

## March 8 Topic: Mormonism Part 1

### Homework March 9-14 (for discussion on March 15)

To view the Mormonism lecture online: <http://www.tlc.org/tuesday-morning-bible-study/>

**NOTE:** Members of the LDS Church use the King James Version of the Bible. It would be good to look at these verses in the KJV as well as the version you normally use.

#### DAY 1: JUST PRAY ABOUT IT?

One of the first things a Mormon missionary will do is give a potential convert a copy of The Book of Mormon, ask them to read it and then pray to “ask God if it is true”. This comes from The Book of Mormon itself:

*“We invite all men everywhere to read The Book of Mormon, to ponder in their hearts the message it contains, and then to ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if the book is true. Those who pursue this course and ask in faith will gain a testimony of its truth and divinity by the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Introduction to The Book of Mormon).*

*“And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you ...And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” Moroni 10:2,4*

Mormons are convinced that if a person asks “in faith”, “with a sincere heart”, and with “real intent”, they will “gain a testimony” of the truthfulness of The Book of Mormon (and by extension, Joseph Smith and the LDS Church). They will often quote James 1:5 in support of this method of discerning truth.

**Read James 1:2-5** What is the topic James introduces in verses 2-4?

*In this context*, what kind of “wisdom” might we be lacking, and need to ask God for (vs. 5)?

What’s the difference between “wisdom” and “knowledge”? Mormons say this verse says we should ask God whether or not something is true. Do you think this is a legitimate interpretation of this verse? Why or why not?

**Read Act 17:11.** The Bereans heard Paul’s message and were very enthused about it. What did they do to decide whether or not Paul’s message was *true*? How could this example help us in analyzing Mormon claims to new revelation?

**Read Deut. 18:22.** Joseph Smith claimed to be the “Prophet of the Restoration”, yet made numerous prophecies that did not come to pass. Based on this verse should his stories or “revelations” be trusted? Would there be any reason to “pray” about it?

*Prayer: Pray that this study will help you talk to Mormons you know or meet about the true Gospel.*

## **DAY 2: JUST HOW MANY GODS ARE THERE, ANYWAY?**

Many people are surprised to learn that Mormonism is not a monotheistic faith. Mormonism teaches there are three Gods in charge of our world: Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. These three separate beings make up the Godhead. They are “one” only in the sense of being one in purpose and in power. There are other Gods in the universe beside these three (such as Heavenly Mother, or Heavenly Father’s Father), but the three Gods in the Godhead are the only ones with whom we have any kind of contact or relationship. Does the Bible teach this?

**Read Deuteronomy 6:35 & 39.** What do these verses teach about how many Gods there are? Does there seem to be any indication that the LORD is part of a trio of Gods?

**Read Isaiah 44:6-8, 45:5-6, 18, 22.** List the characteristics of the LORD. What does He have to say about the idea he is in partnership with two other Gods? What about the idea that somewhere in the vast universe there are other Gods just like him?

**Read John 17:3, I Corinthians 8:5-6, I Timothy 2:5 and James 2:19.** According to Jesus and the Apostles, how many true Gods are there? Mormons sometimes point to I Corinthians 8:5-6 to show that the Bible teaches there are “many gods and many lords” in the universe. But what is Paul actually saying?

The reality is that monotheism is taught from the first verse of the Bible to the last! These are just a few of hundreds of verses you could look at.

*Prayer: Acknowledge the LORD God, creator of the heavens and the earth, as the one and only God. Reaffirm your trust in him alone.*

### **DAY 3: WHO IS GOD?**

Mormonism teaches that God has not always been God. He was once a mortal man at some point in the past, but gained knowledge and progressed until he reached his current, immortal, exalted state as God. He cannot create “out of nothing”, but creates by reorganizing existing matter.

*“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. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea. . . .” Joseph Smith, The King Follett Discourse*

**Read Psalm 90:2, Nehemiah 9:5b-6.** How long has God been God, according to the Bible? How do these verse rule out the idea that God “progressed” to become God?

It was during the last 5 years of Joseph Smith’s life, from 1839 to 1844 that many unbiblical doctrines and practices were developed and taught. The Book of Mormon, published in 1830, teaches a more biblical view of God. For example, Moroni 8:18 it says, *“For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.”*

**Read Isaiah 40:13-14, 25-28.** Do these verses seem to mesh with the Mormon doctrine that God was once a man who had to gain knowledge and progress? What specifically would suggest otherwise?

