

WANTED: "One Mighty and Strong" **Fundamentalists Charge LDS Church Has Fallen into Apostasy**

During the night of June 5th, 2002, someone crept into the Salt Lake City, Utah, home of Ed and Lois Smart, devout members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon), and kidnapped their fourteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth.

Jon Krakauer, in his 2003 best seller *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*, noted:

Details of the audacious kidnapping were reported breathlessly and without pause by the news media, leaving much of the country aghast and riveted. When a massive investigation failed to locate Elizabeth or her unidentified abductor by summer's end, people assumed the worst: that she had been subjected to some unspeakable ordeal and murdered. (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, by Jon Krakauer, Doubleday, p. 41)

However, she was found almost a year later in an adjacent town, dressed in a disguise and accompanied by two former Mormons, Brian David Mitchell and his wife, Wanda Barzee.

Although LDS temple workers at one time, Mitchell and Barzee had gradually drifted to more radical views. *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

... he and Barzee attended church less and less. Mitchell spoke strange prophecies, balked at paying his tithing and refused to pay income taxes. He railed against materialism and hypocrisy, renounced mainstream Mormonism and viewed himself as a messenger from God. . . .

By the late 1990's, Mitchell had grown a long beard and become a Jesus-like fixture on downtown Salt Lake City streets, extending his hand to passers-by with a plaintive, "Please help."

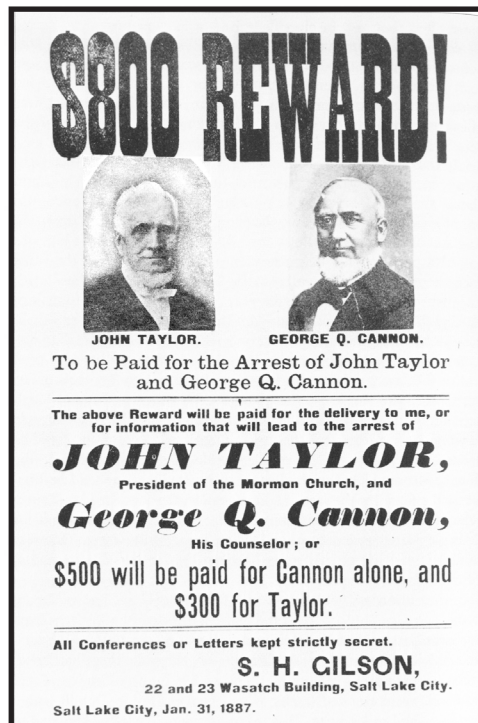
According to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Lois Smart hired Mitchell in November, 2001, for five hours to help with some roofing work at the Smart home. Seven months later,

the LDS Church excommunicated Mitchell and Barzee for their extreme views. That same week, Elizabeth Smart disappeared (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 30, 2003, p. A15).

Evidently, after receiving various revelations that he was to enter polygamy, Mitchell remembered young Elizabeth Smart and decided she was God's choice for his second wife. Since Mitchell had not been to the Smart's home for several months the family evidently did not think to associate him with the kidnapping.

Krakauer relates:

Mitchell marched Elizabeth at knifepoint four miles into the foothills west of her home. Upon reaching a secluded campsite in Dry Creek Canyon, he and Barzee conducted a weird, self-styled wedding ritual to "seal" the girl to Mitchell in "the new and everlasting covenant"—a Mormon euphemism for polygamous marriage. (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, p. 44)



This 1880s reward poster appeared when President Taylor and others went underground to avoid prosecution. (*The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, p. 406)

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The Book of Immanuel David Isaiah

On April 6, 2002, Brian David Mitchell compiled his revelations in a 27 page work titled *The Book of Immanuel David Isaiah*. One revelation declared the current LDS Church leaders to be in apostasy and that Mitchell is now God's chosen prophet: "One who is mighty and strong I have ordained in the stead of him who was ordained of God."

In another of Immanuel David's revelations, Wanda Barzee is instructed:

"And thou shalt take into thy heart and home seven times seven sisters [wives], to love and to care for; forty-nine precious jewels in thy crown . . ." (*Deseret News*, March 15, 2003)

Thus it seems that Mitchell was planning to gather more wives than Joseph Smith, who had at least thirty-three (*In Sacred Loneliness*, Todd Compton, pp. 4-7). Police believe he may have tried to kidnap Elizabeth's cousin as well. *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

The Elizabeth Smart kidnapping case could be back on track by October.

A 3rd District Court judge has ordered mental competency evaluations of Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee to be completed by Sept. 29. . . .

Mitchell and Barzee are each charged with six felonies, including aggravated kidnapping and aggravated sexual assault. Two of the counts allege they attempted to kidnap Elizabeth's 15-year-old cousin. (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, August 28, 2003, p. B2)

The March 31, 2003, issue of *People* magazine reported:

Nine months after Elizabeth was taken at knifepoint from her bedroom as she slept, she emerged as if from nowhere on a busy street in Sandy, Utah, on March 12, after four people recognized the man she was with: Brian David Mitchell, 49, profiled days earlier on *America's Most Wanted*. She was dirty and disguised and clearly under the spell of Mitchell, a religious fanatic who worked as a roofer at the Smarts' home for a day in 2001 and who claimed to be a prophet named Immanuel. (*People*, March 31, 2003, p. 44)

Jon Krakauer explained:

As for Brian David Mitchell, in the days following his arrest he steadfastly insisted that he had done nothing wrong, arguing that forcing a fourteen-year-old girl into polygamous bondage was not a criminal act because it was a "call from God." Speaking through an attorney, he

explained that Elizabeth was "still his wife, and he still loves her and knows that she still loves him." (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, pp. 48-49)

The Salt Lake Tribune observed that Mitchell is but one of a long line of self-proclaimed prophets in Mormon circles:

Brian David Mitchell, who calls himself Immanuel, . . . joined a notorious cast of characters who have attributed actions to conversations with the Almighty. . . .

Utah has its special brand of religious fanaticism that has cropped up again and again. Often it is associated with polygamy, which the LDS Church disavowed in 1890 and for which members are excommunicated.

In many cases, it also has been associated with the "one mighty and strong," as described in the Doctrine and Covenants, . . .

The belief that anyone can receive revelation is a thread that runs through many of Utah's most bizarre crimes, said historian D. Michael Quinn. "It will probably always be a problem, I would say, in Mormon culture . . ."

Elizabeth Smart's disappearance is just the latest tale of claims of divine revelation gone bad. . . . But if history is a guide, it may not be the last time Utahns hear of self-proclaimed prophets. (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 16, 2003, p. A10)

In the Footsteps of Joseph Smith

Besides Mitchell, dozens of Mormon men through the years have claimed to be Smith's successor and God's anointed to restore the original teachings, such as polygamy, to the LDS Church.

Joseph Smith's revelation on plural marriage stated:

. . . if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another . . . and they are virgins, . . . then is he justified; . . . And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, . . . (*Doctrine and Covenants* 132:61-62)

Among Smith's thirty-three plural wives were fourteen-year-old Helen Mar Kimball, daughter of Apostle Heber C. Kimball, and at least six other teen-agers. Possibly a dozen of Smith's other wives were living in a polyandrous union, staying with their first husbands while being secretly wed to Smith. (See *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd Compton, pp. 4-7.)

