

The importance of Joseph Smith in Mormon theology cannot be over-emphasized. Brigham Young, who became the second president of the church, frequently praised Joseph Smith:

Well, now, examine the character of **the Savior**, and examine the character of those who have written the Old and New Testaments; and then compare them with the character of **Joseph Smith**, the founder of this work . . . and you will find that **his character stands as fair as that of any man's mentioned in the Bible**. We can find no person who presents a better character to the world when the facts are known **than Joseph Smith, Jun.**, the prophet and his brother Hyrum Smith, who was murdered with him (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 14, p. 203).

. . . no man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God **without the consent of Joseph Smith**. . . . Every man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith, junior, as a passport to their entrance . . . I cannot go there without his consent. . . . He reigns there as **supreme a being** in his sphere, capacity, and calling, as **God** does in heaven. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, p. 289)

While present-day Mormons do not worship Joseph Smith, there seems to be evidence that Smith wanted to elevate himself almost to the same level as Jesus Christ. Josiah Quincy related that when he visited Joseph Smith in 1844, the prophet put this inquiry:

“Is not here **one greater than Solomon**, who built a Temple with the treasures of his father David and with the assistance of Hiram [sic], King of Tyre? Joseph Smith has built his Temple with no one to aid him in the work.” (*Figures of the Past*, as cited in *Among the Mormons*, p. 138)

The *History of the Church* contains some statements which seem to show that Joseph Smith felt he was almost equal with God:

God made Aaron to be the mouth piece for the children of Israel, and He will make me be god to you in His stead, and the Elders to be mouth for me; and if you don't like it, you must lump it. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 319-20)

If they want a beardless boy to whip all the world, I will get on the top of the mountain and crow like a rooster. I shall always beat them. . . . **I have more to boast of than ever any man had**. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, **nor Jesus ever did it**. I boast that **no man ever did such a work as I**. **The followers of Jesus ran away from Him**, but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 408-9).

One of the most important factors leading to Joseph Smith's death was his order to destroy a newspaper. Mormon scholar Kenneth W. Godfrey wrote:

The Prophet's mayoral order, with the consent of the city council, to destroy the *Nauvoo Expositor* became the immediate excuse to stamp out his life. . . . Perhaps in retrospect both Mormons and Gentiles were partly to blame for conflict which developed between them. (*Brigham Young University Studies*, Winter 1968, pp. 213-14)

The *Nauvoo Expositor* was to be printed in Nauvoo by prominent Mormon defectors who opposed Joseph Smith's political ambitions and the practice of polygamy. While LDS writers often refer to the *Nauvoo Expositor* as a scandalous and vile publication, an examination of the paper reveals that it advocated high morals

and obedience to the law. The thing that really disturbed the Mormon leaders, however, was that the *Nauvoo Expositor* exposed Joseph Smith's secret teaching of polygamy. In an affidavit published in the *Expositor*, June 7, 1844, Austin Cowles charged that he had seen “a revelation given through the Prophet” which taught “the doctrine of a plurality of wives.” The Mormon leaders responded that Austin Cowles had lied, but eight years after Joseph Smith's death they published the revelation on polygamy. A careful reading of the revelation (now printed in the *Doctrine and Covenants* as Section 132) proves beyond all doubt that the statements in the *Expositor* were true. Thus it is clear that the *Expositor* was condemned on the basis of false testimony given by Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum. In the synopsis of the proceedings of the Nauvoo City Council we found the following:

Mayor [Joseph Smith] said, if he had a City Council who felt as he did, the establishment (referring to the Nauvoo Expositor) would be **declared a nuisance** before night. . . . Hyrum Smith believed the best way was to **smash the press and pi the type**. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 441, 445)

The Nauvoo City Council “passed an ordinance declaring the *Nauvoo Expositor* a nuisance” and ordered the press to be destroyed. Under the date of June 10, 1844, we find the following in Joseph Smith's *History*:

The Council . . . issued an order to me to abate the said nuisance. **I** immediately ordered the Marshal to **destroy it** without delay. . . . About 8 p.m., the Marshal returned and reported that he had removed the press, type, printed paper, and fixtures into the street and **destroyed them**. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 432)

Mormon historian B. H. Roberts admitted that “the legality of the action of the Mayor and City Council was, of course, questionable,

. . . neither proof or argument for legality are convincing. On the grounds of expediency or necessity the action is more defensible” (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 432). Vilate Kimball, the wife of Heber C. Kimball and a faithful Mormon, wrote: “June 11th. Nauvoo was a scene of excit[e]ment last night. Some **hundreds** of the brethren turned out and **burned the press of the opposite party**” (Letter published in *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, p. 340).

At first Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum fled to Iowa to avoid arrest, but they were accused of being cowards and urged to return to save Nauvoo from the possibility of destruction. They finally went to Carthage, Illinois, where they were arrested for destroying the printing press. The Smiths were allowed to post bail for this offense but were then held on a charge of treason against the State of Illinois. While they were being held at Carthage a mob attacked the jail and both Joseph and Hyrum were shot dead by their assailants.

In the LDS Church’s *Doctrine and Covenants*, 135:3-4, we find these words concerning Joseph Smith’s death:

Joseph Smith, the prophet and Seer of the Lord, **has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men** in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it . . . When Joseph went up to Carthage to deliver himself up . . . he said: “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter . . .”

While we agree with the Mormons that there is no way to justify the unlawful and brutal acts of the mob at Carthage, we feel that it is going beyond the facts to compare the death of Joseph with that of Jesus. The Mormon leaders seem to be appealing to Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” In the New Testament it is claimed that Christ fulfilled this prophesy (see Acts 8:32). He died without resistance. In 1 Peter 2:23 we read: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened

not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” When Peter tried to defend Jesus with the sword, Jesus told him to “put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11)

Most Mormons believe that Joseph Smith died without putting up a struggle, but the actual truth is that he died in a blazing gunfight with his enemies. In the *History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 617-18, the following account is given concerning Smith’s death:

. . . there was . . . a discharge of three or four firearms. . . . **Joseph** sprang to his coat for his six-shooter . . . he **discharged his six-shooter** in the stairway . . . two or three barrels of which missed fire.

Joseph . . . dropped **his pistol** on the floor, and sprang into the window . . .

John Taylor, who became the third president of the church, testified that Joseph Smith “snapped the pistol six successive times; only three of the barrels, however, were discharged. I afterwards understood that **two or three were wounded by these discharges, two of whom, I am informed, died**” (*History of the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 102-103).

From the preceding information it can be seen that the death of Joseph Smith can in no way be compared to the death of Jesus. Jesus did go like a “lamb to the slaughter,” but Joseph Smith died like a raging lion.

Today the Joseph Smith of Mormon adoration is a highly romanticized version of the real Joseph Smith. While possessing natural abilities and talents, his personal character was far from the saintly image his followers mold him into. For more information on Joseph Smith and the LDS Church see the book, *Major Problems of Mormonism*, available from Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

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Jesus and Joseph Smith

