

## WHY I AM NOT A MORMON

Consistency takes front and center stage in any trial. I am constantly examining people and their claims under a microscope for consistency. There are even specific rules of evidence based on consistency because it is that important to establishing the truth. An example might be helpful.

Under the Federal Rule of Evidence 404, evidence of a person's character or character trait is not admissible to prove that on a particular occasion, the person acted in accordance with that trait. There are some exceptions, especially in a criminal case, but the lawyer who utilizes those exceptions had best beware!

There is a follow-up rule (number 405) that provides that if a person's character or a character trait is admissible, then on cross-examination, the court may allow inquiries into relevant specific instances of the person's conduct. In other words, if a party puts into evidence the good character of a witness or party, then the other side is allowed to delve into areas of testimony that might show inconsistency with the offered character evidence.

I had an important trial where this issue took front and center stage. The company on trial was a large multi-national company that most everyone would have heard of. That in itself should have been enough for the defense attorneys, letting the jury carry into their deliberations the fairly good public image of this company. Yet their lawyers pushed it further.

With a man on the stand who had served the company in many roles over the decade, including president, the lawyers delved into the company's reputation. They discussed how the company was an amazing corporate citizen, with roots in small-town Americana. The company's headquarters was set before the jury complete with pictures of the local high school football stadium, a seminary that was in the neighborhood, and a picture of Main Street that looked straight out of a 1950's movie. Of course, the case (and the company) had nothing to do with the seminary, the high school, or even Main Street, but the lawyers liked the impression it left of the company.

Still, the lawyers weren't finished. They put up photographs from inside the corporate offices, including a massive one of the "Patriotic Wall," as it was described. This had a larger than life American flag painted on it, along with pictures of all the employees who had served America in the armed forces in the Iraqi war. The president spoke of how proud the company was of its service women and men, and how being good patriotic Americans was near and dear to the company's corporate heart.

I asked the judge to allow me to probe this patriotic, small-town, apple-pie character with specific instances of conduct that seemed inconsistent with the portrayal. Over strenuous

objection, the court granted my right to go into areas that I otherwise would not have been allowed. The main one was the “patriotic” company’s admission that they had violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by bribing public officials in other countries to use their products. This included violating the Oil for Food economic sanctions assessed against Saddam Hussein and his regime leading up to the Iraqi war. The “Patriotic Wall” company displaying the pictures of those who fought in the Iraqi war had illegally financed Saddam’s henchmen leading up to the war.

The evidence of the corporate character was not consistent with the image of the corporate character put before the jury. The company had paid over a million dollars in fines, admitting its wrong-doing. It was a stinging indictment that illustrated behavior quite different from what they wanted to show to the jury.

Inconsistency isn’t always so glaring, but it is always important in examining the truth. This lies at the heart of why I am not a Mormon. I find the Mormon faith inconsistent in core areas of teaching and practice with that of the Bible.

This might not seem a problem to some because they might say, “Well, maybe the Book of Mormon has it right and the Bible has it wrong!” But it doesn’t work that way. The Book of Mormon, and other Mormon Scriptures, claim to be consistent with the Bible. They are meant to be completions of the Bible, never at odds with Biblical teachings. Yet I find they are inconsistent, and therein lies my problem.

To analyze this, it helps to place Mormonism into its historical context first. Then I will examine what the Mormon teaching is on the authority of the Bible. Finally, I will dissect several core teachings of Mormon doctrine and compare them to the related Christian doctrines, looking for consistency.

## **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MORMONISM**

Mormonism arose during an interesting time in American history. The United States was young, and because America, unlike England, had no national church, there was an intense pluralism developing on the religious scene. The United States had the Catholic and Anglican churches associated with England. There were the Methodists, a movement also hailing from England and arising out of the Anglican church. The United States had a Calvinist/Presbyterian presence like portions of continental Europe.

By 1800, America was ripe for a protestant revival that has become known as the “Second Great Awakening.” This revival was especially strong in the Northeast, stretching into Ohio and Illinois, down into Kentucky and Tennessee, and into further parts of the Midwest. The revival produced the movements that grew into today’s Seventh Day Adventists, the Holiness churches, and the Shakers.

There were also separatist groups that were seeking to make themselves known, often claiming no affiliation with any known church group. Among these was a movement known still today as the “restoration movement.” Associated with key figures like Alexander Campbell, the restoration movement sought to distance Christianity from the creeds and doctrines that had accumulated over the centuries, often bringing division to the church. Instead, the plea of Campbell and others was to return to the Bible and follow Scripture alone, leaving out any church additions. Campbell and others became the genesis of what was later called the “Churches of Christ” and the “Disciples of Christ.” The debates of the day included church structure, forms of baptism (sprinkling, pouring or immersion), activity of the Holy Spirit, and levels of authority in churches. There was an inherent distrust of any church traditions that were not found clearly in Scripture.