While Joseph Smith did not physically kidnap any of his wives, he did use spiritual (psychological) coercion to get women to submit. Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, married and a faithful Mormon, told how Joseph Smith had

approached her to be his secret plural wife with the claim that God had sent an angel to him “three times between the year of ’34 and ’42 and said I [Smith] was to obey that principle [plural marriage] or he would lay (destroy) me” (*In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 212).

Todd Compton observed:

. . . Smith linked plural marriage with salvation, . . . If Mary accepted him as her husband, her place in heaven would be assured. (*In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 212)

Another young married woman, Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, entered into a polyandrous marriage with Joseph Smith after she was informed:

. . . an angel with a drawn sword had stood over Smith and told him that if he did not establish polygamy, he would lose “his position and his life.” Zina, faced with the responsibility for his position as prophet, and even perhaps his life, finally acquiesced. (*In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 80-81)

No explanation was given as to how married women met the criteria for “virgins” in Smith’s plural marriage revelation (Section 132 in the *Doctrine and Covenants*).

One Mighty and Strong

In 1832 the two main centers of LDS population were in Kirtland, Ohio and Independence, Missouri. The Mormons were to “consecrate” (turn over) all of their assets to the church and then receive back a portion for their own necessities (their “inheritance”), thus giving the church the funds to establish Zion, God’s kingdom on earth. This led to a number of problems, leaving Smith with doubts about Bishop Edward Partridge’s handling of affairs. Section 85 of the *Doctrine and Covenants* warned the bishop that if he did not perform his duties according to God’s will, another would be sent:

. . . I, the Lord God, will send **one mighty and strong**, holding the scepter of power in his hand, . . . to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 85:7, emphasis added)

This 1832 revelation was printed in various LDS publications but was not added to the canon of LDS scripture until 1876. While LDS leaders contend this situation was resolved during Smith’s lifetime, many continue to look for the “one mighty and strong . . . to

set in order the house of God.” In fact, when Sec. 85 was added to the *Doctrine and Covenants* there was a footnote to this passage that informed the saints “A future messenger promised” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 85, footnote ‘g’ in the 1883 and 1890 editions).

John Taylor’s 1886 Revelation

With increasing arrests and pressure from the U.S. government in the 1880’s to give up plural marriage, LDS Church President John Taylor, husband of at least 15 wives, had to go into hiding. During this time he recorded, but did not publish, a revelation that plural marriage should never be relinquished. Richard S. Van Wagoner, in his book *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, explained the impact of President Taylor’s 1886 revelation:

Mormon polygamists who today rationalize plural marriage on the grounds that polygamy can be rightly maintained by a special dispensation of priesthood authority independent from the church organization usually refer to themselves as Fundamentalists. Most Fundamentalists trace their authority to President John Taylor, who, on the underground at the John W. Woolley home in Centerville, Utah, in September 1886, allegedly “asked the Lord if it would not be right under the circumstances to discontinue plural marriages.” Taylor’s son, John W., claimed he found among his father’s papers after his death the response to this question— “a revelation given him of the Lord, and which is now in my possession, in which the Lord told him that the principle of plural marriage would never be overcome” (Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 29 March 1892). . . . (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 183)

Taylor’s 1886 revelation would become the focal point of arguments and justifications made by later polygamists:

Fundamentalists insist that President Taylor secretly commissioned several priesthood holders to continue the practice of plural marriage as individuals rather than as church representatives. . . . Numerous Fundamentalists since have declared themselves the One Mighty and Strong. (*Mormon Polygamy*, pp. 183-184)

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1890 Manifesto

Mormons had been practicing plural marriage since the 1840's with the understanding that it was required by God as part of His "new and everlasting covenant of marriage." Preaching in 1866, Brigham Young declared:

The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 268)

As the United States government continued to press the church to give up the practice, new laws were enacted to force compliance. In 1887 the Edmunds-Tucker Bill was passed which, among other things, "declared that marriages not publicly recorded were felonies . . . The most serious stipulation of the bill, however, was the threat to dissolve the legal entity of the church corporation and to confiscate all church property in excess of \$50,000" (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 133).

Historian B. Carmon Hardy explains:

Then, on September 24, 1890, President Woodruff produced his famous Manifesto, advising church members to obey the laws of the land as they related to polygamy. (*Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, by B. Carmon Hardy, p. 130, out of print but available on *New Mormon Studies* CD-ROM)

However, many were left to wonder if this statement was to be considered a revelation or just an admonition. Did it mean all Mormons were to discontinue living with their plural families, refrain from having more children born to these unions, or just that they were not to take any additional wives. There seemed to be one policy for the public and another in private.

B. Carmon Hardy lists the names of 220 LDS men, including bishops, stake presidents and apostles, who continued to take plural wives after the Manifesto (see *Solemn Covenant*, Appendix II).

When examining just the time period from 1902 to April 1904 Richard Van Wagoner observed "at least sixty-three plural marriages were sealed throughout the church" (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 159).

As the government and public became more aware of leaders marrying additional wives, sometimes out of the country, the church was under pressure to put a stop to all aspects of plural marriage. The spotlight was again turned on the church when Apostle Reed Smoot ran for the U.S. Senate. After winning the election he was challenged on his right to be seated. The Senate investigation took three years:

The Smoot Hearings (January 1904 to February 1907) examined far more than the specific charges brought against Smoot. The entire structure of the Mormon church was closely scrutinized by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections. (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 164)

Hardy explained that government dissatisfaction with Mormonism included more than just polygamy:

The church was under siege not only for the practice of polygamy but also for allegations that oaths involving threats of death were taken in the temples and that secret promises to avenge the martyrdom of early Mormon leaders were made. (*Solemn Covenant*, p. 128)

The oath to avenge the death of their slain leaders was dropped in the early 1900's as a result of the government investigation relating to Senator Reed Smoot (see *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony*, pp. 22-26 and *Mysteries of Godliness*, pp. 133-136).

Testimony presented in the hearings made it clear that a number of church leaders were continuing to father children with their polygamist wives and that some were taking additional wives.

Second Manifesto

Finally, on April 7, 1904, President Joseph F. Smith issued a second Manifesto declaring that members were to enter into no new plural marriages. However, these statements were understood by some to simply mean that there were to be no new marriages in the United States, that they did not apply to plural marriages in Mexico or outside of the country.

Richard Van Wagoner explained that most Mormons did not know that some of their leaders had secretly continued the practice of polygamy:

Though the 1904 Manifesto sought and obtained Mormon confirmation of President Smith's statements before the Smoot hearings, most Saints knew little of the covert post-Manifesto polygamy that church leaders had been supporting. (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 168)

Two apostles, John W. Taylor, son of President John Taylor, and Matthias F. Cowley, were dropped from the quorum for their continued practice of the principle (see *Solemn Covenant*, chapter 7).

Since LDS Church leaders had continued to enter into plural marriages long after the 1890 Manifesto some rank and file members felt that they also should continue the

practice. When the church started to excommunicate those who entered the practice after the second manifesto, some started to feel the brethren had gone into apostasy.

