



THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO
JOSEPH
SMITH

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO
MORMON TEACHING



ETHAN E. HARRIS

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FOREWORD BY
BILL MCKEEVER



P U B L I S H I N G

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This book is dedicated to

DRS. GARY DERICKSON AND RICHARD CAULKINS

*who have tried to teach me how to
humbly read the Bible and
think clearly.*

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FOREWORD

The Gospel. The Good News. Those who have experienced its effect see it as an act of infinite grace and mercy on an undeserving world. To think that the God of all creation would consider the plight of sinful mankind, step into time, and volunteer to pay man's sin-debt has kept Christian believers in awe for centuries. To be sure, Christ came into the world to save sinners. He bestowed His mercy and displayed His unlimited patience, and as a result, millions who have offended His righteousness have come to believe and receive His gift of eternal life. For this we can't help but give God honor and glory for ever and ever.

History demonstrates that man has a way of corrupting what is good and pure. It didn't take long before even the Gospel itself was considered in need of "revision." Down through the ages a multitude of people, some well-meaning, others outright evil, have attempted to tamper with the Good News of God's salvation. Unfortunately, that which is not the pure and perfect Gospel is, as stated by the Apostle Paul, "no gospel at all."



Probably no other American religion has been as colorful and controversial as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From its humble beginnings in the backwoods of New York, this organization has become a major player in the realm of world religions. Though many see Mormonism as just another Christian denomination, the LDS Church makes no such claim for itself. From the beginning its founder, Joseph Smith, insisted that his church was "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth," the only church with which God is "well pleased." To the majority of Mormons, those who profess to be Christians but are not members of the LDS Church are, in actuality, a part of what they call the Great Apostasy.

Discerning the differences between Mormonism and Christianity has not always been easy. Because Mormons use a vocabulary that is very similar to that used by professing Christians, it has been difficult for some to see the vast difference in the doctrinal positions held by the two groups. Because Mormons often speak of the "Heavenly Father," the "Savior," "salvation by grace," "the Scriptures," and being "born again," many have assumed that the disparities are only minimal and should not cause any alarm. The fact of the matter is that Smith and his successors have devised a religious system that falls far short of Christian orthodoxy.

The Body of Christ can no longer ignore the presence of the LDS Church. To do so in light of its rapid growth would be irresponsible. It behooves all Christians to better understand what motivates our LDS friends and relatives if we are going to effectively dialogue with them.

The volume you hold in your hand will help you quickly sift through the language barrier and enhance your understanding of this complex religion. By citing primary sources,



Ethan Harris allows the leaders of the LDS Church to explain the positions of their church in their own words. It should grieve us as Christians to see how far these men have strayed from the Truth. To know that millions of people have embraced their error should also cause us great concern. It should also give us a resolve to defend what we believe to be true to all who may ask. It is our prayer that this book, like any tool, will be used wisely and for the glory of God.

Bill McKeever
Mormonism Research Ministry

PREFACE

The many inconsistencies that lie within the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) will be exposed in the following pages. This is in no way an exhaustive compilation of difficulties facing the Mormon Church, but is an effort to underscore some of the most problematic areas.

The method of this study is to give a general overview of foundational teachings from the texts of Mormonism and its Prophets. We will, by way of contrast, cite authorities within that community and biblical passages that are in contradiction with them. We will explicate "The LDS View" and then see how "The Biblical View" opposes it.

We will also see that though many members of the Mormon Church claim absolute allegiance to their Church, a vast majority of them are not fully aware of the official Church teaching on a wide variety of doctrines. Additionally, we will point out the hostility of Mormon leaders toward Christianity and the manufacturing of misinformation to val-



idate their accusations. Finally, this work will demonstrate that the LDS Church has no solid philosophical foundation for the work of its missionaries, preaching, apologetics, ethics, or any other realm of rational interaction.

Official Mormon doctrine is something of an elusive entity. Most doctrine passed along to non-Mormons is confined to what is common knowledge among LDS members. The doctrines of Mormon Prophets that are not considered popular are usually not mentioned or discussed in public.

Other than the book *Mormon Doctrine*, written by the Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, there does not appear to be any formal systemization of the doctrine of the LDS Church. Many scholars from Brigham Young University and freelance writers have attempted to represent official LDS teaching over the years. The problem is that their writings are not accepted by the LDS community as binding or as divinely inspired. They do not officially represent the teachings of the Mormon Prophets or the Standard Works.

