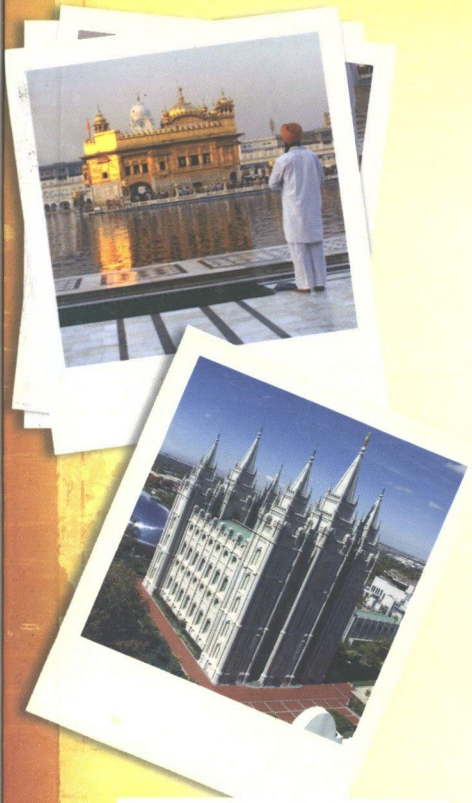
A BIBLE-BASED REVIEW OF 50 WORLD FAITHS



HANDBOOK OF WORLD RELIGIONS

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Worldviews

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Brief Histories

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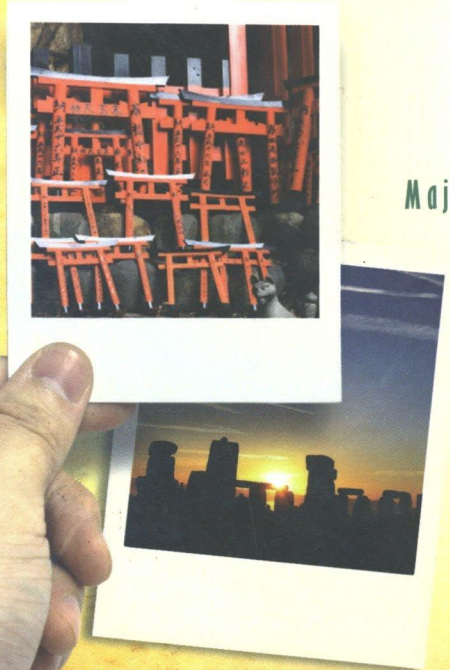
Basic Beliefs and Values

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Major Differences with Christianity

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Full-Color Illustrations



LEN WOODS

Major Differences from Christianity

Belief	Mormonism
Sacred Text(s)	The Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants; Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible, as far as it has been correctly translated
Nature of God	Many gods; the God who rules our world—called Heavenly Father—is an exalted man who achieved divine status; he is believed to have a physical body
Jesus Christ	A separate being from God the Father, he was created from the sexual union between Elohim and Mary.
Human nature	Preexistent spirit beings (conceived by the physical/spiritual union of Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother) that inhabit newborns; sinful, but capable of achieving godhood
About human need	Need to return to God after this life by trusting, obeying, and serving God in this life
Salvation	Eternal life requires faith and works, especially Mormon baptism
Afterlife	Heaven comprised of three kingdoms: celestial, terrestrial, and telestial; all will be resurrected and have immortality; Christ will judge; only the faithful will attain to the highest level

"We have come not to take away from you the truth and virtue you possess. We have come not to find fault with you nor to criticize you. We have come not to berate you. Keep all the good that you have, and let us bring to you more good."
—George Albert Smith, past President of the Mormon Church

Number of Followers

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or as it is commonly known, the Mormon Church, has between eleven million and twelve million followers. (Online sources quote between 10.6 million and 12.2 million.)

