation came LDS concepts of Christ, salvation, and eternity. From his so-called "translations" came LDS views of history, the cosmos, and creation. Greater Christendom finds this dependency on one man, especially a man such as Joseph Smith, to be much too weak a foundation for faith.

*B. Is this evaluation of Joseph Smith accurate?*

1. Biographical information.

- a) Smith was born in Vermont in 1805 to Joseph Smith and Lucy Mack, a hard-working but impoverished couple.
- b) In 1816 the family moved to the Manchester-Palmyra area of New York.
- c) While they hoped for better things, within ten years their best efforts to avoid destitution had failed, and they entrusted their survival to money-digging, also known as treasure hunting by means of divination and folk magic.
- d) The activity enthralled young Smith who gained a reputation as a skilled digger adept at occult ritual, though many neighbors regarded him as an imposter, hypocrite, and liar.
- e) Mormons seek to downplay Smith's role by saying that he was a reluctant participant urged on by his family and as a result of their pressure. However, research by Dan Vogel,

an award-winning author and researcher of Mormon history, describes Smith as an aggressive and ambitious leader among the competing treasure seekers of Manchester, New York.

f) According to the official Mormon story, Joseph's "calling" came in 1820 after some religious "excitement" hit the Palmyra area.

(1) *The revival "converted" great multitudes who were then solicited for membership by local churches.*

(2) *This moved Joseph to ask which of all these groups was correct.*

(3) *Having decided that only God could answer him, he supposedly went into a secluded grove to pray.*

(4) *The current version of what happened is that a pillar of light descended and two radiant "personages" appeared; the first one pointed to the second and said, "This is my beloved son. Hear him!" Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith History 1:17.*

(a) Joseph asked those heavenly individuals which Christian church was right and which one he should join.

(b) In response, the second personage said to "join none of them, for they were all wrong."

(c) Joseph was also told that all Christian creeds were an "abomination" in the Lord's sight and that all Christian teachers were "corrupt" because they taught commandments of men rather than doctrines of God. *Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith History 1:19.*

(d) Smith's first vision is vital to the doctrinal framework of the LDS faith.

- i) Mormon President Gordon Hinckley admitted as much in 1996.
  - ii) Two years later he reiterated his position, saying that the "entire case" of Mormonism "rests on the validity of this glorious First Vision."  
"What Are People Asking About Us?" *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, pp. 70-71.
  - iii) In 2002 he added, "Upon that unique and wonderful experience stands the validity of this church." "The Marvelous Foundation of Our Faith," *Conference Report*.
  - iv) Smith's first vision is one of the reasons that Mormons compare Joseph Smith to Moses, Joseph (Jacob's son), and the apostle Paul.
  - v) Many actually believe that to a limited degree their salvation rests upon Joseph Smith.
    - a. "[A]ll men in the latter days--must turn to Joseph Smith to gain salvation. Why? . . . He alone can bring them the gospel; he alone can perform for them the ordinances of salvation and exaltation; he stands, as have all prophets of all the ages in their times and seasons, in the place and stead of the Heavenly One in administering salvation to men on earth." (Bruce Mc Conkie, LDS apostle, 1982.) *The Millennial Messiah*, p. 334.
    - b. "Smith was the greatest prophet who ever lived upon the earth." (James E. Faust, *First Presidency*, 1997.) "The Importance of Bearing Testimony," *Liahona*, March 1197, p. 3.
    - c. *Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived.*" *Doctrine and Covenants 135:31*.
  - vi) As noted in *Doctrines of Salvation* by LDS President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876 - 1972), "Faith in Christ and Joseph Smith Go Together." Vol. 2, p. 302.
- (e) Smith's first vision is questionable; many different versions of it have been published. See Attachment A.**

2. Credibility information.

a) *Doctrine and Covenants* 84:21-22, which is an 1832 revelation of God to Joseph Smith, states that without Mormonism's so-called "Melchizedek Priesthood" "no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live." But according to today's version of the First Vision, Joseph Smith saw the face of God in 1820 -- many years before he supposedly received the Melchizedek Priesthood. Oddly, no one seems to know with any certainty just when or how Smith received this "priesthood," since LDS references to the event are not only vague, but also contradictory. None of Smith's earliest converts had even heard about this priesthood or seen it conferred on any LDS leaders until 1831.

b) Historical data suggests that there was no 1820 revival in Palmyra that converted "great multitudes." Church records only show revivals in 1816-1817 and 1824-1825. The latter event actually prompted Smith and several members of his family to join in Christendom. This would have been an odd thing to do if Jesus had already told young Joseph that all of the churches were wrong.

c) Joseph Smith was given to magic and occultism.

(1) *Historians record that early Mormons were not just superstitious, but were attuned to the supernatural powers of witchcraft.*

(2) *One piece of evidence was from Smith's mother while defending her family against charges of laziness: "[L]et not my reader suppose that. . .we stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac[,] drawing Magic circles or sooth saying to the neglect of all kinds of business [--] we never during our lives suffered one*

*important interest to swallow up every other obligation but whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remember the service and welfare of our souls."*

- (a) Soothsaying is foretelling the future by means of occult tools, e.g., tarrot cards.
- (b) Drawing magic circles related to a ritual used to gain power over spirits invoked by an occultist. *The Ancient Book of Magic* explains that when contacting these spirits, a magician must draw a circle within a circle, which forms a barrier impassable by demons. This is what Joseph Smith Sr. and Jr. did while money-digging.
- (c) The 'faculty of Abrac" refers to the diety regarded by the second-century Basilidians as the "chief of the 365 genies ruling the days of the years." It is from the word *Abrac* (or *Abraxas*) that we get the word *abracadabra*.
- (d) Joseph Smith chose to organize his church on April 6, 1830, a day known in folk magic as the beneficial "DAY-FATAL-ITY," which in 1830 coincided with an alignment of Jupiter and the Sun. He even entered into various marriages and introduced new doctrines on days that had astrological significance to him.
- (e) In Bainbridge, New York in 1826 Smith was charged with being a "disorderly person and an imposter," having broken the law by hiring himself out as a money-digger to a Josiah Stowell. He was brought to court as a glass-looker -- one who, by peering through a glass stone, could see things not discernible to the natural eye. He admitted to having a stone that he used to find buried treasure. He was convicted and given "leg bail" -- released on the condition that he get out of town. Mormons denied this story for years as a story concocted to smear Joseph Smith's name. But in 1971 evidence for the validity of the 1873 transcript was unearthed by religion researchers, who found the bill for the 1826 court case presided over by a Justice Albert Neely.

## II. About the Book of Mormon.

### A. *Statements about the Book of Mormon.*

1. [The Book of Mormon] is approved by the highest authority in the universe, the Lord himself." Marion G. Romney, LDS apostle, 1949.
2. "There is no greater issue ever to confront mankind in modern times than this: Is the Book of Mormon the mind and will and voice of God to all men?" Bruce McConkie, LDS apostle, 1982.
3. [T]he Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. It is the keystone in our witness of Christ. It is the keystone of our doctrine. It is the keystone of our testimony." Ezra Taft Benson, LDS president, 1986.