The Mormon Church not only has been diverted from the biblical understanding of truth, but also has deviated from many teachings of the *Book of Mormon*, which is the foundation of the Latter-day Saints belief system. This may be seen in the many contradictory statements made by later teachers and in documents written after the *Book of Mormon* was made available. Our quotation of various passages will demonstrate contradictions within the teachings of the sacred texts and authorities of the Mormon Church. To counter the charge of taking quotes out of context, I challenge the reader to read all Scripture and other quotations in the original sources.

God has given us an opportunity to be involved in the lives of those around us. We should find satisfaction in bring-



ing His Word to others just as others have been used to bring His Word to us. Study of His Word should bring us understanding through the Holy Spirit's guidance, and we should subject all of our thoughts and beliefs to rigorous scriptural analysis. Accordingly, the use of LDS materials in this volume is not meant to defame the LDS Church, its members, and its leaders, but to emphasize the points of departure from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

By studying and examining the doctrines and various teachings of the Mormon Church, we Christians can indicate to Mormons that we are open to taking up the challenge and evaluating their message. That their message sounds spiritual or mystical does not in itself make that message spiritual or true. Maybe their teaching is false, maybe it isn't; but how will we know without prayer and study?

It is our hope to come to a greater understanding of the differences between the Latter-day Saints and those who disagree with their beliefs, and to aid anyone who is studying the teachings of the Mormon Church to test their validity in the light of the Old and New Testaments. With prayerful study and patience, may we come to a knowledge of the Truth that God has delivered to the universal Church through Jesus Christ the Messiah.

The God of the Bible is much more than the man-centered religion of the Mormon Church claims. He is holy and perfect, and we are His creation. I was once asked by a very gracious LDS man, "What is the point of your faith if you cannot become a god?" I told him that the end goal was to worship God and enjoy Him forever. He laughed.

It is my sincere conviction that most of the Mormons with whom I have spoken do not show a deep desire to worship and praise Christ. They believe they love the Lord.



They claim that they praise God. But the words of the gentleman I cited are typical of what many Mormons really feel about worshipping God. I usually come away depressed after a personal conversation with LDS members. I want them to know the joy of knowing the Christ of the Scriptures. It hurts me when they fail to understand and accept His true nature.

The first two chapters give preliminary information that is necessary as a foundation. We will present statements by Mormon officials and passages from Scripture that encourage serious study of all materials that we are given. We will also see the bias that many LDS members hold against Christians. Christians are often seen as liars who distort the doctrines of the Mormon Church.

The next section, chapters 3–7, presents a brief discussion of Mormonism, an external critique of LDS doctrine as viewed from the standpoint of biblical Christianity. We will note many differences of doctrine between Christian and Mormon theology. Chapter 8, an internal critique of LDS philosophy, focuses on the weaknesses of Mormonism from an ethical perspective. In chapter 9 we conclude by reprinting a number of testimonies of Christians who have left the Mormon Church and the difficulties that they faced in their decisions to leave.

Our conviction is that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot logically respond to our critique, nor can it comport with the ethical claims that it has made. Since it is not based on an absolute concept of God, the LDS Church has no ultimate foundation for much of its work and theology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is amazing to discover how many people it takes to complete a book. Without the many hours of effort by others, this work would never have been possible. I would like to express my gratitude to them in this short space.

Let me first extend appreciation to my wife, Mindi, and her mother, Mary Lynn Twombly, for burying themselves in the manuscript, hunting out grammatical errors, in an attempt to make me sound coherent. Keith Mathison read through the manuscript multiple times and made numerous suggestions that enhanced the flow of the work. Without the encouragement of R. C. and Vesta Sproul, Al Fisher, and Alan Yardis, this title would never have gone to print.

More than all, I would like to thank Lane Thuet and Bill McKeever. Lane spent untold hours clarifying, proofing, checking references, making suggestions, and offering criticisms that have made this title more successful than I could have made it myself.