Major Figures/Prophets

- **Joseph Smith** (1805–1844)—founder of Mormonism. Smith began the Latter-Day Saints Church in 1830 in Palmyra, New York
- **Brigham Young** (1801–1877)—the successor to Joseph Smith and second president of the Latter-Day Saints Church
- **EzraTaftBenson**(1899–1994)—former United States Secretary of Agriculture under President Eisenhower and thirteenth president of the Latter-Day Saints Church

Short History

In 1820, Joseph Smith, Jr. was a God-fearing but spiritually confused farm boy living in upstate New York. He lived during a time of great religious fervor, when multiple sects and denominations were each claiming to be the true church with the true gospel.

Conflicted by such religious strife in the face of the Bible's clear, simple claim that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5 NIV), Joseph prayed earnestly for wisdom and insight as to which of these competing churches was right. Mormons claim that Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith and commanded him not to join any of the existing churches, for they "were all wrong." The Lord went on to say that none had the full, unadulterated gospel, nor did these various churches possess legitimate priesthood authority. Following the deaths of the original twelve apostles, the priesthood had long since disappeared from the earth.

In 1823, Smith claimed that an angel named Moroni appeared to him. Moroni, son of a prophet named Mormon, had recorded previously unknown historical events on some golden plates. These revelations included stories about two migrations of ancient civilizations to the Americas, and Christ's post-resurrection visitation to these "sheep of another fold." Moroni revealed the whereabouts of these buried plates and indicated they contained "the fullness of the everlasting gospel." When Smith unearthed them, he claimed they were written in a curious kind of hieroglyphic writing, which he termed "reformed Egyptian." Smith said he was able to translate them by using two special stones he called "Urim" and "Thummim." In 1830, *The Book of Mormon* was published.



Joseph Smith receiving his first vision

Almost immediately, this new faith with its different views and practices (including polygamy) was viewed with suspicion and met with persecution. Smith and his followers began a gradual migration west, moving from New York to Ohio to Missouri, then to Illinois. During this time (the early 1830s to the early 1840s), Smith claimed more divine revelations,

In short, the Latter-Day Saints church believes that God restored this long-lost priesthood authority to and through Joseph Smith. Hence, Mormons regard only their Latter-Day Saints church as the continuation of the legitimate church of Jesus Christ that we read about in the New Testament book of Acts.

which, when compiled, became the Mormon holy book *Doctrines and Covenants*. This text adds certain beliefs not found in *The Book of Mormon*.

At Nauvoo, Illinois, Smith was arrested, then shot and killed in a gunfight. Brigham Young became the new leader of the group in 1844, and he is credited with relocating the faithful to the valley of the Great Salt Lake in Utah in 1847. Since that time, Salt Lake City has served as the international headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

- *History*—The so-called "Lost Tribes of Israel" migrated to the Americas around 600 BC. After his burial and resurrection (AD 34), Christ appeared to these inhabitants of the Americas and tried to revive Heavenly Father's plan (that is, His sacraments, kingdom purposes, and so forth) through them. These events and truths were recorded on golden plates, but never enacted. They had failed as their Hebrew ancestors had done, thus setting the stage for the renewal of God's perfect plan through Joseph Smith.
- *Jesus and Satan*—The Latter-Day Saints church claims that Jesus and Lucifer were brothers, the first two spirit children of the Father-God of our universe. When Jesus was selected to be the Savior of the world, Satan rebelled, initiating a great holy war in heaven. As punishment, Heavenly Father decreed that he would never have a human body.
- *Human Nature*—Mormonism teaches that we are all preexistent spirit beings—the result of spiritual/sexual union of Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. We became embodied at the moment of our birth, the immaterial spirit child indwelling the newborn infant body. In addition, Mormons teach that because we are the literal children of God, we are gods in the making: "As man is, God once was: as God is, man may be" (James Talmadge in *A Study of the Articles of Faith*). Live as a devout Mormon, and you can literally one day be the god of your own universe.
- *Jesus*—The Mormon church declares that Jesus was not conceived by the Holy Spirit as the Bible teaches, but rather is the result of sexual union between Father God and Mary. This makes Jesus the "elder brother" of all mankind.

