

Who is Joseph Smith As It Relates to the Mormon?

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The religious group known as the Mormons cannot be investigated very long until the name Joseph Smith rises to the surface and is seen as one held in high regard. In order for one to examine the doctrines, practices, and views of the Mormon faith one must become acquainted with Joseph Smith, and who he is, who he claimed to be, and how the Mormon views him as it relates to his or her faith. However, just who is Joseph Smith? Who is Joseph Smith as it relates to the Mormon? We will examine who Joseph Smith is, his early childhood and religious affiliation, his founding the religion of the Mormons, how the Mormon views him, and how Joseph Smith and the views his followers hold of him contradicts the Bible.

Joseph Smith Early Years

Joseph Smith was born to Lucy and Joseph Smith in Sharon, Vermont, December 23, 1805. Joseph Smith was the fifth of eleven children born to the union of Joseph and Lucy Smith. The Smith family moved a lot during Joseph's early childhood and they experienced difficult financial times as well. During the winter of 1812-1813 Joseph along with others of his family were affected by the typhoid fever, which led to bacteria infecting his shin bone. Although Joseph would later recover, he would endure the remainder of his life with a limp that would not depart from him. As far as it relates to Joseph's education, he had little formal education that can be known of; the majority of his learning in the early years was done at home under the guidance of his mother Lucy. Joseph's mother said of him early on, that he was far less inclined to the study of books, especially as compared to the other children; however he was frequently engaged in meditation and deep study (Vogel 27). Lucy Smith, Joseph's mother, also stated that although

he was not a reader, he could entertain the family with “the most amusing recitals” of the life and the religion of ancient Native Americans with much ease, seemingly, as if he has spent his whole life with them (Smith 84-85). Joseph was described early on as one who was quiet, good mannered, and rarely ever known to laugh (Smith 73). Biographer Fawn Brodie wrote of Joseph, he was gregarious, cheerful, and imaginative in his youthful years, born to leadership, but hampered by meager education and grinding poverty (18).

Joseph Smith Religious Background

Smith grew to maturity in what is often referred to as the Second Great Awakening, a period of religious excitement in the United States. This time period influenced his ancestors and would later come to influence Joseph and his beliefs as it relates to religion. Joseph’s family a wide variety of religious views and denomination affiliations when he was growing up (Bush 26). Asael Smith, Joseph Smith’s paternal grandfather, was a Universalist, who opposed evangelical religion, however, his maternal grandfather, Solomon Mack, self published a book describing heavenly visions he experienced which led to his conversion to “Christianity” at the age of seventy six (Bushman 25-26). Smith’s parents also claimed to experience religious visions, in fact during the years of 1811-1819, his father claimed to have had seven visions. Like thousands of their contemporaries, the Smith family practices various forms of folk magic such as using diving rods and seer stones to search for buried treasures. Smith’s family environment was one in which his family was skeptical of organized religion, believed in prophecy and visions, and very much drawn to folk magic and new religious ideas. Although Smith states that he began to wonder about religion around the age of 12, later he seems to have doubts as to

whether a Supreme Being did exist (Bushman 36-37). Smith attended Presbyterian Sunday school as a child and later gravitated toward Methodism. It has been stated that Smith was drawn toward the Methodist persuasion due to attending camp meetings, however some point after 1822 he withdrew himself from organized religion (Bushman 37-38). According to Smith's mother he stated "I can take my Bible and go into the woods for two hours and learn more than you can learn in two years at those meetings if you could attend all the time" (Smith 90). Joseph Smith grew up under confused religious guidance and his views were shaped under inconsistent and misguided information, which seems to be the result of a fanciful and inaccurate religious upbringing.

Joseph Smiths First Vision

The year 1820 seems to be the year that he says he got his religious calling to be a "prophet". Joseph states that after reading in the King James Bible from James 1:5 which states, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. Joseph Smith states that in the year 1820 he was the recipient of a marvelous vision in which God the father and God the Son materialized and spoke to young Smith as he prayed in a neighboring wood. Smith records the alleged incident in great detail in his book, *The Pearl of Great Price* (Joseph Smith- History 1:1-25), where he states that two "personages" saw the state of Christianity as defiled, corrupt, and falling short of the original divine plan. As a result of the view of the church held by the two "personages" that encountered Smith, he states that he was then told that there was a need to restore Christianity to its true state and that he, Joseph Smith, Jr., had been chosen to launch this new dispensation. It is interesting to observe that however extravagant the vision Smith claimed to have had and seen, he must not

have been too moved because he shortly after the “vision” took up digging for treasure again along with his father and his brother (Martin 170).