**B. *How did the Book of Mormon originate?***

1. How it was discovered.
  - a) As noted on Attachment A, Smith's first vision involved just an angel. It was later turned into a visit from Jesus. Then it became a tale about the Father and Son appearing to him in 1820. So what became of the original "angel" story? It became Smith's second vision -- that of the angel Moroni.
  - b) This event, according to today's *official* LDS history, unfolded on September 21, 1830. As Smith prayed at night, a light filled the room until it was lighter than noonday. Then an angel appeared and announced that God had a mission for Smith -- one involving golden plates said to contain the fullness of the gospel as delivered by the Savior to America's ancient inhabitants.
  - c) Moroni did not let Smith have the plates at first, but made him return every year on September 22. Finally, on September 22, 1827 the angel let Smith retrieve the plates, along with two stones, the Urim and Thummim. The angel

said that these stones were what constituted "seers" in ancient times and that God had prepared them for translation of the plates.

- d) Smith now had all that was necessary to produce another testament of Jesus Christ: The Book of Mormon; the "keystone" of Mormonism.

2. What story does the Book of Mormon purport to tell?

- a) It claims to reveal God's dealings with the inhabitants of America from 2,200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ to 421 years after the death of Jesus Christ. These inhabitants allegedly arrived by three migrations.

*(1) First came the Jaredites, whose migration took place shortly after the Tower of Babel. They produced a civilization that lasted about 2,000 years until it was destroyed by internal conflicts and war.*

*(2) Second came the Nephites during the reign of Judah's King Zedekiah (about 600 B.C.), when two friends named Lehi and Ishmael led their families from Jerusalem. This group, like the Jaredites, traveled by ship to the Americas, where they began a thriving society.*

*(3) Finally came the Mulekites who arrived from the east under the leadership of Mulek. According to the book of Mormon, Mulek was the son of King Zedekiah. Unlike the Jaredites and the Nephites, the Mulekites did not establish their own culture. They simply joined the flourishing Nephite society founded by Lehi and Ishmael.*

- b) What happened to the three groups?

- (1) *The Nephites, named after their mightiest prophet, Nephi, were faithful members of the church, believed the revelations, and sought to keep the commandments of God. Depending on their lineage, some Nephites were also known as Jacobites, Josephites, or Zoramites.*
  
- (2) *The Lamanites, named after Laman (their most powerful leader), were rebellious. their minds were darkened by unbelief and they are apostates from the church. Some Lamanites also were known as Lemuelites or Ishmaelites after persons to whom they were related by blood or marriage. The Lamanites were so evil that God forbade marriage between them and the Nephites, reinforcing his wishes by pronouncing a curse on the Lamanites -- a skin of blackness. This he did so that they might not be enticing to the white Nephites. 2 Nephi 5:21. The Lamanites thus became loathsome to look upon. 2 Nephi 5:22.*
  
- (3) *Mercifully, God promised that repentant Lamanites who joined the Nephites would have the curse removed and their skin would become "white like unto the Nephites" and their young men and their daughters would become "exceedingly fair." 3 Nephi 2:14-16.*
  
- (4) *For centuries the Lamanites and the Nephites lived in strife until around A.D. 34, when Christ appeared to them and offered his gift of salvation. 3 Nephi 9:14-21. He told them about his crucifixion and resurrection and taught them the same things he had taught in Galilee. 3 Nephi 11:1-17.*
  
- (5) *All responded to Christ which brought about peace and unity. Soon afterward, however, war again erupted between the two groups who traveled northward. Millions were killed, until all the remaining warriors met for a final*

*battle in New York, near Cumorah. The Lamanites won the showdown, leaving only a handful of Nephites alive and scattered abroad.*

*(6) These Lamanites became so vile that they began warring among themselves and lost all knowledge of their spiritual heritage. By the time Columbus found them, these so-called American Indians had even forgotten that they were Israelites. The Latter-day Saints' Messenger & Advocate, an early LDS periodical published in Kirtland, Ohio, October 1834 - August 1837. July 1835, vol. 1, no. 10, p. 158.*

c) According to Smith, this Native American saga would all have been lost but for faithful historian-prophets like Mormon, who etched the tale on golden plates. He gave the plates to his son Moroni, who in turn added a few words of his own and then buried them in the hill Cumorah. Book of Mormon, introduction. There they remained until Joseph Smith found them, thus fulfilling Book of Mormon prophecies. 3 Nephi 29.

3. How credible is the Book of Mormon?

a) Credibility problems begin with the story of the origin.

*(1) There is a discrepancy in the identity of Smith's angel. The 1839 History of the church, reportedly dictated by Smith himself, states that the angel was Nephi, not Moroni. In Smith's 1832 account it is an unidentified angel of the Lord who tells of the plates engraved by Moroni (not Moroni saying "I engraved the plates).*

*(2) Today's official version of how the plates were found attributes the discovery to Moroni; however, for years it was understood that Smith found the plates by means of his*

*seer stone. Martin Harris wrote of an 1859 interview with Smith in Tiffany's Monthly, "Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase. . . .It was by means of this stone that he first discovered these plates. . . .He found them by looking in the stone."*

*(3) Early LDS converts, unlike today's, knew that Smith translated his Book of Mormon without even looking at the golden plates. Instead, he gazed into his seer stones and read the book aloud as it appeared to him. As Isaac Hale, Smith's father-in-law, said, Smith translated "the same as when he looked for the money-diggers, with the stone in his hat, and his hat over his face, while the Book of Plates were at the same time hid in the woods."*

b) Its claim of ancient origin lacks credibility.

*(1) While many Mormons believe that the BOM is an ancient account of American Indian origin, it is in reality a rehashing of nineteenth century speculations linking Native Americans to Israelites. These ideas were very popular during the 1800's, especially around Smith's locale. This was due in part to the many burial mounds dotting the land. Curiosity about them "made an amateur antiquarian of almost everyone in the area." Fawn Brodie, No Man Knows My History, p. 34.*

*(2) By 1823, Palmyra residents were being inundated with notions about American Indians and Israelites. One 1825 article in the Wayne Sentinel of Palmyra printed a speech wherein Native Americans were labels "descendants of the tribes of Israel."*

*(3) Smith undoubtedly came into contact with many works advancing such theories. In fact, research has shown that he drew great inspiration from a number of relevant works,*

*actually incorporating text from some of them into his Book of Mormon. Most striking are the parallels existing between Joseph's work and Ethan Smith's View of the Hebrews (1823).*

