

Cults and Other “Gospels”

Recognizing and Understanding the Differences



Cults and Other “Gospels”

- ♦ **Remember our definition of a “cult”**
 - ♦ **I've recommended six questions to ask yourself about any religious groups that seem at least potentially suspicious to you...**
 1. **Does the group have a prophet/founder who is revered by followers and claims to have *special* revelation from God or from angels?**
 2. **Are there authoritative writings or scriptures *in addition to* or *instead of* the Bible?**
 3. **Does the group view itself as the one *true* church, founded because the *true* gospel was lost in the early centuries of the church?**
 4. **What does the group believe regarding the Trinity? Is Jesus fully God, the second person of the Trinity? Is the Holy Spirit fully God, the third person of the Trinity?**
 5. **How does the group believe we are *saved*? By grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ, or by faith plus good works?**
 6. **What belief does the group hold regarding life after death? What is its concept of Heaven and Hell?**



Cults and Other “Gospels”

- ◆ Introduction to Cults
- ◆ Peoples Temple
- ◆ **The Mormons**

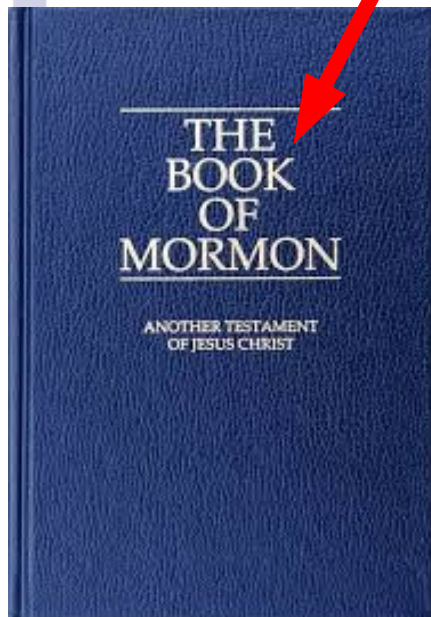
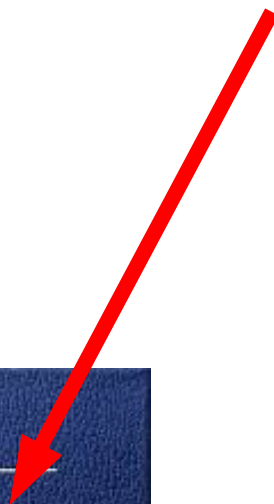


Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ♦ The “Mormons” *aren't really* the “Mormons”
 - ♦ “Mormon” was really just a character in their mythology—the 4th century AD Jewish prophet in America who redacted large chunks of other prophecies as part of the Book of Mormon (the whole book is called by his name, but his section is technically only part of it)



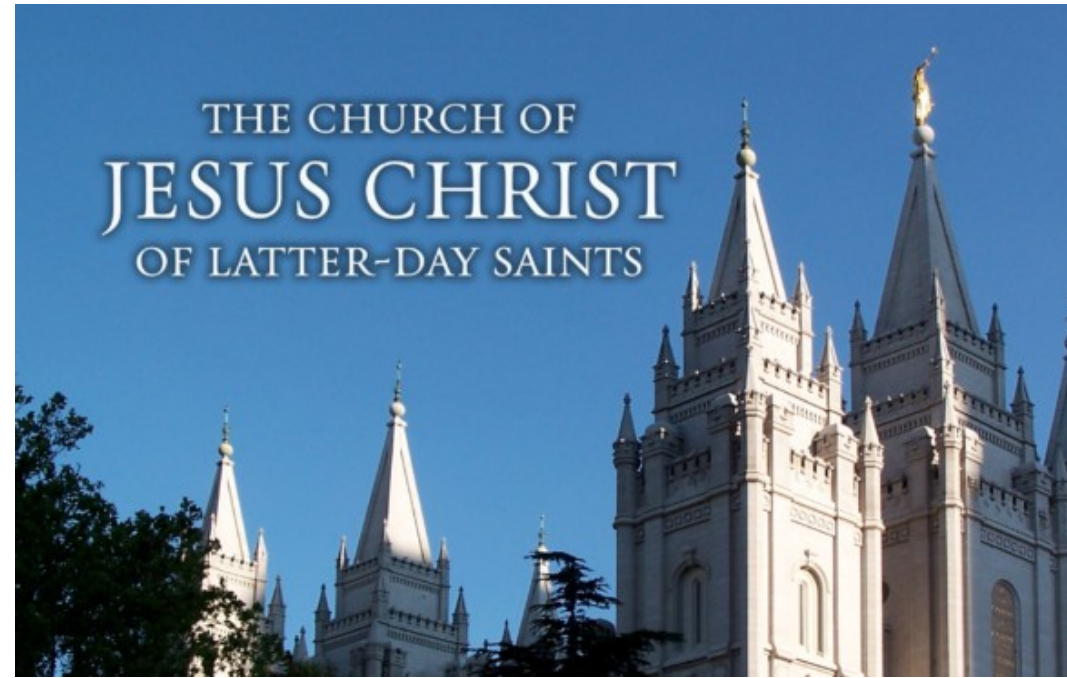
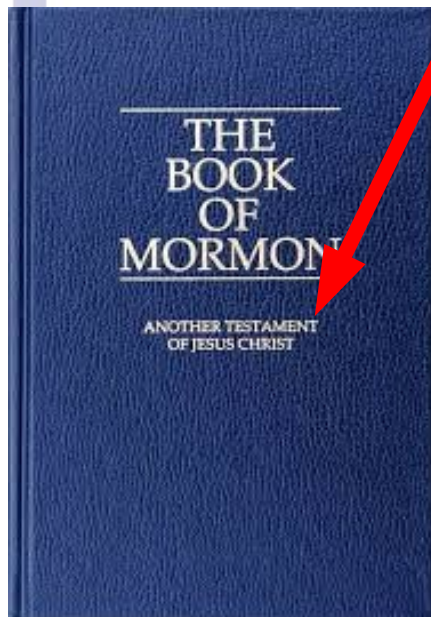
Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ♦ The “Mormons” *aren't really* the “Mormons”
- ♦ The *proper* name for the group is “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints”
 - ♦ See, the whole idea of the cult is that the only *real* followers of Jesus Christ are those who have only *recently*—i.e.; in these *latter* days—come to discover the *truth* about Him

(NOTE: The subtitle of their book puts the focus not on Mormon, but on Jesus Christ Himself —that this is *another* testament that teaches us the *actual* truth)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ❖ The “Mormons” *aren't really* the “Mormons”
- ❖ The *proper* name for the group is “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints”
- ❖ But in point of practice, even the *Mormons* often refer to themselves as “Mormons”
 - ❖ So don't judge me too hard for using the easier label throughout this lesson...