Joseph Smith “encounters Moroni and golden plates”

Although Smith claims to have seen a vision of God the Father and Jesus the Christ in the year 1820, he states that it was not until the year 1823 that he had seen the angel Moroni at his bedside and that the angel commissioned him three times to restore the Christian church (Joseph Smith –History 1:29-54). Smith claims that after this initial meeting he later had two more encounters with the angel that night and one more on the following morning and he began to relate the stories to his family. In 1827 Smith claimed to receive the golden plates upon which the *Book of Mormon* is alleged to have been written (Martin 172). Smith states that after he found the plates in the hill Cumorah near Palmyra, New York , Smith began to “translate” the “reformed Egyptian” hieroglyphics inscribed thereupon by means of the “Urim and Thummim”. One of the problems with Smith’s alleged story is that “Reformed Egyptian “ is a nonexistent language according to every leading Egyptologist and philologist ever consulted on the problem (Martin 172).

Furthermore, while Smith was supposedly translating the plates (1827-29), Oliver Cowdery, one of Smiths future converts and closest friends, reached such spiritual heights and zeal that on May15,1829 heaven could no longer restrain its joy; and so John the Baptist in person was speedily dispatched by Peter, James, and John to the humble state of Pennsylvania with orders to confer the “Aaronic Priesthood “ on Smith and Oliver(Martin 173). The event of the conferring priesthood is recorded in great detail in the Pearl of Great Price (Joseph Smith-

History 1:68-73), following which it is said that Oliver baptized Smith and Smith baptized Oliver, they blessed one another and spoke of supposed prophecies which should “shortly come to pass”. Smith was never too detailed as he recorded his prophecies, seeing that most Mormon prophecies never came on schedule or at all for that matter. Smith is said to have completed the translation of the *Book of Mormon* at the home of Peter Whitmer in Fayette, New York and published and copyrighted the book in 1830. Martin states that on April 6th 1830, Joseph Smith in company with his brothers, Hyrum and Samuel, Oliver Cowdery and David and Peter Whitmer ,Jr., officially founded a new religious society entitled “The Church of Christ” (later to be named the Church of the Latter-day Saints, and finally as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), (173). It was from this time forward, that the false religious cult known as Mormonism began its organized movement in the United States of America.

How do the Mormons View Joseph Smith

Although Joseph Smith himself claimed many things and is said to have seen various visions which in no way have been authenticated or proven, how do the Mormons view Joseph Smith? What is the view held among those who hold to this faith as it relates to the identity and exaltation of Joseph Smith? In the first place the Mormons hold Joseph Smith to be a true Prophet of God. The Mormons believe that the visions that Joseph Smith claims to have had, the encounters with the angel Moroni, and the tables and translating are all factual events and have been recorded accurately as it relates to their receiving them. The Mormons believe that during the lifetime of Joseph Smith the church was in a desperate and errant state and that Joseph Smith was chosen by God to be the one and only restorer of the correct way.

Members of the Mormon faith believe that Joseph Smith was a modern “prophet, seer, and revelator” (a person who reveals divine truth). Although the Mormons claim that they do not worship Smith, they do believe that he as” the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it”(Doctrines and Covenants 135:3). Many of the Mormons along with Smith himself believe that he is proven to be a prophet by the Book of Mormon which they believe to be “the most correct of any book on earth “(McKeever 85). According to tenth LDS president Joseph Fielding Smith, “ Mormonism as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith”. He was either a prophet of God divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground”. (McKeever 85).

There are others who were and are highly esteemed among the Mormon faith that hold Joseph Smith, a mere fallible man, to a higher esteem than he deserves. Mormon leaders have often made incredible statements about the role and character of Joseph Smith. For example, Mormon “prophet” Brigham Young and his counselor George Q. Cannon, both insisted that the only way a Latter-day Saint could hope to enter the highest level of Mormon heaven(the celestial kingdom) was if he had Joseph Smith’s permission . Mormon apostle Bruce McConkie also declared that “all men in the latter days must turn to Joseph Smith to gain salvation”(McKeever 85), McConkie also stated that Joseph Smith aided God the Father in the creation of the earth (McKeever 85).