- (a) Both books share the same premise about a large group of Israelites who arrived in the New World and separated into warring factions, the more violent of which prevailed, but then ended up in a savage state.
- (b) Joseph's saga about finding a buried book written by the ancestors of Native Americans also may have been lifted from *View of the Hebrews*, which declared, "If the Indians are of the tribes of Israel, some decisive evidence of the fact will ere long be exhibited." Ethan Smith then noted a discovery in Massachusetts of parchments containing Hebrew characteristics. These had been found buried in a place called Indian Hill.
- (c) Both the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews* share the following characteristics:
  - i) They begin with frequent references to Jerusalem's destruction.
  - ii) They tell of inspired prophets among the ancient Indians.
  - iii) They quote heavily from the Biblical book of Isaiah.
  - iv) They describe the ancient Americans as a highly civilized people.
  - v) They declare that it is the mission of the American nation in the last days to father Native Americans into Christianity, thereby hastening the day of the glorious millennium. See Sandra Tanner, "Where Did Joseph Smith Get His Ideas for the Book of Mormon?"
- (d) Interestingly, one of the residents of the small town in which *View of the Hebrews* was first published in 1823 was a teenager named Oliver Cowdery -- Joseph Smith's third cousin and future scribe. The Cowdery family also happened to be associated with the Poultney, Vermont Congregational Church, the very church led by none other than Pastor Ethan Smith, author of *View of the Hebrews*.

c) The reality of the Golden Plates lacks credibility.

(1) *Smith always took great pains to insure that no one saw the plates, explaining that the angel would take them away if he allowed this to happen. Moreover, anyone who physically looked upon the plates allegedly would perish.*

(2) *But what about those men who said that they did see and handle the plates?*

(a) They are divided into two groups:

i) The Three Witness (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris).

ii) The Eight Witnesses (Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jr., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sr., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel Smith).

(b) These joint declarations imply that the signers *physically* saw the plates with their eyes and handled them with their hands.

(c) According to BYU professor Daniel C. Peterson, this virtually proves that Smith had the plates. Their existence, he says, is among the most securely established facts in Latter-day Saints history.

(d) What many Mormons apparently do not know is that the witnesses did not *literally* see or handle the plates. They beheld them in visions. Grant Palmer, former director of the LDS Institutes of Religion in California and Utah, explained the cause of today's incorrect notions about the witnesses. He writes that "Ezra Booth, an early Mormon convert, reported of Joseph: 'he does not pretend to see them [spirits and angels] with his natural, but with his spiritual eyes; and he says he can see them as well with his eyes shut, as with them open.'" . . . The eleven witnesses to the Book of Mormon claimed second-sight as well. *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, pp. 175-176.

(e) The plates are now gone forever; once they were translated they were returned to Moroni. Brigham Young wrote: "When Joseph got the plates the angel instructed him to carry them back to the

hill Cumorah, which he did. Oliver [Cowdery] says that when Joseph and Oliver went there, the hill opened, and they walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. . . .They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up on the corners and along the walls.

d) The archaeology and geography of the Book of Mormon lack credibility.

(1) *Archaeology.*

- (a) Mormon apologists, in order to get around the inaccuracies of the Book of Mormon, pay little attention to the words that Smith used in the text, allegedly by inspiration. They redefine many terms, in effect restating what he must have meant. Vogel and Metcalfe, in *American Apocrypha*, p. xiii. For example: steel is actually iron; horses are deer; wheat is amaranth; goats are brockets [small deer], cows are deer, brockets, camelidae [llamas], or bison; and tents are makeshift huts. In short, things are not what they appear. Never mind that Mesoamerica had no metallurgy to speak of until after the Book of Mormon times, that the Nephites used the horse to pull chariots in battle and over long distances, or that tents are described as being "pitched," portable and usable. Only with increasing difficulty do apologists accept the Book of Mormon at face value.
- (b) There is no archaeology to support the Book of Mormon. One Mormon scholar (Dee F. Green) said that the "first myth we need to eliminate is that Book of Mormon archaeology exists." Non-LDS renowned anthropologist Michael Coe said that "[N]othing, absolutely nothing, has ever shown up in any New World excavation that would suggest to a dispassionate observer that the Book of Mormon, as claimed by Joseph Smith, is a historical document relating to the history of early migrants to our hemisphere."
- (c) While Coe's statement might be dismissed by LDS apologists, they cannot so easily dismiss a 2002 admission by Terry L. Givens (BYU graduate, author of *By the Hand of Mormon*, and professor of religion and literature at the University of Richmond: "[N]ot one single archaeological artifact has been found that conclusively establishes a direct connection between the record [that is, the

book of Mormon] and any actual culture or civilization of the Western hemisphere."

(2) *Geography.*

- (a) At one time Mormons held that the book's saga encompassed the entire Western hemisphere. Now, however, LDS defenders are claiming that the events took place in a limited region of Mesoamerica (the area surrounding the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Southern Mexico). Such a view helps offset the vast distances that the Book of Mormon peoples would have had to travel to get from their homelands to the Hill Cumorah in New York, where the golden plates were buried.
- (b) While such a view offsets the long distances, it does violence to the Book of Mormon text, early Mormon history, Joseph Smith's divine edicts, and Mesoamerican archaeology. Vogel and Metcalfe, *American Apocrypha*, pp. viii-ix.
- (c) An example of modern Mormon apologists' claim is that of BYU professor John L. Sorenson who maintains that the Nephite saga "played out in a limited area probably less than 500 miles in diameter" and that the "LDS assumption that the New York hill where Moroni buried the gold plates was the same as the Book of Mormon's Hill Cumorah, where Mormon had his great records repository, doesn't work very well."
- (d) Thus, even the long-held belief about the final Nephite-Lamanite battle in New York has been jettisoned by modern LDS apologists. They have gone so far as to suggest that *not a single* early Mormon, including Joseph Smith, ever bothered reading the Book of Mormon "closely enough to grasp the fact that the plates Mormon gave to Moroni were never buried in the hill of the final Nephite battle." Sorenson and Roper, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, p. 10.
- (e) However the apologists might ignore Mormon history, others are not so quick to do so. As recently as 1990,, a letter from the LDS Church's Office of the First Presidency was still advocating the standard LDS teaching that "Cumorah" in the Book of Mormon is the New York Hill Cumorah: "The church has long maintained, as attested to by references in the writings of General Authorities, that the Hill Cumorah in western New York state is the same as referenced in the Book of Mormon.

(f) However, a more recent letter (1993) from the First Presidency may be trying to please both sides. It states with some vagueness: "While some Latter-day Saints have looked for possible locations and explanations because the New York Hill Cumorah does not readily fit the Book of Mormon description of Cumorah, there are no conclusive connections between the Book of Mormon text and any specific site that has been suggested." This may be telling the old-line Mormons that they can hold to the old view because there is no conclusive connection between to any of the newly suggested locations for the Book of Mormon's events, or it may be supporting the new Mesoamerican sites by implying that all statements made by past leaders were just opinions, since there are "no conclusive connections" to any location for the events.

e) DNA discoveries demonstrate that the Book of Mormon lacks credibility.

