

# THE APOSTASY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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“If I said what’s on my mind,  
You’d turn and walk away,  
Disappearing way back in your dreams.  
It’s so hard to be unkind,  
So easy just to say  
That everything is just the way it seems.”

*From the song, “A Man I’ll Never Be” by Boston*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SOME COUNSEL TO THE READER .....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE PROBLEM.....	4
THE APOSTASY OF THE LDS CHURCH .....	10
Acknowledgments Of Apostasy Within The LDS Church.....	10
Becoming Popular.....	17
Prophecies About Salt Lake City .....	20
Scriptural Prophecies About The Latter-Day Apostasy.....	21
Changes To The Temple Ordinances.....	25
Celestial Marriage.....	29
The Leadership Of The Church.....	36
Holy Men That Ye Know Not Of.....	43
Summary.....	46
IS THE LDS CHURCH STILL TRUE? .....	49
What Does “Apostasy” Mean?.....	49
The Four Main Areas Of Apostasy .....	52
The Calamities Will Begin Upon The Lord’s House.....	61
John Taylor’s Vision.....	63
The Church Will Be Set In Order .....	65
The Priesthood Restored For The Last Time.....	67
What About President Benson?.....	74
What Constitutes A Prophet? .....	76
WHAT SHOULD WE DO?.....	88
Dealing With Local Leaders .....	89
They Who Sit In Moses’ Seat .....	93
To Whom Shall We Go?.....	96
Who Are The Real Apostates?.....	99
Rules Of Thumb For Ultra-Mormons .....	104
A Plea For More Revelation.....	106
FINAL THOUGHTS AND TESTIMONY.....	110
Spiritual Experiences.....	112
Rational Explanations .....	113
Moral Principles .....	114

## SOME COUNSEL TO THE READER

This manuscript discusses some very difficult issues. It is not intended for non-Mormons. Nor is it intended for those whose faith is weak or who are not well versed in the doctrines, history, and/or practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I feel it is important that a foundation of faith and knowledge exists before a person attempts a study such as this one. Without such a foundation, the discussion which follows may do more damage than good to a person as far as building faith and promoting righteousness are concerned. I encourage all who receive a copy of this manuscript to use wisdom before sharing it with others - always keeping in mind the welfare and best interests of those with whom you share it.

Joseph Smith once said,

*I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen. (TPJS Pg.331)*

It has been my experience that even among the most active and faithful Mormons, we will find those who have great difficulty with some of the issues that follow. Please know that it is my intent to learn truth and to promote Zion, not to deceive or destroy. If there are false teachings found within these pages, which there probably are, I would encourage the reader to judge the teachings, rather than the author. If there are offensive but true teachings found within this manuscript, I would encourage the reader to prayerfully judge themselves in relation to those teachings, rather than judging God, his gospel, or his servants. I feel this is important to keep in mind as we proceed.

## INTRODUCTION

There are at least three types of "Mormons." I refer to these three types as anti-Mormons, social Mormons, and ultra-Mormons.

Everybody is familiar with anti-Mormons. These are people who claim to know more about Mormonism than most others. Some tend to pride themselves on knowing the "deep dark secrets" of LDS history and doctrine. Yet, for whatever reason, they have come to view it all from a rather negative perspective. Other anti-Mormons don't know much at all about LDS history or doctrine. They have simply had a bad experience with the church or its leaders. Most anti-Mormons have one thing in common: seldom do they say anything positive about the LDS church or its doctrine. They tend to view the whole of it as negative, hypocritical, and false. They often believe that no good thing could ever come from any part of Mormonism. They have

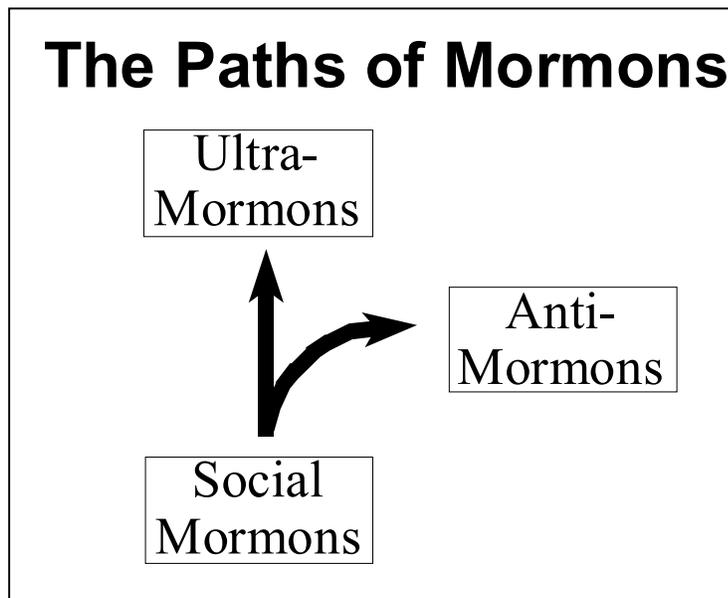
the uncanny ability to find something wrong with aspects of the church that are obviously praiseworthy and tend to criticize even the most innocent and positive remarks made by leaders of the church. Anti-Mormons generally claim that both social Mormons and ultra-Mormons are misled, naive, and uninformed. Yet, for some reason, many anti-Mormons find it difficult to leave Mormonism alone. They often refuse to leave quietly or let well enough alone. It is not enough for some anti-Mormons to simply reject Mormonism and leave it behind. For some reason, they feel they must attack it. They often seem to feel somewhat “duty bound” to correct others or justify their own views and conclusions regarding Mormonism.