**Look again at Isaiah 40:25-28, and also Isaiah 44:24.** In 40:26, the LORD urges the hearer to “lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things”, clearly referring to the countless stars in the heavens. Knowing what we know about our universe, is it likely that God took existing matter and made it into “the heavens and the earth”? What does the LORD seem to be claiming in these verses?

### BONUS STUDY: DIGGING DEEPER

The LDS Church claims that in the Old Testament the Hebrew word “Elohim” or “El” is referring to Heavenly Father, whereas “Jehovah” (Yahweh or YHWH) is referring to Jesus in his pre-incarnate state. This interpretation bolsters their view of multiple Gods. But this interpretation cannot hold up under scrutiny.

The Hebrew word for “god” is the word “elohim”. It is a plural word, but when referring to God it is used with singular pronouns (a typical literary device in the ancient Near East called the “majestic plural”— in fact, the Qur’an uses this device). YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah; LORD in all caps in most Bibles) is the covenant *name* of God. Many times throughout the Hebrew scriptures both *elohim* and *YHWH* are used in the same sentence to refer to the same being. For instance:

*"That all the people of the earth may know that the **LORD is God**, and that there is none else," (1 Kings 8:60).* In Hebrew this reads “YAHWEH is ELOHIM”. Clearly both terms refer to *one being*.

*"Know ye that **the LORD he is God**: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves," (Psalm 100:3).*

For other examples, look up Zechariah 13:9, Deut. 4:35, Psalm 18:31, and Isaiah 44:6

The prayer of Israel, the “Shema”, is perhaps the best example of all. Deut. 6:4: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”* “Hear, O Israel: YHWH our *elohim*, YHWH is one!”

*Prayer: Praise God that he is the everlasting God, who does not change, who was and is and is to come! Praise him as the maker, the creator, of all that is!*

### DAY 4: DOES GOD THE FATHER HAVE A BODY?

There are verses in the Bible that speak of God’s face, eyes, mouth, nostrils, head, hair, ears, right hand, left hand, arms, fingers, bosom, heart, thighs, and back. The Bible refers to him as walking, standing, sitting, speaking, hearing and wearing tangible objects like garments, quivers, and signet rings. Mormon doctrine insists that these are not metaphors but are literal descriptions of our physical God.

**Read Psalm 91:4.** The problem with taking poetic descriptions of God as literal, is that we must be consistently literally. What physical characteristics would God have if we took this verse literally?

Furthermore, if we take the physical *body part* literally, then in order to be consistent we have to take the whole description of what that body part is *doing* literally. Look up these verses and describe what God’s *literal* body part would *literally* be doing:

Psalm 39:10	
Psalm 18:8	
Psalm 21:8-9	
Psalm 89:21	

**What problems arise from this kind of interpretation?**

New vocabulary word: *anthropomorphism*. *Anthropomorphism* is attributing human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal or object. “God’s mighty arm” or “the trees will clap for joy” are anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphism is used as a poetic, literary device in Scripture, as a *metaphor*, to help us understand God and his actions in the world.

**Read Deut. 4:11-12, 15-16.** Why does God insist that the Israelites make no image of him, including an image of a man or a woman? Mormons paint pictures of God the Father appearing to Joseph Smith, but they don't worship the painting. Are they abiding by this commandment?

**Read John 4:24.** How does Jesus describe God?

One of the most important sources for the LDS belief that God has a body of flesh and bones is the "First Vision". Joseph Smith claims to have personally seen God the Father and Jesus Christ, and they both had physical bodies of flesh and bones. But go back to the Day 1 homework, and look at your answer to the question regarding Deut. 18:22. Do you think it's a good idea to trust Smith's vision and *base your theology about God* on what he says he saw?

*Prayer: Ask God to help you to remember he is not a man with a white flowing beard and white robes. Praise him for his marvelous nature, that he can fill the whole universe with his presence.*

#### **DAY 5: HUMAN BEINGS: WHERE'D WE COME FROM AND WHERE CAN WE GO?**

Mormonism teaches that we were all born as "spirit children" to our heavenly parents. One of the purposes in coming to earth is to gain physical bodies so we can continue progressing toward Godhood.

**Read Jeremiah 1:5.** Mormons believe this verse clearly teaches that all people had preexistence as spirit children. But what does it mean that the LORD "*knew*" Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb? Does it mean "know" as in I "know" my friend Jenny? Or does it mean something else?

Amos 3:2 can help, because it uses the same Hebrew word: [God says to Israel], "You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth." Surely God isn't saying he didn't *know* any other families! Hebrew scholars tell us that this word for "*known*" can mean "*chosen*", implying God's sovereign choice, his ordination or "setting apart" of something or someone for a specific purpose. If we read Amos 3:2 as "You only have I *chosen* of all the families of the earth", this makes perfect sense. (In fact many Bible translations use the word "chosen", because that's the clear meaning.)

