

Elephant – Mormonism

5/7/23

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Sunday AM

If you're just joining us, we're in a series comparing the tenets of Christianity w/ those of the other 4,200 religions/cults. As I've stated from the start, this series isn't to condemn or speak condescendingly of another faith, but to clarify our differences to help us to engage people of other faiths as well as to grow in our faith.

Over the past few weeks, we've looked at the beliefs of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Catholicism – today/next week, I want us to turn our attention to (2) of the more influential cults in our community.

Definition: a cult refers to a non-orthodox religious group that has a devotion to a person, object, or set of new ideas often marked by a sense of exclusivity and secrecy. A couple of typical traits found in a cult are:

- **A Newer Prophet** – by some unique revelation, the founder has discovered a better way than that of orthodoxy – allowing the leader to claim to be sent by God to lead this new true religion.
- **A Better Way** – they claim they've been given a *special revelation* from God superior to the Bible and orthodoxy that explains what the Bible is *really* trying to say – and this writing always supersedes the Bible in authority.

WTM – today we're going to discuss **Mormonism** – also known as the *Church of JC of Latter-Day Saints*. Today is a challenging topic b/c most of us know someone who is a Mormon and we know them to be kind, conservative, God-fearing people – who often consider themselves to be *Christians* – yet their true core beliefs are far, far from Biblical Christianity.

I The **BEGINNING** of Mormonism

The saga of Mormonism began in 1820 when a 14-yr old boy, named **Joseph Smith, Jr.** purportedly had a vision in which (2) celestial beings appeared to him. In his exchange w/ these beings, he asked which Christian denomination he should join and they told him that ***all existing churches were wrong, their creeds were an abomination, and all their professors were corrupt.*** They also made it clear to Joseph that he'd been chosen to not ***reform*** but to ***restore***, a church that had disappeared from the earth.

In 1823, at 17, Smith claimed the angel Moroni appeared to him and divulged the location of golden plates purportedly containing the *fullness of the everlasting gospel*. (4) yrs later, Smith claimed to have found these plates written in ***reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics*** in NY – along w/ (2) stones able to translate them – the ***Urim*** and ***Thummim***.

The result – a new revelation – the ***Book of Mormon*** and by 1830, a new religion began called ***Mormonism***. The Mormon movement wasn't quickly embraced but rejected and from 1830-1840 moved from NY to OH to MO to IL. In IL, the movement built its own city in ***Nauvoo***. Ultimately, Smith and a group of followers were arrested by the governor for questionable activities and sent to Carthage for trial. While awaiting trial, an irate mob stormed the jail – and Smith and his brother were killed. Shortly thereafter, ***Brigham Young*** became the leader and moved the movement to Utah where it is based today.

Today, Mormonism is the fastest-growing cult in the world w/ more than 16.5 mil. Mormons worldwide. They have over 31k+ congregations, 315 Temples, and 63k full-time missionaries.

II The WRITINGS of Mormonism

The primary sacred writings of Mormonism include the *Book of Mormon* (BM), the *Doctrines and Covenants* (DC), and *The Pearl of Great Price* (PGP).

A The Book of Mormon (BM)

As mentioned, the **BM** is Joseph Smith's translation of the golden tablets he unearthed in NY that he (*although untrained*) translated from reformed Egyptian into English. By his account, this translation records the history of a race of people called the *Jaradites* who were scattered after the tower of Babel to the northern hemisphere 2,200 yrs before Christ.

The **BM** says around 600 B.C., these Jewish descendants divided into the *Lamanites* (ancestors to native American Indians) and the *Nephites*. Mormon, the last surviving Nephite leader, supposedly inscribed the race's history onto these golden plates. Of course, as fate would have it, after Smith translated the plates, Moroni whisked the plates back to heaven NEVER to have been seen by another person. (how convenient)

To say blind faith plays a major role here is a gross understatement. While the accounts of Christianity can be supported historically and thru archeology, there's NO historical/archeological evidence to support Smith's claims.

- Not one city in the **BM** has ever been located
- Not one artifact in the **BM** has ever been validated
- No other sources of antiquity support the **BM**
- No DNA evidence to prove the tribes mentioned in the **BM** have Hebrew heritage

In fact, for yrs, the Smithsonian has distributed a statement denying the **BM** as a valid guide for history and archeology regarding Native American Indian history/culture b/c nothing in it could be substantiated. In addition, the credibility of the **BM** has always been in question b/c it's been altered over 4,000 times to compensate for Smith's poor command of the English language, for cultural changes, and for numerous other errors/inconsistencies.

B Doctrines and Covenants (DC)

DC is a text the LDS considers authoritative in matters of doctrine. Originally, it contained (2) parts – (1) an extensive collection of lessons on Mormon doctrinal beliefs. And (2) featured supposed “revelations” given to the prophets of the LDS.

Thru-out its history, the content in the DC has been revised numerous times, adding new revelations and correcting/removing others – like polygamy and views on non-whites – to name a few.

C The Pearl of Great Price

The **PGP** is a selection of materials touching on many of the vital aspects of the Mormon faith/doctrines. These items were produced by Joseph Smith and later published. PGP contains (4) major sections – *Book of Moses* (BMo), *Book of Abraham* (BA), and *Joseph Smith on Matthew*, and the *History of Joseph Smith*.

This writing is quite troubling. Take the **BA** for example. Smith purchased the writing from a traveling Egyptian mummy exhibit in 1835. Written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, He claimed these writings included Abraham's account of the creation among other things. The truth is, according to actual Egyptologists, these writings are

excerpts from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and have nothing to do w/ Abraham but w/ the Egyptian goddess of Osiris/Anubis.