The social Mormons, on the other hand, are those who are basically the rank and file members of the church. They are, in some ways, the opposite of the anti-Mormons. These are the devout church goers who tend to doubt no portion of the restored gospel or the church itself, whether they understand it or not. In word, social Mormons accept literally all of the leaders of the church, both past and present, without question or debate. Yet, in common study, conversation, and practice, social Mormons tend to appreciate the modern leaders of the church more than the early leaders, especially Brigham Young. Social Mormons are generally unable to successfully combat anti-Mormons. For the most part, social Mormons don't have the knowledge, or even the interest, to do so. They all but ignore the anti-Mormons and are usually content to remain active in the church without ever really gaining an understanding of the higher doctrines or difficult issues involved with Mormonism. Social Mormons usually have testimonies of the restored gospel, but may not fully understand or appreciate the source or content of their testimonies. Often, social Mormons can be accurately described as having “zeal without knowledge” or as accepting without question or understanding. Social Mormons may also include those who are simply inactive in the church - not because they know something, but more often because they don't.

Ultra-Mormons are a unique group of people whose numbers seem to have grown dramatically in recent years. Because of their diversity, they are a little more difficult to define. In general, ultra-Mormons are those who have spent a good deal of time thinking about the hard questions of Mormonism but who continue to have a strong testimony of Joseph Smith and the restored gospel. They've dealt with most of the difficult issues and are generally aware of the arguments of the anti-Mormons, both historical and doctrinal. In fact, ultra-Mormons even view some of the anti-Mormon arguments as further evidence that the restored gospel is true. Much of what is considered to be a negative by both the antis and the socials, such as plural marriage, Adam-God, or the united order, is often sweet to the taste of an ultra-Mormon. Ultra-Mormons also tend to have more appreciation for the early leaders of the church, especially Brigham Young, than they do for the modern leaders. Often frustrated by “modern Mormonism” in general, ultra-Mormons are not always active members of the LDS church. Some are even members of various LDS fundamentalist groups, while others have either been excommunicated for “apostasy” or have drifted away from the church on their own accord. Yet, there are numerous, active, church-going ultra-Mormons, many of whom are unknown to the general population of the church. This is often by design because of fear that they will be kicked out if their views are ever discovered. Some of these active ultra-Mormons are viewed as trouble-makers by the social Mormons because they continually bring up difficult issues or “off the wall” comments in Sunday School, Relief Society, and/or Priesthood meeting. Due to their love for and knowledge of the restored

gospel, they are often a little too adamant in their approach, making people uncomfortable and causing themselves to look and sound like fanatics.

These three general categories are not rigid in their definition. There are many shades of gray between them. However, most Latter-day Saints start out as social Mormons. As time passes, some of these social Mormons end up migrating into one of the other camps, a difficult and often painful transition indeed. Unfortunately, many of those on the path of becoming ultra-Mormons never finish the process and end up as anti-Mormons. This is often the result of having a bad experience with the LDS church or its leadership. When one is on the path of becoming an ultra-Mormon, there are many questions to be answered. The LDS church generally provides few good responses to these questions. In fact, often it provides incorrect answers or no answers at all. This leaves a bad taste in the mouth of the learning ultra-Mormon. In some cases it causes them to stop the learning process altogether and leave the whole issue behind them. Other people tend to only focus on the negative parts of the restored church, without giving equal time to the positive issues so clearly present. Still others are able to overcome these difficulties and continue the process of objectively and honestly searching for answers to their difficult questions. This last group generally becomes the ultra-Mormons.



As a general rule of thumb, you can tell which type of Mormon you're dealing with by the comments they make about the church and the restoration of the gospel. In most cases, over 90% of the comments made by social Mormons will be positive as far as the church, its leadership, or the restoration in general is concerned. On the other hand, you can usually identify an anti-Mormon because over 90% of their comments on similar topics will be negative. Both socials and antis generally only find and speak about those things they're looking for to defend their own perspectives on

Mormonism. They sometimes have a tendency to put the whole truth aside in lieu of their personal agendas of either defending or attacking the church. Unfortunately, they are often more concerned with who's right than they are with what's right. Ultra-Mormons, however, tend to see and speak about both the positive and the negative aspects of Mormonism. They may not always be 50-50 in their views and comments, but they will seldom be as extreme as either the socials or the antis. A true ultra-Mormon will usually be more interested in what is right or wrong than he is in who is right or wrong. Because of this, they will tend to find and comment about both the positive and the negative within Mormonism.

