

STUDY PACK 6

MODERN CULTS

The Mormons

“There is no salvation outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 670 “no man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith.”

~ Journal of Discourse, Vol. VII, p. 289 ~

I. THE MOST POPULAR CULT IN THE UNITED STATES

Mormonism is without a doubt the most popular and widespread cult in the United States. It is also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

A. J. K. Van Baalen on Mormonism.

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is distinctive among all the religious cults and sects active in the United States in that it has by far the most fascinating history, and one worthy of consideration by all students of religions originating on the American continent.

The Mormons, as they are most commonly called, are divided into two major groups, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints with headquarters in Independence, Missouri. Today, over 150 years after the movement’s founding, the Mormons number more than 5.3 million adherents, own considerable stock in the agricultural and industrial wealth of America, and circle the earth in missionary activities, energetically rivaling evangelical Christianity. The former group, which is the main concern of this chapter, claimed a membership in excess of 5.1 million in April of 1983. The reorganized Church has just over 200,000 members worldwide, and has won acceptance in some quarters as a “sect of Fundamentalism.” The Reorganized [Missouri] Church, which rejects the name “Mormon,” is briefly reviewed in this chapter, but there can be little doubt that it has gained much ground in recent decades and is composed of a zealous group of dedicated people. They irritate the Utah Church consistently by pointing out that court decisions have established their claim that they are the true church and Utah the schismatic. From its founding the Mormon Church has been characterized by thriftiness, zeal and an admirable missionary spirit, and even before the advent of World War Two, it had more than 2,000 missionaries active on all the mission fields of the world, Since the close of World War two, however, and in keeping with the acceleration of cult propaganda everywhere, the Mormons have more than 26,000 “missionaries” active today.

One interesting fact, however, accounts for this large missionary force and that is the practice of the Mormon Church to encourage its most promising young

people, boys aged 19 and girls aged 21, to dedicate two years of their lives to missionary work on a self-supporting basis. In some cases the parents support the young people during this tour of duty, but it is significant to note that approximately every two weeks some seventy to ninety young men and women begin such missionary activities.”

B. Walter Martin on Mormonism.

“Mormonism is a marvelously composite faith. It has developed over a period of time, and as it went along it took over some of the most divergent elements from other sects and groups. They brewed, to speak with Mr. Ferguson, a synthetic religion in Utah.”

II. FOUNDER JOSEPH SMITH, JR. 1805-1844

Joseph Smith was born on December 23, 1805 in Sharon, Vermont, the fourth of nine children. He came from a poor family and being reared in poverty, ignorance, and superstition, he was always in trouble with the law. As he grew, he developed craftiness, “an air of mystery” as his neighbors put it.

After the Smith family moved to New York, to what is now present day Rochester, most of them joined the Presbyterian Church. Joseph, however could not decide what church to join because there was so much disagreement between denominations. This was the beginning of the road that lead to forming the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.”

1823 – Smith claims that an angel named Moroni revealed to him the location of the “Golden Plates” which contained the history of ancient America.

In 1825 – Smith bought a “seeing stone” with which he claimed to locate hidden treasures. Those who believed him dug, but never found any treasure.

1827 – Smith persuaded Emma Hale to elope with him because her father refused to consent to the marriage on the grounds that Joseph’s only occupation was that of digging for hidden treasures. In this year Smith was allowed to take and begin translation of the stones. Also he met Martin Harris, a New York farmer who would eventually finance the *Book of Mormon*.

1830 – March, the *Book of Mormon* was completed and went on sale.

1830 – April, The “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” was officially started.

1832 – Smith was tarred and feathered by an angry mob in Ohio.

1838 – Smith moved to Missouri.

1844 – Joseph Smith, Jr. was shot to death in an Illinois jail by a mob.

III. THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

On April 6, 1830, at Fayette, New York, the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” was organized. This came about after Smith had convinced a few friends that he had translated the “Golden Plates” with assistance of the angel Moroni, and then returned the plates to him.

From the beginning there is trouble. These plates, from which the *Book of Mormon* comes claimed to have been found by Smith in the “Hill Cumorah”, contain many, many quotations from the King James version of the Bible. Even someone with little intelligence can figure this out. If the “Golden Plates” were hidden in the earth from 420 A.D. until September 22, 1823, how then could they contain the modern styles and ideas of the 1600’s. In actuality it is an imitation of the Bible and declares it inadequate; so much so that it even changes portions of Scripture supposedly by divine revelation.

