



What to say to Mormons ... Ch. 1 About the Mormons

Mike Licona

Chapter 1 About the Mormons

[Back to contents]

1. Who are the Mormons?

A. History. Mormonism started in 1830 with twenty-four year old Joseph Smith, Jr. According to Smith, he had several experiences, during which God, Jesus, and the angel Moroni gave him instructions. Part of the instructions was to dig up some gold plates buried by the angel Moroni around AD 400 on a hill just outside of Smith's town of Palmyra, New York. Smith dug up the plates, claimed they were written in "Reformed Egyptian", and that God had given him the ability to translate them. This translation became known as the *Book of Mormon*, an account of the ancient inhabitants of North America between 600 BC and AD 400.[1]

Mormons have four sources of authority: the *Bible*, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has become one of the fastest growing religions in the world. In 1997, Latter-day Saints membership totaled just shy of 10 million worldwide.[2] The church owns many businesses, including Brigham Young University.

B. Doctrines. Mormon beliefs are fundamentally different from Biblical Christianity. These have been detailed in other publications.[3] Therefore, it

will not be the purpose of this book to spell out the differences in Mormon and Christian doctrine, but rather to answer the question, "Is Mormonism true?" However, a few of the more peculiar Mormon doctrines are mentioned below:

1. *God*. Once a human as we are now, and progressed to become God. He is one of many Gods.

2. *Man*. Has the ability to progress and become a god just as Jehovah did.

3. *Marriage*. Polygamy is no longer advocated, although it once was encouraged.

4. *Jesus*. The son of God, but not part of the Godhead. Mormons do not believe in the Trinity.[4]

C. The People. Mormons are wonderful people who are very sincere about their faith and are very caring. Conversations with Mormon missionaries promise to be cordial. Although Mormon scholars, such as those at Brigham Young University, are well aware of the challenges which face Mormonism, Mormon laity, including Mormon missionaries, are pretty much in the dark and will be surprised when you share the information contained in the first half of this book.

2. What Mormons tell you when they knock on your door

When Mormons visit you, they usually will not focus on the doctrines previously mentioned. In fact, they probably will not even bring them up during the first few meetings. Instead they will seek to find common ground with you on many of the doctrines Christians believe. For example, they may begin by saying that God revealed the Old Testament through Moses and the Prophets. Then Jesus came, was crucified and resurrected. His disciples wrote books and letters that became the New Testament. We all agree on these facts. Then the differences begin. They will tell you that before Jesus' ascension into Heaven, he appeared to the inhabitants of North America and gave them the Gospel as well. His message and the history of these inhabitants from 600 BC to AD 400 are recorded in the *Book of Mormon*.

Furthermore, they will tell you that since the apostles were not replaced when they were killed, the Church went into apostasy; in other words, it abandoned the true faith. Therefore, a restoration

was necessary. Mormons believe that God chose Joseph Smith to bring that restoration and, therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true Church.

3. How to answer Mormons

Mormons are well equipped to answer many of the issues Christians bring to their attention and have answers adequate to silence the average critic. The Mormon missionaries who come to your door are cordial and will listen to what you have to say. Enjoy the opportunity to share your faith with them, but be prepared by having good answers.

Although there are many issues, which you may bring to the Mormons' attention, focus on four that are of primary importance. These will be the focus of the first half of this book and are:

A. The Bible is reliable. Mormons claim that the *Bible* has been corrupted over the years as evidenced by the many different translations. How do we know that the *Bible* we have today is the same as it was two thousand years ago? In Chapter 2 we will see that the original words of the *Bible* have been preserved with remarkable purity and that its accuracy has been confirmed by both history and archaeology. We will also discuss how the variances among English translations do not call into question the preservation of the *Bible* over the years. Until you have shown this to a Mormon, it is useless to point out that some Mormon doctrines differ from the *Bible*. They will only respond that the *Bible* is unreliable. This is our topic in the next chapter.

B. There is no archaeological confirmation of the Book of Mormon. While the spade of the archaeologist has confirmed many places and peoples mentioned in the *Bible*, it has not been at all favorable to the *Book of Mormon*. Although Mormons will confidently assert that archaeology has confirmed the *Book of Mormon's* accuracy time and time again, professional archaeologists have arrived at quite a different conclusion. You will find out more about this problem in Chapter 3.

C. The Book of Abraham is a fraud. The *Book of Abraham* is one of the books in the *Pearl of Great Price*, one of Mormonism's Scriptures. Joseph Smith purchased some ancient Egyptian

papyri and claimed it was an original book penned by Abraham himself while in Egypt. He translated it allegedly by the same gift which God had given him to translate the *Book of Mormon*. Professional Egyptologists have translated the papyri since their rediscovery in 1967. Their translations bear no resemblance to Smith's translation, exposing him as a charlatan. You will find out about this subject of which few Mormons are even aware in Chapter 4.

D. Evidence for Mormonism? Mormons are convinced that Mormonism is true because of the inward testimony of God that tells them so. If you are going to be effective when talking to Mormons, it is crucial that you address this issue as well. Otherwise, no amount of solid evidence, which testifies against Mormonism, will be of help to them. See that their approach is neither prudent nor biblical. This will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 will show you how to communicate these four issues so that you will be able to respond intelligently and effectively to Mormons the next time they knock on your door.

[Go to next chapter]

References:

[1] It was originally believed that the events described in the *Book of Mormon* occurred in North America. Most Mormons who come to your door believe this. However, since no archaeological evidence has surfaced, Mormon scholars also consider Central America as a possible setting. However, this theory has serious problems, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

[2] *TIME*, 4 August 1997, p.52.

[3] Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Mission, 1982). The Tanners are former Mormons who have written many books on Mormonism and have one of the best known ministries to Mormons. For information, call Utah Lighthouse Ministry at (801) 485-8894, or reach them on the internet at www.utlm.org. Judy Robertson, *No Regrets* (Indianapolis: Light & Life Communications, 1997). Judy and her husband, Jim, are also former Mormons. Jim is a former Bishop. For information, call (480) 833-2537, or reach them on the internet

at www.concernedchristians.org. Henry L. Ropp, *Is Mormonism Christian?* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1995). These books discuss the doctrines and problems of Mormonism in depth.

[4] For a defense of the Trinity, see Chapter 9.

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