This manuscript was written mostly with the ultra-Mormon in mind. It is an effort to keep new or fledgling ultra-Mormons from becoming anti-Mormons. In general, most social Mormons

won't be aware of or even care about the issues raised in this work. It is possible, however, that a social Mormon may begin the journey of becoming an ultra-Mormon through reading this material. On the other hand, most anti-Mormons are too far gone to give these arguments any credence. My experience has been that most anti-Mormons have pretty much made up their minds and that a legion of sword-carrying angels could not convince them otherwise. I'm sure they see themselves quite differently, as is their right.

In general, this paper will likely be unpopular among most groups associated with the restoration of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith. It will probably be unappealing to both "apostle" and "apostate" alike, however you may define those terms. The arguments presented here reflect somewhat of a "lose-lose" scenario. And everybody hates to be on the "losing team."

Most social Mormons will find the contents of this work offensive due to the references regarding apostasy in the LDS church. However, most anti-Mormons, and even many ultra-Mormons, will also find portions of it unappealing due to the defense given to the position of the LDS church. In some cases, those who read this work will claim that it is half right and half wrong, depending on their current view of Mormonism. Yet, I feel this is a work that is worth writing and should be seriously considered by all who claim to have an in-depth interest in Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel in the latter days. It is a work that searches for harsh honesty and difficult truths in the midst of hypocrisy, pride, and apostasy. It tries to point out the gray area on topics that most people want to see as either black or white. Although certainly not complete in its scope, I feel that those ultra-Mormons who honestly care about the work of God in the latter days will likely find this work appealing in some way or other, even if they disagree with some of the arguments presented.

## **THE PROBLEM**

It is clear that we live in a time of great religious confusion. There is a lot happening today that is difficult to explain. For some, Mormonism and all of its associated factions or split-off groups has become similar to the times of Joseph Smith, when he was trying to find the true church among all the different denominations of his day. This problem is especially acute among the ultra-Mormons, who are actively looking for answers to their complex questions. The number of people today crying "lo here and lo there" has reached epidemic proportions within the realms of Mormonism. To make things even more difficult, because of their LDS roots, many of these groups cling desperately to the principle of personal revelation. There is an increasing number of people who claim that personal revelation or some other spiritual experience has confirmed their convictions. These experiences, they testify, have pointed them in some spiritual direction or other regarding the restored gospel and the LDS church. These various groups tend to employ the same arguments of conversion used by LDS missionaries since the church was established. They not only claim personal revelation themselves concerning their own beliefs, but they also claim that anyone can receive the same witness for themselves and thus "know" that the direction being taught to them is the correct one. This seems to throw an added wrench into the cry of "lo here and lo there" that was not so prevalent in Joseph Smith's day. As we've seen

from the success of the LDS church, this method of getting converts tends to work well among people who truly care about God and his gospel.

In addition to the plea for personal revelation, this spiritual confusion is also increased because more and more people are learning the higher principles of the gospel, as taught by the early leaders of the LDS church. Access to church historical documents is at an all time high. With a short search on the Internet or a quick spin of a CD, Mormons and non-Mormons alike can have literally thousands of LDS references at their fingertips regarding almost any topic. Unfortunately, what most people are finding is that there is a significant discrepancy between the early LDS church and the modern LDS church. For those who are true believers of Joseph Smith and who honestly want to live according to the fundamental principles he restored, this tends to cause some anxiety concerning those principles. To some extent, this is what causes social Mormons to become either anti or ultra. Many Latter-day Saints are becoming confused and frustrated by the apparent incongruities between “early Mormonism” and “modern Mormonism.” These incongruities have become so obvious and easy to research that it is no longer a viable option to ignore the issues or try to cover them up. For perhaps the first time in LDS history, church leadership is unable to control what people read and hear about LDS doctrine and history. Given some recent comments in General Conference and other forms of media, it seems clear that LDS church leadership is both aware of this problem and they are concerned about how to deal with it. Yet, it seems equally as clear that no easy solutions are readily available.

In general, the LDS church seems to like the social Mormons, while disliking or not caring much about the anti-Mormons, and being confused by the ultra-Mormons, many of whom have no desire to fight against the church in any way. Many ultra-Mormons simply love the restored gospel and have strong desires to pursue it in its fullness. For a while the ultra-Mormons appeared to be largely disliked by church leaders. In many instances the church even confused them with anti-Mormons. They were often excommunicated as apostates and troublemakers. However, this attitude seems to be changing over the last several years. Although still concerned about the ultra-Mormons, the LDS church seems to be taking a slightly different approach than it once did. The results seem to include more tolerance and fewer excommunications, as well as perhaps a different curriculum focusing on the teachings of early leaders (though watered down somewhat). There seem to be fewer “witch hunts” than there used to be in the church. Yet, even with these changes, it is still unclear how the church views ultra-Mormons. Excommunications still take place and most local church leaders, comprised mostly of social Mormons, still seem largely unprepared to deal with the issues raised by the ultra-Mormons.

By way of example, I believe the following portion of a letter adds substance and meaning to the problem at hand. This letter represents an example of how one family chose to deal with the apparent discrepancies between what we will call “early Mormonism” and “modern Mormonism.” This letter came to me anonymously from a friend on the Internet. I feel it characterizes the concerns more and more people are having with the LDS church today. The letter was originally written to a Bishop and Stake President in an effort to explain why this person and his family had chosen to become inactive. I feel it is a classic example of how many ultra-Mormons feel today and that it also expresses the complexity of the issue.

