

A Mormon Encounter

It could happen to you

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Author: Vincent Poldrugovac
Website: www.LdsLearning.org

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Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from the King James version.

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Preface

This year had an interesting summer for me. I walked out of my spiritual box to try to learn more about the religion of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – also known as the Mormon Church.

Since many of you heard about my ongoing talks with the Latter-day Saints and were interested to know some general information about them, I decided to write this text.

I also hope to place this text into the hands of some of the Latter-day Saints that I met and conversed with. I trust that I have accurately portrayed their teachings by quoting from their official church web site and/or teaching manuals.

Introduction

I originally met with three Mormon missionaries in early June. I had found their ward from doing a church locator on www.mormon.org. The intersection of streets X and Y was close to me.

It was a Saturday morning and I drove there around 10:30 am. When I arrived, an office clerk helped me for ten minutes searching for someone to talk too. We eventually found three missionaries. We spoke for a few minutes outside and then they handed me a Book of Mormon and two booklets called "*The Plan of Salvation*" and "*The Restoration*."

They took my phone number and gave me theirs. I learned that they were devoted to the Spanish section of their church so I would not be meeting with them at a scheduled time. Instead, I would be meeting with several others.

About a week later, I returned to their ward and met two current missionaries – Elders "H" and "F." Another Elder called B accompanied them. It is a custom of Latter-day Saints not to refer to their missionaries on a first name basis so they told me their last name. They will tell you their first name if you ask, but they are addressed formally. I noticed this too when I attended their Sunday service. It was Elder this and Elder that instead of the casual greeting by first names that we experience in our church.

I wish to make mention of a Latter-day Saint called B. He was hospitable in opening up his home to me and several other missionaries so that we could talk further. The pie and ice-cream was a bonus. Thank you B. You have a really nice son.

The original three Spanish-devoted missionaries gave me several passages in the Book of Mormon to begin reading. For our first meeting, we mostly focused on the booklets "*The Plan of Salvation*" and "*The Restoration*." In subsequent meetings we discussed other things.

Without letting the proverbial "cat out of the bag," I will inform you of some basic principles I learned about the Latter-day Saints and their approach to preaching the gospel to new investigators. First and foremost is their belief that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ personally appeared to him on a spring day in 1820, and that Joseph Smith helped to restore the true gospel of Christ that was believed lost from the earth after the Apostles died.

They will ask you to pray about the Book of Mormon to determine if it is true. A promise is given in Moroni 10:4 – “I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

This is understandable given the fact that you may have already been asked in your Christian church if the Bible is true before you became a Christian. I even asked the Mormon missionaries if they had prayed to know the Bible is true, and they assured me that they had prayed about it.

But how important is doctrine? Many churches believe Peter and Paul were apostles and that the Bible is the Word of God – but this has not stopped false doctrines from creeping into various churches. Does it really matter if some claim Joseph Smith was a prophet of God who translated the Book of Mormon if false doctrines and practices can be found in their church too?

The Latter-day Saint called B told me in one of our meetings that when I accept Joseph Smith as a true prophet of God and the Book of Mormon, then my questions/concerns will disappear from my mind. Is this wise counsel? Do you remember the Bereans? The apostle Paul preached to them and said, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:10-11).

If you are a Latter-day Saint and you are viewing this material, then please read carefully. If you feel that something is not correct, then check the sources which are provided. Back in 1820, Joseph Smith made the charge that all Christian churches were wrong and that all her creeds were an abomination to God. Christians outside of the LDS faith need to answer the charge made by this Mormon prophet – by examining what he and those after him taught.

Doctrines and other church practices are very important. The New Testament Apostles warned Christians to beware of false prophets and teachers. We must examine the truth of all teachings in the light of the Word of God. Let us be wise stewards.

Let’s begin ...

1. The Scriptures

In the opening pages of the Book of Mormon it is written that the Bible contains, as does the Book of Mormon, the fulness of the gospel.

I asked them, "What is the difference between the fulness of the gospel and the gospel?" I think it was Elder "H" who replied that both books contain everything we need to know in order to return to Heavenly Father.

The Bible (King James version), the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price are the scriptural books that make up their canon.

As you read the Book of Mormon, you may get a sense of familiarity – several sections are copied verbatim from the King James version. It is said to contain a history of the ancient inhabitants who lived on the American continents. These civilizations primarily came from some of the Tower of Babel people and an exodus out of Jerusalem before the Babylonians destroyed it.

The Doctrine and Covenants is said to be modern-day revelations to the LDS Church. The Pearl of Great Price is said to be a translation of an Egyptian text into English, constituting the Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses.

