

Copyright © 2023 Luke Thomas Rininger

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

TRAINING THE LAYPEOPLE AT JERSEY BAPTIST
CHURCH OF NEW ALBANY, OHIO, TO ENGAGE
MORMONS WITH THE GOSPEL

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
Luke Thomas Rininger
May 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

TRAINING THE LAYPEOPLE AT JERSEY BAPTIST
CHURCH OF NEW ALBANY, OHIO, TO ENGAGE
MORMONS WITH THE GOSPEL

Luke Thomas Rininger

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. George H. Martin

Second Reader: J. Keith McKinley

Defense Date: February 27, 2023

I dedicate this project to my beloved bride and best friend, Lauren.

Thank you for your patience, love, and godly example.

May we be a light in this dark world for God's glory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| PREFACE..... | vii |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Context..... | 1 |
| Rationale..... | 4 |
| Purpose..... | 5 |
| Goals..... | 5 |
| Research Methodology..... | 6 |
| Definition, Limitations, and Delimitation..... | 7 |
| Conclusion..... | 8 |
| 2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT..... | 9 |
| Biblical Monotheism..... | 11 |
| Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4..... | 11 |
| Exegesis of Mark 12:29..... | 14 |
| Analysis of Isaiah 43-46..... | 15 |
| Exegesis of Isaiah 43:10..... | 18 |
| Exegesis of Isaiah 44:6..... | 19 |
| Exegesis of Isaiah 44:8..... | 20 |
| Biblical Eternality of God the Son..... | 22 |
| Exegesis of John 1:1-14..... | 22 |
| Exegesis of Colossians 1:15-20..... | 24 |
| Exegesis of Hebrews 1:8-12..... | 26 |

| Chapter | Page |
|---|-----------|
| Conclusion | 28 |
| 3. THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT..... | 30 |
| Mormon Teachings..... | 31 |
| Polytheism | 32 |
| God the Father as a Created Being | 36 |
| God the Son as a Created Being | 41 |
| Conclusion..... | 44 |
| Apologetic Responses to Mormon Teachings..... | 45 |
| Apologetic Response to Polytheism | 46 |
| Apologetic Response to the Creation of God the Father | 49 |
| Apologetic Response to the Creation of God the Son | 50 |
| Final Thoughts..... | 52 |
| Conclusion | 52 |
| 4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT | 54 |
| Preparation | 54 |
| Implementation | 56 |
| Content Overview | 57 |
| Week 1: Why This Project?..... | 57 |
| Week 2: Monotheism vs. Polytheism Part I | 59 |
| Week 3: Monotheism vs. Polytheism Part II..... | 61 |
| Week 4: The Nature of God the Father | 63 |
| Week 5: The Nature of God the Son | 65 |
| Week 6: Was Joseph Smith a Prophet? | 67 |
| Week 7: Common Arguments and Responses..... | 69 |
| Week 8: Mock Debate | 71 |

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| 5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT | 73 |
| Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose | 73 |
| Evaluation of the Project’s Goals..... | 74 |
| Strengths of the Project | 77 |
| Weaknesses of the Project..... | 78 |
| What I Would Do Differently..... | 79 |
| Theological Reflections | 80 |
| Personal Reflections..... | 81 |
| Conclusion | 83 |
| Appendix | |
| 1. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC..... | 84 |
| 2. PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY | 86 |
| 3. FINAL MEETING SURVEY | 89 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 90 |

PREFACE

This project is rooted in the desire to see all who walk in darkness come to know the light of Christ. God radically changed my life over a decade ago, and He continues to grow, mold, and shape me toward Christlikeness. My prayer is that I would be used by God to sow and reap for His kingdom and His glory.

Jersey Baptist Church of New Albany, Ohio has been very supportive of my pursuing a doctoral degree from Southern Seminary. I would like to thank my pastor, John Hays, for his faithful ministry at Jersey for over 40 years and for being a spiritual father to me. God has used Pastor John in a mighty way, and John continues to humbly serve the Lord while investing in my life in multiple ways.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Pastor Todd Smeltzer, who spent many hours investing in me, preparing me for teaching, and building a course for this project. Todd serves Christ in a way that I desire to model for my own family. Todd's wisdom and insight are invaluable to my walk with the Lord.

Next, I would like to thank Taylor Hartley and Vince Stainbrook. These two men spent countless hours discipling me, showing me the beauty of God's Word, what it means to have a relationship with Him, and pushing me to be obedient to the Lord by furthering my education. I would have never matured in my faith, discipled others, or pursued higher education if it were not for Taylor's and Vince's friendship and mentorship.

I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Jackson. Dr. Jackson is the one who pushed me to start and gave me the confidence to complete the doctoral program. I will be forever grateful for his mentorship and friendship.

Next, I would also like to thank my supervising professor, Dr. George Martin. Dr. Martin invited my wife and me to travel overseas to where he was a missionary. He taught us about the culture, language, and modeled evangelism and care for those who did not know the Lord. I will never forget Dr. Martin and his wife, Donna.

Dr. Matthew Haste is another professor whom I would like to thank. The way in which Dr. Haste set up this program has made the entire process much less stressful than I ever thought a doctoral program could be. Dr. Haste's love for his students, his timely communication, and how well organized he was allowed for a tremendous learning experience that I will never forget.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Lauren, and three boys, Elijah, Isaiah, and Luke for their continued support as I continued my education and pursuit of God's call to ministry. Lauren is a godly woman who holds me accountable in a loving and submissive manner. I cannot imagine God granting me a better gift as a wife than she.

Luke Rininger

New Albany, Ohio

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Christless Christianity? Can someone be a true Christian apart from the Jesus portrayed in Scripture? Many Christians may recognize missionaries representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church; a.k.a. Mormons) by their black pants, white dress shirt, tie, and name tag. A small percentage of believers may even have a distant memory of hearing about strange practices and beliefs within the Mormon church. Many members at my church understand Mormonism as an unusual branch of Christianity. However, I do not believe enough people within the Christian community understand that their Mormon neighbors do not know the Jesus portrayed in the Bible—even though the name of Jesus appears in the title of their organization. According to the 2012 Religious Congregations and Membership Survey (RCMS), Mormons are the fastest-growing religious group in the United States.¹ Because of the growing influence of the Mormon community and the lack of urgency among Christians to evangelize those within the Mormon community, training those interested in being used by God to penetrate the hearts of the Mormons with the gospel is paramount.

Context

This ministry project occurred within Jersey Baptist Church (JBC or Jersey) in New Albany, Ohio, which is in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is a booming city, attracting people of all nations and religious backgrounds, including the growing population of those within the LDS church. These self-proclaimed Christians are

¹ Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, “Study Shows That Mormons Are the Fastest-Growing Religious Group in the U.S.,” PRRI, last modified May 2, 2012, <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/study-shows-that-mormons-are-the-fastest-growing-religious-group-in-the-u-s/>.

increasing in influence in the Columbus area with ten wards—the Mormon equivalent of churches. Jersey is located near the intersection of five major communities within the greater Columbus area: New Albany, Gahanna, Johnstown, Pataskala, and Granville. This location is significant because of the strategy of Mormon missionaries. Mormons strategically divide missionary locations into zones. Missionaries cannot conduct ministry outside of their zone. Anytime a Mormon missionary comes into contact with someone who desires to learn more about Mormonism but lives outside of that missionary’s zone, he or she would give that person’s information to the missionary team in the corresponding zone. Because Jersey has about 1500 regular attending members, many members live in all five major communities where Mormons are going door to door to promote their gospel.

In addition to the many Mormon wards in Columbus, a great number of companies are setting up their headquarters near JBC, such as Facebook, Kohls, Amazon, Discover, Google, and Alliance Data. Companies like Discover have other locations for headquarters in Utah and Arizona, which are the states with the highest populations of Mormons. Many of the people working in these companies have moved their families from Utah or Arizona to the greater Columbus area, which is creating a greater influence among other conservative businesspeople. In addition to most Jersey members’ identifying as conservative, biblically and politically, many within the church who have a basic understanding of the Bible have a misunderstanding of the role works play in believers’ lives. Mormons can be very effective in promoting Joseph Smith’s gospel because those within the LDS church believe that “it is by grace that we are saved, *after* all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added).² According to this passage, a person completes good works, and then God’s grace fills in the gap of what that person could not

² In this project, all quotations of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price are taken from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *The Book of Mormon; The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

accomplish. In addition to many professing Christians' wanting to feel like they are giving or earning something in the process of salvation or standing before God as righteous, the business of life impedes deeper discipleship and fellowship for so many within Jersey. Especially because the church consists of over 1,500 members, many people can walk through the doors and sit among the congregation for over one year without being disciplined. Mormon missionaries give two full years to minister to others, complete service projects, and answer troublesome questions about evil in the world, hell, why good works matter. Many Christians desire to be intentional and make other people a priority throughout the week, but they often fail to be consistent. Yet, those within the Mormon community, especially those who are on mission, will not go back on their word to meet with individuals. They will be present any day requested because declaring their gospel comes above all else.

Although many laypeople within Jersey are excited to learn more about topics within the realm of apologetics, many are fearful of putting learned techniques into practice. This fear seems to stem from many insecurities: being asked a question they do not know how to answer, not remembering everything they were taught, or an overall sense of feeling inadequate to share God's truth. However, because of the great interest in apologetics within JBC, a higher likelihood exists that a larger number of people will attend a course on this subject. Laypeople within Jersey are excited to learn about other religions and their similarities to and differences from Christianity. Even if a follower of Christ has spent many hours studying God's Word faithfully, Mormon leaders have trained all their members in Mormon apologetics on a grander scale. Therefore, even nominal Mormons will be able to respond to and dismiss common questions or objections raised by Christians, leaving many followers of Christ unable to respond.

There is a growing population of Mormons in the Columbus area near JBC. Mormons teach they are the one true church and that all others are wrong and

abominations to God. Christians should inform themselves regarding what Mormons truly believe, spend more time in God's Word, and take part in making disciples.

Rationale

If Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” and not one person comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6),³ then there must be an urgency within JBC to evangelize those within its community. Because a quick search for “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” in Google Maps provides seventeen Mormon churches and one Mormon temple within the Columbus area, Christians need to be equipped with tools and strategies to engage Mormons with the true gospel.

This ministry project is important because of the increased interaction and influence church members and their children will have with Mormons in the workplace, schools, and community. Many warnings are found in Scripture concerning false gospels and false christs. One such example is Galatians 1:8-9, where Paul warns against anyone preaching another gospel contrary to the one laid down by the apostles. According to Paul, anyone believing someone preaching such a gospel should be accursed because that person does not know Christ and, therefore, does not know God. The desire for this project promoting urgency in reaching the Mormons with the gospel does not stem from minor differences (e.g., Mormons' abstention from coffee and other strongly caffeinated drinks) but from concern about the eternal destination for those within the LDS church. In addition to the church(es) in Galatia, Paul was concerned for the Christians in Corinth because the attractiveness of another gospel would easily deceive them (2 Cor 11:3-4). The issues within the early church concerning false teachings are very similar to the issues Jersey is facing today, and the training this project will provide will show the congregation that it should also heed Paul's warnings. In order to have a proper heart for

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

evangelism, JBC members will first look inward in order to see where the Holy Spirit would have them repent, which will enable them to engage those within the Mormon community with a desire to see an inward change rather than to win an argument.

This training will also teach JBC members the importance of biblical discipleship in order to strengthen the body of Christ. Once the congregation learns the primary differences between Mormonism and Christianity, the members will see that Mormons believe in a false god and a false christ. The purpose of this knowledge is not to condemn our Mormon friends but to free, convert, and to disciple them in the ways of the true giver of life, joy, and peace—Christ Jesus. This project aims to show JBC members that because another christ or gospel outside of the Bible cannot save, Christians should weep at the thought of so many within Jersey’s surrounding community who claim to be Christians but are destined for hell. In the end, if Mormons do not accept the Jesus of the Bible, then they will hear the powerful yet terrible words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 7:21-23: “I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of lawlessness.” Because many congregants already have hearts broken for the lost within the community, after this training, members will have a greater urgency to share the true gospel with their Mormon friends.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to train the laypeople of Jersey Baptist Church in New Albany, Ohio, to engage Mormons with the gospel.

Goals

The following three goals are necessary when considering how best to engage Mormons with the gospel in such a way that believers understand the language and meaning behind what Mormons proclaim so that the true gospel of Jesus Christ may penetrate their very hearts.

1. The first goal is to write an eight-session curriculum that will equip laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel by teaching key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures.
2. The second goal is to teach laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel by teaching laypeople key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures.
3. The third goal is to send laypeople from JBC to engage Mormons in the local community with the gospel using the evangelistic strategies learned from the course in a loving and respectful manner.

A specific research methodology has been created that will measure the successful completion of these three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal is to write an eight-session curriculum that will equip laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel by teaching key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures.⁴ This goal will be measured by a pastor within JBC who will utilize a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum (see appendix 1). This goal will be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria meet or exceed the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark is not initially met, then the material will be revised until the standard is met.

The second goal is to equip laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel effectively by teaching key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures. This goal will be measured by administering a pre-course assessment and a post-course assessment that will measure the participants' level of knowledge and understanding of the doctrinal differences between the teachings of the Christian Bible and Mormon sacred texts, such as the Book of Mormon (see appendix 2). This goal will be considered successfully met

⁴ All the research instruments used in this project have been performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

when more than 70 percent of participants complete the post-course assessment and achieve at least a 50 percent increase between the pre-course and post-course assessment means.

The third goal is to send laypeople from JBC to engage Mormons in the local community with the gospel using the evangelistic strategies learned from the course in a loving and respectful manner. This goal will be measured during the final meeting, two weeks after the last instructional session, by using a one-question assessment (see appendix 3). This goal will be considered successfully met when at least 70 percent of participants affirm that they have engaged at least one Mormon with the gospel within two weeks of completing the course.

Definition, Limitations, and Delimitation

The following key term and definition will be used in this project. A *Mormon* is “a member or adherent of a religious body, calling itself ‘The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.’”⁵

Four limitations will apply to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre-course assessment will depend upon the willingness of the participants to be honest. To mitigate this limitation, the surveys completed by the participants will remain anonymous. Second, including participants who do not know anyone within the Mormon community may deter them from engaging in a gospel conversation after completing the course. To mitigate this limitation, the contact information of Mormon missionaries will be given to all participants. Third, the knowledge received from the training will depend on participants’ active attendance—low attendance may produce inaccurate data gathered on the last day of the course. To mitigate this limitation, each session will be recorded and given to all participants who miss a class. Fourth, the effectiveness of the application of

⁵ J. A. Simpson and E. S. C Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 665.

the training is unknown (because actual engagement is being measured and not the fruitfulness of the engagement). To mitigate this limitation, an additional class will gather on the tenth week to discuss who met with someone of the Mormon faith, what went well, what did not go well, and what information should be added to subsequent courses.

One delimitation will apply to this project. The project will be confined to a ten-week timeframe. Doing so should increase the number of participants and allow for accurate information to be gathered in a timely manner.

Conclusion

There are many strategies to reach those who do not know Christ. Prior to his ascension, Christ declared, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). One strategy beneficial to those within JBC will be to train laypeople to show the love of Christ to Mormons in a respectful and loving way. Members will be prepared to engage Mormons in their neighborhood, workplace, and daily life. Chapter 2 of this project will outline the biblical and theological foundations for understanding who God the Father and God the Son are according to the Christian Scriptures in order for Christians to best share those truths with Mormons.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

This chapter will be foundational for preparing laypeople to engage Mormons with the gospel because Scripture (the Old and New Testaments) maintains monotheism throughout.¹ Orthodox Judaism has consistently held to monotheism and to the teaching that God alone is to be worshiped because he alone deserves worship.² The unchanging teachings of the reality of one God throughout the Old Testament should be enough to dismantle the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; however, members of the Mormon community will probably share passages from the Old Testament in order to support their belief that the Bible teaches that there are multiple gods. Uninformed Christians will presumably stumble over some passages shared by Mormons if they have not first studied the context surrounding the passages proposed by those within the Mormon community. One of the greatest resources that Christians have is the Word of God rightly understood.³ Jesus commonly corrected

¹ Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 140. Monotheism is the “belief in and worship of one God.” Allison uses the Jewish *Shema* from Deut 6:4 as an example of Jewish monotheism as being “at the heart of Christianity.”

² Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 8.

