

# Mormonism

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**Official name:** Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

**Popular Name:** The Mormon Church (Mormon is a Native American Indian in the Book of Mormon)

**Founder:** Joseph Smith, Jr. on April 6, 1830

**President:** Thomas S. Monson (born 1927) became the 16th president in 2008

**Headquarters:** Salt Lake City, Utah

**Membership:** 13,508,509 million (2008-worldwide), 5,873,408 million in 50 states and the District of Columbia (2007)

**Congregations:** 28,109 (worldwide), 13,201 in 50 states and the District of Columbia (2007)

**Missionaries:** 52,494 (2008)

**Temples:** 129 operating, 9 more under construction and 8 announced for a total of 146 (2008)

**Scriptures:** Bible (KJV), Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price.

## History

The Mormon Church, first called the Church of Christ, was founded by Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805-1844) in Fayette, New York, on April 6, 1830. The first six members were Smith; two of his brothers, Hyrum and William; Oliver Cowdery; and David and Peter Whitmer.

The name of the church was changed to the Church of the Latter-day Saints in 1834, and then to the current name, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1838.

As the western migration occurred, Smith and several hundred followers migrated to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831. Other followers settled in western Missouri. The first temple was built in Kirtland. It still stands but is owned by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (note the slight difference in the spelling). This church changed its name to the Community of Christ in April 2001. The Community of Christ claims the church was reorganized in 1852. Joseph Smith's son, Joseph Smith III was installed as president in 1860, and until the current president, each president had been a direct descendent of Joseph Smith, Jr. The Community of Christ rejects a number of Mormon teachings, including polygamy and the temple ordinances. It is headquartered in Independence, Missouri, where the church dedicated a temple in 2004. Its worldwide membership is around 250,000.

There are dozens of other LDS splitter groups. One such group is the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) in Independence. It claims the land dedicated by Smith for a temple. In a conversation with one of the Apostles of this church, he explained that his church was too small to build temple. However, he told me, at the right time, God would reveal the need for a temple in Independence to other churches, supposedly including Baptist churches, who would contribute to the building of the temple.

While the LDS lived in Nauvoo, rumors of the practice of polygamy among some LDS leaders, including Smith, became widespread. One former high ranking follower, John C. Bennett, published a

story revealing the practice of polygamy and charging Smith with complicity in the attempted assassination of Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs, who had issued an "Extermination Order" in 1838 against the Mormons forcing them to leave Missouri. Boggs was shot, but survived. The "Extermination Order" was rescinded in 1976 by then Missouri Governor Christopher Bond.

Smith's opponents claimed he ordered the destruction of Bennett's printing press and all copies of the paper outlining the charges against Smith. Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were arrested and taken to the county jail in Carthage, Illinois. While in jail, a gang stormed the jail and in an exchange of gun fire with the Smith brothers (guns had been smuggled in to them), the brothers were killed. They are buried on land owned by the Community of Christ in Nauvoo, Illinois.

After Smith's murder, most of the Mormons choose Brigham Young, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, as the new president, and finalized plans to migrate to the Salt Lake Valley. The first group left for the Salt Lake Valley on February 2, 1846, with the first group arriving in the Valley on July 24, 1847.

## Revelations

Continuing revelations from God through the LDS president, who is called the "Prophet, Seer and Revelator," are a major teaching of the LDS church. Smith claimed to have received two revelations prior to the formation of his church. Dozens of other revelations were recorded in subsequent years.

The first, in 1820 during the closing years of the Second Great Awakening, came as a result of Smith's question about which church he should join. He claimed "two Personages," whom he identified as God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him in a wooded area not far from his home in Palmyra, New York. These Personages told Smith not to join any church because "all their creeds were an abomination."

A second vision is said to have occurred in his room when a single Personage, identified as the angel Moroni, appeared several times on September 21-22, 1823 to tell Smith of golden plates buried not far from his home in a hillside, called Cumorah in the Book of Mormon. Smith claims he found the golden plates but was not allowed to remove the plates from the ground until September 22, 1827, four years later.