So it has been shown in the material above that the as it relates to the Mormon, Joseph Smith is prophet of God, he was divinely inspired to write the book of Mormon, one must hold the proper view of him and even have his permission to enter the uppermost heaven. The Mormons also hold to the view that without believing Joseph Smith’s claims about his

revelations, and restoration one cannot be saved. Is any of this factual? Who is Joseph Smith as it relates to the Mormon, a spiritual hero, a restorer of the ancient order, a revelator. However, the most important question is who is Joseph Smith as it relates to God? Who is Joseph Smith as it relates to the biblical view of a prophet and God's manner of revealing his will toward men. Do any of Joseph Smith views, claims, and allegations contradict God's word? In the remaining portion of this lecture it will be shown how Joseph Smith and his relationship to the church contradict the Bible and how the views held by Mormons of Joseph Smith contradict the scriptures as well.

The One Time Delivery of the Faith

Joseph Smith claims to have met with God the Father and God the Son to be told that the church was no longer present in the world and that he was being selected to restore things. He also states that an angel Moroni appeared to him and shortly after he found golden plates that needed to be translated so that the "latter day" revelation could be communicated to man. There are various problems with the claims held by Mr. Smith and his claims of receiving "another revelation". In the first place, in the first century, Jude, an inspired penman of the New Testament states that although he wanted to write to this group of Christians about the common salvation we share, he was compelled to write to them that they contend earnestly for "**the faith**", which was "**once**" delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Jude inspired of the Holy Spirit to write to Christians in the first century knew nothing of a new revelation that would come about or the need to have a "latter day" revelation because he spoke of the faith in a singular nature and also expressed the thought that it had been delivered once for all to the saints. While Joseph

claims that he was guided by God and an angel to write a second revelation of Jesus Christ, his report contradicts that of Jude who discusses the faith as having been delivered in proper fashion once and for all and from that point on only needing to be guarded and defended and contended for, not to be revamped, altered or given again in another form or fashion.

The idea of Joseph Smith that he received a “latter day” revelation is indeed a late one, one that is too late to be considered as approved by God. If the Bible claims that the faith was delivered once for all to the saints and yet Joseph Smith claims that he received another revelation there is an obvious contradiction and a decision must be made as to who is correct and who is true. Smith’s view of needing additional revelation fails to measure up to the biblical standard of the faith having been delivered to the saints once and for all.

Which Is Not Another

In Galatians 1:6-10, the apostle Paul expresses shock and concern that the Christians in Galatia had been so soon removed from the truth of the gospel to what was alleged to be another gospel, which Paul said is not another. Paul said, “ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8). Paul here shows that the gospel that had been proclaimed to the Christians in Galatia was of surety from God, undefiled and no need to be improved upon or changed, in fact there was no way in which such could be done successfully and maintain the gospel in its pure and unadulterated form. Even if an apostle or an angel from heaven, which would include

the supposed Moroni, was to deliver something new, Paul says under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, let him be accursed.

Joseph Smith cannot hold to the claims that he received another revelation approved of the God of the Bible and His Son Jesus Christ without contradicting clear teachings like the ones found in Galatians Chapter one. So, in light of what Paul says as it relates to another gospel being delivered and in light of what Joseph Smith claims to have received there is yet another contradiction of Divine truth and false allegations made by a mere man. If the Holy Spirit in one place says there is not another gospel, however, comes again with another gospel, how would mankind ever be able to trust the message delivered and know that the Holy Spirit was right the second time around? Joseph Smith's claims to another revelation of Jesus Christ is as Paul said, "It is not another" (Gal 1:5). Joseph Smith claims to be the one who the angel communicated additional truths to, through the golden plates, should have refuted such a claim if it ever did take place based along the lines that angels have no more authority than man as it relates to originating truth from God and adding to God's revealed and completed word.

The Test of a True Prophet

God in his eternal wisdom and knowledge has always been and will always be (Ps. 90:1-2). God knows the thoughts of men, and nothing ever catches him by surprise (Ps. 139:1-12). God knew that false prophets and false teachers would arise and attempt to lead his people astray. God knew this to be true in the Old Testament times when the Nation of Israel was his people, and he knows it to be true under the Christian dispensation. God, knowing that false

prophets would arise, has always given man a way by which to test and measure individuals who would claim to speak for him. The mere fact that a man rises up from a corner of the earth and claims that God has spoken to him and as a result men must follow his lead or else be lost in no way makes an individual right in the sight of God. The test of a prophet is can he pass the Divine Test of God as it relates to him saying he is a prophet, and do his claims harmonize with the rest of the revealed will of Almighty God.

