

YOU SHALL BE AS GODS:
THE MORMON SACRED STORY

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How to study religious movements?

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I. RESEARCHERS STUDYING religious movements differ with regard to what is the most **basic question**:

1. **How do they function?** (sociology, psychology)
2. **What do they proclaim?** (theology, philosophy)

Ad 1. We treat them as one more kind of social groups. This is **reductionism**. It turns its back on their common **aspiration to be new religions**.

Ad 2. Aspiring to be a religion requires doctrines to be proclaimed, and their rational premises to be formulated.

This is why any **analysis of a doctrine as well as a rational evaluation of the truth of its content are essential for any overall assessment of every religious movements**.

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Why philosophy?

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Theological research in **sacred stories** (doctrines) has been raising serious questions:

Theoretical issue: theology is not a scientific inquiry in any sense, but an interpretation of a revelation;

Practical issue: theologians are not impartial researchers due to the competition on the 'market of religious services'

Philosophy is immune to such arguments because:

1. It limits itself to rational considerations only;
2. It does not refer to revealed truths;
3. It does not proclaim any religious concept of salvation.

Who are the Mormons?

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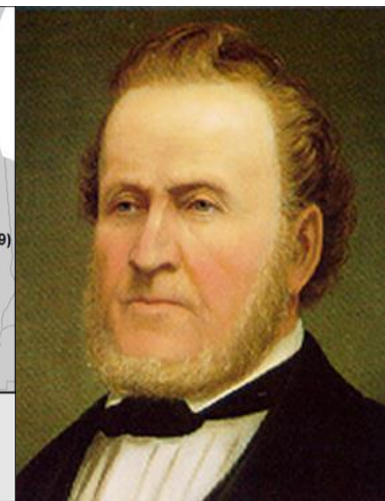
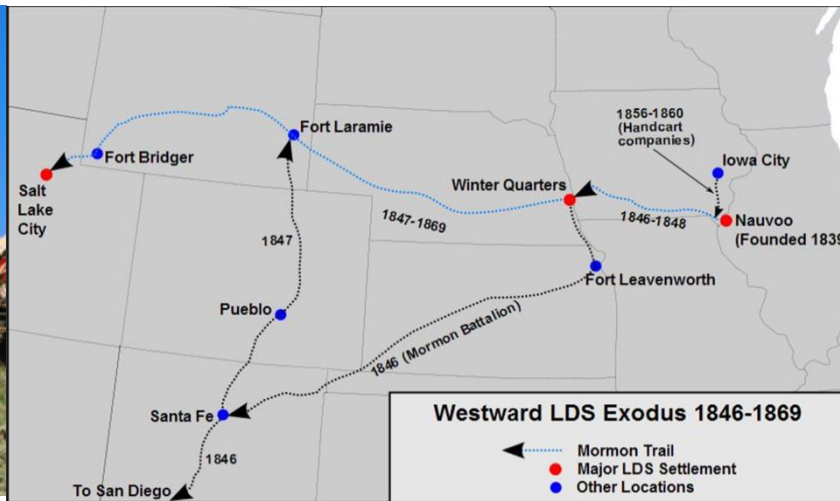
- The founder of the Mormon church, **Joseph Smith** (1805-1844) lived in times of great spiritual upheaval in America.
- In 1820 Smith was said to receive a **revelation** in which he beheld Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.
- This revelation made him realize that all churches of his time are false churches.
- For this reason he took up the task of **restoration of the true church of Jesus Christ**.



Basic facts on Mormons

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- Claiming to be the only true religion and the acceptance of polygamy caused persecution.
- Joseph Smith himself fell victim to the persecutions, shot dead on 27th of June 1844 by an angry crowd in Carthage, Illinois.
- After Smith's untimely death **Brigham Young** (1801-1877) become the leader. To protect Mormons from violent attacks he led them further to the West.



