



MORMONISM

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

The Mormon church was founded by Joseph Smith in 1830 as The Church of Christ. The name was later changed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). The nickname Mormon is from the title of their primary scripture “The Book of Mormon”. Mormon is the name of a prophet in the story.

1. The Mormon church is a restorationist religion like the Jehovah’s Witnesses.
2. The LDS claim to be a Christian church, but they don’t have a Trinitarian view of God, and they are not recognized as Christian by any of the Nicaean faiths.
3. They claim that the early Christian church that Jesus founded was taken from the Earth soon after the deaths of the Apostles because of the corruption and wickedness of the early Christians.
4. They assert that the LDS church is the one true church on the face of the earth.
5. Mormons claim that only the LDS church possesses the divine authority of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood as restored by God to Joseph Smith in 1829 (*D&C* 13; 27:8- 13; 107:1-20; *PGP*: Joseph Smith-History 1:68-73).
6. They teach that Joseph Smith was chosen by God to restore the one true church to the Earth in the early 1800s.

Mormon Church Origin Story

Joseph Smith and his family were born in New England and relocated to a farm in upstate New York when he was a young boy. They lived during a time of intense religious revivalism known as the second great awakening. Joseph’s parents and grandparents were believers in visions, spirits, and other divine influences. His grandfather’s Unitarian Universalist beliefs influenced the theology that later developed in the Mormon church.

(In the 19th century many people believed they were surrounded by spirits and magic. So, what seem like crazy ideas to our modern mind was more plausible to the people who first heard Joseph Smith’s stories.)

Some key events in the early church history:

1. 1820 age 14 - Joseph receives the First Vision where **God the Father** and His Son, **Jesus Christ** appeared to him in a grove of trees near his family farm in answer to a prayer about which church to join.
2. Joseph Smith claimed Jesus Christ told him to join none of the existing denominations because “they were all wrong . . . that all their creeds were an

abomination in his sight; that those professions were all corrupt” (PGP: Joseph Smith-History 1:19-20).

3. 1823 age 17 - Joseph is instructed by the **angel Moroni** (A character from the Book of Mormon) for the first time, who reveals to Joseph information about an ancient record that will need to be translated and about the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. 1824 age 18 - Joseph is instructed by the **angel Moroni** to visit a nearby hill that he called the hill Cumorah, near his family farm, on the same date every year until 1827.
5. 1827 Joseph dug up the “golden plates’ from the hill Cumorah.
6. 1829 - Joseph finished “translating” the Book of Mormon.
 - a. The BOM was written with the use of a magical seer stone, or as Joseph called it a peep stone.
 - b. He found his peep stone while digging a well. The church still has this stone in its possession.
 - c. He placed the stone in the bottom of a hat, held the hat to his face, and sat behind a curtain dictating the Book of Mormon to a scribe. Joseph said that the English words appeared on the stone as glowing lights. He claimed the actual plates were hidden somewhere in the house or on the farm during this process.
 - d. The original witnesses said they saw the golden plates with their “spiritual eyes”, not their actual eyes. The church has now revised this story to claim that the scribes and witnesses handled the golden plates.
7. 1829 - Harmony, Pennsylvania: Joseph and his cousin and Book of Mormon scribe Oliver Cowdery are ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood and are baptized by **John the Baptist**.
8. 1829 – On the banks of the Susquehanna River: Joseph and Oliver are ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood by the apostles **Peter, James, and John**.
9. 1830 - The Book of Mormon is published and Joseph with his family and a few neighbors form the Mormon church.
10. 1836 - Joseph and Oliver Cowdery receive a series of visions in the Kirtland, Ohio Temple. **The Lord** appears and accepts the temple; **Moses** restores the keys of the gathering of Israel; **Elias** restores the keys of the dispensation of the gospel of

Abraham (the eternal family order); **Elijah** restores the keys of fullness of the priesthood sealing power (Doctrine and Covenants 110).

11. 1846 Joseph and his brother Hyrum were killed by an armed mob. The church split into competing groups with the largest group following Brigham Young to Utah in 1847 and 1848. Joseph's descendants formed The Reorganized LDS Church (now the Community of Christ Church) in Independence, Missouri. Several other smaller groups followed various charismatic leaders to form churches.