In the Old Testament in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 13, in the first three verses Moses discusses a test that Israel was to use to measure a true prophet. Moses states that if a man rises up claiming to be a prophet, and attempts to draw the people away to serve other gods that they had not known and to follow after gods which were foreign to their knowledge that they were not to listen to that prophet. Even if the prophet who was attempting to lead the nation of Israel way attempted to do signs and wonders (Deut. 13:1), the mere fact that his message contradicted the God of Israel and would leave people in a different direction was reason enough for him to be counted as a false prophet. Joseph Smith's claims fail this test and lead individuals toward a different institution than the one Jesus promised to build (Matt 16:18), a different gospel (Gal 1:6-9), a different faith (Eph 4:4-5, Jude 3).

Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 18:20-22, Moses admonishes the children of Israel not to listen or accept the word of anyone who claims to be a prophet yet the things spoken by that prophet do not come to pass. The test is rather simple, when a prophet says something it must happen as the prophet has said in order for the listeners to know whether or not the truth is being spoken. For instance in the book of Micah in the Old Testament , it is said where Jesus, the Son of God would be born (Mic 5:2), this prophecy comes to pass in Matthew 2:6 and the accuracy of Micah's prophecy is upheld and he passes the test of a true prophet. Joseph Smith fails this

test laid out by Moses for the fact that he claims that the golden tables which included the new revelation he received were written in a language that has never been known to ever exist. He further claims to be a prophet of God and yet he describes animals, places and events that were not in existence during the time that he wrote the book of Mormon (Martin 183).

In the New Testament the Bible speaks of false prophets coming to Christians with a false message as well (2 Pet. 2:1-3). Jesus warns his followers to examine the message that is brought to them and any who would claim to be prophets must be know by their fruit (Matt. 7:15-20). When one sincerely looks at the fruit of the teachings promoted by the Book of Mormon along with the fanciful and unreliable accounts of inspiration and miraculous events reported by Joseph Smith, his fruits suggest that he cannot be trusted. Just because an individual is claiming to be rendering religious service in the name of Jesus does not mean he is accepted of Jesus, he must do the things spelled out in the Father's will (Matt. 7:21-23).The Christian is warned to be on guard against those who would bring a new message or that would bring something they had not heard (2 Jn 9-11). The Christian is admonished to put teachers to the test (1 Jn 4:1), and to test or prove all things and hold only to that which is good or healthy spiritually. When the teachings of Joseph Smith are examined in light of the scriptures it does not take long for one to see that he is a false prophet, who is following his own way and leading many astray (Prov. 14:12,16:25, and Jer. 10:23).

Following Blind Guides

As stated early, many Mormons hold Joseph Smith in high esteem and feel as if he was inspired of God despite the contradictions of his teaching to the Bible. As it relates to the Mormon, Joseph Smith is a prophet, but as it relates to God and his word, Joseph Smith is a false prophet. What will become of Smith's Followers? Jesus warned against being lead by blind individuals (Matt. 15:14), and the New Testament consistently reminds us that we must account individually before God for our spiritual standing (Rom. 14:12, 2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 9:27). Those who hold Smith in such high regard have the responsibility of seeking the truth through the divinely inspired scriptures and seeing whether the things that are stated therein, if properly handled can be harmonized with the book of Mormon.

The followers of Joseph Smith must see the inconsistencies in his claims and have desire to know the truth and practice the truth which frees men from spiritual slavery (Jn 8:31-32). Salvation can in no way be attained by following behind blind teachers who are not inspired, that prophesy falsely and contradict the all knowing God of Heaven. The Bereans in the book of Acts are commended for their not taking anyone's word for the truth but searching the scriptures to see whether the things being taught to them were true (Acts 17:11). If the followers of Smith and his religion would do the same they would find that Jesus is the head of the church (Col. 1:18), that there is not another foundation that can be laid (1 Cor. 3:11), and that he only named by which one can obtain salvation is Christ (Acts 4:12). One must not have the proper relationship with Joseph Smith or any other religious phony in order to be saved, one must sincerely believe and obey the Gospel from the heart (Rom. 6:17), and God adds them to his Son's church (Acts 2:47).