Modern-day revelation to Latter-day Saints can also be found in their church magazine called "Ensign." It is published monthly. You can order this from their church or obtain a copy when you visit their ward. Other sources that could be considered revelation can be found in their talks during bi-yearly General Conferences.

2. The Plan of Salvation

I learned that "Heavenly Father created your spirit, and you lived with Him as a spirit before you were born on earth" (*The Plan of Salvation*, p. 2). This is referred to as the pre-mortal existence.

I did some more investigation on the church's web site and found another teaching. "I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man ... There never was a time when there were not spirits ... God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church – Joseph Smith*, 2008, chapter 17, p. 210).

I learned that Satan is also one of God's spirit children (*The Plan of Salvation*, p. 5). I have always believed that Satan was a created angel of Jesus.

Latter-day Saints believe the spirit children left their heavenly home and came to earth in mortal bodies "to live and gain experience" (p. 6). *Gospel Principles* elaborates further – "Everything that he does is to help his children become like him – a god" (chapter 2, p. 9). This is the purpose of life. If you hinder God in his attempt to make you a god, then you are actually fighting against him.

Before I proceed further, let me just say that *Gospel Principles* is written "both as a personal study guide and as a teacher's manual" (p. 1). Such a training manual has a purpose – "As you study this manual, seek the Spirit of the Lord. The Holy Ghost will increase your understanding and testimony of Jesus Christ, his atonement, and the restoration of the gospel. Through your study of this text and its related scriptures, you can find answers to life's questions, gain an assurance of your purpose and self-worth, and solve personal difficulties" (p. 1).

"Because of the Fall, you are separated from God physically and spiritually" (*The Plan of Salvation*, p. 9).

I can agree with that.

"When you make wrong choices and commit sin, you separate yourself to some degree from God. The scriptures call this separation spiritual death" (p. 9).

I would have to disagree here. Even before we commit our first sin, we already are in a separated (in a spiritually dead) position because of the Fall.

The glossary section provided some interesting definitions. For the Fall, "Because Adam and Eve, disobeyed God's commandments, they were separated from His presence" (p. 18). For spiritual death, "Separation from God as a result of disobeying His commandments" (p. 19). I searched in the Book of Mormon and found something similar - "Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil" (Alma 12:31).

I have always believed Adam and Eve fell and were separated from God by transgressing just one commandment, not others.

3. The Restoration

Heavenly Father Reveals His Gospel

I learned that "Prophets receive the priesthood, or the authority to speak and act in the name of God to lead His children" (*The Restoration*, p. 4).

I learned women are not prophets and they do not hold the priesthood in the Mormon Church. Also, a boy can be a deacon as young as twelve years old (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 14, p. 88).

We see that women can be both prophets and priests when we study the Bible.

Women are part of a chosen generation and royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). Some women were prophets in the Old Testament (Ex. 15:20; Jud. 4:4; 2 Ki. 22:14; 2 Chr. 34:22; Neh. 6:14; Isa. 8:3). We find a similar thing in the New Testament. Anna was a prophetess (Luke 2:36). Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:7-9). Women prayed and prophesied (1 Cor. 11:5).

The Mormon elders in my first meeting assured me that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a "restored" church, not a "reformed" church. "Restoration differs from reformation in that to reform means to modify an existing organization or practice in an effort to return it to its original state, while to restore means to reestablish or renew the original organization or practice in its entirety" (*The Restoration*, p. 19).

I don't think so. Mormon women are not prophets and priests like in the Bible.

Jesus Christ Established His Church

What about twelve apostles?

"He chose twelve men to be His Apostles, including Peter, James, and John" (p. 7).

Okay. I see twelve.

"He [the President], his counselors, and the twelve Apostles hold the priesthood authority held by all the prophets and apostles of previous times" (p. 12).

Now I see a difference.

Looking further on the Mormon Church's web site, I found this - "On Saturday, February 2, 2008, funeral services for President Hinckley were held in this magnificent Conference Center - a building which will ever stand as a monument to his foresight and vision. During the funeral, beautiful and loving tributes were paid to this man of God. The following day, all 14 ordained Apostles living on the earth assembled in an upper room of the Salt Lake Temple" (Looking Back and Moving Forward, speech by current President Thomas Monson, General Conference, April 2008).

Assuming the deceased President Hinckley was an apostle, this would make 15 apostles. This doesn't sound like a restored church to me. In my discussion with Elder "F," Elder "H" and B, they agreed that their church is both a restored church and a reformed church. Okay, but let's hope they will change that definition portion.

