

# Men's Discipleship

## False Religions: Mormonism Part 1

The origins of **Mormonism**, formally known as the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church)**, trace back to the early 19th century in the United States during a period known as the **Second Great Awakening**, a time of intense religious revivalism.

Mormons refer to themselves as "**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**" for theological and historical reasons rooted in their belief that they are the **restored** Church of Jesus Christ in the **modern era**, or the "latter days."

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## Breakdown of the Name

### 1. "The Church of Jesus Christ"

- Mormons believe that their church is the one **true** church, originally established by **Jesus Christ** in the New Testament (around 30 A.D.).
- They teach that after the death of the apostles, there was a **Great Apostasy**, during which the original church lost its priesthood authority and correct doctrines.
- They claim Jesus **restored** His church through **Joseph Smith** in 1830.

**Doctrine & Covenants 1:30** (LDS scripture):

"...to be the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth..."

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### 2. "of Latter-day Saints"

- The term "**Latter-day**" distinguishes their restored church from the "**former-day**" **saints** (the early Christian Church in the New Testament).
- "Saints" is a biblical term used in the New Testament to refer to followers of Christ (e.g., Romans 1:7; Ephesians 1:1).

**LDS interpretation:** Members of the restored church are "saints" living in the **latter days**, meaning the time before the Second Coming of Christ.

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### 3. Why Not Just "Mormons"?

- "Mormon" comes from the **Book of Mormon**, but it's a nickname.

- In **2018**, President Russell M. Nelson (LDS prophet) instructed members to **avoid using the term "Mormon"** when referring to the church.
- The official name emphasizes **Jesus Christ**, not Mormon.

“The Lord has impressed upon my mind the importance of the name He has revealed for His Church... The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

— Russell M. Nelson, October 2018 General Conference

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## Protestant Perspective

Protestant theology holds that:

- There was **no Great Apostasy** in which the true Church ceased to exist (Matthew 16:18: *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”*).
  - The **"restoration"** claim is seen as heretical and **unnecessary**, since Christ's Church has always existed, preserved by God.
  - The name is viewed as **misleading**, because it suggests exclusivity and divine legitimacy not supported by Scripture.
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### 1. Founder: Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805–1844)

Joseph Smith claimed that in **1820**, at age 14, he experienced a **vision** (the "First Vision") in which God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him that all existing churches were corrupt and that he should not join any of them.

**Key events:**

- **1823**: Smith claimed that an angel named **Moroni** appeared and revealed the location of golden plates buried in a hill near Palmyra, New York.
  - **1827–1829**: Smith said he translated these plates into English using supernatural tools (Urim and Thummim), producing what became the **Book of Mormon**.
  - **1830**: The **Book of Mormon** was published, and the **Church of Christ** (later renamed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) was officially founded in **Fayette, New York**, on **April 6, 1830**.
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## What Are the Urim and Thummim in the Bible?

**Old Testament References:**

- First mentioned in **Exodus 28:30** as objects placed in the **High Priest's breastplate of judgment**.
- Their exact appearance and function are **not fully described**, but they were used to seek God's will—possibly by casting lots or illuminating choices.

**Exodus 28:30** – “And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart...”

- **Meaning:** The words are usually translated as:
  - **Urim** = “Lights”
  - **Thummim** = “Perfections” or “Truth”

### **Biblical Use:**

- Used occasionally for **divine decision-making** (e.g., Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6).
- The exact method is unknown; may have involved a yes/no answer from God.
- Not mentioned after the **Babylonian exile** (some think they were lost).

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## **LDS (Mormon) View of the Urim and Thummim**

### **Joseph Smith's Claim:**

Joseph Smith said the **golden plates** of the Book of Mormon were accompanied by **Urim and Thummim**, which he used to **translate** the ancient record.

He described them as “two transparent stones set in silver bows” attached to a breastplate—similar to large spectacles.

- LDS teaching equates them with the biblical Urim and Thummim.
- Smith claimed they were prepared by God for the **purpose of translation**.
- He later used a **seer stone** as well (distinct from the Urim and Thummim).

**Joseph Smith – History 1:35** (in *Pearl of Great Price*):

“...with the records was a curious instrument which the ancients called ‘Urim and Thummim’, which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate.”

### **Broader LDS Belief:**

- In LDS theology, **multiple Urim and Thummims** exist:
  - Earth will become a Urim and Thummim in the celestial kingdom (D&C 130:9).
  - The white stone given to the righteous in Revelation 2:17 is interpreted as a personal Urim and Thummim (D&C 130:10).