The Story told in the Book of Mormon

1. The main BOM story is about a group of Israelites led by a prophet named Lehi who took his extended family from Jerusalem in 600 BC. They built a ship and sailed across the ocean to Central America.
2. They multiplied and eventually split into two groups. One group, the Lamanites, forgot their beliefs, became heathens, and were the ancestors of the American Indians. The other group, the Nephites, developed culturally and built great cities but were eventually destroyed by the Lamanites about 400 AD.
3. Before that occurred Jesus appeared and taught the Nephites on the American continent after his Ascension.
4. The book itself and the writings of church leaders are unclear on the location of BOM events. Most speculate that most of the story occurs somewhere in Central America. The final great battle that led to the complete extermination of the Nephites occurred in what is now upstate New York near the Joseph Smith family farm. It is unclear how and when the combatants moved from Central to North America.
5. According to the book, the history of the descendants of Lehi and the teachings of Jesus were abridged and written on gold plates by the prophet Mormon in the final years before the Nephite extermination. The book and the church get their name from this last prophet. Mormon's son Moroni made additions and buried the plates in the ground, where they remained for about 1,400 years until Moroni, appearing as a resurrected being or an angel, delivered them to Joseph Smith.

(In the 19th century people were interested in where the American Indians came from. There were several popular books written that speculated that they were from the lost tribes of Israel.)

6. Moroni instructed Joseph to translate the characters engraved on their surfaces with the aid of special stones called "interpreters." Completing the work in less than 90 days, Smith published it in March of 1830.

7. The church has now softened its claims about the BOM stories in light of the complete lack of DNA or archaeological support.

Mormon Doctrine

The Doctrine of God:

They believe in multiple Gods with physical bodies living on planets in our universe. In their theology God was once a mortal man who lived on a different planet. He was a good man and followed all the rules of the Mormon church and was rewarded in his next life by becoming a God himself. They believe that his eldest son was Jesus.

1. God (Heavenly Father) is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone. LDS founder Joseph Smith said, "If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible-I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345).
2. The Trinity is denied with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost seen as three separate entities. "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us" (*Doctrine and Covenants* [D&C] 130:22).
3. Heavenly Father is the Elohim of The Bible - LDS Church (2011) "Chapter 2: God the Eternal Father". Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith. pp. 36–44.).

The Doctrine of Jesus Christ:

1. Jesus was the spiritual "first born" Son of God in the preexistence. "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* [GP], p. 11)." And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the father, and am the Firstborn" (D&C 93:21).
2. Jesus is the Jehovah of the Bible and creator of this Earth (Kirkland, Boyd (Spring 1986). "Elohim and Jehovah in Mormonism and the Bible".
3. He is also the "only begotten" physical offspring of God by procreation on earth. "Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father. That is why he is called the "Only Begotten Son" (GP, p. 64).
4. His atonement (death and resurrection) provides immortality for all people regardless of their faith. "Christ thus overcame physical death. Because 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 and

young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous” (*The Book of Mormon* [BOM], Alma 11:44)” (GP, p. 74). (See GP, pp. 11, 17-19, 61-77).

(Read King Follet Pages)

The Doctrines of Scriptures and Authority:

