

# The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

By Rick Branch

**Founder:** Joseph Smith

**Founding Date:** April 6, 1830

**Scriptures:** Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price.

**Official Publications:** *Church News* is a weekly 16 page news paper and the *Ensign* is a monthly magazine.

**Organizational Structure:** One prophet leads the Church. Beneath the prophet in authority is the Council of the Twelve Apostles. A third group of men are called the First and Second Councils of the Seventy. All of these men together are called the General Authorities.

**Unique Terms:** Local churches called *Wards* or *Stake Centers*. The *Temples* are not for worship, but are used for ceremonies for the living and the dead. Less than ten percent of all LDS are allowed to enter these structures.

**Other Names:** The Mormons or LDS.

## HISTORY

Born in 1805 in Sharon, Vermont, Joseph Smith would begin just a few years later what would become one of the world's largest and fastest growing non-Christian religions.

According to the official story of the LDS Church, in 1820 Smith was visited by God the Father and God the Son after praying about which church he should join. He was told by Jesus, he should join none of them for they were "all wrong" and all the Christian church's doctrines "were an abomination" (**Joseph Smith - History 19, Pearl of Great Price**). This First Vision was followed by several visits from an angel named Moroni (pronounced Ma-roe-nie) who, in 1827, allowed Smith to retrieve a set of Golden Plates which had been buried in a hill near Smith's home in Palmyra, New York.

Between 1827-1830, Smith, with the help of friends, translated the Golden Plates into the LDS scripture, the Book of Mormon. Published in 1830, this was to become the first of many scriptures for the Mormon Church. By this time, Smith had also officially organized the LDS Church and was gaining a following. Over the next ten years the church headquarters would move to Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Missouri and Far West, Missouri. Finally it would find a resting place in Nauvoo, Illinois between 1839-1944.

It was in Nauvoo, that many of its more unique doctrine were to find their beginnings. Nauvoo grew to be the second largest town in the state. This growth, however, brought several problems with its neighboring towns. Problems which would eventually lead to the death of Smith at Carthage, Illinois on June 27, 1844 (**Truth Restored**, Gordon B. Hinckley, pp. 41-86).

After Smith's murder, several LDS leaders stepped forward to take control of the Church. Each claimed to have the authority to lead the Church, and some even claimed Smith had appointed them to be his successor. This fracturing of the Church has caused over 100 splinter groups throughout the movement's history (**Divergent Paths of the Restoration**, Steven Shields). The largest of these splinter groups is the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

The majority of the Mormons followed Brigham Young, who himself added several strange and unique doctrines to the LDS Church's repertoire after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. Today the LDS Church is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah with a network of worldwide outreaches.

## DOCTRINES

**TRINITY:** Mormonism is a polytheistic religion. Joseph Smith declared, "I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (**Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith**, p. 370).

Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie spoke about the Godhead in this way, "Plurality of Gods: Three separate personages: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only Gods we worship. But in addition there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods" (**Mormon Doctrine**, pp. 576-577).

**GOD THE FATHER:** Joseph Smith explained, "I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. 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" (**LDS History of the Church**, Vol. 6, p. 305).

**GOD THE SON:** Brigham Young stated, "The birth of the Saviours was a natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood, was begotten of his Father, as we were of our father" (**Journal of Discourses**, Vol. 8, p. 115). Mormon Apostle McConkie explained, "And [Christ](#) was born into the world as a literal Son this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. He was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events (**Mormon Doctrine**, p. 742).

[Jesus](#), according to Milton Hunter of the LDS First Council of the Seventy, is the brother of [Lucifer](#). "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind" (**The Gospel Through the Ages**, p. 15).

**GOD THE HOLY GHOST/HOLY SPIRIT:** In Mormonism a distinction is drawn between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit. As LDS Apostle Marion G. Romney stated, "The Holy Ghost is a person, a spirit, the third member of the Godhead" (*Ensign* May 1977, 43-44). The sixth LDS prophet, Joseph F. Smith explains that the Holy Spirit is not a person but rather an impersonal force. "You may call it the Spirit of God, you may call it the influence of God's intelligence, you may call it the substance of his power; no matter what it is called, it is the spirit of intelligence that permeates the universe" (**Mormon Doctrine**, McConkie, pp. 752-753).