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PROPHETS (PRESIDENTS) OF THE LDS CHURCH

		BORN	BECAME	DIED
			PROPHET	
1	JOSEPH SMITH	1805	1830	1844
2	BRIGHAM YOUNG	1801	1847	1877
3	JOHN TAYLOR	1808	1880	1887
4	WILFORD WOODRUFF	1807	1889	1898
5	LORENZO SNOW	1814	1898	1901
6	JOSEPH F. SMITH	1838	1901	1918
7	HEBER J. GRANT	1856	1918	1945
8	GEORGE ALBERT SMITH	1870	1945	1951
9	DAVID O. MCKAY	1873	1951	1970
10	JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH	1876	1970	1972
11	HAROLD B. LEE	1899	1972	1973
12	SPENCER W. KIMBALL	1895	1973	1985
13	EZRA TAFT BENSON	1899	1985	1994
14	HOWARD W. HUNTER	1907	1994	1995
15	GORDON B. HINCKLEY	1910	1995	2008
16	THOMAS S. MONSON	1927	2008	

1



SETTING THE STAGE

We begin our examination of Mormonism by encouraging both LDS and non-LDS to seriously study what we are taught by others and to compare those teachings to Scripture. For a person, group, or organization to claim authority from God does not necessarily prove that their teachings are true. If Scripture is our ultimate authority, all human words should be subject to verification by God's Word. There must be a standard from which we may determine truth. Studying to show ourselves approved of God should be the goal of all who profess the name of Christ (2 Tim. 2:15).

The Mormon Prophet Brigham Young challenged all people to compare the teaching of the Mormon Church to the Bible:

I say to the whole world, receive the truth, no matter who presents it to you. Take up the Bible, com-



pare the religion of the Latter-day Saints with it, and see if it will stand the test.¹

The Mormon Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith lamented that so many members of the Mormon Church would not study the Standard Works:

It is a regret to be under the necessity of saying that too many of the members of the Church are mentally lazy so far as seeking the words of life. We have been commanded to search the commandments in the Doctrine and Covenants; we have been commanded to study the Book of Mormon, and the Lord has blessed us with the Pearl of Great Price, all in addition to what the world for nearly two thousand years and more has had.²

A recent Mormon Prophet, Ezra Taft Benson, echoed the words of his predecessors:

We urge you to study the Book of Mormon as individuals and families and then to do as the Prophet Nephi counseled: liken the Scriptures to yourselves so that it will be for your profit and learning (see 1 Nephi 19:23–24).³

The biblical book of Acts gives an account of the Bereans' response to the teachings of Paul:

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more



noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. (Acts 17:10–12)

In the closing remarks of his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul encourages the Church to test his words by Scripture:

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. (1 Thess. 5:21–22)

In another letter, 2 Timothy, Paul tells us how we should respond to those who oppose us:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Tim. 2:24–26)

The Apostle Peter tells us what those who love the Lord must be like. Notice the manner in which we are supposed to approach others:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with



meekness and fear: Having a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. (1 Peter 3:15–16)

One final admonition from the Apostle John stresses the need to distinguish with certainty between what God has delivered as Truth and those words that false prophets have proposed:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out unto the world. (1 John 4:1)

We must always carefully examine the doctrine and various teachings that are presented to us. All Scripture must be studied in context to get a full understanding of what the writer means. Even the passages quoted above should be checked in the Bible for their context. Challenge yourself to look up and verify the context of all citations of Scripture that are used in your Church or in discussions with others. If the context does not support an interpretation that is being presented, we must be cautious about the doctrine in question.

H A T E O R C O M P A S S I O N ?

Before we enter our brief study of Mormonism, we must be aware of the potential hostility that awaits Christians who wish to share the Gospel with Mormons. Mormons are generally very concerned about the impression that the



outside world has of them. Mormon missionaries make it clear that their Church does not criticize other beliefs. They also take pains to show how compassionate they are in the face of opposition. But we must remember what the consensus of Mormons really is regarding Christians: Christians are apostate.

The claim is still frequently made that the LDS community has never engaged in name-calling or insulting other religions. Mormon Prophets have stressed the need for humility and decency in dialogue with people who disagree with their belief system. We must likewise stress that simple argumentation should not be seen as slanderous. Asking for discussion and debate does not necessitate hostility and antagonistic dispute. Issues can be discussed without hatred for the opposite viewpoint.