The early New Testament Church had 12 apostles, not fifteen.

The Great Apostasy

It is believed by Latter-day Saints that there was a great apostasy. The Apostles were killed and priesthood authority was taken from the earth. This apostasy resulted in the formation of many churches (p. 8).

"Because the Church was no longer led by priesthood authority, error crept into Church teachings" (p. 8).

I did not agree with this. Errors crept into some churches even during the time Peter and Paul were still preaching. And they still had the authority.

The Restoration Of The Gospel

It is believed that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ both appeared to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820. The only true church in the world today is thought to be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Mormons that I was speaking to assured me that they have respect for other churches and that they do not view themselves as better.

This was difficult to understand given what the booklet stated next. "Jesus told Joseph not to join any of the churches, for they were all wrong" (p. 11). When I looked at the church's web site, it elaborates further - the creeds of all the other churches are said to be an abomination to Jesus Christ and all her professors are corrupt (*Joseph Smith History*, volume 1).

All professing Christians outside of the Mormon Church are corrupt because they are said to believe in abominable creeds. If the Mormon Church is the true church, then they have to regard themselves as better. Wouldn't you agree?

Strangely enough, page 8 of *The Restoration* says, "This apostasy resulted in the formation of many churches with conflicting teachings."

But Latter-day Saints do not apply the same standard to themselves – for many churches have arisen out of the foundation of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon (The Community of Christ, the FLDS, the Strangites, The Church of Christ – Temple Lot, and the list goes on). All these other sects have conflicting teachings and they regard The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as being apostate.

I can sympathize with the missionaries' view that their church is a restored church, but I don't get this testimony when I read the Bible.

For instance, Luke chapters 9 and 10 reveal Jesus gave the Apostles and seventy others authority to cast out devils and power to heal. The book of Acts also reveals many instances in which the Apostles and other disciples had these miraculous signs and wonders.

When you study Doctrine and Covenants (believed to be modern-day revelations to the LDS Church), these signs and wonders never happened – even though it said these signs would be present in the Mormon Church (D&C 24:13; 35:9; 84:67; 124:98).

The New Testament Church had their Day of Pentecost and this was verifiable by unbelievers. The Mormon Church prayed to experience their Pentecost (D&C 109:34-37), but it never came.

While not all Christians have these miraculous powers, one would figure that the current 14 living LDS apostles would have them to authenticate their supposed ministry.

Signs and wonders still exist in the Church of Christ. Like in the New Testament Church, unbelievers cannot deny them when they are made evident.

4. A Typical Sunday

They invited me to join them one Sunday.

Their worship services consist of three one-hour meetings.

The first one starts at about 1:00 pm. It is the Sacrament meeting. They use bread and water as the emblems. Roughly three to four hymns are song. There is some exhortation, announcements, and a sermon.

The second takes the form of a Sunday school. *Gospel Principles* is taught in one class while another text is taught in another class.

The third one-hour session consists of a Priesthood meeting. For this last meeting, only the male priesthood holders are present. The women participate in what are called Relief Society meetings.

Various language services happen throughout the morning and afternoon. From time to time, the English service will start in the morning and the Spanish service would start in the afternoon.

The temples are usually closed on Sunday but open throughout the week. They are only accessible by holders of temple-passes.

5. Songs of Praise

Singing plays less of a role in their Sunday service as compared to Evangelical churches.

They have their own church hymnal – songs which constitute praise, reveal some church history, and pronounce doctrine.

I will give you some examples.

The angel Moroni comes from heaven – “An Angel from on High,” hymn #13. Latter-day Saints thank God for guidance – “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” hymn #19. “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer,” hymn #26.

An interesting hymn is #27 – “Praise to the Man.” It says that Joseph Smith is already ascended into Heaven where he is mingling with the Gods. You might have guessed already – Mormonism is polytheistic.

Maybe you will recall the songs, “Onward, Christian Soldiers” – hymn #246 and “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (the King of Creation)” – hymn #72.

“Choose the Right” – hymn #239 is one about making decisions in life. We’ll discover later on if Adam and Eve chose right or wrong.

6. Did Jesus visit the Americas?

The missionaries originally instructed me to read 3 Nephi 11 (pp. 427-430).

I really have to hand it to the Latter-day Saints here. All of them use the same Book of Mormon so everything can be referenced by using page numbers. I think this is the same concept in other language translations. When they say turn to page 427, everyone will end up in the same place.

True to my form, I decided to read a few chapters before and then a few chapters after.

