

Questioning Joseph Smith

By

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Meeting Mormons

I've had the opportunity during the past 40+ years to meet and speak with many Mormons. Some were teenage missionaries. Others were bishops or high priests of the LDS (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints). I once spent five hours on a plane talking with an elder of the LDS. I became friends with the leader of a local Mormon church through my job as a journalist and his job working for a government agency.

Even though I asked them many questions about what they believed, I would have liked to question Joseph Smith. Smith lived in the early 19th century (1805-1844) and was the founding Mormon prophet. Mormons have told me he that is the "lynchpin" (their word) of their beliefs and relationship with God. Smith claimed that God used him for "the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Is that true?

In case you haven't had the opportunity to meet and talk with Mormons, let's begin there.

I usually learn something new every time I meet a Mormon. Even though what they share is similar to what I've heard before, each person is unique and brings their own personal experience into the conversation. I think it's important that we demonstrate respect and a genuine interest in the person when we have discussions with people who believe differently than we do.

The Apostle Peter wrote that Christians should —

... always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. 1 Peter 3:15

Being “ready” to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us means being prepared. In fact, the Greek word translated “ready” in 1 Peter 3:15 is *hetoimoi* and means “prepared, standing by.” It's the idea of being ready to meet any challenge that might come your way.

I ask Mormons about themselves and their beliefs, then share my story of how I came to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. After I share what I believed about Jesus, most Mormons I meet say they agree with everything I said. I respectfully disagree based on what I know about Mormon beliefs. That often leads us into some interesting areas of discussion that I will address in this series.

Mormon missionaries often hand me a copy of *The Book of Mormon* and ask me to read a section they marked. They ask me to read the marked verses and pray that God would show me that what I was reading was true. Reading Mormon Scriptures is how I've learned what Mormons believe and why they believe it. Knowing what they believe is helpful in reaching them with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Questioning Joseph Smith

The reason Mormons believe what they do is because of what Joseph Smith believed. The reason I believe what I do is because of what Jesus Christ believes. That's the primary difference between Christians and Mormons — the issue of authority. Is Joseph Smith the authority? Or is Jesus Christ the authority?

That may sound like a strange question since the official name for Mormons is — “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” It would appear from the name of their church that Jesus Christ is their primary authority. However, if you look deeper into what they believe you learn that the one they trust for truth is Joseph Smith and what he said Jesus said and did. That may sound a bit harsh to a Mormon who is reading this, but please stay with me. My approach to spiritual truth is similar to my approach as a journalist to any truth claim.

Mormons treasure four books that were written/translated by Joseph Smith. They are —

1. The Book of Mormon
2. King James Bible (as translated by Joseph Smith)
3. Doctrine and Covenants
4. Pearl of Great Price

Mormons believe *The Book of Mormon* to be “the most correct of any book on earth.” Is that true? Why would Mormons believe it to be the “most correct?” Because of their belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. Is that true? Was Smith a prophet of God?

The Restoration According to Joseph Smith

A primary belief of Mormons is that the Church of Jesus Christ became apostate soon after the apostles died. They also believe the original writings of the Bible were corrupted by the apostate church. Why do they believe that? Because Joseph Smith said so.

Mormon missionaries sometimes give me a booklet titled *The Restoration Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ*. Here's what it claims about how the original Church of Jesus Christ became apostate —

God chooses a prophet. The prophet teaches the gospel and leads the people. God blesses the people,. The people gradually disregard or disobey the teachings of the prophet and his teachings and fall into apostasy. Because of apostasy, people lose knowledge of the gospel. Priesthood authority is taken from them. When the time is right and people are ready to follow Him again, God chooses another prophet, restores the

priesthood and the Church, and directs the prophet to teach the gospel. The Restoration of the Gospel, p 4

The booklet goes on to give a history of what it calls “The Great Apostasy” that followed the death of the apostles of Christ. According to the teachings of Joseph Smith, here’s how Mormons view this apostasy —

The Apostles were killed, and priesthood authority—including the keys to direct and receive revelation for the Church—was taken from the earth. Because the Church was no longer led by priesthood authority, error crept into Church teachings. Good people and much truth remained, but the gospel as established by Jesus Christ was lost. This period is called the Great Apostasy. The Restoration of the Gospel, p 8

Mormons believe God prophesied this apostasy through the 8th century BC prophet Amos —

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. Amos 8:11-12 (KJV)

Why do they believe a prophecy from a Hebrew prophet who prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel prior to its destruction by the Assyrian army was for the Church age? Because that's what Joseph Smith taught.

Mormons believe, based on the teaching of Joseph Smith, that the Church that Jesus Christ said He would build (Matthew 16:18) became apostate about 70 to 100 years after His death, resurrection, and return to Heaven. They believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was “lost” for 17 centuries until God called Joseph Smith to be the prophet who would restore the Gospel on earth.

Mormons believe God revealed Himself to Smith in 1820 AD “to restore the gospel and the priesthood to the earth” (*The Restoration of the Gospel*, p 11). Mormons believe “Joseph Smith received the same priesthood authority that Jesus Christ had given to His Apostles” (*The Restoration of the Gospel*, p 12) in 1829. Mormons believe God continues to direct “the Church today through living prophets and apostles” (*The Restoration of the Gospel*, p 12).

As we look at the teachings of Joseph Smith in this series we will also share some of the teachings of past and present Mormon prophets and apostles. Mormons believe that “These men are prophets, seers, and revelators” (*The Restoration of the Gospel*, p 12). Why do they believe that? Because of the teachings of Joseph Smith. It has to do with the restoration of the “priesthood” that would be passed from Smith to others —

After he received priesthood authority, Joseph Smith was directed to organize the Church of Jesus Christ again on the earth. Through him, Jesus Christ again called the Twelve Apostles” (*The Restoration of the Gospel*, p 12).

As you can see from what Mormons say and write, they base everything they believe on the priesthood authority of Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith and The Book of Mormon

It has long been my habit when reading a book to begin with the front cover, back cover, and first several pages. You can learn a lot about a book by following that simple process. Observe everything you see and make notes about anything that you'd like to research later.

Let's do that with the book Mormons claim is “the most correct of any book on earth.”

Mormons call *The Book of Mormon* “Another Testament Of Jesus Christ.” The first English edition was published in Palmyra, NY in 1830. The copyright on the copy the missionaries gave me included two different years: © 1981, 2013 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Copyrights that are later than the original copyright can indicate changes to the original. That's something to note and research.

The first page after the copyrights reads — “The Book Of Mormon, An Account Written By The Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken From The Plates Of Nephi, Translated By Joseph Smith, Jun.” Many observations and questions come to mind for Joseph Smith.

The front page goes on to claim the book is “an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites ... An abridgment taken from the Book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared.” More questions for Joseph Smith.

The next page was for Abbreviations of the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and other Abbreviations and Explanations. Again, more questions.

The next page is the Contents page. It includes: Introduction, Testimony of Three Witnesses, Testimony of Eight Witnesses, Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Brief Explanation, Illustrations, 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, Words of Mormon, Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, 4 Nephi, Mormon, Ether, Moroni, Pronunciation Guide, Index.

The Introduction page begins with these truth claims:

The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas and contains the fulness of the everlasting gospel.

Notice that Mormons believe *The Book of Mormon* is “comparable” to the Bible. The Introduction continues:

The book was written by many ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Their words, written on gold plates, were quoted and abridged by a prophet-historian named Mormon. The record gives an account of two great civilizations. One came from Jerusalem in

600 B.C. and afterward separated into two nations, known as the Nephites and the Lamanites. The other came much earlier when the Lord confounded the tongues at the Tower of Babel. This group is known as the Jaredites. After thousands of years, all were destroyed except the Lamanites, and they are among the ancestors of the American Indians.

How does Joseph Smith fit into The Book of Mormon?

After Mormon completed his writings, he delivered the account to his son Moroni, who added a few words of his own and hid up the plates in the Hill Cumorah. On September 21, 1823, the same Moroni, then a glorified, resurrected being, appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and instructed him relative to the ancient record and its destined translation into the English language.

