

## Question #2: Are You Getting the Right Directions?

Both Mormons and Christians alike agree that God has revealed Himself as well as His plan of salvation in the Scriptures.

But we must ask, “Do Mormon doctrines and scripture present the plan of salvation as laid out in the Bible? Can Mormon doctrines and scripture be shown to be consistent and trustworthy as the Bible can?”

### Explore...

#### “Is the Book of Mormon from God or Is It Man-made?”

##### Is the Book of Mormon “Another Testament” of Jesus Christ?

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 any other book.” (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4:461.)

##### Premise:

The Mormon Church teaches that the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ and that it is the most correct book of any book on the earth. Here we will explore whether either of those claims are true as well as look at the Scriptures that supposedly back those claims as purported by the Mormon Church.

##### Isaiah 29:1-4

*Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. 2 Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. 3 And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. 4 And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.*

### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons teach that this passage is speaking about the Book of Mormon. Though the Biblical reference concerns only the Jews (in Jerusalem), Mormons say the passage looks beyond the Jews and refers to so-called Nephites, who allegedly inhabited North America long ago.

Mormon Apostle James E. Talmage says, "Isaiah's prediction that the nation thus brought down should 'speak out of the ground,' with speech 'low out of the dust' was literally fulfilled in the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon, the original of which was taken out of the ground, and the voice of the record is as that of one speaking from the dust." (Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 293-294; quoted by James E. Talmage)

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Isaiah called Jerusalem "Ariel." This name means "hearth of God", since Jerusalem was the location of the altar on which sacrifices were burned. The name Ariel fits the context of judgment as well, for in verse 2 Jerusalem is called "an altar heart."

The prophet Isaiah was saying that the coming judgment by God would be so devastating that the bloodshed and flames would make Jerusalem comparable to an altar on which sacrifices were burned. This judgment against Jerusalem was fulfilled during Sennacherib's siege of the city in 701 B.C. (F.F. Bruce, *The International Bible Commentary*, p. 740)

### **Ask...**

- Would you please read from **Isaiah 29:1-4**?
- Ariel is defined as "the city where David settled." Where was that city? (It's nowhere near North America)
- Would you please read from **2 Samuel 5:6-9**? Isn't it clear that Ariel is referring to Jerusalem.
- Can you see that as a result of Sennacherib's siege of the city in 701 B.C., Jerusalem had been humbled such that their speech was "out of the ground," or "low out of the dust"?

We must not only focus on what the overall passage means but also on what a "familiar spirit" is. There are at least 15 Old Testament references to "familiar spirits" and all of them deal with witchcraft or spiritism (see **Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; 1 Samuel 28:3-9; 2 Kings 21:6; 23:24;**

**Isaiah 8:19; 19:3; 29:4**). This means that when the Book of Mormon claims it has a familiar spirit, it is claiming to have a relationship with the demonic.

#### **Ask...**

- Did you know that every single reference to a “familiar spirit” in the Old Testament relates to witchcraft or spiritism?
- Did you know that in passages like **Deuteronomy 18:9-12** God condemns anyone who relates in any way to a familiar spirit?
- In view of this, what do you make of the claim by Mormon leaders that the Book of Mormon has a “familiar spirit”? (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pp. 97-98)

#### **Isaiah 29:11-12**

**11** *And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed:*

**12** *And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.*

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons claim that these verses refer to the book of Mormon, or the gold plates from which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. We find a reference to these sealed plates in the testimony of Martin Harris, one of the alleged three witnesses to the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s “first assistant.”

Harris took a copy of some of the characters which Joseph had drawn off the plates to a professor Charles Anthon, a man celebrated for his literary attainments. Here is Harris’s account:

*Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation was also correct... He asked me how the young man found*

*out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him. "He then said to me, 'Let me see that certificate'"... When he took it, he tore it to pieces, saying there was no such thing now as the ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, "I cannot read a sealed book." I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting the characters and translation. (Joseph Smith – History, 2:63-65)*

**Isaiah 29:11-12** is cited as a prediction that the Book of Mormon would be taken to professor Anthon at Columbia College, who would refuse to read it (because he couldn't read a "sealed book"), and the book would be given to the "unlettered youth," Joseph Smith. (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 99)

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

One of several problems with the Mormon interpretation of **Isaiah 29:11-12** is that the text shows the subject is a vision and not a book. The visions God gave to the prophets had become like words of a sealed book that were meaningless to the people.

Consider the following insightful questions from scholars Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine...

### **Ask...**

- How could professor Anthon say the translation was correct when all he could assess were some of the characters drawn on a piece of paper by Joseph Smith?
- In Isaiah, the book went to the learned man first and then to the unlearned. But the Mormon story has the book of gold delivered first to the unlearned Smith, and then a paper with characters copied from the plates delivered to the "learned" Anthon. How do you explain this?
- In Isaiah, the book was delivered to the unlearned man, who simply said, "I am not learned." He made no effort to read or translate it. But Smith claimed he did read the book, even though he was unlearned. How do you explain this?

## **Did the Old Testament Predict the Book of Mormon?**

### **Ezekiel 37:16-17**

*16 Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions:*

*17 And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.*

### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons teach that the two sticks refer to the Bible (Judah) and the Book of Mormon (Joseph). LeGrand Richards says, "Could this promise be fulfilled in a simpler more perfect manner than it was through the coming forth of the Book of Mormon?... The two records have now been joined together, constituting a complete fulfillment of another great prophecy." (LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, pp. 67-68)

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

The idea that the two sticks refer to the Bible and the Book of Mormon is impossible based off the verses that follow in **Ezekiel 37:18-28**. **Verse 22** alone clearly identifies the "sticks" as two nations or kingdoms, not as books.

### **Ask...**

- Wasn't the Book of Mormon written on gold plates and not on papyrus that could be wound around a stick?
- Please read **Ezekiel 37:22**. What does this verse say about the true identity of the two sticks?
- If the two sticks are nations and not books, doesn't this refute the idea of the Bible predicting the Book of Mormon?
- Is the Mormon Church reading something into this passage that isn't there?

## **Did the New Testament Predict the Book of Mormon?**

### **2 Corinthians 13:1-2**

*1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. 2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:*

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

According to Mormons, the Bible is one witness of Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon is another testament of Him.

#### **The Biblical Teaching:**

These verses are a warning to the Corinthian Church to stop living in sin, but should they continue to sin they would be held accountable on the account of multiple witnesses.

You also need to point out that the Bible already contains multiple witnesses of Jesus Christ as it is made up of 66 books written by some 40 authors.