He found writing on the plates in "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics," but using a "seer stone" buried with the plates, he was able to translate the plates into what is known as the Book of Mormon. When the translation was completed, the angel Moroni took the plates to heaven.

Five thousand copies of the book were published in 1830 with Smith listed as "Author and Proprietor."

### **The Book of Mormon**

The following is a summary of the Book of Mormon.

In about 600 B.C. a Jewish family left Jerusalem and sailed across the Indian and Pacific Oceans and landed somewhere in South America. Eventually, two of the sons, Laman and Lemuel rebelled against their Jewish faith and fell into idolatry. They were cursed by God with a dark skin. The descendents of these brothers are the Native American Indians, sometimes called Lamanites by LDS. Two other brothers, Sam and Nephi, who remained faithful to their religious past, migrated to North America.

One part of the Book of Mormon, tells of Jesus' visit to the western hemisphere after His resurrection. Jesus is said to have established a church in the Americas, taught baptism by immersion and a memorial supper interpretation of the Lord's Supper. He also is said to have ordained twelve disciples and ordained priests.

However, by A.D. 321, the church begun by Christ in the Americas had fallen away.

In a series of battles, the Lamanites amassed a huge army and attacked a Nephite army of 250,000 soldiers near the Hill Cumorah in what is now western New York State. The last great Nephite general, Mormon, who had written a history of his people on golden plates, gave the plates to his son Moroni who buried them in the hillside. Moroni lived as a hermit until his death. (His statue, in which he is depicted blowing a horn, is placed on the highest spire of LDS temples today.)

Several stories of other groups are told in the Book of Mormon.

The story of the Book of Mormon has not been documented by recognized archeologists or other scholars.

### **Origin of the Book of Mormon**

The LDS Church accepts without question the official account of the Book of Mormon's origin,

namely, that Joseph Smith translated the book from golden plates deposited around A. D. 400 by Moroni.

Other theories have been suggested. Many books were published prior to the Book of Mormon in 1830, which popularized the idea of a connection between the Native American Indians and the Hebrews. For example, Elias Boudinot wrote a book entitled *A Star in the West; or, a Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Ten Tribes of Israel*, which was published in 1816. Another possible source is a book by Ethan Smith, who was no relation to Joseph, entitled *View of the Hebrews*. This popular book was published in 1823. Still another popular theory is that Solomon Spaulding wrote a manuscript entitled *Manuscript Story* prior to his death in 1816. The manuscript, given to Oberlin College in Ohio in 1884, has some interesting similarities with the Book of Mormon. Each describes a sea voyage, wars between two factions of ancient Americans, and a final battle fought on a hill.

Fawn Brodie wrote *No Man Knows My History*, one of the most comprehensive biographies on Joseph Smith. She argues that Smith was a genius who wrote the Book of Mormon as "frontier fiction." She also found the Ten Commandments, 21 chapters from Isaiah, Malachi 3-4, the Sermon on the Mount and 1 Corinthians 12-13 in the Book of Mormon. She pointed out numerous quotes by Jesus in the New Testament reportedly said by Native American Indians as early as 544 B. C. Brodie also claimed Smith borrowed and revised stories from the Bible to put into the Book of Mormon. More than a hundred of the 350 names in the Book of Mormon are biblical names; over a 100 others are biblical names with slight changes in spelling or additions of syllables.

American history made its way into the Book of Mormon. A prophecy concerning Columbus and his voyage in 1492 is said to have been made in First Nephi 13:12 prior to 592 B. C. First Nephi 13:17-19 is said to be a prophecy of the Revolutionary War.

A subtitle, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," was added to the Book of Mormon in 1982. For Mormons, the Book of Mormon is the Word of God without error. However, numerous changes have been made in the text since it was published in 1830.

### **Other LDS Scriptures**

The Book of Mormon is given by LDS missionaries to persons who express interest in the LDS Church. However, few of the teachings of the LDS Church are found in the Book of Mormon. In fact, some of the teachings in the Book of Mormon contradict current LDS teachings.

