

Mormons

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How should Christians view the Book of Mormon?

When Mormon missionaries (properly called Latter Day Saints or simply "LDS") come to your door, they will often offer a free copy of the Book of Mormon and tell you about its author, Joseph Smith. Smith, they will say, translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates he dug up in a hill in New York in the early 1800s. This is supposed to confirm his calling from God as the new prophet on the earth in these latter days. Further, they will tell you that the Holy Ghost will confirm the truth of the Book of Mormon by producing good feelings in you. Next will come the invitation to "read the Book of Mormon, pray, and ask God to show you it is true." Of course you must do this with sincerity, or it won't work.

Before you fall to your knees, there are some things you need to know that they are not telling you (and won't unless you ask). The first concerns many LDS beliefs that separate them from historical, orthodox Christianity. These are not found in the Book of Mormon. In fact, there is really very little in that book that is doctrinally disagreeable to orthodox Christians. The real meat of Mormonism is found in their other scriptures, *The Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price*. These books, however, Mormons do not hand out at the door—and for good reason. If people knew up front what they were really going to be asked to believe (things such as God once being a man, denial of the Trinity, Satan being Jesus' brother, pre-existence of souls, etc.), they may not be quite so willing to put aside their skepticism.

The second thing to realize is that in accepting the Book of Mormon, one is, in fact, accepting Joseph Smith as a prophet. So what about this test of a prophet? Isn't it legitimate to "give this question up to God?" No, it isn't. This is because God has already revealed His test for would-be prophets, and it has nothing to do with prayer or feelings, and God has no obligation to answer prayers that He has already answered! We do not have to ask God whether or not we should rob a bank or murder someone. Rather,

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it will be given to him." Wisdom is applied knowledge, not lack of it.

God never tells us to pray about what is true. When we want to know how tall a wall is, we don't pray about it; we get something that we know is true (a ruler) and compare it to the wall. The Bible, God's Word, is true. That is our measuring stick for truth. See Acts 17:11, for example, which describes a group of people who were considered noble because when Paul came to them with the Christian message they "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."

Feelings are unreliable because they are subjective, easy to produce, and are not meant to discover facts but to tell us how we feel about facts. Psychological persuasion techniques, intensity, eye contact, or mere desire can produce feelings that feel real because they are real! But real feelings are still just letting us know how we are reacting to something, not the truthfulness of that thing. The Mormon missionary handbook specifically details these techniques, and missionaries go through training on how to persuade people before they ever leave the house.

What are the biblical tests for a prophet? They are in God's Word: Deuteronomy 18:21-22 says, "You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him." Did Joseph Smith ever claim "in the name of the LORD" that something would happen when it did not? Yes—many times, in fact.

Joseph Smith prophesied that New York would be destroyed if they rejected the [Mormon] gospel (D&C 84:114-115). He also prophesied that the rebellion of South Carolina and the War Between the States would result in war being poured out upon all nations; slaves would revolt; the inhabitants of the earth would mourn; famine, plague, earthquake, thunder, lightning, and a full end of all nations would result (D&C 87). Oddly, this

prophecy is the one most often cited by Mormons to prove Joseph Smith's prophetic power!

Further, Deuteronomy 13:1–3 says that "if a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul." Did Joseph Smith lead his followers to other gods? Yes.

Joseph Smith was a polytheist. History of the Church 6:474 records Smith stating, "I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods." Joseph Smith declared that "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 345). This is clearly not the biblical God.

Galatians 1:6-7 says that people may be "turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all . . . trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." And Paul pronounced a curse upon them for doing so. In Romans 1:16 Paul tells us that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation"—that's pretty important. Did Joseph Smith teach a "different gospel"? Yes.

Mormons believe that the Book of Mormon contains the "fullness of the gospel." The Book of Mormon says so itself in its introduction (see also Doctrines and Covenants 20:9; 27:5; 42:12; and 135:3). So what is the gospel according to Mormonism? It's a tough question for many LDS to answer. According to Mormon apostle Bruce McConkie, author of the book Mormon Doctrine, the gospel is "the plan of salvation [that] embraces all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers, authorities, and keys necessary to save and exalt men." In other words, the whole of Mormon theology. In the Mormon gospel we see belief + repentance + baptism + laying on of hands + temple work + mission work + church ministry + tithing + ceasing from sin + abstaining from the use of intoxicants and strong drinks and tobacco and caffeine + confessing Joseph Smith as

Prophet + temple marriage + baptism for the dead + genealogy research . . . the list could go on and on and on. Only upon completion of all these things may Mormons attain to the third and highest level of heaven, thus achieving the ultimate goal of the Mormon gospel—godhood (see McConkie, Mormon Doctrine 116-117; Book of Mormon [3 Nephi 27:13-21]; Doctrines of Salvation 1:268; 18:213; The 4th Article of Faith; Smith, Gospel Doctrine pg. 107; Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses 3:93; 3:247; 9:312; Gospel Principles 290; Doctrine and Covenants 39:5-6; 132:19-20). In essence, Christ's death means nothing more to a Mormon than the gaining of the ability to be resurrected so that his works may be judged.