Mormon Fundamentalists

A sore spot with the LDS Church is the use of the label “Mormon Fundamentalist.” The church insists that the term “Mormon” should not be applied to anyone other than members of their particular church. Jon Krakauer explained:

. . . LDS Church authorities bristle visibly when Mormons and Mormon Fundamentalists are even mentioned in the same breath. As Gordon B. Hinckley, the then-eighty-eight-year-old LDS president and prophet, emphasized during a 1998 television interview on *Larry King Live*, “They have no connection with us whatever. They don’t belong to the church. There are actually no *Mormon* Fundamentalists.”

Nevertheless, Mormons and those who call themselves Mormon Fundamentalists (or FLDS) believe in the same holy texts and the same sacred history. . . .

There are more than thirty thousand FLDS polygamists living in Canada, Mexico, and throughout the American West. Some experts estimate there may be as many as one hundred thousand. (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, pp. 4-5)

In his book, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, Richard Van Wagoner discusses the growing number of individuals who declare they are either the One Mighty and Strong or claim authority to continue the practice of polygamy. Some trace their authority through an earlier ordination by President John Taylor:

In 1922, Fundamentalist Joseph W. Musser recorded several oral accounts of the 1886 revelation from Lorin Woolley and Daniel Bateman, another individual reported to be in attendance at the 1886 meeting. . . .

Musser records that President Taylor called together Samuel Bateman, Charles H. Wilkins, George Q. Cannon, John W. Woolley, and Lorin C. Woolley and gave them authority both to perform plural marriage ceremonies and to ordain others with authority to perform polygamous marriages, thus insuring that children would be born to polygamous parents each year thereafter to the Millennium. The account relates one of the most important prophetic statements in Fundamentalist history. “In the time of the seventh president of this Church,” Taylor reportedly said, “the Church would go into bondage both temporally and spiritually and in that day . . . the One Mighty and Strong spoken of in the 85th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants would come.”

Numerous Fundamentalists since have declared themselves the One Mighty and Strong. Such claims became a serious enough concern during President Joseph F. Smith’s administration that the First Presidency published a lengthy discussion of the matter in the 13 November 1905 *Deseret News*. Those proclaiming themselves the “One Mighty and Strong” were declared “vain and foolish men” who make the claim to “bolster up their vagaries of speculation, and in some cases their pretensions to great power and high positions they were to attain in the Church.” During a special priesthood meeting on 8 April 1912, President Smith announced that the “One Mighty and Strong to deliver as referred to in the D and C Sec. 85 has no application to the Church at present.” (A. W. Ivins Journal, 8 April 1912)

President Smith made a total of nine public statements denouncing new polygamy during his administration . . . (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 184)

Historian B. Carmon Hardy commented on the growing number of Fundamentalists:

While fundamentalist organizations became most visible in the 1930s, they had arisen from the environment of indistinct authority and inconsistent response surrounding Mormon plurality in the years following the Manifesto. It was during those years that some stalwarts began attaching large importance to a divine communication to former president John Taylor, in which he was told that plural marriage was an “everlasting covenant” and that its requirements could never be revoked. Fundamentalists additionally said that Taylor charged certain individuals with perpetuating the practice until the millennium. Linked with this was a prediction that the church would fall into apostasy, captive to the appetites of modern secular society. . . .

After succeeding Joseph F. Smith as president of the church in 1918, [Heber J.] Grant turned harshly against those contending for perpetuation of the principle. Although he had been a pluralist himself, Grant moved against those found to be contracting such unions with greater sharpness than any of his predecessors. (*Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, by B. Carmon Hardy, p. 341)

The growing number of dissidents and those claiming the prophetic mantle led President Joseph F. Smith, in 1909, to proclaim:

There never was a time, perhaps, when there were more false prophets than there are today, . . . We get letters from them, and commands and threats from them, and admonitions and warnings and revelations from them, nearly every day. Our table is frequented by revelations from false prophets, . . . some calling themselves “deliverers of Israel,” some calling themselves “the one mighty and strong, who is to deliver Israel out of bondage.” . . . We have these letters—

those that we have not destroyed—stacked up almost by the cord. Some of these false prophets, these men to “deliver Israel,” and these foolish, unwise, unstable creatures, led about by every wind of doctrine have risen right in our own midst. (*LDS Conference Report*, October 1909, p. 9)

However, the problem did not go away. Through the first half of the twentieth century numerous polygamist groups and colonies sprung up in the western United States, Canada and in Mexico. In 1945 Apostle Mark E. Peterson issued another warning:

So, Latter-day Saints, beware of false teachers. . . . when men come among you, . . . advocating the so-called practice of plural marriage, . . . or when a man comes among you declaring that the Church is off the track and that he is one mighty and strong sent to set the Church in order, . . . remember that such doctrines cause dissention among the people, that they cause disputes which lead to apostasy and that the Lord condemned disputes of that kind. (*LDS Conference Report*, October 1945, pp. 91-92)

Apostle Peterson’s warning also failed to stem the tide of new polygamist groups and those claiming to be the One Mighty and Strong.

Ken Driggs, writing in 1990 in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, gave this summary of the Fundamentalists’ objections to current Mormonism:

Fundamentalism is essentially a protest movement against the religious and cultural accommodations the Church made as it searched for a way to survive under the often savage pressures of the gentile world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those accommodations began with the 1890 manifesto and gained speed during the long administration of President Grant. Fundamentalism strives to remain close to the Mormonism of the 1880’s, which is seen as the golden age of the faith. By studying fundamentalist beliefs, we better understand those changes. Although plural marriage is the most obvious topic, shifts and changes can also be seen in temple ceremonies, religious communalism, the Word of Wisdom, and the strong hold of religious leaders over the last century’s Mormons, a hold that is considerably diminished today. (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1990, vol. 23, no. 2, p. 59)

Mormons, Blacks and Fundamentalists

While Joseph Smith had allowed a few blacks to be ordained to the LDS priesthood, Brigham Young taught that they were not to receive those blessings until all the rest of Adam’s posterity had been given the chance.

The Bible teaches that when Cain killed Abel, in Genesis 4, God put a curse on Cain, announced in verses 11-12, stating that he would be a vagabond. When Cain complained that people would try to kill him, God put a mark on him to warn others not to take his life. Mormonism has traditionally taught that the mark was a black skin, the beginning of the Negro race, and priesthood was denied to his lineage. However, the Bible never depicts the mark as a color or racial origin of blacks.

Preaching in 1854, Brigham Young announced that blacks would not receive the priesthood until after the resurrection:

The Lord put a mark on him [Cain]; and there are some of his children in this room. When all the other children of Adam have had the privilege of receiving the Priesthood, and of coming into the kingdom of God, and of being redeemed from the four quarters of the earth, and have received their resurrection from the dead, then it will be time enough to remove the curse from Cain and his posterity. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, p. 143)

Brigham Young, while addressing the Territorial Legislature in 1852, declared that if the priesthood were ever given to the blacks it would be the end of LDS priesthood authority:

Speech by Gov. Young in Joint Session of the Legislature. Feby. 5th 1852 giving his views on slavery. . . . Let this Church which is called the kingdom of God on the earth; we will summons the first presidency, the twelve, the high counsel, the Bishoprick, and all the elders of Isreal, suppose we summons them to apear there, and here declare that it is right to mingle our seed, with the black race of Cain, that they shall come in with us and be pertakers with us of all the blessings God has given to us. On that very day, and hour we should do so, the preisthood is taken from this Church and kingdom and God leaves us to our fate. (Brigham Young Addresses, Ms d 1234, Box 48, folder 3, dated Feb. 5, 1852, LDS Church Historical Dept., typscript by H. Michael Marquardt. Entire text of speech available on our web site www.utlm.org, under Brigham Young Sermons.)