Latter-day Saints believe that after Jesus ascended into Heaven, he returned to somewhere in the Americas and established his church among the Nephites and the Lamanites. The Book of Mormon does not seem to take into account that Jesus remained with the disciples for 40 days after his resurrection. It seems to depict a relatively quick appearance of Christ to the Americas after the resurrection (3 Nephi 11:1-2).

Originally the Nephites and Lamanites were the physical descendants of Nephi (the son of Lehi – who is said to have left in the Jewish exodus from Jerusalem that I talked about earlier) and Laman/Lemuel (Lehi's other sons). As the civilization grew, the term "Nephite" and "Lamanite" came to denote a spiritual state. The "Nephites" were believers, the "Lamanites" were unbelievers.

I learned that tempests, earthquakes, fires, whirlwinds and physical upheavals attested the crucifixion of Christ from 3 Nephi 8. There was a whole lot of destruction going on in the Americas as I read. Many cities were destroyed, people were sucked away in whirlwinds, earthquakes lasted for three hours, and the whole land was in darkness for three days.

Wow. What a difference with the Bible. Surrounding the crucifixion of Christ, it was only dark for three hours and there was a brief earthquake that tore the temple veil in two. No one perished. Also, the Book of Mormon lacked any mention of the tearing of the temple veil. The meaning of this veil is found in Hebrews chapters 9 and 10.

I had spoken to Elder "F" about this during our second meeting, but he did not know the spiritual meaning of this temple-veil tearing.

There are some confusing details surrounding the days of darkness. Only those considered more righteous were spared (3 Nephi 9:13; 10:12). One passage says that the survivors endured three days of darkness (3 Nephi 8:20-23), whereas another passage indicates the survivors were not overcome by darkness (3 Nephi 10:12-13). This makes you wonder if those spared had their cities destroyed, just damaged, or neither.

3 Nephi 9:17 says, "And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God." I found this a little odd because Latter-day Saints teach that believers and unbelievers are already sons of God before coming to earth. So now only people who believe in Jesus can become sons of God. Apparently the unbelievers are the sons of the devil (John 8:44).

3 Nephi 9:20 says a group of people called the Lamanites were baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire and "they knew it not." I commented about this to Elders "F" and "H." I told them that when you are baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, you and everyone around you will definitely know about it.

3 Nephi 11:8-16 is an interesting passage. It resembles the appearing of Christ to the disciples when they were in hiding after his death. In this section, all of the Nephites and Lamanites are encouraged by Jesus to come, see, and touch the nail prints in his hands and feet. After their seeing and touching, then they "did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come" (v. 15).

They were not sure of the words of the prophets until they had actually touched the risen Christ. Let's look at a New Testament example. Thomas said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

"And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Thomas believed when he heard the words of Jesus. He did not touch him.

By the way, do you ever wonder how Jesus miraculously appeared to his disciples in the room when the doors were shut (John 20:26)?

The "Jesus" of the Book of Mormon commanded all the Nephites and Lamanites to come forth and touch him to know that he was the God who provided an atonement from sin (3 Nephi 11:14). In the Bible's case, it was for Thomas because of his earlier admission that he would not believe until proven.

3 Nephi 12:44-45 echoes something said a while ago. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you ... that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." Must we do something to become children of Heavenly Father? But it is taught by the LDS Church that even people who don't do these things are already spirit children of Heavenly Father.

3 Nephi 16:1-3 brings up a familiar theme from the Bible – the "other sheep." Latter-day Saints believe the Nephites and the Lamanites are the "other sheep" Jesus spoke about. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

This is a little different than what our church teaches because we view the "other sheep" as the Gentiles. There are two basic groups of people in the Bible. The believers (in the New Covenant) and the Gentiles (those outside of the Covenant). The Jewish unbelievers and the Gentile unbelievers can, I believe, be considered as the "lost sheep."

3 Nephi 16:3 records that Jesus also went to visit some of the other tribes scattered around the world, apparently to repeat what he had done among the Nephites. This would probably mean calling twelve other disciples and establishing a church too. If these scattered groups were anything like the Nephites, then they may have built temples like Solomon's in Jerusalem.

There are three main reasons for God approving only one temple. There was only one ark of the covenant which was in the holiest of holies. The site of the temple was the site where Abraham bound Isaac and prepared to offer him as a sacrifice at God's initial request. And this is the same site where Jesus atoned for the sins of the world.

Well-meaning people can build as many temples as they want, but God did not tell them to build it for these very reasons.

3 Nephi 19:11 reveals that a person named Nephi is baptized again but contrary to the way Jesus showed him back in 3 Nephi 11:22-27.