#### **Transition:**

As we have seen, the Bible does not predict the Book of Mormon as none of the authors expected such a book to be coming from God. To further explore whether the Book of Mormon is from God and another testament of Jesus Christ let's further explore the Book of Mormon itself and see if it is trustworthy and true.

## **Is the Book of Mormon Trustworthy and True?**

We must remember that the Book of Mormon is said to be the most correct book of any on earth. Let's explore whether that is the case.

### **Insurmountable Problems with the Book of Mormon**

There were more than 3,913 changes between the original edition of the Book of Mormon published in 1830 and the ones printed and issued through the mid-1970s. The 1981 edition introduced between one and two hundred additional word changes.

The problem is the Mormon account of how Joseph Smith went about translating the Book of Mormon would seem to disallow any possibility of any errors or the need for changes – even relating to misspellings and grammar mistakes. David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, gives the following details on the translation process:

*I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principle scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any man. (David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 1976)*

Oliver B. Huntington recorded in his journal in 1881, Joseph F. Smith, who later became the sixth president of the Mormon Church, taught that the Lord gave Joseph Smith the exact English wording and spelling that should be used in the Book of Mormon. (“Journal of Oliver B. Huntington”, p. 168)

### **Ask...**

- Did you know that following the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith said: “We heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, ‘These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct’”??
- Did you know that over 4,000 changes have been made in the Book of Mormon since its original publication in 1830? Even your own *Ensign* magazine admits that numerous changes have been made.
- How do you reconcile those changes with the testimony of the heavenly messenger speaking to Joseph Smith?

These changes in the Book of Mormon are much more than just grammatical changes. Consider the following chart:

### Changes in the Book of Mormon

Verse	The 1830 Version	Today's Version
<b>1 Nephi 11:21</b>	“And the angel said me, Behold the Lamb of God, Yea, even <i>the eternal Father.</i> ”	“And the angel said me, Behold the Lamb of God, Yea, even <i>the son of the eternal Father.</i> ”
<b>1 Nephi 11:32</b>	“And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, <i>the everlasting God</i> was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record.”	“And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, <i>the Son of the everlasting God</i> was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record.”
<b>1 Nephi 13:40</b>	“The last records... shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is <i>the Eternal Father</i> and Savior of the world...”	“The last records... shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is <i>the Son of the Eternal Father</i> and the Savior of the world...”
<b>Mosiah 21:28</b>	“... <i>King Benjamin</i> had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings.”	“... <i>King Mosiah</i> had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such Engravings.”

### Archaeology and the Book of Mormon:

According to the Mormon Scriptures, the Nephite and Lamanite nations had huge populations that lived in large, fortified cities. They allegedly waged large-scale wars with each other for hundreds of years, culminating in a conflict in which hundreds of thousands were killed in A.D. 385 near Hill Cumorah in present-day New York State (see Mormon 6:9-15).



**Ask...**

- If these large-scale wars happened with hundreds of thousands being killed wouldn't we have some archaeological evidence that such an event occurred?

These Nephite and Lamanite peoples are allegedly groups of people that migrated from Israel to the Americas by command of the Lord. But the Smithsonian Institute says the following, "There is no evidence whatever of any migration from Israel to America, and likewise no evidence that pre-Columbian Indians had any knowledge of Christianity or the Bible." (Natural Museum of Natural History – Smithsonian Statement on the Book of Mormon #8)

Consider these questions from Mormon experts Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine...

**Ask...**

- Do you find it curious that the Smithsonian Institute says there is no evidence whatever for a migration from Israel to America, which is a major teaching in the Book of Mormon?
- Did you know that even a Mormon scholar at Brigham Young University – Dr. Ray Matheny – said there is a great lack of archaeological evidence for historical accounts in the Book of Mormon?

**Does Current Mormon Doctrine and the Book of Mormon Coincide?**

The Book of Mormon contains very little in terms of "Mormonism" as taught by the Mormon church today. Among other things, the book of Mormon says nothing about:

- Mormon church organization
- The Aaronic priesthood
- The "plurality of gods" doctrine
- The "God is an exalted man" doctrine
- The doctrine that men may become gods
- The doctrine of the three degrees of glory, or three kingdoms
- The "plurality of wives" doctrine
- The "celestial marriage" doctrine with all the elaborate temple ceremonies and oaths

- Baptism for the dead
- The “word of wisdom” doctrine
- The doctrine of preexistence
- The doctrine of eternal progression

**Ask...**

- How can the Mormon church claim that the Book of Mormon is the “fullness of the everlasting gospel” when so much important Mormon doctrine is missing from it?

We must also point out that some of the teachings found in the Book of Mormon are not followed in present-day Mormonism. Those include:

<b>Doctrine</b>	<b>Book of Mormon Reference</b>
<b>There is only one God</b>	Mosiah 15:1-5; Alma 11:28,29; 2 Nephi 31:21
<b>God is unchanging</b>	Mormon 9:9, 19; Moroni 8:18; Alma 41:8; 3 Nephi 24:6
<b>God is a spirit</b>	Alma 18:24-28; 22:9-11
<b>The Holy Spirit...</b>	<i>Dwells in man</i> – Alma 18:35 <i>Is God</i> – Alma 18:28 <i>Created all</i> – 3 Nephi 9:15
<b>Jesus Christ...</b>	<i>Is God</i> – 2 Nephi 10:3; Mosiah 13:34-35; 15:1-5 <i>Was virgin born</i> – Alma 7:10 <i>Created all</i> – 3 Nephi 9:15
<b>God the Father...</b>	<i>Redeemed man</i> – Mosiah 13:32 <i>Created all</i> – Jacob 4:9
<b>Polygamy condemned</b>	Jacob 1:15; 2:23,24,27,31; 3:5; Mosiah 11:2,4 Ether 10:5,7

**Ask...**

- Why do so many present-day Mormon beliefs contradict the Book of Mormon?
- Are we to conclude that the Book of Mormon is wrong? Or is present-day Mormon leadership in error?

We must note at this point that this is radically different from the absolute trustworthiness of the Bible, as can be seen below:

### **The Reliability of the Bible**

We have seen that the Book of Mormon is unreliable due to its numerous inaccuracies, changes, and lack of archaeological support. But now we must explore whether the Bible fares any better and whether it can be trusted. Here we will use the acrostic **C.A.M.P.S.** to give evidence for the fact that the Bible is truly the Word of God and worthy of being trusted with our lives in the here and now and in eternity.

#### **1. Changed lives.**

- In looking at the Scriptures, especially the New Testament, we see multiple men and women at one point who had turned their backs on Jesus in His time of greatest need at the cross, to men and women who were dying for Jesus only days later.

