

Visions of God
Mormons
Donald E. Knebel
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1. Today we will talk about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or “LDS,” whose members have gained the nickname “Mormons.”
2. As we will see, Mormon beliefs bear many similarities to beliefs of other Christians, but also vary in significant ways from traditional Christian beliefs.
3. Despite persecutions from the very beginning for their beliefs, today Mormons are among the fastest growing religious groups in the world.

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1. Before we talk about the Mormon views that differ from those of most Christians, it is important to talk about the beliefs of Mormons that are the same or virtually the same as those of most Christians.
2. In 1842, a newspaper asked Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism, what Mormons believed.
3. Smith responded with a letter including 13 Articles of Faith, which were adopted as scripture by the general conference of the LDS Church in 1880 and are now included in a book entitled *The Pearl of Great Price*.
4. Article 1 states: **“We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”**
5. Article 3 states: **“We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”**
6. Article 4 states: **“We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”**
7. Like most Christians, Mormons believe in Jesus’ virgin birth and his coming return.

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1. As we discussed last week, “[b]eginning at the very end of the eighteenth century, a mighty reawakening of religious interest swept the land.” Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 652.
2. Out of that period came the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses.
3. This dramatic expansion in religious fervor was fueled by “revival meetings,” led by charismatic ministers who preached and obtained immediate conversions.
4. As a result, “a conscious and often emotional conversion experience came to be widely understood as the normal way of entering the Christian life.” *Id.*
5. During this period, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were particularly successful in gaining new members.

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1. As a young child, Joseph Smith had moved with his family to Manchester, New York, an area that became known as the “burned-over district” because of the passion of its revival meetings.
2. According to his account, written 18 years later, Smith had attended revival meetings near his home when he was 14 years old. *Joseph Smith – History ¶¶ 5 – 7* (included in *Pearl of Great Price*).
3. He was stirred by the emotional preaching that he heard but unsure which of the religions he heard about were true.
4. Reading his Bible, he came upon *James 1:5*, which says: “**If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.**”
5. So, on a spring day in 1820, Smith walked into a secluded grove of trees near his home to pray and learn from God which church to join.

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1. As he was praying, young Smith first saw a pillar of light falling upon him.
2. He then saw what he described as “**two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air.**” *Joseph Smith – History ¶ 17.*
3. According to his account, “[o]ne of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other — *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” *Id.*

4. When he asked the Personages which church to join, one told him to “**join none of them, for they were all wrong**” and “**all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt.**” *Id.* ¶ 19.
5. Because Smith ultimately recounted different versions of what Mormons call the “First Vision,” skeptics claim it never happened.
6. But for Mormons, the truth of this event is the cornerstone of their faith.
7. The LDS website describes Joseph Smith’s First Vision as “**the greatest event in world history since the birth, ministry, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**”
<http://josephsmith.net/article/the-first-vision?lang=eng>
8. For Mormons, the First Vision established Joseph Smith as a true prophet of God.

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1. More important, this vision established Joseph Smith’s conception of God, which is extraordinarily important to today’s Mormons.
2. As one author states: “**Smith thought that he saw God the Father and God the Son as two individual and fully embodied persons, and he drew the conclusion that God really does look like us.**” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 84.
3. Joseph Smith derived from this experience two essential beliefs of most Mormons today.
4. First, because Smith was able to see God as a Personage that looked like him, “**the most basic principle of Mormon metaphysics states that all reality ‘under the sun’ (the natural world) is of the same basic nature as all of reality ‘above the sun’ (the supernatural world).**” *Id.* at 33.
5. “**Rather than the supernatural and the natural being opposed to each other, the supernatural is nature intensified but not abolished.**” *Id.* at 151.
6. Mormons believe that “**God is one of the objects of the world, not an unimaginable perfect entity that exists in a totally unique fashion.**” *Id.* at 33.
7. “**Latter-day Saints perceive the Father as an exalted Man in the most literal, anthropomorphic terms.**”
<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/EoM/id/4391/show/3732>
8. As a book written by Mormons and seeking to describe Mormonism to non-Mormons states: “**To Mormons, God is the same species as humans, but he’s infinitely more advanced.**” Reiss, *Mormonism for Dummies* at 42.