The missionaries were not able to explain why no authorized person baptized Nephi the second time, why he even needed to be baptized again, or why he was baptized contrary to the way Jesus instructed them. According to 3 Nephi 7, Nephi was

already preaching the gospel, baptizing other people, and even raised his brother from the dead – before Jesus is said to have come to the Americas.

Where in the Americas did Jesus come to?

Figuring out a general Book of Mormon geography for these destructive events proves troublesome. There is mention of a land northward and a land southward (3 Nephi 8:11-12). So apparently there was some “middle” or “central” land too.

When you look at the pictures included in the Book of Mormon, the LDS Church gives you the impression that Jesus visited the Yucatan Peninsula or somewhere in Peru. My, those pictorial structures look very familiar to what you see in the travel magazines.

So I tried to figure out where these missionaries believed these events took place. I needed to establish a context.

According to our first or second discussion, Elder “F” set the scene for a Mesoamerican location for the Book of Mormon – somewhere in Central America. This was important because I wanted to know the context of what lands were affected near the crucifixion of Christ when many cities were said to be destroyed (3 Nephi 8:12, 17-18).

Now that I knew what land they were talking about, I came across 3 Nephi 20:22.

“And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant, which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem.”

What and where is the New Jerusalem?

Originally the “land” context of 3 Nephi 8 was somewhere in Central America, but now B told me that the land in 3 Nephi 20:22 applied to North, Central, and South America. This did not agree with what Nephi was talking about.

According to *Gospel Principles*, New Jerusalem refers to a city that Latter-day Saints will build before Jesus’ Second Coming. This city will be built in the United States, specifically Independence, Missouri (chapter 41, p. 268).

So Nephi’s land of New Jerusalem, in an apparent context of Central America, now becomes the land of New Jerusalem which encompasses North, Central, and South America.

A passage in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church – Joseph Smith* creates some extra confusion on this matter.

“Now we learn from the Book of Mormon the very identical continent and spot of land upon which the New Jerusalem is to stand, and it must be caught up according to the vision of John upon the isle of Patmos” (chapter 15, p. 189).

First of all, the Book of Mormon does not identify the identical spot of land for the New Jerusalem – unless Jesus visited Missouri instead of Central America. Second, the New Jerusalem is not caught up to Heaven according to John’s vision. The New Jerusalem comes down from Heaven after the Millennial reign of Christ on earth.

When you study the Bible, Christians do not build the New Jerusalem. God is the builder. Of Abraham, the New Testament says, “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

We see two New Jerusalems in LDS theology so far. Digging further into the Mormon scriptures, I found a third New Jerusalem.

Anyone familiar with the Bible should know the name of Enoch. Well, apparently there is the same character in a Mormon scripture called *The Pearl of Great Price*. This Enoch builds a righteous city and this New Jerusalem (Zion) is translated to Heaven with him and the rest of the population (Moses 7:69).

At some future time the city of Enoch returns from Heaven and is possibly melded into the New Jerusalem on earth – “And the Lord said unto Enoch: Then shalt thou and all thy city meet them there, and we will receive them into our bosom, and they shall see us; and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other” (Moses 7:63).

There could be some confusion here because the city of Enoch may actually be the city of New Jerusalem which comes down from Heaven.

From the Bible we know that only Enoch was translated to Heaven. The city and its inhabitants did not make a celestial journey.

The biblical city of New Jerusalem lies foursquare. The length, width, and height are the same; 12,000 furlongs. The thickness of the wall is 144 cubits. The wall is of jasper. The city is pure gold and has 12 gates. There are 3 gates each on the north, south, east, and west sides. There is no temple in the New Jerusalem.

Latter-day Saints may be planning to build something but it won’t follow the biblical version. The land of Missouri is not even capable of accommodating such a size.

Christians believe Jesus will return at any time – maybe even while you are reading this text. Latter-day Saints do not believe so. In their minds, Jesus will not return until after a New Jerusalem is built in Missouri.

7. The Fall of Adam

"After Adam fell, the whole creation fell and became mortal ... the fall is a blessing ... Adam and Eve should be honored in the station as the first parents of the earth" (www.lds.org -> Scriptures -> Study Helps -> Bible Dictionary -> F -> Fall of Adam).

Chapter 6 of *Gospel Principles* reveals that great blessings resulted from the Fall – "We are blessed with physical bodies, the right to choose between good and evil, and the opportunity to gain eternal life" (p. 33). Another blessing was the ability to procreate. Latter-day Saints believe Adam and Eve could not have children before they disobeyed God. "Their physical condition changed as a result of their eating the forbidden fruit. As God had promised, they became mortal. They were able to have children" (p. 33).