(1) *One of the harshest blows to the Book of Mormon has come through DNA research. It has verified that Native Americans are not of Israelite origin; They are Asiatic.*

(2) *LDS apologists and BYU professors are advocating a new unofficial opinion that Lehi and his people represented only a "small band" of Israelites, compared to a larger population of indigenous people in the New World. Consequently, only a small number of Native Americans might be related to the Israelites.*

(3) *Some Mormons are now going so far as to say that a biological link between Israelites and Native Americans will never be found because the genetic markers that would have been found have been lost or diluted because of extensive intermingling with non-Israelites, i.e., Asiatics.*

(4) *LDS professor Jeffrey Meldrum stated this new mindset well in a 2003 lecture: "The necessary experiment simply cannot be designed that would refute the historicity of the Book of Mormon as the record of a small population on the basis of DNA studies and population genetics."*

- (5) *The problem with this position, however, is that according to Mormon 1:7, the Nephite and Lamanite populations were hardly small: "The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings, and the people were as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea [about A.D. 322]."*
- (6) *Helaman 3:8 adds, "And it came to pass that they did multiply and spread, and did go forth from the land southward to the land northward, and did spread insomuch that they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east."*
- (7) *It is nothing less than radical for Mormons to now be departing from what was originally taught by LDS leadership who clearly believed that all Native Americans, including Central and South America, are descendants of Israelites.*
- (a) LDS president Spencer Kimball stated: "The term Lamanite includes all Indians and Indian mixtures, such as the polynesians, the Guatemalans, the Peruvians, as well as the Sioux, the Apache, the Mohawk, the Navajo, and others.
- (b) As recently as 2003, LDS president Gordon B. Hinckley was voicing similar ideas.
- (c) The clear implication of modern DNA research is that the Book of Mormon is neither an authentic nor a historical account of either the ancient Israelites or Native Americans. This assessment, which is commonly used by secular critics of the church, is ever troubling to Mormons.
- (8) *Another doctrine being jettisoned is that the cursed Lamanites were supposed to become white like unto the Nephites once they converted en masse to Mormonism.*

**(a) In 1981 the Book of Mormon was edited so that it no longer said that they would become "white and delightsome" but "pure and delightsome."**

**(b) LDS leaders claimed that the prediction had nothing to do with the absurd notion that "Indians" would physically turn white. Similar passages indicate otherwise. 2 Nephi 5:21.**

**(c) Numerous statements from LDS officials indeed taught that the curse of dark skin upon Native Americans would one day be removed.**

**i) In 1960, LDS president Spencer Kimball reported that Indians were already becoming a white and delightsome people. He added that Indian children in the home placement program in Utah are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation. Kimball also said he knew one Indian girl who, because she was LDS, was several shades lighter than her parents.**

**ii) In *Why Believe*, Mormon writer George Edward Clark noted that he himself had been privileged to see the miraculous change in the skin pigmentation of LDS American Indians. He wrote of the Catawba tribe of South Carolina: "That tribe, or most of its people, are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon). Those Indians, at least as many as I have observed, were white and delightsome; as white and fair as any group of citizens of our country. I know of no prophecy, ancient or modern, that has had a more literal fulfillment. P. 129.**

#### **4. Whom shall we believe?**

**a) If we believe Joseph Smith's teachings, then the Book of Mormon is out of step with history, geography, anthropology, archaeology, and other sciences.**

**b) If we embrace the views of today's LDS apologists and professors, then we can only wonder how many more of Smith's views are flawed.**

5. Two who no longer believe.

- a) After years of research, LDS apologist B.H. Roberts reached a shocking conclusion about the Book of Mormon, as stated in *Studies in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brigham D. Madsen and Sterling M. McMurrin. In reference to certain characters he wrote: "The evidence, I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America." Shortly before his death in 1933, he told Wesley P. Lloyd, former dean of the BYU graduate school, that he had come to realize that the Book of Mormon was a nonhistorical document. Lloyd wrote in his diary that Roberts said the plates "were not objective but subjective with Joseph Smith, that his exceptional imagination qualified him psychologically for the experience which he had in presenting to the world the Book of Mormon. Lloyd's statement is found online at [www.lds-mormon.com/bhrlettr.shtml](http://www.lds-mormon.com/bhrlettr.shtml).
- b) Popular LDS scholar Thomas Stuart Ferguson reached a similar conclusion. He had dedicated his life to finding objective proof for the Book of Mormon, going so far as to found the New World Archaeology Foundation at BYU. It was established specifically for the purpose of unearthing archaeological evidence supporting the book. But by 1972 Ferguson's expectations had been all but utterly destroyed. This led to his preparation of 1975 of a 29-page report that responded to papers written by LDS apologists John Sorenson and Garth Norman, both of whom were claiming that archaeological evidence of the Book of Mormon existed. Ferguson wrote: "With all of these great efforts, it cannot be established factually that

anyone, from Joseph Smith to the present day, has put his finger on a single point of terrain that was a Book-of-Mormon geographical place. And the hemisphere has been pretty well checked out by competent people. . . .I must agree with Dee Green, who has told us that to date there in no Book of Mormon geography. I, for one, would be happy if Dee were wrong." In a 1976 letter, however, Ferguson explained that he had decided to keep quiet about his findings because to do otherwise might destroy the faith of others. He suggested that like-minded Mormons do the same, because he saw Mormonism as a well-conceived "myth-fraternity" to be enjoyed. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, letter dated Feb. 9, 1976. For a copy of this letter see Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under Gods*, p. 80. "[Smith] can be refuted," he wrote, "[b]ut why bother. . .? It would be like wiping out placebos in medicine, and that would make no sense when they do lots of good."

### III. About God?

#### A. *One God vs. Many Gods.*

1. Mormons reject the doctrine of the Trinity, which affirms that there is ONE God who eternally exists in three Persons (or some say "centers of self-consciousness). Although these three Persons have individuality, they share the same divine substance, or essence. Hence the three Persons are ONE God. Mormons teach that the Father (the Elohim of the Old Testament), the Son (the Jehovah of the Old Testament), and the Holy Spirit (the unnamed God) are three separate and distinct persons, each one a God, thus numbering three.
  - a) "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct

personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three God." Joseph Smith, LDS founder and president, 1844.