Basic facts on Mormons

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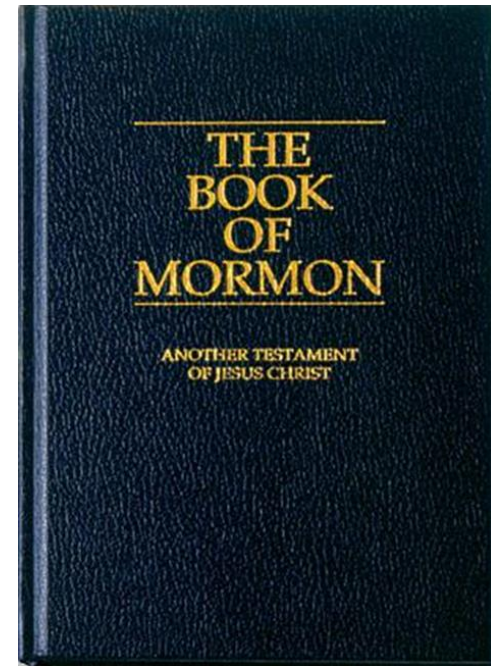
- Young, called by Mormons 'American Moses' led them to the Great Salt Lake.
- They founded **Salt Lake City** which initiated growth of the state of Utah. In 1851 Young became its governor.
- Salt Lake City has been ever since the world centre of the Mormon church, and the movement itself has spread across the globe.



The Book of Mormon – the Source of the Sacred Story

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- His revelations Smith reported in the following works: *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*.
- Among the scriptures venerated by Mormons the *Book of Mormon* has a special place. It is called *the Gospel of 19th Century*.
- As we can read in the introduction of this book: „**the Book of Mormon was 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**“.
- The text was first printed in 1830.



The Book of Mormon – the Source of the Sacred Story

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- According to Joseph Smith this book was written as a result of translation of a text engraved on golden plates dug down on Hill Cumorah, upstate New York.
- He claimed that the plates were engraved with hieroglyphs of the language referred to by Smith as **'reformed Egyptian'**.



The Book of Mormon – the Source of the Sacred Story

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- *The Book* tells the story of the tribes of Israel who have reached the shores of America **20 centuries before Columbus**.
- It begins with the life of **prophet Lehi** of Jerusalem (not mentioned in the Bible) who was forced to leave the holy city due to persecution from the Jews.



- This was supposed to happen during the reign of Zedekiah (meaning **before the destruction of the city by armies of Nebuchadnezzar**).

The Book of Mormon – the Source of the Sacred Story

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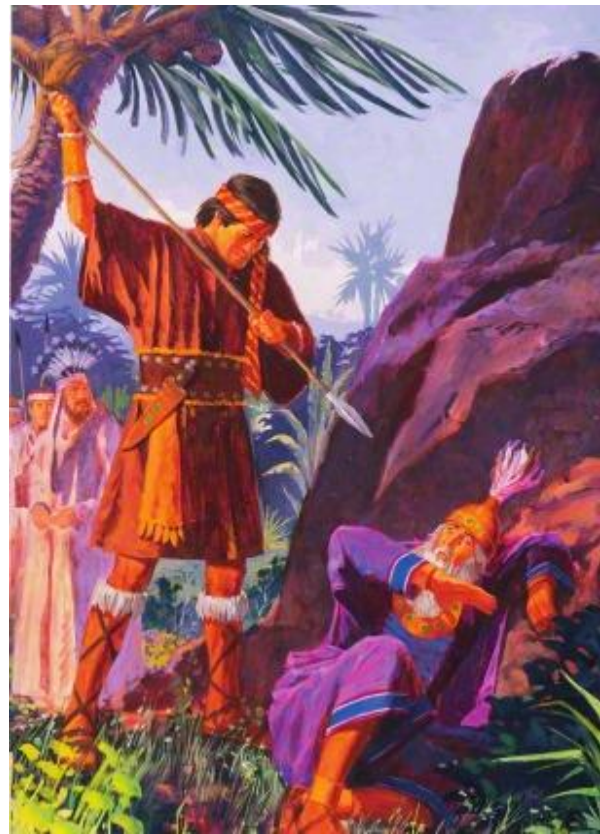
- To escape persecution Lehi, ordered by God, built a ship and with his sons sailed to America.
- His travel was a success thanks to the use of compass (**Liahona**) handed by God to Lehi.
- Conflicts between Lehi's sons have divided the newcomers into wicked Lamanites and righteous Nephites.



The Book of Mormon – the Source of the Sacred Story

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- Out of the Israeli tribes living in America only Lamanites survived.
- According to Mormons the native American population are their direct descendants.
- Moroni, son of the prophet Mormon, and the last of the Nephites, hid the plates with the engraved *Book of Mormon* on Hill Cumorah.
- It all took place between 600 BC and AD 421.