It was a time when the country was smaller, and the territories were not fully explored. Society was expanding west into Native American territories, and there was a lot unknown about the “Indians,” as they were called. The white people were obviously aware of their own arrival from Europe. The black people were brought in from Africa. Asian peoples were known as well, but serious questions were asked about the Native Americans. Where did they come from? A number of intellectual articles proposed the idea that the Native Americans must have been from the lost tribes of Israel, or some other group of Jewish people.

A New York newspaperman named Joseph Noah wrote in 1823 that there were those “strongly” of the opinion that the Indians were “the lineal descendants of the Israelites,” and Noah shared those opinions, citing a number of reasons, including his belief that their language was like ancient Hebrew!<sup>1</sup> (By the way, it isn’t!).

Science and knowledge was not then what it is now, and there were large groups of people who believed in divining rods for finding water, magical stones that gave people an ability to find buried treasure, and more. Often, the buried treasure was believed guarded by spirit beings, and only certain people had the ability or insight to get past these beings. It might take an incantation or some spell, maybe secret words of knowledge or insight, or even the powers associated with some relic. Treasure hunting was often a way that swindlers and others could make a mark. They would set up partnerships, getting others to fund the searches, only to come up dry and move on to the next opportunity. This was not a belief peculiar to “Christians,” but was common throughout many people in society.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wayne Sentinel*, Oct. 11, 1825.

People commonly reported visions from God along with private messages. Frequently these private messages included affirmations that the contemporary churches were corrupt and had left the true Christian faith.<sup>2</sup>

Into this time and place was born Joseph Smith, Jr. (born December 23, 1805). Both of Smith's parents were Bible readers, but they followed their own interpretations, not agreeing with those of the churches around them.<sup>3</sup>

Smith's family also believed that God visited them in dreams. Smith claimed his own visitations and revelations started when he was just 14. In that vision, Smith was told,

that the true Church of Jesus Christ that had been established in New Testament times, and which had administered the fullness of the gospel, was no longer on the earth.<sup>4</sup>

Over his early years and into his early adulthood, Smith was associated with using a rock as a relic to aid in finding buried treasure, called a "money-digger" in its day. Marquardt cites sources pointing out that Smith "was thought to be able to locate lost goods with a special seer stone and magical religious ceremonies."<sup>5</sup>

Some early Mormon accounts credit the same stone with Smith finding the gold tablets that subsequently formed the basis of his Book of Mormon. Smith's accounts varied over the years, but most often he claimed that in his late teens, a spirit appeared to him and told him where to dig and find the tablets in a stone box. Smith was only allowed to take the tablets if he followed precise instructions, and his failure the first time caused him several years of delay before he could again access the plates.

Smith took possession of the book of plates, but would not let others see them, although eventually eleven witnesses claimed to have seen them and attested to such. Smith went to work "translating" the plates, but this was not done in any sense we might think of today. Smith did not look at the plates and work through them word by word. Instead, he was

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<sup>2</sup> *Wayne Sentinel*, Oct. 22, 1823. See also, Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels, and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Beck & Foster, 1816), 1:56, 59; B. Hibbard, *Memoirs of the Life and Travels of B. Hibbard* (Self-published in New York, 1825), 22-24, along with other citations in Marquardt, H. Michael, *The Rise of Mormonism 1816-1844*, (Xulon Press 2013), at 68ff. Marquardt came out of the Mormon church and has written a carefully documented early history of the church. He does a superb job of placing the early days of the church into their immediate context.

<sup>3</sup> Marquardt, at 68ff.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from the Introduction to *The Pearl of Great Price*.

<sup>5</sup> Marquardt, at 91ff.

able to “translate them” without taking them out of the box where he had kept them safe. In a sense, he was being told what to say or write. He put his seer’s stone into his hat, then buried his face in the hat and was supposedly able to discern the right translation.

A neighboring farmer helped Smith get the text written and printed up copies for sale. The first edition of the book of Mormon was published in 1830, and part of the sales pitch included the background that this book was a message from God. The books contained a great number of quotations from the King James Bible, buried around narratives, characters and events not contained in the Bible. The books were sold for fourteen shillings a piece, a price allegedly set by God.

The reports vary on what happened to the plates. Some say they were taken back by a spirit, some say Smith reburied them, and some say they were placed in a cave, but no one has found them again. Ultimately Smith continued to “receive messages” from God that became additional Mormon scriptures, even without any kind of tablet as the source. These later books are called *The Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price*.

Over time, Smith and his compatriots moved from place to place, selling the Book of Mormon and finding others who would agree with the premise that Smith had been given a direct word of revelation, bringing truth back into a world of fraudulent and wayward churches.

## THE BOOKS

### *The Book of Mormon*

In its introduction, *The Book of Mormon* claims to be,

a record of God’s dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains the fullness of the everlasting gospel.<sup>6</sup>

The book claims to be a history that sets out the heritage of the American Indians as including in their ancestry the “Lamanites,” who were supposedly Jews who fled Jerusalem in 600BC.