- b) 'How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods." Brigham Young, LDS president, 1859.
  - c) "We have already shown that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct persons, and, so far as personality is concerned, are three Gods." B.H. Roberts, LDS apostle, 1903.
  - d) "There are three Gods--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." "There is an infinite number of holy personages drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods." Bruce McConkie, LDS apostle, 1958.
  - e) "[Jesus] acted in concert with other Gods to create our world: 'Then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens, and earth." *Ensign*, LDS Church publication, 1989.
  - f) "[U]nder *God the Father*; . . .3. He is named Elohim. . . .4. He is 'God above all Gods.' . . .'Elohim. . . is also used as the exalted name title of God the Eternal Father, a usage that connotes his supremacy and omnipotence, he being God above all Gods.'" *LDS Aaronic Priesthood Manual*, 1995.
2. Mormons seek to avoid the charge of being polytheistic (perhaps because polytheism is associated with non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Wicca, neopaganism, and ancient mystery

- religions) by redefining polytheism, monotheism, and "one God."
- a) They define polytheism as either 1) belief in and worship of, more than one god; or 2) belief in, and worship of, false gods or pagan deities. While the worship of more than one god is intrinsic to some definitions of polytheism, what Mormons often fail to address is how their denials square with the fact that they do in fact worship more than one god.
  - b) Others define monotheism to mean the worship of one primary or supreme God above all other gods. In LDS theology, the Father is this supreme God--at least for this planet, in this universe. This redefinition allows Mormons to say that there is only "one God" while still believing that other gods exist. Monotheism, however, properly understood, means belief in only one God, excluding the very possibility of other gods.g
  - c) Mormons redefine "one God" to mean a single group of gods--specifically the LDS triumvirate of Father, son, and Holy Ghost (also know as the Godhead). The Godhead is one. And worshipping one Godhead, so the argument goes, is tantamount to worshipping only one god. Even if the Mormon redefinition of "one god" is accepted, it does not erase LDS teachings about the existence of other gods. Mormons would still be guilty of another form of polytheism known as *monolatry*--the worship of only one god [or is LDS-speak, one Godhead], while the existence of other gods is admitted or not questioned.
3. Some Mormons just accept the charge. Truman Madsen, BYU's widely quoted professor emeritus of philosophy and religion, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1996, "People tell us, 'you don't believe in one God: you believe in three Gods.' And the

answer is 'Yes, we do." If that is polytheism, then we are (polytheists)." April 8, 1996.

**B. *Heavenly Father is a man.***

**1. Mormon quotes about the nature of God.**

- a) God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man....I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form--like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man;...We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea....He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did. Joseph Smith, 1843 or 1844.
- b) God undoubtedly took advantage of every opportunity to learn the laws of truth as He became acquainted with each new verity He righteously obeyed it....As he gained more knowledge through persistent effort and continuous industry, as well as through absolute obedience, His understanding of the universal laws continued to become more complete. Thus he grew in experience and continued to grow until He attained the status of Godhood." Milton R. Hunter, LDS apostle, 1958.
- c) God is a perfected, saved soul enjoying eternal life. Marian G. Romney, LDS apostle, 1977.
- d) God the Father is an exalted man, a corporeal being, a personage with flesh and bones....Smith taught in 1844 that God our Father was once a mortal, that he lived on an earth, died, was resurrected and glorified and grew and developed over time to become the Almighty that he now is. Robert L. Miller, BYU professor, 1998.

- e) Not much has been revealed about this concept beyond that fact that God was once a man and that over a long period of time he gained the knowledge, power, and divine attributes necessary to know all things and have all power. Robert L. Miller and Noel B. Reynolds, BYU professors, 1998.
  - f) God is a man, a Man of Holiness...who possesses a body of flesh and bones....These concepts are clearly part of the doctrinal restoration. Robert L. Miller, BYU professor.
2. John 4:24 and Luke 24:39 establish that the Mormon doctrine of the nature of God is false.
- a) Mormons interpret John 4:24 to mean what it has to mean in order to be consistent with Mormon doctrine, *i.e.*, that God *has* a spirit, not that He *is* a spirit.
  - b) Others argue that John 4:24 does not limit God to being a spirit only, which is another form of the same argument. However, no one argues that God is nothing but a spirit; He is much more. The question is whether he has flesh and bones, and the Bible clearly establishes that He does not.
3. Contrary to Mormon teaching, God has always existed. He has no beginning, no end, and no succession of moments in his own being. He sees events in time and acts in time, but He himself knows no such limitations. This is known as the doctrine of God's eternity or infinity, sometimes also referred to as His unchangeableness.

**C. *If God did not exist eternally, what, if anything, did?***

- 1. All of us, according to Mormon thought, are literal spirit-children of God. Moreover, God is married to an exalted woman

known as Heavenly Mother. She is literally the mother of our spirits. This LDS perspective is based primarily on a single presupposition voiced by Joseph Smith--namely, that only two things are eternal: 1) spirit matter (or "element"); and 2) "intelligence."

- a) These ideas are basic to the LDS claim that nothing has ever been "created" by God. He has merely *organized* everything out of pre-existing matter. Only the elements are eternal according to Smith; accordingly, the word "created" in Genesis should read "formed or organized."
  - b) Thus Mormons believe that even humans are not created by God, but, like everything else, are simply organized. Unlike objects, however, we are supposedly formed out of disorganized intelligences.
  - c) Even God sprang from "intelligence"; consequently, he is an organized being just as we are. All of us, therefore, are of the same species as God.
  - d) "Intelligence" is usually defined as the eternal essence of our being...[I]t is the nucleus of our identity and individual personality...Intelligence is an eternal gift of the universe, the essence of our reality.
2. Building on these doctrines, Mormons assert that before being born on earth we made the transition from disorganized intelligences to organized intelligences thanks to Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother--who, through some kind of sexual union, "clothed" each of us with a spirit body. "God is the actual father of the spiritual bodies possessed at that time. This is not a case of creation but of procreation." Angel Abrea, member of the first Quorum of the Seventy.

- a) We existed in this form or "First Estate" for countless years, during which time we were reared into grown spirit men and women.
- b) We dealt somewhere in the cosmos near the as-yet-undiscovered planet Kolob, where one day equals 1000 earth years. We lived there much like any family would on this planet, until it finally came time for us to become mortal (our "Second Estate").
- c) The first spirit-children to make this journey to Earth were Adam and Eve.

*(1) They arrived in order to do what all of us are supposed to do--travel the path of "eternal progression" toward all that God wants us to be. Their first task was to be fruitful and multiply which was supposed to provide a way for the rest of God's offspring (spirit-children) to assume physical bodies. [It should not be surprising that until 1998 Mormon leaders harshly condemned birth control.]*

*(2) There was one problem, however; Adam and Eve could not yet have children because they were not yet mortal. They were only spirit beings with bodies formed from the earth. To progress toward Mormon "salvation," they must be mortal.*

*(3) Adam and Eve ultimately saw that their only choice was to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. Thus, they "died," and in so doing became flesh and blood mortals, subject to death. But they also became capable of reproducing. The Fall, therefore, was a spectacular blessing--"Adam fell that all men might be." See Pearl of Great Price--Moses 5:11, and Jeffrey R. Holland, Christ and the New Covenant, p. 204. Mormons do regard Adam and*

*Eve's participation in the Fall as a sin. Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 1, pp. 114-115.*

#### IV. About Christ?

*A. While Mormons say many things that sound very much like Biblical teaching about Christ, their concept of Christ is radically different from that presented in the Bible. Mormons have redefined several significant terms that, when used, sound very traditional, but conceal the very nontraditional LDS views of Christ's eternal nature, pre-existence, relationship to us, atoning work, and ultimate mission.*

##### 1. Jesus pre-birth existence.

- a) Just like all men, Jesus existed as a disorganized intelligence until being organized by Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother into an individual spirit.
- b) Unlike God's other offspring, Jesus achieved a higher degree of advancement in the premortal world than the rest of us, his spirit brothers and sisters.
- c) He demonstrated his supremacy in godliness at a so-called Grand Council in heaven to which Elohim allegedly called his spirit-children.
- d) It was here, before creation, that we are said to have learned of Heavenly Father's plan for how we, if we followed his plan could become "like him," *i.e.*, gods.  
  