In due course the plates were delivered to Joseph Smith, who translated them by the gift and power of God. The record is now published in many languages as a new and additional witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of the

living God and that all who will come unto Him and obey the laws and ordinances of His gospel may be saved.

Did Smith believe The Book of Mormon was “comparable” to the Bible or more “correct” than the Bible?

Concerning this record the Prophet Joseph Smith said: “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”

Members of the LDS depend on the accuracy of the translations and writings of their prophet. They also believe that *The Book of Mormon* is “the most correct of any book on earth.” Mormons believe the Bible is also the Word of God, “as far as it is translated correctly.” That is, by the way, the **eighth article of faith** in Mormonism.

The next page included “The Testimony of Three Witnesses” and “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses.”

*Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. **The Testimony of the Three Witnesses***

Three men are listed as the witnesses: Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris.

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has

the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken.

Eight men are listed as the witnesses: Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jun., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sen., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith.

The next page is **The Testimony Of The Prophet Joseph Smith**. Smith wrote that he was praying to “Almighty God” on the evening of September 21, 1823. Smith wrote that a light appeared in his room and increased “until the room was lighter than at noonday.” Smith wrote that “a personage” appeared at the side of his bed, “standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.” Smith described the personage as a robe “of most exquisite whiteness.” Smith wrote that the personage called him by name and said that God had sent him with a message. The name of the personage was *Moroni*.

He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; 'Also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted 'seers' in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.

Smith wrote that Moroni then left him and ascended “right up into heaven.” As Smith considered what had just happened, he wrote that his room became light again and “the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside.” Smith wrote Moroni told him about “great judgments which were coming upon the earth,” then ascended again. Smith wrote that as he “lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard,” Moroni appeared to him again. This time, as Smith testified, Moroni “added a caution to me, telling me that

Satan would try to tempt me ... to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich.” Smith wrote that “After this third visit, he again ascended into heaven as before.” Smith wrote that “the cock crowed” after Moroni ascended the third time.

Smith wrote that he rose from his bed and went outside to do his usual “labors of the day.” However, Smith testified that he lost strength and “fell helpless on the ground, and for a time was quite unconscious of anything.” Smith wrote that he heard a voice speaking to him and saw that it was Moroni. Smith testified that Moroni told him to tell his father what had happened. Smith wrote that his father told him “it was of God” and that he should do what the messenger had said. Smith testified that he went to the place where Moroni told him that he would find the golden plates. Smith wrote that he went to “a hill of considerable size” in an area “Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario county, New York,” and found the plates, “the Urim and Thummim, and the breastplate, as stated by the messenger.”

You can read a more complete account at [Joseph Smith—History](#) in the Pearl of Great Price.

The next section of the introduction to the Book of Mormon was called “A Brief Explanation About The Book Of Mormon.” I noted this interesting paragraph at the end of the explanation:

Some minor errors in the text have been perpetuated in past editions of the Book of Mormon. This edition contains corrections that seem appropriate to bring the material into conformity with prepublication manuscripts and early editions edited by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I look at the Illustrations, then move into the text Mormons ask me to read. It's often from 3 Nephi.

3 Nephi

The dates for the writing, as given in the text, were “About A.D. 34.” The location was somewhere in the Americas. I’ll share a few verses from each chapter so you’ll understand why I respond as I do.

And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marveling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place. And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death ... And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them: Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him. And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a

Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them. And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. 3 Nephi 11:1-2, 6-11

And it came to pass that as the disciples of Jesus were journeying and were preaching the things which they had both heard and seen, and were baptizing in the name of Jesus, it came to pass that the disciples were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting. And Jesus again showed himself unto them, for they

were praying unto the Father in his name; and Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said unto them: What will ye that I shall give unto you? And they said unto him: Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter. And the Lord said unto them: Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing? Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day. 3 Nephi 27:1-6

I tell the Mormons I'm speaking with that the chapters sound a little like the King James Bible, but that the words have been changed from the Bible. If *The Book of Mormon* is a "volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible," I would expect the translation of 3 Nephi to be comparable to the Bible. It isn't comparable, which raises serious questions for me about the truthfulness of Mormonism.

Christian Questions / Mormon Answers

Even though I've written about **Mormon beliefs** many times before, I want to look at the religion from the aspect of questioning Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of the LDS church (Latter-Day Saints). Smith lived in the early part of the 19th century (1805-1844). Though I can't question him directly, I can question his writings and those who follow and share his teachings.

I mentioned in the last chapter that Mormon missionaries often ask me to read portions of *The Book of Mormon*, which I do. In fact, I've read the entire book, along with other writings of Joseph Smith (e.g. *Pearl of Great Price*, *Doctrines and Covenants*, *Jospeh Smith Translation of the Bible*). Reading Smith's writings always raises multiple questions. Though the words had a similar sound to the King James Bible (e.g. thee, thou, etc), the words in the BOM (Book of Mormon) had been changed, rearranged, or added to the original text of the Bible. Mormons believe the Bible is the Word of God, "as far as it is translated correctly." I'll address that in a few minutes.

The early questions I raise to Mormons comes from an investigative process I call PPT — People, Places, Things. That's the process I used when I was an atheist investigating the Bible. I would not have continued investigating the reliability of the Bible if it had not passed the PPT test. That's how important it is in determining truth.

The PPT test is simple. As you read through pages in a document, especially one that purports to be historically accurate, make a note every time a person, place, or thing is mentioned. Then, research each one to see if there is any extra-source document or historical/anthropological/geographical/archaeological finding that supports the source claim. That's what I did with the Bible. Because I found extra-biblical material that supported the PPT claims in the Bible, I kept reading. I found the Bible to be reliable in the areas of history, anthropology, geography, and archaeology. While that alone did not lead to my believing in God, it led me to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he wrote —

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time ... Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did

not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 12-19

The Apostle Paul, who was an enemy of Jesus and his disciples, became a disciple of Jesus Christ after a miraculous encounter with the risen Lord. The arch enemy of Christ became an apostle of Christ because of seeing Jesus for himself. Paul (Saul) knew that Jesus had died on a Roman cross. Paul lived in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death. Paul was zealous in his efforts to arrest and punish the early followers of Jesus Christ. The fact that Paul became a follower of Jesus is a powerful witness in itself. Then there are hundreds of other people who also saw Jesus after He rose from the dead. Eye-witness testimony is often considered direct evidence in a trial, especially this type of eye-witness testimony. People actually saw the risen Jesus, talked with

Him, touched Him, ate with Him, etc. That's direct evidence to the reality that Jesus rose from the dead.

I tell Mormons that *The Book of Mormon* does not pass the PPT test. I can't find the extra-source support (e.g. historical, anthropological, geographical, or archaeological) for the people, places, and things listed in the book. Part of the anthropological aspect is that DNA evidence doesn't support the Mormon belief that native Americans were descendants of the Jews. I'm always careful to research the writings of Mormon scholars and scientists to see what they say in answer to these questions. I'll share their findings as our series continues.

Mormon missionaries usually tell me that they don't have answers to my questions, but that they rely on the *feeling* they receive from God's Spirit that tell them *The Book of Mormon* is true. Some have told me that rather than rely on physical evidence, I should look to God for spiritual testimony to the truth of *The Book of Mormon* and other Mormon writings. I tell them that the spiritual testimony I have from God is that

Mormon writings are not true. That's the spiritual *feeling* I have after reading *The Book of Mormon*.

Trying to depend on *feelings* instead of what's **objectively true** is a big problem. Why? Because lots of people from various and often conflicting religions say they have *feelings* about their religion being true. I share with Mormons the example of people with varying worldviews climbing a tall spiritual mountain from different sides with conflicting beliefs, only to arrive at the top and learn they had all reached the same position even with beliefs that conflict. I ask them if they think that's logical or reasonable.

I continue by pointing to the logic that Jesus and His apostles used in presenting a seamless message about God's promises from the Old Testament to the New Testament. One of the primary promises is the one God made to Eve in the Garden of Eden following her disobedience to God's command.

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:15

We can follow the “Seed” throughout the Bible to the virgin birth of Jesus. Jesus came from Heaven to earth for many reasons, but one of them was to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). That hearkens back to God’s promise in Genesis 3:15. After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples and taught them that what had happened to Him was part of His fulfilling Scripture —

Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Luke 24:44-45

Jesus taught His disciples God's Word throughout their time together. He even told them they were going to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed and killed —

Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again. Matthew 20:17-19

Jesus was a true Prophet. After His death and resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples and went deeper into how He was God's fulfillment of the Seed promise. When Thomas doubted that Jesus had really raised from the dead, the disciples didn't ask Thomas to believe based on *feelings*. They presented their eye-witness testimony – “We have seen the Lord” (Matthew 20:25). Thomas said he would not believe “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side.” What did Jesus do? He appeared to Thomas eight days

later and said – “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (Matthew 20:27). Jesus presented Thomas with direct evidence. Thomas answered and said, “My Lord and my God!” (Matthew 20:28)

Peter did not appeal to *spiritual feeling* when he preached in the streets of Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. He appealed to the evidence from the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 2). The same with the Apostle Paul when he spoke in Jewish synagogues across the Roman world —

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ. Acts 17:2-3

As I look at any religious text (as I did in *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality*), my primary interest is in supportive evidence rather than how religious people *feel* about their religion. Mormons want me to have faith in the translations of Joseph Smith even when there's little to no evidence to support it. If something is true, there will almost always be evidential support.

People, Places, Things

Mormons ask me to depend on spiritual *feelings* to believe in the teachings of Joseph Smith even when evidence is lacking or contradictory. As a career journalist, I find that very troubling.

I use a variety of proven investigative techniques when researching truth claims. Mormons claim that The Book of Mormon is the “most correct of any book on earth.” However, that claim doesn’t hold up under careful investigation. Even Mormon scholars struggle with the lack of evidence or contradictory evidence to the writings of Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of Mormonism.

PPT stands for *People, Places, Things*. It’s a simple investigative process of searching for evidence of truth claims concerning whether people, places, and things existed at a particular time. I used PPT as an atheist while investigating the truth claims of the Bible. The Bible held up very well during the investigation, which kept me searching for the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

Joseph Smith believed and taught that native Americans (Indians) are descendants of the Jews who left Jerusalem in 600 BC and sailed to the Americas. Smith wrote that *The Book of Mormon* “is a record of God’s dealings with ancient inhabitants of the Americas.” Is that true? What’s the evidence that supports the claim?

Here’s another truth claim from *The Book of Mormon* that Joseph Smith translated —

The book was written by many ancient prophets by the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Their words, written on gold plates, were quoted and abridged by a prophet-historian named Mormon. The record gives an account of two great civilizations. One came from Jerusalem in 600 B.C. and afterward separated into two nations, known as the Nephites and the Lamanites. The other came much earlier when the Lord confounded the tongues at the Tower of Babel. This group is known as the Jaredites. After thousands of years, all were destroyed except the Lamanites, and they are among the

ancestors of the American Indians. The Book of Mormon, 1981, 2013 copyrights

The current copyrights for the copy of *The Book of Mormon* I have are 1981 and 2013. The original publication copyright is 1830. That means more than 150 years between the original publication and the current copyrights. The first copy of *The Book of Mormon* that I read was published before 1981 and some of the words in the translation have since changed. For example, the current BOM (*Book of Mormon*) uses the phrase “they are among the ancestors of the American Indians.” The earlier translation I read stated – “they are the principle ancestors of the American Indians.” There is a big difference between a people being “principle ancestors” to being “among the ancestors.” Why would the Mormon church make that change in its “most correct of any book on earth”?

The headquarters for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, Mormons) is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. The following is from an article that ran in the [Salt Lake Tribune](#) in November 2007.

*Many Mormons, including several church presidents, have taught that the Americas were largely inhabited by Book of Mormon peoples. In 1971, Church President Spencer W. Kimball said that Lehi, the family patriarch, was 'the ancestor of all of the Indian and Mestizo tribes in North and South and Central America and in the islands of the sea.' After testing the DNA of more than 12,000 Indians, though, most researchers have concluded that the continent's early inhabitants came from Asia across the Bering Strait. With this change, the LDS Church is 'conceding that mainstream scientific theories about the colonization of the Americas have significant elements of truth in them,' said Simon Southerton, a former Mormon and author of *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA and the Mormon Church*. 'DNA has revealed very clearly how closely related American Indians are to their Siberian ancestors,' Southerton said in an e-mail from his*

home in Canberra, Australia. ‘The Lamanites are invisible, not principal ancestors.’

If true, that might help explain the **change in wording** for the current publication of *The Book of Mormon*. How do we discover the truth? One way is scientific investigation. Many Mormon scientists have investigated and found some of the claims untrue or at least scientifically doubtful. A Mormon attorney shared his concerns this way —

‘It’s very difficult. It is almost traumatizing,’ said Jose Aloayza, a Midvale, Utah, attorney and Peruvian native who likened facing this new reality to staring into a spiritual abyss. ‘It’s that serious, that real. I’m almost here feeling I need an apology. Our prophets should have known better. That’s the feeling I get’ (‘DNA Results Challenge Core Mormon Beliefs,’ Local News, Seattle Times, Aug. 14, 2004).

Faith vs Evidence

This quote from a Mormon scientist and scholar is interesting given the pressure of believing the writings of Joseph Smith even when the evidence to support them is compromised.

A spiritual witness is the only way to know the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Although DNA studies have made links between Native Americans and Asians, these studies in no way invalidate the Book of Mormon despite the loud voices of detractors (“A Few Thoughts From A Believing DNA Scientist,” by John M. Butler, Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, vol. 12, no. 1, 2003, p. 36).

Dr. Butler is a **leading expert** on forensic DNA profiling. He knows that DNA evidence contradicts many of the truth claims in the writings of Joseph Smith. However, Dr. Butler is able to set aside the evidence against the writings of Joseph Smith and choose “a spiritual witness” as his way of knowing the

truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Why would a scientist and scholar come to that conclusion?

In light of Dr. Butler's quote in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* that a "spiritual witness is the only way to know the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, " I found this quote from him to be insightful —

Scholarship comes from a desire to master information on a particular subject and involves intense study with careful attention to detail. The depths of a topic under investigation are plumbed through diligent research and hard work. Often after a great deal of effort, the final product is usually a scholarly publication or presentation. Having gone through this process many, many times in my professional career on numerous topics, I would suggest that a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is subject to the same requirements: desire, diligence, and devotion to data collection and analysis, and the due process of time. For those with a desire to learn, the data are available. And most importantly, the Source is citable — "by the power of the Holy Ghost, [you] may know the

truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). Dr. John Butler, Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, 2010

The two quotes appear to be contradictory. Dr. Butler wrote of going through the “scholarly” process many times, yet believes in documents that are contradictory to his own findings as a forensic DNA profiler. I question the kind of scholarship that can look at evidence that contradicts a belief, yet continue to believe the belief. That would seem to be an example of “faith without evidence.”

Here are other Mormon (and former Mormon) scholars and scientists who have written about the subject —

While perhaps affording revisionist Book of Mormon studies a veneer of scientific respectability, these apologetic efforts to reinvent Lamanite identity face some formidable challenges . . . (“Reinventing Lamanite Identity,” by Brent Lee Metcalfe, Sunstone, March 2004, p. 20).

In contrast to this account, data from numerous molecular population genetic studies suggest that the ancestors of extant Native Americans came from Siberia. No genetic evidence specifically supports the hypothesis that Native Americans descended from Middle Eastern populations (“Now What,” by Trent D. Stephens, Sunstone, March 2004, p. 26).

With the significant number of studies that have already been conducted concerning the genetic profiles of extant Native American populations, it does not seem likely that additional studies of this kind will present new data that differ significantly from that already accumulated (“Now What?,” by Trent D. Stephens, Sunstone, March 2004, p. 27).