#### **Ex.: Luke 22:54-62**

- Peter was later crucified upside down for His faith.

- What caused the turn around in his life.

- The Bible says that it is because Peter and the others saw Jesus resurrected with their own eyes. (2Peter 1:16; 1John 1:3; Acts 2:22)

- This is what makes the followers of Jesus different from any other religious followers, they were actual eyewitnesses.

- This means that the followers of Jesus either knew they were dying for a lie, which makes no sense, or they knew they were dying for the One they had seen crucified and resurrected.

- Martyrs of all other religions have had to take the word of their leader, they weren't allowed to see it for themselves.

#### **Other religions:**

- Mormons: Joseph Smith went into the hills of Cumorah by himself and later reported his supposed visions from God.

- Muslims: Muhammed went into a cave by himself and came back to report His supposed vision.

- Buddhists: Siddharta Guatama sat under a tree by himself and brought back his

supposed vision.

- Jesus was seen by his disciples, over 500 at one time, and many others. (1Cor. 15:3-8)
- Even here you can see Paul daring people to check out his claims and see if they're true.

## 2. Archaeological evidence.

- Archaeological evidence is either going to confirm that what the Bible says about history, geography, and anthropology (the study of man) to be true or expose the Bible as being a lie. So, what do the facts say?
- Defending Your Faith by Max Anders, "More than a century of biblical excavations at over 25,000 sites have repeatedly confirmed the accuracy of the Bible."
- What archaeologists have found regarding the preservation of the Word of God is simply this:

## 3. Manuscript evidence.

- **Nearly 25,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament alone have been discovered, with some dating all the way back to the end of the first century, and the rest being from different geographical locations, from different time periods, in different languages, and all coinciding to the point of 99.6% accuracy.**
- The .4% of incongruity is simply grammatical, such as an apostrophe being left out or an order change in words such as Jesus Christ instead of Christ Jesus.

## 4. Prophetical evidence.

- Many have undertaken to make claims about a future event, and some have by coincidence seen those fulfilled. However, no person or book has ever made predictions so precise, especially considering a single person, and seen them fulfilled with 100% accuracy as has the Bible.

### **Quote:**

The following probabilities are taken from Peter Stoner in *Science Speaks* (Moody Press, 1963) to show that coincidence is ruled out by the science of probability. Stoner says that by using the modern science of probability in reference to eight prophecies, "we

find that the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in  $10^{17}$ ." That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. In order to help us comprehend this staggering probability, Stoner illustrates it by supposing that "we take  $10^{17}$  silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep.

"Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man."

- Once again we have great weight given to the Bible being the inspired Word of God.

#### 5. Scriptural inerrancy.

- The Bible is the only holy book in all of human history that has been proven to be 100% free of error or contradiction in any of its verifiable documentations.

- Here's why this makes that fact so incredibly staggering:
  - A. It was written over a period of 1,500 years.
  - B. It was written by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, military leaders, poets, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, scholars, shepherds, etc.
  - C. It was written from different places such as Moses writing in the wilderness, Jeremiah in a dungeon, Paul in a prison, Luke while traveling, John while exiled on an island, etc.
  - D. It was written from three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe.
  - E. It was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

**All this and yet not one single author in the Bible contradicts another author.**

#### **Conclusion:**

We have discovered that while the Bible is 100% accurate and trustworthy the same cannot be said for the Book of Mormon and other writings of Mormonism. Let's now look at whether the directions given (the plan of salvation) is the way to eternal life according to Mormonism.

## Explore...

### “Is the Plan of Salvation in Mormonism Consistent with Scripture?”

#### Salvation in Mormonism – Defining Terms

Mormons teach that there is both general and individual salvation. General salvation, Bruce McConkie tells us, is “that which comes by grace alone without obedience to the gospel law, and consists in the mere fact of being resurrected. In this sense salvation is synonymous with immortality; it is the inseparable connection of body and spirit so that the resurrected personage lives forever... This kind of salvation eventually will come to all mankind, excepting the sons of perdition.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1966, p. 669)

Individual salvation, however, refers to “that which man merits through his own acts through life and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1975) 1:134) We are told that “salvation in its true and full meaning is synonymous with exaltation or eternal life and consists in gaining an inheritance in the highest of the three heavens within the celestial kingdom... This full salvation is obtained in and through the continuation of the family unit in eternity, and those who obtain it are gods.” (McConkie, p. 670)

#### The Mormon Goal of Godhood

The ultimate goal in Mormonism is godhood. Brigham Young said that “the Lord created you and me for the purpose of becoming Gods like himself... We are created... to become Gods like unto our Father in heaven.” (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saint’s Book Depot, 1854-1856, 3:93).

Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20 also tells us, “Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.”

The official *Gospel Principles* manual p. 290 tells us that “exaltation is eternal life, the kind of life that God lives... We can become Gods like our heavenly Father. This is exaltation.” Joseph Fielding Smith said that “eternal life is the name of life possessed by the Father and the Son; it is exaltation in the eternal realm.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), p. 327)

In Mormon theology, having an eternal family (the union of a celestial husband and wife) enables a person to have spirit-children for all eternity. Eventually these spirit-children will have the opportunity to gain godhood and procreate their own spirit-children. This process has supposedly been going on for all eternity and will continue for all eternity. It is an endless cycle of procreation.

In Mormon theology, attaining eternal life and having an eternal family requires godhood. Only a God can have eternal life, and only a God can have an eternal family. The immediate goal is that of perfection which allegedly moves people closer and closer to godhood. They believe there is biblical support for this.

### **Can One Attain Perfection and Eventual Godhood According to Scripture?**

#### **Matthew 5:48**

##### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Joseph Fielding Smith wrote that “it is our duty to be better today than we were yesterday, and better tomorrow than we are today. Why? Because we are on that road... to perfection, and that can only come through obedience and the desire in our heart to overcome the world.” (Smith, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles*, p. 292) Mormon theology teaches that perfection is an attainable goal and one that all should strive for because, after all, Jesus wouldn’t give a command we couldn’t keep.

##### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Reading this verse in its proper context we discover that Jesus is telling those He is speaking to, to love others perfectly just as God does. That includes even loving and blessing one’s enemies.

He is also teaching that God did not lower His standards to accommodate man but instead set forth His holiness as the standard.

It is important to note that Mormons teach of a future perfection that they believe can one day be attained, but Jesus speaks in the present tense, that we are to be perfect *now* and Mormons agree that we are not currently perfect.

