

The Sons of Elohim

The Newest Evangelicals – Part II

Mormonism's Bid For Christian Status

Selected Scripture

Introduction

As I mentioned in our last discussion, a Mormon Temple is under construction nearby. It happens to be one of the things that the Lord has used to challenge my heart to lead this series of studies on Mormonism. What an incredible ministry we can have to Mormons. One of the few Mormon temples in the world is being built here. We need to know what they believe and, more importantly, what the Bible teaches we are to believe. Then, we need to follow that with uncovering where the two belief systems contradict one another.

This past week, one of the elders on our church board and I drove to the Mormon Temple site. Their building project is surrounded by “Keep out” and “Trespassers will be prosecuted” signs. So, we stood outside the fence and had a time of prayer that God would allow us, as a body of believers, to reach many of the Mormons, who will be involved there, with the gospel of the only true and living God.

The Newest Evangelicals

Are we really that different? The average Mormon would say, “No, we’re not.”

In fact, in our generation, they have made great strides in presenting themselves as just another Christian denomination. However, it all began very differently.

In 1820, a man, by the name of Joseph Smith, experienced, what he called, the “First Vision”. In that vision, as he would later write, he was told,

All existing churches are wrong . . . all Christian doctrine is an abomination . . . all Christian leaders are corrupt.

Three years after this vision, Smith claimed to be visited in his room by an angel, named Moroni. This angel showed Smith a set of golden plates that were buried near his home. He told Joseph that, because of his direct descent from Jesus and one of his wives, he was qualified to serve as the next prophet. Joseph would be allowed to uncover and translate the golden plates. Ten years later, the *Book of Mormon* was published.

In that same year, April of 1830, Smith organized, what was then called, the Church of Christ. In 1831, Smith and his followers bought land in Independence, Missouri, and began to build a temple. They were motivated by the promise of Joseph Smith that Jesus Christ would return during their lifetime and reign from that temple with Joseph Smith at His side.

Primarily because of Smith’s views on polygamy, he and his followers eventually were forced to move. They moved to Illinois and founded a city where they began to build another temple. It was during their stay in Illinois that Joseph transferred many of his Masonic rituals and ceremonies into the Mormon Church. And, in the meantime, even though he publicly denied his polygamy his entire life, he had already married at least fifty women in secret.

Some disillusioned followers, who had been expelled from the church, published a newspaper

attempting to expose Joseph's polygamy. Since Joseph was the mayor of the town, he ordered that the printing press be smashed. That created a riot, so Smith declared martial law. Charged with rioting and with treason for having declared martial law, he avoided arrest by crossing the Mississippi. As he prepared to flee, his wife (his first wife Emma, to whom, by the way, he had always denied his polygamy), convinced him to turn himself in, rather than risk being killed in his escape. That night, after Smith surrendered to authorities and was placed in an upstairs holding room, a mob attacked the jail in Hancock County. On June 27, 1844, after firing his own gun and killing two men, Joseph Smith died while attempting to jump from the upstairs window.

Is that the end of the story? Hardly. For Joseph Smith, according to his followers, immediately gained the unique status of martyr. They spoke of his, "shedding his blood for their sakes". In the aftermath, the followers were divided. Led by the influence of Emma Smith, a reorganized Church of Latter-day Saints emerged, which refused to practice polygamy and other beliefs. The largest faction, still known today as simply, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, moved to Salt Lake Valley. There they were led by a terrific administrator and leader named Brigham Young.

By the time of Brigham Young's death, Mormonism's key doctrines of man becoming God, God being an exalted human man with many wives, and Jesus also being an exalted man, became the cornerstones of their beliefs.

Approximately one hundred years ago, the fourth president of the Mormon Church began the process of accommodation and compromise to the American religious scene. That process has been further defined until today, in our generation, the church of Joseph Smith is attempting to be recognized as simply another Christian denomination.

A more recent Mormon leader wrote,

Latter-day saints are Christians because they emphatically believe in Christ, use His name in their official church title and believe in the Bible and the Book of Mormon which testify repeatedly of the reality of Christ and the truth of His teachings.

The Question of Jesus Being the Only True God

As I mentioned in our previous discussion, the Mormons today, are using the vocabulary of evangelicalism, but are using a different dictionary.