³ One of the best ways for a Christian to explain the error of a Mormon’s use of a particular text is to try to avoid using too many illustrations that stray from the text (e.g., how the Trinity can be explained using an illustration of an egg: egg shell, egg white, and egg yolk) and—instead—to directly quote the biblical text as much as possible. Mormons will commonly diffuse any other explanation of biblical texts by responding with something like “Everyone has different interpretations.” However, Christians need only to quote Scripture to avoid being accused by Mormons of inserting his or her own interpretation of the text.

misunderstandings of Scripture during his ministry, yet the Son of God affirmed monotheism while teaching the people which command was the greatest (Mark 12:29).⁴

Advancing monotheism using Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29 will not be enough to convince Mormons.⁵ Therefore, Christians desiring to engage Mormons with the gospel should turn to larger passages of Scripture. For example, chapters 43-46 of the book of Isaiah show that the Father does not even know of any other gods.⁶ Laypeople may use Isaiah, as well as other passages in Scripture, if they are going to effectively show the differences between the teachings in God’s Word and those promoted by the Mormon church.

Finally, this chapter is significant because it will show that Jesus has been eternally in existence as God—he is not a created being, as the Mormons believe. The correct view concerning Jesus is paramount because if the Jesus of the Bible differs from the Jesus within Mormonism, then the Jesus of Mormonism cannot save those within its community. Laypeople must understand that sharing the gospel and discussing biblical teachings with those in the Mormon faith is not meant to show where Mormons and Christians differ merely on non-salvific issues but on matters of eternal significance.

None who deny the eternity of God the Father or God the Son can possess eternal life. Therefore, this chapter will demonstrate how Scripture teaches the essential belief in monotheism throughout the Old and New Testaments (opposing the Mormon

⁴ Mark 12:29 will be explained later in this chapter in the section titled “Exegesis of Mark 12:29.”

⁵ Mormons will affirm the Bible to be true as long as it is translated properly. However, they also hold that the Bible is corrupt and missing plain and precious parts (1 Nephi 13:26-29). However, from my experience with those in the Mormon community, once Mormons are shown where the Bible contradicts the teachings of the Mormon church in multiple places, they start to question the validity of their own teachings. Christians must be patient with those within the Mormon community because there is a lot of information that has been engrained in them with the result that it is difficult for them to see that they do not know the God of the Bible.

⁶ Because Mormons believe that the Bible has been corrupted, they may be able to dismiss verses that contradict Mormon teachings. However, it will be less likely for members of the LDS church to dismiss four consecutive chapters of a book in the Bible. Chapter 3 of this project will go into greater detail on the teachings of Joseph Smith and the LDS church concerning the finitude of God the Father and the multitude of gods affirmed to be in existence today.

doctrine of God, which will be demonstrated in chapter 3). First, the reader will see how a passage proclaimed in the Pentateuch, which proclaims monotheism, is the same teaching Jesus presents (and the surrounding teachers of the law agree) in the New Testament. Second, various passages throughout Isaiah chapters 43-46 will be examined exegetically in order to show how there has never been a time when God the Father has not existed, nor does He know of any other God in existence. Finally, three passages will be examined exegetically in order to show the biblical teaching of God the Son, Jesus, as an eternal being having never been created. Finally, the only biblical conclusion which stays faithful to the Old and New Testaments is that God the Father and God the Son have always existed within the Godhead.

Biblical Monotheism

Monotheism has been taught within Judaism and Christianity and understood as foundational to both faiths for thousands of years. If a person were to deny the belief in one God, then his or her belief would be a denial of the truthfulness of the teachings contained throughout the biblical narrative. A denial of monotheism would never occur from one indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, none can adequately profess the title *Christian* if they deny monotheism. The following passages will demonstrate how orthodox Christianity teaches monotheism throughout its metanarrative.

Exegesis of Deuteronomy 6:4

In Deuteronomy 6:4 Moses proclaims, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” August Konkel advances this verse as one of the most well-known passages in the entire Old Testament; it is called the *Shema*, which is derived from the first Hebrew word in the verse, meaning “to hear.”⁷ Warren Wiersbe proclaims the

⁷ August H. Konkel, *Deuteronomy*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 2, *Deuteronomy-Ruth*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 110.

Shema is paramount to orthodox Judaism—even today, devout Jews throughout the entire world recite the *Shema* every morning and evening.⁸ In Hebrew lexicography, the imperative form of the verb “to hear” is tantamount to “to obey.” Wiersbe shares that the *Shema* is so significant in the confession of orthodox Jewish homes that parents teach the young males in their homes to recite it as soon as they can speak.⁹

Although there is great importance for understanding the significance and reverence of the *Shema* in Judaism, the latter portion of verse 4—“the LORD our God, the LORD is *one*” (emphasis added)—will be the primary focus concerning the scriptural teaching of monotheism. The usual meaning of “one” (*'echad*) shows that the God of Israel is unique and incomparable. Trying to use finite language in such a way to describe adequately the infinite Creator of the universe is an impossible task, especially when trying to comprehend the intricacies of *how* God is one. Besides God’s uniqueness, “one” can also mean “a unity” or “numerical oneness,” as seen in Genesis 2:24 in the description of the oneness of Adam and Eve as well as in Exodus 26:6, 11 in the description of the “unity” of the curtains in the tabernacle. Wayne Grudem explains the “oneness” described in Deuteronomy 6:4 (and other passages in Scripture) shows that God is one in *essence* or *being*.¹⁰ Therefore, the Jewish people at the time of the writing of Deuteronomy—as well as practicing Jews today—understood that Yahweh was and is to be the sole object of Israel’s worship, allegiance, and affection.

Konkel observes how other accepted translations of Deuteronomy 6:4 include “The LORD our God is one LORD” (KJV), “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one” (NASB), and “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (NIV), and how all these

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament in One Volume* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2003), 318.

⁹ Wiersbe, *Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, 318.

¹⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 39.

translations carry the same implication that Yahweh is the one and only true God and that there are no other gods in existence.¹¹ In addition to this verse, Deuteronomy elsewhere explicitly declares that there is no other God but Yahweh (Deut 4:35, 39; 32:39). Because there is only one true God and no other, Yahweh cannot be a part of the pantheon of gods, neither in Israel's day nor in our own day.¹² God is not a leader of the gods, or *only* the God of this earth among other gods of other planets. Merrill proclaims that God is indeed a unity, but beyond that, he is the only God in existence.¹³

Those opposed to monotheism object that there are verses in Scripture in which God speaks in a plural form. For example, in the creation narrative, God says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness" (Gen 1:26; emphasis added). Mormon apologists use this passage to support their view of many gods as opposed to the Jewish and Christian teaching of the one true God.¹⁴ Grudem explains how the use of "us" and "our" in Genesis 1:26 does not indicate the existence of multiple *gods* but multiple *persons* at creation.¹⁵ Christians, after reading the entirety of Scripture, would read backward into the text and see signs of multiple persons in the Godhead. One may logically deduce that when God describes making humankind after "our" image and "our" likeness, angels are the only other beings possibly being referred to, but because God did not make humankind in the image of angels but "in the image of God" (Gen

¹¹ Konkel, *Deuteronomy*, 108.

¹² Wiersbe, *Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, 318. Christians use this verse and idea of "a unity" to express God's being "one" as one of the ways to leave room for a proper interpretation of the Trinity.

¹³ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 163.

¹⁴ One of the ways to respond to a member of the Mormon church after discussing that there is one God in three persons is to ask him or her, "Who wrote the book of Genesis?" Christians may be surprised to find that Mormons may not know who authored Genesis. Once both parties understand that Moses wrote the book of Genesis, the Christian may again ask the Mormon, "Who wrote the book of Deuteronomy?" A follow-up response to the fact that Moses wrote both works in question could be to ask, "Do you think it is reasonable to think that the same author, Moses, who described the creation narrative as being done by multiple gods, as you propose, would then contradict himself numerous times throughout the rest of his work by declaring that there is only one God?" These questions allow for the faithful Mormon to think more about what Scripture truly teaches rather than what he or she was taught that Scripture teaches.

¹⁵ Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, 37.

1:27; see also Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9), Genesis 1:26 must imply that there is more than one person in the Godhead. Konkel observes that because the *Shema* restates the first command of the Decalogue that Yahweh is one, the second command would follow that the requirement of exclusive love for God denies the worship and existence of any other deity.¹⁶

Exegesis of Mark 12:29

The *Shema*, described above, remains to this day an essential part of the life of faithful Jews. About 1400 years after Moses first recorded the *Shema*, the Jewish people continued to recite the monotheistic creed. This creed set Israel apart from all of the polytheistic religions, not only in the time of Moses but also in the Greco-Roman world—so much so that the *Shema* was often the last words on the lips of a martyr.¹⁷ When a scribe asks Jesus what the greatest commandment is, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 in his answer: “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one’” (Mark 12:29). By citing the foundational tenet of the Jewish faith, Jesus showed that the *Shema* was at the heart of the law, and his hearers agreed. R.T. France explains this text not only shows that the affirmation of God’s being “one” spanned over 1400 years but also demonstrates that Jesus was an orthodox Jew who maintained that there is only one God.¹⁸ No room exists in Judaism or Christianity for more than one God. According to James Brooks, the reality that God is one is crucial because the obligation to love God is based upon his oneness according to Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29; and because God is one, love for him must be undivided.¹⁹ Therefore, the teaching of one

¹⁶ Konkel, *Deuteronomy*, 109.

¹⁷ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 541-42.

¹⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 2002), 479.

¹⁹ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 197.

God is critical in maintaining Christian orthodoxy.²⁰ The scribe's response to Jesus in Mark 12:32 supports the thesis of the existence of only one God and no other when the scribe says, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him." Adela Collins explains that Jesus's answer to the scribe's question, as well as the scribe's response to Jesus, prove that Jesus and the scribe, even being 1400 years removed from the writing of Moses, still affirmed monotheism.

The teachings of the Old and New Testaments are clear that there is only one Godhead. Moses, Jesus, and the other authors of the canon consistently affirmed monotheism. Although some people within the Mormon community will maintain that there are other passages in the Bible that show there are other gods besides Yahweh, the next section, through an analysis of passages contained within Isaiah 43-46, will show that Yahweh does not know of any other gods.

Analysis of Isaiah 43-46

So far, this chapter has shown that God is one—in essence or being—and that because of his oneness, Yahweh ought to be worshiped and loved above all else. Throughout their history, Judaism and Christianity have consistently held to monotheism. In the book of Isaiah, God speaks to Israel, the people of God, through the prophet Isaiah concerning the idols that were common in the nation of Israel and the surrounding nations. God not only regards the idols of the nations of the world *as* nothing but also shows that those idols can *do* nothing. A careful analysis of Isaiah 43-46 will show that (1) there is no other god besides Yahweh, (2) there has never been and there never will be a god besides Yahweh, and (3) Yahweh does not know of any other gods.

One of the primary guidelines when interpreting the Bible is to recognize repetition. Repetition should cause readers to slow down when reading in order to pay

²⁰ Later in this chapter, three texts will be examined exegetically in order to show in part that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity and a part of the eternal Godhead.

attention to the importance of what is being communicated through such repetition.

Robert Plummer reminds readers that the biblical authors could not use bold type and other common tools used today to emphasize a point, so they would often employ repetition to direct readers' attention to something significant within the text.²¹

Throughout Isaiah 43-46, God, through the prophet Isaiah, repeats himself many times, declaring himself to be the only God in order that the world would know that he is the one true God and there is none besides him. Isaiah 45:5 captures the major theme of the oneness and uniqueness of God well: "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God." Twice in Isaiah 45:5 and seven more times throughout Isaiah 45-46, Yahweh declares that there is no other god besides him—that he is the only true God and sovereign. Repetition of the truthfulness of the one transcendent being allows Isaiah to make many sweeping assertions in the name of God because there is no other God. Yahweh shows that he cares for individual people, nations, and the entire world "from the rising of the sun and from the west" so that everyone would know "that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isa 45:6).

One way in which Yahweh proves himself to be the only God is through his work in creation. J. A. Motyer teaches that God did not create the world and its people arbitrarily or meaninglessly; rather, God created the heavens and the earth to declare, "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isa 45:18).²² Because God created the heavens, the earth, and the inhabitants of the earth, it is no surprise that the worthless idols created by creatures lack both ultimate power and ultimate purpose (Isa 45:20). False gods that do not exist, fashioned by human hands, can be neither righteous nor unrighteous. Only the one true God of the universe is perfectly righteous in all that he does and therefore can

²¹ Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2010), 194.

²² J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 364.

proclaim that “there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me” (Isa 45:21). John Oswalt explains that every act and thought that God has is right and just; Yahweh is the only one who is perfectly holy and righteous. Isaiah is not giving his readers the impression that other gods in existence are evil; instead, he is saying that the Lord alone stands outside of this world as the Creator and that there is none besides him.²³ In the following verse, Motyer demonstrates that Isaiah contrasts the non-salvific power of false gods with salvation that is grounded in the monotheistic belief in the one true God, whose very nature includes salvation: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (45:22).²⁴ Israel’s only Savior is the Savior of the universe. He alone is God, and there is no other. Lastly, Yahweh declares, “Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me” (46:9). God completes his declaration by asking his audience to reflect as far back as they can go in order to see that only the Being who did all that Yahweh did may be called God, and there is no other being in the cosmos who can rightly claim the title of God. Yahweh is not only transcendent in divine glory and power but also unique in that there is none like him.

Repetition is one way in which God emphasizes—through Scripture—that he is the one true God and that there is no other like him. Although Scripture is clear that it affirms monotheism, Isaiah 43:10 and 44:6 show not only that God is the only God of this world but also that there were no other gods formed before him and there will not be any gods formed after him.²⁵ Mormons, faithful to their religious teachings, may respond

²³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 202.

²⁴ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 366.

²⁵ Mormons believe that God, Heavenly Father, was once a man as we are now. He was a created being on another planet by his father and mother. Mormons also believe that males in the Mormon church can become a god over their own planet one day, as God the Father had done in the past, through a process of exultation. Isaiah 43:10, 44:6, and other biblical texts, are important passages to show Mormon friends that the Bible contradicts their view of the preexistence (which Mormons believe is the period of

to the texts in Isaiah 45-46 by proposing that Yahweh is the God of *this* earth and the only God we worship. However, God’s Word does not allow for anyone faithful to Scripture to conclude that any being other than he is the one true God of the universe or that other gods were formed before him or will be formed after him.

Exegesis of Isaiah 43:10

In Isaiah 43:10, God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, says, “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.’” This passage is one of the best in the Bible to share with someone in the Mormon faith, for it speaks to God’s eternity, uniqueness, and declaration of being the only God in existence from eternity past to the future. When God declares, “I am he,” he is expressing his changelessness and self-consistency. This declaration echoes God’s appearance to Moses through the burning bush in Exodus 3:14 as an indication of his unqualified existence. Knowing God is not merely an intellectual exercise, like knowing the distance between the earth and the sun. When people know Yahweh through a relationship, they learn his true character and that he alone is God.

Yahweh existed before his creation (humankind), he made all of the so-called gods, and he will continue to exist after all of the supposed gods are gone. Every person whom God created, who now bows down to other gods, had to fashion and fabricate every god he or she worships. Every other god in the pagan world came into being through a genealogical relationship with another god. Yahweh eclipses all other formed gods because he neither proceeds from nor is succeeded by any of these other gods. He is the one and only God, existing from the beginning without a superior or inferior god. John Calvin exclaims that none of the pagan gods can even compare with the eternal

time before the creation of this earth when spirit children were awaiting their physical bodies) and of the afterlife. The Mormon teachings of those mentioned above will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter 3.

God.²⁶ Yahweh is not merely a God who is all loving and all powerful; he is also the one with whom all of creation must come to terms. Klaus Baltzer explains how there may have been other gods for other peoples, but Yahweh denies the actual existence of other gods through his monotheistic formulation “before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.”²⁷ God is showing the world that until it relies on him, people have no salvation. All people know of some form of deity, but mere knowledge of God’s existence is not enough to receive salvation (Rom 1:21). Calvin observes that God alone is to be worshiped, and he cannot allow any other god to be equal to him or share his majesty.

Exegesis of Isaiah 44:6

In order to emphasize that there are no gods formed before or after Yahweh, God says in Isaiah 44:6, “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” No other pagan god can even be compared to the eternal, self-existing Being who is God. Yahweh is not declaring that he is the greatest of the gods; he is denouncing the other gods’ existence and worthiness of even being considered in the same category with himself. Not only are these pagan gods not worthy of being equated with Yahweh (categorically), but these false gods are made through human effort. God’s describing himself as the “first” demonstrates that he neither derives life from elsewhere nor depends on anyone or anything else as do the other idols and gods; instead, Yahweh is self-existent and self-sufficient. Calvin argues for another facet of God being the “first” is that he is always like himself, meaning that he is consistent and unchanging.²⁸ Creation

²⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Andesite Press, 2010), 332.

²⁷ Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 166.

²⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 3:364.

does not have to worry about God being different today or in the future than he was in the past—God will continue to be what he has always been.

Yahweh is also the “last,” so he remains at the end, even after all idols and false gods have passed away. God is supreme and totally fulfilled. Therefore, Yahweh, being the first and the last, shows that he encompasses all of existence from beginning to end, or from start to finish. Never was there a time when God was not, and never will there be a time when God is no more. He is from eternity to eternity (Isa 43:13), and besides him, there is no god.²⁹ Although “the first and the last” is a title, it is so much more—it is a description of a uniquely sovereign God who is over all events throughout history. Gary Smith expresses that God’s sovereignty throughout the ages is a great comfort to all believers because his Word is reliable for the rest of time.³⁰

Exegesis of Isaiah 44:8

Not only is there one sovereign who has existed from eternity past, but Yahweh shows his people that he is the only one upon whom they can rely. Isaiah 44:8 records Yahweh as saying, “Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.” Every other time Isaiah writes “God” (*elohim*), he writes it in the plural form. The plural form shows God’s fullness and totality of divine attributes. However, in 44:8, “God” is singular—the only time the singular form occurs in Isaiah. This use of the singular form in this one instance is intended to stress the importance of the reality that God is the one and only God of the universe. Israel’s security comes only in the “Rock” of Israel. Is there a God besides Yahweh? Can any of these pagan gods do what God

²⁹ If God is self-existent, then this means that there was never a time when he was not, nor was there ever a time when he was not God. Mormons not only believe that God was once a man as we are today, but they also believe that there was a time when he did not exist. It would be impossible for God to have a time when he did not exist if there were no gods before him that could create him. Also, the truth proclaimed in Scripture that there will not be any other gods formed or created after him—because he is the last—invalidates the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Mormon church.

³⁰ Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary, vol. 15B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 226.

does? Smith points out that the answer found in the double negative is unavoidably “No!”³¹ No other idol or god can do what Yahweh does. God’s character brings ultimate assurance for his people. God’s description as “Rock” also provides his people with security and confidence in deliverance from attack. The ultimate word from God is that he does not even know of any other “Rock” or “God.”³² No other god can match his sovereign control and power over all creation and history. Therefore, Yahweh is the only being who can be trusted and relied upon.

Scripture maintains monotheism throughout Isaiah 43-46, not only concerning who the people of God should worship, but also regarding the non-existence of any other gods. Yahweh is not merely one of many who later became the leader of the gods. He is the first and he is the last, and besides him there is no god. If there ever were any other true gods or if there will ever be any gods in the future, then the God of the Bible is a liar and cannot be trusted. However, if Yahweh, as revealed in Scripture, is truthful and not a liar, then all in the world worshipping another god will continue to be in their sins with no hope that the god they have fashioned with their own hands or minds can save them.

In summary, there is no other God besides Yahweh. The next portion of this paper will demonstrate from Scripture that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God the Father; he is God himself, through whom all things were made in heaven and on the earth; and with him, there is no end.

³¹ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 227.

³² Even if Mormons could work around the other texts discussed in the chapter, there is no way around this verse other than a clear rejection of God and his Word. Yahweh is saying that he does not even know of any other god in existence. Therefore, it would be impossible for there to have been a god over Yahweh, a council of gods to help Yahweh, or goddess wives married to Yahweh as well as for any other god(s) to be formed, created, or exalted after this earth passes away. Believers in the one true God have trustworthy and authoritative Scripture on which to stand. Jesus declares that God’s Word is truth (John 17:17), and followers of the true Christ must never forget his words of power and promise.

Biblical Eternality of God the Son

The eternity of God the Son is another point within theological studies in which one cannot be considered a Christian if he does not understand that Jesus is not a created being. The New Testament is clear that Jesus is not a created being, but is God, and has always been God. Although numerous texts could be used in the New Testament to show that Jesus is God and has always existed, three texts will be examined exegetically below, which should suffice in proving this biblical truth. One benefit of using the following three passages is that they are written by three different authors, and evangelical Christians may enjoy seeing how multiple authors teach the same theological truth regarding God the Son, while liberals who challenge inerrancy may find it more challenging to deny the consistent biblical teaching across multiple books by multiple authors.

Exegesis of John 1:1-14

John 1:1-14 is a part of the evangelist's Prologue. John 1:1 reads, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Don Carson brings reader's attention to how the opening words "In the beginning" should immediately convey a connection to the opening verse of Genesis 1.³³ Before the beginning of creation, in eternity past, was the Originator of creation and all things.³⁴ The statement "the Word was with God" shows that the Word is differentiated from God the Father. Then, the text says that this Word "was God" (emphasis added).³⁵ John describes this Word as being God's eternal fellow and even God's own self.³⁶ John 1:1 is like a multifaceted diamond. Every time readers think they know something about God and his

³³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 113.

³⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 114.

³⁵ James M. Hamilton Jr., *John*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 9, *John-Acts*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 36.

³⁶ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 117.

Word, the diamond that is the text slowly turns to reveal another depth of beauty in God's Son. James Hamilton explains because that which is stated at the beginning of verse one is restated in verse 2: "He was in the beginning with God," all of John's Gospel is to be read in light of these two verses.³⁷

In verse 3, the text reads, in the positive sense, "all things were made through him," and, in the negative sense, "without him was not any thing made that was made." Everything that was ever created was created through this Word. This Word is not an impersonal force; he is a real person—the divine Son. He is coequal with and indistinguishable from God; he is one in essence with the Father but distinct in person. Nothing came into being without the Father's sovereign purpose working through the Son (cf. Isa 45:7). John goes on to say, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5). In the person of the Word was life, and those people who are in the darkness cannot understand the light unless they are born of God. The light of the world came to the world, and everyone "who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (v. 12). It is through this Word and light that anyone is given the right to become one of God's children. John reaches the climax of his Prologue when he describes who the Word is: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (v. 14). When the Word became flesh, he did not stop being God, nor did the Word give up his deity. God the Word took on humanity by becoming a man. Not only did the Word become flesh, but Carson points out that he also "dwelt" among us, or "tabernacled" among the people, in the same way that God is said to have tabernacled with the Israelites in the Old Testament.³⁸ This Word is the "only Son" of the Father. The word

³⁷ James M. Hamilton Jr., *John*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 9, *John-Acts*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 36.

³⁸ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 127.

monogenous, translated “only Son” in the ESV, is better understood as “only begotten” so that readers can differentiate God’s unique begetting of Jesus from his begetting of the elect.³⁹

In summary, John explains that the Word not only was with God, and therefore differentiated from him, but also was God’s own self. Creation was brought forth through this Word who became flesh, and this Word was always in existence before any other thing was created. God the Son incarnate is the unique and one-of-a-kind begotten of the Father, unlike any other being has been or ever will be. Concerning John’s Prologue, D. A. Carson writes, “Once the identity of the Word is grasped, the incarnation is a stupendous act of revelation, of divine self-disclosure; but if the identity of the Word is not grasped, the incarnation itself is a nonsense.”⁴⁰

Exegesis of Colossians 1:15-20

Thomas Schreiner proposes that most scholars agree that Colossians 1:15-20 is one of the most important texts in all of Paul’s letters because the theme of this passage is Christ’s all-sufficiency.⁴¹ Colossians 1:15 reads, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” The description of Jesus as the “image of the invisible God” means that Christ represents who God is to human beings. God the Father is invisible not only to human eyes but also to human understanding. Calvin describes that God’s “image” is revealed to humankind in Christ alone so that men and women may behold him as in a mirror or reflection.⁴² In the ancient world, “image” also symbolized what the object pictured—similar to an image on a coin. In Christ, the invisible God became

³⁹ Hamilton, *John*, 41.

⁴⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 130.

⁴¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul’s Letters*, 2nd ed., Handbooks on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 320.

⁴² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Bellingham, WA: Andesite Press, 2010), 150.

visible. Richard Melick teaches that Jesus, who shared (and shares) the same substance as God, made God's character known in this earthly sphere of existence.⁴³ A distinction exists between all of humanity's being *created in* the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) and the Son's *being* the image of God, perfectly representing who God is to human beings (cf. Heb 1:3). Therefore, the Son is fully human and fully God.

Paul's description in Colossians 1:15 of Christ as the "firstborn of all creation" means that Jesus is preeminent (cf. v. 18). Arius (AD 256-336), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons have understood "firstborn" as meaning that Jesus was not fully God. However, in the Hebrew culture, the title "firstborn" meant that one had positional priority, authority, and sovereignty. Psalm 89:27 displays this idea of "firstborn" when David is declared to be the "firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." David was neither the first king nor the oldest in his family. Schreiner points out that David is identified as the firstborn in order to designate the sovereign rule that God gave to him.⁴⁴ Paul's description in Colossians 1:18 of Jesus as "firstborn" indicates that he is distinguished from and preeminent over creation—he is not a created being.⁴⁵ Eduard Lohse shares that the biblical text is not indicating that Jesus merely possesses a temporal advantage over other creatures but that he is the superior agent of all creation who is before all creation.⁴⁶

⁴³ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 215.

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *Acts and Paul's Letters*, 320

⁴⁵ This is an important distinction because the Mormons believe that Jesus was the literal firstborn of God the Father and one of his goddess wives through a physical relationship. If Jesus is a created being, then all of humankind is still in their sin and they have no hope of a savior who can fully pay their debt owed because of sin. The nation of Israel is said to be God's firstborn in Exod 4:22, but the person Israel (Jacob) was not the literal firstborn, and the nation of Israel was not literally birthed. The Bible describes Israel—the person and the nation—and Jesus in terms of preeminence.

⁴⁶ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 49.

In order to clarify the meaning behind Jesus's being the firstborn, Paul writes in Colossians 1:16-17, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Not only did God the Son create everything; he also continues to rule over everything. John 1:1-3 shows that Jesus created all things; yet, Paul is speaking of not only all things on this earth but also all things in heaven—everything visible and invisible, "thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." "Thrones" and "dominions" refer to all angels, principalities, and cosmic powers. There is no angel, human, or particle that sprang into being apart from the creative agency of the divine Son.⁴⁷ All things are in subjection to Christ so that they may not obscure his glory (cf. Heb 1:4). Paul does not elaborate on what "all things" means, but readers understand that it was through Christ that everything in existence was made. To misunderstand Christ's preeminence is to lessen his glory.

Exegesis of Hebrews 1:8-12

The final passage that will be used in order to show the eternity of God the Son comes from Hebrews 1:8-9. The author of Hebrews is using a passage from Psalm 45:6-7, which shows what God the Father teaches about God the Son. The first point of interest within this passage is the manner in which the author of Hebrews contrasts Jesus with angels. Christ does not serve angels but rules over them as the divine king. The author says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Heb 1:8). There was a time when there were no angels in existence, but the Godhead—which includes the divine Son—has always existed. Andreas Köstenberger explains that not only is the Son ontologically

⁴⁷ Schreiner, *Acts and Paul's Letters*, 321. The truth that Jesus created all things, including Satan, demons, and the "good" angels, is very important because Mormons believe that Jesus and Lucifer are brothers. Mormons hold that Jesus and Satan are the literal offspring of God the Father, which is a teaching that cannot be supported by proper exegesis of the Bible. Believers in Christ must understand the meaning of Col 1:15-20 because Mormons use this text in order to show that Jesus was created.

superior to angels, but also, he is functionally superior to angels in terms of his role as the mediator of divine revelation and redemption.⁴⁸ Although many interpreters place much attention on the divinity of Christ in Hebrews 1:8-12, some miss the idea of Jesus's everlasting kingship. Schreiner makes clear that Christ's eternal reign has been rewarded to him due to his perfect obedience as the divine-and-now-incarnate Son.⁴⁹ An interpretive challenge arises when the author of Hebrews cites Psalm 45:6-7 and calls the king "God." The psalmist is anticipating royal succession, which would not make sense if the king were literally God. There are at least two other examples from the Old Testament where "God" is used when referring to human beings who are speaking the words of God or pronouncing God's judgment on the people.⁵⁰ However, Schreiner concludes that the author of Hebrews is clearly ascribing divinity to the Son, for he is seeing Psalm 45 as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.⁵¹

In Hebrews 1:8-9, the word "God" is used twice in reference to the Father. However, Dennis Johnson points out that verses 10-12 shift focus to the Son as the eternal Creator who is infinitely more permanent than the heavens and earth he fashioned.⁵² Additionally, the author of Hebrews cites Psalm 102:25-27 in order to declare, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands." This statement echoes the creation account in Genesis 1:1 in which God is said to create the heavens and the earth at the beginning. When speaking of human leaders, the author of Hebrews says of Christ in verses 11-12, "They will perish,

⁴⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Handbook on Hebrews through Revelation*, Handbooks on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 10.

⁴⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 71-72.

⁵⁰ Moses is described as "God" to Pharaoh in Exod 7:1 when Moses speaks God's authoritative word to Pharaoh, and the judges in Israel are described as "gods" in Ps 82:1, 6.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 71.

⁵² Dennis E. Johnson, *Hebrews*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews-Revelation*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 39.

but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.” Human leaders may come and go, but Jesus, the Creator of the universe, is the same yesterday and today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8). Christ is not detracted by the passing years, nor does he grow weary with time.⁵³ Schreiner explains that an important point that should not be missed is that in verses 10-12, the author of Hebrews appropriates Psalm 102, which is about Yahweh, and applies it to Jesus Christ.⁵⁴ Therefore, Jesus is once again shown to be the eternal God and the Creator of all things. He had no beginning, he has no end, and he was not created by any other being. There was never a time when Jesus was not.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated many teachings contained in Scripture concerning God the Father and God the Son. First, the Old and New Testaments maintain the teaching and reality of there being one God in existence, also known as monotheism, which is an essential doctrine for the Christian faith. Moses shows his readers right away that God is more complex than what their minds can comprehend when God says in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” However, the same author of Genesis, Moses, also wrote Deuteronomy 6:4, which became known as the beginning of the *Shema*, declaring throughout the rest of Scripture the reality that only one God exists. Second, Isaiah chapters 43-46 show how Yahweh is not just one deity among many in existence. The Bible teaches that God the Father has always been God, he does not even know of any other gods in existence, and there will never be any other gods who come into existence for all eternity. Finally, according to

⁵³ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 75. Notably, Mormons believe that God *does* change. However, many passages in the Bible that this chapter has discussed show that neither the Father nor the Son change.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 73.

Scripture, Jesus Christ is not a created being. He is the Word who was in the beginning with God and who became flesh to model perfect obedience and to establish his kingship forever. Jesus created all things on earth and in heaven. Not one thing came into being unless Jesus created that thing. Jesus is eternally God, and it is only through the Jesus described in Scripture that salvation may come to any. A departure from any of the three abovementioned teachings disqualifies one from being a Christian. Therefore, that person who denies any of these teachings does not serve a god who can save him or her.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), more commonly known as the Mormon church, has been one of the fastest growing religions in the United States and the world for over two decades.¹ In the year 2021, the Mormon church had over 50,000 full-time missionaries out in the field spreading their message, which provides answers to common questions many people in the U.S. have—questions to which evangelical Christians often struggle to provide satisfactory answers.² For example, Mormons have answers (although incorrect) appealing to itching ears with regards to the following questions: “What about those who die and never heard about Christ?” “What about my family members who have already died without Christ?” “How could a loving God send people to Hell?” “What role does my good works play regarding salvation?” There are many additional LDS teachings more palatable for non-Christians, and the result is a religion that is loosely based on the Bible and that has man at its center.

There are many doctrinal differences between Mormonism and Christianity, some of which are not essential for salvation. For example, Mormons rarely partake in drinking alcohol or strong caffeinated drinks such as coffee and tea. Christians often bring up other differences between the two faiths that are not beneficial for engaging Mormons with the gospel. Additional topics would include Mormons’ temple rituals, age

¹ Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, “Study Shows that Mormons Are the Fastest-Growing Religious Group in the U.S.,” PRRI, Published May 2, 2012, <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/study-shows-that-mormons-are-the-fastest-growing-religious-group-in-the-u-s/>.

² James R. Smith, “Number of Missionaries Serving from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,” Latter-Day Saint Mission Prep, October 9, 2012, <https://latterdaysaintmissionprep.com/news/number-of-mormon-missionaries/>.

of accountability, meaning of baptism, and frequently worn undergarments. Although all biblical issues are important to discuss, when faithful Christians focus on secondary issues rather than salvific issues, an air of arrogance, criticism, and condemnation can come across rather than a desire to see someone in the Mormon community come to know the true Christ and living God.