#### **Ask...**

- Did Jesus say that we are to strive for eventual perfection (future) or that we are to be perfect now (present)
- Let's read **James 2:10** together.
- Would you agree that we all fail to live up to the whole law perfectly? If so, what hope do we have of being in heaven with the Lord?
- Can I share with you how I have been liberated from this bondage of perfection based on what Jesus did? It can be found in **Hebrews 10:14** which says, "By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

#### **Can We Reach Ultimate Godhood?**

##### **Romans 8:16-17**

##### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons tell us that these verses point to the result of eternal progression: Godhood. In his book *Mormon Doctrine*, Bruce McConkie said, "Those who gain eternal life receive exaltation; they are sons of God, joint heirs with Christ, members of the Church of the Firstborn; they overcome all things, have all power, and receive the fullness of the Father. They are gods."

##### **The Biblical Teaching:**

The Mormon interpretation of **Romans 8:16-17** fails to consider the immediate context of the verses. We become "children of God" not by nature, but rather, we are adopted into God's family. We do not have the seed of godhood in us that can become exalted and grow to godhood. We are adopted into God's family as humans. (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 318) In addition, Paul's statement that we can become "co-heirs" with Christ has nothing to do with becoming exalted as a God. Heirs are people who



inherit something. As Christians, then, we are co-heirs with Christ who will inherit all spiritual blessings in this life (Ephesians 1:3), and in the life to come we will share with the Lord Jesus in all the riches of God's glorious kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). (Ibid., p. 318)

**Ask...**

- Would you please read aloud from **Acts 14:8-15**?
- How did Paul react when people thought he was a god?
- Would you please read aloud from **Acts 12:21-23**?
- What did Herod do to provoke God's punishment?
- What was the true God's response?
- Would you please read from **Exodus 9:13-14**?
- Did you know that the Pharaoh was thought to be the incarnation of the Egyptian sun god, Ra, and was therefore considered a "god" in his own right?
- Yet how does the one true God respond to Pharaoh? Please read **Exodus 9:14** again.

We must also look at what God Himself has to say about the existence of other gods.

**Ask...**

- Would you please read **Isaiah 44:8**?
- How do you reconcile this with the Mormon claim that God has a Father-god who has a Father-god and so on?
- Would you please read **Isaiah 43:10**?
- Since there were no gods before the God of the Bible doesn't this mean that God had no Father-gods before Him?
- Since no gods will come after God, doesn't this mean that none of His children will become gods?
- Don't these verses clearly show that you and I cannot become gods ourselves?

(Questions from Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 321)

Now consider the following questions regarding the Book of Mormon...

- Did you know that even the Book of Mormon states that there is only one God? Would you please read from Alma 11:22-31?
- Doesn't this teaching from the Book of Mormon refute the church's later teaching of the doctrine of eternal progression and becoming gods?

Eternal life is a present possession of those who believe in Jesus Christ, not a goal that a person works toward and attains via perfection.

**Ask...**

- Would you please read aloud from **John 6:47**?
- Did you know that the word "hath" in this verse is in the present tense, indicating that people who believe in Jesus Christ have eternal life as a present possession?

According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, eternal life (**Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18**) is consistently equated with being saved (**Matthew 19:25; Mark 10:26-27; Luke 18:26-27**) and entering into the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 19:23-24; Mark 10:24; Luke 18:24**). Nowhere in the New Testament is eternal life used to mean to "attain godhood." Eternal life is always portrayed as something received by faith in Christ (**John 3:16; 6:28-29**), not something that is achieved or worked for.

We have discovered that one could never attain to perfection by fulfilling all of the law let alone attaining godhood. This means that apart from Christ paying our sin debt and crediting His righteousness to our account we have no hope of being in heaven. Yet, the Mormon Church continues to teach that there is a long list of requirements to meet and commands to be kept if one hopes to be in heaven when life on this earth is over. Let's look at what some of the requirements and commands are that must be met according to the Mormon Church and see how those measure up to what Scripture teaches.

Exaltation to godhood in Mormon theology ultimately involves not just what a person does in this earthly life (mortality), but also what he has done in premortality (his pre-existence as a

spirit-child), and in postmortality (his return to the spirit world following physical death). A person's progression toward godhood is an extended process.

### **Premortality**

As the book *Gospel Principles* on p. 9 tells us, "Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansion of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal [physical] body."

The Mormon Church teaches that because we were born as spirit-children of our Heavenly Father, we have the very nature of God. As Spencer W. Kimball put it, "Man has in himself the seeds of godhood, which can grow and germinate and grow and develop. As the acorn becomes the oak, the mortal man becomes a god."

In Mormon theology, spirit-children begin progressing toward godhood in the premortal state. Mormons believe that their being born on earth is a sign that they used their agency wisely in the preexistence. It proves that they didn't follow Lucifer in the rebellion against God. The following quote from *Gospel Principles* fleshes out this belief, "Because we are here on earth and have mortal bodies we know that we chose to follow Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father... In our pre-earth life, we chose the right." We must continue choosing the right during our mortal existence.

### **Mortality**

Mortality – the earthly life, or "Second Estate" – is a time of testing for the Mormon. This is because the person now has a physical body.

The logic goes this way: In order to become a god a person must face (and overcome) physical temptations and trials. Such growth is not possible for a spirit-child, because, without a physical body, it's not possible to encounter physical temptation. That's why spirit-children take on human bodies, and during this time of mortality they face physical temptations and make progress toward godhood.

Once a person has entered mortality and gained a physical body, he must fulfill an unbelievable list of requirements in his endeavor to make progress toward exaltation, or godhood. This includes repentance, baptism, membership in the LDS church, innumerable good works, abiding by the Mormon “Word of Wisdom”, marriage and other temple rituals, and “keeping all the Lord’s commandments until the end of one’s life on earth.” (*Gospel Principles*, pp. 292-293)

Let’s now look at some of the requirements and commands that must be met in this life (mortality) according to Mormon theology.

### **Baptism and Salvation**

Mormonism identifies baptism with being “born again” and therefore baptism has eternal significance in Mormon theology.

Bruce McConkie said that “the second birth begins when men are legally baptized in water by a legal administrator.”

Orson Pratt explains:

*But who in this generation have authority to baptize? None but those who have received authority in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; all other churches are destitute of all authority from God; and any person who receives baptism or the Lord’s Supper from their hands will highly offend God; for He looks upon them as the most corrupt of all people, both Catholics and Protestants are nothing less than the “whore of Babylon” whom the Lord denounces by the mouth of John the Revelator as having corrupted all the earth by their fornications and wickedness. (Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (Washington D.C., 1853-54), p. 255)*

### **Does One Have to Repent and Be Baptized to Be Saved?**

#### **Acts 2:38**

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons teach that this verse says a person must be baptized to receive forgiveness of sins and be saved. James Talmage tells us that “biblical proofs that baptism is designed as a means

of securing to man a remission of his sins are abundant.” One of these proofs, Talmage assures us, is Acts 2:38.