Written in King James English, the Book of Mormon is a "bridge" between the Christian faith and Mormon teachings. Only after crossing the

bridge will a person begin to learn basic Mormon teachings.

The King James Version of the Bible is accepted as Scripture "as far as it is translated correctly." Smith taught that the Bible contains many errors. He began a "correction" of the so-called biblical errors, which were published as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) or the Inspired Version of the Bible, in which 3,410 versions were altered in some way. The Inspired Version of the Bible is not used by the LDS Church, although all of its changes are found in footnotes or an appendix in the LDS edition of the King James Version, or in another Scripture, The Pearl of Great Price.

For example, Smith claimed John 1:1 should be translated, "In the beginning was the 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" (JST).

A third Scripture is The Doctrine and Covenants, which consists of 138 revelations, primarily to Joseph Smith, Jr., who is "Prophet, Seer and Revelator," and 2 declarations.

Most of the LDS teachings can be found in The Doctrine and Covenants, including baptism for the dead; the Word of Wisdom, which prohibits the use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages and "hot drinks," which has been interpreted as referring to caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea, and cola drinks; polygamy or "plural marriage;" and the priesthood.

During the late 1800s, the U. S. Congress passed several laws prohibiting the practice of polygamy. Some LDS leaders were imprisoned; others fled to other countries. In addition to these laws, the territory of Utah desired to be admitted as a state. So the LDS president Wilford Woodruff issued the first declaration declaring his "advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land." The revelation allowing polygamy is still found in D&C 132.

The second declaration was issued in 1978 and extended LDS priesthood to persons of African descent, "every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood." Women are still prohibited from receiving ordination.

The LDS Church has two ordinations: the Aaronic Priesthood to boys at the age of 12 years. Joseph Smith claimed John the Baptist appeared to him and Oliver Cowdery, and gave them authority to ordain others to the Aaronic Priesthood. The Melchizedek Priesthood is given to young men at age 18. Men who hold the Melchizedek are called "Elder." The Apostles Peter, James and John are said to have appeared to Smith and Cowdery and ordained them to the Melchizedek Priesthood. This priesthood is said to have been held by Adam, but was lost during the Great Apostasy.

The Great Apostasy began sometime shortly after Jesus' ascension and continued until Joseph

Smith, Jr. restored the one true church through the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.

The fourth LDS Scripture is the Pearl of Great Price. This work was first published in 1851 in England and was accepted as LDS Scripture in 1880. It includes a section called "Selections from the Book of Moses," which is Smith's changes to Genesis 1-8. Smith changed the biblical text to teach that God has prepared many planets, "worlds without number," to be populated by Mormons who achieve Godhood, that Adam's fall was beneficial; and that Adam was baptized by immersion. Another section is called the Book of Abraham. Smith purchased several Egyptian papyri in 1842 and proclaimed this section was a lost book written by Abraham while in Egypt. The Book of Abraham teaches the plurality of Gods, the preexistence of souls, and reveals that God lives near a star named Kolob. A third section is Smith's changes to Matthew 23:39-24:51. Another section is called "Joseph Smith – History" and tells of Smith's first vision in which God the Father and Jesus Christ told him that all churches were corrupt. The Articles of Faith of the LDS Church constitute the last section of the Pearl of Great Price.

The Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price are generally in one volume.

The four LDS Scriptures are known as the Four Standard Works.

## Church Leadership

A fifth authority is the church leadership, primarily the president or prophet. LDS Apostle Nathan Eldon Tanner (1898-1982) said of the prophet, "When the prophet speaks the debate is over." Former LDS president Ezra Taft Benson said, "The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything." The prophet can add to or change the Four Standard Works as God reveals new truths to him.

The president and two counselors make up the First Presidency of the LDS Church, the highest authority in the church. Next in authority are the Twelve Apostles.

