

Mormonism 101

What the Mormons want you to know ... and some things they wish you didn't



Mormonism 101

Betcha didn't know that Kolob is the name of the star closest to the throne of God, huh?



Mormonism 101

A former believer reflects on the history and beliefs of the Church



Agenda, Part One

- Who am I?
- Overview of Mormon history
 - Joseph Smith
 - How'd they wind up in *Utah*?
- What Mormons believe
 - The Book of Mormon
 - More modern revelation
 - Articles of Faith



Agenda, Part Two

- Recent research into sacred origins:
 - Which First Vision?
 - View of the Hebrews
 - Native American DNA
 - The Book of Breathings
- Polygamy in Utah: then and now
- If there's still time: Lots more things to talk about, depending on what's interesting



My Story



The Prophet Joseph Smith



- Born Dec 23, 1805 – 200 years ago
- First Vision, Spring, 1820
- Angel Moroni, 1823-1827
- Translated The Book of Mormon, 1830

The Prophet Joseph Smith



- Founded the Church of Christ, 1830
- Prophet, Seer, Revelator, 1830-1844
- Martyred, June 27, 1844

From New York to Utah

- 1830: Church founded, Fayette, New York
- 1831: Moved to Kirtland, Ohio
- 1839: Moved to Nauvoo, Illinois
- 1844: Succession crisis
- 1847: Pioneers arrive Salt Lake Valley
- 1893: Salt Lake Temple dedicated
- 1896: Utah becomes U.S. State



The Salt Lake Temple



The Book of Mormon

- A history of Ancient America, from the Tower of Babel to about 421AD
- Another testament of Jesus Christ
- Compiled by prophet historian Mormon, one of the last of his people, in about 400AD, written on a stack of gold plates
- Delivered to Joseph Smith by Mormon's son Moroni, now an angel, in 1827



Jesus Appears to the Nephites



Modern Revelation

- The Book of Doctrine and Covenants contains many subsequent revelations.
- The Pearl of Great Price contains:
 - Smith's revisions to Genesis and Matthew
 - The writings of Abraham, by his own hand
 - An account of Smith's First Vision
 - The Articles of Faith



Article of Faith #1

- “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”
- “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.”

– D&C 130:22



Article of Faith #2

- “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.”
- In other words, no “original sin”.
- “Children who die before [age 8] are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.”

– D&C 137:10



Article of Faith #3

- “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”
- No “salvation by grace alone”.
- Universal salvation? That depends on your definition.



Article of Faith #5

- “We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.”
- Translation: your baptism doesn't count.



Article of Faith #5, continued

- God told Joseph Smith that other churches “were all wrong; that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; [and] that [their] professors were all corrupt,” (JS-H 1:19) and that Mormonism is “the only church upon the face of the whole earth with which I, the Lord, am well pleased.” (D&C 1:30)



Article of Faith #6

- “We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.”
- Compare Ephesians 4:11-15



Article of Faith #8

- “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.”



Article of Faith #8, continued

- “The Book of Mormon [is] the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man [will] get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book.”

– Joseph Smith



Article of Faith #12

- “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”
- Remember this when we talk about polygamy in a few minutes.



Questions and Answers

Does anybody want to ask questions about any of the stuff we've covered so far?



Questioning Sacred Origins

- Many conflicting revisions of The First Vision narrative exist.
- Can they be harmonized?
- Was the First Vision “a tale that grew in the telling”, as J.R.R. Tolkien would say?



Questioning Sacred Origins

In the 1930's B.H. Roberts wrote a private treatise that asks, paraphrased, "Is it more probable that the Book of Mormon is an authentic history of Ancient America, or a collection of folk legends about Native Americans that were widely believed in the 1830's but are now known to be untrue?"



Questioning Sacred Origins

In the 1950's and 1960's, archaeologist Thomas Stuart Ferguson set out for Central America determined to find Book of Mormon artifacts ... and returned despondent, convinced that no such artifacts would ever be discovered.



Questioning Sacred Origins

In the past decade, publications by Mormon scientists Thomas Murphy and Simon Southerton have asserted, based on DNA studies, that Native Americans originated in Asia (as anthropologists have theorized since before DNA research was possible), and not Jerusalem, in contrast to the Book of Mormon's claims.



Questioning Sacred Origins

- The Book of Abraham's source material, Egyptian papyrus scrolls once owned by Joseph Smith, were rediscovered in 1967 after being presumed destroyed.
- Egyptologists recognize these scrolls as common funeral texts from a few centuries BC, and not from the time of Abraham, much less written by his own hand.



Polygamy in Utah

A Brief Overview



Okay, now what?

- Institutional discrimination
 - Skin color, Blacks and the priesthood
 - Gender roles, women and priesthood
- The temple and Freemasonry
- Temples and family history
- Adam is our father and our God
- Gay marriage and Prop 22



Institutional Discrimination

Blacks, women, and the Mormon
priesthood



Blacks and the Priesthood

- 19th Century American racism
- Joseph Smith's tolerance contrasted with Brigham Young's overt racism
- Over time, speculations evolved into officially sanctioned reasons for the ban
- In 1978, the ban was lifted, but not the corresponding rationale for why it existed



Women and the Priesthood

Similarly, women have never had the priesthood, although evidence exists which hints that Smith was planning to organize the women as a priesthood quorum. (Two prominent writers were excommunicated for publishing this speculation in 1993.)



Women and the Priesthood

In the meantime, folk doctrine has evolved, asserting that women don't "need" to hold the priesthood, since they are innately more spiritual than men. Men "need" to hold the priesthood to teach them to be spiritual, caring, and benevolent – qualities which all women already possess. Priesthood in men and motherhood in women are considered God's way of balancing marriage partners.



Questions and Answers

If there's any time left now, you all need to think of questions to ask, or I'll just ramble on some more.