Heber J. Grant, one of the early LDS Prophets, emphasized the need for Mormons not to criticize anyone but themselves:

I have given much advice to the Latter-day Saints in my time, and one of the principal items was never to criticize anyone but ourselves. I believe in fault-finding for breakfast, dinner and supper, but only with our own dear selves.⁴

Brigham Young, the second LDS Prophet, thought it was wise not to judge anyone, but to let God do the judging because only He has full knowledge of the world:

I am very thankful that it is not our province, in our present condition, to judge the world; if it were, we would ruin everything. We have not sufficient wis-



dom, our minds are not filled with the knowledge and power of God; the spirit needs to contend with the flesh a little more until it shall be successful in subduing its passions, until the whole soul is brought into perfect harmony with the mind and will of God. And we must also acquire the discretion that God exercises in being able to look into futurity, and to ascertain and know the results of our acts away in the future, even in eternity, before we will be capable of judging.⁵

Spencer W. Kimball, another LDS Prophet, made a pointed statement about how people respond to each other:

Therefore, we often judge wrongfully if we try to fathom their meaning and give our own interpretation to it.⁶

Ezra Taft Benson, one of the more recent Prophets of the LDS Church, believed that in order to evangelize non-Mormons, one should be patient and not critical:

Let us exhort each other to fulfill our missionary responsibility. Let us do it with love—not criticism. Let us do it with understanding—not berating. But let us do it, and do it with urgency. Let us catch the vision and the inspiration of President Spencer W. Kimball. We need to understand that member-missionary work is literally the key to the future growth of the Church and that we have covenanted with our Father in Heaven to do this work.⁷



While most of us would agree with many of these comments by the Mormon Prophets, it is astounding to find that many of the LDS Prophets have openly criticized Christians with a great deal of hostility and malice. Although LDS Prophets have called for compassion to non-Mormons, they often do not apply this teaching to themselves. Consider a few of the claims that Mormon leaders have made regarding those who in the past two millennia have called on the name of Christ.

Brigham Young, the second Prophet of the LDS Church, gives us his view of Christians:

The Christian world, I discovered, was like the captain and crew of a vessel on the ocean without a compass, and tossed to and fro whithersoever the wind listed to blow them. When the light came to me, I saw that all the so-called Christian world was groveling in darkness.⁸

There are various other fine examples of Young's open slander against the non-Mormon world:

While Brother Taylor was speaking of the sectarian world, it occurred to my mind that the wicked do not know any more than the dumb brutes, comparatively speaking; but it is our business to hunt up and gather out all the honest portion of the nations of the earth, and give them salvation. We may very properly say that the sectarian world do not know anything correctly, so far as pertains to salvation. Ask them where heaven is? where they are going to when they die? where Paradise is? and there is not a



priest in the world that can answer your questions. Ask them what kind of a being our Heavenly Father is, and they cannot tell you so much as Balaam's ass told him. They are more ignorant than children.⁹

The arts and sciences are somewhat advanced among the Christian nations; but as to a true knowledge of things as they are in eternity, there never were nations more ignorant. According to my definition of the word, a people are heathenish that do not know things as they ought. The Christian world, so called, are heathens as to their knowledge of the salvation of God.¹⁰

With regard to true theology, a more ignorant people never lived than the present so-called Christian world.¹¹

Clearly, Young shows a high level of negativity toward Christians. In yet another instance he supports the charge that Christians are hatched in Hell:

Brother Taylor has just said that the religions of the day were hatched in Hell. The eggs were laid in Hell, hatched on its borders, and then kicked on to the earth. They may be called cockatrices, for they sting wherever they go. Go to their meetings in the Christian world, and mingle in their society, and you will hear them remark, Our ministers dictate our soul's salvation; and they are perfectly composed and resigned to trust their whole future destiny to their priests, though they durst not trust them with



one single dollar beyond their salaries and a few presents. They can trust their eternal welfare in the hands of their priests, but hardly dare trust them with so much as a bushel of potatoes. Is that principle here? Yes, more or less.¹²

In this refutation of Christianity, Young suggests that the major fault of Christians is their willingness to accept the words of their ministers.¹³ However, one would be hard-pressed to identify a Christian Church whose members believe that their pastor controls and dictates their eternal salvation. It would be more proper to lay this charge against the Mormon Church or any other group that claims that biblical Truth comes from its organization alone.