Our perspective is that of active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who view the Book of Mormon as an accurate, correct account of actual historic events that occurred on the American continent. We are also biologists. . . . As biologists we accept the published data dealing with Native American origins and view those

data as reasonably representing American-Asian connections. . . .

*We propose that . . . the children of Lehi . . . [act] as leaven with bread. The leaven is, of necessity, only a small ingredient in bread, not the bread itself. We propose that the children of Lehi are the leaven of the Abrahamic covenant in the New World, unlikely to be detected by genetic analysis of modern New World inhabitants (“Who Are the Children of Lehi?” by D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2003, p. 38).*

*The data accumulated to date indicate that 99.6 percent of Native American genetic markers studied so far exhibit Siberian connections” (*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2003, p. 41).*

Folk biological claims of an Israelite ancestry, a curse with a dark skin, and a whitening of dark-skinned Native American and Polynesian Mormons fail to stand up to scrutiny among scientifically literate Latter-day Saints (“Genetic Research a ‘Galileo Event’ for Mormons,” by Thomas W. Murphy and Simon Southerton, Anthropology News, February 2003, p. 20).

*From a scientific perspective, the Book of Mormon’s origin is best situated in early nineteenth-century America, . . . The Book of Mormon emerged from an antebellum perspective, out of a frontier American people’s struggle with their god, and not from an authentic American Indian perspective (“Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics,” by Thomas W. Murphy, in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, Signature Books, 2002, p. 68).*

*Anthropologists and archaeologists, including some Mormons and former Mormons, have discovered little to support the existence of these civilizations. Over a period of 150 years, as scholars have seriously studied Native American cultures and prehistory, evidence of a Christian civilization in the Americas has eluded the specialists. In Mesoamerica, which is regarded by Mormon scholars to be the setting of the Book of Mormon narrative, research has uncovered cultures where the worship of multiple deities and human sacrifice were not uncommon. These cultures lack any trace of Hebrew or Egyptian writing, metallurgy, or the Old World domesticated animals and plants described in the Book of Mormon (*Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church*, Simon Southerton, Signature Books, 2004, Introduction, p. xiv-xv).*

*In fact, the DNA lineages of Central America resemble those of other Native American tribes throughout the two continents. Over 99 percent of the lineages found among native groups from this region are clearly of Asian descent. Modern and ancient DNA sample tested from among the Maya generally fall into the major founding lineage classes . . . The Mayan Empire has been regarded by Mormons to be the closest to the people of the Book of Mormon because its people were literate and culturally sophisticated. However, leading New World anthropologists, including those specializing in the region, have found the Maya to be similarly related to Asians (*Losing a Lost Tribe*, pp. 190-191).*

The Brethren no doubt recognize that to change the way Mormons think about the Book of Mormon would bring disruption and turmoil and risk undermining the foundation on which many people have based their religious convictions. . . . Millions of members feel a familial bond with Father Lehi, an emotion that frequently plays a central role in people's conversion to the church. The General Authorities are aware of just how deep-

seated and crucial these feelings are in the processes of conversion and retention ([Losing a Lost Tribe](#), p. 206).

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*It came as no surprise to most scientists to learn that the DNA of living indigenous Americans was most homologous with the DNA of Asians. Well before the structure of DNA had been determined, the Asian source had been accepted through the steady accumulation of over a century's worth of research from many disciplines. It was, and still is, widely accepted that the first waves of colonization occurred around or before 14,000 years ago from Siberia by way of the Bering Strait (*Losing a Lost Tribe*, p. 73).*

Simon Southerton, a plant geneticist, . . . resigned his position as bishop and withdrew his church membership. In Mar 2000, he published the story of his disillusionment on the Internet. [<http://www.exmormon.org/whyift125.htm>] He ‘failed to find anything that supported migration of Jewish people before Columbus’ and found “no reliable scientific evidence supporting migrations from the Middle East to the New World.’ . . . Investigation of mitochondrial DNA of more than 5,500 living Native Americans reveals that 99.4% can be traced back to Asia primarily via maternal lineages known as A, B, C, D and X. Only 0.6% came from Africa or Europe, most likely after 1492. Lineages A through D are only found in Asia. While the X lineage also is found in Europe and the Middle East, Asian and American lineages have distinctive markers that indicate an ancient separation long before the events described in the Book of Mormon. Similar results from nearly 1,000 paternal lineages substantiate a Northeast Asian origin of American Indians. Likewise, approximately 99% of the Polynesians surveyed to date can trace their maternal lineages back to Southeast Asia.

The other 1% almost certainly came from Europe in the recent past.

Book of Mormon Geography

Church leadership officially and consistently distances itself from issues regarding Book of Mormon geography in order to focus attention on the spiritual message of the book ... Church leaders have generally declined to give any opinion on issues of Book of Mormon geography.

BYU Book of Mormon Geography

Most Mormon missionaries I've talked with through the years answer my questions about evidence that questions or contradicts *The Book of Mormon* and other writings of Joseph Smith (e.g. Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants) by saying that the writings focus primarily on the "spiritual message."

Many other religions say the same thing when questioned about lack of evidence or contradictory evidence for their sacred writings from history, anthropology, geography, or archaeology. Saying that a person should ignore evidence for a spiritual message is not helpful for many people, like myself.

When asked to review a map showing the supposed landing place of Lehi's company, President Joseph F. Smith declared that the "Lord had not yet revealed it" (Cannon, p. 160 n.). In 1929, Anthony W. Ivins, counselor in the First Presidency, added, "There has never been anything yet set forth that definitely settles that question [of Book of Mormon geography].... We are just waiting until we discover the truth" (CR, Apr. 1929, p. 16).

That response from Mormon leaders brings us to the issue of Mormon apologists. How do scholar apologists of Mormonism deal with questions of evidence concerning the writing and teaching of Joseph Smith.

Mormon Apologists

What do you think of when you hear the word “apologist?” Some people think it means a person who apologizes for their beliefs, but that’s not the meaning of the word. The word comes from the Greek word *apologia* (ἀπολογία), which means “a verbal defense, a speech in defense, a well-reasoned reply.” The Apostle Paul used the word many times in his speeches and letters.

Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.

Acts 22:1

My defense to those who examine me is this: 1

Corinthians 9:3

... just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. Philippians 1:7

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. Philippians 1:15-17

God appointed Paul “for the defense of the gospel.” Paul was often in prison “in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” When people accused or questioned Paul, he gave them a well-reasoned speech in defense of what he believed. Defending verbally or in writing what we believe is the purpose of apologetics.

What then about Mormon apologists? If the official position of their church leadership is to officially and consistently distance itself “from issues regarding Book of Mormon geography in order to focus attention on the spiritual message of the book,” then what is the need for apologists in Mormonism?

Here is an official position of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints concerning *The Book of Mormon* geography

—

The Book of Mormon includes a history of an ancient people who migrated from the Near East to the Americas. This history contains information about the places they lived, including descriptions of landforms, natural features, and the distances and cardinal directions between important points. The internal consistency of these descriptions is one of the striking features of the Book of Mormon.


Since the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, members and leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have expressed numerous opinions about the specific locations of the events discussed in the book. Some believe that the history depicted in the Book of Mormon—with the exception of the events in the Near East—occurred in North America, while others believe that it occurred in Central America or South America. Although Church members continue to discuss

*such theories today, the Church's only position is that the events the Book of Mormon describes took place in the ancient Americas. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints***

What did Joseph Smith believe about the geography of The Book of Mormon?

The Prophet Joseph Smith himself accepted what he felt was evidence of Book of Mormon civilizations in both North America and Central America. While traveling with Zion's Camp in 1834, Joseph wrote to his wife Emma that they were "wandering over the plains of the Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book of Mormon, roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls and their bones, as a proof of its divine authenticity."¹ In 1842, the Church newspaper Times and Seasons published articles under Joseph Smith's editorship that identified the ruins of ancient native civilizations in Mexico and Central America as further evidence of the Book of Mormon's historicity.

