

# Mormonism: a brief introduction – Dr. Neil Shenvi

## I. History

### A. Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of Mormonism, was born in Vermont in 1805

1. In 1820, he went into the Sacred Grove to pray and was met by Jesus and Heavenly Father, who told him **'those professors were all corrupt'** and **'all their creeds were an abomination in his sight'** (JS-H, v.19)
2. In 1827, Smith began working on translating the **Book of Mormon**, an ancient historical record printed on golden plates and revealed to Smith by the angel Moroni, who first appeared to Smith in 1823
3. Smith continued to receive revelations from God, one of which commanded the reintroduction of polygamy. **Smith married more than 30 wives, at least 8 of whom were already married to living husbands**
4. **Smith was killed in 1844** by an angry mob, having led the Mormons from Palmyra, NY to Nauvoo, IL

### B. Brigham Young took over as the leader of the Mormons and oversaw their migration to Utah

1. He taught that some sins could only be atoned for by **shedding the criminal's blood**: "take a person...[who] is taken in a gross fault [who] knows that by having his blood shed he will atone for that sin... is there a man or woman in this house but would say, 'shed my blood that I might be saved and exalted with the Gods?'" (JOD, 4:219-220)
2. **At General Conference in 1852, Young taught that Adam was our Heavenly Father**: "our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken-HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do." (JOD,1:50-51)
3. Young taught that **Jesus was conceived through sexual relations** between Heavenly Father and Mary: "[The birth of Jesus] was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood - was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers." (JOD 8:115)

### C. The modern LDS church

1. **The LDS church officially renounced polygamy in 1890**, shortly before admission of Utah into the Union
2. **The ban on priesthood for men of African descent was officially lifted in 1978**

## II. Beliefs

**A. Nature of God - God is an exalted human being with a body of flesh and bones.** "He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth" (JS, King Follett discourse). "God has a body that looks like ours. His eternal spirit is housed in a tangible body of flesh and bones..." (GP, p. 9)

**B. Nature of man - All human beings, angels, and demons were procreated by Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother in the pre-existence.** Those who with Heavenly Father when Satan rebelled were given bodies on Earth, having had a veil drawn over their memories of the preexistence (GP, p.11-15)

**C. The Fall - Adam and Eve's sin in the garden enabled us to procreate and was in some sense a noble act.** "Some people believe Adam and Eve committed a serious sin...However, latter-day scriptures help us understand that their fall was a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing to all of us." (GP, p.33)

**D. Nature of salvation - Jesus lived a sinless life and through his atonement, he ensured all humans a physical resurrection into one of three kingdoms: telestial, terrestrial, or celestial. But exaltation to Godhood and into the presence of Heavenly Father depends on obedience to the 'celestial law'**

**E. Canon of Scripture – The Bible** is “the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.” (Article of Faith #8). The standard works also the **Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.** “In addition to these four books of scripture, **the inspired words of our living prophets** become scripture to us...through conferences, Church publications, and instructions to local priesthood leaders.” (GP, p. 55)

**F. Great Apostasy and Restoration** - shortly after the death of the apostles, the church lost all priesthood authority and ceased to exist. **“After the Savior ascended into heaven, men changed the ordinances and doctrines that he and his Apostles had established... The true Church was no longer on the Earth.” (GP, p.109)** The gospel was only restored when Joseph Smith received the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedekian Priesthood in the 19th century.

**G. Temple ceremonies - Worthy Mormons gain entrance to the temple,** where they receive their Sacred Garments, and perform various rituals like Baptism for the Dead and Eternal Marriage

**H. Eternal progression** - Through obedience to the celestial law, Mormons can attain exaltation, in which they become Gods, and they are reunited with their families to create their own worlds and populate them with spirit children. **‘As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.’ - President Lorenzo Snow**

### III. Apologetic problems

**A. Book of Abraham** - Smith translated the Book of Abraham from a papyrus obtained from a traveling salesman in 1835. The papyrus was later believed to be lost, but was rediscovered in 1967. Egyptologists agree that the document has nothing to do with Abraham and is an Egyptian burial text

**B. Book of Mormon archaeology** - No archaeological evidence for the existence of any Book of Mormon cities, peoples, or animals has even been discovered

**C. Teaching of the Living prophets** - Past Living Prophets have repeatedly taught doctrine that is now deemed false and even damnable by modern Mormons

### IV. Sharing the gospel with Mormons

**A. Religious epistemology** - how do we know truth about God? James 1:5/Moroni 10:4 - pray to know?

#### 1. Problems with Mormon religious epistemology

- The problem of JS's other revelations – if the BoM is true, does it follow that Smith is a prophet?
- The problem of multiplied testimonies – what about testimonies of evangelicals? Muslims? RLDS?
- The problem of conflict with Scripture – **if I gave you a book that claimed to be Scripture and said on the first page “Adultery is good”, would you pray about it to know if it was true? Why not?**