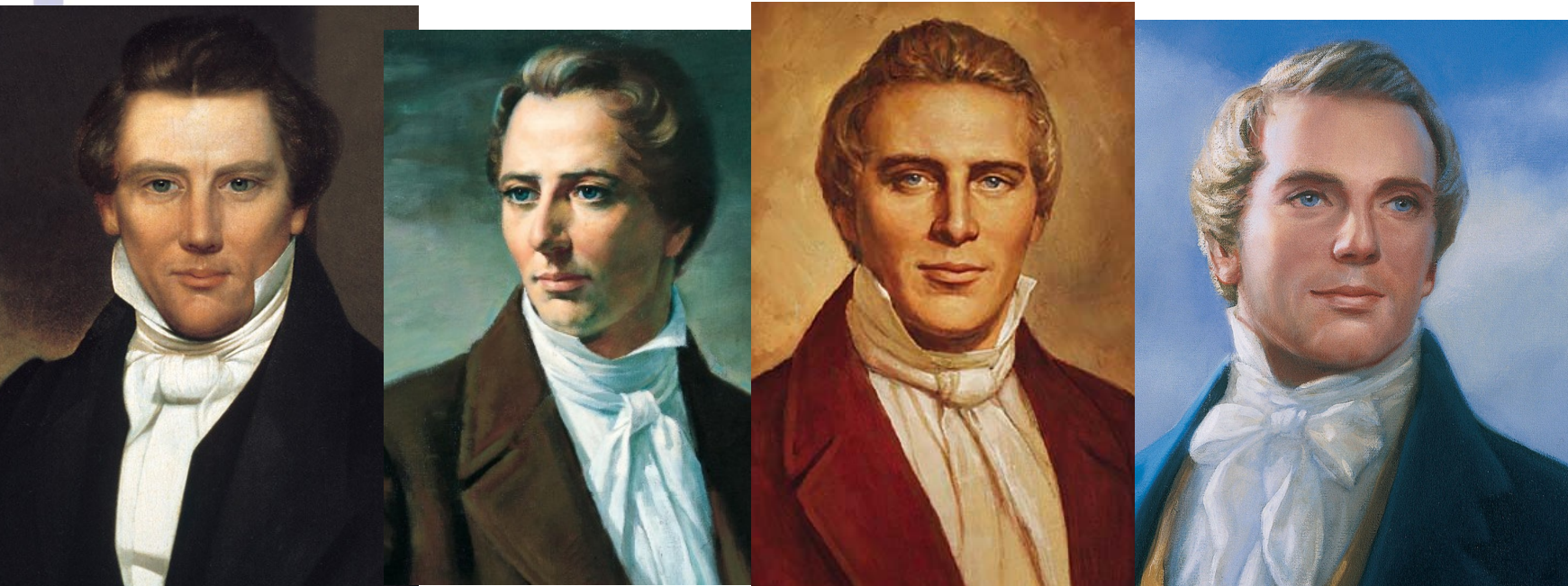
THE
BOOK
OF
MORMON

ANOTHER TESTAMENT
OF JESUS CHRIST



Mormons

- ♦ **Let's go through our six questions...**
 - ♦ **Who is their founder?**
 - ♦ **Joseph Smith**
(who appears to have grown blonder and more robust with each successive portrait painted over the past 200 years)



Mormons

- ◆ **Let's go through our six questions...**

- ◆ **Who is their founder?**

- ◆ **Joseph Smith**

- ◆ **“No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith. From the day that the Priesthood was taken from the earth to the winding up scene of all things, every man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith, junior, as a passport to their entrance into the mansion where God and Christ are.”**

—Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*

- ◆ **“I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet.”**

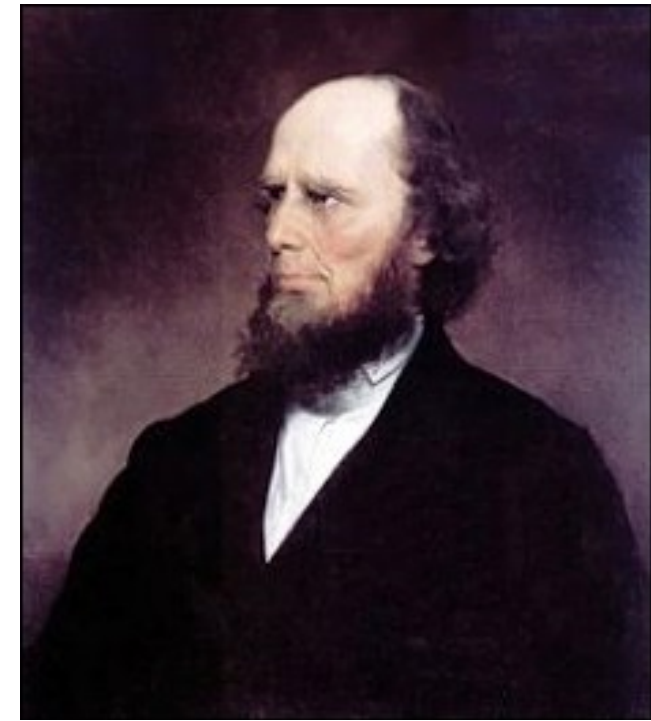
—Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*



Mormons

♦ Joseph Smith

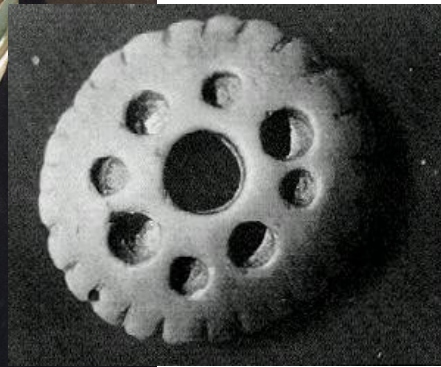
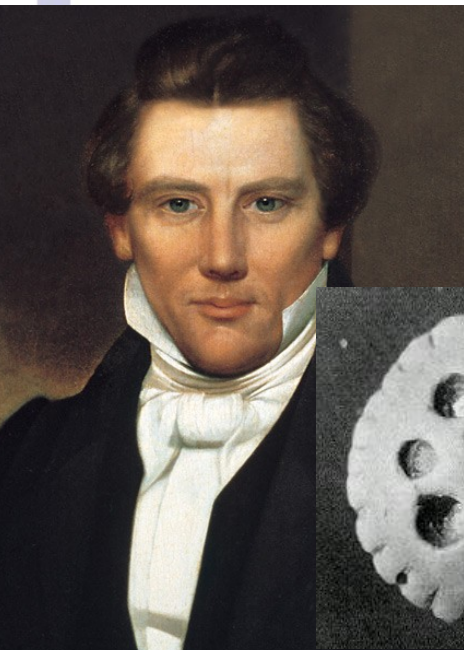
- ♦ Joseph Smith was born in Vermont in 1805 but grew up in west New York's “burnt district” (NOTE: Christian evangelist Charles Finney had named it that because so many revivals had happened there that there was no more unsaved “kindling” left to burn with the Spirit)
(Remember that for the future, because we're going to see a lot of Christian offshoots come out of this region of New York, “tweaking” familiar Christianity to make something new)



Mormons

♦ Joseph Smith

- ♦ Joseph Smith was born in Vermont in 1805 but grew up in west New York's “burnt district” as the son of a Bible-quoting mother who frequented revivals and a father who considered religion to be unimportant at best
 - ♦ His father spent much of his time hunting for buried treasure in the woods, taking his sons with him, and Joseph Jr. became famous in the area for his use of “peep stones” to hunt for treasure
 - ♦ People would pay him to look through the center hole in his “peep stone” to see where treasure might be buried
 - ♦ Amazingly, that never actually worked (in fact, he was sued at least twice for fraud —as Peter Ingersoll attested in 1833, Smith acknowledged in court that “he could not see in a stone now, nor never could; and that his former pretensions in that respect were all false. He then promised to give up his old habits of digging for money and looking into stones...”)