9. Mormons therefore take very literally the statement in *Genesis* that God “**was walking in the garden in the cool of the day**” and could not find Adam and Eve hiding “**among the trees**” of the Garden of Eden. *Genesis* 3:8.

10. We will talk later about the implications of the idea that God and humans are made from the same material.

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1. Second, “[b]y affirming a material God, Mormons have a more robust understanding of the individuality of each member of the Trinity.” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 99.

2. Mormons understand the Holy Trinity “as three literal, distinct personalities: **God the Father; His Son, Jesus the Christ (who is one with the Father in purpose and thought, but separate from Him in physical fact); and the Holy Ghost, a Personage of spirit.**” Rosen, *Religions of America* at 189.

3. Unlike many Christians, Mormons reject the idea that Jesus has always existed, believing that God the Father came first and created both Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

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1. As Bible scholars have long recognized, the Old Testament actually contains two Hebrew names for the God of Israel.

2. *El* or *Elohim* is usually translated simply as “God.”

3. “*Yahweh*,” a pronunciation of YHWH, is usually translated as “LORD.”

4. Mormons sometimes call God the Father “El” or “Elohim” and Jesus “*Yahweh*” or “Jehovah,” an earlier pronunciation of “*Yahweh*.”

5. Mormons since Joseph Smith have pointed out that *Elohim*, a Hebrew word translated as “God,” can be used as plural of “God.”

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1. Although the First Vision caused Joseph Smith to conclude that the existing churches were all corrupt, he did not immediately learn what Mormons now understand are the correct beliefs.

2. Those beliefs came to him in a series of later experiences, the most famous of which he said occurred in 1823.

3. According to his later account, he was praying in his bedroom when he saw a bright light above him and “**immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.**” *Joseph Smith – History ¶ 30.*

4. Like the two personages of God and Jesus he had experienced in the First Vision, this personage “**was glorious beyond description.**” *Joseph Smith – History ¶ 32.*

5. The personage said his name was “Moroni” and told Smith, then 17, that God had chosen him to translate a book “**written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang.**” *Joseph Smith – History ¶ 34.*

6. Moroni said Smith could translate the hidden plates with “**two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim – deposited with the plates.**” *Joseph Smith – History ¶ 35.*

7. Smith said he found the plates and the stones in a hill near his house the next morning but was forbidden from removing them for four years.

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1. With the golden plates in hand, Smith began using the stones to translate the text, which he said was written with “**Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic**” characters. *Joseph Smith – History ¶ 64.*

2. Although he never displayed the plates, three people later testified they had seen them.

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1. In 1830, Smith self-published 5000 copies of the 588-page *Book of Mormon* as a translation of what he found on the plates.

2. The stories on the plates were said to have been written by a man named Mormon and Moroni, his son, who buried the plates on the New York hill in 421 A.D., where they remained hidden until Moroni revealed them to Joseph Smith.

3. The *Book of Mormon’s* “**style, and its moral cycle of virtue leading to pride, sin, chastisement, and repentance, had the ring of the Old Testament.**” Moynahan, *The Faith* at 612.

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1. The *Book of Mormon* tells of a Hebrew family that sailed from Israel to what is now North America in 600 B.C. and eventually produced two warring branches, the Nephites and the Lamanites.