Our final examples come from the words of the third Prophet, John Taylor:

There is no nation now that acknowledges that hand of God; there is not a king, potentate, nor ruler that acknowledges his jurisdiction. We talk about Christianity, but it is a perfect pack of nonsense. Men talk about civilization; but I do not want to say much about that, for I have seen enough of it. Myself and hundreds of the Elders around me have seen its pomp, parade, and glory; and what is it? It is a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; it is as corrupt as Hell; and the Devil could not invent a better engine to spread his work than the Christianity of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

The transactions of men are even more outrageous against the Lord, and the only excuse for them is



their ignorance. What! are Christians ignorant? Yes, as ignorant of the things of God as the brute beast.¹⁵

And Christianity, at the present time, is no more enlightened than other systems have been. What does the Christian world know about God? Nothing; yet these very men assume the right and power to tell others what they shall and what they shall not believe in. Why, so far as the things of God are concerned, they are the veriest fools; they know neither God nor the things of God.¹⁶

Clearly, Mormon Prophets have not shown much compassion in their teachings about Christianity. These are public statements made with extremely hostile feelings. Earlier, we read statements by Mormon Prophets urging Mormons not to criticize or think less of those who do not agree with LDS teaching. Yet, at the same time, these Prophets denied their own words and spoke with great hostility and insensitivity toward Christians. May we, as Christians, not respond to unbelievers as in the examples above.

If we truly believe that people are lost, how should we respond to them? Unbelief is surely not a laughing matter. We must not be arrogant in our belief. If we are to boast, let us boast in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who saves us from sin and condemnation.

A SHORT HISTORY

Bruce McConkie in his work *Mormon Doctrine* identifies the origin of the nickname "Mormon." It came from the ancient Nephite prophet, Mormon, who compiled and



abridged the sacred records of his people under the title *Book of Mormon*.¹⁷ The nickname is given to those who believe the *Book of Mormon* to be a true account of Jesus Christ and the inhabitants of ancient America. The title "Mormon" is not offensive to most members of the Latter-day Saints Church.

The origin of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a somewhat recent occurrence. Joseph Smith, the founder and first Prophet of the LDS Church, was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont. According to the account that appears in the *History of the Church*, Smith in 1838 reflected on how the events in his earlier life came to be used by God. In 1820, having encountered Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists fighting against each other in a war of words and tumult of opinions, he yearned to find out which of the prevalent religious beliefs of his day were correct.¹⁸ After reading James 1:5 ("If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God"), Joseph went into the woods near his home and prayed to God to reveal which of these groups was correct or if any was correct at all. Being just fourteen years old, Joseph now for the first time prayed to God out loud. No sooner had he done so than a pillar of light appeared and came down on him. He later claimed that two beings descended and stood above him in the air.

One of them spake unto me, calling me by name,
and said—pointing to the other—THIS IS MY
BELOVED SON, HEAR HIM.¹⁹

Joseph asked these two personages which of the sects was correct; he was told that none of them was correct and to join none of them.



Joseph Smith's second vision took place on September 21, 1823. While he was lying in his bed in prayer, a bright light filled the room and a messenger appeared. The messenger revealed his name as Moroni. The Angel's mission was to instruct Joseph to retrieve Golden Plates that contained the history of the

former inhabitants of this continent, and the sources from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; also that there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted "seers" in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.²⁰

Joseph was directed to go to the site where Moroni had buried the Golden Plates:

[It] is located between Palmyra and Manchester in the western part of the state of New York . . . (Morm. 6; Ether 15). Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and many of the early brethren, who were familiar with all the circumstances attending the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon* in this dispensation, have left us pointed testimony as to the identity and location of Cumorah or Ramah. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:232–41).²¹



Gordon Hinckley, the current LDS Prophet, writing on the Restoration of the Church, states that after locating the Golden Plates, Joseph Smith translated the *Book of Mormon* into English.

On the 6th of April, 1830, six men came together and Joseph Smith was declared a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, and has been regarded since that time as the Prophet.²²

Joseph Smith had established the Restoration of the Kingdom of God, the Restoration of the Gospel, and the Restoration of the Church. (On the Mormon doctrine of Restoration, see pp. 17–21.) Brigham Young so revered Joseph Smith that he once claimed that "the period will come when the people will be willing to adopt Joseph Smith as their prophet, seer and revelator and God!" (*Journal of Wilford Woodruff*, 11 Dec. 1869).

WAS JOSEPH SMITH A PROPHET?

Before we briefly discuss the Mormon claim of a Restored Church, we must first look at the single authority figure who was able, according to LDS teaching, to bring about a full Restoration of the Church of Christ. As we've seen, Joseph Smith proclaimed himself to be a Prophet of God. He claimed to be able to decipher "Reformed Egyptian" engravings on the Golden Plates, which he then translated into the *Book of Mormon*. But how do we know he was a Prophet? Can we take his word for it? We must have an objective test to determine whether the revelations he gave and the works that he delivered to the LDS Church are



true. If Joseph Smith was a false prophet, none of the claims of the Mormon Church have any foundation in truth.