Mormons

♦ Joseph Smith

- ♦ Joseph Smith was born in Vermont in 1805 but grew up in west New York's “burnt district”
- ♦ In 1820, with the family in financial hardship and his parents arguing over going to church, Joseph went out to the woods to ask God about what church he should attend
- ♦ Suddenly, he saw two glowing figures appear (actually, he *originally* said that he saw one figure and then later testified that he saw *several angels* but eventually settled on saying that he just saw two blonde, glowing figures, who looked exactly alike)



DOCUMENTED HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH'S FIRST VISION



tion of the world...He told him the Gospel was not among men, and that there was not a true organization of His kingdom in the world..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 2, pp.196-197)

1857 Nov. 8—LDS Apostle Heber C. Kimball seemed to be oblivious to any vision where Joseph saw God and Christ: "Do you suppose that God in person called upon Joseph Smith, our Prophet? God called upon him; but God did not come himself and call, but he sent Peter to do it. Do you not see? He sent Peter and sent Moroni to Joseph, and told him that he had got the plates." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 6, p.29)

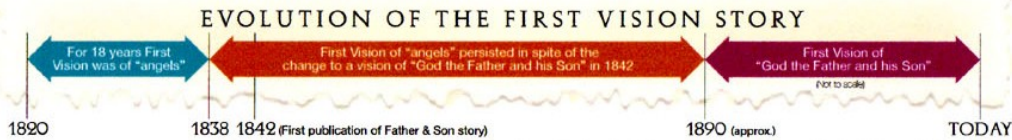
1863 Mar. 1—Apostle John Taylor explained in a sermon: "How did this state of things called Mormonism originate? We read that an angel came down and revealed himself to Joseph Smith and manifested unto him in vision the true position of the world..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 10, p.127)

1863 Nov. 15—LDS Apostle George A. Smith preached: "When Joseph Smith was about fourteen or fifteen years old...the Lord answered his prayer, and revealed to Joseph, by the ministrations of angels, the true condition of the religious world. When the holy angel appeared, Joseph inquired which of all these denominations was right and which he should join, and was told they were all wrong..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 12, pp.333-334)

1864 Nov. 15—A year later, Apostle Smith seemed to be describing the vision in a more traditional way: "When the Lord appeared to Joseph Smith...He [Joseph] thus describes the incident: 'In the spring of 1820...I saw a pillar of light...I saw two personages...This is my beloved son, hear him.'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 11, pp.1-2)

1869 Jun. 20—Apostle Smith again referred to Smith's First Vision: "He sought the Lord by day and by night, and was enlightened by the vision of an holy angel. When this personage appeared to him, of his first inquiries was, 'Which of the denominations of Christians in the vicinity was right?'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 13, p.77-78)

1869 Dec. 19—Orson Pratt taught "By and by an obscure individual...proclaimed the startling



Concerning Joseph Smith's "First Vision", seeing God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ together, Mormon prophet Gordon B. Hinckley said:



"...this is the pivotal thing of our story. Every claim that we make concerning divine authority, every truth that we offer concerning the validity of this work, all finds its roots in the First Vision of the boy prophet. Without it we would not have anything much to say...This becomes the hinge pin on which the whole cause turns. If the First Vision was true, if it actually happened, then the Book of Mormon is true. Then we have the priesthood. Then we have the Church organization and all of the other keys and blessings of authority which we say we have. If the First Vision did not occur, then we are involved in a great sham. It is that simple." (Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley, p.227)

From the above quote, it is obvious that the history of Joseph Smith's First Vision is of paramount importance. For that reason the following documented accounts, beginning in the year 1820, have been compiled to enable the reader to determine how, and when, the First Vision actually came about.

1820 There are no known references to the First Vision recorded in the year 1820. In fact, until the year 1838, there was no mention of Joseph having seen God the Father and his Son in any newspaper or contemporary writing, including Latter-day Saint (LDS) Church publications; not even in the diaries and journals of Joseph's closest friends and church leaders, like Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, George A. Smith, George Q. Cannon and Oliver Cowdery. Nor was there any mention of a vision of the Father and Son in the writings of any of Joseph's many enemies of the period between 1820

news that God had sent an angel to him...This young man, some four years afterwards, was visited again by a holy angel." (Journal of Discourses, Vol.13, pp.65-66)

1871 Mar. 19—Orson Pratt preached: "He went out to pray, being then a little over fourteen years of age...He saw in this light two glorious personages, one of whom spoke to him...saying, 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 14, pp.140-141)

Although Orson Pratt's sermon on March 19, 1871 could be interpreted as either angels or God, his sermon on Dec. 10 of that year clearly identified the messengers as angels: "There was Joseph Smith, a boy...he was only between fourteen and fifteen years of age...Would he stand forth and bear testimony that he had seen with his own eyes a messenger of light and glory, and that he heard the words of his mouth as they dropped from his lips and had received a message from the Most High, at that early age? And then...to have the finger of scorn pointed at him...No visions in our day, no angels come in our day..." and still continue to testify...that God had sent his angel from heaven." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 14, p.262)

1874 Jun. 23—President Brigham Young was still identifying the personages as messengers rather than God and Christ: "Do we believe that the Lord sent his messengers to Joseph Smith, and commanded him to refrain from joining any Christian church...informing him that the Lord was about to establish his kingdom on the earth... Yes, this is all correct." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 18, p.239)

Brigham Young never once mentioned the First Vision of God the Father and his Son in his 32 years of preaching as President of the Church.

1874 Sept. 20—Orson Pratt preached: "Joseph Smith...was a boy about fourteen years of age at the time the Lord first revealed himself...to him...he saw nothing excepting the light and two glorious personages...One of these personages, pointing to the other, said—'Behold my beloved Son, hear ye him.' After this, power was given to Mr. Smith to speak, and...he said that he desired

and 1840. There is also no evidence that Joseph Smith taught that God and Jesus were separate deities with bodies prior to 1838.

1832 In Joseph's handwritten first draft of his history, only Jesus is mentioned as appearing. (The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, compiled by Dean Jesse, Deseret Book, 2002, pp. 10-11)



1832-34 The Evening and Morning Star periodical, a major LDS publication, contains no mention of Joseph's having seen the Father and the Son.

1835 The Book of Commandments, a chronology of revelations from God to Joseph Smith was published. This would have been a natural place to include Joseph's first revelation. But there is no mention of the First Vision.

1834-36 The Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate claimed that it would be "a full history of the rise of the church" (Vol. 1, p.13) and on page 42 of the same volume we read that it would contain "a correct statement of events." In the February, 1835, issue, Oliver Cowdery told how Joseph Smith made his first contact with God. A "messenger" appeared to him in his bedroom. No mention of the Father and the Son.

1835 Nov. 9—Joseph related his first vision to a Jewish minister. When he went into the grove to pray, two personages appeared. The second one "testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He "saw many angels in this vision." (The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, pp.104-5) This account has been deleted from the History of the Church, Vol. 2, p.304.