The Seed Principle Properly Applied

The truth that every seed produces after its own kind cannot be denied (Gen. 1:12). If one plants corn seeds, corn will come up, if one plants orange seeds oranges will follow. The seed of Gods Kingdom is his Word (Lk. 8:11). When the word is planted it will only produce Christians (Acts 11:26, 1 Pet. 4:16). The person who studies the Bible, God's Word, and applies honest and reliable principles of interpretation cannot become anything other than a Christian. When you take the message of God's Word in its totality, it has a unifying message, and all who adhere to that undefiled message become the same thing religiously, Christians. If you plant the Word of God into an individual's heart it will not produce disciples of Joseph Smith, it will produce disciples of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20, Jn. 8:31-32).

Joseph Smith stated that he read James 1:5 in his Bible and that as a result he prayed for wisdom and was lead to this vision which contradicts the rest of the inspired message. Joseph Smith fails to realize, he read a passage written for saved individuals and the blessings to be derived for obeying that command are only for the individuals already in a saved condition, the lost individual can't offer up prayers to God in an effort to find salvation. The proper response to the individual who is in lost condition that Joseph Smith found himself in, is not prayer, but he must first obey the Gospel of Christ to enjoy the spiritual blessing of prayer (Rom. 6:17, Eph. 1:3). One obeys the Gospel by hearing the message of Christ (Rom. 10:17), believing the message that was preached (Heb. 11:6), Repenting of sins (Acts 17:30), confessing Jesus as God's Son (Rom. 10:10), and being immersed in water(baptism) for the remission of sins (Acts 22:16, 1 Pet. 3:21). Once one has obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation, then one can continue in the apostles doctrine and then pray comes into place in the Christians life (Acts 2:42). Joseph Smith sought God in the wrong manner and as a result was lead down a wrong road and has been leading others down that same road as well. Joseph Smith created a new seed, an unapproved

seed of his own making and when the Book of Mormon is planted it does not produce what God desires all men to be and that is Christians, the only name in which an individual can glorify God (1Pet. 4:16).

Who is Joseph Smith as it Relates to the Christian

While the Mormons would think of Joseph Smith as a hero, a prophet and a restorer, the Word of God proves Smith to be a fraud, a dreamer, and a distorter of the truth. What is the Christian's response to all of this? The Christian must align with his Master, and must reject the claims of those that are in direct opposition to the authority of Christ. The Christian has a charge to point out the inconsistencies taught by Joseph Smith and any other false teacher (2 Cor. 4:1-3). The Christian does not need to study every false doctrine and false teacher that the world will come up with; the Christian must become so familiar with the true, genuine, unpolluted teaching of scripture through constant study and thorough examination that he or she knows false teaching when it is taught.

The Christian needs to see Joseph Smith for who he really is, an opponent to the ancient way, a deceiver of the simple and uninformed (Rom. 16:17-18). Joseph Smith can be identified by the Christian as one who played on the ignorance of his hearers and did not teach the truth. For the Christian Joseph Smith stands as an example of what can happen when religious zeal is not coupled with knowledge (Rom. 10:1-4). The Christian must ever endeavor to be pleasing to God, through the avenues that God has prescribed in his word, and not try to create new and foreign ways to please God that do not harmonize with his word. The Christian can rest assured that the message we believe and stake our lives on is one that is true, authenticated, and approved of in heaven (2 Pet. 1:16-20).

The Conclusion of the Matter

When the wisest man in Israel sought every way imaginable to please himself, he came to the conclusion that the duty of mankind is to reverence and fear God and obey His commands (Eccl. 12:13-14). The conclusion of the matter, contrary to the belief of the Mormons, is to have ones life in harmony with God's revealed will and not with the will of Joseph Smith. However clever Smith was at storytelling, he could not put together a true and trust worthy account because the truth will be here forever to refute the error of men (2 Jn. 2). Joseph Smith is the founder of a man made sect known as the Mormons, and his teachings are simply of his own origination, as he was not inspired by God to write the things which he did.

The true founder of Christianity is Jesus Christ, he established one church (Matt 16:18, Eph 4:4). The church has no latter day message, the message that was revealed once just needs to be continually proclaimed and obeyed (Jude 3). The message does not need to be improved upon or changed, and if the entire world would reject this message, it still remains true because it does not depend upon the acceptance of others to remain true. Truth will always be truth, it does not abide with the majority or the minority, truth is truth whether somebody believes it or nobody believes it. Let us desire to be Christians and take interest in what Jesus and his inspired ambassadors said and leave the writings and thoughts of Joseph Smith and other men on the shelf of uninspired opinion where they belong.

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All scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.