This chapter focuses on essential doctrines that separate Mormonism from orthodox Christianity (as well as orthodox/historical Judaism), disqualifying Mormons from being identified as true Christians—as they claim to be. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not alone in claiming to be the one true church; however, its teachings concerning polytheism, as well as its teachings of God the Father and God the Son as being created beings, disqualify Mormons from the salvation that, according to the Bible, is found in Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12). A God and a Christ who do not exist, no matter how fervently one serves the false deities, cannot provide salvation to anyone.

The first section of this chapter will discuss the Mormon teachings of polytheism, God the Father as a created being, and Jesus as not only a created being but also one of billions of Heavenly Father’s spirit children.³ The second section will present Christian apologetic responses to these Mormon teachings based on God’s Word (i.e., the Old and New Testaments), thereby showing how the authoritative teachings of Mormonism are contradictions of and, therefore, deportations from orthodox Christianity.

Mormon Teachings

The section engages the Mormon teachings of polytheism, the createdness of God the Father as a created being, and the createdness of God the Son—in that order.

³ Throughout this chapter, it will be shown how Mormonism teaches that Jesus is the literal offspring of God the Father with one of his many wives, just as all of humanity has been, is, and will be until the end of this age.

Polytheism

Chapter 2 provided multiple examples of the teaching of monotheism throughout the Bible. One such example came from Deuteronomy 6:4, which is commonly known by the Jewish people throughout history as the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Jesus affirmed the *Shema* over 1400 years after Moses penned Deuteronomy when he taught the Greatest Commandment as recorded in Mark 12:29: “The most important [commandment] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’” The greatest Old Testament prophet, Moses, and the one greater than Moses, Jesus Christ, positively affirmed monotheism. Yet Mormons are quick to point out passages in the Old and New Testaments that seem to contradict monotheism.

Does the Bible contradict itself by teaching that there is one God and that the Father and Son are God? Mormons would answer affirmatively to that question, claim that the Bible is missing many “plain and precious parts,” and claim that the Book of Mormon is another testimony of Jesus Christ (1 Nephi 13 introduction). Christians affirm what Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” Although Paul in this passage is specifically referring to the Old Testament, other New Testament writers, such as Peter, affirm Paul’s writings, the Gospels, and the other books of the New Testament canon as being God-breathed and authoritative as Scripture. Due to the fact that all the apostles who were eyewitnesses of the life, ministry, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have passed from this earth into heaven to be with the Lord, Christians maintain that the canon of Scripture is closed. The closing of the canon to new special revelation is important because Mormonism teaches that there are living prophets today and that God still provides special revelations to his creation. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe they are a “restoration of the Church originally established by Jesus Christ during His mortal lifetime. Part of that restoration includes

living prophets and apostles. Along with modern prophets comes continuing revelation and additional scripture.”⁴

The following texts and quotations will show how Mormon apostles and prophets have used the Christian Scriptures to support their claim of the existence of multiple gods. Moses records in Genesis 1:2, “Let us make man in our image and our likeness,” suggesting that there is more than one God. Joseph Smith builds on the brief creation account by teaching, “In the beginning, the head of the gods called a Council of the gods, and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.”⁵ Not only was there more than one God, but also there were many gods who came together to give advice to God the Father regarding how to create and people the earth. Faithful Christians may try to point out that this cannot be true because of the teachings throughout Scripture that God the Father is the one true God of the universe. A common response from Mormons may be as follows: “Heavenly father is the God of this world—the one true God whom *we* worship.” Because many Christians do not know how to explain the seemingly confusing doctrine of the Trinity, Mormons will continue to ask questions that uninformed Christians struggle to answer. When speaking of the doctrine of the Trinity, Joseph Smith teaches,

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God! I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster.⁶

In addition, Mormons use the following five passages to argue that the Bible teaches the existence of many gods. The first is 2 Corinthians 4:4, in which Paul

⁴ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Newsroom,” Prophets, accessed January 18, 2023, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/prophets#:~:text=Members%20believe%20The%20Church%20of,continuing%20revelation%20and%20additional%20scripture>.

⁵ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 349.

⁶ Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church*, vol. 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 476.

describes Satan as “the god of this world.”⁷ Second, Mormons will point out that God the Father himself said to Moses in Exodus 7:1, “See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet” (KJV), arguing that the Bible teaches that Moses is a god. Third, Psalm 82:6 declares the judges of Israel as gods: “I have said, Ye are gods; And all of you are children of the most High” (KJV). Fourth, Jesus quotes Psalm 82 when he teaches in John 10:34-35, “Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods? And the Scripture cannot be broken” (KJV). Finally, the apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (KJV). According to Mormonism, these verses (and others) clearly show that the Bible teaches that God the father is the one true God of *this* world and the only one whom creation ought to worship. But, Mormons will say, there are many other gods within all of the universes whom those on this earth do not worship or recognize as their God.

If faithful Christians try to show how Scripture declares that “God is one,” as Galatians 3:20 states, Mormons will most likely respond by saying something to this effect: “Yes, but doesn’t the Bible also teach that you and your wife are one flesh? But you are not *literally* one flesh. So, in the same way that we are one *in purpose* with our spouse, God the Father is one *in purpose* with the Son. You and your spouse are two people, just like there are multiple gods.” Brigham Young, successor to Joseph Smith, states, “Gods exist, and we had better strive to be prepared to be one with them,” thus showing that mankind is to be one in purpose with the gods.⁸ Finally, Joseph Smith confirms his polytheistic teaching with the following statement: “I wish to declare I have

⁷ All biblical references quoted from the Mormon perspective are from the *King James Version* because it is the only recognized translation of the Bible in the LDS church.

⁸ Brigham Young, “Providences of God—Privileges and Duties of the Saints—Spiritual Operations and Manifestations—The Spirit World, &c (September 1, 1859),” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7 (Liverpool: Amasa Lyman, 1860), 238.

always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods.”⁹ Joseph Smith supposedly translated the book of Abraham, which states, “And then the Lord said, let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (Abraham 4:1).¹⁰ In the Book of Mormon, Mosiah 7:27 and Ether 3:14 respectively declare, “Christ was the God, the father of all things” and, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the father and the son.” A surface reading of these passages from the Book of Mormon may seem to indicate an orthodox teaching of the Godhead; however, the teaching that Jesus is the Father and the Son is closer to the early heretical teaching of modalism.¹¹

Unfortunately, the hermeneutical misunderstanding of Joseph Smith and his followers concerning the Bible’s teaching on the Godhead has led Mormon leaders to create confusing and embarrassing doctrines, such as the Adam-God doctrine. Brigham Young writes,

When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is Michael the Archangel. The ancient of days about whom holy men have written and spoken. He is our father and our God, in the only God with whom we have to do.¹²

Here, Young teaches that God the Father is Adam and that he is Michael the Archangel. There is no doubt that the Adam-God doctrine was a challenge for the Mormon people. Young later records,

How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter Day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them in which God revealed to me. Namely,

⁹ J. Smith, Jr., *History of the Church*, 6:306.

¹⁰ The book of Abraham appears in the Pearl of Great Price, which is an authoritative text in Mormonism.

¹¹ Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 12016), 137. Modalism is “a heresy that maintains that ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ are three names for, or *modes* (thus, *modalism*) of, one and the same person. They are not three persons.”

¹² Brigham Young, “Self-Government—Mysteries—Recreation and Amusements, Not in Themselves Sinful—Tithing—Adam, Our Father and Our God (April 9, 1852),” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1 (Liverpool: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854), 50.

that Adam is our father and God. Well, says one. Why was Adam called Adam? He was the first man on the Earth and its framer and maker. He, with the help of his brethren, brought it into existence. And he said, I want my children, who are in the spirit world, to come and live here. I once dwelt upon an earth something like this, in a mortal state. I was faithful. I received my crown and exaltation.¹³

Young responds to the “unbelieving” followers of Mormonism by sharing what he claims God the Father revealed to him concerning the Adam-God doctrine.

Mormons cannot deny the existence of polytheistic teachings in their church’s history. I will expand upon these teachings in the following two sections, demonstrating that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that God the Father and God the Son are created beings who were not always God—a view that departs from historical Jewish and Christian orthodoxy of almost 3500 and 2000 years, respectively.

God the Father as a Created Being

A second theological departure of the LDS church from orthodox Christianity is the Mormon teaching that God the Father is a created being, meaning he has not always been God and there will be many more gods to come after him. Prophet Lorenzo Snow writes, “As man is, God once was, as God is, man may become.”¹⁴ Snow’s authoritative teaching argues that God was once a man, just like humans are today. In addition, mankind may become like God in the sense of actually becoming gods over their own planets one day in the future:

Mormon prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. He is God. The father became God in exalted being through obedience to the same eternal gospel truths that we are given opportunity today to obey.¹⁵

¹³ Brigham Young, “Discourse,” *Deseret News*, June 18, 1873, BYU Library Digital Collections, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews3/id/143049/>.

¹⁴ Lorenzo Snow, quoted in Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 105.

¹⁵ Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, 104.

In the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Brigham Young University professor George W. Pace writes that “Joseph Smith’s two-hour-and-fifteen-minute message, famously known as the ‘King Follett Discourse’ may be one of the Prophet’s greatest sermons because of its doctrinal teachings.”¹⁶ What follows is a selection of the “King Follett Discourse” given by Joseph Smith at the Conference of the Church in April 1844:

I want you all to know God, to be familiar with him What sort of being was God in the beginning? First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, is a man like unto one of yourselves If you were to see him today, you would see him in all the person, image and very form as a man I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are the simple and first principles of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another, and that God himself; the father of us all dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did What did Jesus say? (mark it elder Rigdon) Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power; to do what? Why what the Father did, that answer is obvious Here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you—namely, by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.¹⁷

According to Joseph Smith, God was on an earth like the one occupied today, and mankind must learn to become gods themselves, just as all of the other gods have done in the past. Smith teaches that God has a body “like unto one of yourselves,” which implicitly shows that God was once a man and continues in Godhood with a body of flesh and bones.

Joseph Smith is not the only one to teach that God the Father has a body and therefore is a created being. Mormon apostle James Talmage writes in *The Articles of Faith*,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims against the incomprehensible God, devoid of “body, parts, or passions,” as a thing impossible

¹⁶ Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 772.

¹⁷ Joseph Smith Jr., “Character and Being of God—Creation—Salvation of the Dead—The Unpardonable Sin—Resurrection—Baptism of the Spirit, Etc. (April 6, 1844),” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6 (Liverpool: Asa Calkin, 1859), 3-4.

of existence, and asserts its belief in and allegiance to the true and living God of scripture and revelation. Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of Elohim, is called “the Father” That Jesus Christ, whom we also know as Jehovah, was the executive of the Father, Elohim, in the work of the creation as set forth in the book *Jesus the Christ*, chapter IV.¹⁸

Talmage mistakenly teaches that Elohim and Jehovah are two separate gods; Elohim is “the greater god,” and Jehovah—who is Jesus—is “the lesser god” who was begotten by Elohim. Talmage’s claim is unfounded in the Old Testament Hebrew language because as any Hebrew concordance of the Old Testament would show, “LORD” is “Yahweh” and “God” is “Elohim” in the original language.¹⁹ Faithful Christians may also notice how Talmage teaches that the notion that God the Father is “devoid” of a human body (as we have today) is “incomprehensible” and “impossible”—a point that will be responded to later in this chapter.

Additionally, in the periodical *The Seer*, which is an authoritative Mormon journal, Mormon apostle Orson Pratt writes, “In the Heaven where our spirits were born, there are many Gods, each one of whom has his own wife or wives, which were given to him previous to his redemption, while yet in his mortal state.”²⁰ In this text, one sees the teaching of polytheism (“there are many Gods”) and polygamy (“his own wife or wives”). According to Pratt, God the Father was given his wife or wives “while he was yet in his mortal state” in order to populate the earth throughout its entire history. This text teaches that God was not always the immortal God of Scripture and therefore that the Father is a created being. Mormons teach that marriage is eternal and that the process that the Heavenly Father went through will be repeated with them.²¹ Therefore, all of the time and

¹⁸ James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 466-67.

¹⁹ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 238.

²⁰ Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (Salt Lake City: Seagull Book & Tape, 1993), 37.

²¹ That is, being born as a spirit child, receiving a body on his previous planet where he served his Heavenly Father, dying and going to heaven with his many wives, going through the process of

work spent being committed to one's spouse will not be wasted because marriage is eternal and everything will be perfect in heaven, including marital relationships.

Concerning the bodily form of God the Father, Joseph Smith states, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's: the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit" (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Smith also emphasizes that the Father is an exalted man: "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man."²² As cited earlier, Mormon prophet Lorenzo Snow continues Joseph Smith's teachings that God the Father is a non-eternal being and that humans can become gods one day: "As man is God once was. As God is, man may become." According to Mormon teaching, God the Father went through a process from grace to grace and from exultation to exultation in order to become a God himself. The Father became a God over his own planet, created after the coming together of a council of gods. In addition, human beings on this earth may become gods by keeping the Lord's commandments unto exultation until repeating the process with one's own wife (or wives) in order to inhabit, create, and lord over their own planet and spirit children, who will receive fleshly bodies.

In *Key to the Science of Theology*, Parley P. Pratt writes, "Each of these Gods, including Jesus Christ and His Father, being in possession of not merely an organized spirit, but a glorious immortal body of flesh and bones, is subject to the laws which govern, of necessity, even the most refined order of physical existence."²³ Continuing the teaching of mankind following in the Father's footsteps toward exultation, another Mormon apostle, Orson Hyde, writes, "Remember that God, our Heavenly Father, was

exultation so that he became a god, having billions upon billions of spirit children with his wives so that the spirit children could inhabit an earth similar to this earth, and following a gospel similar to the gospel of this earth.

²² J. F. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 349.

²³ Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2016), 23.

perhaps once a child, and mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved forward and overcome, until he has arrived at the point where he now is.”²⁴ The implication of God the Father’s progressing to exultation is that God was once a sinner, as all human beings on this earth are.

James Talmage writes, “It is impossible to deny that God the Father would have a material body without denying God Himself.”²⁵ After discussing sections of the Nicene Creed, Talmage continues teaching about the Father’s material body, saying, “It would be difficult to conceive of a greater number of inconsistencies and contradictions expressed in words as here The immateriality of God as asserted in these declarations of sectarian faith is entirely at variance with the scriptures, and absolutely contradicted by the revelations of God’s person and attributes.”²⁶ Talmage sets forth by the previous two quotes that the beliefs and teachings of the creeds and early church fathers contradict the Christian Scriptures concerning the supposed reality that God the Father is an exalted man—just as billions (or trillions) of gods were before him.

Mormons put on an air of Christian orthodoxy in order to appeal to the masses. However, because Mormons are bound to the authoritative teachings of their prophets, apostles, and presidents (as noted above), they must affirm all doctrines taught by these men to be as true as the very words of God himself. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches polytheism and that God the Father was once a man similar to how mankind is now. In the next section, I will show how Mormons depart from a third major Christian doctrine regarding the eternal nature of God the Son.

²⁴ Orson Hyde, “The Man to Lead God’s People—Overcoming—A Pillar in the Temple of God—Angels’ Visits—the Earth (October 6, 1853),” in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:123.

²⁵ James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Houston, TX: Covenant Communication, 2006), 466-67.

²⁶ Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 48.

God the Son as a Created Being

The Mormon church departs from orthodox Christianity by teaching that God the Son is a created being. According to Mormons, Jesus was once a spirit child; he was the first and greatest creation of Jehovah, making Jesus the literal brother of Satan and the rest of those who inhabit the earth.²⁷ In the pre-existence, there was a great war. God and his wives had many spirit children who did not yet possess a body. The only way to get a body was to come to this earth through the sexual relations of human couples. This spirit-to-body process is one reason Mormons typically have large families, for they hope to allow the other spirit children still in heaven with God the Father to enjoy the blessing of obtaining a mortal body, thereby allowing those spirit children to go through the process of exultation into becoming their own gods of their own planets. In the pre-existence, Jesus and Lucifer each proposed a plan of salvation to Heavenly Father. Ultimately, God chose Jesus's plan of salvation over Satan's plan, and a great war broke out in heaven. In the end, those who sided with Satan in the great war were cast out of heaven, and those who valiantly sided with Jesus are those spirit children who were given mortal bodies into Mormon families (and possibly good Christian families). Those spirit children, who chose Jesus's side, but were not valiant in the war, were cursed with dark skin. These spirit children are those born into black and other minority families.

Orson Pratt affirms the statements above when he writes, "It was in heaven where our spirits were born. That there are many gods, each one of whom has his own wife or wives, which were given to him previous to his redemption, while yet in his moral state."²⁸ In *The Articles of Faith*, Talmage explains that "Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His

²⁷ Brigham Young, "The Word of Wisdom—Spiritualism (October 30, 1870)," in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13 (Liverpool: Horace S. Eldredge, 1871), 282.