- *Salvation*—In short, to the Mormon way of thinking, salvation is by faith and good works (Mormon baptism, tithing, temple marriage, and participation in secret rituals). They believe that a person must be baptized to become a member of the restored Church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and to eventually enter the kingdom of heaven.

Basic Beliefs and Values

Mormonism teaches a number of historical and theological ideas that most uninformed non-Mormons find surprising:

Because Mormon baptism is essential for salvation, Mormons engage in the little-known practice of proxy baptism, or "baptism for the dead." Relying on vast genealogical research and records, devout members of the Latter-Day Saints church attempt to help nonchurch members make it into heaven by serving as "stand-ins" at continuous baptismal ceremonies held in Mormon temples.

- *Other Churches*—The current official Latter-Day Saints church view is that orthodox Christian churches are incomplete rather than corrupt. The so-called "Great Apostasy" means that historic Christianity lost the "fullness" of the gospel, not the entire message and teaching of Christ. Through the revelations given to Joseph Smith, Mormons believe God restored the true gospel. Mormons do not dismiss other people's religious experiences, and believe that anyone who accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God is a Christian and can have divine guidance.
- *Practices*—Mormons do not have paid clergy. All church work is voluntary. All services are led by the laity. While women are eligible to serve in various capacities, the priesthood is open only to faithful, worthy men. Each authorized, ordained successor of Joseph Smith—there have been fourteen Mormon "presidents" since Joseph Smith's death—is regarded as a modern-day, God-appointed prophet. Each president has the assistance of a group of contemporary apostles.

View of God

Faithful and devout adherents to Mormon doctrine call God "Heavenly Father." In Mormon theology, "Heavenly Father" (also known as *Elohim*) was once a man ("As man now is, God once was"). This is known as "theois"—the notion that divinity is the result of an eternal progression. Through this process, Mormons are also taught that they, too, can eventually achieve the status of deity. One Web site source states,

"Having a divine nature as a child of God, you can with the assistance and power of Christ, progress to become one day even as He is." Thus Mormonism is technically polytheistic.

In Mormon thought, God is physical. Joseph Smith claimed, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's," (from *Gospel Doctrine*, Joseph Smith). God is also married. Heavenly Father is not Triune. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are actually three separate Gods.

Regarding the Holy Spirit (Mormons prefer to call Him the Holy Ghost), Latter-Day Saints doctrine says, "All good people can feel the influence of the Holy Ghost, but only those who are baptized and who receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by priesthood authority have the right to His constant companionship throughout life."

Other Practices

All devout Mormons participate in a full-time mission (lasting eighteen to twenty-four months). Their missionary service, usually done while in their late teens or early twenties, primarily involves door-to-door evangelism. Committed members of the church tithe faithfully (that is, giving 10 percent of their income to the work of the church). In addition, Mormons have strict prohibitions against the use of alcohol or tobacco. Caffeinated drinks are taboo also.

Worldview

Mormons regard themselves as Christians (in fact, as stated above, they see the Latter-Day Saints church as the only true and pure church of Jesus Christ). They claim belief in the Bible and faith in Jesus Christ. And yet many Christian scholars and denominations see Mormonism as an aberrant belief system that uses orthodox terms even while giving those words new, unorthodox theological meanings.