#### 2. Biblical religious epistemology – Scripture is the ultimate test for truth

- Giving of the Pentateuch accompanied by public miracles.**
- Miracles tested against Scripture** - “If a prophet ... arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder...saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet...that prophet ... shall be put to death” - Deut. 13:1-5
- Apostles tested against Scripture** – “the Bereans were of more noble character... for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures ... to see if what Paul said was true.” –Acts 17:11
- Angels tested against Scripture** – “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” – Gal. 1:8

**3. If God inspired both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, why do they give different criteria for knowing the truth? Why does the BoM say: ‘pray’ and the Bible say ‘Search the Scriptures’?**

## B. Biblical teaching and false prophets

1. **What priority did Jesus say we should give his teaching?** Matthew 7:24-29, Luke 14:25-27
2. **How seriously did Jesus and the apostles view false prophets?** Matt. 7:14-20, 1 John 4:1-3, 2 Pet 2:1-3
3. If we take their teaching seriously, shouldn't we be extremely careful to test prophets?
4. **Are we willing to follow Jesus even if it means losing everything else?**

## C. The nature of God

1. **How many Gods are there?** Deut. 6:4-5, Mark 12:28-34
2. **Has God always been God?** Is. 43:10, Is. 44:8, Ps. 90:2, Moroni 8:18, Alma 11:26-29
3. **Will we one day be Gods?**

## D. The gospel

1. **What must we do to be assured that we will go into Heavenly Father's presence when we die?** John 5:19-25, John 6:25-29, Eph. 2:8-9
2. **Do we have to obey all of Jesus' commandments?** Matthew 5-7
3. **Do we have to repent of all our sins?**
4. **What are the steps of repentance?** "We must recognize our sins, We must feel sorrow for our sins, we must forsake our sins, we must confess our sins, we must make restitution, we must forgive others, we must keep the commandments of God" "To make our repentance complete we must keep the commandments of the Lord (See D&C 1:32). We are not fully repentant if we do not pay tithes or keep the Sabbath day holy or obey the Word of Wisdom. **We are not repentant if we do not sustain the authorities of the Church and do not love the Lord and our fellowmen.** If we do not pray and are unkind to others, we are surely not repentant." (GP, 125-126) See Luke 10:25-37
5. **Will we be able to repent after death?** "For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end...**For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his;** therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked" Alma 34:31-35
6. **Have you repented or not?**
7. **Two paths:** eternal death vs. eternal life. John 3:16-18, Rev. 20:11-15; Rev. 21:6-8

## References:

*Mormonism 101*. Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson. Highly recommended book on Mormonism.  
*Kingdom of the Cults*. Walter Martin. Classic work on JW's, Mormons, Christian Scientists, and others  
[www.mrm.org/](http://www.mrm.org/) - Mormon Research Ministries. One of the best Internet resources on Mormonism.  
[www.irr.org/](http://www.irr.org/) - Institute for Religious Studies. Another excellent site.  
[www.GodNeverSinned.com/](http://www.GodNeverSinned.com/) - Links to Aaron Shafovaloff's site. His youtube channel is also excellent  
[www.apologetics315.com/2011/04/robert-bowman-apologetics-audio.html](http://www.apologetics315.com/2011/04/robert-bowman-apologetics-audio.html) - Robert Bowman's 4-hour course on 'Understanding Mormons.'

JS-H – Joseph Smith – History. Part of the standard work *The Pearl of Great Price*

JOD – Journal of Discourses. 26-volume set of sermons by early church leaders

GP – Gospel Principles, 1978 edition. A standard curriculum manual published by the LDS church.

## Terminology:

**Celestial marriage** – marriage that continues into eternity. A couple must be sealed in the temple to enjoy a celestial marriage

**Eternal life** – use this instead of ‘salvation’ or ‘justification.’ ‘Dwelling in the presence of Heavenly Father’ is also a useful concept

**Eternal progression** – the idea that man can pass from mortality to Godhood

**First/Second estate** – our preexistence/earthly life

**Intelligences** – eternally existent matter which God organizes into objects, spirits, worlds

**Heavenly Father** – used as a proper name for God by Mormons

**Holy Ghost** – use instead of Holy Spirit. They are sometimes distinct in Mormonism

**Inspired Version** – a revision of the King James Bible made by Joseph Smith. Smith changed passages in the KJV which he deemed corrupted, although his revision is now not considered canonical. Try to read and quote from the KJV, as this is the version Mormons usually use

**Standard Works** – the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, Doctrine and Covenants

**Testimony** – an experience of the Holy Ghost bearing witness to the truth of the Book of Mormon, sometimes known as a ‘burning in the bosom’.

**Trinity** – be prepared to defend the biblical concept. The Bible does not use the word Trinity, but teaches clearly that: 1) There is one God, 2) The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God 3) The Father is not the Son or the Holy Ghost, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost is not the Son or the Father. Other summary statements: ‘One God in three persons’, ‘One in essence, three in person,’ ‘One *what* in three *whos*.’

**Word of Wisdom** – document prescribing rules of healthy living mandated by the LDS church. Mormons are prohibited from drinking alcohol or coffee or smoking.

## Notes: