



THE BIRTH OF HERESY

The Mormon Manuscript Series

By Ed Decker

The early nineteenth century was a time of great religious excitement in the Northeastern United States. New York State was rocked with spiritual renewal from every direction. While mighty men of God such as Charles Finney, sparked by the power of the Holy Spirit, led so many thousands of people to the Cross of Calvary there also arose those who captivated the few with the fruits of their own vanity and drew them away into the doctrines of a different gospel.

One such man was Joseph Smith, born into a struggling rural farm family in 1805. The Smith family was given to dabbling in the mysteries of divination, glasslooking, peepstoning, and "Abrac". His father, Joseph Sr., had a special gift of visions, through powers from the unseen world. (See Lucy Mack book)

Joseph Jr. was to set his own mark in the world in a series of bold and visionary declarations. He was to claim that in the spring of 1820, he retired to a grove of trees near his home in Manchester, New York. There he sought the Word of the Lord concerning which church he should join of all those experiencing revival. He later testified that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared before him in a pillar of light, above the brightness of the sun.

He said that they instructed him that he was to join none of the churches for they were all wrong; all their creeds were an abomination in God's sight and those who professed these creeds were all corrupt. According to Joseph's declarations, the true gospel of Jesus Christ was lost to the world. The power and authority of God was taken from the earth in the First Century AD, and only now was it about to be restored.¹

In the evening of September 23, 1823 (Joseph reported later), while in an act of prayer and supplication, seeking divine direction regarding the next step in God's plan for his life, God moved again. Another being, who identified himself as the Angel Moroni, descended in a brilliant pillar of light and repeatedly instructed Joseph in the next steps of the restoration of the true gospel through Joseph's holy calling to that purpose.

Moroni told him of a stone chest he had buried in the nearby "Hill Cumorah", in the beginning of the fifth century. It held a book of scripture written upon gold plates, containing the "fullness of the everlasting gospel", as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants of the American continent, who were actually the descendants of Jewish settlers led there from Jerusalem by God 600 years before Christ. The chest also contained the Urim, Thummim, and Breastplate of Jewish antiquity for the purpose of translation.

Led to the site by Moroni, Joseph was instructed not to remove the items until given permission. He visited the location annually for four years, until told the time was ready for these scriptures to be translated. And so came forth the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith translated from "Reformed" Egyptian characters, inscribed on the gold plates.²

Joseph later described the return of John the Baptist, who descended in a cloud of light on May 15th, 1829, and ordained Joseph and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, to the Levitical Priesthood of Aaron, and gave them the authority to baptize. A short time later Peter, James and John were to descend and confer the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood, which would hold the keys to all the spiritual power of Christ. Other visitors, such as Moses, Elias and Elijah would later appear with their special messages and keys of "Restoration".

With revelation and prophecy abounding, Joseph began the building of his church. Moving often, and seeking Zion, the true gathering place of the Lamb, the era of Joseph Smith was at its peak in Nauvoo, Illinois.

With over 20,000 members, the Church had become a force to be reckoned with! It had political power and influence, as well as its own small army of 2500 armed men under the charge of General Smith, who now often wore the uniform of that position.

Always fearful of attack from without, the final chapter of Joseph's life came through "the conspiracy of traitors and wicked men". On the 27th of June, 1844, Joseph Smith died a martyr at the hands of a mob in the jail at Carthage, Illinois, thus sealing his testimony of the Book of Mormon with his own blood, as church history relates.³

While the church split in several directions at his death, the main body of the resolute believers trekked to a Rocky Mountain retreat - the New Zion - named it Deseret. It is now known as Utah. Through hard work and a special brand of zeal, they carved an empire out of the desert under the powerful direction of Brigham Young.

Today, Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States and many countries. It fields more than 30,000 full-time proselytizing missionaries. Its Corporation of the First Presidency is one of the very wealthiest business corporations in the country, sitting easily within the top 25 corporations. (see Mormon Corporate Empire)

These vast business interests are controlled by the Prophet and the Apostles totally without disclosure to the members.

If Mormonism were truly a Christian work, drawing people to the Cross of Calvary, we could only cheer at the sidelines! But the doctrines of Mormonism are not the doctrines of the Christian faith. Let's examine this brief history of Mormonism in the light of Christian scripture. In II Corinthians 13:1, we are warned that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established, and we will put Mormonism to that test!

In the 11th chapter of II Corinthians, Paul warns us that if men come and preach another gospel, another Jesus, another spirit, we might well bear with them, for such are false Apostles--deceitful workers, having the appearance of ministers of righteousness, but whose end shall be according to their works - (not Christ's mercy). We are warned that Satan himself is transformed as an Angel of Light.

IF Joseph Smith really did see what he claimed, two personages appeared to him in a pillar of light. They claimed to be God the Father and Jesus, His son.

The very first clue that something was wrong was a physical man in the role of God the Father. We are told that "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the Son of Man that he should repent" (Numbers 23:19). John 4:24 says that,

"God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Jesus specifically taught that a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). In Matthew 16:17, Jesus declares that His father in heaven is not of "flesh and blood". John 1:18 states that no man has seen God at ANY time.

The first words out of the mouth of Joseph's Jesus should bring loud clanging warning bells to the Christian with even the most limited knowledge of the Bible. He declared that the creeds of all the churches were an abomination to him--that all those who professed those creeds were corrupt. The Christian pastors were deceivers. There was no authority of God left on earth!

What was the Christian confession in that day? The same as it was at the time of Christ! The same as it is today! The same zeal for souls seen in the life of Paul is the same zeal we read about in the life of Charles Finney; in Joseph Smith's day--and it is the very same zeal we see in the Christian body this very hour! That is the zeal these two personages claimed was filthy in their eyes.

Can we believe that the power of God, as it was established by Christ and carried forth by his Apostles and followers was lost to mankind? Did the world become void of the authority of God? Did Jesus fail?

Isaiah 9:7 claims that there will be no end to the increase of Christ's government and peace. His Kingdom shall be established from henceforth even for ever! Why? The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform it! We are promised that He (Christ) shall reign forever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:33). Jesus, being the Petra - the bedrock itself, proclaimed that upon that rock (Petra) He would build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! (Matthew 16:18).

One need only skim through "Foxe's Book of the Martyrs" and read some of the many testimonies of the Christian martyrs throughout the centuries to know without a doubt that the zeal of the Lord of Hosts is still performing the establishing of His Kingdom!

And what about the Holy Spirit? Was He so less a power of God that He could not fulfill His divine function? Jesus said He would abide with us forever, to dwell with us and in us! (John 14:16-17). He promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us, being a testimony of Christ, bringing all things of Jesus into our remembrance (John 14:26). To receive the message of Joseph Smith's first vision would be to call God a liar, Jesus a failure, the Holy Spirit without function and the Bible of no merit or truth!

The next episode in the Mormon Restoration centers around the Angel Moroni, preparing Joseph Smith to succeed where Jesus failed. Moroni, appearing as an angel of light, brings Joseph word of the gold plates and the Book of Mormon, which were to contain the fullness of the everlasting gospel.

Paul gave clear warning about anyone, even an angel from heaven, preaching any other gospel. He said that they should be accursed (Galatians 1:8). Here again, the warning flag waves frantically!

The Book of Mormon claims to contain the sacred writings of the Jewish people who relocated from Jerusalem to the western shores of the Americas in 600 B.C.

The first warning sign is that this scripture was written in Egyptian, a cursed language to the Jews. There has never been a verse of Hebrew Scripture written by Jews for Jews in Egyptian. It would be blasphemous! Nehemiah makes that clear. He cursed those who had traffic with Egypt, smote them and yanked out the hair of the offenders (Neh. 13:23-27).

Secondly, the Book of Mormon speaks of a great civilization, with 38 major cities and Temples as great as Solomon's--built from 600 BC to 400 AD. Yet there is not so much as a stone tablet, or a stick that the Mormon archaeologists can identify as Book of Mormon archaeology. This is in spite of thousands of discoveries of other cultures in the supposed Book of Mormon "locations".

Even the Hill Cumorah, where Joseph unearthed the plates, was said to have been host to a great battle in 385 AD, where approximately a half million people died with all manner of weapons of war. The site would have to hold a mountain of archaeological evidence, yet not a single piece of evidence has been produced in proof of the greatest battle in this hemisphere in the history of mankind.