2. Their prophets predicted the birth of Jesus, who then appeared to them after his resurrection.
3. The *Book of Mormon* includes a number of statements of Jesus similar to those in the New Testament.
4. But it also “**has stories about and sayings by Jesus that do not appear in the New Testament.**” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 116.
- 5 Skeptics immediately claimed that the *Book of Mormon* was a fabrication.
6. They noted that it referred to horses and steel on the American continent before 421 A.D. when there was no archaeological evidence those existed until the arrival of Europeans.
7. They pointed out that Smith and his brother often hunted for “**the caches of gold that local tradition held to be hidden in the region**” and “**it was a short step for Joseph to dream up Moroni and the golden plates.**” Moynahan, *The Faith* at 613.
8. When people asked Smith to show them the plates, he said Moroni took the plates back from him after he had published his book and will someday return with them to prove the truth of his story.
9. Despite the skeptics, Smith chartered a church in April 1830 and immediately began gaining followers, some of whom traveled from New York to find converts in other areas.

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1. Article 8 of the *Articles of Faith* states: “**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.**”
2. The *Book of Mormon* provides only some of the Mormon beliefs that differ from those of most Christians.
3. Others come from the *Book of Moses* that Joseph Smith said was revealed to him beginning in 1830 to correct errors in the Old Testament.
4. The *Book of Moses* is now included in *The Pearl of Great Price* that Mormons believe has the same authority as the *Book of Mormon*.

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1. According to the Bible, Moses never saw the face of God “**because he was afraid to look at God.**” *Exodus 3:6.*
2. The *Book of Moses* revises the story of Moses’ encounter with God on “**an exceedingly high mountain.**” *Moses 1:1*
3. In the retelling, Moses “**saw God face to face**” with his “**spiritual eyes**” just as Joseph Smith believed he had seen God during the First Vision. *Moses 1:2; 1:11.*
4. Relying on the reported experience of Moses and Joseph Smith, Mormons believe that God can be seen, face to face, and reject the idea that God is unknowable or abstract.
5. As one author writes, for Mormons “[k]nowing God is the ultimate perceptual experience.” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 37.
6. It is the claim that God can be seen that made the teachings of Joseph Smith so attractive to his followers and makes the Mormon message so attractive today.
7. When traditional Christians say that God cannot be seen except through the person of Jesus, Mormons point to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said: “**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**” *Matthew 5:8.*

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1. The *Book of Moses* includes the roots of another Mormon teaching that is fundamentally different from the beliefs of most other Christians.
2. For most Christians, a human soul is created by God either at the time of conception or upon quickening.
3. But the *Book of Moses* quotes God as saying that he “**had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them; and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air.**” *Moses 3:5.*
4. As a result of this and other revelations to Joseph Smith, Mormons believe that every person “**has existed from the premortal past and will continue, with his individual identity, into the endless future.**” Rosen, *Religions of American* at 190.
5. In other words, Mormons believe in a “**human identity that extends eternally in both directions, a human existence marked by incremental progress like a continuous line, rather than an abrupt beginning and endless future like a ray, or a flash of aborted life like a flash.**” Given, *The God who Weeps* at 46.

6. Mormons believe this idea is supported by this statement in *Jeremiah*: “**Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.**” *Jeremiah* 1:5.
7. According to the *Book of Moses*, God had created everything “**spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth.**” *Moses* 3:5.
8. As a result, Mormons call these unborn human beings, past, present, and future, “spirit children.”
9. For Mormons, spirit children “**cannot become perfect without becoming embodied.**” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 123.
10. So God gives them a choice to come to earth to be tested and perfected before going on to their eternal destinations.
11. At birth, the spiritual body is joined with a physical body and the spiritual body forgets its prior life during the process.
12. This illustration of God or Elohim with his spirit children is from an LDS website.

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1. Many Mormons believe that the spirit children are the products of God, the Heavenly Father, and his wife, the Heavenly Mother.
2. Although not universally accepted and rarely commented upon publicly, a book written by Mormons for non-Mormons states that “**God is eternally married to Heavenly Mother, and together they've populated the world with their children (us).**” Riess, *Mormonism for Dummies* at 42.
3. A Mormon publication states: “**Latter-day Saints infer from authoritative sources of scripture and modern prophecy that there is a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father.**” http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Mother_in_Heaven
4. The LDS Church traces belief in a Heavenly Mother to the teachings of Joseph Smith. <https://www.lds.org/topics/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>

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1. The idea that God is married has ancient Jewish roots.
2. This Holy of Holies from a Jewish temple in Arad in southern Israel has two incense burners, one for Yahweh and one for Asherah, his consort.