While the Mormon today, will say, "Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ," which Jesus are they talking about?

The Mormon Doctrine

Let us define their Jesus.

The Mormon Church teaches that,

The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ.

You may remember, from our last discussion, these heavenly parents are Elohim (God the Father) and one of his many wives.

Another quote,

The physical body of Jesus Christ was produced by relations between Elohim and Mary.

Elohim, being a man of tangible flesh and blood, simply came to earth and knocked on Mary's door and had relations with her. Thus, He produced the human baby that His spirit baby, Jesus, could inhabit.

To a Mormon, Jesus Christ and every one of us are spirit babies. We are all born first in heaven, in a premortal state, and then given a human body by our human parents. We are all, in fact, gods in the making. Elohim, or God the Father, got His start from His God the Father. And, we will also be, if we are faithful Mormons, a God the Father one day.

Listen to Brigham Young, preaching in 1855,

If we should take a million of worlds like this and number their particles, we should find that there are more gods than there are particles of matter in those worlds.

Obviously, among many things, the uniqueness of God is dissolved. He is not the only God, He is one of many gods.

And what about the uniqueness of the Son of God?

Mormon President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote,

Jesus was no more the son of God than any of the other billions of God's children – we are all His children because we too were conceived by Him and one of His many wives – and simply awaited as spirit beings the birth of our physical body by human parents.

One of the favorite Mormon sayings, that boils Mormon doctrine down to a sound-bite, was spoken by Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the Mormon church,

As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be.

You might say, “Well, that was written decades ago, it’s old beliefs.”

Listen to what one Mormon scholar recently wrote in a book that I just finished reading. He was debating, in print, with a Denver Seminary theologian. This Duke graduate, who now teaches at Brigham Young, wrote,

We believe that God and humans are the same species of being and that all men and women were his spiritual offspring in a premortal existence. The main purpose of the gospel of Christ is therefore not so much to get us to heaven as it is to get us home.

In other words, everyone is, in reality, a god, and we just needed to know that. That is the essence of the Mormon Gospel. And, by being obedient to that gospel, we will one day, achieve our own god-status and rule some galaxy of our own, with our many wives, producing our own millions of spirit babies to populate the earth’s physical babies below, that we have created for our pleasure.

The Biblical Record

In the letter of the apostle John, known as First John, he warns the church to test what they hear and critically think through the messages they receive from Bible teachers, prophets, and messengers. As he put it, in chapter 4, verse 1,

. . . many false prophets have gone out into the world.

False prophets have a different gospel. False prophets use the name of Jesus, but they believe in a different Jesus.

Matthew, chapter 7, verses 22 through 23, records Jesus saying,

Many will say to [Jesus] on [judgement] day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you, depart from Me . . .”

So, the issue is not whether or not Jesus’ name is on the door of your church building, or who says the name of Jesus most often, the issue is who that Jesus is!! The correct definition of the gospel depends upon a correct definition of the nature of Jesus Christ, right?!

The Mormon Doctrine

So, let us focus on the Mormon belief that Jesus Christ is not eternal God, but an exalted man.

I will quote from the Mormon’s *Bible Dictionary*,
When one speaks of God, it is generally the Father who is referred to; that is, Elohim. All mankind are his children. The personage known as Jehovah in the Old Testament times, and who is usually identified in the Old Testament as Lord, is the Son, known as Jesus Christ, and who is also a God . . . he being the eldest of the spirit children of Elohim.

In other words, Mormon teaching believes that Jesus is Jehovah in the Old Testament, and Elohim is God the Father. That is wonderful news, not because it is true, but because it gives us the opportunity to search the scriptures to see what is true. We now have something a little more tangible to inspect. It is hard to argue whether or not an angel came to Joseph Smith, but it is possible to correctly interpret the Bible.

So, Mormons believe that Jesus is Jehovah, but that Jehovah is not Elohim. They are two different Gods.

The Biblical Record

Let me show, from the Old Testament, that Jehovah and Elohim are interchangeable names for the same God.

Genesis, chapter 27, verse 20, tells us,

Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have it [the ram] so quickly, my son?” And he said, “Because the Lord [Jehovah] your God [Elohim] caused it to happen to me.”