²⁸ Pratt, *The Seer*, 37.

mission in the flesh.”²⁹ Mormons use teachings like Talmage’s, arguing that Jesus is the literal offspring of God the father.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches not only that Jesus is the literal offspring of Heavenly Father and one of his wives as a spirit child in heaven but also that when Jesus gained his physical body on earth, Heavenly Father had sexual relations with Mary, the mother of Jesus, so that no other man could do so. Mormonism denies the virgin birth through the power of the Holy Spirit and instead teaches that Jesus was born in Jerusalem because of a physical act between Heavenly Father and Mary. On this teaching, Brigham Young writes,

When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who was the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by his Father in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve; from the fruits of the earth, the first earthly tabernacles were originated by the Father, and so on in succession Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven.”³⁰

Young not only alludes to the Adam-God doctrine and denies the virgin birth through the Holy Spirit; he also states plainly that Jesus is the first creation and elder brother, in the natural sense, of all mankind. Talmage agrees with Young, writing, “His [Christ’s] unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother [Mary] and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father [Elohim].”³¹ Two more quotations of Brigham Young show how Mormonism describes the sexual relations between Heavenly Father and Mary: (1) “When the time came that His first-born the Saviour, should come into the world and take a tabernacle, the Father came Himself and favoured that spirit with a

²⁹ Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 466-67.

³⁰ Young, “Self-Government . . . (April 9, 1852),” 1:50-51.

³¹ Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 473.

tabernacle instead of letting any other man do it;”³² (2) “The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood—was begotten of his Father, as we are of our fathers.”³³

Hearers of LDS teachings may wonder how Mormons could believe that the Father begat Jesus through natural means and not through the Holy Spirit. Mormons attempt to demonstrate their views from the Christian Bible by quoting passages like Colossians 1:15, which says that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God. The *firstborn* of every creature.” According to Mormons, this passage proves that Jesus is the firstborn and offspring of Heavenly Father. Mormons then expand on their teachings using Joseph Smith’s additional revelation given to him by God. Mormons propose that just as God had prophets in the Old Testament and apostles in the New Testament who revealed his Word, so also God still has living prophets and apostles today who disclose additional revelation to his creation. However, when President Gordon B. Hinckley was asked by some outside of the LDS church if Mormons believe in the traditional Christ, he responded, “No, I don’t. The traditional Christ of whom they speak is not the Christ of whom I speak.”³⁴ While Mormons may say that they believe in Jesus Christ, they do not believe in the traditional Christ who is described in the Bible. Instead, they believe in the Jesus who has been revealed through the additional revelations provided to Joseph Smith and other Mormon leaders.

³² Brigham Young, “To Know God is Eternal Life—God the Father of Our Spirits and Bodies—Things Created Spiritually First—Atonement By the Shedding of Blood (February 8, 1857),” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 4 (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1857), 218.

³³ Brigham Young, “Character of God and Christ—Providences of God—Self-Government, &c (July 8, 1860),” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 8 (Liverpool: George Q. Cannon, 1861), 115.

³⁴ Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Church News Archives, “Crown of Gospel Is upon Our Heads,” *The Church News*, June 20, 1998, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/1998/6/20/23250528/crown-of-gospel-is-upon-our-heads>.

Conclusion

The teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints described above (i.e., polytheism, the createdness of God the Father, and the createdness of God the Son) are a fair representation of the true teachings of the Mormon church because they have been presented from the teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith as well as the recognized authoritative teachings of other Mormon apostles, prophets, and presidents. Although there are many other doctrinal differences between Mormonism and biblical Christianity worth discussing, the teachings examined in this chapter are more than sufficient to show how the Mormon church departs from orthodox Christianity—the dominant Christian teaching for 1800 years prior to the teachings of Joseph Smith and those within the Mormon community.

The following section demonstrates how Christians may take the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and lovingly share the essential differences between biblical Christianity and the teachings of the Mormon church vis-à-vis monotheism/polytheism and the uncreatedness/createdness of God the Father and God the Son. Faithful Christians must guard themselves from approaching those within the Mormon church in an unloving, condemning, and argumentative manner. Because of the power of heretical Mormon teachings, an aggressive approach to engaging Mormon friends with the gospel will only drive them further away from a desire to know the truth about what the Bible teaches. The posture of Christians engaging anyone made in the image of God with the gospel—especially those within Mormonism—should be one of humility, love, and grace. Christians should remember that they, too, were once children of wrath and separated from God when he showed them endless mercy and grace (Eph 2:1-10). God’s children are to be heralds of the gospel and beautiful feet to those who do not know the truth about the only one who can truly save—Christ Jesus. Like all people, Mormons believe that their religious beliefs are correct. Christians’ duty is to share the truth about the Father and the Son in order that all would come to know Christ as the

Lord and Savior of one's soul. The weight of this monumental task should not lessen when Christians engage people who believe in heretical teachings taught to them from a young age. The following apologetic responses will equip Christians to engage Mormons in a winsome and effective manner.

Apologetic Responses to Mormon Teachings

As previously demonstrated, Mormonism teaches polytheism, that God the Father is a created being, and that God the Son is a created being. Because of the required acknowledgement of the authoritative teachings of the prophets, apostles, and presidents in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as what is recorded in the LDS holy books, those within the Mormon church will ultimately have to come to a crossroads offering two options. Either they will have to affirm biblical truth and deny the teachings of Joseph Smith and those teachings that most Mormons have grown up hearing—with the likely outcome that Mormons converting to Christianity must leave everything they have ever known, be cast out of their communities, and be shunned by their family—or they will continue to deny the clear teachings of the Old and New Testaments and the only Christ who can save them in order to continue following the false gospel taught by the Mormon church that has no power to save. Members of the LDS church are taught that the Bible is missing “plain and precious parts” and that “the Book of Mormon [is] the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”³⁵

Chapter 2 examined several key texts from the Old and New Testaments, demonstrating biblical monotheism, the uncreatedness of God the Father, and the uncreatedness of God the Son. A few of the same arguments will be briefly restated in the

³⁵ Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 461.

following sections as examples of how Christians can provide apologetic responses to Mormon teachings.

Apologetic Response to Polytheism

The Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947 by a shepherd boy may be one of the greatest affirming pieces of evidence for the Bible’s accuracy to the original manuscripts, called autographs. The most complete scroll found was a scroll containing the entire book of Isaiah written about one hundred years before Christ and is “virtually identical” to the Masoretic texts copied over one thousand years later that are still used today to translate the Old Testament into other languages.³⁶ The completeness of the Bible is important to show Mormons that the Bible is not missing many “plain and precious parts”—as promoted by Joseph Smith—but that the Old Testament available today is “virtually identical” to the Scriptures Jesus affirmed as the very words of God. Consequently, the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6, a Jewish prayer that Jews would repeat thousands of times throughout their lives, is one of the greatest pieces of evidence against the Mormon teaching of polytheism. The *Shema* begins by declaring, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4). The same author—Moses—who recorded the declaration in Deuteronomy that there is only one God is the same author who recorded God as saying in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Therefore, it is unlikely that the same author of Genesis would later contradict himself in Deuteronomy if there was indeed a teaching of the existence of many gods among the Jewish people. For almost 1400 years prior to Christ’s incarnation, the Jewish faith consistently held to monotheism, which was a minority view among the surrounding regions and cultures. When Jesus was asked which of the commands was the most important, he responded by quoting the *Shema* in Mark 12:29: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord

³⁶ Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Rose, 2015), 43-44.

our God, the Lord is one.” The *Shema* is one of many examples of the Bible’s clear monotheistic teaching; it is also a counter to the Mormon teaching that God’s Word is missing many plain and precious parts. The entire world can have confidence when reading the Old and New Testament Scriptures that monotheism is not a new concept in Judaism or Christianity but the true teaching recorded in the combined biblical timeline of almost 3500 years.

In addition to the *Shema*’s and Jesus’s teaching of monotheism, the clear declarations by God in the book of Isaiah are sufficient evidence for the biblical teaching of monotheism, especially considering that the same text used to translate Isaiah today is “virtually identical” to the scroll of Isaiah found one hundred years before Christ’s incarnation. Isaiah 43-46 declares many times that Yahweh is the only God and Savior. Sometimes, Mormons will respond to those verses by saying something to this effect: “Well, yes, Heavenly Father is the one God of *this* world. There are many other gods, but we are not to follow them.” Christians may counter this statement by explaining that when the Bible talks about other gods, those are false gods that do not actually exist. The Old Testament (Num 23:19) and the New Testament (Heb 6:18) teach that God cannot lie. Therefore, Christians would do well to point out that Isaiah 44:8 clearly teaches that God does not even know of any other gods. If it were true that there was a council of gods that came together to determine how this earth would be created, that Heavenly Father has goddess wives, and that all of mankind can become gods in the future just as there were many gods in the past, then God would be lying when he says that he does not even know of any other gods. In Isaiah 43:10-11, God says, “Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior.” Hence, the Mormon teaching of polytheism and the sin committed when thinking that one could become like God in the sense of being his equal contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture held for thousands of years.

How should Christians respond to the supposed teaching of multiple gods in Scripture? For example, Psalm 82:6 refers to the judges of Israel as “gods.” In the King James Version of Psalm 82, the psalmist records, “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High” (see also John 10:34). Yet it is important to remember the context of this statement. The psalmist goes on to say in verse 7 that the judges “shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” Therefore, this passage is not proclaiming that all mankind are gods, or could become gods, but that in the eyes of the people of Israel, they became “as gods” in positions of authority like judges, leaders, or kings. The so-called gods mentioned in Scripture are never gods by either identity or nature but gods by human creation or acclimation.³⁷ Therefore, neither the Bible nor Jesus endorses godhood for mankind. In fact, Mormons should not want to associate themselves with Psalm 82 because it says nothing good about those so-called gods. Only judgment from the one true God follows.

Finally, even Mormon apostle James Talmage correctly identifies the “gods” of Psalm 82:6, as well as John 10:34, as merely judges when he writes, “In Psalm 82:6, judges invested by divine appointment are called ‘gods.’ To this the Savior referred in His reply to the Jews in Solomon’s Porch. Judges so authorized officiated as the representatives of God and are honored by the exalted title ‘gods.’”³⁸

Christians must stick with biblical texts in order to show the true teachings of the Bible concerning monotheism. In addition to the Bible, Christians should learn some of the teachings of the Mormon church so that they can present those teachings to those Mormons whom they are engaging with the gospel. The teachings of the Bible are plain concerning monotheism, and even Mormon apostle Talmage acknowledges the correct

³⁷ Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 235.

³⁸ Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 501.

meaning of “gods” in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34. The following section will focus on Christian apologetic responses to the Mormon teaching of the creation of God the Father.

Apologetic Response to the Creation of God the Father

There never was a time when God the Father was not. This is a truth that Jews and Christians have understood for millennia. Mormon apostle James Talmage denies the biblical teaching of John 4:24 that “God is spirit” and instead teaches, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims against the incomprehensible God, devoid of ‘body, parts, or passions,’ as a thing impossible of existence, and asserts its belief in and allegiance to the true and living God of scripture and revelation.”³⁹ Joseph Smith declared God has a “body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). The Mormon teaching presented is a denial of the biblical teaching that no one has seen God, nor can anyone see him face to face (Exod 33:20; John 1:18). Mormons fail to recognize the logical inconsistencies with their hermeneutical approach to passages of the Bible that describe God. Because God the Father is beyond the comprehension of our limited minds, the Bible uses anthropomorphisms—characteristics or attributes used in one’s common language—to describe something that is indescribable in order to allow readers to get a glimpse of what God is like.⁴⁰ For example, when the Bible describes the “arm,” “eye,” “hand,” or other physical attributes of the Lord, interpreters encounter a problem when they interpret such descriptions about God in a literal sense because in order to be consistent, they would also need to interpret literally all of the other passages describing God’s physical attributes. For example, the Psalms speak of God’s having a “covering with his feathers” (Ps 92:4) and man’s “trusting under [God’s] wings” (Ps 91:4). There are also many times in the New Testament in which Jesus uses similar

³⁹ Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 466.

⁴⁰ Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 20.

language, such as his being a “door” (John 10:9), “shepherd” (John 10:11), “vine” (John 15:1), “road” (John 14:6), or “bread” (John 6:35), but readers understand the literary device that is being used in such passages. Therefore, the Mormon church’s teachings concerning the attributes of God the Father are logically and hermeneutically inconsistent with Christian Scripture.

Apologetic Response to the Creation of God the Son

Mormon President Gordon B. Hinckley’s response to the question about whether he believes in the “traditional Christ” is sufficient to show that the orthodox view of Jesus is not the same Jesus of Mormonism. Hinckley states regarding the orthodox view of Jesus, “No, I don’t. The traditional Christ of whom they speak is not the Christ of whom I speak.”⁴¹ In addition, Mormon apostle James Talmage teaches, “Jesus Christ is the son of Elohim, both as spiritual and bodily offspring. That is to say, Elohim is literally the father of the spirit of Jesus Christ, and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed his mission in the flesh.”⁴² According to Mormon teaching, not only is Jesus a being who was created by a natural sexual relationship between God the Father and one of his goddess wives, but also Jesus came to this earth naturally through a sexual relationship between the human Mary and the immortal God the Father. Mormon teachings clearly deny the virgin birth of Christ taught in the Bible. Matthew 1:18, 20 reads, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child by the Holy Spirit . . . that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” In addition, Luke 1:35 reads, “And the angel answered her [Mary], ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will

⁴¹ Hinckley, quoted in Church News Archives, “Crown of Gospel Is upon Our Heads.”

⁴² Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 466.

be called holy—the Son of God.” Finally, Isaiah prophesies in 7:14 and 9:6, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Scripture plainly teaches that Jesus was miraculously conceived through the Holy Spirit and not through a physical sexual relationship between God the Father and the human Mary.

Most Mormons today agree with the Mormon President Spencer W. Kimball, who states, “Latter-day Saints are true Christians. We cannot understand how anyone could question our being Christians. . . . We are the true followers of Jesus Christ; and we hope the world will finally come to the conclusion that we are Christians, if there are any in the world.”⁴³ However, Joseph Smith is not as kind as Kimball when describing his encounter with the Lord:

My object in going to inquire of the Lord which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, that I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.” He again forbade me to join any of them; and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time.⁴⁴

According to Smith, Christians who profess the truths of Scripture and the creeds are an “abomination” and “corrupt.” Therefore, according to the founder of the Mormon church, Christians have no hope.

⁴³ Edward L. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1982), 434.

⁴⁴ Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 18-20.

Final Thoughts

In order to witness to Mormons properly, Christians must quote directly from the Mormon authoritative texts, as quoted above, and show how the teachings of the Mormon church differ from those of the Bible. Mormons will be taken by surprise upon hearing teachings they did not know exist, and faithful members of the LDS community will likely respond by saying something like “Well, we don’t believe that” or “That’s not what our church teaches.” Christians should take advantage of the opportunity to ask if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints still maintains that the teachings and writings of their apostles and prophets are as equally authoritative as the Bible? Christians may gently remind their Mormon friends that Joseph Smith, while prophesying, once declared that Mormon apostle and prophet Brigham Young’s ascension to the presidency of the LDS church was by the will of God.⁴⁵ Therefore, for Mormons to deny the teachings of one of their prophets is to deny the very teachings of prophet Joseph Smith, the LDS church, and God. In the end, faithful Mormons must either adhere to all the teachings of their recognized apostles and prophets—including teachings such as the Adam-God doctrine, God the Father’s sexual relations with Mary, as well as teachings of the Mormon church that contradict Scripture—or affirm that there are false teachings and prophecies within their church. Deuteronomy 18:22 teaches how to test a prophet claiming to speak the very words of God: if a prophet has even one false prophecy, then his prophecies are not to be listened to because they are not from God. Using this teaching from Deuteronomy discredits the entire Mormon religion.

Conclusion

Every false teaching about Jesus Christ is idolatry. The beloved disciple ends his first epistle with the following command, “Little children, keep yourselves from

⁴⁵ John W. Welch, *Opening the Heavens* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2017), 343-480.

idols” (1 John 5:21). “All idols are other Christs,” says Brian Vickers.⁴⁶ The hard truth is that a christ described outside of the Bible’s teachings is a false christ; therefore, he is a christ who cannot save anyone. The Mormon prophets and apostles have shown from their very mouths and authoritative writings that they do not hold to and believe in the same Christ whom faithful Christians today believe in as revealed in Scripture, and so, ultimately, they cannot have any salvation in the God of the Bible because they deny his very existence. Jesus commands believers to share the good news of salvation to all people throughout the entire world and to make disciples as believers go about their lives. Gentleness and humility must be present when declaring the truth of Scripture to those in the Mormon faith so that they may come to know the true gospel, Christ, and Creator in whose image they have been made. Mormons will sometimes speak of Christians’ using “anti-Mormon” material, but this chapter shall end with a quote from Mormon President J. Reuben Clark: “If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Brian J. Vickers, “Hermeneutics of 1 John” (unpublished class notes for “Johannine Theology” [80354], The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2022).