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1. Because Mormons believe human beings are with God as spirit children until coming to earth as babies, they reject the idea of original sin.
2. Article 2 of the *Articles of Faith* states: “**We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.**”
3. One author ties this rejection of original sin to the unique Mormon conception of God that we discussed in connection with the First Vision: “**The very substance of our existence – our material being – is the same type of stuff that makes up God, so there is no inherent reason why we cannot be on the path toward God’s holiness in this earthly life.**” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 40.
4. Mormons believe that God gave the spirit children who were born on earth free will to make choices that affect their eternal destiny.

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1. The traditional Christian view of creation is that God created everything in the universe from nothing.
2. Mormons have a different view of the idea of creation, which they equate to ordering or arranging existing matter.
3. For Mormons, all matter, including spiritual matter, has always existed and God created the heavens and earth from that existing matter in the same way that a builder might create a house from existing materials.
4. This view is actually consistent with the literal wording of *Genesis* 1.1, translated in *Young’s Literal Translation* as: “**In the beginning of God’s preparing the heavens and the earth.**”

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1. Soon after announcing the *Book of Moses*, Joseph Smith joined his followers in Kirtland, Ohio.
2. On December 27, 1832, he reported a revelation requiring that his church restore use of a temple like the one used by the Jews in the Old Testament.
3. So, the Mormons in Kirtland built the first temple in 1833.
4. Because of their beliefs, their economic success, and their opposition to slavery, the Mormons were persecuted in Kirtland and Joseph Smith ran into legal problems trying to finance the temple.

5. As a result, Smith left Ohio and joined his followers in Jackson County, Missouri.

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1. The Mormons were no better received in Missouri than they had been in Ohio.
2. In 1838, the Governor of Missouri issued an order to either kill the Mormons or drive them from the state.
3. Choosing to flee instead of die, Joseph Smith and his followers received a charter from the State of Illinois to found the town of Nauvoo on the banks of the Mississippi River.
4. In the late 1830s, missionaries baptized “**some eight thousand people in Britain, proving Mormonism to be exportable.**” Moynahan, *The Faith* at 615.
5. Many of those converts came to Nauvoo, which had a population of about 12,000 in 1844, about the size of Chicago at the time.

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1. In Nauvoo, the Mormons under Smith built a 50,000 square foot temple to perform the rituals that Mormons still practice.
2. Today, a reproduction of Nauvoo temple, destroyed by fire in 1848, is a major tourist attraction.
3. As do all Mormon temples today, the temple includes a golden statue of Moroni.

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1. On April 7, 1844, Joseph Smith gave a sermon before 20,000 Mormons in Nauvoo that has been described as “**one of the truly remarkable sermons ever preached in America.**” Bushman, *Joseph Smith* at 533.
2. The sermon, known as the “King Follett Discourse,” was given in the context of the death of King Follett, a friend of Joseph Smith who had recently been killed in an accident.
3. As a result, Smith took the occasion to give his thoughts “**on the subject of the dead.**” <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1971/04/the-king-follett-sermon?lang=eng>
4. Smith first told his audience what he had learned about the nature of God: “**God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret.**” *Id.*

5. This statement is startling to most Christians, but it follows from Smith's conclusion, based on seeing God as a Personage in the First Vision, that "**God, angels and men are all of one species.**" Givens, *The God who Weeps* at 53.

6. But what followed from that is even more startling – any human being has the potential to become not only like God but to become a god.