Although it has been rewritten, the introduction that accompanied the earlier generations of publication of the Book of Mormon wrote of these ancient Jews that supposedly settled America.

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from the Introduction to *The Book of Mormon*.

After thousands of years, all were destroyed except the Lamanites, and they are the principal ancestors of the American Indians.<sup>7</sup>

As modern science has unraveled DNA markers of people, it has become apparent and really without dispute that the DNA of Native Americans does not reflect Jewish people as their principal ancestors. In fact, there is really no discernable presence of Jewish DNA in the studies done so far. The Mormon responses typically include arguments that not all Native Americans have been tested. However, it seems notable to me that the introduction has been changed from saying the Jewish Lamanites were the “principal ancestors” to the Lamanites being “among the ancestors.”

Of course, all of this is further unraveled a bit also by the direct revelation claims of Joseph Smith that “the Indians were the literal descendants of Abraham.”<sup>8</sup>

The books also relate that Jesus came to North America and preached his gospel to the displaced Jews after his resurrection. The history was written by a prophet historian named Mormon, who gave them to his son Moroni. Moroni added a few words, then buried the tablets on Hill Cumorah in New York where Smith found them almost 1800 years later. By the time Smith got to them, Moroni had become a “glorified, resurrected being” who gave Smith his instructions.

The book of Mormon is considered “another testament of Jesus Christ,” and it carries that denotation as part of its subtitle.

### *The Doctrine and Covenants*

These writings are from Smith as well as later prophets. They are not ancient translations, but claim to be contemporary revelations to guide the church. In the introduction, we read the material is,

a collection of divine revelations and inspired declarations given for the establishment and regulation of the kingdom of God on the earth in the last days.

Much of this material contains core areas of Mormon theology. It speaks to the nature of God, of humanity, of Satan and evil, salvation, marriage, church structure and more.

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from the Introduction to *The Book of Mormon* until recently. See, for example, the first Doubleday publication of the Book of Mormon.

<sup>8</sup> *Papers of Joseph Smith*, Vol. 2, Journal of 1832-1842, at 69-70.

## *The Pearl of Great Price*

This book contains many more sayings and teachings of Smith, including a number that were published in newspapers and church periodicals in Smith's day. Like the other books, this one has received edits over the years, getting additions, and subtractions.

It includes some work by Smith claiming to be a "translation" of different parts of the Bible. I use quotation marks around "translation" because Smith was not proficient in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, such that he could translate the Bible. Smith worked off the King James Version and made certain adds and alterations as he was "inspired" to do. So, his work is not really translating the Scriptures. He simply took a translation and modified it. It seems he might better claim it was the "corrected Scriptures" rather than a translation.

The book also contains a good bit of Smith's own recollection of the history behind his movement. There is also a record of "The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" that Smith sent in to a questioning newspaper who wanted to know what the Mormon people believed.

### **MORMONISM AND THE BIBLE**

Mormons claim the Bible as an authoritative word of God, but only if it is rid of the errors that have allegedly crept in over the centuries through human error and a corrupt church. Smith is quoted as saying, "I believe the Bible as it is read when it came from the pen of the original writers."<sup>9</sup>

In the Articles of Faith (1:8), we read similarly,

We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly;  
we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

It is this view of the Bible that is one of the reasons I could never be a Mormon. If the Mormons are right, then their doctrines should not conflict with core doctrines or teachings of Scripture, at least when Scripture is reliably translated. Yet there are many distinctions that cannot be explained away as simply one where the Bible has been mistranslated, much less corrupted.

While this will be probed topically below, a useful example is taken from Joseph Smith's "translation" of the New Testament Gospel of John, the very first verse.

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<sup>9</sup> See the official LDS website at: <https://www.lds.org/topics/bible-inerrancy-of?lang=eng>.

John 1:1 reads,

King James Version	Joseph Smith Version	Greek Text
"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."	"In the beginning was the <i>gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.</i> "	Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος

Admittedly, it helps me in this discussion to have studied Greek for 35 years, but I can safely say that even mid-way through my first-year of studies, there could be no way to mistranslate this as Joseph Smith has done.

Smith's translation of John 1:1 uses the word "gospel." There is a Greek word for "gospel" that is used over and over in the New Testament. It is **εὐαγγέλιον**, and even a non-Greek reader can see it is not used once in John one, much less twice!

Furthermore, there is no verb in the passage for Smith's translation "preached" (the Greek **κήρυγμα**). The Greek doesn't have Smith's word, "Son". The Greek text plainly says exactly what the English Standard Version translates. Even Smith's idea of the Son being "of God" couldn't be found in the Greek. There is no usage of the word "Son" (the Greek **υἱός**). The word is clearly "Word," not "Son." Even if one wanted to translate "Word" as "Son," you still couldn't get to Smith's translation. The form of "God" in the last phrase is not in the "genitive," which would be necessary for the "Word" or "Son" to be "of God."