**MAN'S DESTINY:** As Lorenzo Snow, fifth prophet of the LDS Church exclaimed, "As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be" (*Ensign*, February 1982, pp. 39-40). This means that every worthy male, according to the standards of Mormonism, will become a god and rule over their own planet. But what about the women? That question was answered by Joseph Fielding Smith, tenth prophet of the Church, when he spoke of Man's salvation or exaltation as it is called in Mormonism.

"The Father has promised us that through our faithfulness we shall be blessed with the fullness of his kingdom. In other words we will have the privilege of becoming like him. To become like him we must have all the powers of godhood; thus a man and his wife when glorified will have spirit children who eventually will go on an earth like this one we are on and pass through the same kind of experiences, being subject to mortal conditions, and if faithful, then they also will receive the fullness of exaltation and partake of the same blessings. There is no end to this development; it will go on forever. We will become gods and have jurisdiction over world, and these world will be peopled by our own offspring. We will have an endless eternity for this" (**Doctrines of Salvation**, Vol. 2, 48).

## Other Doctrines

- 1) God the Father is married and there is a Mother God (**Answers to Gospel Questions**, Joseph Fielding Smith, Vol. 3, pp. 143-144).
- 2) All men and women who have ever lived on Earth are the spirit offspring of Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. Every person was conceived and born in a pre-existent spiritual realm (**Mormon Doctrine**, p. 589).
- 3) Black people are black because of their misdeeds in the pre-existence (**Three Degrees of Glory**, LDS Apostle Melvin J. Ballard, p. 21).
- 4) Temple ceremonies include Baptism for the Dead, Washing and Anointing for the living and the dead (**Mormon Doctrine**, McConkie, pp. 72-74, 226-228).
- 5) Salvation or exaltation, whereby men become gods, is based on one's own good works or merit (*Church News*, October 8, 1988, p. 23 and **The Religion of the Latter-day Saints**, Lowell Bennion, LDS Institute of Religion Director, p. 160).
- 6) The [Bible](#) is considered usable, but suspect due to its many errors and missing parts (**Articles of Faith** No. 8, *Ensign* January 1989, pp. 25, 27).

## BIBLICAL RESPONSE

- 1) Only one God (Isaiah 43:10, 44:6-8, 45:5-6, 18, 22, 46:9, 48:12, 1 Corinthians 8:4).
- 2) Mankind is not a son or daughter of God from a pre-existent birth (John 1:12 "power to become").
- 3) Salvation is a free gift from God, not something to be worked for or earned (Romans 3:24, 4:4-5, 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-10, Titus 3:5-7).
- 4) Holy Spirit is a Person, not simply a force (John 16:13-14).

## RESOURCES

### For Christian Information

- 1) **Is Mormonism Christian**, Gordon Fraser. This is a good general information, easy to read book. Some documentation, 192 page paperback, \$5.
- 2) **Mormonism, Mama and Me**, Thelma Geer. This book is an easy to read, well documented book. It has some personal testimony intermingled with the information. 285 page paperback, \$7.
- 3) **Mormonism: Shadow or Reality**, Jerald and Sandra Tanner. This is THE Definitive book on Mormonism. Extremely well documented, covers every subject the reader would want. Nearly 700 page hard back, \$17.

## **For Witnessing to members of the LDS Church**

1) **Witnessing to Mormons with the Book of Mormon**, compiled by James Walker. Documentation manual with cassette tape. Examines photocopies of various versions of the Book of Mormon and demonstrates the changes that have taken place over the years. Very effective and easy to use. \$8

2) **Mormonism: How Shaky A Foundation**, compiled by Rick Branch. Documentation manual with cassette tape. Examines photocopies of some of Joseph Smith's false prophecies and the evolving nature of the Mormon God. Very effective and easy to use. \$8.