⁴⁷ Michael D. Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 24.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Teaching a course on engaging Mormons with the gospel has done more for the participants and me than I could have imagined. Yes, participants learned more about the background of Mormonism and the apologetic approaches that result from learning about Mormonism. However, the greatest end goal for this project was to instill into the participants a heart for those who are lost and to do so for the glory of God. A genuine love for those who do not know Christ extends well beyond the scope of evangelizing Mormons effectively. The following sections describe the preparation for the project, the implementation of the project, and an overview of the content covered throughout the eight-week classroom time.

Preparation

The first goal of this project was to write an eight-session curriculum that equips laypeople at Jersey Baptist Church (JBC) to engage Mormons with the gospel. The greatest help in preparing for the development of the course was taking the course “Foundations of Teaching” under Dr. Matthew Haste. Dr. Haste’s course focused on developing at least one learning outcome for each session and then creating a lesson plan ensuring the learning outcome(s) would be met. The process of writing an eight-session lesson plan as well as learning outcomes for each session was a great start to creating a finalized curriculum for this project. However, additional innovation and reconfiguration of the project’s curriculum was needed to get to the point at which the project was ready to be implemented.

Ultimately, the greatest preparation for the implementation of this project became clear after I completed chapter 3. Although the teaching sessions were developed from the content featured in chapters 2 and 3, the ordering of that content needed to be adjusted so as to best fit the classroom setting. For example, when Christians are engaging Mormons with the gospel, they will most likely not hear an entire presentation on who Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are from the Mormon perspective. Therefore, believers will not be able to fully expound their entire presentation of the biblical teachings in response to every topic that Mormons may produce. However, Christians must exhibit a desire to engage in healthy conversations with Mormons while genuinely listening to their views, asking questions, and raising their own objections with love and respect. This Christlike attitude helps achieve the second goal of this project.

The second goal was to teach laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel by teaching laypeople key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures. This goal was met by implementing a change in curriculum whereby each topic covered in the course was handled in the same manner as if a conversation were taking place. Mormons use a lot of the same words as Christians but with different definitions, as shown throughout chapters 2 and 3. The information students learned throughout the eight sessions gave laypeople evangelistic tools to engage Mormons with the gospel by focusing on primary theological issues. However, that information may be considered worthless if the third goal of this project was not implemented.

The third goal is to send laypeople from JBC to engage Mormons in the local community with the gospel using the evangelistic strategies learned from the course in a loving and respectful manner. Knowledge is very powerful, but if knowledge is not used well, then it loses its power altogether. The knowledge gained in the eight sessions can be a dangerous weapon in the hands of those whose fleshly nature overcomes their new nature in Christ. Christians' desire must be to see all who do not know the biblical Jesus

come to serve him as Lord and Savior. When knowledge is wielded poorly, the information learned may harden other people's hearts. However, when knowledge is utilized well, the information learned may be used to call others into the adoption that is from God the Father. Therefore, it is imperative that Christians share the gospel with love and respect as reflects the example of Christ. Having clearly defined the three goals of this project, I proceed to discuss the implementation process of this project.

Implementation

In order to teach laypeople how to engage Mormons with the gospel within my context at JBC, I needed to do so in a classroom setting—because I am not a pastor or on church staff. JBC divides the fall and spring into two equal terms of about eight weeks each during which pastors and lay leaders can teach courses commonly seen in seminaries. As one of the people in charge of this ministry, I was able to plan for a course to be taught for this project during the fall 2022 semester. Throughout my years of teaching courses at JBC, I have been able to build relationships with many in the congregation who were willing to sit through the course as developed for this project.

The participants in this course met each Sunday from 10:00 to 11:30 am for eight weeks in a row, from October 23 to December 18, 2022. Students scheduled a meeting with someone in the Mormon community after the last course in order to implement what they had learned throughout the course. Finally, the group scheduled one last gathering at my home on Friday, December 30, to enjoy a meal together, ask any additional questions participants had as a result of the course, or discuss any challenging or positive interactions participants had with their Mormon friends.

The following section offers a brief overview of the most important information provided to students during the eight-week course.

Content Overview

The purpose of this project was to train the laypeople of Jersey Baptist Church in New Albany, Ohio, to engage Mormons with the gospel. However, the reality that ultimately resulted from this project was that participants cultivated a broken heart for all people of all backgrounds who do not know the Jesus Christ of the Bible as their personal Lord and Savior. In order to properly teach laypeople to engage Mormons with the gospel, I needed to provide fair and accurate information regarding the beliefs of those within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This way, the participants of the course would know how to best give an apologetical response to those within the Mormon community and to engage them with the true gospel.

Week 1: Why This Project?

As students walked into the classroom, I gave them a pre-course survey and asked them to read the directions and answer each of the ten questions as honestly as they could. They were to do so only if they were willing to participate in that portion of my project. Everyone in the room was assured that they were still able to sit in the class even if they did not fill out the survey. After a few minutes, I collected the surveys, introduced myself to the group, and explained the main challenge that I had already faced because of this project from well-meaning brothers and sisters within the church.

The greatest challenge I faced was that I had four different men within JBC approach me and object to what I was trying to accomplish in my project. Citing passages such as 2 John 10-11 (“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works”), some said I should slam the door in Mormons’ faces after telling them to get lost if they came knocking on my door. Others claimed that those within the LDS community were doing the work of Satan, and I should flee from any conversation with them. Still others challenged me, appealing to Matthew 7:6, where believers are admonished not to “cast your pearls to swine.”

I shared with the class that the timeless principle within the context of 2 John (as well as in the culture of the day) was that we should not *support* the ministry of those teaching a false christ, *bless* their false ministry in any way, or *encourage* them to continue down the path in which they are going. I shared with the class that if we stretched the logic of those opposing contact with anyone in the Mormon community, then Christians would never be able to evangelize anyone of any faith or background outside of Christianity because all without Christ are dead in their sins and trespasses and are serving Satan over God.¹

After discussing the importance of evangelism, I briefly explained to the class how I became interested in Mormonism. Twelve years ago, Scott Sharples became my mentor teacher for the first four years of my high school teaching career. I was a new believer, and Scott was a very zealous member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Scott started teaching me about his own church, and the way that he asked me questions made me feel that it was impossible for me to answer them without falling into a trap. They were questions that I had not thought about so early in my Christian walk (e.g., “Do you believe in living prophets today?” “Is God not able to speak to you today?” “When do you receive your soul?”). I explained to the class about my journey learning about Mormonism and how I allowed my pride to get in the way for the purpose of winning an argument. In those prideful moments, I did not have a heart for drawing Scott closer to the true Christ of Scripture. Praise God that I have been humbled many times since those conversations almost eight years ago, and now, I have a heart to see not only Scott but also all people within the Mormon community whom I encounter come to know Christ.

¹ In Romans 3:23, Paul observes, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and Ephesians 2:2 explains that everyone in Christ “once walked, . . . following the prince of the power of the air [i.e., Satan].” Therefore, if Christians never spoke to anyone serving Satan, then they would never be able to speak to anyone who was not already a Christian.

Finally, I lead the class through a brief history of the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, and his explanation of the “need of the restoration of the Church,” the first vision, and where the contents of the Book of Mormon (and other authoritative sources within Mormonism) supposedly came from. Many students eagerly asked questions because they started to see contradictions between Joseph Smith’s record of events and what the Bible teaches (i.e., God the Father, God the Son, and teachings of angels). I assured the students that when we came to cover monotheism versus polytheism in weeks 2 and 3, we would be able to address many of their questions and, most likely, cause additional questions to be raised.

Week 2: Monotheism vs. Polytheism Part I

At the beginning of the second class, I emphasized asking God to give us a heart for those within the Mormon community and for all those who do not know Christ as Lord and Savior instead of focusing on how “stupid” one may think another’s beliefs may be. After a brief review of Joseph Smith’s first vision account (the one commonly accepted by Mormons) and the direction given to Smith by Heavenly Father, I introduced the class to the polytheistic teachings within Mormonism, using their authoritative texts as well as Bible references commonly used by Mormons.

The setup for this week (and the ensuing weeks) was predominantly discussion based. I would share a Mormon teaching, answer any questions students had about this teaching, and then ask the students how this may differ from biblical teaching. First, we discussed the creation narrative from the Mormon perspective: “In the beginning, the head of the gods called a Council of the gods, and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.”² Then, we read the creation narrative given in

² Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 349.

Genesis 1:1 and 1:26. After being asked why Genesis 1:26 uses a plural construction with respect to God, many in the class brought up the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is a doctrine that many Mormons find confusing and about which Joseph Smith teaches the following:

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God! I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster.³

It does not help that, generally speaking, Christians do not know how to explain the doctrine of the Trinity very well. I shared with the class that it is important to point out to Mormons that Christians do not believe that the Son is the Father, the Father is the Son, and so on. This doctrine of modalism was deemed a heresy long ago and is not accepted in the Christian church. After questioning the class further, I walked the students through the manner in which the same author who wrote Genesis 1:26 was the same author who wrote Deuteronomy 6:4—Moses. This fact is important because Moses would not start the Pentateuch with a teaching of multiple gods and then end the Pentateuch with a teaching of one God.

The final discussion for the class surrounded Jesus's quotation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34-35. Mormons often use these passages to show that even Jesus teaches that there are multiple gods when he quotes the Old Testament. It is very important for Christians to take their Mormon friends to Psalm 82 and go over it carefully. First, Christians should point out that verse 7 shows that this psalm is a psalm of condemnation and not a psalm you hope is speaking about you. Second, if needed, Christians may point out that Mormons' own prophet, James Talmage, taught that Psalm 82 was about actual men dying and not about other gods, so to try to use this passage in such a way is to

³ Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, vol. 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 476.

ignore the context of the psalm and the teaching of a prophet in their own church.⁴ After answering last-minute questions, I told the class that we would continue the discussion the following week concerning the Mormon teaching of the plurality of gods with regard to their pre-existence and exultation.

Week 3: Monotheism vs. Polytheism Part II

At the start of the third class, I reminded the participants to try to set up their first meeting with a Mormon in order to listen to his or her presentation of the gospel so that they could schedule a second meeting after our final class together. After a quick review of material from the previous two weeks, we prayed for God to soften our hearts in such a way that we would have a genuine love and desire to see our Mormon friends come to know him as the one true God of the Bible. Continuing our discussion on the Mormon teaching of polytheism compared to the biblical teaching of monotheism, I started by sharing with the class the Mormon doctrine of the pre-existence. Although greater discussion concerning the nature of God the Father would take place the following week, I quickly explained the Mormon teaching of exultation by quoting Mormon prophet Orson Hyde: “Remember that God, our Heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved forward and overcome, until he has arrived at the point where he now is.”⁵ In addition, I recommended that students memorize a quotation from Mormon prophet Lorenzo Snow: “As man is, God once was, as God is,

⁴ James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Houston, TX: Covenant Communication, 2006), 501.

⁵ Orson Hyde, “The Man to Lead God’s People—Overcoming—A Pillar in the Temple of God—Angels’ Visits—the Earth (October 6, 1853),” in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:123.

man may become.”⁶ Snow’s statement is one that every Mormon would be familiar with; therefore, they would be unable to deny the teaching of polytheism within Mormonism.

Because Heavenly Father was once a man who is now God of this earth, according to Mormonism, the class moved on to a discussion about spirit children: “In the Heaven where our spirits were born, there are many Gods, each one of whom has his own wife or wives, which were given to him previous to his redemption, while yet in his mortal state.”⁷ Mormons believe that before being born on this earth, human beings had to have been born in heaven through a physical relationship between Heavenly Father and one of his wives; these children in heaven are called spirit children. It is necessary to teach this Mormon doctrine so that Christians can see why Mormons may refer to them as “brother” or “sister.” Mormons believe that we are all brothers and sisters because we all literally share the same father in heaven. This is how Mormons interpret passages in the Bible that proclaim Jesus as the “firstborn.” According to Mormon theology, Jesus was the first spirit child of Heavenly Father and one of his wives.

Next, the class discussed how Mormons will explain their doctrine of exultation, which is the process that Heavenly Father went through when he was a man long ago, before he became a God. According to Mormonism, we human beings may also go through this process by doing good works and becoming *like* God. As mentioned above, Snow writes, “As man is, God once was, as God is, man may become.”⁸ I shared with the class a common argument that Mormons offer and asked the participants how they would respond:

Have you ever had one of your children try to copy what you were doing like wear one of your shoes or something similar? Well, your child does this because they want to be like you, they want to be like their father or mother, and that brings you

⁶ Lorenzo Snow, quoted in Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 105.

⁷ Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (Salt Lake City: Seagull Book & Tape, 1993), 37.

⁸ Snow, quoted in Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, 105.

much joy. In the same way, we want to be like our Heavenly Father. We cannot do so on this earth perfectly, but eventually we will be like him.

This argument helps to lower the defensiveness of others by trying to show that it is out of love and affection for Heavenly Father that Mormons want to be like him and not out of blasphemous thoughts and desires. The class responded by sharing that living in a way that is God-honoring is completely different from believing one can become like God in the sense of being a god themselves.

The class spent the rest of our time reading Isaiah 43-46 in order to formulate our final response to the Mormon teachings of exultation and polytheism. God shows that he is the only God in existence. In fact, he proclaims that he does not even know of any other gods, that there were never any gods before him, and that there will never be any gods after him. The book of Isaiah is a powerful tool to use when speaking with those in the Mormon community because it denies so many of their doctrines at once. Isaiah disproves that there were gods before God; it disproves that God has goddess wives (by showing that God does not even know of any other gods, and he would surely know his wife if he had one [or many of them]); and it disproves that we human beings can become gods ourselves one day. After answering final questions, I shared with the class that we would be focusing our next session on what Mormonism teaches about Heavenly Father and compare that to the biblical teaching about God the Father.

Week 4: The Nature of God the Father

At the start of the fourth class, after quickly reviewing the information taught over the previous three weeks information, I reminded the participants to set up their meeting with a Mormon if they had not done so already. Next, I explained that we are going to get into some of the teachings of the Mormon church that may bring about a variety of emotions. I warned the class that we must keep those emotions under control when speaking to those of the Mormon faith. We must gently and lovingly share the truth that is proclaimed in God's Word because most Mormons have never read the entire

Bible; therefore, they have not been taught about the things in God’s Word that contradict the LDS church’s teachings. I started by reading a few quotes from Joseph Smith and other Mormon prophets that every Mormon would be familiar with. As mentioned above, Lorenzo Snow writes, “As man is, God once was, as God is, man may become.”⁹ Further, Joseph Smith proclaims the following in his most famous sermon, known as the “King Follett Discourse”:

I want you all to know God, to be familiar with him What sort of being was God in the beginning? First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, is a man like unto one of yourselves If you were to see him today, you would see him in all the person, image and very form as a man I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are the simple and first principles of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another, and that God himself; the father of us all dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did What did Jesus say? (mark it elder Rigdon) Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power; to do what? Why what the Father did, that answer is obvious Here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you—namely, by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.¹⁰

Finally, concerning the bodily form of God the Father, Smith states, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s: the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Although there are many more quotes from authoritative teachings within the Mormon church concerning the nature of God the Father (or Heavenly Father), these three quotes suffice to show how Mormonism departs from Christian orthodoxy. After answering many questions, reminding the participants to do their best to keep their emotions under control, and asking how they would respond to the above-mentioned

⁹ Snow, quoted in Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, 105.

¹⁰ Joseph Smith Jr., “Character and Being of God—Creation—Salvation of the Dead—The Unpardonable Sin—Resurrection—Baptism of the Spirit, Etc. (April 6, 1844),” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6 (Liverpool: Asa Calkin, 1859), 3-4.

claims, I led the group in a discussion regarding the Christian response to these teachings as well as possible Mormon replies to the Christian response.

One of the ways that Christians can lovingly respond to Mormon claims concerning God the Father is to ask their Mormon friends how they would understand Jesus's teaching that "God is spirit" (John 4:24). In addition to this teaching, the Bible also records that no one has seen God, nor can anyone see him face to face (Exod 33:20; John 1:18). In addition to these Scripture passages, Christians should take their Mormon friends to Isaiah 43-46 for an undeniable teaching concerning God the Father. I then informed the class about the following week—how we would discuss the nature of God the Son to see if and how Mormons depart from the biblical teaching concerning Jesus Christ. After praying for God to break our hearts for all those who do not know him, I dismissed the class.