1835 Nov. 14—Joseph told his story to Erastus Holmes: "...I received the first visitation of Angels which was when I was about 14 years old..." (The

to know which was the true Church...immediately after receiving it, he began to relate it to some of his nearest friends, and he was told by some of the ministers who came to him to enquire about it, that there was no such thing as the visitation of heavenly messengers, that God gave no new revelation...he knew that he had seen this light, that he had beheld these two personages, and that he had heard the voice of one of them...and he continued to testify that God had made himself manifest to him..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 17, pp.278-280)

1876 Dec. 31—Apostle John Taylor identified the personages in the First Vision as follows: "...the Father and the Son appeared to him, arrayed in glory..." This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 18, pp.325-326)

1879 Mar. 2—John Taylor stated: "...Joseph asked the angel which of the sects was right...the angel merely told him to join none of them..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 20, p.167) However, later the same day, he declared that the Father and Son appeared to Joseph: "When the Father and the Son and Moroni and others came to Joseph Smith, he had a priesthood conferred upon him..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 20, p.257)



1879 Dec. 7—John Taylor declared: "the Lord revealed himself to [Joseph] together with his Son Jesus, and, pointing to the latter, said: 'This is my beloved Son, hear him.'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 21, p.161; see also p.65 for a similar message)

1880 Sept. 18—Orson Pratt gave his most specific identification of the personages: "...in the spring of 1820...an answer to his prayers, there was the manifestation of two of the great personages in the heavens—not angels, not messengers, but two persons that hold the keys of authority over all the creations of the universe. We were they? God the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 21, p.308)

1882 Oct. 29—Apostle George Q. Cannon seemed to start Joseph's call with the vision of Moroni. He did mention that Joseph saw Jesus and God but did not put those experiences in the framework of the first vision: "He [Joseph] was visited constantly by

Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, p.113) This account has been changed in the History of the Church, Vol. 2, p.312. It now reads "my first vision" instead of "visitation of angels."

1835 Doctrine and Covenants, a revision of the Book of Commandments, was published. Ironically, God the Father is portrayed, not as having a physical body but, as "being a personage of spirit" in contrast to the Son who was "a personage of tabernacle" (body). (D&C, 1835, p. 53) This, in spite of the official First Vision which depicts the Father as a physical being.

1838 Joseph Smith wrote that "I continued to pursue my vocation in life until the twenty-first of September one thousand eight hundred and twenty-three [1820-1823. That's three years since the First Vision, according to the official version.] all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision." (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith History 1:27) Yet, the LDS Messenger and Advocate, 1834-36, which was to be "a full history of the rise of the church," was silent on Joseph's having seen the Father and the Son in a vision.

1839 Joseph receives a revelation from God proclaiming "a time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods they shall be manifest." (D&C 121:28) In light of the official version of the First Vision, Joseph should have been aware of more than one God since 1820, making this an unnecessary revelation.

1841 Orson Pratt published a booklet titled, An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions. He related that when Smith was "about fourteen or fifteen years old" he was praying in the woods when "two glorious personages" appeared. There was no indication that they were the Father and Son.

angels; and the Son of God Himself condescended to come and minister unto him; the Father having also shown Himself unto him; and these various angels, the heads of dispensations, having also ministered unto him. Moroni, in the beginning, as you know, to prepare him for his mission, came and ministered and talked to him from time to time..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 23, p.362)

1883 Former Apostle, William Smith, Joseph's brother, remembered the vision as happening in 1823. He wrote that Joseph went into the woods to pray about which church to join: "An angel then appeared to him...He told him that none of the sects were right..." (William Smith on Mormonism, by William Smith, 1883, Herald Steam Book, Iowa, pp.5-10, as printed in New Mormon Studies CD-ROM)

1884 Jan. 13—Apostle George Teasdale understood the First Vision to be "a vision of the Father and the Son." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 25, p.13 & 18)

1884 Jan. 28—B.H. Roberts related: "In the Spring of 1820, Joseph Smith...was praying in the woods to the Father. He saw a pillar of light descending from heaven...In the midst of this glorious light stood two personages... 'This is my beloved son; hear ye him.'...for the Father had revealed the Son to him." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 25, p.138)

1888 LDS assistant Church Historian Andrew Jensen still had the understanding that the first vision was one of angels. He published an account of the First Vision in the paper The Historical Record, Jan. 1888, pp.353-357. This account is taken from the Times and Seasons account with Jensen's comments summarizing the experience, "The angel again forbade Joseph to join any of these churches..." Jensen then reverted Smith's narrative, "Many other things did he [the angel] say unto me which I cannot write at this time." Note that Jensen adds the clarifying words "the angel." When Jensen's paper was reprinted a couple of years later this account had been changed in two places. At the spots where he identified the being as an "angel" it was changed to "the Holy Being" and "the Christ."

Thus we see that the details of the First Vision vary in the different accounts. Early LDS leaders usually thought of the vision as one of angels, not God. They did not appear to the first vision to establish their teaching that God has a body.

1842 Mar. 1—In a letter from Joseph Smith to John Wentworth, "Two glorious personages" appeared and informed him that none of the churches "was acknowledged of God." There was no indication that they were the Father and Son. (Times and Seasons, Vol. 3, no.9, p.707)

1842 Mar. 15—Joseph's 1838-39 version of the First Vision was published for the first time. Two personages appeared. One pointed to the other and said, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." (Times and Seasons, Vol. 3, no. 10, p. 748)

1845 In the first draft of her autobiography, Joseph's mother, Lucy Smith, remembered Mormonism starting with a visit, in 1823, by "an angel" who told him "...there is not a true church on the Earth." Later, in the published version, she said nothing about her own recollection of the vision but simply inserted Joseph's account from Times and Seasons. (First draft of Lucy Smith's family history, p.46, Church Archives; First Mormon Documents, Vol. 1, p.289-290)



1854 Speaking at the April Conference, Apostle Orson Hyde stated: "Some one may say, 'If this work of the last days be true, why did not the Saviour come himself to communicate this intelligence to the world?' Because to the angels was committed the power of reaping the earth, and it was committed to none else." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 6, p.335)

1855 Feb. 18—LDS President Brigham Young taught: "...The Lord did not come with the armies of heaven...But He did send His angel to...Joseph Smith jun...and informed him that he should not join any of the religious sects of the day..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 2, p.171)



1855 Feb. 25—Apostle Wilford Woodruff preached: "That same organization and Gospel that Christ died for...is again established in this generation. How did it come? By the ministering of an holy angel from God...The angel taught Joseph Smith those principles which are necessary for the salva-

These historical records of the First Vision leave us with more questions than answers:

- If Joseph Smith's claim to a vision in 1820 had resulted in the kind of public persecution he described, why did the story go completely unnoticed by the public media, and remain absent from the official literature of the LDS Church for 22 years?
- Why is there no mention of the 1820 appearance of the Father and the Son in all of Brigham Young's sermons?
- If Brigham Young believed Joseph's revised First Vision of the Father and the Son, why would he continue to tell the story of a First Vision wherein the Lord sent his angels to tell Joseph not to join any of the churches?
- Why did it take more than 50 years for the revised First Vision, adding the Father and the Son, to replace the original First Vision of angels as the church's standard teaching?
- If President Hinckley's statement is true—"If the First Vision did not occur, then we are involved in a great sham. It is that simple."—are we gambling with our family's eternal destiny by not carefully examining the documented history of the First Vision story?

