Mormons – Lesson 5

**Other Mormon Beliefs**

**The Restored Church**

In the beginning, Joseph Smith was told that all churches were “wrong”. Therefore the “one” true church had to be restored, along with its priesthood authority (more on that later).

Ever since, Mormon leaders have spoken about the total apostasy (abandonment of faith) that occurred after the death of the apostles. In the introduction of the official “History of the Church” we find:

Nothing less than a complete apostasy from the Christian religion would warrant the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Further, the Mormons purport that there were actually seven apostasies. One after each of these groups was “given” the gospel: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, the Nephites (the Mormon’s tale of an ancient American civilization) and Jesus and His Apostles. Each one eventually failed, going into complete apostasy. Then there was supposedly a “restoration” to or by the next group. The Mormon (LDS) church is supposed to be the latest restoration (and according to them, the last one there will ever be).

There are several verses cited by Mormons to prove their claim of “total apostasy”, most using eisegesis [pronounced “I see gee sis”](reading a meaning into the text) instead of exegesis (drawing a meaning out of the text).

Acts 3:20b-21

…that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Mormons say that this passage points to an apostasy and a subsequent time of “restoration.” Two of the most prevalent Christian interpretations of this passage are that this is referring to the restoration of Israel or a general restoration after the final judgment when Jesus returns.

Regardless of which interpretation is correct, we can know with certainty what this passage does not say. The text (and surrounding context) does not even hint that there would be a total apostasy of the entire church. This is the Mormons reading something into the passages that’s not there. Plus, if we employ the principle of using Scripture to interpret Scripture, and that Scripture doesn’t contradict itself, we can look at Matthew 16:18 where Jesus says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” To say that the entire church went into apostasy is in direct conflict with this verse.

And then there’s Matthew 28:20 where Jesus promises His followers, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” How could Jesus be with His followers until the end of the age (or world) if the entire church went into apostasy? No, He is saying that His sustaining power would endure with His followers until the end.

Also take Ephesians 3:21, where Paul says, “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.” (“him” referring to God) There can be no glory to God in a totally apostate church.

There are several more verses that prove these same points.

Another passage that Mormons construe to try and prove that the church went into complete apostasy is Paul’s message in Acts 20:29-31 –

29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Mormon’s say that Paul prophesied that an apostasy would occur and had already begun. Then they expand this to conclude that Christ’s Church was to be totally abandoned to apostasy. What the Mormons are ignoring is the fact that Paul was addressing a specific group of people – the elders of the church in Ephesus (verse 17). He was warning them of something that would be happening in their own church, not the entire church the world over. Plus, passages in Timothy confirm that this did happen to the church in Ephesus. But nowhere is it even hinted that this refers to any other church than that in Ephesus.

Another example of the Mormons attempt at generalizing a passage is with Galatians 1:6-8 –

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

The Mormons often cite this passage in their attempt to prove that the early church became completely apostate (believing “a different gospel”) and was thus in need of restoration (this restoration of course coming through the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith). But the same principle applies here – don’t read into it more than what’s there.

There are more examples like this, all with similar generalizations. But as we have proved, their belief of a “total apostasy” is simply unfounded. Which brings us back to their statement that nothing less than complete apostasy would warrant the formation of the Mormon (LDS) church. So according to their own words, their church should not exist.

In Revelation 14:6 we read:

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

Mormon’s believe that this “another angel” was their Moroni that brought the Gospel to Joseph Smith, and that through the restored church (LDS) the everlasting gospel is proclaimed to all who dwell on the earth.

What they leave out is what this gospel was that the angel was proclaiming, which is found in the next verse (14:7):

And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

So this angel’s message was one of “glory to God” and “judgment is coming,” not a message related to the Mormon gospel of Joseph Smith.

When we trace the history of the Christian church, it is clear that the Mormon claim of a “restoration” of the gospel is pure fiction. (read quote from David Reed and John Farkas, pg. 59).

Now, in the last couple of decades the Mormon church has been downplaying their exclusivity doctrine of LDS being the one true church. They are doing this in order to obtain better relations and harmony with other Christian religions. They are trying to change their image from a fringe cult to an accepted mainstream religion. So what does this say about their position that all other Christian religions/churches are abominations?