I did not have a *Gospel Principles* during my initial meeting with Elders "F" and "H," so I had to rely on printing the section from the church's web site.

I asked the elders, "What type of blessings did Adam and Eve have when they were created? Did they worship God in the Garden of Eden?" Elder "F" acknowledged that Adam and Eve did worship God. "Did they worship God in song?" He again assured me that they did worship God in song, because song is a very important part of worship. "Can you worship God in praises and in songs without joy?" He said no. I agreed with him. Adam and Eve had joy when they worshipped God in the Garden of Eden.

That is pretty evident to anyone. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith" (Gal. 5:22).

But when you look into the Book of Mormon, it says the opposite – Adam and Eve did not have joy before the Fall: "And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen ... and they would have had no children ... having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin ... Adam fell that men might be" (2 Nephi 2:22-25).

From my understanding of Mormon theology, God really wanted Adam and Eve to disobey him because otherwise they would have frustrated his plan for them to progress. The belief is that the atonement required the need for the Fall.

But I believe that the Fall necessitated the need for the atonement. God wanted Adam and Eve to obey him.

What is eternal life?

In LDS theology, eternal life is becoming a god and living the type of life God lives.

"All good things come from God. Everything that he does is to help his children become like him – a god. He has said, Behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 1, p. 9).

Everyone who does not become a god suffers what is known as "eternal death."

"Men are free according to the flesh ... free to choose liberty and eternal life ... or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity of the devil ... I would that ye should ... choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; and not choose eternal death ... which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom" (2 Nephi 2:27-29).

In LDS theology, becoming a god is God's plan for you. If you do not become a god, then you frustrate his plan and thus suffer eternal death. As I learned later in *Gospel Principles*, only married people can become gods and goddesses (chapter 38, pp. 241-242).

1 John 5:11 says, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Single people will have eternal life too according to the Bible. It is through Christ, not through marriage.

Study the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. The sheep will inherit eternal life. The goats will inherit eternal punishment.

8. The Trinity

I believe the consensus of historical Christianity is that the Trinity is three personages, but one God.

My question to the Mormon elders was whether the Trinity is one God or three Gods. To be honest with you, I didn't really get the answer that I was looking for. I was thinking they would give me a quick affirmative in the belief in one God. But they did not do this.

"Is the Trinity one God or three Gods?" I waited some more time and still did not get a sufficient answer. Elder "H" said something about them (Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost) being one in purpose. I suppose this is what they understood by the term "one God."

I went into the Mormon scriptures to find any teaching about the Trinity.

"Which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God, infinite and eternal" (D&C 20:28). "The only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end" (2 Nephi 31:21).

I did not mean to sound rude but I kept repeating the question. "Is the Trinity one God or three Gods? Do the Mormon scriptures teach they are one God or three Gods?"

Okay. Let's proceed with the line of thought of the Mormon elders – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one in purpose. There is one Godhead. Now suppose all these three elders are one in purpose with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Therefore, the Father + the Son + the Holy Ghost + Elder "H" + Elder "from England" + B = one God in their line of reasoning.

I did more searching and found something that contradicts what we read earlier.

"I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church – Joseph Smith*, 2008, chapter 2, pp. 41-42).

Joseph Smith first taught the Trinity is one God, then three Gods.

The Bible is very clear. "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Isa. 45:5). "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6).

Can we become Gods?

The Bible is clear on this matter too. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isa. 43:10).

9. Gods and Children of God

The idea that Mormons can become gods may be founded on an incorrect interpretation of the Bible's Psalm 82:6 – "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High."

This passage has been taken out of context. These "gods" (the judges of Israel) are being rebuked for their wickedness – "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?" (verse 2). They are ignorant – "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course" (verse 5). Judgment befalls them – "But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."

Satan is also called a god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) and Moses was said to be a god unto Pharaoh (Ex. 7:1), but Satan and Moses were not deities.

I think the Mormon belief in humans being the children of God is in part based on a reading of Romans 8:14 – "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." I do not believe this applies to all humans. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, while the others are sons of the devil (John 8:44).

Mormon theology teaches that all Christians are not the sheep of Jesus Christ.

The Bible reveals they are.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

LDS theology defines eternal life as living life as a god – exaltation in the highest division of the Celestial Kingdom). This would mean that many Latter-day Saints are not considered Christ's sheep because they will not attain eternal life.

10. The Word of Wisdom

Latter-day Saints in our days are required to obey a dietary commandment.