1978 Priesthood Change

Pressure mounted through the years for the LDS Church to give the priesthood to those of African lineage. During the 1960’s and 1970’s there were repeated demonstrations and articles denouncing the church’s position on race. Finally, in June of 1978 the LDS Church announced that the Lord “by revelation has confirmed that . . . all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Official Declaration—2).

For Fundamentalist Mormons this was another sign that the LDS Church was in a state of apostasy. On July 23, 1978, a group calling itself *Concerned Latter-Day Saints* placed a full page ad in *The Salt Lake Tribune* denouncing the church for caving in to the pressure of the world and changing various doctrines, such as lifting the ban on blacks in the priesthood and giving up polygamy:

The trend of the Church, since its concession to the world in 1890, has been to apologize and to yield on one point after another, thus implying that the early Church leaders were in error. . . . The setting in order spoken of in Section 112 of the Doctrine and Covenants, to begin at the House of the Lord, cannot be far distant. . . .

There are still a few valiant, uncompromising men, within and without the official Church, whose integrity leaves no room for changing the doctrines and ordinances, breaking the everlasting covenant, or for presuming to bestow blessings out of season. (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 23, 1978)

Many LDS fundamentalists who had tried to maintain their standing in the church while secretly practicing polygamy, withdrew from the church after the 1978 priesthood change. They felt that at that point the church had lost the priesthood.

Fundamentalists and Violence

While most Mormon fundamentalists are peaceful, a few have resorted to violence to enforce their beliefs. They take Brigham Young's early sermons on personal blood atonement seriously. Brigham Young proclaimed:

There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it; . . . (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3, p. 247)

Preaching in 1857, Brigham Young stated:

Will you love your brothers or sisters likewise, when they have committed a sin that cannot be atoned for without the shedding of their blood? Will you love that man or woman well enough to shed their blood?

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I could refer you to plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain, in order to atone for their sins. . . .

This is loving our neighbour as ourselves; if he needs help, help him; and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be saved, spill it. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 4, pp. 219-220)

D. Michael Quinn gave this background on the blood atonement doctrine:

Some LDS historians have claimed that blood-atonement sermons were simply Brigham Young's use of "rhetorical devices designed to frighten wayward individuals into conformity with Latter-day Saint principles" and to bluff anti-Mormons. . . . The first problem with such explanations is that official LDS sources show that as early as 1843 Joseph Smith and his counselor Sidney Rigdon advocated decapitation or throat-cutting as punishment for various crimes and sins.

Moreover, a decade before Utah's reformation [in the 1850's] Brigham Young's private instructions show that he fully expected his trusted associates to kill various persons for violating religious obligations. The LDS church's official history still quotes Young's words to "the brethren" in February 1846: "I should be perfectly willing to see thieves have their throats cut." (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, p. 247)

Over the past thirty years several polygamists have been arrested for their religiously motivated murders. On January 29, 1988, the *Deseret News*, owned by the LDS Church, ran an article entitled "18 Deaths Tied to 'One Mighty and Strong.'" In the article we read:

Ex-Mormons who have claimed to be that messenger have committed at least 18 murders and suicides in the past 15 years and are suspected of 10 others. . . . But splinter groups from the church say the One Mighty and Strong will yet come to restore order to the church forcefully — as when Christ cleansed the temple — because they claim the church fell when it altered early practices by banning polygamy in 1890 and ordaining blacks to the priesthood in 1978. . . .

Of concern to lawmen is that at least seven other leaders of Mormon splinter groups nationwide also claim to be the One Mighty and Strong. In interviews, all have said they are non-violent. But their rhetoric is sometimes the opposite. (*Deseret News*, January 29, 1988, p. A6)

The LeBarons

Possibly the most deadly group of Mormon fundamentalists was the LeBaron family. Claiming priesthood authority through the line of a few faithful men reportedly set apart by President John Taylor back in the

1880's, the LeBaron brothers were convinced they were the true representatives of God on earth. Problems arose, however, when they each had competing claims of who was God's chosen prophet. The two main contenders were Joel and Ervil. Krakauer comments:

Both Ervil and Joel were imbued with exceptional charisma—and both claimed to be the “one mighty and strong.” It was therefore inevitable, perhaps, that the LeBaron brothers would eventually clash. . . . On August 20, 1972, in the polygamist settlement of Los Molinos [Mexico], which Joel had established eight years earlier on the Baja Peninsula, he was shot in the throat and head, fatally, by a member of the group loyal to Ervil.

After he ordered the death of Joel, Ervil initiated a divinely inspired series of murders, resulting in the killing of at least five additional people through 1975 and the wounding of more than fifteen others. In March 1976 he was arrested for these crimes and held in a Mexican jail, . . .

Less than a year after he was incarcerated, Ervil was let out of jail. . . . Within a few months of his release, he had a disobedient daughter killed, and shortly after that arranged the murder of Rulon Allred (leader of a rival polygamist group), whose followers Ervil coveted and hoped to convert to his own group, the Church of the Lamb of God. (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, p. 266)

Ervil LeBaron was again arrested in Mexico, extradited to the United States and died suddenly of a heart attack in the Utah State Prison in 1981. However, he left behind a sort of hit list of those he thought deserved death. Several of his fifty-four children felt called to avenge their father's death and take care of the dissenters. Krakauer commented:

Two men on the hit list were assassinated in 1987. Then, on June 27, 1988—the 144th anniversary of Joseph Smith's martyrdom—three more people on the list, along with the eight-year-old daughter of one of them, were ambushed and gunned down. These latter four murders, which occurred within five minutes of one another at different sites in Texas three hundred miles apart, were carefully planned to occur at almost the exact hour that Joseph was fatally shot in the Carthage jail. Afterward, the Lambs of God bragged that they were responsible for the deaths of seventeen people all told. Because each of their victims had been killed as an act of blood atonement, the Lambs explained, the terminations were justified in the eyes of the Lord.

In 1993, two of Ervil's sons and one of his daughters were sentenced to life in prison for their involvement in some of these crimes. Two years after that, Aaron LeBaron, the mastermind of the gang, was captured. . . . and in 1997 sentenced to forty-five years in prison. (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, p. 267)

Dan and Ron Lafferty

Another group competing for the position of One Mighty and Strong was the Lafferty family in Provo, Utah. Dan and Ron Lafferty both grew to adulthood as faithful Mormons, but their devotion eventually led them to more radical views. Dan convinced his brothers that they should return to the earlier church doctrines and practice polygamy.

As Ron embraced more and more of Dan's teachings his marriage failed and his wife, Dianna, left him. Ron placed the blame on Brenda, one of his sisters-in-law, who did not approve of the brothers' new beliefs.