When is a Prophet actually speaking for God and when is a Prophet speaking for himself? Can a phrase that is spoken by a man be divine? Ought we to take all of the statements by a self-proclaimed Prophet as inspired? Can a Prophet be wrong or mistaken?

The Old Testament has much to say about testing false prophets. Deuteronomy teaches that if a prophet's revelation does not come to pass, he is a false prophet:

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:21–22)

The sixth Mormon Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith, similarly claimed that if a man acts without God, then error is sure to follow:

No man, in and of himself, without the aid of the Spirit of God and the direction of revelation, can found a religion, or promulgate a body of doctrine, in all particulars in harmony with revealed truth. If he has not the inspiration of the Lord and the direction of messengers from his presence, he will not comprehend the truth, and therefore such truth as he teaches will be hopelessly mixed with error.²³



Some Mormons may say, when confronted with a false prophecy by one of their leaders, that the prophecy didn't come to pass exactly as it was written. They may also say that the Prophet was sharing an opinion, or even that he made a mistake (e.g., Brigham Young made a mistake when he claimed that Adam was God and was the actual Father of Jesus, as will be discussed in a later chapter). However, when a Prophet makes a "Thus saith the Lord" type of statement, that Prophet is claiming that he is speaking directly for God. If the statement is untrue, it is not simply bad judgment; it is a false prophecy of a false prophet.

We must have an *objective* way to *test* whether Joseph Smith was really a prophet. Since there are dozens of people who claim to be a prophet of God, there must be some way to distinguish between true and false prophets. . . . False prophecies are not mistakes. We all make mistakes but most of us never claimed to be a prophet of God who speaks inspired revelations. To equate false prophecies with mistakes is like equating apples and shoestrings. There is no logical connection.²⁴

If his [Joseph Smith's] claims to a divine appointment be false, forming as they do the foundation of the Church in this the last dispensation, the superstructure cannot be stable.²⁵

If we are to know whether a statement is from God, we must have an objective means to discover the Truth. We are commanded in the Bible to seek the Truth, not only with our hearts, but by examining events, statements, or any-



thing else that bears on the validity of the teachings of men. All teachings must be weighed against the witness of Scripture.

What exactly does the Mormon Church consider acceptable to use as Scripture? Are the Prophets from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints viewed as giving "inspired" guidance?

The prophecies from *Doctrine and Covenants* come from an inspired book of the Mormons. Each inspired revelation is dated and numbered. They usually begin by saying, Thus says the Lord. Thus they are *not* mere opinions or guesses made by Smith but inspired prophecies.²⁶

We believe that God is as willing today as He ever has been to reveal His mind and will to man, and that He does so through His appointed servants—prophets, seers, and revelators—invested through ordination with the authority of the Holy Priesthood.²⁷

Some Mormons, when confronted with errors of previous LDS Prophets, may say that new Prophets take precedence over earlier Prophets, and that any mistakes are only human misunderstandings. That would be nice if it worked. The issue is not which Prophet takes precedence or which prophecy of God should apply to the LDS Church today. The main point of those who are critical of the Mormon Church is that the foundation of the Mormon Church is built on a plethora of errors, false prophecies, and unbiblical doctrines.



If the words of the prophet are of equal validity to the written word, Mormons cannot be so quick to distance themselves from past teachings. If both are inspired, there should be no contradiction.²⁸

A prophet is a man called by God to be his representative on earth. When a prophet speaks for God, it is as if God were speaking. . . . [He] teaches truth and interprets the word of God. We should follow his inspired teachings completely. We should not choose to follow part of his inspired counsel and discard that which is unpleasant or difficult.²⁹

Joseph Smith is accepted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a Prophet. He translated the *Book of Mormon*, received revelations, which are shared in *Doctrine and Covenants* and translated the *Pearl of Great Price*. Together with the King James Version of the Bible, these books are considered, by the LDS, to be the Standard Works and Scriptures of God. If the teachings found in the Standard Works of the Mormon Church are found to be false, then great caution must be used in accepting anything from Joseph Smith or any other Prophet from the LDS community.

DOES THE TRUE CHURCH NEED TO BE RESTORED?

If in the nineteenth century our Lord Christ needed to restore the Church to His true Gospel through Joseph Smith, then the Christian Church has not been correct in its understanding of the Gospel for almost two thousand years. If the Restoration ushered in by Smith was not needed,



however, then the very foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is invalid, and the LDS Church itself is not necessary to the Kingdom of God.