This is not a translation of the Greek! Smith is writing an entirely different passage, which radically changes the meaning of the original Greek. It fits Mormon theology, which has Jesus as someone less than God the Father, but it doesn't fit the Greek.

The Mormon response might be, "Well, the Greek from John's pen must have been altered." Even that defies common sense though. We have *many* manuscripts of John's gospel dating back over 1500 years. Not one single manuscript suggests in any way, shape, or form that this passage was altered. The alterations to get to Smith's translation would have to be massive, not only in verse one, but in later verses as well. Justification for Smith's translation simply isn't found anywhere.

## **DIFFERENCES IN CORE TEACHINGS AND THEOLOGY BETWEEN MORMONISM AND THE BIBLE**

Smith created a set of theological ideas that I believe are contrary to Biblical teaching. If the premise of Mormonism **not** being in conflict with the Bible is right, then there should be no conflict. But I see major conflicts. Consider:



## *God the Father*

On April 2, 1843 Joseph Smith declared as God's prophet certain instructions about a number of different topics. We read in the Doctrines and Covenants section 130 what Smith declared about God the Father. This instruction is a formative Mormon belief that God the Father is human in form, complete with skin and bones.

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 (D&C 130:22).

They believe that the early church thought so as well, and that the idea that God is a spiritual being is a corrupting influence of Greek thought.

Early Christian views of God were more personal, more anthropomorphic, and less abstract than those that emerged later during Christianity's creedal stage. The key ideological shift that began in the second century, after the loss of apostolic authority, resulted from a conceptual merger of Christian doctrine with Greek philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Do Mormons correctly teach the Biblical doctrine about God the Father as a flesh and bones being? I don't think so. A common sense reading of the New Testament unfolds a very different perspective on God the Father. Notably, this is not the perspective of a church overcome by seductions of Greek philosophy. This is the very New Testament church in its most nascent state.

Consider John 4:24, a passage where Jesus was discussing worship with a Samaritan woman he had just met at a water well. The Woman asked Jesus about the dispute over where God was worshipped. This was an understandable question for the time because a lot of people thought of God (or the gods) having particular regions, cities, even buildings where they were located or empowered.

Jesus answered that very soon, the physical location for worshipping God the Father wouldn't matter. Jesus emphasized that people would be worshipping internally, "in spirit," with true convictions and in earnestness. Jesus' explanation included the fact that God is not a physical being to be worshipped in some physical location. Jesus told the woman,

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

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<sup>10</sup> From the article on "God the Father" at the official LDS website at: <https://www.lds.org/topics/god-the-father?lang=eng>.

We get insight into Jesus' plain meaning and usage of these words from his challenge to those who doubted his physical resurrection. When Jesus appeared, his followers thought they were seeing a spirit or apparition. Jesus rejected this thought, and in the process explained what being a "spirit" meant.

See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have (Lk. 24:39).

I have here two diametrically opposed teachings, that of Jesus in the Bible and that of Joseph Smith in Ramus, Illinois, April 2, 1843. Jesus says God is "spirit" and a spirit has no "flesh and bones." Smith says God "has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's."

Now the critical reader might suggest, "Maybe Smith got it right and Jesus got it wrong." Or, "Maybe the Mormon doctrine is right and the Biblical doctrine is wrong." But those are not acceptable answers. For the Mormon belief is that Mormonism *does not contradict* the Bible, but merely fills in information missing from the Bible. Hence, I am left with either having to overlook the plain obvious teaching of the Bible, or rejecting the Mormon revelation of Joseph Smith.

This is contrary to Joseph Smith's declaration, but is consistent with other teachings of the earliest church. Paul called God the "invisible God" (Col. 1:15). In First Timothy God is one "whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:19). This is not because people have poor eyesight or are in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is because God is not a physical being. He is invisible. In the same letter we already read that in a praise proclamation.

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Tim. 1:17).

Now one might argue that there are times, notably in the Old Testament, when physical features are used in speaking of God. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel declaring,

I have engraved you on the palms of my hands (Is. 49:16).

Are we to take from that that, contrary to the statements of Jesus, God has physical hands? One needn't be a sophisticated scholar to recognize the usage of human language to express the important ideas that humans will best perceive through that language. This is a good example of what linguists call a "trope." It is a figure of speech with great artistic effect.

A simple read through the Old Testament readily indicates that the "hands of God" are references to his actions and his power. So, when we read about the plague on a Philistine city in 1 Sam. 5:11, it says,

there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The **hand of God** was very heavy there.

It would not be fair to say that God's heavily weighted hand was crushing the city. Likewise, in 2 Chronicles 30:12 we read,

The **hand of God** was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD.

We should not envision a flesh and blood physical hand of God, giving a heart to Judah (a tribe that would have numbered hundreds of thousands).

The Mormon ideas of God being flesh and blood, in a sense, humanity on a super-sized scale, are not Biblical ideas. It closely fits, however, with the Mormon idea of creation.

