

# Mormonism

## (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

### Basic Facts

#### Founded

1830 in Upstate New York, when Joseph Smith announced he had translated the Book of Mormon and began gathering followers.

#### Key Figures

**Joseph Smith** (1805 - 1844): Founder and first apostle. Considered by Mormons to have restored Jesus Christ's true church. Led Mormons to Nauvoo, Illinois, where he was killed by a mob while under arrest in Carthage, IL.

**Brigham Young** (1801 - 1877): After a succession crisis, became second leader of the LDS church. Led Mormons west to the Utah Territory, where he founded Salt Lake City. BYU (Brigham Young University) is named after him.

#### Geography

Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. Adherents throughout the world, particularly in the United States, South America, and Polynesia.

#### Adherents

Estimates range from 5 million to 13 million worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

### Basic Beliefs

#### The Great Apostasy

From the beginning, Joseph Smith taught that the original gospel taught by Jesus has been lost shortly after the death of the apostles, and all other Christian churches were false and corrupt. Smith claimed that his new church restored the original gospel in its fullness.

#### God, Jesus, and the Pre-existence

Mormons reject the orthodox Christian view of the Trinity. Mormons believe that God has a physical body, as well as a wife. They believe that all human beings were begotten by God in the Pre-existence, a pre-mortal realm before we were born to our human parents (gaining bodies just like God's). All human beings, then, are spiritual children of God. Jesus was the firstborn son of God, preeminent among all other spiritual children. Lucifer was also a spiritual child of God, but Lucifer disagreed with God's plan to give everyone free will in their bodily existence. This led to a war in the Pre-existence between Jesus and Lucifer, with Jesus winning. Lucifer and his followers became demons (fallen angels). All human beings born on earth are those who sided with Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> The LDS church reports 13 million members worldwide, but critics say that this includes many people who have left the church but whose names remain on membership rolls.

It is sometimes claimed that Mormonism is polytheistic, because their theology holds open the possibility that “God” is only God of the planet Earth, and that other gods might exist or exist sometime in the future (see “Salvation and the Afterlife” below). Most Mormons, however, are offended by this claim, and insist they worship only one God. They claim that statements by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or other Mormon figures about the existence of other gods were only speculation, and are not Mormon doctrine.

### **God in North America**

The Book of Mormon claims that Jesus visited North America after his resurrection. However, Mormon beliefs about North America go much further than that. Joseph Smith taught that the Garden of Eden was located in North America, and that Christ’s physical return will happen in North America. Additionally, the Book of Mormon purportedly tells the story of a small group of Jews who flee Jerusalem and come to North America, where they become the ancestors of Native Americans.

### **The Book of Mormon and Other Scriptures**

Mormons recognize the authority of the Old and New Testaments, but add additional Scriptures to them. Joseph Smith claimed that the angel Moroni gave him a set of Golden Plates, written in “Reformed Egyptian,” which he then translated by divine means. This became known as the *Book of Mormon*. Joseph Smith also claimed to have translated other ancient texts, which became known collectively as the *Pearl of Great Price*.

In 1835, Smith and other early leaders published a series of official teaching called the *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C). The D&C is where many of the most distinctive Mormon teachings can be found. The LDS church believes that God’s revelation is still ongoing through the person of the Mormon President, and new sections can and have been added to the D&C. For example, two revelations contained at the end of the D&C include an 1890 revelation ending the practice of plural marriage and a 1978 revelation opening the Mormon priesthood to men of African descent (who had previously been denied the priesthood).

### **Salvation and the Afterlife**

The LDS church teaches that there are three levels of heaven. The first, the Telestial, is a paradise reserved for wicked men and women after they have been punished in hell. The second, the Terrestrial, is for righteous people or those who died without the law, and also to Mormons who were not obedient during their lives. The third and highest level of heaven, the Celestial, is open only to obedient Mormons. Mormons who make it to the Celestial Heaven can reach *exaltation*, with the reported possibility of eternal marriage, spiritual children of their own, and the opportunity to create and rule over their own planet as gods.

## **Further Resources**

There are several ministries and websites that reach out to Mormons or provide Christian apologetics against Mormon claims. Some of these include:

Utah Lighthouse Ministries – [www.utlm.org](http://www.utlm.org) -  
Truth in Love Ministry - [www.truthinloveministry.net](http://www.truthinloveministry.net)  
Mormonism Research Ministry – [www.mrm.org](http://www.mrm.org) -  
Utah Partnerships for Christ - [www.upfc.org](http://www.upfc.org)