Our Lord Jesus said, "...And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn 8:32)

For more information, contact:

UTAH LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY
www.utlm.org • 801-485-8894

Christian Research & Counsel
3500 12th Av N • St Petersburg FL 33713 • 727-667-4112
jrcrc@j.net • www.christianresearchandcounsel.org

Cover photo: © Museum of Church History and Art
Research and portraits of text: www.utlm.org
Portraits from: Unofficial Australian LDS Page: http://www.oreil.com

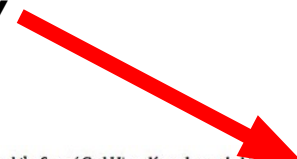


Mormons

(NOTE: Former Mormon President Gordon B. Hinckley once preached,

“Every claim that we make concerning divine authority, every truth that we offer concerning the validity of this work, all finds its roots in the First Vision of the boy prophet... If the First Vision did not occur, then we are involved in a great sham. It is that simple...”

—in *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*



tion of the world...He told him the Gospel was not among men, and that there was not a true organization of His kingdom in the world..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 2, pp.196-197)

1857 Nov. 8—LDS Apostle Heber C. Kimball seemed to be oblivious to any vision where Joseph saw God and Christ: "Do you suppose that God in person called upon Joseph Smith, our Prophet? God called upon him; but God did not come himself and call, but he sent Peter to do it. Do you not see? He sent Peter and sent Moroni to Joseph, and told him that he had got the plates." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 6, p.29)

1863 Mar. 1—Apostle John Taylor explained in a sermon: "How did this state of things called Mormonism originate? We read that an angel came down and revealed himself to Joseph Smith and manifested unto him in vision the true position of the world..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 10, p.127)

1863 Nov. 15—LDS Apostle George A. Smith preached: "When Joseph Smith was about fourteen or fifteen years old...the Lord answered his prayer, and revealed to Joseph, by the ministrations of angels, the true condition of the religious world. When the holy angel appeared, Joseph inquired which of all these denominations was right and which he should join, and was told they were all wrong..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 12, pp.333-334)

1864 Nov. 15—A year later, Apostle Smith seemed to be describing the vision in a more traditional way: "When the Lord appeared to Joseph Smith...He [Joseph] thus describes the incident: 'In the spring of 1820...I saw a pillar of light...I saw two personages...This is my beloved son, hear ye him.'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 11, pp.1-2)

1869 Jun. 20—Apostle Smith again referred to Smith's First Vision: "He sought the Lord by day and by night, and was enlightened by the vision of an holy angel. When this personage appeared to him, of his first inquiries was, 'Which of the denominations of Christians in the vicinity was right?'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 13, p.77-78)

1869 Dec. 19—Orson Pratt taught "By and by an obscure individual...proclaimed the startling

news that God had sent an angel to him...This young man, some four years afterwards, was visited again by a holy angel." (Journal of Discourses, Vol.13, pp.65-66)

1871 Mar. 19—Orson Pratt preached: "He went out to pray, being then a little over fourteen years of age...He saw in this light two glorious personages, one of whom spoke to him...saying, 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 14, pp.140-141)

Although Orson Pratt's sermon on March 19, 1871 could be interpreted as either angels or God, his sermon on Dec. 10 of that year clearly identified the messengers as angels: "Here was Joseph Smith, a boy...he was only between fourteen and fifteen years of age...Would he stand forth and bear testimony that he had seen with his own eyes a messenger of light and glory, and that he heard the words of his mouth as they dropped from his lips and had received a message from the Most High, at that early age? And then...to have the finger of scorn pointed at him...No visions in our day, no angels come in our day...and still continue to testify...that God had sent his angel from heaven..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 14, p.262)

1874 Jun. 23—President Brigham Young was still identifying the personages as messengers rather than God and Christ: "Do we believe that the Lord sent his messengers to Joseph Smith, and commanded him to refrain from joining any Christian church...informing him that the Lord was about to establish his kingdom on the earth...Yes, this is all correct." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 18, p.239)

Brigham Young never once mentioned the First Vision of God, the Father and his Son in his 32 years of preaching as President of the Church.

1874 Sept. 20—Orson Pratt preached: "Joseph Smith...was a boy about fourteen years of age at the time the Lord first revealed himself...to him...he saw nothing excepting the light and two glorious personages...One of these personages, pointing to the other, said—'Behold my beloved Son, hear ye him.' After this, power was given to Mr. Smith to speak, and...he said that he desired

to know which was the true Church...immediately after receiving it; he began to relate it to some of his nearest friends, and he was told by some of the ministers who came to him to enquire about it, that there was no such thing as the visitation of heavenly messengers, that God gave no new revelation...he knew that he had seen this light, that he had beheld these two personages, and that he had heard the voice of one of them...and he continued to testify that God had made himself manifest to him..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 17, pp.276-280)

1876 Dec. 31—Apostle John Taylor identified the personages in the First Vision as follows: "...the Father and the Son appeared to him, arrayed in glory..." This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 18, pp.325-326)

1879 Mar. 2—John Taylor stated "...Joseph asked the angel which of the sects was right...the angel merely told him to join none of them..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 20, p.167) However, later the same day, he declared that the Father and Son appeared to Joseph: "When the Father and the Son and Moroni and others came to Joseph Smith, he had a priesthood conferred upon him..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 20, p.257)



1879 Dec. 7—John Taylor declared: "the Lord revealed himself to [Joseph] together with his Son Jesus, and, pointing to the latter, said: 'This is my beloved Son, hear him.'" (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 21, p.161; see also p.65 for a similar message)

1880 Sept. 18—Orson Pratt gave his most specific identification of the personages: "...in the spring of 1820...in answer to his prayers, there was the manifestation of two of the great personages in the heavens—not angels, not messengers, but two persons that hold the keys of authority over all the creations of the universe. Who were they? God the Eternal Father and his Son Jesus Christ..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 21, p.308)

1882 Oct. 29—Apostle George Q. Cannon seemed to start Joseph's call with the vision of Moroni. He did mention that Joseph saw Jesus and God but did not put those experiences in the framework of the first vision: "He [Joseph] was visited constantly by

angels; and the Son of God Himself condescended to come and minister unto him, the Father having also shown Himself unto him; and these various angels, the heads of dispensations, having also ministered unto him. Moroni, in the beginning, as you know, to prepare him for his mission, came and ministered and talked to him from time to time..." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 23, p.362)

1883 Former Apostle, William Smith, Joseph's brother, remembered the vision as happening in 1823. He wrote that Joseph went into the woods to pray about which church to join: "An angel then appeared to him...He told him that none of the sects were right..." (William Smith on Mormonism, by William Smith, 1883, Herald Steam Book, Iowa, pp.5-10, as printed in New Mormon Studies CD-ROM)

1884 Jan. 13—Apostle George Teasdale understood the First Vision to be "a vision of the Father and the Son." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 25, p.13 & 18)

1884 Jan. 28—B.H. Roberts related: "In the Spring of 1820, Joseph Smith...was praying in the woods to the Father. He saw a pillar of light descending from heaven...In the midst of this glorious light stood two personages... 'This is my beloved son; hear ye him.'...for the Father had revealed the Son to him." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 25, p.138)

1888 LDS assistant Church Historian Andrew Jensen still had the understanding that the first vision was one of angels. He published an account of the First Vision in the paper *The Historical Record*, Jan. 1888, pp.353-357. This account is taken from the *Times and Seasons* account with Jensen's comments summarizing the experience, "The angel again forbade Joseph to join any of these churches..." Jensen then reverted Smith's narrative, "Many other things did he [the angel] say unto me which I cannot write at this time." Note that Jensen adds the clarifying words "the angel." When Jensen's paper was reprinted a couple of years later this account had been changed in two places. At the spots where he identified the being as an "angel" it was changed to "the Holy Being" and "the Christ."