Joseph's later claim that John the Baptist descended and restored the Levitical priesthood of Aaron, can only lead one to believe that he had little or no knowledge of the Bible or Jewish tradition.

First, John the Baptist never held the Levitical priesthood, and could not restore something he never had, even in Mormon theology. John wore the skins of an animal and ate food that was considered unclean to the Levitical priesthood. He functioned by proclaiming Jesus Christ, calling people to repent and be baptized. The priesthood functioned within the temple at the altar.

If he were a member of the priesthood, its leaders knew nothing of it. When challenged by Christ regarding this very subject, they were ignorant of John's authority (Matthew 21:23-27). Further, the Mormon priesthood that Joseph Smith claimed was a restoration does not deal with the key functions of the early Aaronic priesthood, the offering of gifts according to the law (Hebrews 8:4).

Jesus has given us a better Covenant, established upon better promises and has made the old to vanish away (Hebrews 8:6, 7, 13).

Joseph Smith claimed that Peter, James and John came and restored the Melchizedek priesthood. This declaration, like each before it, cannot meet the test of Scripture, or logic.

In Mormonism, no man can hold the Melchizedek priesthood without first holding the Aaronic priesthood. Those great Apostles of the Lord most obviously were not operating as Levitical priests. Everything they did within the record of the Word of God places them totally outside that dead priesthood.

The true Melchizedek priesthood was always a priesthood of only ONE! It existed before the law was given (Genesis 14:18) and after the law was ended (Hebrews 7:11-17).

It sprang forth with the first offering of the Bread and Wine. It reappeared only when the final offering of the broken body of Christ and His shed blood ended the penalty of the law as He became our sin offering by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:12-14).

The final irony of Joseph Smith's life came in the story of his death. The Mormon Church pronounces him a martyr,

sealing the testimony of the Book of Mormon with his blood. Yet truth, and Mormon history, tells another story. By 1844, Joseph already claimed 27 'Celestial' wives, by Church count, and 48 by Historian Fawn Brodie's count.⁴ Always on the lookout for more, he finally provoked leading men within the Church to take action.

Austin Cowles, first Counselor to the Church at Nauvoo, and William Law, Smith's second Counselor, published charges (of heresy, adultery and fornication) against Joseph Smith in the Nauvoo Expositor.⁵ Joseph destroyed the press, and charges were filed against him in Carthage, Illinois, the nearest community having non-Mormon officials. At first, Joseph fled and hid, but was convinced to return at his wife's pleading, by Porter Rockwell, his bodyguard, and was arrested.

Joseph was in the second floor of the jail, with visiting friends and without a locked door. After members of his own militia retired to their homes for the night, a mob formed outside, shouting insults. As some of the mob came up the narrow stairwell, Joseph discharged his pistol into their midst, killing two men and wounding a third. He and his brother, Hyrum, were killed in the exchange of gunfire.⁶

Under no circumstance can Joseph Smith be described as a martyr, sealing his testimony of the Book of Mormon with blood. He died in a gunfight, in a tragic ending caused by his own carnal, sinful use of other men's wives. Stephen was a martyr. He knelt down as he was killed, crying "Father, forgive them!" (Acts 7:60).

Who are men to follow? Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, who said "...Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), or Joseph Smith, the man who said, "I have more to boast of than any man had--neither Paul, John, Peter nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I."⁷

By every test of a prophet, Joseph failed. By every test of man, he was corrupt. Yet over six million people follow his teachings in Spiritual Blindness.

It is only by the power in the spiritual authority of the believer, by your knowledge of the Word of God, by love for a lost people and by prayer that you are going to win Mormons to the Lord of Calvary. But they can be reconciled to God and we have God's Word on it! (Colossians 1:21-22).

J. Edward Decker

References

1. LDS Scriptures, Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith 2:14-20
2. Ibid, Joseph Smith 2:30-35
3. LDS Scripture, Doctrine_&_Covenants, Section 135
4. No Man Knows My History, The Life of Joseph Smith, Fawn M. Brodie, Alfred Knopf Publishers, 1971 page 457.
5. Nauvoo Expositor, June 7, 1844
6. LDS, History of the Church, Vol. 6, pages 616-619.
7. Ibid, Vol. 6, page 408.