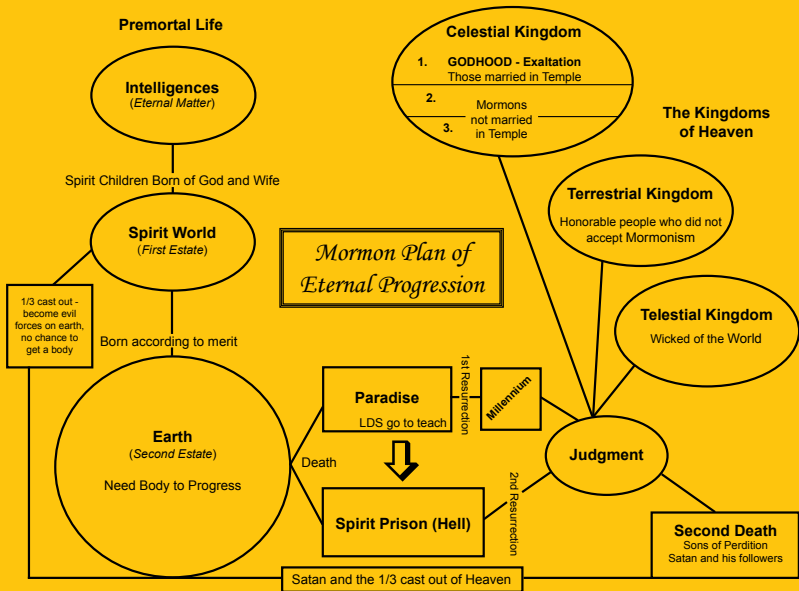


41 UNIQUE TEACHINGS OF THE LDS CHURCH



By Sandra Tanner

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(**Bold** added in quotes for emphasis.)

Note: *Ibid.* in the footnotes refers to the previous reference although there may be a different page number.

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church), claimed that in the spring of 1820, when he was fourteen years old, there was a significant revival in his neighborhood. He recounted that “Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.” While Joseph Smith favored the Methodists, his mother, two brothers and his sister joined the Presbyterian Church.¹

Then, according to the *Pearl of Great Price*, Smith went out into the woods to pray for wisdom concerning which church he should join. Smith reported that in answer to this prayer God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him as two separate, distinct beings. They told him not to join any of the churches “for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt.”²

On the basis of this vision, Mormons declare that God has rejected all other churches, and that only the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has the authority to act for God. They also point to this vision as proof that God the Father and Jesus Christ both have physical, resurrected bodies and are totally separate gods.

The LDS Church teaches that when Christ first set up His church in Israel it contained both the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods. They claim that this authority is necessary for one to act in the name of God and perform such rites as baptism, priesthood ordination and eternal marriages. Mormons claim that the early Christian church contained all the same teachings as the LDS embrace today. However, with the death of Christ’s apostles, they believe the church fell into total apostasy, instituted false doctrine, changed the scriptures and lost the authority to minister in God’s name.³

1 *Pearl of Great Price* Joseph Smith—History 1:7-8.

2 *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:5-19.

3 *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*, Religion 430 and 431, LDS Church, 2010, pp. 59-63.

Thus the “true” church of Christ was not on the earth from approximately 100 AD to 1830 AD when God restored it through Joseph Smith. He claimed that on May 15, 1829, John the Baptist appeared to him and his associate, Oliver Cowdery, and bestowed on them the keys of the Aaronic priesthood, thus giving them the authority to perform valid baptisms.⁴

Smith claimed that a month later Peter, James and John appeared to him and Cowdery and bestowed on them the Melchizedek priesthood. This priesthood authority, said to have been lost since the time of the original apostles, is necessary to ordain any man as a minister of God. With these two priesthoods restored Smith proclaimed that he had the correct authority to re-establish the “only true church.”⁵

The LDS concept of a total apostasy contradicts Christ’s promise that “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18 KJV). Also, the book of Hebrews explains that the Levitical (or Aaronic) priesthood was brought to an end with the death of Christ and that Christ is our only eternal High Priest “after the order of Melchisedec.” (See Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-16; 5:1-10; 6:20; 7:11-28)

In March of 1830 Joseph Smith published his new book of scripture, the Book of Mormon, financed by Book of Mormon witness, Martin Harris. This new scripture purports to be an account of God’s dealings with three migrations to the New World. The first group fled to the New World after the time of the Tower of Babel, the second and third groups were Israelites who left Jerusalem and migrated to the Americas at approximately 600 BC. Also recounted in the book are their wars, divisions, doctrines and the appearance of Christ in the New World shortly after his crucifixion. The story ends at approximately 421 AD when the last of the righteous leaders hid the sacred record of his people away in a hill, to preserve it until God saw fit to bring it forth to the world through Joseph Smith. A few weeks after the publication of his book, Smith organized his new church in New York on April 6, 1830.

Smith’s fledgling church adopted many of the teachings of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, early advocates of the need for

4 *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:68-71.

5 *Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 20:1-4; 22:1-4; 13:1; 27:8; 84:18; *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 2:68-70.

a restoration of New Testament Christianity. They rejected church creeds, taught baptismal regeneration, rejected infant baptism and had communion every week.