*In 1977, we purchased a set of the JOURNAL OF DISCOURSES, and that purchase changed the entire course of our lives. As you know, the JOURNALS consist mostly of conference reports and other addresses by the General Authorities of the Church. Members of the Church are encouraged to be concerned only with the reports of current conferences, because, since it is only necessary to "follow the living prophet," no one need be concerned about the teachings of former prophets. Most members who buy the 26 volumes of the JOURNALS leave them unread on the shelf. Well, we not only read them but studied them, and this has made all the difference.*

*As we continued studying the JOURNALS, they led us to other sources of information about the teachings and practices of the Church and its leaders in the 19th Century. Over the months and years, it gradually dawned on us with an ever-increasing awareness that the Church we belonged to as mid-20th Century Mormons was not the same Church as that founded by the Prophet Joseph Smith and perpetuated by Brigham Young. In spite of the constant reassurances by contemporary Church leaders that, only procedural matters of "form and policy" have changed, we began to realize that the changes have been much more extensive and profound. In fact, there have been drastic doctrinal changes, including total reversals of official Church position. How could this occur in a system based on the revelation of absolute, unchanging and unchangeable "truths" to prophets of God? Could one of the "prophets" have been wrong? Or both? Or maybe all?*

*For years we attempted to work it all out so that it all made sense. The more we studied and prayed, the less the pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit, and the greater became our concern and our dismay. Eventually, however, we came to realize that the reason the pieces did not fit was because they were pieces to different puzzles. The Church had changed so much from its 19th Century origins that it was no longer the same.*

*To list the changes of which I speak and to document them would lengthen this epistle into a volume of unwieldy size. Some of the more outstanding areas of concern, however, include the identity of and nature of Deity ("Adam-God"); Jehovah of the Old Testament and Christ; consecration, united order and tithing; the nature of eternal progression; the temple endowment; eternal marriage, polygamous and monogamous; Negro and priesthood; the priesthood garment; priesthood offices, particularly that of Seventy; blood atonement; preaching by the spirit vs. written speeches; method of missionary work; trusting our salvation to human leaders; world and national politics, government and friendship with the world; infallibility of the President of the Church; the nature of revelation; gathering of Israel; rebaptism; adoption; laws of God and laws of man; establishment of the Kingdom of God; sacrament; and more. In all of these areas, the present teachings of the Church are not the same as they were before the great transition in Mormonism which occurred just after the turn of the century. (Anonymous letter received from a friend in the fall of 1997)*

Regardless of our own personal views regarding each the various doctrines mentioned above, the point to be made is that more and more people are beginning to see differences between early Mormonism and modern Mormonism. An article in a recent Utah newspaper also outlined the problem.

*Salt Lake District Attorney Neal Gunnarson talks about a caller who said he could point out 500 ways the LDS Church has been changed since Joseph Smith. An excommunicated Mormon, the caller said he can't follow the LDS Church but he will always believe in Joseph Smith. Therefore, the caller tells Gunnarson, he must believe in polygamy. "Do you have more than one wife now?" Gunnarson asked the caller. "No, but my wife and I are looking." (Deseret News, Sunday, August 30, 1998)*

The crime of these particular ultra-Mormons, if one has been committed at all, is apparently that they love the restored gospel with all their heart and honestly want to know and do what is right, but they are having difficulty reconciling the "truth" of early Mormonism with the "truth" of modern Mormonism. This creates no small problem for church leaders who are also trying to do what they feel is best and right. As this work will attempt to show, this problem is complex, with few black and white solutions.

Another good example of the problem at hand can be found in a letter written by Elder Bruce R. McConkie to a member of the church. In that letter Elder McConkie openly admitted that he objects to certain points of doctrine espoused by President Brigham Young regarding Adam. Elder McConkie stated,

*Yes, President Young did teach that Adam was the father of our spirits, and all the related things that the cultists ascribe to him. This, however, is not true. He expressed views that are out of harmony with the gospel. (Letter to Eugene England, February 19, 1981)*

The reason this statement is so meaningful is that it is a clear admission that Brigham actually taught what he taught about Adam and that Elder McConkie believed these teachings were "out of harmony" with the gospel. If nothing else, I believe this is an honest assessment of the situation. It also raises some good questions about the popular LDS belief that a prophet of the church would not be allowed to lead the church astray or teach false doctrine. Evidently, Elder McConkie believed otherwise in the case of Brigham Young. Brigham Young's teachings regarding Adam are not only clear, but relatively consistent. To say that there is no discrepancy between Elder McConkie and President Young on this point is to state an untruth. Yet, this is only one of many areas of disagreement between Elder McConkie and President Young.