Now go back to Jeremiah 1:5, and read it as "*chose thee*" instead of "*knew thee*". Write down other words in the verse that might indicate this is talking about God's *choice* of Jeremiah before he was even born, rather than a statement about *being related to Jeremiah* in a preexistent state.

**Read Genesis 2:7** . The LDS Church teaches that God put a preexisting spirit child into a physical body when he created Adam. Is there anything in this verse, which describes Adam's creation, that would indicate Adam was already in existence? Is there anything that would negate that idea?

**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:** You may be wondering, does it really matter whether or not we were "spirit children" in heaven before coming to earth? Yes, it does, because it's part of a whole doctrine that teaches that God is busy procreating with his wife (or wives) in the celestial realm. This is a pagan, not biblical, view of God. Also keep in mind, that the LDS Church over its history has used this doctrine to promote some pretty blatant racism:

*"There is a reason why one man is born black and with other disadvantages, while another is born white with great advantages. The reason is that we once had an estate before we came here, and were obedient, more or less, to the laws that were given us there. Those who were faithful in all things there received great blessings here, and those who were not faithful received less."*  
President Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1975. (NOTE: Blacks were denied the priesthood in the Church until 1978 based on this justification.)

*"We cannot escape the conclusion that because of performance in our pre-existence some of us are born as Chinese, some as Japanese, some as Latter-day Saints. These are rewards and punishments, fully in harmony with [God's] established policy in dealing with sinners and saints, rewarding all according to their deeds." Apostle Mark E Petersen, "Race Relations", speech given at BYU, 1954.*

While these racist statements are no longer made, Mormon children are still often taught that the "choicest spirits" are sent to Mormon families. This cannot help but make it difficult to live out Paul's command to "in humility, consider others better than yourselves." (Phil. 2:3)

*"As man now is, God once was. As God now is, man may be."* Lorenzo Snow, 1843

**Read Isaiah 43:10 and Rev. 21:3.** What statement does the Lord make in Isaiah 43:10 that would indicate man does NOT become God? In Revelation 21:3, the glorious scene in heaven, what is the relationship between God and those who will live with him? Is there anything in this scene that indicates men will be exalted to the level of God?

*Prayer: Pray for any Mormon friends, relatives or neighbors that you know. Ask God to help you be a light.*

## **DAY 6: WHO IS JESUS?**

In Mormon theology, Jesus is the Savior and a perfect example for us to follow—and we agree with that. But he is also the firstborn “spirit child” of our heavenly parents, so he is literally our elder brother. He is the “only begotten Son of God” because the Heavenly Father is not just the father of his spirit, but his *physical* father as well. Jesus has *attained* Godhood. He is a separate being from God the Father, but he is one “in purpose and power” with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

### **Read John 1:1-18.**

vs. 1 “In the beginning” matches the opening of Genesis. What is the significance of that? The “Word” is Jesus. What are the three descriptions of the Word in vs. 1? How does this already differ from the Mormon view of Jesus?

vs. 3 What activity is associated with the Word? Who does this activity in the Old Testament (look up Genesis 1:1 if needed)?

vs. 5 & 9 What does the Word bring? Read Psalm 36:9—who does this verse refer to? What connections is John making?

vs. 14 and vs. 18 Why is Jesus called the “one and only”, or “unique”, or “only begotten” son, according to these verses? Is there anything here that indicates the Father physically sired the Son?

In your own words, summarize what John is trying to say about who Jesus is:

**Read John 3:13, 31 and 8:23** How do these verses contradict the Mormon doctrine that all humans have come to earth from preexistence in a celestial home? How does Jesus show he is unique?

**Read Colossians 1:15-17**

How is Jesus described? What does it mean to be the “image” of “the invisible God” ? What is Jesus’ relationship to the creation?

**Read Hebrews 1:1-3**

How is Jesus described?

vs. 3 Your Bible may use the phrase “express image”, “exact representation”, or “exact imprint” . The Greek word is *charakter*, like a stamp that is impressed in wax. How does this word help you understand what the writer is trying to communicate about Jesus?

From all of these verses, what is the relationship between the Father and the Son? How is this Jesus different from the Jesus of Mormonism?

**Read 2 Corinthians 11:4.** Is it a problem to promote “a different Jesus”?

*Prayer: Thank God for revealing himself to us through his Son, Jesus Christ! Be amazed and grateful that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us—and gave his life for us. Think about how that act of love has changed your life, and express your gratitude to God.*