7. Smith told his followers that when they died, they would follow the examples of God and Jesus and obtain the "**same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a god, and ascend the throne of eternal power.**"

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1971/04/the-king-follett-sermon?lang=eng>

8. A Mormon prophet later summarized Joseph Smith's teachings of the King Follett Discourse this way: "**As man now is, God once was: as God now is, man may be.**" Riess, *Mormonism for Dummies* at 42.

9. The King Follett Discourse has never been adopted as scripture by Mormons and the idea that humans can become a god is not often discussed publicly by Mormons.

10. But this idea is outlined in a book by Mormon authors explaining their beliefs for non-Mormons. *Id.*

11. The authors note that one of the ultimate rewards of human beings is to gain a "**perfected body capable of producing spirit children**" and "**become eternal parents like God.**" *Id.* at 37.

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1. Joseph Smith was killed by a mob in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1844, shortly after delivering the King Follett Discourse.

2. He was succeeded as president of the Church by Brigham Young, who had become an early follower of Joseph Smith.

3. After becoming president, Brigham Young moved the headquarters of the Church to the Utah Territory, "**where a community of great material prosperity was inaugurated.**" Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 661.

4. Young became the first Governor of the Utah Territory in 1851.

5. When he died, Brigham Young "**left \$2.5 million to 17 wives and 56 children.**" Moynahan, *The Faith* at 514.

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1. The current Mormon temple was opened in Salt Lake City in 1893.
2. Today, it is the largest of 149 temples, including one in Indianapolis.

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1. Mormons do not use their temples for weekly worship services.
2. Sunday services take place in a meeting house that serves a particular geographic area called a “ward.”
3. Both from the outside and on the inside, a Mormon meeting house is not much different from a traditional Protestant church.
4. Services in the meeting house are much the same as in other churches, with hymns, prayers and sermons.
5. Outsiders are welcome to participate in the Sunday services.
6. Since Mormons do not have professional ministers, the sermons are given by members of the congregation.
7. Communion is served once a week, with bread and water.
8. The use of water instead of wine is based on a revelation reported by Joseph Smith in 1830, which said that what is used in the communion service is not important and water was easier to obtain than wine.
9. Because Mormons are prohibited from using alcoholic beverages, the use of water also reinforces that message.

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1. Meeting houses are also used for baptizing the living.
2. Children are baptized by complete immersion at age 8, when they have reached the “age of accountability” and can be held responsible for their choices.
3. A member of the priesthood lays his hands on the head of the newly baptized person and calls for the person to receive the Holy Spirit.
4. Only men can be priests.

5. But recent teachings of church leaders give to Mormon women priesthood power and authority even though they are not literally priests.

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1. Mormon temples are not designed for ordinary worship services, but for rituals.
2. Once a temple has been consecrated, it can be entered only by baptized Mormons who have received a “temple recommend” from a church leader.
3. The recommend is given every two years to Mormons in good standing with the teachings of the Church.
4. Many people have noted the similarity of Mormon rituals and practices to those of the Freemasons, which Joseph Smith joined at the same time that he was developing the temple rituals. Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 151.
5. But a non-Mormon who has written favorably of Mormon practices sees nothing unusual or alarming about this because “**Smith had to borrow from various sources for his rituals because the Christianity of his day provided him with so few examples.**” *Id.*

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1. One of the most important temple rituals is the “endowment” ceremony or “ordinance,” which is similar to initiation ceremonies in Masonic and similar organizations and takes place in a special room designed like an auditorium.
2. For the endowment ordinance, baptized Mormons are dressed in white and watch a dramatization of God’s plan of salvation, from creation, through the fall of Adam, and then to the redemption of mankind by Jesus.
3. The endowment dramatizations were previously performed by church members, but are now done through videos.
4. Along the way of this two-hour ceremony, participants are given instructions about Mormon teachings and asked to make covenants consistent with those teachings, such as to stay chaste, follow the Gospel of Jesus, serve the cause of righteousness and be pure and obedient.
5. In exchange, participants are assured of God’s promises for their salvation and their eventual life with God.
6. During the endowment, participants are also given certain gestures and phrases that they keep secret from non-Mormons.