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## Protestant Perspective

### Summary:

- The biblical Urim and Thummim were real historical tools used **only by the High Priest** of Israel for **limited divine guidance**.
- **No longer used** after Christ's fulfillment of the Law and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

**Hebrews 1:1-2** – “God... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...”

**James 1:5** – Believers are to seek wisdom from God through prayer, not divination or relics.

### Protestant Objections to LDS Usage:

1. **No biblical basis** for using the Urim and Thummim to translate books or hidden records.
2. **Extra-biblical revelation** (like the Book of Mormon) is rejected.
3. **Association with occultic practices** – use of seer stones and magical instruments is condemned (Deut. 18:10–12).

“The idea that Joseph Smith translated an ancient record using magical stones violates the sufficiency of Scripture and the nature of biblical revelation.”

— Typical Reformed Theological Critique

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## Side-by-Side Comparison

Feature	LDS Perspective	Protestant/Reformed Perspective
<b>Definition</b>	Sacred stones used to translate the Book of Mormon	OT tools used by High Priest for limited decisions
<b>Function</b>	Translation of ancient records	Decision-making (possibly yes/no answers)
<b>Biblical Support</b>	Claims continuity with OT Urim/Thummim	Ends after OT period; no NT use
<b>Modern Usage</b>	Used by Joseph Smith, not by members today	No modern use; fulfilled and obsolete
<b>Associated Practices</b>	Seer stones, continuing revelation	Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura)
<b>Theological Concern</b>	Seen as divinely appointed tool	Seen as occultic when misused post-Christ

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## 2. The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon claims to be a record of ancient American civilizations descended from Israelites, focusing on Jesus Christ's appearance in the Americas after His resurrection.

- Smith said it was written in "**Reformed Egyptian**" and engraved on golden plates.
- The narrative includes stories of the **Nephites**, **Lamanites**, and **Jaredites**, civilizations said to have existed in the Americas.

## What Is "Reformed Egyptian" in Mormonism?

Joseph Smith claimed that the **Book of Mormon** was originally written on golden plates in a language called **Reformed Egyptian**.

### **Book of Mormon, Introduction:**

"...written by many ancient prophets... in reformed Egyptian."

- Supposedly, this language was used by Nephite prophets from ~600 BC to 400 AD.
  - Smith said he translated the plates by the **gift and power of God**, using the **Urim and Thummim**.
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## Is There Any Evidence for "Reformed Egyptian"?

### **No Known Linguistic Evidence:**

- **No credible scholar, linguist, or Egyptologist** has ever found evidence that "Reformed Egyptian" existed as a distinct language or writing system.
- It is **not listed** in any known classification of ancient scripts.
- Ancient Egyptian did go through changes (hieroglyphic → hieratic → demotic → Coptic), but none are called or resemble a "reformed" version with the characteristics claimed in the Book of Mormon.

**Hugh Nibley**, an LDS apologist, tried to argue that Egyptian was used by Semitic peoples in ancient times, but even his claims were speculative and not widely accepted outside LDS circles.

### **LDS Responses:**

- Some LDS scholars suggest "Reformed Egyptian" could refer to a **modified script** used by a small, literate elite.
- Others say it may have been a **private adaptation**, not found in archaeological records.

However, this claim lacks **external, objective validation**.

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## Historical and Linguistic Problems

### 1. Why Would Israelites Use Egyptian?

- The Book of Mormon says Nephite prophets (Israelites) wrote in Reformed Egyptian because Hebrew “would have taken too much space” on plates (Mormon 9:32–33).
- Yet:
  - Ancient Israelite prophets wrote in **Hebrew**, not Egyptian.
  - Hebrew is a **more compact language** than Egyptian hieroglyphs.
  - There’s **no known precedent** for Jews writing scripture in Egyptian.

### 2. No Manuscript Evidence

- No golden plates exist today.
- No known **examples or fragments** of Reformed Egyptian exist in any museum, collection, or archaeological site in the Americas or the Near East.

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## Protestant View

From a Christian standpoint:

- The **Book of Mormon is not divinely inspired**, and “Reformed Egyptian” is seen as part of a fabricated narrative.
- The Bible warns against adding to Scripture (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18–19).
- The **lack of historical, archaeological, and linguistic support** undermines the Book of Mormon's claim to divine origin.

“A language without evidence, a people without ruins, and a gospel without Christ.”  
— Reformed critique of the Book of Mormon

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## Summary

Claim	LDS Position	Scholarly / Reformed Response
Reformed Egyptian	Ancient, modified Egyptian script used on golden plates	No evidence it ever existed
Historical Accuracy	Asserted but undefined	Lacks linguistic, archaeological, or historical support

Claim	LDS Position	Scholarly / Reformed Response
Use by Israelites	Claimed for practical reasons	Implausible; no biblical or historical precedent
Scholarly Support	Minimal, and only within LDS apologetics	Rejected by mainstream linguists and historians

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### 3. Distinctive Beliefs (Early Doctrines)