(1) *But we were also told that for the plan to succeed we would have to go to earth as mortals, gain knowledge and experience, choose between good and evil, endure suffering and trials, and follow God.*

(2) *Sadly, the weakness of mortality would cause us to be sinners with no memory of our pre-earth life.*

(3) *A "veil of forgetfulness" would be over us so we could choose God's way by faith, rather than by knowledge.*

e) This heavenly amnesia would necessitate that a savior be sent to rescue us from eternal death--a savior who could lead us on the path of righteousness.

(1) *But who would it be?*

(2) *Two spirit brothers stepped forward in response to the call and volunteered to redeem humanity--Jesus, Elohim's firstborn spirit child, and his brother, Lucifer.*

(3) *One crucial difference separated them.*

(a) *Jesus, like Heavenly Father, wanted to ensure that all men and women on earth would be given an opportunity to choose freely whether or not to accept salvation.*

(b) *Lucifer, however, wanted to force all men and women on earth to accept Heavenly Father's plan.*

(4) *God chose Jesus (who, according to Mormons appears in the Old Testament as Jehovah). The choice did not sit well with Lucifer who responded by rebelling. This caused a war in heaven and ultimately Lucifer was cast down from heaven. Moreover, he and his followers were never given mortal bodies which meant that they could never advance toward godhood.*

f) And so the plan of Heavenly Father proceeded.

(1) *The world was created (not just by Jesus, but by all of God's spirit children).*

- (2) *Adam and Eve "fell" so that man might be.*
- (3) *Jesus, as Jehovah, appeared to Old Testament believers to help them follow God.*
- (4) *Christ was born of Mary, after being "begotten" by her and Heavenly Father.*
- (a) Brigham Young asserted that the Father literally came down from heaven in order to beget Jesus Christ, and that Christ partook of flesh and blood--was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers. *Journal of Discourses*, July 24, 1853, vol. 1, p. 238, and July 8, 1860, vol. 8, p. 115. His meaning is clear from his explanation that there is only one way to create--the natural way of procreation through sex. *Journal of Discourses*, June 18, 1865, vol. 11, p. 122.
- (b) Young also stated that Jesus was begotten of the Father, and he was born of the virgin Mary as my mother bore me and as my father begot me and as you begot your children. Brigham Young, July 14, 1861, in Eldon J. Watson, ed., *Brigham Young Addresses: 1860-1864*, p. 137. He went so far as to say that although Joseph did not have another wife, Mary had another husband. *JOD*, August 19, 1866, vol. 11, p. 268. That husband, Young said, was Heavenly Father, who impregnated Mary instead of letting any other man do it. *JOD*, Feb. 8, 1857, vol. 4, p. 218.
- (c) Mormon Apostle Heber C. Kimball gave an analogy to clearly explain Mormon teaching on Jesus conception: "I was naturally begotten; so was my father, and also my Savior Jesus Christ....[H]e is the first begotten of his father in the flesh and there was nothing unnatural about it." *JOD*, Sept. 2, 1860, vol. 8, p. 211.
- (d) This concept continues to this day. See *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), which stated that "LDS doctrine that Jesus Christ is the child of MARY and GOD THE FATHER, 'not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof.'"
- (e) Fortunately for Mary, the Mormons redefined "virgin" so that she did not lose her virginity by having sexual relations with Heavenly Father: Christ was born of the virgin Mary....[T]he record teaches us that he was begotten by the power of God, and not of man, and that she had no intercourse with *mortal* man in the flesh until after

she gave birth to the Savior, who is called the Son of God."  
Erastus Snow, March 4, 1878, *JOD*, vol. 19, p. 271, emphasis  
added.

*(5) Christ suffered, died and rose again in fulfillment of his  
premortal guarantee to redeem humanity from sin and  
death.*

2. Differences regarding his birth.

- a) Regarding Jesus eternality, they see him as having been created ("organized") just as we were created--as a spirit child from intelligence.
- b) The main difference between us and Jesus is that he was begotten not only in the spirit by Heavenly Father, but also in the flesh by him.

3. Differences regarding his atonement.

- a) Mormons state that they believe in Christ as their Savior
- b) In a sense that is true; Mormons teach that the death of Jesus atoned for the sins of Adam, but not for the sins of anyone else.
- c) No one other than Adam is cleansed by the blood of Christ.
- d) Man's sins are forgiven by his own death, i.e., the shedding of his own blood.
- e) Brigham Young stated that if he came upon one of his wives (he had 25) in the act of adultery that he would unhesitatingly thrust a javelin through both of them and that in so doing he would be guiltless. In fact, he said, he

would be assisting in their salvation by shedding their blood.

- f) This may account for some of the Mormon massacres in the early years of their existence.

## v. About Eternal Salvation?

- A. *The pathway for man to become a God is to be a Mormon, and to be a very good Mormon.*
- B. *That is not required for salvation, however, because Mormons believe in universal salvation.*
- C. *Those who are evil must go to hell, but they will ultimately come out and go into the first heaven, the Tellestial region.*
- D. *This lowest heaven is for the heathen people who rejected the Gospel and those who are at the second coming of Christ suffering in hell pending the last resurrection.*
- E. *The second heaven, the Terrestrial region, will be inhabited by Christians who did not accept the Mormon message, Mormons who did not live up their church's requirements, and men of good will of other religions who rejected the revelations of the saints.*
- F. *The final or Celestial heaven is itself divided into three levels, the highest of which is godhood or the possession of a kingdom for one's self and one's family.*
- G. *This particular estate has as its prerequisite the candidate's having been sealed by celestial marriage in a Mormon temple while upon the earth.*

H. *Even in the celestial kingdom godhood is by slow progression, and in the end each who becomes a god will, with his family, rule, propagate, and populate a separate planet of his own.*

## VI. Polygamy?

A. *Generally speaking, Mormons believe that marriage is essential for deification.*

1. Finding a mate is critically important to Mormons, especially to Mormon women, whose "eternal life" is uniquely dependent upon a faithful LDS husband.
2. In a 1988 article in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Melodie Moench Charles noted that "a husband helps his wife attain salvation in a way that a wife does not do for her husband....*The Mehchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide* from 1984 included the following: 'Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: "[Husbands] must...love their wives, sacrifice for their wellbeing and salvation, and guide them in holiness until they are cleansed, sanctified, and perfected, until they are prepared for exaltation in that glorious heaven where the family unit continues. Husbands thus become in effect the saviors of their wives" (*Doctrinal New Testament commentary* 219).'"