## Theology

**Godhead:** The LDS Articles of Faith state, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." However, Mormon theology rejects the doctrine of the trinity, holding instead that the three persons in the Godhead are three separate and distinct persons. The Father and the Son "have tangible bodies of flesh and bones" while the Holy Ghost "is a personage of spirit without flesh and bone."

A well-known saying attributed to Lorenzo Snow, the first president of the LDS Church is, "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become." In other words, God the Father, who is *Elohim* in the Old Testament, was once a human who lived on a planet like the Earth. He lived the

same “gospel teachings” followed by Mormons today and progressed to Godhood. With his wife (or wives), God the Father procreated billions of children in the spirit world, who later were born or will be born to physical parents on Earth. Mormon men believe they too can progress to Godhood as God the Father did. “In short, man is a god in embryo.”

The LDS teaching of a Heavenly Mother is seldom mentioned. However, Smith taught the doctrine as early as 1839. In *Achieving a Celestial Marriage*, published by the LDS Church in 1976, we read that God’s “marriage partner is our Mother in heaven. We are their spirit children, born to them in the bonds of celestial marriage.” This teaching is not found in the Book of Mormon or Doctrine and Covenants.

Because God has a physical body, He is not omnipresent, but can be in only one place at a time. Although Mormons worship only one God, they believe in a plurality of Gods, like *Elohim*, throughout the universe. Each of these Gods progressed to Godhood and is populating other planets prepared for him. Mormons use passages such as Deuteronomy 5:4 to support this doctrine. This passage states that God spoke to the people at Sinai “face to face.” However, Deut. 4:12 states that God spoke to the people at Sinai, but they saw “no form.” This LDS teaching is not found in the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith, Jr. changed John 4:24 to reflect his belief that God the Father has a body of flesh and bones. The passage in the JST reads, “For unto such hath God promised his Spirit.”

**Holy Spirit:** The doctrine of the Holy Ghost is not emphasized in the LDS Church. The Holy Ghost, who “is a Personage of Spirit,” is not omnipresent. Mormons sometimes use the term “Holy Ghost” to refer to the gift that follows faith, repentance and baptism.

**Jesus Christ:** Jesus Christ is the first born Son of God in the pre-existence and the only begotten Son of God in the physical world. Although the Book of Mormon in Alma 7:10 teaches that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost, LDS teaching holds that God the Father was Jesus’ earthly father and that Mary was his earthly mother. Jesus is the Son of God “in the literal and true sense of the word.”

Some Mormons maintain that Christ married Mary and Martha at the wedding at Cana of Galilee (John 2:2-11). Other Mormons also hold Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and other women, and that He had children by them.

**Creation and the Fall:** Mormons reject the teaching that God created the universe out of nothing (“ex nihilo”), but organized it out of eternal matter. Jesus, who was Jehovah in his pre-existence, Adam, who was Michael the Archangel, and perhaps others help to form the Earth.

Adam and Eve, two of “God’s noblest children,” were placed in the Garden of Eden, located in what

is now Jackson County, Missouri. The two were given conflicting commandments: to become mortal and have children, and “to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil out of which mortality and children and death would result.” Adam broke the lesser of the two commandments and ate from the tree, thereby losing his immortality, but enabling him to have children waiting in the pre-existence for earthly parents. “Adam was one of the greatest men who has ever lived on the earth . . . Adam fell, but he fell in the right direction. He fell toward the goal . . . Adam fell, but he fell upward” (“Church News,” *Deseret News*, July 31, 1965, p. 7.

Adam was then baptized (Moses 6:64-65. Moses is found in “The Pearl of Great Price,” in which Smith changed the opening chapters of Genesis.)

**Christ’s Atonement:** Mormons teach that Jesus Christ died to atone for Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, which caused the loss of immortality. Christ’s atonement provided “general salvation,” which means that all mankind has received immortality and will live somewhere for eternity. General salvation cannot be refused.