"Much of the information God has given us concerning good health is found in Doctrine and Covenants 89. This revelation is called the Word of Wisdom" (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 29, p. 192).

It was not a commandment when given in the early days of the Mormon Church, but it is now. It is so important that if one fails to live this law, then they cannot obtain a temple-pass.

Meats are permitted, although sparingly. The focus is on healthier fruits and vegetables. Alcoholic drinks and tobacco are forbidden.

"The Lord also counsels us against the use of hot drinks. Church leaders have said that this means coffee and tea, which contain harmful drugs. We should avoid all drinks that contain harmful drugs" (p. 193).

It seems Coke and Pepsi do not contain any harmful drugs according to the LDS Church because she does not write about banning these acidic and high-in-sugar beverages.

We spoke a little on the concept of the "letter of the Law" versus the "spirit of the Law." Can one commit a grave sin by having a cup of coffee on a monthly basis or a glass of wine on special occasions throughout the year, but be justified in God's eyes by drinking Coke every day? Which is more harmful? Do you see how one can obey the letter of the Law and yet break the spirit of the Law?

I think some Christians have also tried to keep the dietary laws of the Old Testament.

Most think nothing of going into a restaurant and ordering chicken or beef without any thought of how it was cooked. If any "clean" food comes into contact with a pot, an oven, a utensil, or a grill that has ever had an "unclean" animal on it, then that so-called "clean" animal has become "unclean" (Leviticus 11:32-35).

Failure to obey the Word of Wisdom is said to result in the promise of being slain by the destroying angel (D&C 89:21) just like some Israelites were in the night before the exodus from Egypt. New Testament believers are not under such a dietary threat.

11. Heavenly Father

I learned from Joseph Smith that Heavenly Father was once a man who became a God.

"When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel – you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave. This is the way our Heavenly Father became God. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God. ... He was once a man like us; ... God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did" (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 47, p. 305).

"God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church – Joseph Smith*, 2008, chapter 2, pp. 40, 573).

Joseph Smith taught, "We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 1938, p. 345). This teaching has been removed from the 2008 version so as not to inform modern-day Mormons.

The Mormon version of Heavenly Father is married. His mate is called Heavenly Mother.

They became god and goddess on their own world.

"If we passed our tests, we would receive the fulness of joy that our heavenly parents have received" (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 2, p. 14).

12. Who is Jesus Christ?

In LDS theology, Jesus is the first son of Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father.

"The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ (see D&C 93:21), so he is literally our elder brother" (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 2, p. 11).

Mormons use the term "firstborn" in Doctrine and Covenants 93:21 as their basis to teach this. But this is not the context of the term as stated in the Bible. Israel, Ephraim, and David were also considered the firstborn (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; Ps. 89:27), but they were not born first. The proper meaning is preeminence or special status.

For some reason, the Latter-day Saints that I spoke with did not seem to want to accept the teaching of Heavenly Mother as a doctrinal truth.

She was referenced in more passages of *Gospel Principles*. "Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal [physical] body" (p. 11). "Our heavenly parents provided us with a celestial home more glorious and beautiful than any place on earth" (p. 13).

I went to the church's official web site (www.lds.org), did a search, and found many teachings of Heavenly Mother – but none of them came from the Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, or Doctrine and Covenants. I'll cover just a few of them.

"We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our earthly father and mother" (A Sure Trumpet Sound, President Lee, Ensign, February 1974).

"All human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny" (The Family – A Proclamation to the World). This is not entirely accurate though. Their spirits are said to be eternal and uncreated.

"Finally, when we sing that doctrinal hymn and anthem of affection, "O My Father," we get a sense of the ultimate in maternal modesty, of the restrained, queenly elegance of our Heavenly Mother, and knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less if we live so as to return there?" (The True Way of Life and Salvation, President

Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, May 1978; Religion 234-235 – Eternal Marriage Student Manual, p. 371).

I found this song in their current hymnal, #292:

In the heav'ns are parents single?
No, the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I've a mother there.

When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?

So we see a Jesus who has not always been God. "By obedience and devotion to the truth he attained that pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God, as the Lord Omnipotent, while yet in his pre-existent state" (*Religion 430-431 – Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*, chapter 4, p. 10). The Mormon Jesus became a God after reaching some level of intelligence. But Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother became god and goddess before Jesus was born to them.

Some Mormons do not believe in this Heavenly Mother while others sing about her.

Latter-day Saints may even refer to the teaching of Heavenly Mother as speculation, but this is not accurate. Heavenly Mother is a truth and doctrine in LDS theology. Look at the hymn mentioned above. The word "truth" is used twice.