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What do church leaders think about that?

*The Church does not take a position on the specific geographic locations of Book of Mormon events in the ancient Americas. Speculation on the geography of the Book of Mormon may mislead instead of enlighten; such a study can be a distraction from its divine purpose. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints***

Notice that the official position of Mormon leaders is that a study on the geography of the Book of Mormon “may mislead instead of enlighten” and could be “a distraction from its divine purpose.” While that might appear to hamper attempts by Mormon apologists to “defend” (*apologia*) the Book of Mormon and other sayings and writings of Joseph Smith, it depends what type of defense Mormons use.

Types of apologetics range from Fideism and Presuppositionalism to Classical apologetics and Evidentialism.

- Fideism is basically faith that is independent of or even opposed to reason. A fideist would say that a person should not look to evidence for religious belief.
- Presuppositionalism begins with a *presupposition* that God exists, that He is the God of the Bible, and that all truth comes from God
- Classical apologetics is the process of proving theism, then Christianity. I came from atheism to Christianity by way of Classical apologetics – theistic arguments followed by Christian evidences,
- Evidentialism is the process of using evidence to prove the truth claims of theism and Christianity.

There are several other types of apologetic methods, but these four help us understand the range of thinking in defending a particular religious perspective or worldview.

It's interesting to note that Mormons often refer to C.S. Lewis, a leading Christian apologist, when talking or writing about apologetics.

C.S. Lewis pointed out that since enemies have invoked 'science' or 'reason' to attack faith, it may now be necessary that someone respond in the same vein.

Mormonism and Apologetics

Some Mormons believe that apologetics is a waste of time since religion can't be proven. However, some Mormon scholars have spoken to these concerns. Here are responses from Mormon scholars Dallin H. Oaks and Neal A. Maxwell —

The lack of decisive scientific proofs of scriptural truths does not preclude gospel defenders from counterarguments of that nature. When opponents attack the Church or its doctrines with so-called proofs, loyal defenders will counter with material of a comparable nature to defend.

*There will be a convergence of discoveries (never enough, mind you, to remove the need for faith) to make plain and plausible what the modern prophets have been saying all along...[I] do not expect incontrovertible proof to come in this way..., but neither will the Church be outdone by hostile or pseudo-scholars. **Mormonism and Apologetics***

As I've mentioned before, Mormon missionaries admit that they don't have answers to most of my questions about evidence that supports the truth claims of Mormonism – especially in the areas of history, geography, anthropology, and archaeology. However, they often point me to the writings and videos of Mormon apologists. One of the recommended apologists is Hugh Nibley (1910-2005). He was a Mormon scholar who taught at Brigham Young University (BYU) for almost 50 years. Some commentators have said that while B.H. Roberts was the greatest Mormon apologist of the first half of the 20th century, **Hugh Nibley** was foremost during the second half.

In the last chapter about questioning Joseph Smith, we looked at Mormon apologetics about geographical evidence for the *Book of Mormon* in light of the official LDS church position- “The Church does not take a position on the specific geographic locations of Book of Mormon events in the ancient Americas. Speculation on the geography of the Book of Mormon may mislead instead of enlighten; such a study can be a distraction from its divine purpose” ([Book of Mormon Geography](#))

Here’s another perspective from an archaeologist and professor of anthropology at Brigham Young University —

The Book of Mormon must be the final and most important arbiter in deciding the correctness of a given geography; otherwise we will be forever hostage to the shifting sands of expert opinion. [John Clark](#)

As a believing Mormon and practicing Mesoamerican archaeologist, I’m frequently questioned by strangers and neighbors about physical evidence and proofs of the Book of Mormon. I try to dissuade both friends and foes

alike from going down this path, because absolute proof is a logical and philosophical impossibility. I have frequently made three claims that may at first glance appear at odds: (1) archaeological evidence will never prove or disprove the truth or falsity of the Book of Mormon, (2) the amount of physical evidence that potentially corroborates claims in the Book of Mormon has increased as a function of more and better archaeology, and (3) evidence gets interpreted according to one's prior belief or disbelief in the book. Belief is sight, and disbelief is blindness. This is a well-known social and psychological phenomenon not limited to religious, political, or scientific topics, and I will not explore it further. Antecedent beliefs account for most of the shouting about the Book of Mormon I have read or heard (except for that by disgruntled or excommunicated Mormons). Belief of some sort precedes any parade of evidence, and believers of all stripes tend to see what they look for. John Clark

Book of Mormon Geography

The Book of Mormon covers thousands of years of human history, which includes the locations of where those humans lived. The Book of Ether begins at the Tower of Babel with the family of Jared traveling to “the land of promise” (Ether 2:7). The estimated dates would be during the third millennium BC. The Jaredites landed somewhere in the Americas about 600 B.C. The question for both families is “where.”

Here are some of the primary **location models** for the Book of Mormon —

- Mesoamerican Model
- Limited Mesoamerican Model
- Hemispheric Model
- Central American Model
- Hourglass Model
- North American Model
- Heartland Model

- Limited Geography Model (aka Hinterland Model)
- Western New York Model
- Malaysia Model

The large number of models for where the Jaredites and Nephites landed in the *New World* after sailing west from the *Old World* demonstrates the challenges Mormon apologists have in defending the historical authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*.

Two of the top Mormon apologists of the 20th century were B.H. Roberts and Hugh Nibley. What were their positions on geographical evidence for the *Book of Mormon*?

Let's begin with Brigham Henry Roberts. Roberts was born in 1857 and died in 1933. He was a historian and leader in the LDS church for many years. While standing by the authority of the Book of Mormon, Roberts also listed many problems with and arguments that can be made against the Book of Mormon.

Recently, that faith has been drawn into question in the minds of some people. This is because of a set of papers about the Book of Mormon which B. H. Roberts wrote in 1922. In these papers, Elder Roberts bluntly lists many Book of Mormon “problems” and raises many arguments that he contemplated could be made against the Book of Mormon. He wrote a series of essays in the early part of the 20th century that were later compiled into Studies of the Book of Mormon and published decades after his death.

*This [power of the Holy Ghost] must ever be the chief source of evidence for the truth of the Book of Mormon. All other evidence is secondary to this, the primary and infallible. No arrangement of evidence, however skilfully ordered; no argument, however adroitly made, can ever take its place; for this witness of the Holy Spirit to the soul of man for the truth of the Nephite volume of scripture, is God’s evidence to the truth; and will ever be the chief reliance of those who accept the Book of Mormon, and expect to see its acceptance extended throughout the world. **B.H. Roberts: Seeker After Truth***

Hugh Nibley was born in 1910 and died in 2005. He was a life-long Mormon and a professor at BYU for almost 50 years.

Hugh W. Nibley's defining statement on Book of Mormon geography was published in 1957:

It is our conviction that proof of the Book of Mormon does lie in Central America, but until the people who study that area can come to some agreement among themselves as to what they have found, the rest of us cannot very well start drawing conclusions. (An Approach to the Book of Mormon, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, 6:442)

Hugh Nibley and the Book of Mormon Geography

What did Joseph Smith think about the locations for the *Book of Mormon*?

The Prophet Joseph Smith himself accepted what he felt was evidence of Book of Mormon civilizations in both North America and Central America. While traveling with Zion's Camp in 1834, Joseph wrote to his wife Emma that they were "wandering over the plains of the

Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book of Mormon, roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls and their bones, as a proof of its divine authenticity.” In 1842, the Church newspaper Times and Seasons published articles under Joseph Smith’s editorship that identified the ruins of ancient native civilizations in Mexico and Central America as further evidence of the Book of Mormon’s historicity. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Notice that Joseph Smith referred to the potential direct evidence of human skulls and bones and claiming them as “a proof of its divine authenticity.” He also wrote about wandering over “the plains of the Nephites” and recounting “the history of the Book of Mormon.” Smith also referred to “roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord.” Those statements alone by the founding prophet of Mormonism open the door to serious questions concerning the anthropology and geography of the people and lands mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*. Smith pointed to the Nephites, their bones

and their lands, as being “proof” of the divine authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*.

City and Land Areas in the Book of Mormon

The *Book of Mormon* lists the names of many cities and areas. Those names should be helpful to geographers and archaeologists looking for those ancient places, but have they helped? It doesn't appear they have. Keep in mind that according to the Book of Mormon millions of people lived in the New World who came from the families of Jared and Nephi. They reportedly lived in the Americas over a period of about 25-hundred years. They built large and small cities and traveled thousands of miles during their journeys. They cooked hundreds of millions (possibly billions) of meals and fought battles where millions of fighters and their families died. We might expect a lot of geographical and archaeological evidence to support their living in the Americas, but little has been found. Here is a short list of the names of the cities and land areas that you'll find in the *Book of Mormon*.

- Antiparah
- Middoni
- Cumeni
- Hill Amnihu
- Hill Riplah
- Moroniha
- Land of Jershon
- Antionum
- Morianton
- Siron
- Amulon
- Onihah
- Middoni
- Hermounts Wilderness
- Valley of Alma
- Manti
- Moron

- Heth
- Jashon
- Waters of Ripliacum
- Zarahemla
- Hill Onidah
- Nephihah
- Moroni
- Mulek
- Tower of Sherrizah
- Land Bountiful
- City of Bountiful
- Gid
- Plains of Agosh
- Zeezrom
- Land of Nephi
- City of Nephi
- Waters of Sebus

- Nehor
- Ablom

That is a short list, but gives you some idea of the places geographers and archaeologists can search for the “proof” Smith pointed to in his writings. The question about where those places may be located depends on the location model one accepts as best. Here are two maps with different location models in mind.

Map One

Map Two

Conclusion Concerning Geography

I've mentioned previously how I used the PPT system (People, Places, Things) to investigate the truth claims of the Bible when I was an atheist. The fact that history, geography, and archaeology supported those claims so well kept me searching the Bible for truth. If, as an atheist, I had used that same criteria for the *Book of Mormon*, I would not have continued my search. The supporting evidence is not there. Mormon missionaries and friends often remind me that what's important about the *Book of Mormon* is the spiritual message, but any religion could say the same thing. There has to be more evidence into a truth claim than just the way someone *feels* about an ancient text or spiritual message.

The Book of Mormon presents itself as a document of history, geography, and anthropology. Therefore, it should have ample supporting evidence for its claims to legitimacy.

Joseph Smith and the Bible

I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” History of the Church, 4:461

According to church history Joseph Smith made that statement to a group of Mormon leaders on November 28, 1841. Smith was the founding prophet of Mormonism and the translator of the *Book of Mormon*. Smith believed the *Book of Mormon* was even more correct than the Bible. Is that true? Is the Book of Mormon more correct than the Bible?

There are many things in the Bible which do not, as they now stand, accord with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to me. Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 310

Look at these words carefully. Joseph Smith is judging the validity of the Bible based on personal revelations he received from God. True or false? Did the Holy Spirit give Smith a revelation of God's Word that's different than the revelation He gave to the prophets and apostles? Keep these two things in mind:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. Hebrews 1:1-2

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. Ephesians 2:19-20

How did Joseph Smith re-translate the Bible? Here's an explanation from the [BYU Religious Studies Center](#) —

In June 1830, Joseph Smith began working on what we now call the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST). The Prophet and his contemporaries called it the New Translation, as it is also named in a revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 124:89). Beginning with Genesis, the Prophet worked his way through every part of the Bible, revising existing text and adding new material by inspiration from God. He left behind 446 pages of manuscripts of the New Translation, as well as his printed Bible on which he marked insertion and deletion points for the changes that are noted on the manuscripts. Joseph Smith's work on the Bible is one of the keystones of the Restoration and is a profound witness of the divinity of his prophetic calling. It is the source of much important revelation to the Church in the latter days. Two sections—Genesis 1–6 and Matthew 24—are canonized and included as scripture in the Pearl of Great Price (Book of Moses and Joseph Smith–Matthew). Throughout the pages of the New Translation,

there are passages that clarify and enlighten, making the Bible alive with inspired additions and rewordings.

The New Translation grows out of the King James Version. While the Prophet was working on the translation, he apparently had his King James Bible before him on the table or in his lap. He read from it to his scribes, who carefully recorded the words they heard from his lips. In some cases, he simply read the words as they were written on the page. In other cases, he spoke words that were different from what was printed, dictating revisions large and small and sometimes entire new passages with no corresponding parallel in his printed Bible. On some occasions, he simply stated the chapter and verse numbers, followed by a single word to be inserted.

Joseph Smith never told us the reason behind any particular change he made to the text of the Bible. Thus we can only speculate about the types of changes included in the New Translation. It is likely that a significant portion of the JST restores text that was once

in the Bible but later became lost. An angel told Nephi that many “plain and precious things” would be taken from the Bible before it would go forth to the world (1 Nephi 13:29), and thus it makes sense to assume that some lost text would be restored in the New Translation. The Prophet taught that truths were lost even before the Bible was compiled, so some JST corrections may reveal teachings or events that never were recorded in the Bible in the first place. In some places, Joseph Smith probably edited the text to bring it into harmony with truth found in other revelations or elsewhere in the Bible.

You have probably heard or read that Bible translations come from a careful comparison of ancient Hebrew and Greek texts. However, that is not the case in Joseph Smith’s re-translation of the King James Bible. Smith did not reference ancient texts. Instead, he made changes to the King James Version claiming divine inspiration to do so.

So, how does Smith's translation compare to the Greek text of the New Testament? Mormons tell me that the Greek texts were corrupted soon after the death of the apostles. However, we have copies of some of the Greek texts from the early part of the 2nd century AD. We also have sermons and writings from Church Fathers who were disciples of the apostles.

Some of those early Greek texts and sermons came from the Gospel of John. Here's an example of differences in the first verse of that Gospel. I've included the King James Version, the Joseph Smith Translation, the Stephanus Greek text used by the KJV translators, plus several texts that are older. You'll notice that every Greek text, no matter how old, is the same as the Stephanus. You'll also notice that Joseph Smith's translation of John 1:1 is far different than the Greek texts and the King James Version he used in his re-translation. Why would he have done that?

King James Bible

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Joseph Smith Translation

In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.

Stephanus and Greek Texts Based on Older Manuscripts

εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος (Stephanus Greek Text)

εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος (Scrivener Greek New Testament)

εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος (Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament)

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. (*SBL Greek New Testament*)

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. (*Tyndale House Greek New Testament*)

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος. (*Nestle Greek New Testament*)

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. (*RP Byzantine Majority Text*)

If you read Koine Greek, you'll see that the Greek words for "gospel," "preached," "through," and "son" are not in any of the ancient texts. I've read all of the available Greek texts of John 1:1 and none of them include those words. They were changed for some reason.

It's important to note here that Joseph Smith changed the Gospel that John preached from Jesus Christ being the Word and the Word being God (Jesus is God being a central message of the Gospel) – to the “gospel” being the word “preached through the Son” and that was “with the Son.” Smith added words to John 1:1 that changed the entire meaning of the Apostle John's opening truth claim. The Apostle John preached that Jesus Christ was God. Smith took that away from Jesus and simply made Him a preacher of the “gospel that was the word.” That's a huge change and should cause Christians great caution in trusting Smith's translation.

Most Correct?

It's interesting to note that Joseph Smith believed the *Book of Mormon* is "the most correct book of any on earth," but that the Bible is the Word of God only if you read the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). You may have noticed that most everything Mormons believe is based on the testimony of Joseph Smith. One Mormon missionary told me that Smith is the "lynchpin" of all Mormon beliefs. That may be true of Mormon beliefs, but I told him that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of all truth. Jesus is the Truth. The missionary said that Jesus Christ gave Joseph Smith new information, so Mormonism is based on what Jesus taught. Is that true? If it is, why so many differences and contradictions in what we read in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon and other translations of Joseph Smith? We've already seen that by looking at just one verse, John 1:1.

The **LDS 8th Article of Faith** reads — “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” What Mormons believe by “as far as it is translated correctly” is that Joseph Smith has to be the translator. They believe the Bible was corrupted hundreds of years ago, so only a prophet of God (Joseph Smith) could make it right again.

The teaching about the Bible by LDS leaders is important to understand. They carry on the teachings of Joseph Smith to the present day. One leader told a group of LDS teachers and seminary students that the Joseph Smith Translation (Inspired Version) is “a thousand times over the best Bible now existing on earth.” Think about that statement for a moment. A thousand times over the best Bible in existence? Really? Take a close look at the JST and you’ll see it’s just a mix of paraphrase (where Smith re-translated) and translation (where Smith left the KJV text unchanged). Can that “mix” be trusted as God’s Word to humanity?

Here's more of what church leaders teach about the Bible and the Joseph Smith Translation. It's very insightful into why there are so many differences between Christianity and Mormonism.

*The **Bible** has the words of prophets who testified of Jesus Christ. When people translated it, they changed or left out some important parts. That's why we believe the Bible is the word of God except for any errors or missing parts. The Book of Mormon also contains teachings of prophets. Joseph Smith translated it with Heavenly Father's help, so nothing was changed or left out. **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints***

The Book of Mormon is translated correctly because an unlearned man did it by the gift and power of God. It took him less than sixty translating days. The Bible abounds in errors and mistranslations, in spite of the fact that the most learned scholars and translators of the ages labored years on end over the manuscripts of antiquity to bring it forth ... The Joseph Smith Translation, or Inspired Version, is a thousand times over the best Bible now

existing on earth. It contains all that the King James Version does, plus pages of additions and corrections and an occasional deletion. It was made by the spirit of revelation, and the changes and additions are the equivalent of the revealed word in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. ... Certainly none of us should be troubled or feel inferior if we do not have a working knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was first written. Our concern is to be guided by the Spirit and to interpret the ancient word in harmony with latter-day revelation.' Bruce R. McConkie, '*The Bible: A Sealed Book*,' BYU speech given to LDS Seminary and Institute teachers

What shall we say then, concerning the Bible's being a sufficient guide? Can we rely upon it in its present known corrupted state, as being a faithful record of God's word?... Add all this imperfection [i.e., lost books and "mutilated, changed and corrupted" text] to the uncertainty of the translation, and who, in his right mind, could, for one moment suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? Who knows that even one

*verse of the Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original?’ Orson Pratt, Divine Authenticity of Book of Mormon, No. 3, ‘**The Bible and tradition, without further revelation, an insufficient guide***

From these statements of the Prophet we can ascertain more clearly the meaning of the eighth article of faith, part of which reads, ‘We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly’ (Articles of Faith 1:8). Here the word translated appears to be used in a broader sense to mean transmitted, which would include not only translation of languages but also copying, editing, deleting from, and adding to documents. The Bible has undergone a much more serious change than merely translation from one language to another. BYU Professor Robert J. Matthews, A Bible! A Bible!, Bookcraft Pubs, 1990

*The fragmentary nature of the biblical record and the errors in it, resulting from multiple transcriptions, translations, and interpretations, do not diminish our belief in it as the word of God ‘as far as it is translated correctly.’ Joseph Wirthlin, **Christians in Belief and Action**, Ensign, General Conference edition*

*Unlike the Bible, which passed through generations of copyists, translators, and corrupt religionists who tampered with the text, the Book of Mormon came from writer to reader in just one inspired step of translation. (Ezra Taft Benson, **The Book of Mormon – Keystone of Our Religion***

There should be no doubt after reading the words of Mormon leaders about the Bible that Christians should seriously question Smith’s “translation” of the Bible.

Critical Christians

Many Mormons wonder why Christians don't believe Mormons are also Christians. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said – “Some people erroneously believe that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members are not Christian. We have difficulty understanding why anyone could accept and promote an idea that is so far from the truth.” He went on to say –

Our beliefs and actions may differ from those of others, but we, as good Christians, do not criticize other religions or their adherents. ‘We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Wirthlin raises an interesting question. Should Christians “not criticize” other religions or their adherents? Are they “good Christians” if they don’t criticize other religions? My answer is simple – Christians should always criticize false teaching by false teachers. I say that based not on my personal opinion, but upon the guidance of God’s Word.

Christians should take their direction from the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles to write Scripture (Hebrews 1:1; Ephesians 2:20; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Jesus and His apostles warned disciples about **false teachers and their teaching** and today’s disciples should as well.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Matthew 7:15-16

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the

Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. 2 Peter 2:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ ... These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; aging waves of the sea, foaming up their own

shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Jude 1:4, 12-13

To “criticize” someone is to be critical about what they believe and teach. Christians should be critical of any and **all false teaching** (**Part Two of the False Teacher series**). Christian leaders have a responsibility to warn Christians about false teachers who want to draw people away from the Gospel (Acts 20:30). However, be sure your criticism is based on God’s Word rightly divided (1 Timothy 2:15). Do not criticize someone’s beliefs unless you have a solid understanding of what the Bible teaches and what it doesn’t.

Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:30-31

False teaching is so serious that the Apostle Paul announced a spiritual curse on false teachers and preachers. I often quote this to Mormon missionaries for discussion and warning purposes.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.
Galatians 1:8-9

The Apostle Peter joined with Paul in warning Christians –

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own

destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:14-18

How To Determine False Beliefs

One of the primary ways to determine whether someone's spiritual beliefs are true or false is to find out what they believe about Jesus Christ. If someone calls himself or herself a Christian but denies the truth about who the Bible says Jesus is, they are either not a Christian or they are ignorant about what the Bible teaches concerning Jesus. The apostles made that clear in their teaching.

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By

*this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.. 1
John 4:2-6*

If you know you're Bible well and are thoroughly convinced from the evidence of what it teaches about Jesus Christ, then you will know what kind of spirit a person has when you talk with them.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 2
Timothy 4:3-4*

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them

sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. Titus 1:10-16

Testing Mormonism

Mormonism can be tested. One test I mentioned earlier in this series concerns People, Places, Things (PPT). That deals with history, anthropology, geography, and archaeology. However, the best and surest test is to compare Mormon beliefs with the teachings of God's Word, the Holy Bible. Using the knowledge you have about what the Bible teaches concerning God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, test these Mormon beliefs – starting with Joseph Smith.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!!! ... We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil, so that you may see. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345)

Christ was begotten by an immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers” ... “There is nothing figurative about his paternity; he was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural

course of events (Mormon Doctrine, 1966, p. 547 & 742, Bruce McConkie, LDS First Council of the Seventy)

Our Father in heaven, according to the Prophet, had a Father, and since there has been a condition of this kind through all eternity, each Father had a Father (Doctrines of Salvation, 2:47, LDS President Joseph Fielding Smith)

God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy Man, an immortal personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about his paternity, he was begotten, conceived, and born in the normal and natural course of events, for he is the son of God, and that designation means what it says (Mormon Doctrine, 1979, p. 742, under Son of God).

The birth of the Savior was a natural occurrence unattended with any degree of mysticism, and the Father God was the literal parent of Jesus in the flesh as well as

in the spirit (Religious Truths Defined, p. 44, quoting LDS President Joseph Fielding Smith)

The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood – was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers (Journal of Discourses, v.8, p. 115, LDS President Brigham Young)

Now, remember from this time forth, and for ever, that Jesus Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost (Journal of Discourses, vol. 1, p. 51, LDS President Brigham Young)

The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ (see D&C 93:21). He is thus our elder brother (see Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 26). Our spirits resemble our heavenly parents although they have resurrected bodies. We have inherited the potential to develop their divine qualities. If we choose to do so, we can become perfect, just as they are (Gospel Principles, 1978, p. 9)

Jesus became a God and reached His great state of understanding through consistent effort and continuous obedience to all the Gospel truths and universal laws (The Gospel Through the Ages, General Authority, Milton R. Hunter, p. 15).