**Prophets of God**

Mormons claim that God always reveals His instructions, laws, ordinances and gospel through prophets. In the times of apostasy (above) the people of earth lived in spiritual darkness without any revelation from God.

Jesus Christ and His apostles were the prophets before the last apostasy. Then, after another period of spiritual darkness, Joseph Smith was chosen to be the prophet to lead all mankind out of darkness. Mormons believe that since that time through today, there has always been a prophet on earth, in the form of the president of the Mormon church.

Each of the previous times of restored spirituality (after a total apostasy) is considered a dispensation period by the Mormons (not to be confused with Dispensationalism as we refer to it). In each dispensation there is a dispensation head—a prophet or revealer of Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith was the first “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator” for this current dispensation, and this title continues to apply to his successors in the office of church president. Thus, in its president, the LDS (Mormon) church has a “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator” leading the church as the mouthpiece of God at virtually all times. (isn’t this very similar to the Pope of the Catholic Church?)

In “Doctrines of Salvation”, Joseph Fielding Smith (10th president) states:

[Mormonism] must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a true prophet of God—divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned —or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground.

Here are some Key scriptures that Mormons use to prove that they both need and have a prophet.

For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

*Amos 3:7*

Mormons say that this passage makes is clear that a prophet is needed on the earth today. Without a prophet, who holds the authority of the priesthood, God will not communicate His will for the church, and the world will remain in spiritual darkness. What they have done here is 1) read more into it than is there, and 2) ignore the context. We cannot say that this verse means that God will always and perpetually have His prophet on earth, without which the church will remain in darkness. The context is that God was about to bring judgment against His people because of their disobedience. This verse simply states that God had warned His people that judgment would follow disobedience, but the people had ignored the prophets. In fact, according to Amos 2:12, the people had told the prophets to keep quiet because they didn’t like what they were hearing.

While on the subject of old testament prophets, remember that the test for a true prophet was 100% accuracy – everything they prophesied had to come true. So do Mormon prophets pass this test?

* Joseph Smith once prophesied that the US government would be overthrown in the 1800s.
* Joseph Smith once prophesied that the New Jerusalem would be built in Missouri, during his generation.
* Brigham Young once prophesied that the Civil War would fail to end black slavery.
* Brigham Young said that both the moon and the sun were inhabited.

In each of these cases, the Mormon “prophet” was clearly a false prophet. What they predicted or stated simply did not come to pass or was patently untrue.

Yes, in the Old Testament there were prophets to tell God’s people what His will was, and to warn them of judgments to come. But today we have the Bible, so we no longer need a continual stream of prophets, as Paul tells us in 2 Timothy:

15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

*2 Timothy 3:15-17*

Back in the days of Amos, they didn’t have the complete written Word of God. Today it is different. Because we have the Bible, and because it is trustworthy and complete, we have all we need.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

*1 Corinthians 12:28*

Mormons say that Jesus Christ established the early church, and that he appointed the necessary officers to carry out the Father’s plan. But then the church, along with its priesthood authority, was lost from the world by a universal apostasy. The mark of the only true church on earth today is that it will have the same church officers – including prophets.

The key thing to point out is that some of these positions (or gifts) were strictly foundational and that there is no need for them today (see Ephesians 2:20). Once a foundation is built, there is no need to build it again. You then build upon it. So the “building” of the church rests on the foundation of the apostles and prophets – there’s no need for any *new* foundations.

Here are other passages and question to consider about whether there are still Apostles today:

* An apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:7-8)
* The words of biblical apostles were all confirmed by miraculous works (Acts 3:3-11; 5:15-16; 9:36-42; 20:6-12; 2 Corinthians 12:12). Can Mormon apostles do these kinds of miracles, signs and wonders?
* The biblical apostles’ were numbered at 12, and their names will be engraved in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). Why aren’t the Mormon apostles’ names included, or anywhere to be found in the New Jerusalem.
* In view of the Bible’s clear teaching on apostles, is it right to claim that the Mormon church has living apostles who are on par with the biblical apostles?