Thus we see that the details of the First Vision vary in the different accounts. Early LDS leaders usually thought of the vision as one of angels, not God. They did not appeal to the first vision to establish their teaching that God has a body.

These historical records of the First Vision leave us with more questions than answers:

- If Joseph Smith's claim to a vision in 1820 had resulted in the kind of public persecution he described, why did the story go completely unnoticed by the public media, and remain absent from the official literature of the LDS Church for 22 years?
 - Why is there no mention of the 1820 appearance of the Father and the Son in all of Brigham Young's sermons?
 - If Brigham Young believed Joseph's revised First Vision of the Father and the Son, why would he continue to tell the story of a First Vision wherein the Lord sent his angels to tell Joseph not to join any of the churches?
 - Why did it take more than 50 years for the revised First Vision, adding the Father and the Son, to replace the original First Vision of angels as the church's standard teaching?
 - If President Hinckley's statement is true — "If the First Vision did not occur, then we are involved in a great sham. It is that simple." — are we gambling with our family's eternal destiny by not carefully examining the documented history of the First Vision story?
- Our Lord Jesus said, "...And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn 8:32)

For more information, contact:

UTAH LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY
www.utlm.org • 801-485-8894

Christian Research & Counsel
3500 12th Av N • St Petersburg FL 33713 • 727-667-4112
ijc@crj.net • www.christianresearchandcounsel.org
Cover photo: © Museum of Church History and Art
Research and portions of text: www.utlm.org
Portraits from: Unofficial Australian LDS Page: http://www.oreil.com



Mormons

♦ Joseph Smith

- ♦ Joseph Smith was born in Vermont in 1805 but grew up in west New York's “burnt district”
- ♦ In 1820, with the family in financial hardship and his parents arguing over going to church, Joseph went out to the woods to ask God about what church he should attend
- ♦ Suddenly, he saw two glowing figures appear, identifying themselves as God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ
 - ♦ They told Smith that *all* of the existing churches were inherently corrupt, and all pastors worked for the Devil (who is another of God's many sons)
 - ♦ Thus, Smith should use his “peep stone” to find buried golden plates that would share a *new* Testament of Jesus Christ and would help Smith establish a new and *true* religion...

(NOTE: Remember, the sub-title of *The Book of Mormon* is “*Another Testament of Jesus Christ*”)



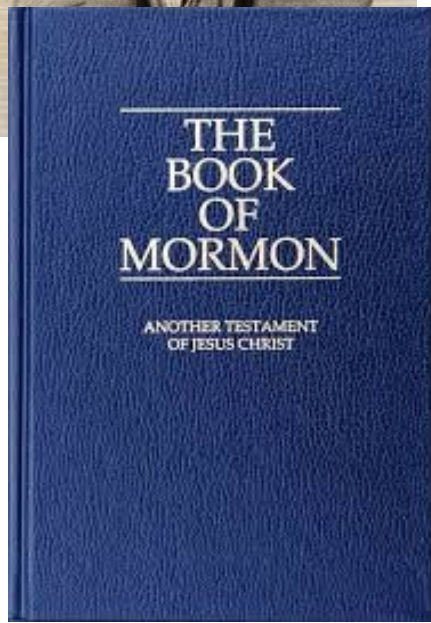
Mormons

- ◆ **Let's go through our six questions...**
 - ◆ **Do they have any authoritative writings or scriptures *in addition to or instead of* the Bible?**
 - ◆ ***The Book of Mormon***
 - ◆ **“Who, in his right mind, could for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? No one can tell whether even *one verse* of either the Old or New Testament conveys the ideas of the original author.”**

—Orson Pratt, *The Bible Alone, An Insufficient Guide*
(NOTE: As the *Book of Mormon* itself explains about the validity of the Bible,

“After the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God. And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles.”

—1 Nephi 13:26,28)



Mormons

- ◆ **Let's go through our six questions...**
 - ◆ **Do they have any authoritative writings or scriptures *in addition to or instead of* the Bible?**
 - ◆ ***The Book of Mormon***
 - ◆ “Who, in his right mind, could for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide...?”
 - ◆ **“The Bible of the Old World has come to us from the manuscripts of antiquity—manuscripts which passed through the hands of uninspired men who changed many parts to suit their own doctrinal ideas. Deletions were common, and, as it now stands, many plain and precious portions and many covenants of the Lord have been lost. As a consequence, those who rely upon it alone stumble and are confused.”**
—in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*
 - ◆ **“Men can get nearer to the Lord... can gain a better understanding of the doctrines of salvation through the *Book of Mormon* than they can through the Bible... There will be more people saved in the kingdom of God—ten thousand times over—because of the *Book of Mormon* than there will be because of the Bible.”**
—in *The Ensign*



Mormons

- ◆ **Let's go through our six questions...**
 - ◆ **Do they have any authoritative writings or scriptures *in addition to or instead of* the Bible?**
 - ◆ ***The Book of Mormon***
 - ◆ “Who, in his right mind, could for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide...?”
 - ◆ “The Bible of the Old World has come to us from the manuscripts of antiquity—manuscripts which passed through the hands of uninspired men who changed many parts to suit their own doctrinal ideas...”
 - ◆ **“The most reliable way to measure the accuracy of any biblical passage is not by comparing different texts, but by comparison with the Book of Mormon and modern-day revelations.”**
—A letter from Presidents Benson, Hinckley, and Monson as quoted in *Church News* (1992)