The Mormon doctrine that there is a Heavenly Mother was affirmed in plainness by the First Presidency of the Church (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund) when they said that "man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father," that man is the "offspring of celestial parentage," and that "all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity" (*Man: Origin and Destiny*, pp. 348-355).

I searched the Book of Mormon for a teaching on Jesus' identity. I found Mosiah 3:5 – "For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases."

It is evident the LDS Church is preaching another Jesus.

Joseph Smith taught that we are uncreated, co-eternal spirits with God and that he did not have the power to create spirits at all (D&C 93:29, 33; *Teachings of Presidents of the Church – Joseph Smith*, 2008, chapter 17, p. 210).

This makes you wonder who the uncreated Eternal God is in LDS theology. It sure doesn't sound like the Jesus described in the preface of every Book of Mormon.

The Mormon Jesus is pictured as saying that his followers must pay the debit for the atonement.

"'Then,' said the benefactor, 'you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.'" (*Gospel Principles*, chapter 12, p. 77, *The Mediator, Ensign*, May 1977, pp. 54-55).

This is not the biblical Christ.

Conclusion

Well ... I suppose I could keep meeting with the Latter-day Saints and talk some more, but I think you have gotten a brief picture of what they believe. During my last meeting with the two missionaries and Elder B, I sensed they did not want to talk further about doctrine. Instead, they wanted me to get a feeling that the Book of Mormon was a true historical text.

During the next several months, I engaged in e-mail conversations with a 55+ year old elder called E. It was sad to see time and time again how he referred to passages in the Old Testament and took them out of context. Terms such as Zion, Mount Zion, firstborn, and Jesus took on various identities depending on the place and time mentioned. I never did get clear answers and opinions on very important questions.

In the end, he actually told me that his Mormon church was not for me and that I was too focused on doctrine. But if one puts more priority on or totally substitutes charitable works over doctrine, then there is no reason why not to join other religious groups.

So, my word to the Christian is ... do not be dismayed. You may find a Mormon who is actually willing to discuss things in the correct context and in a professional manner.

Feelings play an important part in wanting to believe if the Book of Mormon is true. I needed to confirm a hunch, so I visited another LDS ward several weeks later. Even though that missionary knew I was a member of a Christian church for many years, he still wanted me to read some of the Book of Mormon, get a testimony that it was true, and then get baptized in his Mormon ward – all within three weeks.

As he looked steadfastly into my eyes and bore his testimony of Joseph Smith, it felt like he was trying to hypnotize me into converting with his sincerity. I informed him that one needs to examine all the doctrines of the church before one decides to leave one's current religious faith to follow another.

I believe this is wise advice for anyone. Never let feelings or emotions help you determine whether something is true or false. Never let them direct you on if you should do this or that. Examine everything in the light of God's Word.

Be very careful of the exhortation Joseph Smith wrote in Moroni 10:4. I mentioned it in the Introduction section. He forces you into either viewing yourself as being sincere, having faith in Christ, having real intent, and coming to know the Book of Mormon is true or the contrary - viewing yourself as being insincere, lacking faith in Christ, lacking real intent and coming to know the Book of Mormon is not a historical text.

Who would want to view themselves as insincere and call God a liar?

Joseph Smith did not believe the Bible was sufficient to determine spiritual truth, therefore he lost all confidence in appealing to it (History of the Church, volume 1, v. 12). Even many so-called Christians suffer from this today. It is my earnest hope that you do not become a victim of the devil's lies.

So why do people become Mormons and trust Joseph Smith as a prophet?

I believe it begins with someone's insufficient knowledge of the Bible and then continues with their desire to become a god or goddess who will some day go off somewhere with their spouse (plural wives for some) to create new worlds and populate them. Their spirit children will in turn worship them as they worshipped an exalted man when they lived on Earth.

People who convert into the LDS faith develop church and family bonds during this time of progression. As they are confronted by wrong doctrines, it is harder to break free because they have already established a comfort level. So people learn to sacrifice true doctrine for the hope of feeling good where they are.

Is doctrine really important? Does it matter if a church believes Peter and Paul were apostles and that the Bible is the Word of God? Does it matter if some claim Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by the power of God?

Isn't it more important what a proclaimed-prophet or church teaches and if these teachings line up with the Bible?

Do you worship a Jesus who is the Eternal God from all eternity to all eternity or do you worship another Jesus who is the first spirit child of Heavenly Mother and Father? Has your Heavenly Father always been God or do you worship an exalted man?

You cannot be saved if you place your faith in a false Christ.

May the Holy Spirit guide you to the real Jesus – there is salvation in no other name.

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