With dissension in the family, a solution was found in Brigham Young's doctrine of blood atonement. Krakauer comments:

It didn't take him [Dan] long to discover that polygamy wasn't the only divine principle the modern LDS Church had abandoned in its eagerness to be accepted by American society. Dan learned that in the nineteenth century, both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had preached about the righteousness of a sacred doctrine known as “blood atonement”; certain grievous acts committed against Mormons, as Brigham explained it, could be rectified only if the “sinners have their blood spilt upon the ground.” (*Under the Banner of Heaven*, p. 135)

Soon Ron Lafferty began having revelations, one of which stated:

“Thus Saith the lord unto My servants the Prophets. It is My will and commandment that ye remove the following individuals in order that My work might go forward. . . . First thy brother's wife Brenda and her baby, then Chloe Low, then Richard Stowe. And it is My will that they be removed in rapid succession that an example be made of them in order that others might see the fate of those who fight against the true Saints of God.” (Ron Lafferty revelation, as quoted in *Under the Banner of Heaven*, pp. 163-164)

On July 24, 1984, a state holiday commemorating the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in Salt Lake Valley, Ron and Dan Lafferty forced their way into their brother Allen's home in American Fork, Utah, and slit the throats of Brenda and her baby. On August 17, 1984, *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported that “the victim's throats were slashed in what police speculated may have been a ritualistic murder.”

As Ron awaits his execution, possibly next year, for the murders and Dan sits out his life sentence at the Utah State Prison, both remain convinced that they acted on God's orders. (For more on the Laffertys see our *Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 56, March 1985.)

The Fruits of Joseph and Brigham

Richard Van Wagoner observed:

Much of the development of Mormonism can be linked to the introduction, promotion, and eventual abnegation of polygamy. To those who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet of God, plural marriage can be evidence of his divine calling; to those who question or reject his prophetic claims, polygamy is more readily explained as evidence of his downfall. (Mormon Polygamy, p. 212)

Mormons often point to their strong emphasis on morals and family life as proof that Mormonism is true, appealing to Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:20: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." But this passage is not about judging a religious culture, but is a warning about false prophets "which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). We must look at ALL of the LDS prophets' doctrines, not just the ones that are acceptable today. Polygamy, blood atonement, lying and disobeying the laws of the land are also the fruits of LDS prophets.

Sometimes a Mormon will respond that one can find plenty of murders and misdeeds in Christianity's past. The difference is Jesus never advocated murder and polygamy, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young did. Why should we accept their other doctrines if polygamy and blood atonement are not true? What criteria will the Mormons give us to determine when their prophets speak for God?

Past president Ezra Taft Benson, speaking at BYU on February 26, 1980, gave his famous talk, *Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets*. In it he declared:

FIRST: The Prophet is the Only Man Who Speaks For The Lord in Everything. . . . We are to "give heed unto all his words"—as if from the Lord's "own mouth." . . .

FOURTH: The Prophet Will Never Lead The Church Astray. . . .

SIXTH: The Prophet Does Not Have to Say "Thus Saith the Lord" to Give Us Scripture. . . .

NINTH: The Prophet Can Receive Revelation on Any Matter—Temporal or Spiritual. . . .

FOURTEENTH: The Prophet And The Presidency—The Living Prophet And The First Presidency—Follow Them And Be Blessed—Reject Them and Suffer. (Entire speech reprinted in *Following the Brethren*.)

However, President Benson's speech does not explain how a prophet can teach one thing on one occasion and the next prophet teach something just the opposite. If the LDS prophets cannot lead us astray, how are we to account for their contradictory teachings?

DO LDS HISTORICAL ISSUES MATTER?

Some people regard Mormonism's past as irrelevant to its validity as a church today. However, Joseph Smith and his successors have always maintained that the LDS Church is both historically and doctrinally true. Below are several examples of historical events necessary for Mormon truth claims.

First Vision

Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, wrote that in the spring of 1820, when he was fourteen years old, there was a significant revival in his neighborhood. He recounted that "Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist." His mother, two brothers and his sister joined the Presbyterian Church. Then Smith went out into the woods to pray for wisdom concerning which church he should join. In answer to this prayer God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him as two separate, distinct beings. They told him not to join any of the churches "for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt" (*Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:5-19). Mormon claims still stand on the historicity of that 1820 vision.

In 2002 LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley proclaimed:

Our whole strength rests on the validity of that vision. . . . It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then it is the most wonderful and important work under the heavens. (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, October 7, 2002, p. A6)

On the basis of Smith's 1820 vision, Mormonism claims that God has rejected all other churches, and that no one outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has the authority to baptize or act for God. (See Joseph Smith's story at the back of any *Pearl of Great Price*.) Speaking in 1998, LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley declared that the Mormon Church is "the only true and living Church upon the face of the whole earth" (*Deseret News*, Church News, June 20, 1998, p. 7).

While the LDS Church claims to believe in God and Christ, they admit that their definition is very different than that held by historic Christianity. Latter-day Saints point

to Smith's first vision as proof that God the Father and Jesus Christ both have physical, resurrected bodies and are totally separate gods. In 1998 the *Deseret News* reported on President Hinckley's comments while visiting Switzerland:

In bearing testimony of Jesus Christ, President Hinckley spoke of those outside the Church who say Latter-day Saints "do not believe in the traditional Christ. No, I don't. The traditional Christ of whom they speak is not the Christ of whom I speak. For the Christ of whom I speak has been revealed in this the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. He, together with His Father, appeared to the boy Joseph Smith in the year 1820, and when Joseph left the grove that day, he knew more of the nature of God than all the learned ministers of the gospel of the ages. . . ." (*Deseret News*, Church News, June 20, 1998, p. 7)

Thus Smith's subjective experience carries more weight to a Mormon than all the Bible verses a Christian may quote. However, since the vision is also tied to certain historical events, one can challenge the story at those points, which present a number of inconsistencies. The books, *Inventing Mormonism* and *Mormonism and the Nature of God*, give a thorough treatment of the historical problems with the first vision.

Total Apostasy and Loss of Priesthood

Mormonism claims that the early Christian church contained all the same teachings the LDS embrace today, including temple marriage and the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods. However, with the death of Christ's apostles, they believe the church fell into total apostasy, instituted false doctrine, changed the scriptures and lost the authority to minister in God's name. Mormonism declares that God rejects every baptism performed by a minister outside of the LDS church. Not until Joseph Smith restored the "only true church" with the priesthood authority could a person have a valid baptism.

Joseph Smith stated that on May 15, 1829, John the Baptist appeared to him and his associate, Oliver Cowdery, and bestowed on them the keys of the Aaronic priesthood, thus giving them the authority to perform valid baptisms.

Smith claimed that a month later (specific date unknown) Peter, James and John appeared to him and Cowdery and bestowed on them the Melchizedek priesthood. This priesthood authority, lost since the time of the original apostles, is supposed to be necessary to ordain any man as a minister of God. With these two priesthoods restored Smith had the correct authority to reestablish the

"only true church" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 22:1-4; 13; 27:8; 84:18; *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:68-70).

However, there are many historical problems with these alleged events. (See *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*.)

New Scripture

Joseph Smith set up his new church on April 6, 1830, in New York. Two months later the Book of Mormon was published, financed by Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris. This book purports to be a translation of an ancient record. The 1981 Introduction to the book states:

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

While this sounds like Mormonism gives the Bible equal authority with the Book of Mormon the LDS Articles of Faith qualify the Bible's reliability. Article eight states:

We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

The Introduction to the Book of Mormon goes on to promise that if one prays for spiritual confirmation God will reveal the truthfulness of the record to him or her. It states:

Those who gain this divine witness from the Holy Spirit will also come to know by the same power that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith is his revelator and prophet in these last days, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's kingdom once again established on the earth, preparatory to the second coming of the Messiah.