- **Restorationism:** Claim that true Christianity had been lost and needed to be restored, not reformed.
  - **Continuing Revelation:** Belief that God still gives modern-day revelations through prophets, beginning with Joseph Smith.
  - **New Scripture:** The Book of Mormon was considered "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," alongside the Bible.
  - **Godhead:** Denial of the traditional Trinitarian view; belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost as three distinct beings.
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### 4. Growth and Persecution

- The early Mormons faced **severe persecution** for their unorthodox beliefs and practices, including **polygamy** (which was later publicly acknowledged in 1852 and officially renounced in 1890).
  - They moved from New York to **Ohio**, **Missouri**, and then **Illinois** (founding **Nauvoo**).
  - **Joseph Smith was murdered** by a mob in **Carthage Jail** in **1844**.
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### 5. Migration to Utah

- After Smith's death, **Brigham Young** led the majority of Mormons westward to the Salt Lake Valley in **Utah** (then part of Mexico) in **1847**, founding what would become Salt Lake City.
  - The LDS Church established its headquarters there, and it remains the central hub of Mormonism today.
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### 6. Scriptures Used by Mormons

- The **Bible** (KJV preferred)
- The **Book of Mormon**
- **Doctrine and Covenants** – collection of modern revelations

- **Pearl of Great Price** – includes the Book of Abraham and other writings
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## Summary

- **Founded:** 1830, by **Joseph Smith**
  - **Sacred Text:** **Book of Mormon**
  - **Core Belief:** Christianity was restored, not reformed
  - **Key Practice:** Ongoing revelation through prophets
  - **Headquarters:** Salt Lake City, Utah
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**Joseph Smith's false prophecies and known legal convictions**, based on historical records and primary sources.

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## Joseph Smith's Court Convictions

### 1. 1826: Glass Looking/Disorderly Person (New York)

- **Charge:** *Using a "seer stone" to locate buried treasure (divination)*—considered fraudulent.
- **Outcome:** Historical debate surrounds whether he was convicted or released under warning. However, a **court record from 1826** (discovered in the 1970s) shows Smith was brought before Judge Albert Neely in **Chenango County, New York**.
- **Documented by:** Dr. Wesley Walters and others.
- **Smith's own admission:** He claimed he once worked as a treasure seeker but later denounced it.

"Was tried and condemned as a disorderly person, and as such guilty of fraudulent practices."  
— *People vs. Joseph Smith*, Bainbridge, NY (1826 record)

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## Joseph Smith's False or Failed Prophecies

These are **prophecies made in the name of the Lord** that **did not come to pass**, by biblical standards (Deut. 18:20–22).

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### 1. The Second Coming before 1891



- **Prophecy (1835):** Jesus would return within 56 years.
- **Quote:**

“I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when I heard a voice repeat the following: ‘Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man.’”

— *History of the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 336

- **Failed:** Smith died in 1844; Christ did not return by 1891.
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## 2. Zion to Be Built in Missouri in This Generation

- **Prophecy (1832–1833):**

"This generation shall not pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord, and a cloud shall rest upon it."

— *Doctrine and Covenants* 84:4–5

- **Failed:** The temple in Independence, Missouri was never built. The LDS Church owns the site, but nothing stands there today.
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## 3. U.S. Government Will Be Overthrown

- **Prophecy (1833):**

“And now I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that not many years shall pass away before the United States government shall be utterly overthrown and wasted.”

— *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 315

- **Failed:** The U.S. government did not collapse.
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## 4. Civil War Will Spread Worldwide

- **Prophecy (D&C 87:1–3):**

“The Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States... and war shall be poured out upon all nations.”

- **Partially Fulfilled:** Civil War did occur, but it did **not** spread globally as predicted.

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## 5. David W. Patten to Go on Mission

- **Prophecy (1838):**

“That my servant David W. Patten may settle up all his business as soon as he possibly can... to prepare to take his journey next spring.”

— *D&C 114:1*

- **Failed:** Patten was killed in the **Battle of Crooked River** on **October 25, 1838**, before the mission could occur.

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## 6. Joseph Smith’s “New York” Prophecy

- **Prophecy:** That New York and Boston would be destroyed if they rejected the gospel.

“I prophesy in the name of the Lord that... New York, Albany, and Boston shall be destroyed in the judgment of God.”

— *History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 302

- **Failed:** These cities remain.

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## 7. Moon Inhabited by Men

- **Claim (reported by early LDS leaders):** Joseph Smith said the **moon was inhabited by people**, dressed like Quakers and about 6 feet tall.
- **Reported in:** *The Young Woman’s Journal*, Vol. 3, 1892, and by **Oliver B. Huntington**, an early Mormon writer.
- **False:** This is not a prophecy per se but illustrates Smith’s unscientific and fantastical ideas, now discredited.

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## Biblical Test of a Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20–22)

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him... that same prophet shall die... If the thing does not come to pass... the Lord has not spoken.”

By this standard, Smith would be classified biblically as a **false prophet**.