While we cannot judge another person's motives, we can and must judge what a person does or says. Joseph Smith, and hence the Book of Mormon, fails the twin tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. God takes false prophets very seriously. Deuteronomy 13:5 says, "That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God...; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you." Deuteronomy 18:19-21 says, "If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death..." And Galatians 1:8-9 says, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

The gospel is God's power to bring us to Him. He will not stand for those who pervert it. He has given us the ability and the responsibility to discern whether or not the gospel is being tampered with. We must carefully investigate the claims of the LDS if we are to follow what God has commanded. In fact, Mormons invite non-Mormons to examine their claims: "Convince us of our errors of doctrine, if we have any" (LDS Apostle Orson Pratt, The Seer, p.15).

I am a Mormon. Why should I consider becoming a Christian?

Anyone from any religion—or no religion at all—who asks, “Why should I consider becoming a Christian?” should consider the claims of Christianity. For a Mormon asking this question, the differences between the tenets of biblical Christianity and LDS philosophy should be the primary area of inquiry. If the Bible is the Word of God (both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young believed this), then the foundational beliefs of Mormonism and the Latter-day Saints (if those beliefs are reliable) should be consistent with what the Bible teaches. However, there are inconsistencies, and we will look at four areas of discrepancy between Mormonism and the Bible.

1) A Mormon who is considering becoming a Christian should understand that Mormonism teaches dependence on extra-biblical sources. The Bible teaches that it is sufficient for instruction in Christian living (2 Timothy 3:16) and that God specifically cursed anyone who claimed authority to add to what God had already revealed in the Bible. In other words, God pronounced His written revelation complete (Revelation 22:18–19). Therefore, there is no reason for God to write more. A God who writes His Book, says it’s complete, and then later realizes He forgot something either didn’t plan for the future or didn’t know enough to write everything the first time. Such a god is not the God of the Bible. Yet Mormonism teaches that the Bible is only one of four authoritative sources, the other three being the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price. These three came from a single man who declared them to be God-inspired despite their being contrary to the Bible, the first and only truly inspired text. To add additional material to Scripture and call it inspired is to contradict God.

2) A Mormon who is considering becoming a Christian should understand that Mormonism promotes a lesser god. Mormonism teaches that God has not always been the Supreme Being of the universe (Mormon Doctrine, p. 321) but attained that status through righteous living (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345). Yet who defines righteous? That standard can only come from God Himself. So, the teaching that God became God by meeting a predetermined standard originating from God is a

contradiction. Additionally, a god that is not eternal and self-existent is not the God of the Bible. The Bible teaches that God is eternally self-existent (Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17) and He is not created but the Creator Himself (Genesis 1; Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 37:16; Colossians 1:17–18).

3) A Mormon who is considering becoming a Christian should understand that Mormonism teaches an inflated view of humanity that is completely inconsistent with biblical teaching. Mormonism teaches that any human can also become a god (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345–354; Doctrine & Covenants 132:20). Yet the Bible teaches repeatedly that we are all inherently sinful (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10–23; 8:7) and that God alone is God (1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 44:6, 8; 46:9). Isaiah 43:10 records God’s own words: “Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.” How Mormonism can assert that men will become gods in the face of such overwhelming scriptural evidence is a testimony to the depth of man’s desire to usurp God’s place, a desire born in the heart of Satan (Isaiah 14:14) and passed on by him to Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:5). The desire to usurp the throne of God—or to share it—characterizes all who are of their father the devil, including the Antichrist, who will act on the same desire in the end times (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4). Throughout history, many false religions have played upon the same desire to be God. But God declares there is no God but Him, and we dare not contradict Him.

4) A Mormon who is considering becoming a Christian should understand that Mormonism teaches that we are capable of earning our salvation, contrary to Scripture (Articles of Faith, p.92; 2 Nephi 25:23). Although we will certainly live differently because of our faith, it is not our works that save us, but only the grace of God through the faith He gives to us as a free gift (Ephesians 2:4–10). This is simply because God accepts only His own perfect righteousness. Christ died on the cross to exchange His perfection for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). We can only be made holy in God’s sight through faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Ultimately, faith in a false Christ leads to a false salvation. Any salvation that is “earned” is a false salvation (Romans 3:20–28). We simply cannot be worthy of salvation on our own merits. If we cannot trust God’s Word, then we have no basis for trust at all. If we can trust God’s Word, then we must recognize that His Word is consistent and reliable. If God could not or did not preserve His Word accurately, then He would not be God. The difference between Mormonism and Christianity is that Christianity declares a God who is eternally self-existent, who set a perfect and holy standard that we cannot live up to, and who then, out of His great love, paid the price for our sin by sending His Son to die on the cross for us.

If you are ready to place your trust in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you can speak the following words to God: “Father God, I know that I am a sinner and am worthy of your wrath. I recognize and believe that Jesus is the only Savior. I place my trust in Jesus alone to save me. Father God, please forgive me, cleanse me, and change me. Thank you for your wonderful grace and mercy!”

Have you placed your full trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior because of what you have read here? If so, please click on the “I trusted in Christ as Savior today” button below.