

## Overview of Mormonism

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To understand Mormonism it is necessary to know something about its founder Joseph Smith Jr. His stories, activities, and teachings are the foundation of this movement. From Smith comes the religious authority for all fragments of the Latter-day Saint tradition. They believe the starting proposition that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. The Book of Mormon is a Christian work and is considered produced by Smith by divine assistance. This book established him as a prophet and seer.

Joseph Smith organized the Church of Christ in New York on April 6, 1830. The largest church among believers in his prophetic calling is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. There are many smaller churches who believe in the Book of Mormon. Some accept portions of Joseph Smith's revelations and reject other teachings.

Theologically the teachings of the founding prophet moved away from the Book of Mormon and by the Nauvoo period included ideas that were a different or a special form of Christianity or even of early Mormonism. The doctrine of the Trinity for example started from belief in one God. It underwent transformation to two Gods or personages, then three Gods with multitude Gods before them. Monotheism at first and polytheism is still the higher belief of the religion.

Many, but not all, of Joseph Smith revelations are published in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants. These documents cover from July 1828 and relate to the Book of Mormon and continue to 1843. It was taught in the early years of the latter-day restoration that men were to marry only one wife. Later Smith commenced the practice of plural wives. Also practiced were marriages of couples not only until death but for all eternity. This he practiced and taught privately but he publically denied it. His first wife Emma did not know about practice until May 1843 when she gave her husband Joseph a few wives. She regretted this action. This created tensions within the first family. The destruction of the newspaper *Nauvoo Expositor* soon resulted in Smith's death.

Temple ordinances, such as the washing of feet, were performed for the church's ministers in the first temple in Ohio. It was not until Nauvoo that Smith performed a more elaborate religious ceremony to a select body of individuals. This religious endowment included instructions on how to enter into the presence of Deity in the afterlife. Those who were accepted into the group were committed followers of Joseph Smith and pledged a life of obedience to church authority.

Besides the Bible there were two other books accepted by Latter-day Saints in Smith's lifetime. They were the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. After Smith's death a fourth scripture was added called the Pearl of Great Price. This work contains the writings of Moses, being a revision of little more than the first five chapters of Genesis, the Book of Abraham with a revision of Matthew chapter 24. There is also an extract from Joseph Smith's History prior to the start of the church. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints places great emphasis on Joseph Smith as the prophet of the restored church.