Depending on who is currently leading the Mormon church as “Prophet, Seer and Revelator,” that which is true today may literally not be true tomorrow. Mormon presidents often changed doctrine, even contradicting earlier presidents. In fact, Joseph Smith changed theology and doctrine within his own lifetime as president of the church:

* He went from a clear teaching of only one God in the Book of Mormon to an unspecified number of gods in Doctrine and Covenants, and “Gods” in the Book of Abraham (part of the Pearl of Great Price).
* He went from teaching that God is a personage of Spirit in the “Lectures on Faith” (lecture five) to teaching that God has a body of flesh and bones in D&C 130:22, and soon thereafter to the teaching that we can become gods ourselves in D&C 132.
* He first said David and Solomon’s possession of many wives and concubines was abominable in the Book of Mormon, and then later said that same behavior was justified in D&C.

Brigham Young officially taught the infamous Adam-God doctrine while his successors have virtually refused to recognize its existence. This doctrine teaches that Adam (also known as Michael) is God the Father and is literally the father of our premortal spirits, and the literal father of Jesus Christ in the flesh. It was taught by Young on numerous occasions, as shown by early LDS church publications and the private journals of Mormon leaders and eyewitnesses. Some Mormons try to claim that it was only a theory, or the President Young was misquoted, or than enemies of the church have taken it out of context. Mormons who believe that Yong was not always speaking as a prophet when he delivered his sermons should consider his claims:

* I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture.
* I say now, when they [my sermons] are copied and approved by me they are as good Scripture as is couched in this Bible, and if you want to read revelation read the sayings of him who knows the mind of God.  
    
  *Both from “Journal of Discourses”*

There are other examples of the current prophet/president claiming that their “revelations” trumped any exiting scripture or previous prophet. So, a good mantra for Mormons could be “True today, but not tomorrow.”

**Migration to Ancient America**

Read summary story of two migrations to ancient America – one around 2250 B.C. and the other around 600 B.C.…

Mormons have several verses they use to prove this, but again using eisegesis...

No archaeological evidence of these alleged migrations and civilizations…

**Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods**

First some background on Jewish (and Christian) priesthood. The brother of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons, were set aside as the priesthood for the people of Israel. Later the tribe of Levi was also chosen to assist Aaron in the priestly functions. So the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods are essentially refer to the same thing.

But before this, there was a king named Melchizedek, who is called a “priest of the Most High God” in Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7. Melchizedek blessed Abraham (still called Abram at this point), offering sacrifices of wine and bread. Melchizedek’s name means king of righteousness, and his title, King of Salem, means king of peace. Most biblical scholars say that Melchizedek was a foreshadow of Christ. Hebrews 6:20 (in quoting Psalms 110:4) says that Christ is “a priest forever, after the order of **Melchizedek**.” So the Melchizedek priesthood is considered the highest, headed by Christ Himself. At Christ’s death on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn, and now all Christians have direct access to God through Christ. There is no longer a need for human priests to mediate between mankind and God.

In 1829, while working on the translation of the (alleged) gold plates, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery supposedly came across a section that talked about baptism for the remission of sins. They went into the woods to pray about this when “a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light.” The messenger, who is later identified as John the Baptist, laid his hands upon them and said:

Unto you my fellow servants in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.

*D&C 13*

They were also instructed to go baptize each other, thereby ordaining each other to the priesthood of Aaron. John the Baptist also informed them that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Melchizedek priesthood. That higher priesthood would soon be conferred on them also.

According to Bruce McConkie, the Melchizedek priesthood—with all the authority and keys of the kingdom of God—was lost from the earth. “After the apostles ceased to minister among mortals, there was no one left holding the keys to authorize a person to be ordained to any priestly office, and in this manner the Lord took the priesthood from the earth” after the death of the last apostle.

Allegedly, Peter, James and John later came down from heaven and restored the Melchizedek priesthood on Joseph Smith.

So anyway, we don’t believe there is a need for an earthly priesthood anymore, just like the apostles and prophets mentioned earlier, but the Mormons believe there is.

But even if there is a need for earthly priests, one problem for the Mormons is that Mormon doctrine dictates that only a properly baptized and ordained authority can baptize anyone else. Since Smith and Cowdery baptized and ordained each other without at least one of them having been properly baptized by a proper authority, then they were improperly baptized, as has been everyone else in the Mormon church since that time.

There is a lot more that Rhodes presents about the Mormon “priesthood” and corresponding biblical refutation of it. See chapter 12 of Rhodes book for more information.