The Book of Mormon – the Source of the Sacred Story

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- The Book also contains the account of **Christ's visit to America**, which allegedly took place after his ascension.
- According to this account (*3 Nephi*, chapters 11 to 28) what Jesus did in America, among other things, was:

- **Appointing another 12 disciples;**
- **Giving a sermon similar to the Sermon on the Mountain;**
- **Establishing the sacrament of bread and wine;**
- **Predicting future events (including His second coming).**

After that He left for Heaven.



The Key Components of the Mormon Sacred Story

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The World

- According to *Book of Mormon* the world has been created by God through Jesus as his intermediary.
- According to Mormons the age of Earth is 7000 years.

They also proclaim that:

- „Jesus Christ created this world and everything in it. **He also created many other worlds.** (...) By him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, **and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God**”.



Gospel Principles, p. 23

The Key Components of the Mormon Sacred Story

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Man

- **Mormons accept the biblical message about human person: the being in the image and likeness of God.**

- **But:**

Mormon official declaration *The Family* states: „ALL HUMAN BEINGS – male and female – are created in the image of God. Each is a **beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents**, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny”.

- Any interpretation respecting basic conformity with the source must infer from this a surprising conclusion that **God Creator has to have a spouse.**



The Key Components of the Mormon Sacred Story

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God

- The first of the Basic Points of *Belief of the Mormon church* is: „**We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost**”.
- But a closer analysis shows that those are three separate divine beings.
- The essence of the Mormon conception of God was expressed in the famous saying by Joseph Smith: „**God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man [...] That is the great secret. [...] I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form – like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man**”

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345



Mormon Holy Land

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Mormons are a millenarian community. They expect a thousand-year kingdom of Jesus to come before the end of the World.

The New Jerusalem, will be built those days in North America. There is a prophecy on this given by God to Joseph Smith:

„Elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, [...] in this land, which is **the land of Missouri**, [...] **this is the land of promise**, and the place for **the city of Zion**. And [...], **the place which is now called Independence** is the center place.”

Doctrine and Covenants, 57, 1-4



Mormon Holy Land

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And because the Garden of Eden (the Paradise) was also situated in the State of Missouri the history of the world would thus complete a full circle:

- **„The earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory”**

Gospel Principles, p. 265

Mormon sacred story provides a detailed vision of human destinies after death.

The ultimate destiny of humankind is described in the **plan of eternal progress**.

The plan assumes that people will be allocated to respective kingdoms by virtue of what they have accomplished during their earthly lives.



Vision of Salvation – the Plan of Eternal Progress

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Three groups of the saved

Risen from the dead, people will be divided in three classes:

- The first of them being baptized Mormons who are going to live a heavenly **life in the Celestial Kingdom.**
- The second class will include righteous people who did not become Mormons in their lifetime, and only after that (in spirit world) received the Mormon baptism. They will inhabit **the Terrestrial Kingdom.**
- The third class will be those who neither on earth nor in the spirit world received the Mormon baptism. Those will be bound after their resurrection for the underground sphere: **the Telestial Kingdom.**



Vision of Salvation – the Plan of Eternal Progress

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There is also a special reward for those who managed to reach the highest level of perfection in their mortal life.

These are the ones who learnt the plan of God, and obeyed his will on Earth. They will ascend to the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom, and thus will **have an opportunity to become gods themselves.**

In Smith's revelations it is said: **they are gods, even the sons of God"** .

Doctrine and Covenants, 76:51 and 58

This final achievement available within the frames of the plan of eternal progress is called 'Exaltation'.



Concluding Remarks

Concluding, I want to highlight two issues:

1. The Mormon Sacred Story sets up an **intellectual riddle**, which is this: it brings about inconsistencies and statements that challenge what a rational mind is able to tolerate, and yet they seem not to disturb in any way the members of the Mormon church.

The usual solution to this riddle is formulated more or less along these lines:

- **In today's world, dominated by economy we got used to seek optimal plans and best solutions.** And we cherish effectiveness of procedures far more than the abstract truths. The former of those two is exactly what **Mormon sacred story offers – clear procedures to achieve a good place in Heaven.**

Concluding Remarks

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2. However, as a philosopher of religion I have one reservation for such an approach. This **pragmatic approach to religion** invites to seek and find the offer that would deliver the result in the most efficient manner.

Efficiency seems to be the key issue in matters related to faith. **But is it?** The fundamental **goal of religion is, after all, salvation, brought about by intervening and really existing God.**

It is therefore not in the best interest of **sacred story to be the highest bid currently available on the market.**

The best for a sacred story is to be based on a true story.