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Students of the Greek language have pointed out that the word “for” in the Greek text – eis – is a preposition that can indicate causality (“in order to attain”) or a result (“because of”). In **Acts 2:38** the word “for” is used in a resultant sense. The verse might be translated, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ because [or as a result of] the remission of sins.”

### **Ask...**

- Did you know that Greek scholars say the word “for” is a preposition that can be used in the causal sense (“in order to attain”) or in the resultant sense (“because of”)?
- What would **Acts 2:38** be saying if “for” is being used in a resultant sense?

We must remember that in the same book of Acts, when the desperate Philippian jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved and have eternal life, Paul said nothing about baptism. Paul merely said you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is consistent with what we see elsewhere in Scripture such as in **John 3:15; 5:24; 11:25; 12:46; and 20:31**.

### **Is Water Baptism a Prerequisite for Salvation?**

#### **John 3:1-5**

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

James E. Talmage tells us that “the words of the Savior, spoken while He ministered in the flesh, declare baptism to be essential to salvation... It is practically indisputable that the watery birth here referred to as essential to entrance into the kingdom is baptism.”

#### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Notice what Jesus said to Nicodemus: First He spoke about being “born of water and the Spirit” in **John 3:5**; then He explained what He meant in **verse 6**. It would seem that “born of water” in **verse 5** is parallel to “born of the flesh” in **verse 6**, just as “born of... the Spirit” and “born of the

Spirit” are parallel in **verses 5 and 6**. Jesus’ message, then, is that just as a person has a physical birth, so also must a person have a spiritual birth if he wants to enter the kingdom of God. He must be “born from above”.

**Ask...**

- If Jesus clearly lays out what He meant for us in these verses, why we would try to come up with an alternate meaning?

**Do Belief and Baptism Go Together?**

**Mark 16:16**

**The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons teach that mere belief is not enough, a person must be baptized in order to be saved. (James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p. 129)

**The Biblical Teaching:**

A lack of being baptized is not what brings damnation according to this passage, it is unbelief. When a person rejects the Gospel message and the free gift of salvation offered by Jesus they are damned.

**Ask...**

- Would you read from **Mark 16:16**? What is the basis for damnation according to this verse?
- According to **1 Corinthians 15:1-2** what is it that saves a person, the Gospel or baptism?
- Would you read from **1 Corinthians 1:17**? If Paul draws a clear distinction between baptism and the Gospel doesn’t that mean that baptism couldn’t possibly be a requirement for salvation?
- Would you read **John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10; and Ephesians 2:8-9**? What is the basis for salvation according to each of these verses? It is belief and faith apart from any works, including baptism.

There is much more that the Mormon must live up to in order to enter what they say is the highest heaven. Another such requirement is...

## **Church Membership**

Mormons teach that membership in the Mormon church has a role in one's salvation.

“Salvation is in the church, and of the church, and is obtained only through the church.”

*(Deseret News, Church Section, 14 April 1973, p.14)*

Milton R. Hunter affirms that the person on the road to godhood “must become a member and live the gospel principles and ordinances of the true church of the Master – which is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, restored to the earth through divine revelations to the prophet Joseph Smith.”

For the Mormon, however, even church membership isn't good enough, there is also...

## **The Need for Good Works**

Salvation in Mormonism requires a life of consistent good works, fulfilling the law, and striving for perfection. Mormonism teaches that human beings save themselves with the help of the Lord. But, is this consistent with what the Scriptures teach?

## **Does One Have to Perform Good Works to Be Saved?**

### **James 2:17,26**

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Bruce McConkie , after citing **James 2**, argues against such “perversions” of Scripture as the idea that a person is “justified through faith alone, without works.”

James E. Talmage also said that “in spite of the plain word of God, dogmas of men have been promulgated to the effect that by faith alone salvation may be attained... The scriptures... and man's inherent sense of justice furnish a sufficient refutation of these false assertions.”

#### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Martin Luther said it well when he stated: **James 2** is not teaching that a person is saved by works. Rather a person is “justified” by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. In other words, a genuine love for Jesus and trust in Him will always result in good works. We must

remember that while good works never produces salvation, salvation in Jesus will always produce good works.

**Word Picture:** Fruit never produces a tree, but a living and thriving fruit tree will always produce fruit.

James is writing to Jewish Christians (1:1 “to the twelve tribes”) who were in danger of giving nothing but lip service to Jesus. His intent, therefore, is to distinguish true faith from false faith. He shows that true faith results in producing fruit, works which become visible evidences of faith’s invisible presence. In other words, good works are the “vital signs” indicating that faith is alive. (Mark J. Cares, *Speaking the Truth In Love to Mormons*, p. 192)

The following questions from Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine help bring great clarity to this passage in James...

**Ask...**

- **James 2:26** says that apart from the spirit, the body is dead, right?
- By analogy, is it not clear that apart from the evidence of good works, faith is dead?
- Can you see, then, that good works are the “vital signs” indicating that faith is alive?
- Would you please read aloud from **Romans 3:20** and tell me what this means?
- Can we read **Ephesians 2:8-9** together? How does it say one is saved?

**Does One Have to Work for Their Salvation?**

**Philippians 2:12**

**The Mormon Teaching:**

The Mormon Church teaches that while the death of Christ provided a salvation that redeems us from death (guaranteeing us a resurrection), we still have to “work out” our own salvation by our own efforts if we want to attain godhood and an inheritance in the celestial kingdom. (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1966, p. 329)



## The Biblical Teaching:

There are at least two things that must be noted here:

1. “Salvation”, in this context, refers to the community of believers in Philippi and not to individuals (the Greek word for “you” and “your” are both plural). The Philippians were called by the Apostle Paul to “keep working out” (continuously) the deliverance of the church into a state of Christian maturity. (*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1325)  
In other words, they were supposed to “workout” or “experience the outworking” of the salvation they already possessed. Which leads us to the second point...
2. The personal pronoun “your” indicates that they already possess salvation... It is not something they are working to attain.

We must also note that in the process “working out your salvation” in Mormonism no failure is allowed. Perfection is expected now and repentance must be perfect with no backsliding.

In fact, Joseph Fielding Smith said that “to enter the celestial kingdom and obtain exaltation it is necessary that the whole law be kept.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, p. 206)  
*Gospel Principles* tells us that “we must keep all our covenants with exactness. If we do, our Heavenly Father promises us that we will receive exaltation in the celestial kingdom.”