Well, the Mormon might say that both gods brought it to him. This verse is not “airtight”.

So, look at Jeremiah, chapter 32, verse 18,

Who shows lovingkindness to thousands, . . . O great and mighty God [Elohim]. The Lord [Jehovah] of hosts is His name

Note the plurality of names for a singular God!

Let me quote one more verse that removes even the smallest shadow of a doubt that Jehovah and Elohim are dual names for one and only one God. Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 4, and look at this great Hebrew prayer, or “Shema,”

Hear, O Israel! The Lord [Jehovah] is our God [Elohim], the Lord [Jehovah] is one!

If a Mormon says, "Jesus is Jehovah," then you can say, "Amen."

If a Mormon says, "But Jehovah and Elohim aren't referring to the same God," then say, "Hear, O Mormon! The Lord Jehovah is our God Elohim, the Lord Jehovah is one!"

Jehovah and Elohim are two persons of one Godhead. God the Father and Jesus Christ are equally God.

Do I understand the Trinity, or one God in three persons, who are equal in essence, yet subordinate in function? The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son and the Son does the will of the Father. I do not understand it any more than I understand how God created the universe. I do not understand it any more than I understand how eternal God showed up in a virgin's womb, or how life can be within a seed, or the existence of an eternal hell and heaven, or how Lazarus was resurrected from the grave, or for that matter, how you and I will reign with Christ one day. Do I understand it? Not on your life!

It is a matter of faith. Mormons have great faith. Christians have great faith. However, it is not a matter of how great our faith is, it is a matter of in what, or in Whom, we have placed our faith. You can have great faith in thin ice, and drown. You can have weak faith in thick ice, and safely cross a frozen pond.

Now, there are a couple of passages that offer challenges to the Bible student. Let us take a look at them.

What about the verse in Psalms that seems to indicate that Jesus Christ had a beginning? Turn to Psalm, chapter 2, verse 7.

I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord [Jehovah]: He said to Me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You."

It sounds like Jesus, the Son, had a beginning. However, did you notice who is talking to the Son? The Lord! If you remember, that is the name Jehovah. Do you remember who Mormons believe Jehovah is? Jesus.

So, Mormons have a problem with this verse because it has Jesus talking to Jesus, when it is obvious that Jehovah here, is referring to God the Father. They want to ignore that to get to the rest of the verse, which the Mormon Church insists to mean that the Father is begetting the Son on a particular day! Look at the end of verse 7 again.

... today I have begotten You.

They are right about one thing, something is indeed happening on a particular day between the Father and the Son that the Bible refers to as an unusual event. But, what is the answer?

The book of Psalms does not tell us. In fact, David is writing about something he does not even fully understand. This is a Messianic Psalm; this is about a Messiah that David never saw, a Messiah that we know as Jesus Christ.

So, where is the answer? Acts, chapter 13, verse 28, explains Psalm, chapter 2, verse 7. Paul is preaching to the Jews in Antioch. They had not yet heard the good news of their Messiah. Let us pick up Paul's sermon at verse 28 and continue through verse 34, where he preaches,

And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.

When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

But God raised Him from the dead;

and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,

that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, "You are My Son; today I have begotten You."

As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: "I will give you the holy and sure blessing of David."

The begetting of Jesus Christ, ladies and gentlemen, as explained in the clear commentary of Acts, chapter 13, has nothing to do with the procreation of Jesus, but with the resurrection of Jesus. Something special did happen on a particular day. The first day of the week, God the Son defeated death and came back from the dead in His glorified, resurrected body.

Psalm, chapter 2, is not talking about Christ's birth in Bethlehem, but his resurrection in Jerusalem.

Let us look at verse. Turn to Colossians, chapter 1, verse 15.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

The Mormons teach that Christ was the first spirit son of God the Father and his wives. This verse says that, right?

It could. In fact, centuries ago, a man named Arius founded a movement known as Aryanism, which is basically repackaged in Mormonism. Aryanism taught, “Christ was the first creature God ever made.”