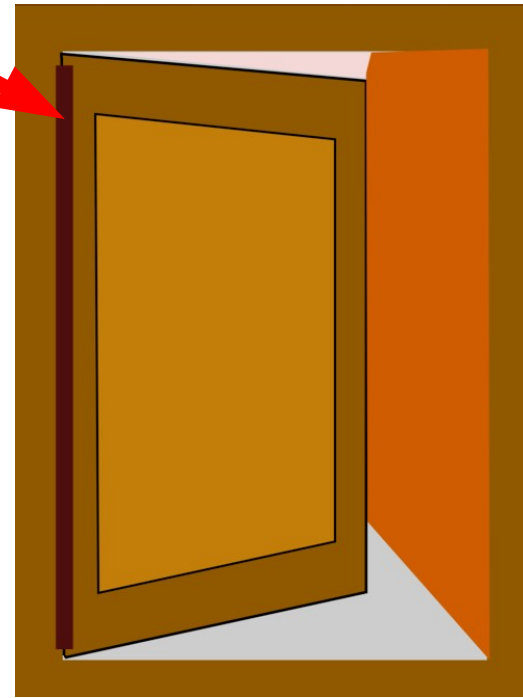
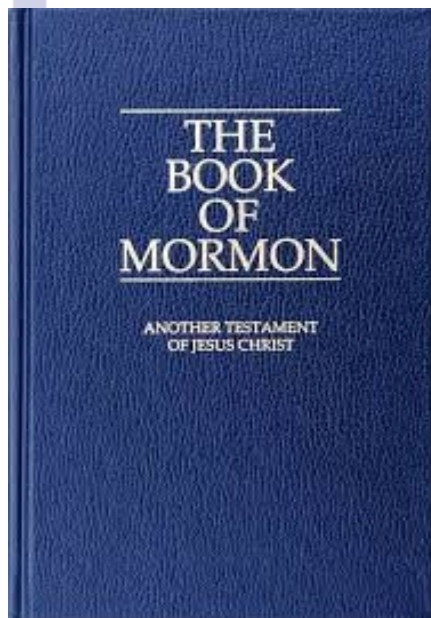


Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

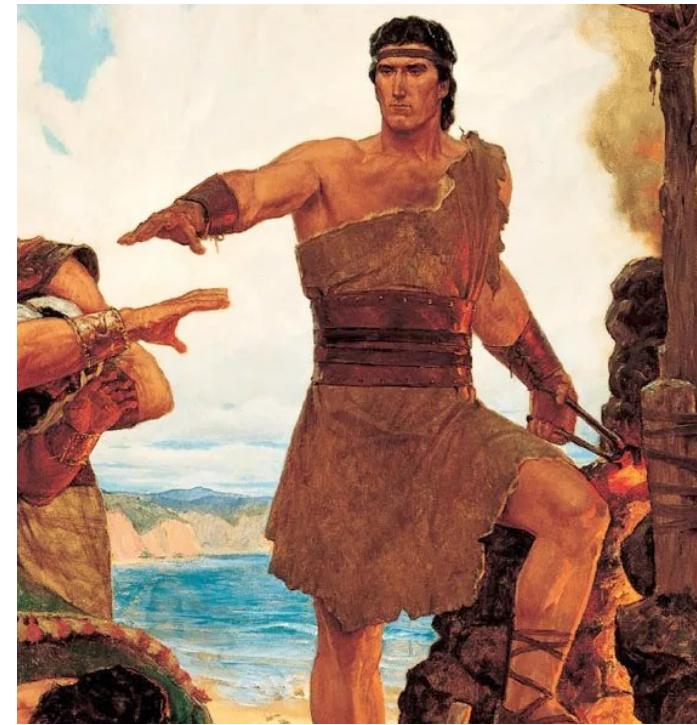
- ❖ As one Mormon missionary explained it to me, think of a door—
 - ❖ If a door only had one hinge, then it wouldn't work as well, because it would be unstable
 - ❖ Thus, it's better to have *two* hinges to hold up the door, so that each can support one another
 - ❖ The *Book of Mormon* is simply another hinge on the door of God's **I**ruth...
 - ❖ I argued that his argument presupposed that the door didn't *already* have a *master* hinge that effectively supported it *completely*
 - ❖ To add “*another* hinge” would require removing or fundamentally changing the *existing* hinge, and the “door of God's **I**ruth” would lose its structural integrity...



Mormons

♦ *The Book of Mormon*

- ♦ Smith used his “peep stone” to find the plates
 - ♦ Amazingly, though Smith said later that he'd been told about the plates in 1820, and he said that he'd found them in 1827, he never said anything about them to anyone until well into the 1830s
 - ♦ Nonetheless, he claimed that in 1823, the angel Moroni visited him to tell him about the plates (NOTE: Moroni had actually been a Jewish prophet of the tribe of Nephi—a group who'd supposedly sailed to the New World in 600 BC)



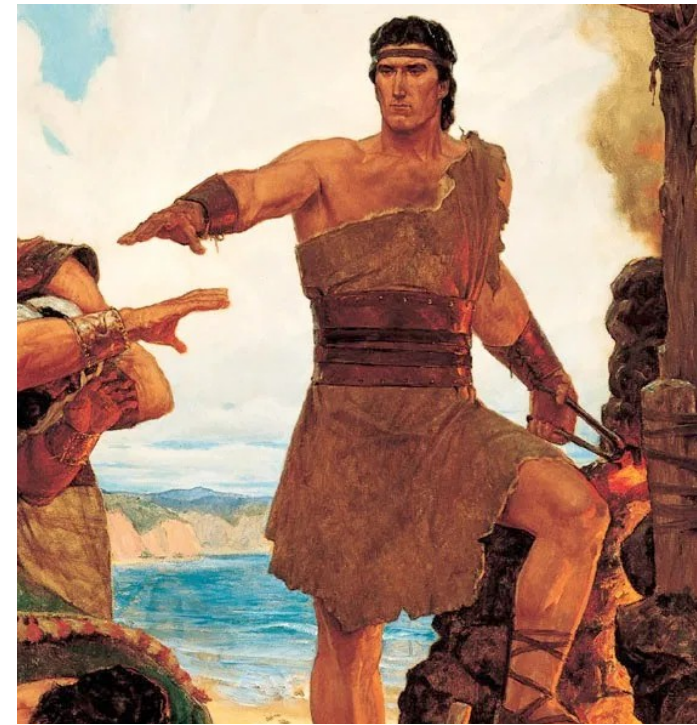
Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ♦ See, the tribe of Nephi included a guy named Lehi who—being led by God—found a buried treasure in Israel called the Liahona

(a magical ball that acted a lot like a compass, which 1 Nephi 16:28 explains worked “according to the faith and diligence” of God's people, rather than on magnetism)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ♦ See, the tribe of Nephi included a guy named Lehi who—being led by God—found a buried treasure in Israel called the Liahona
- ♦ Lehi used the Liahona to direct the tribe to America right before the fall of Jerusalem in 585 BC
- ♦ Once here, they began writing their history on golden plates using Reformed Egyptian hieroglyphs and burying them around New York state for safekeeping—as Jews were famous for doing
- ♦ They also broke up into warring factions—the good Nephites against the evil, dark-skinned Lamanites (who ultimately bred themselves sinfully with the Native Americans)
 - “The skins of the Lamanites were dark... which was a curse upon them... that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve His people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.”—Alma 3:6-8)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ◆ So, both the Lamanites and the Native Americans were *cursed* with darkened skin...
 - ◆ “You see some classes of the human family that are black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind. The first man that committed the odious crime of killing one of his brethren will be cursed the longest of any one of the children of Adam. Cain slew his brother. Cain might have been killed, and that would have put a termination to that line of human beings. This was not to be, and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the flat nose and black skin.”
 - Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (1859)
 - ◆ “Noah's son Ham married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain, thus preserving the Negro lineage through the flood.”
 - Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (1966)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ◆ So, both the Lamanites and the Native Americans were *cursed* with darkened skin...
 - ◆ “And after the flood we are told that the curse that had been pronounced upon Cain was continued through Ham's wife, as he had married a wife of that seed. And why did it pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the Devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God...”
—John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* (1881)
 - ◆ “Negroes in this life are denied the priesthood; under no circumstances can they hold this delegation of authority from the Almighty.”
—Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (1966)
 - ◆ “Not only was Cain called upon to suffer, but because of his wickedness he became the father of an inferior race. A curse was placed upon him and that curse has been continued through his lineage and must do so while time endures... Moreover, they have been made to feel their inferiority and have been separated from the rest of mankind from the beginning...”
—Joseph F. Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (1931)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ◆ So, both the Lamanites and the Native Americans were *cursed* with darkened skin...
 - ◆ “How long is that race to endure the dreadful curse that is upon them? That curse will remain upon them, and they *never* can hold the priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam have received the promises and enjoyed the blessings of the priesthood and the keys thereof. Until the last ones of the residue of Adam's children are brought up to that favourable position, the children of Cain cannot receive the first ordinances of the priesthood. They were the first that were cursed, and they will be the last from whom the curse will be removed.”
 - Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (1859)
 - ◆ “Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.”
 - Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (1863)