### *Creation*

Mormonism teaches that creation was done by Jesus under God's oversight, but the creation was not out of nothing. Jesus created from the elements already in existence. The heavens were already home to the gods. Earth was a convenient location for the spirit gods to become physical.

In the Mormon text *The Pearl of Great Price*, the third chapter of "The Book of Abraham," we read of an account of creation that Abraham supposedly wrote some 2,000 years before Christ. The account places the throne of God in the physical heavens, near some of the stars that Abraham could see, particularly one named "Kolob." From the throne near these stars, God determined that his god-children could inhabit an earthly existence, so Jesus was sent to create the earth out of the materials that already existed in space.

This is not the view of creation that is taught in the Bible. Neither this universe nor the cosmos are material worlds that hold God and pre-existent humanity. Creation was not Jesus reassembling space matter in a suitable corner of space for gods to inhabit. Creation was something "created." All of creation – the heavens and the earth – were God's creation. It was not a re-assembling of materials; it was from nothing.

There is a Latin phrase people often see associated with the Biblical teaching, *ex nihilo*, meaning "out of nothing." It is a major distinction in the Biblical teaching about origins and that of Israel's neighbors. Most Ancient Near Eastern religions taught that the gods created the worlds from pre-existent matter that existed in a state of chaos. That seems at odds with certain key passages of the Bible.

In the Bible's very first verse, we read

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

The earliest understanding of this passage, one that predates the birth of Christ by several hundred years, is that the passage means precisely what it says. God created the heavens and earth. He is not a captive part of the material universe. God has existence outside of creation.

In response to this rather obvious passage, Joseph Smith argued that the word "created" meant "organized," but he would be hard stretched to offer any proof of that in the Hebrew. The Hebrew word *bara* (ברא) is found 41 times in the Old Testament, but its semantic concept is consistently "created," not organized. For example, in Isaiah 43:7 we read,

everyone who is called by my name, whom I *created* [*bara* - ברא] for my glory, whom I formed and made.

This is not God "organizing." It is God creating.<sup>11</sup> Genesis says God created the heavens and earth. This is uniquely something God does. Every time the Hebrew word is used, it is used with God as the subject. There is something distinct about this creating that is more than organizing.

The Biblical doctrine is that God has existence beyond the matter of the cosmos. Hence, the vision in Revelation is of the end of times when the heaven and earth we know will be replaced by an entirely new heaven and earth.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (Rev. 21:1).

Contrary to Joseph Smith's teaching, God's throne is not near some star we see in the heavens. Israel's King Solomon rightly understood as he declared about God when dedicating the newly built temple,

But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? (2 Chron. 2:6).

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<sup>11</sup> Importantly, this is not a debate about evolution, the development of the cosmos from a big bang or some other celestial event. It is one that pre-dates such questions. It is the issue of whether the material cosmos is all there is, and God exists solely within it, or whether there is reality outside of the cosmos, and the cosmos is something brought into being by the God who reigns outside the universe.

Yet Joseph Smith taught that God's throne was somewhere in the Milky Way Galaxy.<sup>12</sup>

Smith's view of creation fits his view of a physical/material God. The physical God inhabits the physical universe. It also fits into a similar problematic teaching on the nature of humanity and our role in this universe.

### *Humanity*

Mormonism (and Smith) believe that people are gods. We were God the Father's spiritual embryos who have come into earth and been given physical forms. This is our step toward becoming a physical God for eternity. The purpose of creation was to provide a forum where the spirit children of God (you and me) could become physical in form. This also provides an avenue for people to be eternally physical, inhabiting earths and propagating families.

In the vision supposedly written by Abraham, God recounts that the souls of Abraham and others were in his presence near that far-distant star before the earth was organized. It was there where one of the many soul-children of God pointed out the area of earth and explained that the soul children could inhabit that planet.

We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell (D&C, Abr. 3:24).

Jesus led the group of gods to earth as we read in the following fourth chapter of the book of Abraham.

And 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 the earth.

Then the process of making earth began. After earth was made, the soul gods took human form and were born as men and women. Hence you and I, and those around us, are in reality, according to Mormon doctrine, embryonic gods waiting to return to some aspect of the physical heavens after we conclude this incarnation.

There are two parts to this view that seem contrary to basic Biblical teaching. First, the Bible teaches against the idea that people existed in a soul state before they were born, i.e., people don't have a "pre-existent soul." Second, the Bible teaches that people are not

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<sup>12</sup> As an aside, now that astronomy has unfolded so many riches of the universe, we know that our stars we see are from one of hundreds to thousands of galaxies. At the time Smith was relating what he believed to be God's revelation, he placed God's throne near stars Abraham saw. This gives us God in the Milky Way, as opposed to a God who is over hundreds and perhaps thousands of galaxies spread throughout space and time.

embryonic gods. We are created beings on a totally different order. We are truly “human beings.”