Christ’s atonement also made possible “individual salvation,” which is the reward for “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,” the teachings of the LDS Church. The laws and ordinances include:

- Faith in God the Father.
- Repentance or a desire to be relieved from sin.
- Baptism by immersion. Baptism by non-LDS clergy is invalid. Children of LDS parents are baptized at age eight years.
- Laying on of hands to receive the Holy Ghost.
- Ordination as a Melchizedek Priest for all males.
- Receiving the temple endowments, a temple ritual which endows a person “with power from on high.”
- Celestial Marriage, or marriage for “time and all eternity,” as opposed to other marriages which last until death or divorce.
- Keeping the Word of Wisdom, which prohibits the use of tobacco, alcohol, and “hot drinks,” referring to caffeine drinks.
- Sustaining the prophet by “common consent,” which refers to accepting him as the prophet, seer and revelator.
- Tithing one’s income.
- Regular attendance at weekly sacrament meetings. The sacrament of water and bread is taken at each weekly meeting. Unbaptized infants and children, being without sin until age eight, are given the sacrament.
- Obedience or “complete subjection to God and his commands.”

**Temples:** Temples are not houses of worship, but exist as places “to receive sacred ordinances and to make covenants with our Heavenly Father.” Three ordinances are performed in temples: endowments, celestial marriage and other “sealing” ordinances, and baptism for the dead.

The LDS Church collects worldwide records to locate persons who may need to be baptized and encourages members to compile family genealogies to determine whether ancestors were baptized into the LDS Church. Relatives and others are then baptized “by proxy.” The LDS Church stopped the practice of baptizing victims of the Holocaust in 1995 after Jewish leaders protested the practice.

Mormons believe persons who do not accept Mormonism while on earth are sent to a spirit prison where they receive word that a person has been baptized for them on Earth. They have the freedom to accept or reject the baptism.

Mormons must possess a “recommend” to enter a temple. A recommend certifies that an individual is a faithful Mormon who keeps the laws and ordinances of the church. Not all Mormons possess a recommend to enter a temple.

**Godhood or Exaltation:** Godhood or exaltation is reserved for the most faithful Mormons who will go to the highest heaven within the celestial kingdom. Faithful LDS families “sealed” in temple ceremonies will live as family units in the celestial kingdom, have spirit children and become Gods, while waiting for a planet to popular as *Elohim* has done on Earth

Persons not married for “time and eternity” in temples will become angels (Mark 12:25) in the celestial kingdom and serve the Gods.

Persons who do not accept Mormonism, but live moral lives will live eternally in the terrestrial kingdom. These persons will see Jesus, but not God the Father, who resides in the celestial kingdom.

Evil persons will live eternally in the telestial kingdom. They will see the Holy Ghost, but not God the Father or Jesus Christ.

Persons who commit unforgivable sins will be assigned to the Second Death, where they will live eternally completely separate from the Godhead. Unforgivable sins include murder and apostasy.

**Last Things:** The name of the LDS Church suggests an emphasis on eschatology. Mormons believe Elijah appeared to Smith and Cowdery in fulfillment of the promises in Malachi 4:5-6.

Prior to the battle of Armageddon, Jesus, Adam and Joseph Smith will appear at Adam-ondi-Ahman in northwest Missouri (in fulfillment of Acts 1:11) to commission 144,000 LDS missionaries to preach the gospel before Jesus appears during the battle of Armageddon to defeat his enemies. The “great and abominable church” will be destroyed, along with all of the wicked.

Both Mormons and honest and deceived non-Mormons will live on earth during the millennium,

with non-Mormons continuing to have the opportunity of accepting Mormon teachings. The major work of the LDS Church will be to perform temple ordinances for those who did not have opportunity to receive them in this life. The LDS Church will exercise political control of the earth during the millennium.

A series of resurrections of the dead will occur at the beginning of the millennium with each person assigned to the kingdom earned during earthly life. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released for a time, but will be defeated in the final battle, and with his “sons” be cast out forever into “a lake of fire and brimstone.” The earth will be changed into a celestial sphere and the meek shall live on the earth forever.