B. *Once an LDS couple agrees to marry, they are wed for time and for eternity.*

1. Their "sealing" marriage is how they will continue their union in heaven and beget children throughout all eternity.
2. This sacred ceremony must take place in an LDS temple, and it is available only to Temple Mormons--Mormons who have proven themselves worthy of the temple.

3. Only with a Temple Recommend which must be shown at the temple door can a Mormon use the temple.
4. This, of course, means that in order to even attend a temple wedding one must be a Temple Mormon.
5. It is one of Mormonism's holiest ceremonies.

*C. For decades, the Mormon concept of marriage was linked to polygamy.*

1. It began in 1830 after Joseph Smith claimed that God commanded him to take more wives.
  - a) He reportedly did not want to take more wives, but God made him an offer he could not refuse. (As we shall see, this doctrine was not announced or revealed for a good while except to a few. The "explanation" is that Smith procrastinated because he did not want more wives until God told him that if he did not do so he would be punished.)
  - b) Called "the Law of Abraham" by Smith, polygamy was a terrible burden for him to bear.
  - c) He felt that its sacredness would be hard for some to discern, so he announced it to only a few.
  - d) But LDS critics did find out and trouble followed. Plural marriage or celestial marriage as it was called stirred up more trouble than any other Mormon doctrine.
2. Smith's first polygamous unions occurred in 1832 or 1833 with Fanny Alger, the 16-year-old daughter in a neighboring Mormon family.

- a) He actually married her in a secret ceremony and then had her move into his home in 1835 as a maidservant and adopted daughter.
  - b) He had not yet officially announced the doctrine nor had any high-ranking leaders publicly sanctioned the practice.
3. Smith took his next wife in 1838, added 3 in 1841, followed by 11 in 1842. In 1843 he took at least 17 wives.
- a) Emma, Smith's original wife, tried to oppose her husband's amorous activities.
  - b) To silence her, Smith simply issued a revelation in which God commanded her to stop complaining and accept Joseph's action, or else be damned. *Doctrine and Covenants*, 132:52.
  - c) The revelation was read to Emma, but kept private except for a few of Smith's trusted followers.
  - d) Orson Pratt's first wife, Sarah, after leaving her husband and the church declared polygamy a "direct curse"; one that demoralized "good men" and made "bad men" worse.
    - (1) *She herself had been propositioned by Joseph, which in part led to her rejection of Mormonism.*
    - (2) *An 1886 interview with her enlightened many readers: "[Joseph] used to state to his intended victims, as he did me: 'God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it.' He only introduced a marriage ceremony when he found out he could not get certain women without it....If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: 'Be silent, or I shall ruin your character. My character must be sustained in the interest*

*of the Church." Richard S. Van Waggoner, Mormon Polygamy: A History (1989), pp. 51-54, 59-60.*

e) Another aspect of Smith's polygamy was that 11 of his wives were already wed to other men "and cohabiting with them when Smith married them." Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness* (1997), p. 15.

(1) *Nine of his first dozen wives were the spouses of some of his closest friends, many of whom were important LDS leaders. Compton, pp. 15-16.*

(2) *Although the wives continued to live with their husbands, they would receive conjugal visits from Smith whenever the need arose.*

(3) *Wife-swapping was eventually looked upon as wholly acceptable if an influential church authority was involved.*

(a) Jedediah M. Grant, for example, admitted, "If President Young wants my wives I will give them to him without a grumble, and he can take them whenever he likes." Quoted in T.B.H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saint* (1904 edition), p. 294.

(b) Grant also explained: "What would a man of God say, who felt aright, when Joseph [Smith] asked him for his money? He would say, 'Yes, and I wish I had more to help to build up the kingdom of God.' Or if he came and said, 'I want your wife?' 'O yes,' he would say, 'here she is; there are plenty more.'" Grant, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, p. 14.

4. Jan Shipps, one of the foremost authorities on Mormonism, wrote that after Smith allowed polygamy for a select number of LDS men, these Mormon leaders "came to resemble children suddenly told that eating candy was good for them." "The Mormon in Politics: The First Hundred Years," Ph.D diss., University of Colorado, 1965, p. 134.

a) Fanny Stenhouse, a wife who left life as a plural wife, described what she witnessed in *Tell It All* (1875).

(1) *"Old men tottering on the brink of the grave have been united to little girls scarcely in their teens." pp.468-469.*

(2) *"I know also another man who married a widow with several children; and when one of the girls had grown into her teens, he insisted on marrying her also...and to this very day the daughter bears children to her step-father, living as wife in the same house with her mother." p. 469.*

b) Bishop Aaron Johnson of Springville, Utah, claimed six of his own nieces as wives--the eldest being only 15 years old when he wed her. The younger nieces ranged downward in age to 2 years old. Johnson asked that they be given to him as they matured, which is exactly what happened. He was finally sealed to the littlest girl when she reached about 13. Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19*, chapter 18.

5. Polygamy continued to be publicly denied and privately practiced.

a) The privilege was gradually extended to others in the LDS community under Brigham Young, who took the LDS to Utah in 1847.

b) It was only then that Mormons began openly practicing polygamy, as evidenced by Young's public acknowledgement of his wives in 1851.

c) When statehood began to be discussed, polygamy became an issue.

- d) Eventually the US government gave Mormons only two choices: 1) continue practicing polygamy and face closure of the church; or 2) stop polygamy and enjoy the benefits of statehood.
- 6. On September 25, 1890, LDS President Wilford Woodruff released an official Manifesto admonishing every Mormon to no longer enter into plural marriage.
- 7. This manifesto did not condemn polygamy in principle, but only in practice upon the earth.
  - a) Today's Mormons still view polygamy as a godly activity.
  - b) A form of it is still practiced in Mormonism: those husbands who have lost a beloved spouse and are left alone in this world can still be married for time and eternity to another wife....It is clear that all marriages continued in heaven will involve participation in plural marriage. Whether instituted in this life or the next, it will be a part of our eternal existence." Shane LeGrande Whelan, *More Than One*, p. 208.

## VII. The Teaching of Scripture.

### A. *Is Joseph Smith a Prophet Inspired of God?*

- 1. Galatians 1:6-8.
- 2. Matthew 7:15.
- 3. 2 Corinthians 11:13.
- 4. 2 Peter 3:16.
- 5. 1 John 4:1.

6. Revelation 2:2.

7. Revelation 22:18.

**B. *Is The Book of Mormon a Message from God?***

1. Galatians 1:6-8.

2. Jude 3.

3. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

4. Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

**C. *Jude***

**D. *Is God Eternal? One? a Man of Flesh and Bones?***

1. God is eternal, not matter.

a) Gen. 1:1 -- "In the beginning" is not the beginning of something; it is the beginning of everything except God who "in the beginning created."