**Humans were Pre-mortal Spirits**

Ok, time to get even weirder. According to Mormon theology, our Heavenly Father once lived on an earthlike planet and had many wives. He proved himself worthy to ***his*** Father-god by living an obedient and virtuous life. Eventually he, his wives, and children died and then were resurrected. He continued his “progression” until he finally reached godhood. Then apparently he was given the space to create his own heaven where he and his wives produced children in spirit-form. Their firstborn was Jesus, known then as Jehovah. Their second-born was Lucifer, and then most likely came Adam and Eve. According to Mormon doctrines, all the people who have ever inhabited the earth were first born in spirit form in heaven.

An interesting point that Rhodes makes is that when a Mormon says that all of us are children of our Heavenly Father, they mean that literally. And when they say, “Jesus is our elder brother,” they mean it in a literal sense.

Anyway, the story goes that in the pre-existence, Jesus was chosen over Lucifer to be the Savior of the world. This allegedly made Lucifer angry, and he rebelled against their Father. He persuaded one-third of the existing spirits in heaven to take sides and rebel also. This, in Mormonism, is known as “the war in heaven,” and is the reason why Lucifer and his group were cast out of heaven to become the Devil and his demons.

One of the most troubling aspects of the Mormon doctrine of pre-existence is the racist concept that black people are dark-skinned because God is punishing them for wrong choices they supposedly made before they were born (physical birth on earth). In the 1966 edition of “Mormon Doctrine,” Bruce McConkie commented on the pre-existence as it relates to black people:

In the pre-existent eternity various degrees of valiance and devotion to the truth were exhibited by different groups of our Father’s spirit offspring….

Those who were less valiant in pre-existence and who thereby had certain spiritual restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as the *negroes*. Such spirits are sent to earth through the lineage of Cain, the mark put upon him for his rebellion against God and his murder of Abel being a black skin. (Moses 5:16-41; 7:8, 12, 22). Noah’s son Ham married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain, thus preserving the negro lineage through the flood (Abra. 1:2-27).

. . .

Negroes in this life are denied the priesthood; under no circumstances can they hold this delegation of authority from the Almighty. (Abra. 1:20-27).) The gospel message of salvation is not carried affirmatively to them (Moses 7:8, 12, 22), although sometimes negroes search out the truth, join the Church, and become by righteous living heirs of the celestial kingdom of heaven…. The present status of the negro rests purely and simply on the foundation of pre-existence. Along with all races and peoples he is receiving here what he merits as a result of the long pre-mortal probation in the presence of the Lord…. The negroes are not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned, particularly the priesthood and the temple blessings that flow therefrom, but this inequality is not of man's origin. It is the Lord's doing, is based on his eternal laws of justice, and grows out of the lack of spiritual valiance of those concerned in their first estate.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Mormon church came under severe criticism and pressure by people both inside and outside the church, including those involved in the civil rights movement. In 1978, the late Spencer W. Kimball—then President of the Mormon church—received a convenient “revelation” from God that all worthy male church members were eligible for the priesthood, regardless of race. Therefore, in the next edition (1978) of McConkie’s “Moron Doctrine” book, he completely retracted the racist statements. In their place is this:

In all past ages and until recent times in this dispensation, the Lord did not offer the priesthood to the Negroes. However, on June 1, 1978, in the Salt Lake Temple, in the presence of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve, President Spencer W. Kimball received a revelation from the Lord directing that the gospel and the priesthood should now go to all men without reference to race or color.

Underlying this Mormon racism is the idea that during our alleged preexistence, we were under probation. And the circumstances and environment we are born into reflect our performance during this probation.

Supposedly, when a person is born on earth, a spirit-offspring of the Heavenly Father has left heaven to dwell in a physical body. And, according to Mormonism, the spirit-child loses all remembrance of his time in heaven when he “passes through the veil” and comes to receive his physical body on earth.

There are many verses from the Bible that Mormons use to support their preexistence theology:

* Jeremiah 1:5 – the “pre-existence” of Jeremiah
* John 17:5 – spirit existence before fleshly existence
* Acts 17:28-29 – the “offspring” of God
* Romans 8:16-17 – “children” of God

But like all the others, they contort and/or read into these verses a meaning that suits them.