The first Bible-believer to write and voice a belief in the pre-existence of soul was Origen (c.184-c.253). His view was denounced as heretical and was never followed by any of the normative Christian churches (Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and most every Protestant church). The belief in pre-existent souls was a pagan Greek philosophy, often associated with Plato, that influenced various heretical movements in the church, but certainly does not seem consistent with the Bible itself.

The Biblical account of God creating Adam is not one of Adam as a soul-god being incarnated as a human. It is one of creation.

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature (Gen. 2:7).

This is quite different than the birth of Jesus, which was an incarnation of a pre-existent being. There the virgin Mary was visited by an angel who declared to her that she would conceive in her womb and bear a Son. Mary was perplexed because her virginity would seem to preclude her pregnancy.

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God Lk. 1:35).

There was a uniqueness about Mary’s pregnancy. It was an incarnation of God himself. It was done in a way that should make sense of that fact. Jesus was the Son of Mary, and hence fully human. Jesus was the Son of God and hence fully God.

Paul wrote of Jesus’ existence before birth, and not of anyone else’s, in a way that sets up Jesus as unique. Paul was urging the Philippians to have the same humble attitude that Jesus exhibited. As Paul made his point, he recited lyrics to an ancient Christian hymn,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).

The spirit of you and me, and all other people, according to normative Biblical teaching was created by God. It hasn't always existed as god. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah explained it,

The oracle of the word of the LORD concerning Israel: Thus declares the LORD, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him (Zech. 12:1).

The Hebrew word Zechariah used for “formed” is *ytzr* (יצר). It is the word used for potter's making pots. It is the same word used in Genesis 2:7 quoted earlier about God how “formed” man from dust. Man's body didn't exist before God formed it. Neither did man's spirit.

Origen thought that passages in the Bible that speak of God's foreknowledge must mean there was a pre-existent soul. These are passages like Jeremiah 1:5,

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

That God would be aware of us and our days before one of them came to be does not mean, however, that we already existed. A builder is aware of the building that will be made before it is actually constructed. I can buy the necessary groceries to make a cake, knowing that the ingredients properly mixed and baked will result in the intended product. Just because God was aware of the turn of events, doesn't mean that those events already transpired.

As for humanity being bodiless gods before birth, or after birth, that is tantamount to blasphemy in Biblical teaching. Jesus' claim to be God was certainly seen by the Jews to be blasphemy, and they picked up rocks to stone him. In Matthew 9, the people viewed Jesus as blasphemous simply because he was forgiving sins, an authority the people knew only God had. In Mark 2, that gospel writer makes the same point recounting what was thought after Jesus healed a paralytic man while announcing, “your sins have been forgiven,”

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7  
“Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

The Bible does teach that there are aspects of God that humanity bears. Genesis says humanity was made in “God's image” (Gen 1:27). But being in the image of God can denote a range of things. It doesn't mean that people are gods. That people are gods was part of the lie the serpent told Eve to seduce her to eat the forbidden fruit.

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4-5).

Smith and Mormonism claim a Biblical basis for their belief from a Psalm that uses the Hebrew word *elohim* (“gods”) in reference to unjust human judges. Psalm 82 wrote of these judges noting that God was in the midst of their assembly (in modern sense, God was sitting in the courtroom where “justice” was supposed to be dispensed.) With God there, the human judges who sat as “gods” needed to judge justly or they would be held to account.

God has taken his place in the divine council [the equivalent of an ancient Israeli courtroom]; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” (Ps. 82:1-4).

These human judges who sat as gods, in the sense of dispensing God’s justice among the people, were to do so on the basis of God’s true justice. The judges of the psalmist’s day didn’t understand that, however.

They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken (Ps. 82:5).

The Psalm concludes making it clear that while they sat as gods, as judges over the people, they were humans and would die like humans.

I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.” Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations! (Ps. 82:6-8).

This Psalm was never a proclamation that there were more than one God. God clearly told Moses, and Moses was told to ensure this teaching to everyone, that there is only one God

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (Dt. 6:4).

The Hebrew here teaches that God is “one.” He is singular and unique. There is no other God.

Some might say, “Doesn’t the Christian teaching of the Trinity, the idea that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God, mean that Christians believe in three gods?” The answer would be “No,” at least for what is considered “orthodox Christianity. Any idea that there is a God



“species” to which Jesus and the Holy Spirit belong (not to mention you and I), have gone far beyond the bounds of Scripture.

As mentioned before, the Bible teaches of God as more than a super-sized human being of flesh and blood. God is so beyond this creation that he is able to hold all of creation in his thoughts. Each atom in each structure throughout solar systems that seem to number at least in the 24-digit range (1 followed by 24 zeros). God knows the thoughts of all 8 billion humans today, as well as everyone that has come before and will come again. This God is not something we and our three-pound brains are going to easily conceive.

I have always considered the Trinity as a chief indicator of a truth about the Christian faith. Any faith that claimed a God with the full knowledge and power claimed for the Christian God, but then taught that such a God was of an essence easily understood by we humans, must be viewed highly skeptically. God is one God who has a state of existence in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but that does not make him three gods. The Bible claims God’s essence is a mystery, not something simply or easily known. So it should be!