From such statements as these it is easy to see how a person with a strong testimony of the restoration can become a "Mormon fundamentalist." Many people who are honest and serious about living the fullness of the restored gospel want to know what is true and correct concerning these doctrines. Yet, when they study the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others, they build a strong argument for following their teachings instead of people like Elder

McConkie. For example, consider what we know about the “spiritual resumes” of President Young and Elder McConkie:

**President Brigham Young**

- Member of the Quorum of 12 Apostles
- President of the Quorum of the 12 Apostles
- President/Prophet of the LDS church longer than any other man
- Member of the council of 50
- Member of Joseph Smith’s “inner circle”
- Member of the Church of the Firstborn
- Close friend and confidant to Joseph Smith
- Established much of the temple ceremonies
- Many other church leaders testified that they received spiritual witnesses concerning the truthfulness of his teachings

**Elder Bruce R. McConkie**

- Member of the Quorum of 12 Apostles
- Author of “Mormon Doctrine,” which was found to have as many as 1067 doctrinal errors within its 776 pages by a committee under the direction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Presidency<sup>1</sup>
- Author of many other publications which propagate many of the same teachings as those found in Mormon Doctrine

The list of credits to Brigham Young could probably go on and on. But this is sufficient to make the point. When compared with Elder McConkie, President Young comes out way ahead. It is difficult to choose Elder McConkie’s teachings over President Young’s. This creates no small problem for honest people studying these issues and trying to deal with the apparent discrepancies. It should be easy to see why many people choose to believe some of the early brethren over some of the modern brethren.

So clear are the discrepancies between early and modern Mormonism that even non-Mormon scholars are starting to speak out rather authoritatively on the subject. For example, Professor Harold Bloom, a non-Mormon scholar of religion from Yale University has stated,

*It has become somewhat of a commonplace to observe that modern Mormonism tends to reduce itself to another Protestant sect, another Christian heresy, while the religion of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt and other leading early Mormons was a far more radical swerve away from Protestant tradition. (The Annual David P. Gardner Lecture, Kingsbury Hall, University of Utah, November 15, 1990)*

Notice that this scholar is not necessarily attacking Mormonism or the LDS church. He’s simply stating that there is a difference between early Mormonism and modern Mormonism - a difference that seems so clear and obvious to him that he refers to it as “commonplace.”

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of President David O. McKay, January 7, 1960.

More and more people, Mormon and non-Mormon alike, are coming to the same conclusions as they study and learn about the teachings of the early leaders of the LDS church. For those who truly love the gospel, and have an unwavering testimony of Joseph Smith, this creates no small concern about the current status of the LDS church. Regarding some issues, either they were right then or they are right now, but not both. Trying to reconcile the various points of disagreement is difficult to say the least.

Elder B. H. Roberts once made a very applicable observation when he said,

*Suppose your youth receive their impressions of church history from “pictures and stories” and build their faith upon these alleged miracles [and] shall someday come face to face with the fact that their belief rests on falsehoods, what then will be the result? Will they not say that since these things are myth and our Church has permitted them to be perpetuated ...might not the other fundamentals to the actual story of the Church, the things in which it had its origin, might they not all be lies and nothing but lies? ... [Some say that] because one repudiates the false he stands in danger of weakening, perhaps losing the truth. I have no fear of such results. I find my own heart strengthened in the truth by getting rid of the untruth, the spectacular, the bizarre, as soon as I learn that it is based upon worthless testimony. (Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story, p. 363)*

Elder Roberts’ insight seems to have proven prophetic. He seems to describe exactly what is happening today among many Latter-day Saints. Unfortunately, many of these people are doubting even the restoration itself because they cannot deal with this problem.

Given the evidence, it is easy to see why confusion regarding the principles of the restored gospel is increasing. There is every reason to believe that this trend will continue. I see no way to keep the flood of information about LDS doctrines and history from the masses. I also see no way to reconcile many of the apparent contradictions found within this information.

This paper attempts to address some of these difficult issues from the perspective of the scriptures and key teachings from the leaders of the LDS church, both past and present. As mentioned earlier, for many social Mormons, the issues presented here won’t even be a concern. For the most part, social Mormons are still largely unaware of the inconsistencies between the early LDS church and the church today. In addition, many won’t even care or see these issues as problematic. The LDS population in general falls into this category and is relatively ignorant of the gospel principles and ordinances originally taught by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others. Yet, I believe there is an increasing number of Mormons for whom this work will have significant meaning.

We will begin our discussion by establishing the fact that apostasy is, indeed, a valid concern within the LDS church today. We will then discuss what this means in the context of latter day prophecies about the LDS church. Finally we will address what our responsibilities might be regarding apostasy in the last days.

## THE APOSTASY OF THE LDS CHURCH

As the letter above mentions, it may be impossible to adequately document all of the differences between the early teachings of the church and those of today. Suffice it to say that the list would be large, somewhat speculative, and fairly controversial. It would require a lot of research and arguments which offer fair perspectives on both sides. One might well grow weary of it before reaching the end.

Rather than trying to deal with each and every issue, it is perhaps more expedient to touch on a few specific areas for the sole purpose of showing that there are differences worth mentioning and that the concern for the LDS church is legitimate. No claim is made by the author that the issues chosen are the best ones to illustrate the problem at hand. I'm sure that other people will have their own favorites. However, I feel the list that follows represents some good examples of the apparent problems between early LDS teachings and modern LDS teachings. They illustrate the kinds of things with which many people are struggling today.