The Greek word for “firstborn” can refer to temporal sequence, or the first of more to come. I could use this word in referring to my son Benjamin, as he was the first born son. He was followed, two minutes later, by his brother Seth – two very long minutes.

However, the same Greek word can also mean, “first in rank, first in prominence”. Jesus Christ is the prominent One over all of creation.

That would be consistent with Romans, chapter 8. Paul is simply saying, in Colossians, that Jesus Christ ranks higher than anything that has ever been created.

While we are at it, look at John, chapter 3, verse 16.

For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten [“monogenes”] Son . . .

The Greek word is “monogenes,” and you could render the adjective “begotten” as “the one and only; the only existing” Son.

One more key passage, a passage that declares that Jesus Christ had no beginning, is John, chapter 1, verse 1 and verse 14a. You may want to turn there and underline some key words.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

Three times, in these verses, you see the verb “was”. The English language does not communicate the volume of truth in that little verb. Its tense is imperfect, which expresses an ongoing state. The verb tense literally reaches back before time ever began and then reaches ahead to future eternity.

You could expand the literal translation to fully express what that Greek verb expressed and correctly amplify the text to read, “In the beginning was, and is, and always will be the Word, and the Word was, and is, and always will be with God, and the Word was, and is, and always will be God.”

There is another truth that John introduces about Christ in these verses. It appears four times as

“Word,” from the Greek word “logos”. It could be translated, “reason” or “explanation”.

Insert that word into verse 1 to read, “In the beginning was the Explanation, and the Explanation was with God, and the Explanation was God.”

To the Greek mind, a literal word, or explanation, from an invisible God was ridiculous.

Xenophanes said, “Guesswork reigns over all.”

Apuleius said that men could catch a glimpse of God as a lightning flash lights up a dark night – one split second of illumination and then the dark.

Plato, several hundred years before Christ, said to his Greek philosophy students, “Maybe one day, a logos [a reason or word] will come from God who will reveal the mysteries and make things plain.”

John selects, under inspiration, that word and says, “The reason has come; the explanation has arrived in the flesh.”

Summary

Let us summarize. Below is a summary table to help your study.ⁱ

The Mormon Jesus	The Biblical Jesus
A created being; the brother of Lucifer and all created angels and mortals.	Uncreated, eternal God (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:10-12.).
Earned his own salvation. (god status)	Created the plan of salvation contingent upon His inherent, sinless perfection (Romans 5).
One of many savior-gods throughout the universe.	Uniquely the Second Person of the Godhead and acts alone as Savior of the world (Acts 4:12).
Conceived by the sexual relations of God the Father and Mary.	Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Who overshadowed Mary, a virgin (Luke 2:35).
A failure in His effort to establish a following.	Successful in redeeming the church which will reign with Christ and enjoy heaven forever (Revelation 5:8-10).

The Mormon may say, “We believe in the same Christ,” but do they really? They may use the term, “Savior of the World,” but do they know Him as their

own personal Savior; as the biblical Savior God who never had a beginning?

They will say, “But, listen, Joseph Smith was visited by an angel, and there were witnesses to that fact.”

Paul wrote in Galatians, chapter 1, verse 8,

But even if . . . an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

Could you handle that deception? What if an angel came and stood by your bed tonight, and said, “I’ve come from God to tell you that you are divine like Him. Believe in yourself.”

What would you say?

I do not doubt that an angel did appear to Joseph Smith, but it was a deceptive angel. It was an angel like the angel of light that Paul warned us about in II Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 14, that is Satan, who transforms himself into an angel of light in order to deceive.

Joseph Smith was deceived. And, instead of magnifying the Savior, he magnified Himself.

Listen to a man speak, who bought the lie that he was equal to Christ and, in fact, better than Christ.

I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I! The followers of Jesus ran away from Him; but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me.ⁱⁱ

Twice Joseph Smith says, “I boast,” “I boast that no man ever did such a work as I!”

I think of another man who also claimed to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. His name was the apostle Paul. How differently he sounds when he writes, not under deception, but under inspiration, in Galatians, chapter 6, verse 14,

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ .

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ⁱ Ron Rhodes, Reasoning From the Scriptures With The Mormons (Harvest House Publishers), p. 284.

ⁱⁱ History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, vol. 6, pp. 408-409.