One of the first to join Smith in his claims was Martin Harris, a man who claimed to have talked to Jesus Christ, ghosts, and the devil. Also he claims to have made a trip to the moon. According to his neighbors he was a conceited hypocrite. Harris became a partner with Smith and supplied the finances needed to perform the translation. Being a partner he believed he was entitled to see the plates. When Smith gave him a copy of some of the writings on paper, he showed them to famous linguists who declared them a fraud. Smith’s father-in-law, Isaac Hale said the whole *Book of Mormon* was, “A silly fabrication of falsehood and wickedness got up for speculation and with a design to dupe the credulous and unwary.”

Harris’ wife now wanted to see the translation and, after failing to convince her husband of the hoax, stole the papers, never to be seen again. This put Smith in a bind. Having not made any copies of the translation it would be impossible to reproduce the original and was afraid to try, fearing Mrs. Harris would burn up the original. This caused Smith and Harris to part company.

Next to join with Smith was Sydney Rigdon, formerly a Baptist preacher who was expelled from a church in Pittsburgh, PA for doctrinal error. He was basically a dishonest man. Solomon Spaulding, who wrote, “*The Manuscript Found*”, delivered his manuscript to a printer in Pittsburgh by the name of Patterson; who, it should be noted was an intimate friend of Rigdon’s. By incontestable evidence it is obvious that the *Book of Mormon* is a copy of this manuscript. Spaulding, near death charged Rigdon with stealing his manuscript.

With the work of the translation now completed they sought to find a publisher for their book. Many had refused to publish it, but finally they found one. Egbert B. Grandin, of Palmyra, N.Y., after securing Harris’ farm for collateral they printed and bound 5000 copies for \$3000.00.

It is interesting to note at this time that despite Smith’s constant declaration that the translation was as exactly as it was on the plates, the printers refused to set it because of the grammatical and spelling errors. We can praise God no such errors occurred in the

revelation of the Word from Him to His creation. In 1830, after Smith made many corrections, the book was printed and offered to the public at \$1.25 per copy. No one wanted it, therefore Harris lost his farm to pay the cost of printing.

Solomon Spaulding, who became an infidel after failing to become a preacher, turned to writing stories which discredited Scripture. Bruce Kinney writes, "His first story pretended that a manuscript found in a stone box in a cave gave an account of the Indians of American who, he claimed, were descended from the lost Ten Tribes of Israel."

Zion, Missouri became headquarters in June 1831 by a "revelation" received through Joseph Smith. Earlier that year they had moved to Kirtland, Ohio where they built the first temple and it was at this time that Smith received another revelation from the Lord, "I will consecrate the riches of the Gentiles unto my people." This can be found in the *Mormon Book of Doctrines and Covenants*, section 42. Liberal interpretation of this "revelation" led to a bad reputation among neighbors. They believed this to mean that they were entitled to just take over or possess whatever property they wanted in the way that God had commanded Israel to do in the promised land. So much was the opposition against the Mormons that in 1832 Joseph Smith and his associate Rigdon were both tarred and feathered by a mob of angry citizens. As compared to other religions, all the persecutions which the Mormons suffered were not brought about because of their religious beliefs but because they outraged human decency. They did this by violating personal and property rights; they considered it their privilege to "spoil the Gentiles." Internal and financial troubles arose and multiplied.

Smith was now forced to flee to Missouri where they were hated just as much. The "Gentiles" held a meeting and declared: "It is a duty we owe ourselves, to our wives and children, to the cause of the public morals, to remove them from among us." They were ordered to leave and the Mormons agreed to do so but Smith had received another revelation that "Zion could not be moved out of her place." He ordered a second temple to be built at Independence and threatened those who refused.

Illinois was the next place they were to move after being driven from Missouri by way of an order from Governor Boggs in 1839. The people of Illinois welcomed the Mormons at first mainly because there were not many settlers in the area and with the size of a group things would change for the better. Things changed considerably after they took over the town of Nauvoo; buildings were erected, real estate schemes were launched and most of all the town boomed economically. In 1841 the cornerstone of the Nauvoo Temple was laid with a spectacular ceremony in which Smith arrayed himself in a lieutenant-general's uniform, a uniform worn by no one since George Washington.