### ***Acknowledgments Of Apostasy Within The LDS Church***

One of the most interesting aspects of the latter-day apostasy are the references made to it by the leaders of the LDS church. Surprisingly, there is a great deal of acknowledgment on the part of the General Authorities. As far back as 1873 Elder Orson Pratt saw how the saints had begun to fall short in their responsibility to live the higher laws. Elder Pratt said,

*What kind of a revolution would it work among the Latter-day Saints if the revelation given in March, 1831, were carried out by them, "It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin?" How much of a revolution would it accomplish in Salt Lake City if this order of things should be brought about? I think it would work a greater revolution among this people than has ever been witnessed amongst them since they had an existence as a Church. (JD 15:355-356)*

Later in the same address Elder Pratt made the following observation:

*There must be a reformation. There will be a reformation among this people, but He will plead with the stronger ones of Zion, He will plead with this people, He will plead with those in high places, He will plead with the priesthood of this church, until Zion shall become clean before him. I do not know but what it would be an utter impossibility to commence and carry out some principles pertaining to Zion right in the midst of this people. They have strayed so far that to get a people who would conform to heavenly laws it may be needful to lead some from the midst of this people and commence anew in the regions round about in these mountains. (JD 15:360)*

Given the evidence available to us, it is reasonable to assume that these problems exist to a far greater extent today than they did in the time of Orson Pratt. It is reasonable to assume that Latter-day Saints today are at least as far away from living the principles of Zion as they were in Elder Pratt's time. It might even be fair to say that most Latter-day Saints today can't even carry on an intelligent conversation about the principles of Zion, let alone live them. Indeed, the whole concept of equality in riches is a fairly foreign idea to most Mormons today. Yet, it is repeated in the Doctrine and Covenants with all but redundant clarity.<sup>2</sup>

In 1886 President John Taylor made this prediction about the membership of the church:

*I would be surprised if ten percent of those who claim to hold the Melchizedek priesthood will remain faithful to the gospel at the time of the seventh president and that there would be thousands that think they hold the priesthood at that time, but would not have it properly conferred upon them. (Minutes of a meeting, September 7, 1886)*

President George Q. Cannon seemed to agree with President Taylor's assessment.

*The day will come when man's priesthood and authority will be called to question, and you will find that there will be hundreds who have no priesthood, but who believe they hold it, they are holding only an office in the church. (Truth, 3:153)*

In more recent years other General Authorities have expressed their concern about the general state of apostasy taking place in the LDS church. For example, in 1938 President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote the following in his journal:

*It is a very apparent fact that we have traveled far and wide in the past 20 years. What the future will bring I do not know. But if we drift as far afield from fundamental things in the next 20 years, what will be left of the foundation laid by the Prophet Joseph Smith? It is easy for one who observes to see how the apostasy came about in the primitive church of Christ. Are we not traveling the same road? (Joseph Fielding Smith Journal, 28 December 1938)*

Notice how President Smith boldly declares that we are following the same path of apostasy that occurred in the primitive church of Christ. It is difficult to misunderstand his meaning.

Elder H. Verlan Anderson placed the apostasy of the LDS church into a fairly clear perspective.

*To fail to consider the possibility that the members of the church are again "falling away" would be to ignore one of the most thoroughly documented lessons of history. Especially is this true in light of the fact that the cultural, political, and educational life of Church members has become so deeply and thoroughly involved with that of non-*

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<sup>2</sup> D&C 49:19-20; D&C 70:14; D&C 78:5-7; D&C 104:15-18

*members that they are overwhelmingly influenced by the “ways of the world.” Through newspapers and magazines, motion pictures and television, schools and lecture halls, and a thoroughly integrated economic system, Church members come into close and continuous contact with those not of their faith.*

*Some may assume that a “Gentile apostasy” in these latter days cannot occur because Christ’s Church is here to stay this time. They may assume that widespread departure from gospel principles by Church members is contrary to prophecy. While the scriptures do assure us that the Church will continue to exist and be divinely led by prophets of the Lord right up until his Second Coming, they do not state that all, or even a majority of its members will follow those prophets. On the contrary, they foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles. (The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 169-170)*

In later sections of this work we’ll discuss some of those scriptures to which Elder Anderson referred. For now, let’s continue with comments about apostasy within the LDS church.

President Ezra Taft Benson once declared,

*Not only are there apostates within our midst, but there are also apostate doctrines that are sometimes taught in our classes and from our pulpits and that appear in our publications. And these apostate precepts of men cause our people to stumble. As the Book of Mormon, speaking of our day, states: “They have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 28:14). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89-90)*

Notice how President Benson associates the scripture in 2 Nephi 28:14 with the members of the LDS church. Most of the time when this scripture is used it is assumed that it refers to those outside the LDS church. However, it is clear that President Benson interpreted this verse quite differently. President Benson has also said,

*Watchmen - what of the night? We must respond by saying that all is not well in Zion. (Conference Report, May 1986, Pg. 4. See Isaiah 21:11.)*

This statement was made concerning the conditions of the church from President Benson’s perspective. In a more direct manner, President Benson has boldly told us that the church is “under condemnation” because of the lack of diligence given to the word of God.