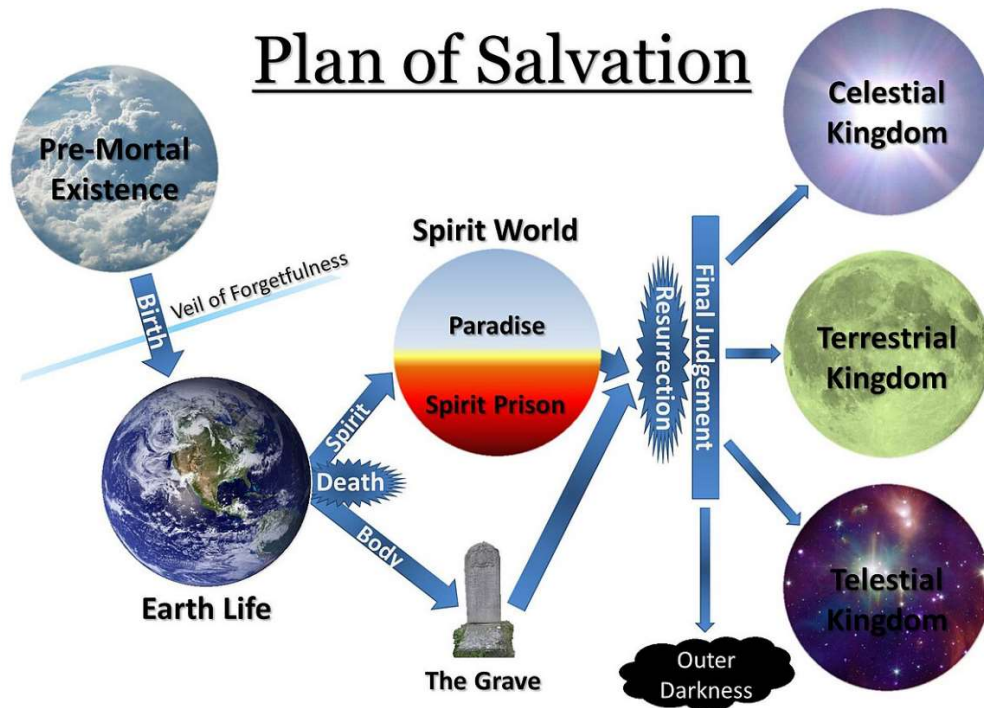
1. The church recognizes the LDS Four Standard Works as authoritative:
 - a. *The King James Bible* “as far as it is translated correctly” (Articles of Faith 1:8).
 - b. *The Book of Mormon* (BOM) which Joseph Smith declared is “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 194).
 - c. *The Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C) as Scripture. It “is a collection of modern revelations . . . regarding The Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored in these last days” (GP, p. 54).
 - d. *The Pearl of the Great Price* (PGP) is the fourth book believed to be inspired. “It clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives added information concerning the creation of the earth” (GP, p. 54).
2. The church’s president is regarded as “a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet” (D&C 107:91-92).
3. Joseph Smith and all subsequent leaders, including their present-day President and prophet Russell M. Nelson, are considered modern-day prophets who speak with God and deliver new revelations.
4. Because of the belief that they receive new revelation from God their scriptures and core doctrines are flexible and subject to change and addition. Even the former prophets including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young are thought to be fallible and their pronouncement have been superseded by new revelations.

The Doctrine of Humanity:

1. People are the pre-existing spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father and Mother. “All men and women are . . . literally the sons and 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 upon the earth in a temporal (physical) body” (Joseph F. Smith, “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, pp. 78,80, as quoted in GP, p. 11).

2. They are born basically good (no original sin) and are “gods in embryo.” A commonly quoted Mormon aphorism (attributed to fifth LDS president Lorenzo Snow) says “As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become.”

The Doctrine of Salvation:



1. After death most people will go to one of three levels of glory:
 - a. Exaltation in the **Celestial Kingdom** is for faithful Mormons through obedience to LDS teachings: faith, baptism, endowments, celestial marriage, and tithing. This is where faithful Mormons may become gods or angels; “Then shall they be gods” (D&C 132:20). “Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God-Wherefore, all things are theirs” (D&C, 76:58-59).
 - b. **Terrestrial Kingdom** for righteous non-Mormons; “These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fullness” (D&C 76:75-76).
 - c. **Telestial Kingdom** for wicked and ungodly (not hell); “these are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers . . . who suffer the wrath of God on earth” (D&C 76:103-104). (See also D&C 76:57-119; 131:1-4).
2. The most evil and wicked people are banished to what they call “**outer darkness**”.
3. These are some of the blessings given to exalted people:

- a. They will live eternally in the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (see D&C, 76).
 - b. They will become gods.
 - c. They will have their righteous family members with them and will be able to have spirit children also. These spirit children will have the same relationship to them as we do to our Heavenly Father. They will be an eternal family.
 - d. They will receive a fullness of joy.
 - e. They will have everything that our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have – all power, glory, dominion, and knowledge (See GP, p. 302).
4. Mormon salvation doctrine is works based. Everyone earns salvation by their own merits.
 5. Baptism for the dead provides post-mortem salvation for non-Mormons and is “by immersion performed by a living person for one who is dead. This ordinance is performed in Mormon temples” (GP, p. 375). (See also GP, chapters 18-23.)