(1) *Some argue that Gen. 1:1 does not explicitly state that creation was ex nihilo - out of nothing. While that is so, the significance of Gen. 1:1 comes from the fact that God is always the subject of the verb - He is the actor; creation is the action.*

(2) *Many Old Testament scholars concur that the word used for "created" emphasizes the initiation of the object, the bringing about of something new.*

(3) *Besides there being nothing in the text to affirm that chaotic matter existed before god's action, the use of the*

*verb translated "created" in the context of Genesis 1 makes the best sense of it is understood as creation ex nihilo.*

*(4) These scholars conclude quite forcefully that the "whole of Gen. 1 is permeated with the idea of the absolute transcendence of God and of the utter dependence of all being on God for its existence.*

*(5) Whenever the word for creation is used in relationship to God, there is never any mention of of preexisting materials that he used; the product is always mentioned - never any materials.*

*(6) Since the heavens and the earth are the result of God's creative will, they are contingent; if they are contingent, they are not eternal.*

*(7) The second law of thermodynamics establishes that matter is not eternal.*

b) Hebrews 11:3 -- This verse declares that the visible universe was not made out of equally visible [preexistent] things (which would include preexistent matter, if that were applicable to the creative process), exist through God's agent, who is the originator of everything. This is borne out by the fact that though the word was, the creation came to be.

c) Colossians 1:15-20 -- This verse speaks comprehensively when it says that all things were created in and through Christ.

*(1) The totality of what was created in Gen. 1:1 is described here as "all things"; there are no exceptions.*

(2) *Christ is before all things; the implication is that there was a state of being in which Christ existed and the universe did not.*

(3) *The words "before all things" not only declare His temporal priority to the universe, but also suggest his primacy over it.*

(4) *Two affirmations are made of Christ:*

(a) *He brought all things into being.*

(b) *He sustains all things in being; without such activity, all things would disintegrate.*

2. God is one.

a) Deuteronomy 6:4.

(1) *Though Elohim, (plural), he is one God.*

(2) *It does not say "Jehovah is alone God," but Jehovah our Elohim is one God.*

(3) *He is the Absolute and the Infinite One, who alone is to be worshipped, on whom all depend, and to whose command all must yield obedience (cf. Zechariah 14:9).*

b) This involves the doctrine of the Trinity.

(1) *Of the many attempts to define the doctrine of the Trinity, this one states it well: The doctrine of the Trinity does not on the one hand assert that three persons are united in one person, or three beings in one being, or three Gods in one God (tritheism); nor on the other hand that god merely manifests himself in three different ways (modal trinity, or*

*trinity of manifestations); but rather that there are three eternal distinctions in the substance of God.*

(2) *L. Berkhof in his Systematic Theology, pp. 87-89, discusses the Doctrine of the Trinity under six "propositions which constitute an epitome of the faith of the Church on this point:*

- (a) There is in the Divine Being but one indivisible essence.
- (b) In this one Divine Being there are three Persons or individual subsistences, Father, son, and Holy Spirit.
- (c) The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons.
- (d) The subsistence and operation of the three persons in the divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.
- (e) There are certain personal attributes by which the three persons are distinguished.
- (f) The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.

3. God is spirit; he is not a man of flesh and bones.

- a) John 4:24.
- b) Luke 24:39.

*E. Is Christ God? Eternal? Virgin conceived? Redeemer?*

1. He is God.

- a) John 1:1-3.
- b) John 3:16.
- c) John 20:28.

- d) Phillipians 2:5-11.
  - e) Colossians 1:15-20, see above.
  - f) Colossians 2:9.
  - g) Titus 2:13-14.
  - h) Heb. 1:1-12.
2. He is eternal. See VII.B.c., above
3. He is virgin conceived.
- a) Isaiah 7:14; 9:6.
  - b) Luke 1, 2.
  - c) Matthew 1:18-25.
4. He is Redeemer.
- a) Isaiah 53.
  - b) 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 6:20; 7:23.
  - c) 2 Cor. 5:17-21.
  - d) Galatians 1:3-5; 3:13.
  - e) Hebrews 1:3
  - f) 1 Peter 2:21-25.
  - g) 1 John 4:10.
  - h) Revelation 1:5.

**F. *Will All Men be Saved? Are there three "heavens," the last having three levels?***

1. All men will not be saved -- there is a hell.

a) Some of what the Bible has to say on the subject

(1) *Hades* - Mt. 11:23 [8] ; 16:18 [9] ; Lk. 10:15 [10] ; 16:23 [11] ; Rev. 1:18 [12] ; 20:13-14 [13] .

(2) *Gahenna* - Mt. 5:22 [14] , 29-30 [15] ; 10:28 [16] ; Jas. 3:6. [17]

(3) *A place of torment.* Luke 16:28 [18] ; Mt. 8:12 [19] ; Rev.14:11. [20]

(4) *A place of everlasting fire.* Mt. 25:41 [21] ; Mk. 9:44 [22] ; Rev. 21:8 [23] ; Lk. 3:17 [24] ; Mt. 13:42. [25]

(5) *Aion and aionios are urged as not denoting eternal, infinite, forever.*

(a) The first is used of Christ. 1 Tim. 1:17 [26] ; Rev. 1:18. [27]

(b) The second is used of the persons of the Godhead. Heb. 9:14. [28]

(c) The second describes both the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the blessed. Mat. 25:46. [29]

(d) If one is restricted, so must the other be.

(6) *Attested by the words of Christ:*

(a) Fire is not quenched.

(b) Wrath of God abideth upon them. John 3:36. [30]

(c) The smoke of the torment of those who worship the beast ascendeth up forever and ever. Rev. 14:11. [31]

(d) A place of darkness. Rev. 9:2 (bottomless pit) [32] ; Jude 1:13 (blackness of darkness). [33]

b) Clearly Hell exists and is the eternal abode of the unbelieving and disobedient.

2. There are not three heavens.

a) Paul's reference to the "third Heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2) is most likely the same as "Paradise" (2 Cor. 12:4). The Jews recognized three heavens -- the lower atmosphere, the universe, and the spiritual heaven. It is not a reference to three eternal heavens for all men, the good going to the first (telestial), the better going to the second (terrestrial), and the best going to one of the three levels the third and best (celestial). There is no such teaching in Scripture.

b) Paul's reference to "celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial" 1 Cor. 15:40, is not referring to "heavens," but to different types of bodies or flesh, by which he demonstrates that God can give His people a resurrection body of a type that pleases him.

### *G. Is Polygamy from God?*

1. Polygamy was never authorized by God. When practiced by God's people, it is always accompanied by problems, including Abraham for whom Joseph Smith named the law of polygamy.
2. Jesus stated clearly that God's plan is one man and one woman for life. Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12. See Handout for Lesson 2 and Lesson 2 in this series.