*The Lord declares that the whole Church and all the children of Zion are under condemnation because of the way we have treated the Book of Mormon. This condemnation has not been lifted, nor will it be until we repent. (See D&C 84:51-81.)*

*The Lord states that we must not only say but we must do! We have neither said enough nor have we done enough with this divine instrument--the key to conversion. As a result, as individuals, as families, and as the Church, we sometimes have felt the*

*scourge and judgment God said would be "poured out upon the children of Zion" because of our neglect of this book (D&C 84:58).*

*The Lord inspired His servant Lorenzo Snow to reemphasize the principle of tithing to redeem the Church from financial bondage. In those days the General Authorities took that message to the members of the Church. So too in our day the Lord has inspired His servant to reemphasize the Book of Mormon to get the Church out from under condemnation--the scourge and judgment. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.63-6. See also A Witness and a Warning, Pg. vii-viii and p.9)*

Imagine if similar words were uttered by Alma to the church in his day regarding the way they were treating the brass plates. If Alma had said that the church in his day was "under condemnation," we would likely view it as a very serious situation - a situation of great apostasy and wickedness. When viewed in this light we can perhaps better understand the direct language President Benson has used with us in our time.

In a 1990 meeting with Regional Representatives of the LDS church Elder Boyd K. Packer expressed his concern about the state of the church today.

*In recent years I have felt, and I think I am not alone, that we are losing the ability to correct the course of the church. You cannot appreciate how deeply I feel about the importance of this present opportunity unless you know the regard, the reverence, I have for the Book of Mormon and how seriously I have taken the warnings of the prophets, particularly Alma and Helaman.*

*Both Alma and Helaman told the church in their day. They warned about fast growth, the desire to be accepted by the world, to be popular, and particularly they warned about prosperity. Each time those conditions existed in combination, the church has drifted off course. All of those conditions are present in the church today.*

*Helaman repeatedly warned, I think four times he used these words, that the fatal drift of the church could occur in the space of not many years. In one instance it took only six years. (Helaman 6:32; 7:6; 11:26) ("Let Them Govern Themselves," Reg. Rep. Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)*

Notice how Elder Packer says "we are losing the ability to correct the course of the church." This implies two very important points. First, that the church is, indeed, off course. Otherwise there would be no need to correct its course. Second, that we are so far off course that Elder Packer is worried that we are "losing the ability" to correct it. These are bold statements from one of the Twelve Apostles of the church.

Likewise, Elder L. Tom Perry has made some rather direct comments about the state of the church today. In a recent conference address he taught that some of the most condemning prophecies found in the Book of Mormon apply not to those outside the LDS church, but those within the LDS church. In the October Conference of 1992, Elder Perry stated,

*He [Moroni] realizes that the record will be a voice of warning to future generations of what occurs when nations like his own turn away from the teachings of the Lord. It is from the depths of his heart that Moroni cries out to those who will eventually receive the record. He wants to spare those who read his account the heartache and misery which comes from disobedience.*

*He writes first to the members of the church and then to those who have not embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. Moroni's last words to the members of the church are written as a voice of warning. He writes as one who sees the history of his people repeating itself in the future. From the Book of Mormon we read:*

*“Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.*

*“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.*

*“And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.*

*“For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.*

*“O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of god? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies--because of the praise of the world?’ (Mormon 8:34-38)*

*I guess one of the greatest mysteries of mortality is why mankind fails to learn from history. Why do those who profess to be true followers of Christ so often become victims of the enticements of the world? The evidence is so strong regarding the blessings which accrue to those who trust in and follow the ways the Lord has prescribed for us. (Conference Report, Ensign, November, 1992, underline added)*

When these words were spoken by Elder Perry, I doubt that most Latter-day Saints understood the significance of those verses to the LDS church. According to Elder Perry, these verses apply directly to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Look at the following list of evils that Elder Perry is associating with those in the LDS church today, as prophesied by Moroni long ago. According to Elder Perry, the membership of the LDS church is guilty of,

- Walking in the pride of their hearts
- Lifting themselves up in the pride of their hearts
- Wearing very fine apparel
- Envy
- Strifes
- Malice
- Persecutions
- All manner of iniquities
- Being pollutions
- Being hypocrites
- Selling themselves for that which will canker
- Polluting the holy church of god
- Polluting all of their churches - "yea, even every one"
- Being ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ
- Loving money, and their substance, and their fine apparel, and the adorning of their churches, more than they love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted
- Not thinking that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies--because of the praise of the world

This list clearly describes an apostate people. And yet it would be difficult to interpret Elder Perry's comments in any other way than to say that he's using Moroni's prophecy to describe the LDS church today.

Years before Elder Perry made these comments Elder H. Verlan Anderson also taught that these verses in the Book of Mormon referred to the LDS church. He said,

*Moroni was similarly explicit in predicting false teachings among the saints. Reflect upon the unmistakable implications of this point-blank indictment of members of the "holy church of God:"*

*"O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God?" (Mormon 8:38)*

*Since there is only one "holy church of God" on earth, and since it is being polluted, the blame therefore appears to rest upon the teachers and hypocrites within that church. (The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 170-171, underline added)*

President Spencer W. Kimball also associated these verses with the Latter-day Saints.