The Doctrine of Sin:

1. People sin by disobedience to God’s laws. Adam’s fall, a part of Heavenly Father’s plan, caused a loss of immortality, which was necessary for mankind to advance, (see *GP*, pp. 31-34). As Eve declared according to LDS scripture, “Were it not for our transgression we never should have . . . known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (*PGP*, Moses 5:11; see also *BOM*, 2 Nephi 2:22-25).
2. Each person is responsible for his or her own sin.

Much of Mormon theology is derived from the teachings of the Universalist churches of New England. Both of Joseph’s grandfathers were Universalists.

Church Organization

Lay Ministry

1. They have an unpaid lay ministry with no requirement for what we would consider seminary, theology, or ministry training. Mormon seminary training is class that is held for an hour before school for high school students.
2. Most adults and many teens serve in various capacities in the functioning of the church. These are referred to as callings. They serve in a calling for a few years and are then released to begin something different.

(For example, the congregation leader – the bishop – job is rotated among the senior males in the ward. They give spiritual counsel, judge the worthiness of

the members of their congregation, perform weddings and funerals, all with little or no formation. The central church distributes handbooks of instruction to perform these tasks.)

3. Preaching and teaching is done by everyone. Everyone from small children, to teens, to adult members and local leaders stand in the pulpit and deliver short speeches that they call sacrament talks.

Priesthood

1. All male members in good standing are ordained to one of six levels of their priesthood. The priesthood levels have increasing gifts and powers. Priesthood levels are different from their church calling.
 - a. Teen boys are called to one of three levels of the Aaronic Priesthood starting with **deacons** at age 12, **teacher** at age 14, and **priest** at age 16. The teenage priests prepare and administer the sacrament and can have other church callings such as working with younger kids, caring for the church buildings, etc.
 - b. Adult men beginning at age 18 are ordained to one of three levels of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The first level is an **Elder**. Male missionaries are elders. Some men remain elders for life. Later in life some are elevated to the quorum of **Seventies** with a special lifetime missionary calling. Those called to church leadership roles become **High Priests**. All the church leaders from the Bishop of the local church up to the senior leadership and prophet hold the priesthood office of High Priest.

Church Organization

1. The Church is led by a president / prophet and two counselors from the headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. Serving under the first presidency are a quorum of 12 apostles. When a prophet dies the next one is chosen from this group.
2. The church is further divided into stakes or missions (in less populated areas) with geographic coverage similar to a diocese. The stakes and missions are led by a president and two counselors.
3. Individual congregations are called wards or branches (again in less populated areas). The wards are led by a bishop who has a priesthood level of High Priest. The buildings are fairly spartan in design. They don't have the symbol of the cross anywhere.

We are in the area of the Conroe Stake that includes Huntsville, Willis, Montgomery, and Conroe. They had a September 2023 average church attendance of 1023 members. The

Ward in our area is the Crighton Ward with an average meeting attendance of 215. They have two church buildings in Conroe and one in Huntsville.

Mormon Temples

1. Mormon temples have no analog in The Catholic Church.
2. They are reserved for special ceremonies for both the living and in proxy for the dead.
3. Only full tithe paying righteous active members are allowed in. No non-Mormons and less than half of the members of the Mormon church itself are allowed inside, even to witness the weddings of their own family members.
4. They perform ceremonies that are part of their path to salvation. Adults are given signs and symbols that they need to access the highest levels of heaven. Couples are married and eternally sealed as a family unit that they believe will remain intact for all eternity.
5. These same rituals and proxy baptisms are performed for all people they can find names for who have died. They believe that good people who have passed on without the opportunity to be Mormon need to have people on earth perform these ceremonies for the in Mormon temples to be allowed into heaven.
6. This is why the Mormon church is active in worldwide genealogy research. They have probably baptized some of your ancestors by proxy in the temple ceremonies.
7. Both adults and church youth groups will go into the temple and be completely immersed in a large font 30 to 50 times with the officiant reading their proxy name and baptizing them over and over.