Week 5: The Nature of God the Son

At the start of the fifth class, I provided a quick overview of the course thus far. Before opening with prayer, I prepared the participants by sharing with them how we are going to see how many of the doctrines we have already discussed will show up the more we dive into the teachings of the Mormon church. Therefore, although our focus is on the true Christ of the Bible, if a Mormon can see even one departure from Christian orthodoxy, the rest of their teachings crumble.

I brought to the class's attention the following Mormon teaching. First, Mormon apostle Orson Pratt writes, "In the Heaven where our spirits were born, there are many Gods, each one of whom has his own wife or wives, raises up a numerous family of sons and daughters; indeed, there will be no end to the increase of his own children: for each father and mother will be in a condition to multiply forever and ever."¹¹ Second,

¹¹ Pratt, *The Seer*, 37.

Lorenzo Snow teaches that in the pre-mortal spirit life, Jesus, Lucifer, and all of us were the spirit children of God and his wives.¹² Third, in *The Articles of Faith*, James Talmage explains that “Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh.”¹³

These teachings of the Mormon church are important for Christians to know and understand so that they can see the difference between the Mormon Jesus and the biblical Jesus because a false christ, who is no christ at all, cannot save anyone. In fact, Paul declares to the church at Corinth that he is afraid that they are so quickly departing from his and the other apostles’ teachings and believing a different gospel, christ, or spirit (2 Cor 11:4). I then walked the class through an example that Christians can use to show that there is such a thing as different Jesuses taught by other religions. Believers can ask their Mormon friends to consider Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teaching that Jesus is the archangel Michael.¹⁴ Christians can ask, “Do you, as a faithful Mormon, believe that Jesus is the archangel, Michael?” I shared with the class that Mormons will sometimes say that they do not believe that statement or that they have no right to judge another’s beliefs; however, if pressed further and asked if Mormonism teaches that Jesus is the archangel Michael, then they will ultimately respond with “No.” At this time, it is important to ask if the Jesus of Jehovah’s Witnesses has any power to save someone? This is an important exercise because it shows that other people can use the same language (e.g., Jesus Christ) and Bible references (e.g., 1 Thess 4:16) and still not be speaking of the same or true Jesus who described in God’s Word. Christians are trying to lovingly show our Mormon friends that the Jesus proclaimed in Scripture, which

¹² Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, 93-99.

¹³ James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 466-67.

¹⁴ This teaching comes from 1 Thess 4:16 of the *New World Translation* (NWT), which the Jehovah’s Witnesses use as their Bible.

Christians believe is truthful and authoritative, is not the same Jesus taught in Mormonism.

Mormons may share with Christians how the Bible teaches that Jesus is the firstborn, the literal offspring of God the Father, by sharing Colossians 1:15, which states that Jesus is “the firstborn of all creation.” One of the reasons I love that Mormons use this verse is that Christians can ask their Mormon friends to read the next few verses of the passage in order to understand the context of what is being said. Christians can point to verse 18, which show that the particular passage in question teaches how Jesus is preeminent and not, as Mormons believe, literally the firstborn of God the Father. The final discussion we had in class occurred when I asked if there were any other examples of “firstborn” being used in the Bible in a figurative or non-literal way. The nation of Israel is also said to be God’s firstborn (Exod 4:22), but we do not believe that God literally birthed a nation. Therefore, there are many times when the Bible uses language in a non-literal manner, and we can know this by reading passages of Scripture within their contexts. After asking our Father to allow us to see more of Christ, the true Christ, and to soften our hearts for all those who do not know the truth, I dismissed the class.

Week 6: Was Joseph Smith a Prophet?

At the start of the sixth class, I was pleased to hear that most participants had their first meeting with a Mormon during which time they listened to their presentation of the Mormon gospel and the supposed need for the restoration of the Christian church. After answering additional questions based on some of these encounters, I quickly went through an overview of the course so far and prayed for God to continue to soften our hearts for those within the Mormon community as well as to soften the hearts of those with whom we would come into contact.

This week’s class time focused on how to ask Mormons if they have tested Joseph Smith as a prophet according to the biblical standard. Throughout my experiences

with Mormons, I have been surprised to discover that they did not know the Bible has a test for the authenticity of a prophet. Therefore, I took the class to two passages in Deuteronomy. First, in Deuteronomy 13:1-5, God says,

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, “Let us go after other gods,” which you have not known, “and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Later, in Deuteronomy 18:22, God says, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”

It is important for Christians to be able to point out these passages to their Mormon friends so that they can see that the Bible teaches that even if one prophecy does not come to pass or even if supposed prophets have true prophecies and yet lead people after other gods, then they are not to be feared or respected but—in Israel’s time, at least—to be put to death. So, the question is this: did Joseph Smith have any false prophecies, say things that were not true while claiming to receive revelations from the Lord, or lead anyone after other gods? Time does not allow for the many prophecies that Smith proclaimed to be from the Lord to come to pass. One such prophecy supposedly from God himself was this: “Now, verily I say unto you my servants, Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon, saith the Lord, it is expedient to translate again; And, inasmuch as it is practicable, to preach in the regions round about until conference; and after that it is expedient to continue the work of translation until it be finished” (Doctrine and Covenants 73:4-5). In this passage, God declares that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon

would finish translating the Bible in their lifetimes. Although Smith translated some of the Bible, he did not come near to translating the entire Bible.

Another statement that Joseph Smith made was that “the Book of Mormon [is] the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”¹⁵ However, there are almost 4,000 changes from the first edition of the Book of Mormon (in 1830) to the 1964 edition.¹⁶ Therefore, the Book of Mormon can hardly be the most correct book on earth. There are other prophecies concerning the Lord’s return and the building of Mormon temples that have still not come to pass, which are facts that even the most faithful Mormons cannot deny.

Finally, the class discussed how the sum of the arguments can be the turning point in participants’ discussions with their Mormon friends. Mormons can either deny the clear biblical teachings about creation, the Father, and salvation through the Son and continue to affirm Joseph Smith and others within Mormonism as true prophets, or Mormons must deny Joseph Smith as a prophet and the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After prayer for those without the true Christ, class was dismissed.

Week 7: Common Arguments and Responses

At the start of the seventh class, I reviewed content previously covered and asked participants how their initial meetings with their Mormon friends went. Of the thirty-eight participants who started the course, thirty-three were still coming to every class, had completed their first meeting with a Mormon, and had their second meeting scheduled. Many of the couples in the class met with Mormon missionaries with another

¹⁵ Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 461.

¹⁶ Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996), “Introduction.”

couple from the class. This allowed for participants of different comfort levels to listen and ask questions as needed. There were some questions that Mormon missionaries raised that led into our discussion of other commonly raised arguments by Mormons and how Christians can respond.

Many times, when Christians ask Mormons if they believe the Bible, Mormons will respond by saying something like this: “We believe in the Bible as long as it is translated properly.”¹⁷ Mormons often say this because many are taught that the Bible was translated so many times that one cannot know the original. It is as if they believe that the Bible was written in Hebrew, translated to Greek, then Egyptian, Ethiopian, Latin, and so on, all the way until the current English version(s). A good question for Christians to ask their Mormon friends is if they know the difference between transmission and translation. They will most likely say, “No,” so Christians can gently explain the difference between transmission and translation and how we *do* have a trustworthy translation of the Word of God in our English Bibles.

The class further discussed absolute truths, baptisms for the dead, and marriage in heaven. However, we spent much time on the Mormon teaching of faith plus works for salvation. The third Article of Faith reads, “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” Also, 2 Nephi 25:23 reads, “. . . for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” These two passages are enough to show that Mormonism does not allow for individuals to be saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Second Nephi 25:23 sounds similar to Ephesians 2:8-9, which reads, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” However, careful students of Scripture

¹⁷ In 1842, Joseph Smith wrote thirteen “Articles of Faith,” which explain the basic doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The response from Mormons quoted above comes from article 8.

will be able to see the difference between the biblical teaching and the Mormon belief. However, our Mormon friends have a response. They will typically ask if Christians think that people have to “just believe” and do nothing else as if works do not matter. Mormons will most likely point to James 2:26 (“faith apart from works is dead”) in order to show that works *do* matter in salvation. However, as with most Bible verses that Mormons use, so with James 2:26 it is important to look at the entire passage within its context to see that James agrees with what Paul writes in Ephesians as well as with what the rest of the New Testament teaches. True believers will produce fruit of righteousness as evidence of the inward change that has been wrought by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the class closed in prayer for the conversations we would soon have. We also asked that God would continue to soften the hearts of our Mormon friends as well as our own hearts so that we could be used to share the gospel in an effective way. After explaining that we would have a mock debate for our next and final week of class, I dismissed the participants.

Week 8: Mock Debate

At the start of the eighth and final class, I answered any last-minute questions from participants after going through our final review of the course. The setup for this week was to first remind participants of our class gathering that would occur Friday, December 30 in my home. The purpose of this final meeting would be to hear how God has worked in the lives of those within the Mormon community whom participants encountered, as well as the participants themselves. After we opened in prayer, the class began the mock debate.

This project had thirty-three students go through the entire course, and during this last week, I felt it was best to practice all the information that we had learned. I acted as if I were a Mormon missionary visiting participants’ homes. Participants asked me questions, and I asked them questions in return. I did my best to ask and answer questions

as someone within the Mormon community would so that the students could practice responding, using Scripture as their foundation, in a loving and gentle manner. There was a lot of laughter and even some frustration among some of the participants. However, I encouraged the class that it is better to get their frustration out in this room rather than when they are in front of those with whom they are trying to share the true gospel. Before ending the course, I reminded participants that salvation will only come through the regenerating work of God and that although I believe in the value of apologetics, even the best arguments will not guarantee the salvation of others. After our final prayer, class was dismissed.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Teaching laypeople to engage Mormons with the gospel was a blessing beyond what I could have imagined when I began this project. Although there were challenges, there were many laypeople in my church who were eager to learn more about Mormonism and how to defend Christianity when conversing with their Mormon friends. Almost all participants in the course knew of a Mormon in their neighborhood, at work, and the like. In fact, one participant grew up in a nominal Mormon household. He and his wife attend our church, but his family is still in the Mormon community. By the end of this course, I saw how God cultivated in the hearts of many people who participated in this study an urgency to share the gospel not only with those within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but also with people of various non-Christian backgrounds. That desire to share the gospel with all people made the entire project worth it.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the laypeople of Jersey Baptist Church (JBC) in New Albany, Ohio, to engage Mormons with the gospel. This project fulfilled the intended purpose. However, after going through this project once, I have had many others say that they wished they would have joined the class because they had spoken with other participants and heard good things about the class. Therefore, I believe I will be able to implement this project again next year in order to allow more laypeople within JBC to learn about engaging Mormons with the gospel. In addition to targeting laypeople within the church, I would like to reach out to students in the high school ministry as well. Most public school students know Mormons in their school, and they can be a

beacon of light for those Mormons with whom they come into contact. Another reason that I would like to implement this project again is that Eric Johnson, author and co-author of a handful of books on Mormonism, invited me to Utah to shadow him as he engages with Mormons outside their largest temple during certain times of the year. I think a trip like this would be an amazing experience for the youth and adult chaperones who have gone through the content presented in this project. I believe that if participants were to use what they learned in my class to engage those within the Mormon community with the gospel and connect them to a local church in the Utah area, then those participants would grow in their faith in a magnificent way.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal of this project was to write an eight-session curriculum that will equip laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel by teaching key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures. The first goal was met through the help and guidance of my project supervisor, Todd Smeltzer, and my taking the course "Foundations of Teaching" through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was during this course that I was able to design a cohesive curriculum that focuses on what each individual participant should take away from every session. Then, my supervisor gave additional advice on how to organize the project in a way conducive for learning.

The second goal of this project was to teach laypeople at JBC to engage Mormons with the gospel by teaching laypeople key similarities and differences regarding common language and beliefs between the Bible and Mormon scriptures. This goal was achieved throughout the entire process of the course. One specific way that this goal was met was through the examination of common or similar terms that Mormons and Christians use. Participants discovered that when Mormons speak of Heavenly Father, they mean something completely different than when Christians speak of God the

Father. The same can be said of terms such as brother, heaven, and Jesus Christ. Mormons use similar language as Christians, yet they have definitions and meanings behind those terms that depart from orthodox Christianity.

Another way this second goal was met was by focusing on primary issues where Mormons depart from orthodox Christianity as clearly taught in the Bible. The purpose of this focus was to try to steer laypeople away from unnecessary insults concerning things that are not useful in sharing the gospel. For example, asking why Mormons do not drink tea or coffee, asking about Mormonism vis-à-vis polygamy, or asking about Mormon undergarments does not promote a posture for Mormons to receive the good news being shared. Therefore, laypeople were equipped with Bible passages, accurate to the surrounding context, which could be used show faithful Mormons where the teachings of Joseph Smith and the LDS church depart from the clear teachings of the Bible. Participants were also provided with common responses and Bible passages that Mormons often use to promote their faith so that Christians would be prepared to respond effectively to their Mormon friends. Thirty-three of the thirty-eight original participants took the pre- and post-course assessment. The pre-course mean was 3.07 out of 6.00, while the post-course mean was 5.16 out of 6.00, demonstrating a 68-percent average increase in understanding of the doctrinal differences between the teachings of the Christian Bible and Mormon sacred texts.

The third goal was to send laypeople from JBC to engage Mormons in the local community with the gospel using the evangelistic strategies learned from the course in a loving and respectful manner. This goal was met in a more unique manner than I had originally anticipated. As I have come across Mormons within my community, I have been shown by the Mormon missionaries how they have phones with a map of the area in which they are serving and how this map has different boundaries outlined. Missionaries use this so that when they connect with someone who wants to hear more about Mormonism, they check that person's address on their phone to see if the interested

person lives in the particular zone that those missionaries are in charge of. However, when someone interested in setting up a meeting with a Mormon missionary lives outside of those missionaries' zone, the missionaries will forward the interested party's information to the specific missionaries in charge of the zone that corresponds to the interested person's home address. Although it may seem like this process is more complicated than it needs to be, this strict system of missionaries' staying within their specified zones allows for more people outside of the Mormon church to come into contact with those on mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

My original thought was to have participants contact the local Mormon ward in order to set up a meeting with a missionary in charge of that zone. I did this same process the first time that I met with a Mormon missionary. In fact, Scott Sharples, the Mormon who was my mentor teacher during my first few years in teaching, was the one who told me to do this. However, I thought it might be strange if a dozen people from JBC called local wards around the same time. In addition to this concern, because of COVID-19, Mormon missionaries were not going door-to-door as they once did. Missionaries were using a new strategy while on mission. They were posting on Facebook selling walls promoting how to receive a free Book of Mormon. This was the main avenue I used for anyone who did not already know someone within the Mormon community. I sent a link to a Facebook post to anyone who needed it so that they could set up a meeting to hear Mormons' gospel presentation.

Since this goal focused on engaging Mormons with the gospel in a loving and respectful manner, before and after each class session, the class prayed for God to soften our hearts to those not only in the Mormon community but also all those who did not know Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. The hope was for participants to push out pride within themselves and receive or cultivate compassion for the lost. Because the focus of the course was on primary salvific issues, participants were given the tools to be able to engage Mormons with the gospel in such a way that participants would not stray

from the essential issues and get distracted with non-essential topics. In the end, the third goal of the project was met with success because at least thirty of the original thirty-eight participants met with someone of the Mormon faith.

Strengths of the Project

One of the strengths of the project was the ability to focus on the essential issues where Mormons depart from orthodox Christianity. Focusing on the essential issues allowed many participants who thought Mormonism was similar to Christianity to see the need to engage Mormons with the gospel. Many believed Mormonism was so similar to Christianity that they assumed Mormons were still Christians who perhaps had a few strange practices. However, after the course, every participant understood that those within the Mormon community do not truly know the God of the Bible and that there is no god outside of the one described in Scripture who can save.

Another strength of the project was the ability to complete the course in an eight-week period. As the weather started to get cold, participants were more likely to be consistent in their attendance, because there were less conflicts with sports and other outdoor activities. Also, because the course was on Sunday mornings after the first service, participants were already at the church, making it easier for them to fit class attendance into their schedules. Although it would be very easy to implement this project over the course of a few months, the eight-week timeline allowed participants to stay engaged from the beginning to the end.