7. In dedicating the temple in Salt Lake City in 1853, Brigham Young explained the purpose of these gestures and phrases: “**Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, ... and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.**” <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1992/04/come-to-the-house-of-the-lord?lang=eng>

8. Also during the endowment, Mormons receive the special undergarments that they are expected to wear for the rest of their lives to remind them constantly of the promises they have made to God.

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1. During the endowment, participants are taught God’s “plan of salvation,” which began when they were spirit children and chose to be born so they could participate in the plan and continues in stages after their deaths.

2. As one author states: “**No Christian tradition has ever had such a concrete, specific, and creative view of heaven.**” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 75.

3. That statement is actually not quite correct.

4. Relying on Paul’s claim to have visited the “third heaven” (*2 Corinthians* 12:2), Mormons actually believe in three heavens, with varying levels of opportunity.

5. Mormons believe that when Jesus returns, the dead will be resurrected, an event Mormons, like many other Christians, see as a rejoinder of the soul to the body.

6. In the meantime, Mormons believe the soul is in one of two places, both of which are on earth but invisible to the living.

7. The first place is a spiritual paradise, for people who believed in Jesus during their lives.

8. The second place is a prison for those who did not accept Jesus during their lives, including those who were never given the chance.

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1. While in either the spiritual paradise or spiritual prison, the dead retain all their earthly personalities, but in perfect form.

2. Everyone is a healthy adult, including those who died as children.

3. Mormons believe that those in spirit prison can still learn about Jesus and make a choice to accept him.
4. They base this idea on the words of Jesus in *John* 5:25: "**I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.**"
5. Other than this spirit prison, which can be a place of redemption, Mormons have no belief in hell or any kind of eternal torture.

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1. Let's go back to the Mormon plan of salvation.
2. It describes three different kingdoms for people whose souls are joined with their once dead bodies upon the return of Jesus – the Celestial Kingdom, the Terrestrial Kingdom and the Telestial Kingdom.
3. All three kingdoms are seen as paradises, with even murderers and rapists going to the Telestial Kingdom, the lowest level.
4. The Terrestrial Level is reserved for Christians who have not done or believed everything required by Mormon teachings, including LDS members who have not done everything required of them.
5. The Celestial Kingdom is reserved for those who have followed the teachings of the LDS Church.
6. The "outer darkness" is for Satan and people who have once accepted the teachings of the Church and then repudiated them.

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1. After completing the endowment ceremony, participants go to a magnificently appointed "Celestial Room" within the temple where they can contemplate what they have just learned and experienced.
2. The Celestial Room is intended to provide those who have just been promised entry to the Celestial Kingdom a foretaste of what that might look like.
3. For Mormons, the Celestial Kingdom is not a place of leisure, but a place of continued striving to get the ultimate reward – the chance to be god, organize a new universe and populate it with spiritual children.

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1. One of the best known and controversial Mormon practices in the temple is baptism of the dead.
2. To accomplish this, Mormons in good standing go into the Temple and are baptized in the name of someone who died without being baptized as a Mormon.
3. To obtain the names of deceased people to be baptized, Mormons maintain and create elaborate data bases and genealogical records.
4. Mormons believe that the deceased people that they baptize have a choice of accepting the benefits of baptism and any salvation the baptism may enable.
5. For Mormons, baptizing the dead answers a question that often troubles other Christians – why should people who died before hearing of Jesus be denied the benefits of being baptized?
6. For Mormons, anyone who has ever lived has the chance in death to be baptized, to accept Jesus, and to be saved.
7. As one Mormon author says: **“If hearing and believing the message of Christ is essential to all mankind’s eternal happiness, then that opportunity must be available beyond the confines of mortal life.”** Givens, *The God who Weeps* at 97.
8. Baptism fonts in all Mormon temples rest on the backs of 12 oxen, following a tradition dating back to the First Temple in Jerusalem.
9. Mormons find their support for baptism of the dead in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: **“Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?”** *1 Corinthians* 15:29.
10. For Mormons, this is proof that the earliest followers of Jesus practiced baptism of the dead.
11. Once deceased persons have been baptized, a Mormon in good standing can go through the endowment ceremony on their behalf, making them eligible for the Celestial Kingdom if they accept the vicariously bestowed benefits.