The closest Mormon temple is in the Klein area at the corner of Cypresswood and Champion Forest Drive.

Key things to be aware of when speaking to Mormons

The Mormon people are just like us all. Sinners trying to do the best they can. The LDS Church teaches citizenship and good morals. They stress family values. But their doctrine is in a perverted form. That's how Satan works, Wolves in sheep's clothing.

1. The church is rebranding itself to appear more Christian. Members are now told to not use the label Mormon and to refer to themselves as Latter Day Saints or LDS.
2. They are taught that they are a Christian faith and are literally the only true church on earth. You will hear “Jesus Christ is in the name of the church”.
3. They believe themselves to be a persecuted people. They are told that anyone who doesn’t agree with them has been blinded by anti-Mormon lies.
4. A Mormon may use words and phrases that sound Biblically true (Jesus Christ, Son of God, salvation by faith, etc.), but they actually mean something entirely different.
5. Many Mormons know very little about their own theology. They are encouraged to not study anything other than approved Mormon books. The church has been systematically downplaying the more controversial elements of their doctrine.

What should I say to Mormons:

There is a Mormon saying that either Mormonism is true, or Catholicism is true (spoiler alert – it’s Catholicism). So, Mormons have a curiosity about the Catholic church that can be an opportunity to start a conversation.

Missionaries – remember their youth. They have a very scripted message. They know little about their own faith and less about the Bible. They are told that all faith is found in their feelings.

I try to see if they are interested in Catholicism and if they are open to learning I compare and contrast the two religions. It may open a door for them in the future.

Devout Mormon friends and relatives – I suggest the same strategy of evangelizing Catholic Christianity. You can share your testimony of the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness of the Catholic Church.

Disaffected Mormons seeking guidance about converting to Christianity. Try to spend time listening with empathy. Share that you have a friend who went through the same difficult experience. Share your testimony of the Catholic church. If you think it is appropriate Henry or I will be happy to talk with them.

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Joseph Smith, Jr. discourses on the nature of God and on the Bible

Joseph Smith gave an address on 7 April 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois, at a general conference of the church. A church elder named King Follett died in an accident a few weeks before the conference so Joseph Smith took the opportunity to specifically comment on Follett's death and to speak on what he called "the subject of the dead." The address has often been referred to as the King Follett sermon or King Follett discourse.

The following excerpts expound on his teaching about the nature of God:

"First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heaven, is a man like one of you. That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today and you were to see the great God who holds this world in its orbit and upholds all things by his power, you would see him in the image and very form of a man".

Denial of an eternal God. God was once a mere mortal on a different planet:

"We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. That he was not (from all eternity) is an idea incomprehensible to some. But it is the simple and first principle of the gospel-to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another. God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible".

His teaching on "Eternal Progression" - that we can all progress to become Gods ourselves:

"And you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves--to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done--by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power."

Denial of Ex Nihilo creation:

"Now I ask all who hear me why the learned men who are preaching salvation say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The reason is they are unlearned."

The text of this sermon was first published in the Mormon newspaper: *Times and Seasons*, 5 (15 August 1844): 612-17, and is available online at the LDS Church history website in "The Joseph Smith Papers" section.

Joseph Smith also "re-translated" the KJV Bible between 1830 and 1833. Below is an excerpt from verses that he added to the end of Genesis where he claims that the authors predicted his own life:

..."And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded. For this promise I give unto you, for I will remember you from generation to generation. And his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of

his father (Joseph Smith was a Junior – his father was Joseph Smith, Sr.). And he shall be like unto you, for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation.”

The Joseph Smith translation of the Bible is also available online.

Question:

Given that the LDS church is modifying its origin story – I wonder if they will take it all the way to morph into a Christian prosperity gospel style institution and conform to Christian beliefs about God?