Mormon doctrine teaches that God the Father “has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (Doctrine & Covenants 130:22, LDS scripture)

The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind (The Gospel Through the Ages, 1945, p. 15)

God used to be a man on another planet. (Mormon Doctrine, p. 321; Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, vol. 7, p. 333)

God resides near a star called Kolob. (Mormon Doctrine, p. 428; Pearl of Great Price, p. 34-35)

Implicit in the Christian verity that all men are the spirit children of an Eternal Father is the usually unspoken truth that they are also the offspring of an Eternal Mother. An exalted and glorified Man of Holiness (Moses 6:57) could not be a Father unless a Woman of like glory, perfection, and holiness was associated with him as a Mother (Mormon Doctrine, 1977 ed., p. 516)

Does any of this correspond to the Word of God? I hope your answer is an emphatic “no!” God was not as we are now. He is not an exalted man. He was not a man on another planet. God does not have a body of flesh and bones like a man’s. Jesus is not spirit child of an Eternal Father and Mother who have resurrected bodies. Jesus is not the spirit brother of Satan. Jesus did not become “a God” through consistent effort and continuous obedience to all the Gospel truths and universal laws. We did not inherit the potential to develop God’s divine qualities and become perfect as God is perfect.

If you do agree with what the Mormon teachers teach, please read the Bible again. You won't find those teachings in the Bible. You may find those teachings in other religious writings, but not in the Bible.

True or False

I believe in objective truth – it corresponds with reality and facts. If you don't believe in objective truth, then you hold to the idea of subjective truth – it doesn't have to correspond with reality or facts. I wanted you to know that so you'll understand this statement.

Mormonism is either true or it is not. That's an objective statement. That's thinking that corresponds with reality and facts. A subjective statement would be that Mormonism may be true for you but not for me. That's thinking that does not correspond with reality or facts.

I can say the same thing about theism and Christianity. God exists or He doesn't. Christianity is true or it isn't. That's objective thinking. It corresponds with reality and facts. To say that God may exist for you but not for me is illogical. To say that Christianity is true for me but not true for you is also illogical. Truth is truth – all the time.

So, what about the question of whether the teachings of Joseph Smith are true or false? I have some theories about that.

Three Theories About Joseph Smith

1. Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God and all that he taught was true.
2. Joseph Smith is not a true prophet of God. He made up the translations to deceive and control people. What he taught was not true.
3. Joseph Smith is not a true prophet of God. He was deceived by angels. What he taught was not true.

You may have some other theories, but those are the three that are prominent in my thinking based on years of research and talking with Mormons.

#1 — Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God and all that he taught was true.

A lot of people today and in the past have claimed to be prophets of God. Should we believe them because they claim(ed) to be prophet of God or is there a way of testing them to see if they are of God?

We can test them! In fact, God wants us to test people who claim to speak for Him.

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that

prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. Deuteronomy 13:1-6

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’— when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. Deuteronomy 18:20-22

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Matthew 7:15-20

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! .. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of

righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15

Being a true prophet of God is difficult to maintain if God is not really speaking through you. If you are mistaken in one area of your prophecies, you are not a true prophet. Read the prophets in the Old Testament and see how easily prophets become false prophets. Here's just one example —

Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' And the Lord said to me, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land'—'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! Jeremiah 14:13-15

Did Joseph Smith make any errors in his prophecies? He did – many – as we've mentioned in earlier parts of this series. That means he was not a true prophet of God, which makes him a false prophet. That means all who follow Smith's prophetic teachings and writings are following a false prophet. Not a good place to be if you want to follow God.

#2 — Joseph Smith is not a true prophet of God. He made up the translations to deceive and control people. What he taught was not true.

Most everything Smith would have needed to make up the translations for the purpose of deceiving and controlling people was available to him in the early 19th century. The King James Bible was available. The Apocrypha was available. The theory about American Indians being part of the lost tribes of Israel already existed in the teaching of many churches of that time. Maps of North, Central, and South America were available to use to make up stories about locations for the the *Book of Mormon*.

So, the question is whether Smith could do that. Many Mormons speak about Smith's lack of education, but he did have some education and could do basic reading, writing, and math. Some of Smith's family members were quoted as saying Smith had only basic proficiency in areas of education. Those family members included his wife, mother, and siblings. Some of his friends said the same.

If we take these people at their word, then it would seem unlikely that Smith could have written the amount of material he did in his short lifetime, in addition to all the preaching and teaching.

That leaves us with one more theory.

#3 — Joseph Smith is not a true prophet of God. He was deceived by angels. What he taught was not true.

Joseph Smith is not the only person to claim that angels spoke to him and gave him special prophetic knowledge from God. I've already covered that in an earlier series about [When Angels Speak](#). You can look there for more details about the angels Smith said visited him.

Muhammad also claimed that an angel gave him prophetic knowledge from God, [\[LINK TO ANGELS PART 8\]](#) as did leaders more recently in the [NewApostolic Reformation](#) and [Progressive Christian](#) movements.

We know that angels are involved in helping God's people (Hebrews 1:14), but we also know that some angels are evil and enemies of God and His people (2 Corinthians 11:14 1 Timothy 4:1; James 2:19; Revelation 16:14 18:2). How can we know the difference?

The answer is simple. What do religious teachers teach and preach? If what they teach and preach is the same as what the Apostle Paul preached, then they're good. If not, they're not.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed ... But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:6-9, 11-12

Joseph Smith claimed that he received the “restored gospel of Jesus Christ.” The LDS church explains it this way —

In many ways the gospel of Jesus Christ is like a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. When Joseph Smith came on the scene, perhaps 100 pieces were in place. Then Joseph Smith came along and put many of the other 900 pieces in place so that people could say, ‘Oh, now I understand where I came from, why I am here, and where I am going.’ As for Joseph Smith’s role in the Restoration, the Lord defined it clearly: ‘This generation shall have my word through you’ (D&C 5:10). **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints**

In Conclusion

I can't be sure that Joseph Smith didn't invent Mormonism from his own thoughts and ideas. However, I think it's more likely that angels deceived him. That would be consistent with other religions that claim their beginnings from angelic visits.

Christianity, the true kind that has its foundations in the prophets and apostles (Ephesians 2:19), does not look to angels for truth. Jesus Christ is Truth. As the Apostle John wrote, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The focus of the Bible is Jesus Christ, not angels.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He

is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. Colossians 1:15-18

There is no question that Mormonism is a false religion. If you doubt that, I invite you to read through the entire study in the free eBook listed below. Look again closely at what Moses said about how to know a false prophet. Look at what Jesus said about false prophets. Look at what the apostles said and wrote about false prophets. Don't be deceived. Question the teachings of Joseph Smith.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them. 2 Timothy 3:13-14

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. 1 John 4:6

Resources on Mormonism

This study about Questioning Joseph Smith is a basic course in Mormonism. There is much more I could share with you, but I thought these nine chapters might help answer any questions you have about Smith's religion. Please look through some of these resources if you'd like to learn more.

[Leaving Mormonism: Why Four Scholars Changed their Minds](#)

[Book Review: Leaving Mormonism – Why Four Scholars Changed their Minds](#)

[Testimony of former BYU Professor Lynn Wilder](#)

[The Truth About Mormonism](#)

[The Six Big Problems of Mormonism – Part One](#)

[The Six Big Problems of Mormonism – Part Two](#)

[Defending Christmas In An Unbelieving World – The Mormons \(Part 1\)](#)

[Defending Christmas In An Unbelieving World – The Mormons \(Part 2\)](#)

[Defending Christmas In An Unbelieving World – The Mormons \(Part 3\)](#)

[Hidden Doctrines of Mormonism](#)

[When Angels Speak](#)

[Ten Lies I Told as a Mormon Missionary](#)

[77 Titles/Descriptions of Joseph Smith](#)

[Joseph Smith, Magic, Masonry and the Occult](#)

[Why I Left Mormonism](#)

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