President Kimball once said that “each command we obey sends us another rung up the ladder to perfected manhood and toward godhood; and every law disobeyed is a sliding toward the bottom where man merges into the brute world. Only he who obeys law is free.” Kimball also said that “the forsaking of sin must be a permanent one. True repentance does not permit making the same mistake again... There can be no holding back. If the sinner neglects his tithing, misses his meetings, breaks the Sabbath, or fails in his prayers and other responsibilities, he is not completely repentant.”

## Ask...

- Would you please read **James 2:10**? What do you do with this verse in light of what President Kimball taught?
- Would you please read **Ephesians 2:8-9**? How does this fit with what President Kimball taught?

- Would you please read **Romans 7:15**? Do you see that even the Apostle Paul stated that he couldn't live up to perfection?
- This is why two chapters earlier the Apostle Paul wrote **Romans 5:1-17**. Would you please read that? Do you see what he says saves us over and over again? Is it obeying the law or is it grace?

### Temple Work

A key to progression in Mormon theology is what is called “temple work.” This temple work involves Mormon rituals – such as endowments, marriages, and baptisms (including baptism for the dead). Yet there are restrictions; only worthy Mormons can enter the temple. Mormons are interviewed by a bishop to determine their worthiness. If they are found worthy in their moral life and obedience to the Word of Wisdom, they are issued a “temple recommend.” (Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 343)

Consider the following questions from the same book...

### Ask...

- Would you please read aloud from **Luke 18:9-14**?
- In this passage, isn't an unworthy publican welcome in God's temple?
- What does this tell you about God's view of temple recommends?

Joseph Fielding Smith said that the “greatest command given us, and made obligatory, is the temple work in our own behalf and in behalf of our dead.”

### Ask...

- Would you please read **Mark 12:29-31**?
- Who is right? Joseph Fielding Smith or Jesus Christ?

Since temple work is necessary for progression towards godhood it is important to unpack and explore three of the major temple works emphasized by the Mormon church. Those include baptism for the dead, the endowment ritual, and temple marriage.

## **Baptism for the Dead**

Mormon doctrine teaches that baptism for the dead enables those that have died to progress in the spirit world. This is the case because one must be baptized to progress, but since spirits don't have physical bodies someone who does must be baptized on their behalf.

The question that we must ask is this, "Does baptism for the dead have any Scriptural merit or support. The Mormon church says "yes" according to the following verse...

### **Do the Scriptures Command Baptism for the Dead?**

#### **1 Corinthians 15:29**

##### **The Mormon Teaching:**

James E. Talmage says, "These words are unambiguous and the fact that they are presented without explanation or comment argues that the principle of baptism for the dead was understood among the people to whom the letter was addressed."

But is that really the case? Was there really any belief amongst believers in Jesus of baptism for the dead? Did the Apostle Paul actually teach this as a principle or command?

##### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Ron Rhodes gives us this insightful teaching on the subject...

It is critical to recognize that throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to the Corinthian believers and himself using first-person pronouns ("we", "ye", "I"). But when he comes to **1 Corinthians 15:29** – the verse dealing with baptism for the dead – Paul switches to the third person ("they"). A plain reading of the text seems to indicate that Paul is referring to those outside the Christian camp in Corinth. Paul also seems to be disassociating himself from the group practicing baptism for the dead.

### Ask...

- Why do you think the Apostle Paul switches from the use of first-person pronouns to third person in **1 Corinthians 15:29**?
- If God wanted us to practice baptism for the dead why isn't it mentioned
- If God desired for us to practice baptism for the dead, why is it mentioned only here in the Bible – with no other references? Why aren't there any commands dealing with this kind of baptism?
- Why doesn't Jesus, Paul, or any of the other apostles command the practice if it's essential as the LDS church claims? Why aren't there any guidelines for conducting this practice?
- Could you please show me a single clear reference from the Book of Mormon that supports the idea of baptism for the dead?
- If baptism for the dead isn't mentioned in the Book of Mormon, and yet it is essential for one's progression towards exalted godhood, then how can the Book of Mormon be said to contain the "fullness of the everlasting gospel"?

### The Necessity of Eternal Marriage

The Mormon Church teaches that marriages that are performed in the Mormon temple last forever and are sealed for time and eternity. Mormonism also teaches that a person's exaltation depends on marriage: "Our Heavenly Father has given us the law of eternal marriage so that we can become like him." (*Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), p.231)

Remember that in Mormon theology Mormon "Gods" procreate and give birth to spirit children. That's why marriage is crucial for Mormon exaltation: "No man can be saved and exalted in the kingdom of God without the woman, and no woman can reach the perfection and exaltation of the kingdom of God alone." (*The Life and Teachings of Jesus & His Apostles* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), p.291)

*Doctrines of Salvation* by Joseph Fielding Smith instructs:

*The duty of man in his own family is to see that he and his wife are sealed at the altar. If married out in the world before they joined the church, or if they have been in the church and have been unable to go to the temple, it is that man's duty to go to the temple, have his wife sealed to him and have their family sealed to him and have their children sealed, so that the family group, that unity to which he belongs, is made intact so that it will continue throughout eternity. That is the first duty that a man owes to himself, to his wife, and to his children. He receives this blessing by virtue of the priesthood.*

### **Ask...**

- Would you please read **Matthew 22:30**?
- Doesn't Jesus clearly teach here that in the resurrection men and women will not be married?
- Why then does the Mormon Church teach that men and women will remain married eternally?

### **Explore...**

#### **"Is Mormon Theology Regarding Sin, Atonement, and Forgiveness Consistent with Scripture?"**

##### **Was Adam's Fall In Sin A Good Thing?**

Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine share the following in regards to sin in Mormon theology...

In Mormon theology, prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were not yet "mortal". The Mormon Church does not define this word as Christians do. They interpret "mortal" not in the sense of death and dying, but primarily in the sense of *having the capability to bear children*. So, prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were not mortal in the sense that they could not bear children.

The Mormon Church actually commends Adam and Eve for what they did. (See *A Study of the Articles of Faith* by James E. Talmage, p.65) That's because spirit-children need bodies before they can progress toward godhood. So, according to Mormon theology, what Adam did made it possible for these spirit-children to get those needed bodies.

However, the Mormon view of “mortality” is a gross distortion of the biblical account. God commanded Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” immediately after He created them, and this was prior to the Fall. Moreover, after Adam and Eve did fall, God did not commend them but He pronounced severe judgment against them and cast them away from His presence and the Garden of Eden (**Gen. 3:16-19**).