Here we see the domino effect of praying about the Book of Mormon. Once it is believed it opens the door for full endorsement of Joseph Smith as God's mouthpiece and the LDS Church itself as God's only approved organization. It will also destroy a person's confidence in the Bible. The Book of Mormon declares:

And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld that the book [Bible] proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; . . . Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles . . .

And after they go forth . . . thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. (*Book of Mormon*, 1 Nephi 13:24-26)

But what physical evidence is there that the Book of Mormon is an historical document written by early inhabitants of the Americas? Scholars have raised many questions regarding these claims. Such books as *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, *American Apocrypha*, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* and *The Creation of the Book of Mormon* present many well-researched problems.

Besides the Book of Mormon the LDS Church has added two other books to their canon of scripture. LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie explained:

By the standard works of the Church is meant the following four volumes of scripture: The Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. The church uses the King James Version of the Bible, but acceptance of the Bible is coupled with reservation that it is true only insofar as translated correctly. (Eighth Article of Faith.) The other three, having been revealed in modern times in English, are accepted without qualification. (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1979, Bookcraft, p. 764)

However, there have been numerous changes in their scriptures. For more information, see the following books: *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*, *Joseph Smith's Revelations: Text and Commentary*, *Case Against Mormonism* (vol. 1) and *Flaws in the Pearl of Great Price*.

Also, the Book of Abraham, part of the Pearl of Great Price, has been shown to be a spurious document. Smith claimed it was a "translation" of ancient papyrus, purchased by the Mormons in the 1830's. However, Egyptologists have demonstrated that the actual text reads nothing like Smith's "translation." (See *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus* and *The Lost Book of Abraham* video [DVD].)

Mormon Doctrine Today

Evangelicals and Mormons both struggle with the level of doctrinal maturity among their followers. However, Mormonism seems to make a deliberate effort to mask its more heretical teachings from potential converts and the press.

In the September 1994 *Ensign* magazine President Hinckley was quoted as saying that Joseph Smith's 1844

King Follett sermon was "an important doctrinal document in the theology of the Church." In this sermon Joseph Smith proclaimed:

I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. . . . God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . I am going to tell you how God came to be God. . . . God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; . . . and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, . . . (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Deseret Book, pp. 345-346)

Joseph Smith's sermon is very clear that there are multiple gods, that our god was once a mortal and achieved godhood after valiant effort. Yet when President Hinckley was asked about this doctrine in various interviews in 1997 he seemed to dismiss it. *Time* magazine reported:

On whether his church still holds that God the Father was once a man, he sounded uncertain, "I don't know that we teach it. I don't know that we emphasize it. . ." (*Time*, August 4, 1997, p. 56)

This raises the question: Is this a public relations ploy or is Mormonism truly moving away from Joseph Smith's doctrine of plural gods?

Obviously many new converts are unaware of this teaching and would probably tell you they have never heard it. Surprisingly, the February 2002 *Ensign* reprinted the 1909 First Presidency statement affirming that "God himself is an exalted man, perfected, enthroned and supreme." This statement reinforces Joseph Smith's teaching that God was a mortal who advanced to Godhood. The First Presidency's statement also teaches that we were born in a pre-earth life to "Heavenly parents" thus proclaiming the belief in a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father (both of whom have resurrected bodies from their prior mortal life). Also, the LDS Melchizedek Priesthood manual for 2002 focused on the teachings of past president John Taylor. Throughout the manual Taylor affirmed there are "Gods that exist in the eternal worlds," that God and man are the same "species" and that man's goal is to become a "God" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor*, pp. 2-5, 82).

The manual also presents the LDS Church as the "Church and Kingdom of God," the only church containing the "everlasting Gospel" and the only ones holding the "priesthood" authority to act in the name of God (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, pp. 17, 33, 35, 70, 72, 80, 84).

Since the LDS Church continues to print and distribute these older sermons, they obviously still endorse them.

However, the Bible declares that there is only one God (Isaiah 43:10-11; Isaiah 44:6, 8) who has always been God (Malachi 3:6; Psalm 90:2). LDS teachings have been challenged in books such as *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* and *The New Mormon Challenge*.

Bremen, Germany: An Example of Apostasy

While Mormonism can be challenged on its theology, its historical claims are equally vulnerable. Joseph Smith's visions were supposedly the result of certain historical events. As President Hinckley said, "It [Smith's first vision] either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud."

These issues were brought to the attention of certain LDS members in Germany with the effect of causing a number of prominent members to leave the church. A recent article in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* stated:

Then, in 1996, a member of the [Bremen] ward encountered a couple of disturbing articles about the early history of the church from the *Utah Lighthouse Ministry*, a conservative Protestant organization with an anti-Mormon mission. Attempting to come to terms with these, he asked friends in the ward for help and, in so doing, unintentionally started a wave of apostasy. Another brother translated parts of these articles into German and distributed them to members. In the fall discussion circles formed and letters were written to local and regional church authorities, questioning the official version of church history. The issues at stake were, first, the different versions of the First Vision as evidence of a developing concept of God rather than an initially clear and complete picture through revelation; second, differences between the Book of Commandments and the Doctrine and Covenants as evidence of changed (or possibly forged) revelations; and, finally, controversy over whether the Book of Mormon was a fiction or a genuinely ancient record. The members were especially upset because these papers had been written twenty years earlier (when most of them had just begun their membership in the church), but evidently no church response or explanation had ever been made available.

In February 1997 the mission president tried to solve the problem in one stroke by inviting everyone to a question-and-answer evening. During that meeting tension became acute between the group questioning the church's truthfulness regarding its history and members affirming their testimonies and high esteem for the Book of Mormon and the First Vision. The mission president did not answer

the questions specifically, but called for a spiritual approach when hard historical facts were placed in question. When he defined truth as "whatever the prophet says, if he is not mistaken," some members decided to leave the ward. Two former bishops and a former branch president were among those who left. All together thirty people left, most of them long active in responsible church positions such as branch and district presidencies, district and stake high councils. The wards, of course, were left in an uproar and are still trying to regain composure. The Delmonhorst Branch was subsequently dissolved. The remaining dwarf units continue to struggle. ("One Hundred Eighteen Years of Attitude: The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Free and Hanseatic City of Bremen," by Jorg Dittberner, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 36, no. 1, Spring 2003, p. 68)

Problems with Smith's first vision are clearly laid out in *Inventing Mormonism* by Marquardt and Walters and our book, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*

We believe early Mormon historical material shows that Joseph Smith was the inventor, not revelator, of LDS scripture.

Even LDS authors have dealt with many of these historical issues. Grant Palmer, a retired LDS educator, has written a well-researched book, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, dealing with some of the major historical problems facing Mormonism. Another valuable book from an LDS general authority and scholar is *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, by B. H. Roberts.