Many Mormon followers believe that the Restoration of the Gospel and the Restoration of the authority of their Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were completed in the revelations of God to Joseph Smith. This Restoration is the basis for the LDS Priesthood authority. According to the LDS Church, without a full Restoration no Church can claim to be the true Church of Christ.

LDS Prophets have claimed that the Restoration of the true Christian Church was completed in the work of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Their belief is that the authority of the true Church of Jesus Christ was lost after the Apostolic Age, and a Great Apostasy fell on the face of Christianity, which led to a corruption of the truths of Scripture. There are some within the Mormon Church, however, who adamantly deny that the full Restoration of the Church took place in Joseph Smith's time and state that it will be complete only when Christ returns. But LDS leaders have taught that the Restoration of the Church was fully accomplished by Joseph Smith.

While speaking of the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the Restored Church, Joseph Fielding Smith, a Prophet of the Church, stated that the Restoration began with Joseph Smith:

Following the raising of this *ensign*, the Lord sent forth his elders clothed with the priesthood and with power and authority, among the nations of the earth, bearing witness unto all peoples of the restoration of his Church, and calling upon the chil-



dren of men to repent and receive the gospel; for now it was being preached in all the world as a witness before the end should come, that is, the end of the reign of wickedness and the establishment of the millennial reign of peace. The elders went forth as they were commanded, and are still preaching the gospel and gathering out from the nations the seed of Israel unto whom the promise was made.³⁰

The Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith went on to say that Joseph Smith was unique in his announcement that a Restoration of the Church has taken place:

No one else, but Joseph Smith, has ever made the claim that this restoration and setting up of the kingdom (i.e., Church of Jesus Christ) has ever been revealed. Yet all indications point to the fact that the predicted signs of the approach of the second coming of our Lord are here. Surely the preparatory work of that coming must precede it. The restored unadulterated gospel must be here. Prophets who can receive revelation and who possess heavenly powers must be here.³¹

Other LDS Prophets have also made similar claims. Harold B. Lee finds the LDS Church's claim to be quite a point of departure from other churches:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one church that declares that the gospel was upon the earth from the days of Adam, and today it



is but a restoration of that early church. I think no other church makes such a claim.³²

Spencer W. Kimball, another Mormon Prophet, affirms that the Restoration occurred with the founding of the LDS Church:

Less than a year after the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer spoke concerning the ugly sin of infidelity and lustfulness and the conditions for receiving forgiveness.³³

Finally, Ezra Taft Benson, the thirteenth Prophet of the LDS Church, said that the true Church was restored through Joseph Smith:

After the restoration of His Church in modern times, Jesus Christ named His Church. With impeccable logic, He inquired of a former generation, How be it my church save it be called in my name? . . . if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man.³⁴

We have labored the point in order to demonstrate the primary accusation of Mormons against the whole of Christianity: They teach that not since the time of the Apostles has there been a true Church that contains the true Gospel. This is an incredible claim. This means that since around the time the Apostle John died, every individual who has placed faith in Christ for personal salvation has taken part in the Great Apostasy and rejected the "true" LDS Gospel.



Billy Graham, Martin Luther, Charles Swindoll, John Hus, Augustine, Adoniram Judson, Charles Spurgeon, John Calvin, George Whitefield. All of these men are recognized as Christian leaders and teachers who have proclaimed the Gospel to vast numbers of people with exhortations to believe in Christ. According to Mormon claims, all of these men were misled. Mormons teach that not only have Christians not had authority to speak in the name of God, and not only have Christians been believing a corrupted Gospel, but also there has been no true Church in all of Christianity. The members of the LDS Church are taught that since the death of the last New Testament Apostle, the Truth was lost until it was restored as the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" in 1830.

As Christian apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon note, the Mormon Church is in a dilemma regarding its claim of the Restoration of the Church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus taught that Hell would not prevail against His Church. But if Joseph Smith restored the Gospel, the authority of Priesthood, and the Church, then Christ's claims were false. If Joseph Smith did indeed restore the true Church, then Hell did prevail against Christ's true Church in what Mormons call the Great Apostasy.³⁵

It should be apparent that the claims of Joseph Smith and other Mormons concerning the Restoration must be accepted if the LDS wish to propagate their beliefs. If there were no need for a Restoration, all the beliefs at the foundation of Mormonism would be irrelevant.