III The TEACHINGS of Mormonism

A Concerning GOD – Exalted Man vs Eternal God

Mormonism teaches *eternal progression*. That is, God was once a man capable of physical death, but He progressed to become God the Father (Elohim). Like us, he once had a physical body, but after he progressed, he was exalted to godhood to inherit his own universe where he sired spirit children destined for human life on Earth. So, he isn't the sovereign God of the Bible, but a man turned god b/c he kept the requirements of Mormonism. *BTW, we too, if we progress, can become gods w/ our own planets.*

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! We have imagined God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil, so that you may see.

Teachings of the Prophet JS – 345

The H.S., Jesus Christ, and Heavenly Father comprise three separate and distinct gods: the Father and the Son have bodies of flesh/bones as tangible as man's, but the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit.

DC – 130:22

Christianity – God is a sovereign, self-sufficient being who is the personal, eternal, infinite Creator of all that exists. He exists as Father, Son, and H.S – always God and never a man who became God.

B Concerning JESUS – Elder Brother vs Divine Savior

Mormonism says that Jesus is pre-existent, but His pre-mortal form was not as God. Rather, Jesus is our elder brother from the great star, *Kolob*. He was Elohim's firstborn spirit child and our elder brother.

Every person who was ever born on earth was our spirit brother or sister in heaven. The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ, so he is literally our elder brother. *Gospel Principles – 11*

Mormonism – Jesus is the literal brother of Lucifer

The doctrine that Lucifer and our Lord, Jesus Christ, are brothers may seem surprising to some – especially to those unacquainted w/ latter-day revelations. But both the scriptures and the prophets affirm that Jesus Christ and Lucifer are indeed offspring of our Heavenly Father and, therefore, spirit brothers... But as the firstborn of the Father, Jesus was Lucifer's older brother. *DC – 93:21*

Christianity believes Jesus is God incarnate and Satan is a created being/fallen angel – not his brother.

C Concerning the DEATH of JESUS

Mormonism says Jesus' death/resurrection provides immortality for all people regardless of their faith.

Christ thus overcame physical death. B/c of his atonement, everyone born on this earth will be resurrected...

This condition is called immortality. All people who ever lived will be resurrected, 'both old/young, both bond/free, both male/female, both the wicked/the righteous. *The BM, Alma 11:44*

Christianity – Jesus is the eternal Word of God, coexistent/coeternal w/ the Father/ H.S. He was God in the flesh, conceived supernaturally by the H.S. and born of the Virgin Mary. He possesses both a human/Divine nature,

lived a sinless life, died on the cross to atone for man's sin, and was raised from the dead as God's solution to the problem of sin.

D Concerning MAN

Mormonism teaches humans are the spiritual offspring of Heavenly Father/Mother ultimately giving us the ability to become gods ourselves.

All men/women are literally the sons/daughters of Deity. Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming on the earth in a temporal (physical) body. *Gospel Principles* – 11

As man is, god once was; as god is, man may become. *Lorenzo Snow – 5th leader of LDS*

Referring to a person's ability to become a god too.

Christianity – Humans are the crowning act of God's creation, created in God's image. Each person is a unique being of dignity/worth, formed by God in our mother's womb. We are not gods nor will we ever become a god, but we can have a relationship w/ God.

E Concerning SALVATION

Mormonism – the plan of salvation is built on the idea that all people have eternal life, but only the most faithful Mormons can experience godhood and enter into the celestial Kingdom. To obtain this salvation, Mormons must exercise faith in the God of Mormonism, its Christ, and the LDS Church, along w/ exercising repentance and being baptized LDS.

Mormons believe salvation is acquired thru *gospel obedience* – that is, thru faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the H.S., and successfully completing *mortal probation* by living a righteous life. Together, this enables them to experience *eternal progression*.

Here then is eternal life — to know the only wise and true God, and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings/priests to God the same as all gods have done before you. Joseph Smith Jr.

Mormons don't believe Jesus' death was sufficient to overcome all sin – and that along w/ believing in Jesus as God's son, one must also live a good life of good works and believe Joseph Smith was God's prophet.

Christianity – Salvation is by God's initiative of grace in Jesus' death and by our faith response to His gift. God became a man in Jesus to become an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It's thru faith in the crucified/risen Jesus that we may be saved.

For it is by grace you have been saved, thru faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so no one can boast. Ephesians 2:1-9

F Concerning the AFTERLIFE

Mormonism believes all people will enter 1 of 3 levels of glory.

- **Celestial** Kingdom for faithful Mormons – people who may become gods/angels. *DC* – 132
- **Terrestrial** Kingdom for righteous non-Mormons

- **Telestial** Kingdom for the wicked/ungodly. Though it's for the wicked, it's not akin to the biblical doctrine of hell.

Christianity – teaches those who've trusted in Christ will receive eternal life in heaven w/ God. The unsaved will receive just punishment for their sins, resulting in separation from God's presence in hell.

These ideas are just the tip of the iceberg as there are many profound differences b/w Mormons/Christians.

Ultimately though, the big difference is the LDS seeks to **humanize** God and **deify** man.

This means Mormonism isn't a sect of Christianity but a contrary teaching to the Bible.

It also means the claims of J.S. have no foundational basis/credibility according to the Bible or history – and that the beliefs/practices of Mormonism readily meet the base criteria to be a cult.

It's almost impossible to write fiction about the Mormons for the reasons that Mormon institutions and society are so peculiar that they call for constant explanation. *Wallace Stegner – Historian of the American West and fiction writer*

IOW – Mr. Stegner, after hours/hours of research on Mormonism, concluded that Mormonism might be the greatest embellishment of fiction ever passed on to humanity and there's no truth/relevance to their outlandish claims.