#### Ask...

- Please read **Genesis 1:28**. didn't God command Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply immediately after creating them?
- Doesn't this mean that Adam and Eve could bear children before they sinned and fell?
- Please read **Genesis 3:16-19**. Is there any hint whatsoever that God thought Adam and Eve's fall into sin was a good thing?

#### Was There Original Sin?

The Mormon Church goes so far as to say that Adam and Eve didn't really sin. After all, what they did was a part of God's plan of salvation. The Mormon book *Gospel Principles* tells us that “their part in the Father's plan was to bring mortality into the world... Adam and Eve were among our Father's noblest children.” (*Gospel Principles*, p. 29) If Adam and Eve fell, it was a “fall upward.” Indeed, “Adam fell, but he fell in the right direction.”

#### Ask...

- Please read **Romans 5:12, 19**. How do you reconcile the Mormon Church teaching that there is no original sin with these verses?
- **Romans 6:23** tells us the penalty for sin is death. If there is no original sin then why does every person die?
- Would you please read 2 Nephi 2:21 and Mosiah 3:19? Since the Book of Mormon teaches that there is original sin, why does the Mormon Church deny it? Isn't this inconsistent theology?

## Redefining Sin

The Mormon Church has redefined sin to fit their theology. They say that sin amounts to wrong judgment, a mistake, or an inadequacy. Moreover, the Mormon Church teaches that children are innocent until they reach accountability at the age of eight.

### Ask...

- Would you please read **Psalm 51:5**? What did King David say about being born in sin?
- Would you please read from **Matthew 12:34; Mark 7:20-23; Luke 15:10 and 19:10; Mark 1:15**? What did Jesus teach about mankind and their sinfulness?

## The Atonement and Salvation

All of the above matters deeply because a weak view of sin always leads to a weak view of salvation and the diminishing of Christ's work on the cross for our atonement. That's why it's not surprising that in Mormonism Jesus's role in salvation is greatly diminished. According to Mormon theology Jesus's atonement simply means that He overcame death for us, but what degree of glory we attain after death is up to us. The official *Gospel Principles* manual of the Mormon Church tells us that "Jesus became our savior and has done his part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to us to do our part and to prove ourselves worthy of exaltation."

The Biblical Jesus taught that His mission was to provide a substitutionary atonement on the cross. Jesus affirmed that He came into the world to die (**John 12:27**). His death was the sacrificial offering for the sins of the world (**Matthew 26:28**). This is certainly how others saw Him as well.

### Ask...

- Would you please read **John 1:29**?
- What did John the Baptist say Jesus would do?
- If Jesus would take away the sin of the world, as John the Baptist taught, why does the Mormon Church teach that His death only provides resurrection but that exaltation is up to us?

### **Is Justification by Faith Alone?**

The Mormon Church teaches that justification from sin is not by faith or belief alone. James E. Talmage goes so far as to say that “the sectarian dogma of justification by faith alone has exercised an influence for evil.” (*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p.65)

However, the Scriptures consistently teach that justification is by faith alone.

#### **Ask...**

- Would you please read **Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1; Galatians 3:8; Galatians 3:21; Galatians 3:24; and Ephesians 2:8-9?**
- What is the consistent theme for justification and salvation from sin?
- Would you please read John 3:14-18; John 5:24; John 11:25; and John 12:46?
- If salvation is not by faith alone, then isn't Jesus being deceptive when he says there is only one condition for salvation, faith?

### **What's The Role of Grace?**

What's the role of grace in the salvation process? In Mormon theology, grace is simply God's enabling power that allows people to “lay hold on eternal life after they have expended their own best efforts.” (Mormon publication called *The Bible Dictionary*, p. 697)

By contrast, the New Testament repeatedly states that salvation is by grace, and entirely apart from the law and good works.

#### **Ask...**

- Would you please read **Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Galatians 2:16; Romans 11:6?**
- Don't all these passages teach that God's grace and man's meritorious works are mutually exclusive?

### **How Does One Attain Forgiveness?**

Forgiveness does not come easily in Mormonism. The *Gospel Principles* manual tells us that “the Lord will not forgive us unless our hearts are fully cleansed of all hate, bitterness, and bad feelings against our fellow men.” Bruce McConkie says that “complete forgiveness is reserved



for those only who turn their whole hearts to the Lord and begin to keep all of his commandments.”

What a contrast to the forgiveness we find in the Scriptures!

### **Ask...**

- Would you please read 2 Nephi 25:23, Alma 11:37, and Moroni 10:32?
- Would you please read **Hebrews 10:17-18; Ephesians 1:7; Psalm 103:11-12?**
- Can you see the difference between the Mormon concept of forgiveness and the Bible's?
- Wouldn't you like to know for sure that all of your sins have been forgiven? Christ has made this possible through His death on the cross.

The Mormon plan of salvation stems from the church's teaching on the nature of man. According to the Latter-day Saint Church we were all premortal spirits who have been given a body to be tested in this life to see if we can attain the goal of godhood and inheriting the celestial kingdom, from which we can establish our own planets and become gods.

### **Explore...**

#### **“Is the Mormon Doctrine of Man Consistent with Scripture?”**

##### **The Mormon Doctrine of Man: Were Humans Premortal Spirits?**

According to Mormon theology, our Heavenly Father once lived on a planet like earth and had many wives. He proved his worthiness to his Father-god by living a pure and obedient life. Eventually he, his wives, and all his children died and were resurrected. He continued his “progression” until he finally reached the stage of godhood.

Then he was supposedly given the space to create his own heaven where he, along with his wives, would procreate children in spirit-form. Their firstborn was Jesus, known as Jehovah and their second born was Lucifer. Then came Adam and Eve. According to Mormonism all people

that have ever been born on earth were first born in spirit form in heaven. In the book *Mormon Doctrine* p. 589, Bruce McConkie says that “pre-existence is the term commonly used to describe the premortal existence of the spirit children of God the Father.”

Mormonism also teaches that in the pre-existence there was what is called “the war in heaven” where Lucifer wanted to force everyone to be saved and do everything himself, whereas, Jesus desired to give man free will, and the Father chose Jesus’ plan over Lucifer’s. This caused Lucifer to become angry and he persuaded one-third of the existing spirits in heaven to take sides and rebel also.

Mormon doctrine teaches that black people are among those who rebelled and were consequently punished with dark skin among others who have made wrong choices in later times in their pre-existence.