I believe the greatest strength of the project was the format of each session as well as how the course climaxed in the final session with a mock debate. After writing chapters 2 and 3 of this project, I knew that the content of those chapters would be crucial to present to the project participants but that it would be most effective if the information was organized in a different manner for a classroom setting. I did my best to teach about a Mormon view or belief and then ask the class to engage in a discussion as to how they

would respond. Having a discussion-type format allowed for other issues to be raised that may not have been brought up in a traditional lecture-style classroom setting. This format also allowed participants to focus on one new piece of information at a time, which would build on itself as we worked through all eight sessions. The mock debate allowed me to see gaps in the learning of the participants that needed to be addressed and given more time in order for the students to feel best prepared for their upcoming conversations with someone within the Mormon community. The mock debate also allowed for participants to voice what they had learned in a safe environment. Further, this setup made participants more likely to store the information learned in their long-term memory rather than to rely on their notes taken in class without any practice.

Weaknesses of the Project

Although the content taught in the project covered essential issues where Mormonism departs from Christian orthodoxy, the amount of new information provided in the classroom was overwhelming to some. I could have done a better job of setting up and explaining the Mormon belief of the pre-existence all at once rather than splitting up the various aspects between three sessions. The Mormon notion of the pre-existence was a stumbling block for many in the classroom, and I believe that such stumbling could have been avoided if I had presented information in a better manner. The next time I teach this course, I will provide a document the week leading up to the discussion on the pre-existence so that students will be able to read and reflect regarding this unusual Mormon belief. This way, when I go over the subject in more detail in class, it will be the second time that students will be receiving this information, and they will be more likely ask clarifying questions, rather than questions that allow for the class to get off task on non-essential issues.

Another weakness of the project was my ability to manage the classroom. Even though I am a high school teacher and am comfortable in a classroom setting, because

there were so many people in the class who were much older than I, I sometimes allowed them to speak for a very long time and get the class off topic. I struggled to redirect the conversation back to the curriculum when someone older than I was speaking compared to when someone around my same age or younger was speaking. The wasted class time could have been avoided with a simple but direct redirection or questioning technique. The next time I teach this course, I will be better prepared in this area.

Although it was a strength to have the class take place on Sunday mornings, I would have preferred the project to have started in January. After the new year, most people are not distracted by the business of Thanksgiving and the Christmas season; thus, they would be more likely to complete all eight sessions and set up the recommended meetings with those in the Mormon community. I could have also done a better job of advertising to laypeople outside of my small circles of influence in order to train and get to know more people within Jersey Baptist Church.

What I Would Do Differently

Besides what I have mentioned above, one thing I would do differently is to slightly change the pre- and post-course survey questions. After going through the pre-course survey questions, I realized that so many people answered higher than what I felt their ability displayed in the class. For example, many people reported that they were confident they could present biblical passages for the qualifications for a prophet. However, as we got to that point in our course, almost no one knew even one qualification for a prophet or where the information is found in the Bible. I think it would be helpful to ask participants to list qualifications laid out in Scripture for a prophet. This would cause the participants to think about what they truly know, and then they may be more likely to answer the pre-course survey question honestly and accurately.

Another thing I would do differently is to work with my youth pastor to encourage high school students to participate in the course. I think this would be

beneficial even if we did not go on a mission trip to Utah because of the growing number of Mormons in the Columbus area. However, this course should be a requirement for any student or chaperone who wanted to attend the Utah mission trip. Also, I strongly believe that there needs to be a greater emphasis on training our students while they are still under our influence in areas of theology, apologetics, and spiritual disciplines. I would like to be a driving force in my church to train and raise up the next generation of disciple-makers.

Theological Reflections

The greatest thing that I learned about God during this project is how perfect and cohesive God's Word is. There are so many wrong ideas about God—both inside and outside of the church—that, I think, stem from portions of Scripture being taken out of context such that so many people are led astray from knowing the true God of the universe. Throughout this project, as I dove into various biblical passages, I was continuously amazed at the holiness and unpredictability of God. He does not behave in a way that humans would be able to conjure up in their own minds. My learning more about God's holiness and unpredictability has afforded me a firmer conviction of the truths of Scripture and its authority for me and my everyday life. There is no question that the God of the Bible is the one true God and that he is not willing to share his glory with any other. Mormons are missing the beauty of who God is due to their idolatrous and blasphemous views of God, themselves, and eternity. According to Mormons, God is just one of billions of gods in the universe and is no different from those of us on this earth other than the fact that he had already gone through the process of exaltation when he was serving his god on his earth many years ago. The Bible is clear that there are no other real gods in existence and that followers of Yahweh have no place for idols in their relationship with and worship of him.

The Mormon religion developed by a human, Joseph Smith, shows how prone to error and contradiction humans are. Smith has produced a religion for man in such a way that his contradicting doctrines have produced numerous issues for those in the Mormon community. And yet, when I read the Bible and see how all sixty-six books written by over forty authors produce one cohesive story, I realize that there is no way that any human (or group of humans) could have produced something so perfect outside of divine intervention. There is a glory in reading the living Word of God that cannot be matched by reading the Book of Mormon.

Another beauty drawn out from this study is the magnificence of Christ as portrayed in Scripture. The Mormon Jesus lacks a reverence to be modeled and worshipped. Mormons' Jesus is no different than everyone else on this earth. There is no beauty in his mission of coming to this earth as a humble servant to save sinners. The Jesus of the Bible was not—and is not—a created being. There never was a time when he was not. God the Son clothed himself in flesh to save and adopt a people he created in love who wanted nothing to do with him. There is also a freedom that Christ brings to believers who understand that they could never be good enough on their own. I have seen so many Mormons heartbroken over their realization that as hard as they try to do more good works than bad, they will never be able achieve that goal. The reason Christians work for and serve Christ is radically different from the reason Mormons participate in good works. Christians do so out of love and reverence for Christ, whereas Mormons work in order to earn their eternity. The weight of Mormons' task to earn their own salvation is a burden that no person can bear and one from which the Jesus of the Bible desires to free them in order to bring rest to their souls.

Personal Reflections

One thing that I learned as a minister of the gospel is that the heavy weight of ministry is impossible to bear in one's own strength. Throughout this project, I have been

discipling and ministering to many people. There is so much hurt in the world, and much of it in my church and community comes from the lack of biblical literacy and desire for spiritual growth and the things of God. So many people with whom I come into contact believe they are saved because they said a prayer a long time ago or because they believe in God and Jesus in their minds even though their lives show no fruit of the Spirit. I have spent much time weeping for those who are lost and do not seem to be concerned about their spiritual state. It can be so easy to be blinded by the things in this world that distract us and keep us from the glory that is in Christ. He is the true joy that no other idol could ever produce.

Another thing I learned during this project was the importance and urgency of discipling my own family and putting away the foolish things of the world. Toward the end of this project, I learned that I was heading toward heart failure and the doctors were not sure what the root cause was. During this phase, there were a few months when I thought God was going to call me home at any moment. I realized how meaningless so many of the things that I gave my time to were and how little I felt I did for my wife, three boys, and those in my circles of influence. God woke me up and fostered an urgency in me to share his truth and to not be ashamed of the gospel. Although I knew in my mind that I am not guaranteed tomorrow, I always assumed that I would live to be in my eighties. In addition, I am very non-confrontational. However, while feeling as if my time on earth was coming to an end, I started to think about the legacy that I would leave and about how well or poorly I have stewarded the time and gifts God gave me. These thoughts and prayers led me to be more persistent in speaking truth to those inside and outside of the church—prayerfully, lovingly, and respectfully. God has allowed me to see much fruit in those conversations, and I pray that this urgency that he has cultivated inside of me will continue to be fanned into flame. My desire is to see the men in my church become true spiritual leaders in their households, training, discipling, and caring for their wives and children in such a way that they will produce men and women thirsty

for God's Word and eager to be obedient to the purposes he has for them. In sum, throughout this project, I have learned to be bolder for God's glory.

Conclusion

One cannot be a Christian without Christ. I could write a book about all the positive traits and characteristics of those within the Mormon community, but that would not do any good for them in terms of their standing before a holy God. The gods they serve do not exist; hence, those gods have no power to save. Salvation can come only through Jesus Christ. This is not the Mormon Jesus, who is a created being, brother of Lucifer, and one whose death on the cross was not enough to cover all of one's sins. This is the Jesus of the Bible, who offers salvation to all as a free gift. My greatest desire from this project is to see the hearts of Christians awakened to the need to share the true gospel to a dying world. I pray that believers would illuminate Christ, through the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God the Father.

APPENDIX 1
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric will be used by an expert panel to evaluate the Mormon course curriculum that I develop for this project.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

| Curriculum Evaluation Tool | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| 1 = Insufficient 2 = Requires Attention 3 = Sufficient 4 = Exemplary | | | | | |
| Criteria | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Comments |
| The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address. | | | | | |
| The history of Mormonism and the need to evangelize was clearly presented. | | | | | |
| The Mormon view of God was fairly represented. | | | | | |
| The biblical view of God was faithful to Scripture. | | | | | |
| The Mormon view of Jesus was fairly represented. | | | | | |
| The biblical view of Jesus was faithful to Scripture. | | | | | |
| The biblical definition of a prophet was faithful to Scripture and fairly presented concerning Joseph Smith's claim of being a prophet. | | | | | |
| Additional arguments that may arise were addressed. | | | | | |
| Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea. | | | | | |
| At the end of the course, participants will be able to better engage Mormons with the Gospel. | | | | | |

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 2

PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY

The following survey will be used to assess participants' general knowledge of the similarities and differences between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity.

PRE- AND POST-COURSE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of biblical of the similarities and differences between Mormonism and Orthodox Christianity of the participant. Luke T. Rininger is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Directions: Please answer the following statements by circling the option that best represents your agreement with the statement: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat, AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. Mormonism is a denomination within Christianity | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I can explain the Mormon teaching of the pre-existence | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I am confident I can answer differences brought up by a Mormon | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I understand the Mormon view of Heavenly Father | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I can present biblical passages promoting Monotheism | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I understand the Mormon view Jesus | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I can present biblical passages promoting Jesus' eternal existence | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I understand the history of the life of Joseph Smith | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 9. | I can present biblical passages promoting the qualifications for a prophet | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. | I have confidence in understanding Mormonism and sharing the gospel of Christianity with a Mormon | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 3

FINAL MEETING SURVEY

The following survey will be used to assess the number of participants who engaged a Mormon with a gospel conversation during the two weeks between the last day of class and the follow-up meeting.

FINAL MEETING SURVEY

Directions: Please circle the appropriate response to the following question:

I engaged in at least one gospel conversation with a Mormon Yes No

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, Gregg R. *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016.
- Baltzer, Klaus. *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Brooks, James A. *Mark*. New American Commentary, vol. 23. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991.
- Calvin, John. *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Bellingham, WA: Andesite Press, 2010.
- _____. *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*. Vol. 3. Bellingham, WA: Andesite Press, 2010.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1991.
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “Newsroom.” Prophets. Accessed January 18, 2023.
<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/prophets#:~:text=Members%20believe%20The%20Church%20of,continuing%20revelation%20and%20additional%20scripture>.
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *The Book of Mormon; The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; The Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981.
- Collins, Adela Yarbro. *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 2002.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*. Edited by Elliot Grudem. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Hamilton, James M., Jr. *John*. In *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 9, *John-Acts*, edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, 12-308. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.
- Hinckley, Gordon B. Quoted in Church News Archives, “‘Crown of Gospel Is upon Our Heads,” *The Church News*, June 20, 1998, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/1998/6/20/23250528/crown-of-gospel-is-upon-our-heads>.

- Hunter, Milton R. *The Gospel through the Ages*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968.
- Hyde, Orson. “The Man to Lead God’s People—Overcoming—A Pillar in the Temple of God—Angels’ Visits—the Earth (October 6, 1853).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 1:121-30. Liverpool: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854.
- Johnson, Dennis E. *Hebrews*. In *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews-Revelation*, edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, 17-218. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Jones, Timothy Paul. *How We Got the Bible*. Peabody: Rose, 2015.
- Kimball, Edward L. *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1982.
- Konkel, August H. *Deuteronomy*. In *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 2, *Deuteronomy-Ruth*, edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, 19-310. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J. *Handbook on Hebrews through Revelation*. Handbooks on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020.
- Lohse, Eduard. *Colossians and Philemon*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
- Ludlow, Daniel H., ed. *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Vol. 3. New York City: Macmillan, 1992.
- Martin, Walter. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003.
- Melick, Richard R. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. New American Commentary, vol. 32. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Deuteronomy*. New American Commentary, vol. 4. Nashville: B&H, 1994.
- Motyer, J. A. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Plummer, Robert L. *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*. 40 Questions Series. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2010.
- Pratt, Orson. *The Seer*. Salt Lake City: Seagull Book & Tape, 1993.
- Pratt, Parley P. *Key to the Science of Theology*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2016.
- Quinn, Michael D. *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years*. Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press, 1983.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Handbook on Acts and Paul’s Letters*. 2nd ed. Handbooks on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.

- _____. *Hebrews*. Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.
- Simpson, J. A, and E. S. C. Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Smith, Gary. *Isaiah 40-66*. New American Commentary, vol. 15B. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009.
- Smith, James R. “Number of Missionaries Serving from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” Latter-Day Saint Mission Prep. October 9, 2012, <https://latterdaymissionprep.com/news/number-of-mormon-missionaries/>.
- Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. “Character and Being of God—Creation—Salvation of the Dead—The Unpardonable Sin—Resurrection—Baptism of the Spirit, Etc. (April 6, 1844).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 6:1-11. Liverpool: Asa Calkin, 1859.
- _____. *History of the Church*. Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950.
- _____. *History of the Church*. Vol. 4. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950.
- _____. *History of the Church*. Vol. 6. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950.
- Snow, Lorenzo. Quoted in Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968).
- Sproul, R. C, ed. *ESV Reformation Study Bible*. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015.
- Strauss, Mark L. *Mark*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Talmage, James E. *The Articles of Faith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981.
- _____. *Jesus the Christ*. Houston, TX: Covenant Communication, 2006.
- Tanner, Jerald, and Sandra Tanner. *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministries, 1996.
- Thomson-DeVeaux, Amelia. “Study Shows That Mormons Are the Fastest-Growing Religious Group in the U.S.” PRRI. Last modified May 2, 2012. <https://www.ppri.org/spotlight/study-shows-that-mormons-are-the-fastest-growing-religious-group-in-the-u-s/>.
- Thompson, J. A. *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 5. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974.
- Vickers, Brian J. “Hermeneutics of 1 John.” Unpublished class notes for “Johannine Theology” (80354), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2022.

- Vidu, Adonis. *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
- Welch, John W. *Opening the Heavens*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2017.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament in One Volume*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2003.
- Wright, N. T. *Hebrews for Everyone*. 2nd ed. New Testament for Everyone. Westminster: John Knox Press, 2004.
- Young, Brigham. “Character of God and Christ—Providences of God—Self-Government, &c (July 8, 1860).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 8:114-17. Liverpool: George Q. Cannon, 1861.
- _____. “Discourse.” *Deseret News*, June 18, 1873. BYU Library Digital Collections. <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews3/id/143049/>.
- _____. “Providences of God—Privileges and Duties of the Saints—Spiritual Operations and Manifestations—The Spirit World, &c (September 1, 1859).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 7:237-44. Liverpool: Amasa Lyman, 1860.
- _____. “Self-Government—Mysteries—Recreation and Amusements, Not in Themselves Sinful—Tithing—Adam, Our Father and Our God (April 9, 1852).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 1:46-53. Liverpool: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854.
- _____. “To Know God is Eternal Life—God the Father of Our Spirits and Bodies—Things Created Spiritually First—Atonement By the Shedding of Blood (February 8, 1857).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 4:215-21. Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1857.
- _____. “The Word of Wisdom—Spiritualism (October 30, 1870).” In *Journal of Discourses*, 13:274-83. Liverpool: Horace S. Eldredge, 1871.

ABSTRACT

TRAINING THE LAYPEOPLE AT JERSEY BAPTIST CHURCH OF NEW ALBANY, OHIO, TO ENGAGE MORMONS WITH THE GOSPEL

Luke Thomas Rininger, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. George H. Martin

This project develops an evangelistic strategy training laypeople to engage Mormons with the gospel. The first chapter provides basic introductory information concerning the need for evangelizing Mormons in Columbus, Ohio. The second chapter presents the biblical teachings regarding the eternality of God the Father and God the Son. The third chapter provides the Mormon teachings, as well as the Christian apologetical response, for polytheism, the creation of God the Father, and the creation of God the Son. The fourth chapter provides details and descriptions of the 8-week course on engaging Mormons with the gospel. The fifth chapter describes the strengths and weaknesses of the project, including what should be done differently if the project were to be repeated.

VITA

LUKE THOMAS RININGER

EDUCATION

BA, Ohio University, 2011

MEd, Grand Canyon University, 2013

MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

High School Math Teacher, Pickerington High School Central, Pickerington,
Ohio, 2011-2023