Mormons

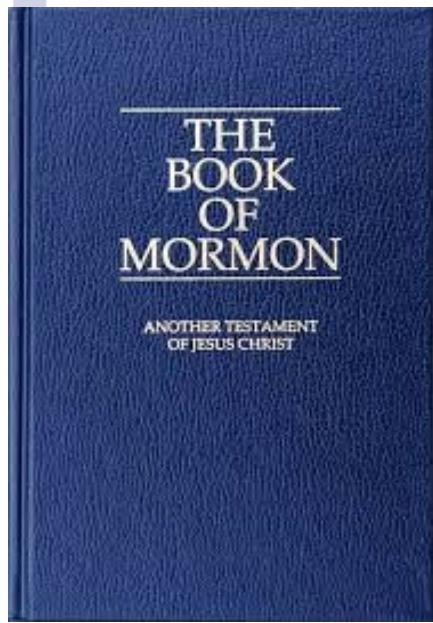
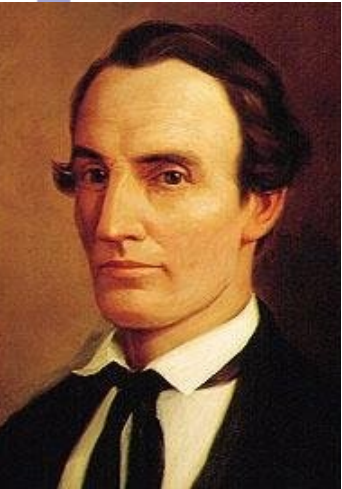


Funky little teaching moment...

- ♦ So, both the Lamanites and the Native Americans were *cursed* with darkened skin...
- ♦ And this curse extended to Native Americans—“The land was left to the possession of the red men, who were without intelligence... The land was again peopled, in a measure, by a rude, wild, revengeful, warlike and barbarous race—such are our Indians.”
—Oliver Cowdery, *LDS Messenger and Advocate* (1835)
- ♦ And yet, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. And then shall they rejoice, for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and a delightsome people..”

—2 Nephi 12, 1830 edition (*the modern 2 Nephi 30:5-6*)

(NOTE: The modern editions of 2 Nephi 30:5-6 change that wording slightly to read, “save they shall be a *pure* and a delightsome people.”)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ◆ So, both the Lamanites and the Native Americans were *cursed* with darkened skin...
- ◆ Fortunately, “We have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren [of color]... He has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come... Accordingly, all worthy male members of the church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color.”
 - Spencer Kimball, *Deseret News* (1978)
 - ◆ Thus, thanks to the tireless efforts of LDS President Kimball, he was able to make God change His mind about people of color, and He has removed their curse early...
(NOTE: This is only applicable to males of color, mind you...)



Mormons

♦ *The Book of Mormon*

- ♦ Smith used his “peep stone” to find the plates
 - ♦ Amazingly, though Smith said later that he'd been told about the plates in 1820, and he said that he'd found them in 1827, he never said anything about them to anyone until well into the 1830s
 - ♦ Nonetheless, he claimed that in 1823, the angel Moroni visited him to tell him about the plates (NOTE: Moroni had actually been a Jewish prophet of the tribe of Nephi—a group who'd supposedly sailed to the New World in 600 BC—and he was the last prophet to inscribe the words of God onto the traditional golden plates)
 - ♦ Thus, it was an aged Moroni who buried the plates before he died, and prayed that a righteous man might someday find them (NOTE: Moroni was *such* a righteous guy himself that God made him an angel when he died, and he was tasked with guiding Smith to them)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

This is why Mormon tabernacles have the angel Moroni on their pinnacles, instead of a cross—to differentiate themselves from Christian church buildings, and to honor the angel Moroni



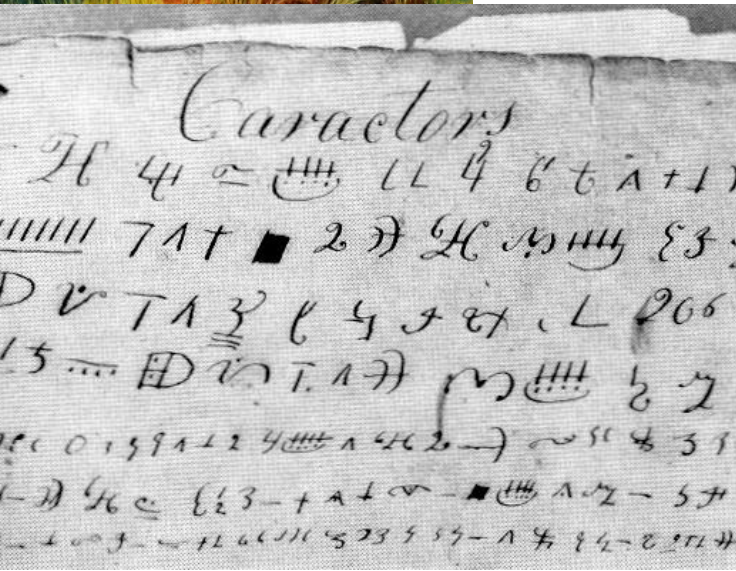
- Then again, sometimes when Smith told the story, he called the angel “Nephi,” and sometimes he called him “Moroni,” so who knows what the angel's name really was... though all of those clashing versions of the stories were later officially edited and harmonized into Smith consistently calling him “Moroni”



Mormons

♦ *The Book of Mormon*

- ♦ Smith used his “peep stone” to find the plates
 - ♦ Amazingly, though Smith said later that he'd been told about the plates in 1820, and he said that he'd found them in 1827, he never said anything about them to anyone until well into the 1830s
 - ♦ So Smith later claimed that in 1823, the angel Moroni visited him to tell him about the plates, and visited him several other times over the years to tell him more about them, repeatedly leading Smith into the forest to look for the golden plates which he eventually found in New York in 1827
 - ♦ Smith then set about translating them, since they'd been written in Reformed Egyptian (NOTE: No Egyptologists have ever even heard of “Reformed Egyptian” before —Smith showed a facsimile of the script to expert Charles Anthon, who said that it was nothing but a “singular scrawl,” written in characters that were clearly not from any single real language)



Mormons



Funky little teaching moment...

- ♦ So how did a relatively uneducated man like Smith translate the Reformed Egyptian, if trained Egyptologists didn't even have a clue about it?