In the 1966 edition of *Mormon Doctrine*, Bruce McConkie commented,  
*Those who were less valiant in the pre-existence and who thereby had certain restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as negroes. Such spirits are sent to earth through the lineage of Cain, the mark put upon him for his rebellion against God and his murder of Abel being black skin (Moses 5:16-41; 7:8,12,22 – Pearl of Great Price). Noah’s son Ham married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain, thus preserving the negro lineage through the flood (Abraham 1:2-27 – Pearl of Great Price).*

Consider the following questions from scholars Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine...

**Ask...**

- Did you know that the unity of the human race is consistently affirmed throughout Scripture in the creation (**Genesis 1:28; 5:1-2**), the sin problem (**Romans 3:23**), God’s love for all people (John 3:16), and the scope of salvation (**Genesis 12:3; Matt. 28:19; Colossians 3:11**)?
- Would you now please read **Acts 17:26**?
- What do you think **Acts 17:26** means when it says all nations came from “one blood”?

- Did you know that **Revelation 5:9** says that God’s redeemed will come from “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”?

### **Did We Pre-Exist in Spirit-form?**

#### **Jeremiah 1:5**

*5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*

#### **The Mormon Teaching:**

According to James E. Talmage’s book *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, **Jeremiah 1:5** firmly establishes the pre-existence of Jeremiah.

#### **The Biblical Teaching:**

We must remember that in the Bible we are dealing with an all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere-present God. Due to the fact that God is all-knowing it simply means that He knew everything about Jeremiah entirely before He ever created him. This passage says nothing of Jeremiah pre-existing.

#### **Ask...**

- If the Hebrew word for “know” indicates preordination, as Hebrew scholars unanimously maintain, then isn’t the Mormon church reading an idea into **Jeremiah 1:5** that simply isn’t there?
- Did you that because of God’s omniscience and foreknowledge, He knows everything and everyone before it occurs or before they are born (Romans 4:17)?
- Would you please read **Jeremiah 27:5**?
- Doesn’t this verse make it clear that God *created* man, not that He *procreated* man?
- Please read **Genesis 2:7**. Isn’t it clear from this verse that God created man’s material and immaterial aspects at the same time?
- Where is the slightest hint in **Genesis 2:7** that a pre-existing spirit-being entered a “tabernacle” of human flesh?
- Please read **1 Corinthians 15:46**. How do you reconcile the Mormon church’s teaching that all humans have spirit-bodies in the pre-existence with this verse?

## Did We Have a Spiritual Existence Before Our Bodily Existence?

### John 17:5

*5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

### The Mormon Teaching:

According to James E. Talmage's book *The Articles of Faith*, **John 17:5** supports the idea of a spirit existence prior to fleshly existence. LeGrand Richards, the late Mormon apostle, also concluded from this verse that "we all lived in the spirit before we were born in the flesh."

### The Biblical Teaching:

The fundamental flaw in Mormon thinking here is the idea that everyone – Jesus included – preexisted as literal spirit-offspring of the Father, and that Jesus (by being firstborn in heaven) is our "elder bother."

### Ask...

- Would you please read aloud from **John 3:13,31** and **John 8:23-24**?
- Can you see that there is a clear distinction between the One from heaven and the ones from the earth?
- If we all came from heaven, these verses about coming from above or from the earth would have no meaning?
- Did you know that according to **Isaiah 42:8**, God said that He would not give His glory to another?
- Since Christ has this glory, according to **Matthew 17:1-23**, what does this tell us about Jesus Christ?
- Since Jesus is absolute deity, we would expect Him to be pre-existent, right?
- But you and I are not God. So we can't use **John 17:5** to support the idea of a pre-existence for us, can we? (Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine, *Reasoning for the Scriptures with the Mormons*, p. 305)

## **Are We the Physical “Offspring” of God?**

**Acts 17:28-29**

### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons often cite this reference to the “offspring of God” to support the idea that the Heavenly Father and Mother gave birth to spirit-children in the pre-existence.

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

You must remember that the Apostle Paul was a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” and was an Old Testament expert having been trained under one of the most well known rabbis ever by the name of Gamaliel. He knew the Old Testament at a very deep and profound level. So, when he said, “We are His offspring,” he was simply teaching that God is our Creator and therefore has ownership over each of us (**Genesis 1; Malachi 2:10**). There is, however, not even a minor suggestion that we are His *procreated* “offspring”.

### **Ask...**

- Doesn't **Acts 17** emphasize God's *creation*, not His *procreation*?
- Could you show me a single verse in all of the Bible that teaches that humans pre-existed in spirit-bodies or that we have a Heavenly Mother?
- If every Heavenly Father has a Father, who Himself has a Father and so on, who was the first Father? Who was the “Father” that got things started?

## **Can the “Children” of God Become Gods?**

**Romans 8:16-17**

### **The Mormon Teaching:**

Mormons say all men and women are “literally the sons and daughters of Deity,” the “offspring of celestial parentage.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 589) They also believe this passage indicates we can eventually be exalted as gods just like our celestial parents. (James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, p. 197)

### **The Biblical Teaching:**

Contextually, this passage does not teach that humans can become exalted as gods. First of all, **Romans 8:15** explicitly states that people become children of God by adoption. Second, being a “coheir” with Christ involves not becoming exalted as a god but *inheriting* all spiritual blessings in this life (**Ephesians 1:3**) and *inheriting* all the riches of God’s glorious kingdom in the next life (**1 Corinthians 3:21-23**). And third, God consistently takes a strong stand against human pretenders to the divine throne (**Acts 12:22-23 and 14:11-15**). In **Galatians 4:5-6** Paul says that God sent His Son “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” In Ephesians 1:5, Paul talks about God “having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

### **Ask...**

- Based on **Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5-6, and Ephesians 1:5**, how do each of us come into God’s family – by physical birth, or by adoption?
- Paul says that in **Romans 8:15** we are adopted into God’s family, not born into it, therefore, **Romans 8:16-17** couldn’t possibly be used to support the idea that we are *procreated* “children” of God could it?
- Would you please read **Isaiah 43:10 and 44:6-8**?
- Don’t the above verses completely obliterate the possibility of a human being becoming a god?

### **Conclusion:**

We have now discovered that the Mormon plan of salvation is fatally flawed and cannot lead one to their intended destination (heaven). This is due to belief in a false god who was not once a man as we are, does not exist in a plurality of father-gods, a Jesus who was not the firstborn of the Father and the spirit-brother of Lucifer that cannot save one from their sins, a degradation of the heinousness of sin, and an improper understanding of the sinfulness of created man. Now that we have explored the directions (plan of salvation) given by the Mormon Church we can look at whether or not one would end up in the right destination by following those directions as well as doing a comparison of the Mormon view of heaven and hell versus what the Bible teaches.