At this time it should be mentioned that the Mormons were beginning to recognize themselves as a government within a government. This is seen in a statement, (sworn testimony) made by T. B. Marsh, an official in the Church. He stated:

The plan of Smith the prophet, is to take over the state; and he professes to his people to intend taking the whole United States and ultimately the whole world. The prophet inculcates the notion, and is believed by every true Mormon, that Smith's prophecies are

superior to the law of the land. I have heard the prophet say that he would yet tread down his enemies and walk over their dead bodies; that if he were not left alone, he would be a second Mohammed to this generation.

General Clark who led the militia in driving the Mormons from the state of Missouri recognized this as their final objective:

Dominion, the ultimate subject of the state and the union to the laws of a few men called the presidency . . . These people have banded themselves together in societies, the object of which was first to drive from their society such as refused to join them in their unholy purposes, and then to plunder the surrounding country, and ultimately subject the state to their rule.

As had happened in every other area where Mormons were, the people of Illinois began to realize what was going on, what the Mormons were up to. In 1848 the temple of Nauvoo was destroyed suspiciously by fire. So great was the hatred for the Mormons, because of their actions and Smith's commands that at one public meeting the people decided this:

Resolve, that the time has arrived . . . when the adherents of Smith should be driven . . . into Nauvoo; that the prophet and his miscreant adherents should then be demanded at their hands, and, if not surrendered, a war of extermination should be waged, to the entire destruction . . . of his adherents.

Because of this Smith was eventually arrested and put in the Carthage jail where a mob raided and shot to death both Joseph and his brother Hyrum.

The Mormons were very buoyant at this time. Instead of the movement losing steam with their leader now dead, they viewed his death as that of a martyr. One question though, who would be president now? Rigdon felt that he deserved to be the leader however there was another man, Brigham Young, who had much influence and who gained support of the Mormons and became the new leader.

Again the Mormons were on the move. In April, 1847, they packed up a wagon train and headed west through unsettled territory, coming to the area of Salt Lake Valley in Utah where they decided to set up headquarters. With being in an unsettled area there was no real authority over them.

IV. MODERN MORMONISM

The Mormon church today is divided into stakes, wards, branches, and missions. A stake can be compared in size to a diocese, presbytery, or classic; it is a large group of churches. A ward is like a local church somewhere around six hundred members, and a branch would be a church or ward just starting out. According to the 1977 revised edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults* by Walter Martin, the Mormon church consists of 700 stakes, 6,250 wards, 1900 branches, and 135 missions.

The greatest number of these are found in Utah. Mormons in general are noted by their moral codes, hospitality, and just plain friendliness. Many Christians could be put to shame by the average Mormon. They are, for the most part, unlearned concerning the history of the church in the areas of corruption and reputation of the founder.

The Mormons who people most often come in contact with are the missionaries. There are 18,000 such missionaries, (this figure as of October 1974) probably more than 20,000 today. They are young people who are encouraged to dedicate two years of their life to this work. They are self-supported, or parent supported; no money is provided through the church. The job of the missionary is to go from door to door, or to airports, or malls, etc. . . . Spreading their literature and winning people to their church, much in the same way Christians go calling but with quite a different story to tell.

The basis of their faith, so they claim is the Bible, however should there be any question, the *Book of Mormon* stands as the source of doctrine. They contend that the Bible was not complete and that God cannot be limited to one book, but rather, He gave and is still giving revelation to man. They do have their own version of the *King James Bible*, which has been changed to coincide with the *Book of Mormon*, but there are grave contradictions between the two. These contradictions are not only scriptural, but there are also several archaeological, anthropological, and scientific differences that can only be explained by the denial of the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*. A comprehensive listing of these contradictions can be found in *The Kingdom of the Cults*, page 160. When confronted with the facts Mormon missionaries are instructed to explain away these errors even to the extent of lying. It is hard to argue from the Bible as they will just agree with everything that is put forth and proceed to explain what it “really” means.

V. A SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINES OF MORMONISM

- A. Christianity became apostate after the First Century. Mormonism is a restoration of true Christianity.
- B. God the Father was once a man who progressed to godhood.
- C. The Trinity consists of three distinct gods. There are potentially millions of gods as men progress into godhood.
- D. All humans can become gods.
- E. Jesus Christ was the first born son of the Heavenly Father and a heavenly mother.
- F. There are three kingdoms in eternity. Everyone will end up in one of them depending upon their faithfulness. Only Mormons can end up in the Third Heaven.
- G. Christ’s atonement secures redemption for all people.
- H. Belief in Christ is necessary to avoid the lowest heaven.