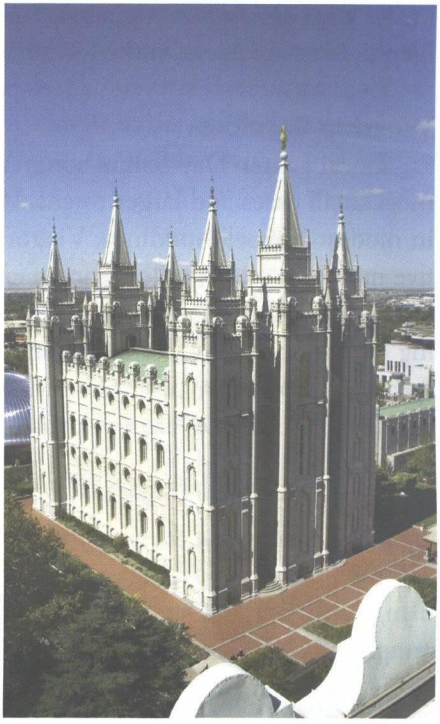
What is not disputed are these realities: the warm, profamily emphasis within the church (Monday nights are typically reserved for family activities); the commendable work ethic of Latter-Day Saints members; the fierce commitment to healthy living; the rigorous generosity of most Mormon families; and the zealous devotion of the faithful for missionary activity.

Polygamy (the practice of marrying more than one wife) was formerly an accepted practice within the Latter-Day Saints Church. Though still practiced among some remote Mormon groups and sects, the official Mormon stance adheres to civil laws forbidding such domestic arrangements.

View of the Afterlife

Latter-Day Saints church doctrine says that after death comes the resurrection. After the resurrection come judgment and/or reward. Mormons teach three levels of heaven, or three kingdoms. The highest, where God dwells and for which devout Latter-Day Saints church members are eligible, is the celestial. In this state, according to the teachings of Joseph Smith, "The same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory" (Doctrine and Covenants 130:2).

Next is the middle or terrestrial kingdom, which will be the eternal address for those "who refuse to accept the gospel of Christ" (those who do not fully embrace the teachings of Mormonism), but who mostly "live honorable lives."



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The Salt Lake Temple in Salt Lake City, Utah

The lowest level of heaven is called the telestial kingdom. This is the ultimate destination for those "who continue in their sins and do not repent until after they have died." Truly wicked, unrepentant sinners are banished to the "outer darkness."

Sacred Texts

The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and *Pearl of Great Price* (all composed, compiled, and written primarily by Joseph Smith) are viewed by Mormons as the most recent and most trustworthy of divinely-inspired texts. Latter-Day Saints church members also study and revere the Bible, considering it authoritative, "as far as it is correctly translated."

Mormons teach that from 1823 to 1827, an angel named Moroni revealed gold plates to Joseph Smith, written in a kind of ancient hieroglyphic. (Moroni was the son of a prophet named Mormon.) Using a special pair of divinely supplied stones, called Urim and Thummim, Joseph Smith was able to translate these ancient writings into English. The finished result, published in 1830, is *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, the never-before-revealed account of what happened when Jesus Christ lived in the Americas from approximately 590 BC to AD 421. Books

in *The Book of Mormon* are named after the prophets who kept the records, such as Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, and Mormon.

Worship Services

Local Latter-Day Saints congregations (called wards or branches) are found in most small cities and larger towns. Wards assemble each Sunday and typically meet in modest "chapel" buildings. Visitors are always welcome at these sixty to seventy-five minute services, called "sacrament meetings." There is no firm and fixed liturgy, but typically these gatherings include congregational hymns and prayer, the partaking of the sacrament (communion), and two or three short messages from assigned speakers (laymen in positions of leadership, as there are no paid clergy). Various Sunday school classes are also commonly offered either before or after the sacrament meeting.

Mormons emphasize the building of temples. Currently there are more than 100 temples in the world. In these holy places, Latter-Day Saints church members learn Mormon doctrine and engage in Mormon ordinances (marriage, baptism, proxy baptism). Only Latter-Day Saints church members in good standing may participate in temple rituals.

Easter (date varies)—commemorating the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ	**Anniversary of the Founding of the Mormon Church** (April 6)
Christmas (December 25)—celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.	**John the Baptist's visitation to Joseph Smith** (May 15)
Pioneer Day (July 24)—commemorates the 1847 arrival of the first group of Latter-Day Saints settlers into Salt Lake Valley after their westward migration.	**General Conference** (first weekends in April and October)—not technically "holidays" but considered important days in the church year.