So I have trouble with the Mormon idea that we are all gods. That we were involved in some divine council that pre-existed the organizing of earth, and that we all decided to be incarnated in this earth while awaiting our return to a celestial system in the Milky Way galaxy.

The difficulties and conflict of the Mormon ideology here grow as one considers their teaching on who Satan is.

### *Satan*

Mormon’s view Satan is part of Father God’s big family as well. He is ultimately a sibling of sorts to we humans as well as to Jesus. Satan disagreed with Father God’s decision about Jesus’ role on earth. Lucifer wanted to assume that role himself. This supposedly set up the cosmic disagreement that pends a later resolution.

Between June and October of 1830, Smith claimed to receive more insights into the Biblical story of Adam and Eve’s temptation in the Garden of Eden. It is written as words from Moses in the Mormon *Doctrine and Covenants*. There Smith related that God told Moses about Satan going before God wanting to be the one who would redeem mankind.

And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor (*D&C*; Book of Moses 4:1).

Smith continued to cite Moses as writing that God instructed Satan that the job of redeeming humanity would go to Satan's brother Jesus instead. At this, Satan threw a celestial fit, and sought to destroy humanity's ability to make free choices (known in Mormon teaching as "agency.")

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down; And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice (*D&C; Book of Moses 4:3-4*).

The Mormons teach that because Satan rebelled against God, and because he sought to do the work of Jesus, that God denied Satan the chance to have a human body, like Jesus got and like you and I got. Satan was relegated to living on earth in a spirit form, and now spends his energy trying to make people miserable.

This idea of Satan being a younger sibling<sup>13</sup> or co-existent God with Jesus is not only not Biblical, it would be tantamount to blasphemy.

The Bible doesn't teach that Jesus is Satan's older brother. Jesus is not an "unfallen angel" while Satan is a "fallen angel." The Biblical book of Revelation recounts a heavenly war between the angels. It pitted the archangel Michael and his angels against Satan and angels who followed him.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (*Rev. 12:7-9*).

These angels should not be confused with Jesus or God. They are angels or messengers, empowered by God to fulfill his purposes. The Greek word used is the source of our English word "angels." It is pronounced in Greek *angelos* (ἄγγελος). It is used for a "messenger" or "envoy." We read of the angels bearing messages to people (Lk. 1 and 2). There is no idea in the Greek that an angel is a god.

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<sup>13</sup> The official LDS website claims, "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." See, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1986/06/i-have-a-question?lang=eng&r=1>.

Jesus is not an angel at all. Jesus is the creator of all, he is the one God. Paul explained,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him (Col. 1:15-16).

Accordingly, the Bible and Christianity teaches that Jesus is to be worshiped as God, but Satan is not to be worshipped at all.

### *Conversion*

Not surprisingly, with such a divergent view of God, people, Jesus, Satan, and even existence, there is a chasm of difference in the concepts of Christian conversion and that of the Mormon faith.

The Mormon faith teaches that conversion is a process, not an event. The process includes a strong legalistic element. Ultimately, the success of the human in Mormon thought is based on deeds done and obedience to the “laws and ordinances of the gospel.” The gospel, similarly, is not one of salvation by grace through faith but rather one of faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, and “enduring” to the end.<sup>14</sup>

Not so Christianity. The Bible teaches that “conversion” happens at the time one decides to trust in Jesus as supplying their righteousness before God. It is a time where the decision is made to “believe” or put one’s faith in Jesus and his sacrifice for sins. (The Greek word for “trust” is also the word for “believe” or the noun form “faith.”)

So, we read in John 3: 16-18 some important words that encapsulate much of this:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

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<sup>14</sup> The official LDS website explains, “Conversion is a process, not an event. Conversion comes as a result of righteous efforts to follow the Savior. These efforts include exercising faith in Jesus Christ, repenting of sin, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in faith.” See, <https://www.lds.org/topics/conversion?lang=eng>.

In this passage, we see conversion as a result of belief or trust in Jesus. We also see the uniqueness of Jesus as the “only Son of God.” Jesus is not one of many; he is the *one*. While believers may still call God “Father,” we do so as adopted children, to use an earth analogy, not as gods who are by nature siblings of Jesus. Paul explained this role of Jesus in many places. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul wrote that God,

he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

We were never adopted simply because we were pre-existent soul brothers or embryonic gods. We were adopted because Jesus redeemed the faithful from the legal structures of trying to maintain fellowship (or a relationship) with God through adequate human behavior. This is something no one can do, and hence all need the redemption of the sacrifice of Jesus to be converted into children of God, adopted into the relationship with the Father.

When we were children, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:3-7).

These samples of the Biblical differences in Mormonism strike to the root of reality as well as our understanding of God and people. Because of the differences in Biblical teaching, I couldn’t be a Mormon. If the church taught that the Bible was not authoritative, I would have different analysis. But since the Bible is accepted, and in fact quoted over and over in the Book of Mormon and other Mormon scriptures, I have no choice but to see Mormonism as false. Either the Bible or the Book of Mormon *must be* false.