Extracts from Letters and Emails

Jan. 2003. I just wanted to write and thank you for all you have done for me over the years. I first came in contact with you, a few years back when I started to have doubts about the mormon religion. Your materials answered many of my questions, and I was able to defend myself from critical family members and friends, once I let them know I no longer was following the mormon church. I am very comfortable and happy with my life away from the church and proud of the choice I made.

I never saw a reason to go through with a name removal until the recent debate over main street repeaked my interest. This last week I sent in a request for name removal and am also preparing a request for a roommate of mine, to be sent this week. Thank you for providing the procedure for accomplishing this on your web pages.

Jan. 2003. Subject: I discovered their lies 9 days after my baptism.

. . . Early last November I met a very decent young man who said “We are all one, so we ought to be nice to each other.” At his invitation, I started visiting the Davis, California LDS Church on the 17th of last November. I was baptized on Dec. 21. I started coughing badly and having trouble breathing from time to time since early last December. I asked the missionaries to postpone the baptism, but was told it could not be done. One of the missionaries assured me that my health would improve after baptism.

. . . Had the Mormon Church truly abolished polygamy, the Sect.132 doctrine would have been removed from its canonized scriptures long time ago. Since then I have been researching the documented Mormon history through books, articles, and the Internet. The Mormon dirty laundry on polygamy alone was appalling, frightening, and disgusting enough! I have also discovered what I was told by by missionaries regard to polygamy, etc. (it was probably the official lines) was a blatant lie and misrepresentation.

The beautifully-packaged “Six Lessons” were half-truth and misrepresentation too. Instead of being the “restored church of Christ”, Mormonism is non-Christian and it is nothing but a man-made institution. The Mormon empire is a multi-national corporation, and it is wealthy, powerful, and fast-growing. . . .

. . . I mailed my resignation letter on Jan.11 (three weeks after my baptism). According to the return receipt, the bishop received it on 1-13. Legally starting 1-13, I am no longer a member of the Mormon Church.

I was such a fool that I let them rush me into baptism. I should have started my research at least one month earlier. Yet I was fortunate that I discovered their lies before investing more time and energy to that organization.

Jan. 2003. Hi. Just a suggestion. I was reading your FAQ’s about Mormonism and noticed that you mention the Deseret News published a statistic that the LDS church has a membership of 10 million or so. You might want to mention somewhere on this web page that many of these 10 million do not consider themselves Mormon, such as myself. I was raised Mormon, but grew to despise that church. When people ask me is I am Mormon, my response is a definite “NO.” However, the LDS Church has me on record as a member still (see what I’m saying?).

Jan. 2003. I HAVE LOTS OF LDS FRIENDS, WHY DON’T YOU LAY OFF.

GOSSIPING (WHAT YOU ARE DOING) IS A SIN TOO, OR DON’T YOU READ THE BIBLE.

Feb. 2003. The Utah Lighthouse Ministry has to be one of the laziest and most delusional group of people anywhere. Imagine not being able to “hack the standards” so much that you spend your whole life trying to prove a religion is false, just so you can convince yourself that your actions and conduct, which is apostasy, is justified.

Folks like you can’t give [up] a simple cup of coffee, so you try and poke holes and President Hinckley. Folks like you at some point, can’t pay their tithing, so they try and disprove the First Vision. Folks like you can’t understand the language of the Spirit, so you try and re-invent what revelation really is. Folks like you would rather rely on your own supposed intellect, rather than the promptings of the Spirit. Is that not the easy way out? Folks like you can’t follow simple laws pertaining to copyrighted materials, so accuse the Lord’s Kingdom of being a multi-billion dollar empire picking on a small ‘ministry’. Folks like you can’t obey the Lord’s commandments, so you call President Packer a bigot.

When it comes right down to it, this is way Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord to answer his humble prayer. He saw the Tanners and the Deckers and the Maxine Hanks of his day. He saw their true apathy towards revealed religion. He saw how they would re-invent religious feeling to manipulate the untaught. . . .

If there were a definition to all of your sick disorder, it would be: Tannertantium...(t n r-t n tr - m) A not so subtle mannerism and sickness displayed in those who are repeatedly shown to be wrong. They vigorously pursue half truths, especially when discredited. Rather than acknowledging any mistake or wrongdoing, those who suffer from this debilitating disease become even more engaged. In severe cases, some of these die-hard anti-mormons have been known to develop a form of color blindness. They see all that is white as black, and vice-versa. The only known relief has been found in the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, this remedy is rarely accepted due to another anti-mormon disease known as pridecomethbeforethefallitis.

Feb. 2003. First of all, great job on a very informative website that fairly presents both sides of the story. My wife converted to Mormonism in 2000 and has spent the last 2 years trying to convert me to this faith. Prior to this conversion, we attended several churches in our joint search for faith. This conversion, as you might expect, has caused great divides in our relationship. My wife is also ready to baptize our daughters into the faith and I am adamantly opposed and have let her know my opinions. Her response is that I “obviously haven’t prayed enough to know the truth”. . . Thanks for your time,

Feb. 2003. I just wanted to say thanks to you all for the work you do. Thanks for your recent e.mail, and thanks also for the book "Major Problems with Mormonism" which I am half way through reading.

I went to the Mormon Church for the last time yesterday, and being the first Sunday of the month I was able to get up and share my testimony of the Saviour and explain why I would not be going to that church again. I kept it short as I wasn't sure the bishop would let me say too much, but I used 2Cor 6:17 as my text and then left the chapel. The only surprise was that around 15-20 people said amen. I'm not sure whether they meant it, or were just not listening.

Still, I feel I have much to thank you for. I'm sure you've had your share of abuse for what you do and thought it only proper to say how grateful I am. Many thanks. may the Lord continue to bless you and your work.

Feb. 2003. Your website is untrue. The things that you say about Joseph Smiths words are false. Surely, knowing that you are relating lies and calling them truth should cause fear in your very soul. . . . May God forgive you.

Was it not Jesus, whom you say that you know, that said "A prophet be without honor in his own country?" Thank you for your persecution. By it, I know that I am founded in true doctrine.

March 2003. I read a statement in one of your articles a while back, that totally explains the way the LDS church explains there theology, and having believed in the LDS church for 34 years, until the Holy Spirit opened my eyes, (6 years ago I became a baptized LCMS Lutheran). The statement you claimed is totally, 100% spot on: "LDS test the Bible by their prophets. Christians test prophets, pastors and teachers by the Bible."

March 2003. I am so very sorry that you have never been properly informed on the topics of which you write. I am sure [you] know full well what you are doing and that no good will come from it.

March 2003. hey! . . . thanks to the fact that i have finally decided to answer the numerous questions that i was told to "put on a shelf", I AM FREE!!! I am especially thankful to your site for opening the "can of worms" for me! it seems that each time i have a thought or a question about "the church", i can turn to you for the answers. my life-long goal is not to bash "the church", but to open the eyes of my blind, programmed friends that i (we) had to leave behind. . . .

March 2003. You two are so utterly ridiculous. You have no idea what you are talking about. The only reason you have the faith that you have is because of the church that you grew up in. And in the very time when you could show your grattitude for those teachings, you turned your backs on the truth. I feel so sorry for you both.