Originally, Joseph Smith titled his church “The Church of Christ,” but in 1834 it was changed to “The Church of the Latter Day Saints.”⁶ Then in 1838 Smith received a revelation to change the name to “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 115:3-4).⁷

The Mormons have four books they consider scripture: the Bible (King James Version), the Book of Mormon (the purported record of the inhabitants of the Americas prior to Columbus), the *Doctrine and Covenants* (mainly Joseph Smith’s revelations) and the *Pearl of Great Price* (the writings of Moses and Abraham, an extract from Smith’s Bible revision and a condensed account of Smith’s early life).

One of the unique teachings of Joseph Smith was that God was once a mortal on another earth system who, along with his wife, eventually achieved godhood. Man’s goal is to attain this same exaltation. Today the LDS Church teaches that eternal life is acquired by diligently following all of the LDS doctrines, including regular participation in their secret temple rituals.

In 2011 LDS Apostle Jeffrey Holland made the following comments to a group of national Christian leaders:

Like you, we have no desire to compromise our doctrinal distinctiveness or forfeit the beliefs that make us who we are. We are eager, however, not to be misunderstood, not to be accused of beliefs we do not hold, and not to have our commitment to Christ and His gospel dismissed out of hand, to say nothing of being demonized in the process.⁸

We agree with Mr. Holland’s plea to accurately portray the LDS Church’s beliefs. Therefore, the reader will be pleased to know that the majority of quotes in this booklet are from either LDS scriptures or from their current teaching manuals.

6 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 62-63.

7 *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, Religion 324 and 325, LDS Church, 2001, p. 286.

8 Jeffrey R. Holland, “Standing Together for the Cause of Christ,” *Ensign* (August 2012)

When discussing the differences between Christianity and Mormonism, it is typical to hear comments that the LDS faith is not that different from other churches. However, the following material will demonstrate that the unique teachings of Mormonism are not shared with standard Christianity.

The LDS Church officially uses the King James Version of the Bible, but due to its archaic wording we will be using the New International Version in this study.⁹

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⁹ To read and compare various versions of the Bible, see (www.Biblegateway.com) (www.blueletterbible.com) (www.biblestudytools.com) or (biblecc.com)

41 UNIQUE TEACHINGS OF THE LDS CHURCH

1. God the Father was once a finite mortal on another planet. After his death and resurrection he progressed to become the God of this world.

In 1844 Joseph Smith preached his famous sermon on the doctrine of God:

I want to ask this congregation, every man, woman and child, to answer the question in their own heart, what kind of a being God is?. . . I am going to tell you **how God came to be God**. 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.¹⁰

A lengthy extract from Smith's sermon is quoted in the 2004 manual *Presidents of the Church Student Manual*:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. . . . I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—. . .

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that **he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did;** and I will show it from the Bible.¹¹

10 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Deseret Book Company, 1975, vol. 6, pp. 302-317.

11 *Presidents of the Church Student Manual*, Religion 345, LDS Church, 2004, p. 89.

I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. I am going to inquire after God; for I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him; and if I am bringing you to a knowledge of Him, all persecutions against me ought to cease. You will then know that I am His servant; for I speak as one having authority.

God An Exalted Man

I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of a being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth, for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and to tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race, and why He interferes with the affairs of man.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another.

In order to understand the subject of the dead, for consolation of those who mourn for the loss of their friends, it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. 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.

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with Him as one man converses with another, and that He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did; and I will show it from the Bible. †

Eternal Life to Know God and Jesus Christ

I wish I was in a suitable place to tell it, and that I had the trump of an archangel, so that I could tell the story in such a manner that persecution would cease forever. What did Jesus say? (Mark it, Elder Rigdon!) The scriptures inform us that Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power— to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious—in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. Do you believe it? If you do not believe it you do not

Joseph Smith's King Follett Sermon¹²

12 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 305. Also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 343-345 and *Ensign* magazine (April-May 1971).

Brigham Young, the second prophet of the LDS Church, also taught that God had once been a mortal. In the 1997 manual *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, he is quoted as saying:

The great architect, manager and superintendent, controller and dictator [absolute ruler] who guides this work is out of sight to our natural eyes. He [God] lives on another world; he is in another state of existence; **he has passed the ordeals we are now passing through**; he has received an experience, has suffered and enjoyed, and knows all that we know regarding the toils, sufferings, **life and death of this mortality, for he has passed through the whole of it, and has received his crown and exaltation** and holds the keys and the power of this Kingdom; . . .¹³

On page 34 of the same manual we read:

The doctrine that **God was once a man and has progressed to become a God** is unique to this Church. How do you feel, knowing that God, **through His own experience**, “knows all that we know regarding the toils [and] sufferings” of mortality?¹⁴

The LDS Church continues to teach that God has not always been God, but achieved this status in the distant past. In their 2002 teaching manual, *Gospel Fundamentals*, we read:

It will help us to remember that our Father in Heaven was once a man who lived on an earth, the same as we do. He became our Father in Heaven by overcoming problems, just as we have to do on this earth.¹⁵

However, the Bible declares that God has always been God:

“I the Lord do not change. . . .” (Malachi 3:6)

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)

13 *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, LDS Church, 1997, p. 30.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

15 *Gospel Fundamentals*, LDS Church, 2002, p. 204.

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