## **THE SOURCES OF MORMONISM**

To deepen my conviction, however, I can turn to history, where this lesson began. The Book of Mormon fits itself nicely into history in a way that explains its non-divine origins. The way the book was “discovered” fit the early 19<sup>th</sup> century belief that buried treasures were commonplace, protected from general awareness by spiritual beings. Smith held the status of a “seer” with a divine stone to give him that ability. The finding was not verified by immediate people, but was secreted for a long time. The few that did claim to

see some semblance of the plates were already “believers” at the time. None of them made a copy of any actual writings on the plates such that they could be examined.<sup>15</sup>

There are many other ways that the writings reflect the conventions and concerns of Smith’s day. Smith’s views on church structure, on Native Americans being of Jewish ancestry, on excluding African Americans from certain roles, on women and on other issues, do not reflect God seeking to restore the New Testament church, but rather reflect the views of one untrained in proper Bible study trying to make of Christianity what he (or they) thought it should be.

I can easily see the development of Mormonism, not as a doctrine of truth, but as the thoughts of a 19<sup>th</sup> century mindset, supplemented and developed through subsequent generations. To some extent, this belies common sense to me. Consider this: Mormonism teaches that God quit revealing truth to the church after the apostles, and the church entered an era Mormon’s call “the Great Apostasy.” So, for over one thousand, seven hundred years, the church was ignorantly following fraudulent and apostate doctrines and beliefs while God left humanity in darkness concerning the real truth of who we are, who he is, what Jesus came to do, and what salvation was all about. All of the biblical scholars were duped for 1700 years, scripture was deceitfully re-written and no one was bright enough to see it, figure it out, or rescue it.

This great duping came about, supposedly, because the church didn’t hold onto the original teaching handed to the apostles, but allowed that to be changed. Of course, the Christian response is that the church *was* led by the Holy Spirit and the church’s leaders did continue to grow and develop better understanding of God and reality, but always based on better understanding the Scriptures. Hence the church grew to debate and inform concepts like the Trinity. Mormonism says this was the church’s apostasy, yet we readily see the Mormons doing the same thing with their own Scriptures. This strikes me as disingenuous and inconsistent.

Mormonism as written by Joseph Smith and his immediate followers was racist in its treatment of African Americans. That supposedly changed when new revelation came to the Mormon apostles in 1978. Similarly, the Mormon position on the heritage of the Native Americans was altered as DNA testing began to prove their ancestry has no Jewish element.

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<sup>15</sup> There are alternate stories about William Harris, Smith’s funder of the original publication of the Book of Mormon, taking a few copied notes to Professor Charles Anthon, a linguist at Columbia. According to Harris, Anthon confirmed the writings as Egyptian, Chaldean, and Arabic. Anthon went on record saying such claims were fraudulent, and that he had verified only that the notes showed a clumsy effort at a hoax. Full cited details of this account are found in Marquardt at 193ff.

So, the Mormon church is able to do a 180 on core tenets of teaching as science and society make it necessary claiming new prophetic insights, yet it indicts the historical Christian church for changing as grew in its understandings and insights of Scripture.

This is an inconsistency that strikes at the root of Mormonism. It claims to restore a new testament church, but it changes its restored church as culture, science, and times change. At the same time, it indicts historical Christianity for changing its views in developing its theology. I find it notable that at least the historical church maintained its theology based upon further studies of the apostolic scriptures, rather than relying on brand new revelations that came to a fellow in upstate New York seeking to form a new religion in the 1800's.

For these reasons, I cannot be a Mormon.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1).*

There is an age-old problem that goes back to the Garden of Eden. We humans want to be like God. Eve was beguiled by the serpent's offer, “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). The truth is that we are NOT Gods or even gods. We are humans, created by God and living in opposition to him until we find his mercy in the cross of Christ. I need to remember that and stand in it daily.

2. *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7).*

There is another age-old problem that goes back to the New Testament church. People claim to come forward with a new and different gospel. Judaizers tried to do it. Gnostics tried. Over and over we read in our history books of those who had the “new,” “clean,” or “restored original” gospel. Yet we should never abdicate that which is taught in Scripture unless we are given solid proof it is wrong. May I bury myself in God's apostolic teaching of those hand-selected by Jesus. May it inform my faith and my life.

3. *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved” (1 Cor. 15:1-2).*

There is a third age-old problem that goes back thousands of years. We want to be able to rely on our own goodness for something. It is as if we are ashamed to admit

that we are thoroughly inadequate and fully in need of God's rescue. There is a saving act by Jesus which comes to those who put their faith in him. This does not come to me because of my pre-creation existence as a god. It doesn't come because I live this life adequately. I stand and am saved by the good news of Christ dying in my stead. It is that simple, and it won't change.