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1. **“Mormons believe that ties that bind us together on this earth will continue in the next life.”** Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 42.

2. Joseph Smith based this idea on the teaching of Jesus in *Matthew* 16:19: “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**”
3. Following this teaching, Mormon couples able to enter the temple can have their marriage “sealed,” which they believe means that they will also be married in the afterlife where they will have the chance to produce spirit children of their own.
4. If they have no children at the time, any children will also be sealed with them for eternity.
5. Any children born before their parents are sealed can be sealed with their parents.
6. Like the endowment and baptism ordinances, the sealing ordinance can be performed on behalf of the deceased, who are free to reject its benefits.

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1. Article 9 of the *Articles of Faith* states: “**We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.**”
2. Today, the LDS president governs along with two other men in a “First Presidency,” assisted by a 12-man Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.
3. Mormons believe that God continues to reveal his truths to Church presidents as legitimate successors to Joseph Smith.
4. In 1890, President Wilford Woodruff received a revelation that polygamy was no longer permissible, making it possible for Utah to become a state.
5. In 1978, Church leaders announced a revelation that reversed a long-standing policy excluding men of black African descent from the priesthood.

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1. “**The Mormon Church is ambitious in that it wants to be the foundation for a way of life, not just a set of beliefs or a moral outlook.**” Webb, *Mormon Christianity* at 43.
2. As a result, the Church has a number of strict rules of behavior that require sacrifice, including avoiding coffee, alcohol and premarital sex, donating 10 percent of one’s income to the Church, wearing special undergarments, and fasting on the first Sunday of the month.

3. Young Mormons are encouraged to spend up to two years as missionaries, with no pay, and thousands of them do.

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1. Those strict rules have not been the reason for people to avoid becoming Mormons, but are the reasons they do.
2. The Latter-day Saints have been extraordinarily successful in gaining adherents throughout the world, today claiming fifteen million members, about the same as the number of Jews in the world.
3. In the last 15 years, an average of 800 people have become Mormons every day.
4. A 2008 study concluded that Mormons live about 10 years longer than the average American, a result attributed both to their life styles and their support of each other. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17920112>

Slide 39

1. Over the course of this series, we have seen that Eastern Orthodox Christians believe that the essence of God is ultimately unknowable, even after death.
2. Today, we saw that Mormons believe that the essence of God is no different from that of us and everyone can know God.
3. We saw that Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses deny as pagan the idea that people go to heaven when they die.
4. We saw that many groups deny the doctrines of original sin and justification by faith that are so important to many Protestants.
5. We saw that Seventh Day Adventists believe that the universe was created from nothing in six literal days and that Mormons believe the material of the universe has always existed.
6. We saw how some people died protesting infant baptism while others killed to maintain it.
7. We saw how Mennonites and Amish believe that God requires that they worship him simply, while Eastern Orthodox believe worship requires an experience suggesting heaven.
8. We saw that Seventh Day Adventists believe in continuing revelations while the closely related Jehovah's Witnesses deny there are such revelations.
9. Everyone holding these irreconcilable beliefs claims to be a Christian, looks to the Bible to support their beliefs and claims Jesus as their Savior.
10. What can we learn from this?

11. We can learn that people of good faith can come to dramatically different views about truth by looking at the same sources.

12. That may be the most important thing we can learn from this series of talks.

Resources:

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Reiss, Jana, *Mormonism for Dummies* (Wiley Publishing 2005)

Rosten, Leo, *Religions of America* (Simon & Schuster 2005)

Walker, Williston, *A History of the Christian Church* (Scribner 1985)

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