April 2003. Hi. It's funny. I had heard horrible things about you guys my entire life. I was raised LDS and then I went on a mission. I came home only ten months into said mission, mostly because I didn't feel good about what I was doing there, and I then proceeded to heavily research the truthfulness of the Mormon church. After many years of study and thought, I came to the conclusion that my assumptions were right and I left the Mormon church for good.

However, I always sort of wrote you guys off as vindictive liars, presumably because that is what I had always been told, so I didn't use any of your resources in my years of research. Damn. Many items that it took me some time to find were readily available through your ministry. I only recently visited your website, prompted mainly by the article in the City Weekly, and I feel moronic for not seeking out your resources earlier.

I commend you for your decades or honest research and courage. I only wish that I would've found you sooner. I would like any materials that you could send me, as my father and I, who is an LDS Institute Director in a major city on the East Coast, continue to have lively discussion about the validity of the Mormon faith. He's a well-spoken man and I need all the help I can get. I would also like to receive your newsletters. Thank you and good luck in passing the torch of your ministry.

April 2003. I find it funny how Mormons assume you're full of hate because you tell them things they don't want to hear. When I was a questioning Mormon I visited your bookstore and met Sandra. What a gentle soul! Thank you for being the face of Christ to people who don't even know how desperately they need Him.

April 2003. . . . We were recently saved 2 years ago. My husband is a direct descendant of Hyrum Smith. I come from a big Mormon Family also generations back, . . . We were born and raised in Mesa Az, I still sound mormon.

But by Gods Grace we were brought out. . . . We were temple, returned missionary mormons. We were married in 1987, I saw the changes to the ceremony in 1990. That really disturbed us back then. It still took years to open our eyes.

God Bless you. Our Family thinks we went nuts and are angry about life. Just the opposite holds true, peace and hope and faith came to us for the first time through the beautiful Lord Jesus Christ.

April 2003. I was born and raised in the “Church” and rose to the rank of Priest before becoming an infidel. Several years ago I found that reading the 7-volume *History of the Church* straight through to be sufficient for completely destroying the remains of any former testimony I might have had. Now I’m discovering that the huge work is a horrible misrepresentation of the tip of the iceberg of all that’s wrong, stupid and insidious about the Church. . . . I was always under the impression that the Anti-Mormons were telling lies and being downright mean to the Mormons for no good reason. Its weird to find out that so many of the most Anti-Mormon texts are written by Joe Smith, Brigham Young, et al. Most of the material on this site is simply a straightforward presentation of Mormon tenets; . . .

April 2003. Go Tanners! You guys are the best. Your research is thorough (despite Mormon criticism), your responses are professional (despite Mormon criticism), your motive is compassion (despite Mormon criticism), your patience is unbelievable (despite Mormon criticism), and the truth is on your side. . . . I guess that leaves them with no response . . . other than criticism. It’s got to be frustrating when your beliefs collide with truth. In all seriousness, it is truly sad to consider the hold this religion has on so many and how deeply the convictions are held.

I had a Mormon missionary once tell me to go about studying Mormonism “as if” I believed it to be true, rather than from a pre-disposition of it being false. Interesting concept! I wonder if he could agree to study “Apostate” Christianity in the same manner?

Nevertheless, many people have studied the Bible in an effort to disprove it and ended up embracing it! The trouble with Mormonism is even if you set out to study it in an effort to strengthen your faith, you keep running into annoying facts that contradict the “truth”! (As I know you well know.)

I will add my voice to the many who rightly observe: You have done an excellent job over the years. You have been and will continue to be blessed. (Despite Mormon criticism!)

May 2003. . . . I have read your book *The Changing World of Mormonism* off the internet and it really opened my eyes. It didn’t take me long to write the letter to the Bishop to have my name removed from the records of the church.

It wasn’t easy; I’ve been an active member for 25 years (convert 1978), married in the SLC temple and the father of 5 children, ages 14 through 21. But my eyes are now open and I feel real joy and freedom in my life as never before. I feel like I’m breathing fresh air for the first time in many, many years. Thanks to you I am rediscovering the real Word of God!

May 2003. Thank you for all of your hard work and ministry! I am just another jewel in your crown, as much of the information on your site served to confirm my decision to leave the Mormon church. I have attached a copy of the letter to my bishop requesting that I be removed from church records.

June 2003. I was just reading some letters that you have received and am very sad that some Mormons think that you hate them. I admire that you LOVE them enough to show them the other side of Mormonism that the LDS church doesn’t. So I just wanted to say thank you for loving the LDS people. My prayers are with you and your ministry. God bless you.

June 2003. Thank you so much for this information! What a blessing from God at just the right time. I just know the Holy Spirit took me to your web site.

I’m a pastor of a very small SBC in Virginia. The LDS have just built a large church here in our area and our members are being called upon weekly by LDS missionaries. . . .

Thanks you again for this work of God and the help it will be for those of us who don’t have the insight, resources or staff to compile this great work of truth you have done.

June 2003. How sad it is that you waste so much time in the pursuit of hate. Surely there are more devious things to investigate than Members of a Church. What if the Mormons are right? I know . . . but what if?

June 2003. . . . I was a Mormon from 1986 to 2002. I am so thankful to the Lord that there are people with so much courage and determination like you. God has put you guys on earth at this point and time to unmask Mormonism. You have been so far of great help for me to get out of Mormonism which has created a lot problem in my marriage since my wife and my 3 children . . . believe blindly in Mormonism. But I certainly hope someday the spark light of the Holy Spirit will come to their minds and hearts so that they too will help themselves test all things and see if Mormon Christianity will pass the test.

June 2003. . . . You might be pleased to know that I accepted Christ as my personal saviour in 1983 after being in the world of Mormonism for 8 years.

I served as a member of the Elders Quorum Presidency, as Sunday School President, Elders Quorum instructor, Investigators class instructor (Gospel Essentials), Ward Inservice director, and Executive Secretary to the Stake Presidency.

The issue for me at the end was the issue of “What had I done with the blood of Jesus Christ and did it avail for me?” I had to answer no! and upon doing so, I immediately repented and left the church that very day.

New Books

- All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* \$33.00
Armand L. Mauss - University of Illinois Press
- American Massacre - The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows*.....\$24.00
Sally Denton - Alfred A. Knopf Publishers
- Christian Companion to The Triple Combination*.....\$8.00
Colleen Ralson - Personal Freedom Outreach
- False Prophecies of Joseph Smith*.....\$4.50
Compiled by Dick Baer - Concerned Christians
- Fast Facts on Mormonism*\$9.00
John Anderberg & John Weldon - Harvest House
- The Keystone of Mormonism* \$17.00
Arza Evans - Keystone Books Inc.
- Point by Point: A Critique of Which Church is True? A Process of Elimination Using the Bible*..... \$4.50
Steven Lee - Utah Lighthouse Ministry
- Under the Banner of Heaven - A Story of Violent Faith*\$23.00
Jon Krakauer - Doubleday

Recent Titles

- A Christian Woman's Guide to Understanding Mormonism* \$11.00
Donna Morley - Harvest House Publishers
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Edited by Gary Bergera - Signature Books
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- Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (Second Edition) \$20.00
David John Buerger - Signature Books
- One Nation Under Gods* (Paper) \$20.00
Richard Abanes - Four Walls Eight Windows
- Welcome All Wonders: A Composer's Journey* \$10.00
J.A.C. Redford - Baker Book House

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