*Saints must keep the covenant of consecration. The Lord has blessed us as a people with a prosperity unequalled in times past. The resources that have been placed in our power are good, and necessary to our work here on the*

*earth. But I am afraid that many of us have been surfeited with flocks and herds and acres and barns and wealth and have begun to worship them as false gods, and they have power over us. Do we have more of these good things than our faith can stand? Many people spend most of their time working in the service of a self-image that includes sufficient money, stocks, bonds, investment portfolios, property, credit cards, furnishings, automobiles, and the like to guarantee carnal security throughout, it is hoped, a long and happy life. Forgotten is the fact that our assignment is to use these many resources in our families and quorums to build up the kingdom of God—to further the missionary effort and the genealogical and temple work; to raise our children up as fruitful servants unto the Lord; to bless others in every way, that they may also be fruitful. Instead, we expend these blessings on our own desires, and as Moroni said, “Ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not.” (Mormon 8:39.) (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.357)<sup>1</sup>*

On another occasion President Kimball expressed further concern about the state of the members of the LDS church.

*...when I review the performance of this people in comparison with what is expected, I am appalled and frightened. If we insist on spending all our time and resources building up for ourselves a worldly kingdom, that is exactly what we will inherit. In spite of our delight in defining ourselves as modern, and our tendency to think we possess a sophistication that no people in the past ever had--in spite of these things, we are, on the whole, an idolatrous people--a condition most repugnant to the Lord. (Ensign, June 1976)*

All of these statements from leaders of the LDS church indicate that there is a significant concern among some of the brethren regarding apostasy in the church. Some of these authoritative statements even use the word “apostasy” to describe our current situation. Others use specific details to describe the apostasy within the church. It is clear that at least some of the brethren view the LDS church as being off course, “polluted,” and “under condemnation” because of wickedness. It is important to note that these accusations are not coming from enemies to or outsiders of the LDS church. These accusations are coming from within - from the leadership of the LDS church.

These statements present a “no win” scenario for Latter-day Saints. If what these brethren are saying is true, then the church has some serious problems. If what they say is not true, then some of our leaders have some serious problems, including some of our most recent prophets. Especially for social Mormons, this presents somewhat of a “lose-lose” scenario.

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<sup>1</sup> See also the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol.7, Ch.13, p.378 - p.379

Now that we've established the possibility that the church is, indeed, off course, let's look at some of the specific areas of alarm, as far as apostasy in the LDS church is concerned.

## ***Becoming Popular***

As Elder Packer stated, one of the first areas that should catch our attention regarding apostasy in the LDS church is the focus of modern Mormonism on becoming popular. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley has recently stated,

*Ours is the blessing to live in a better season [than the early saints]. The terrible persecutions of the past are behind us. Today we are looked upon with respect by people across the world. (Ensign, Conference Report, November, 1996)*

President Hinckley has made other, similar statements from time to time. Not the least of which was a statement on the television program *60 minutes* in which he classified the LDS church as being “mainstream” with other churches. This seems to coincide with Professor Bloom's assessment mentioned earlier.

It is difficult to listen to General Conference or read a church publication these days without some reference given to the LDS church's growth, influence, and the respect it receives from the world. Even other religions and the media are coming to its defense for perhaps the first time in history. Yet, as much we seem to enjoy basking in our new found popularity, it should be recognized that the early leaders of this church both predicted and condemned this state of affairs, especially President Brigham Young. The following quotes reflect President Young's concern about the day when the saints would become popular. Notice the direct, almost prophetic tone which he takes as he expresses his concerns and the consequences he associates with popularity.

*And when the spirit of persecution, the spirit of hatred, of wrath, and malice ceases in the world against this people, it will be the time that this people have apostatized and joined hands with the wicked, and never until then; which I pray may never come. (JD 4:326-327)*

*There is nothing that would so soon weaken my hope and discourage me as to see this people in full fellowship with the world, and receive no more persecution from them because they are one with them. In such an event, we might bid farewell to the Holy Priesthood with all its blessings, privileges and aids to exaltations, principalities and powers in the eternities of the Gods. (JD 10:32)*

*When we see the time that we can willingly strike hands and have full fellowship with those who despise the Kingdom of God, know ye then that the Priesthood of the Son of God is out of your possession. Let us be careful how we make friends with and fellowship unrighteousness, lest the curse of God descends heavily upon us. (JD 10:273)*

*When “Mormonism” finds favor with the wicked in this land, it will have gone into the shade; but until the power of the Priesthood is gone, “Mormonism” will never become popular with the wicked. (JD 4:38)*

*They would come now by thousands and thousands, if the Latter-day Saints were only popular. “What, these honorable men?” Yes, they would say, “I want to be baptized. I admire your industry, and your skill in governing. You have a system of governing that is not to be found anywhere else. You know how to govern cities, territories, or the world, and I would like to join you.” But take care if you join this people without the love of God in your soul it will do you no good. If they were to do this, they would bring in their sophistry, and introduce that which would poison the innocent and honest and lead them astray. I look at this, and I am satisfied that it will not do for the Lord to make this people popular. Why? Because all hell would want to be in the Church. The people must be kept where the finger of scorn can be pointed at them. Although it is admitted that we are honest, industrious, truthful, virtuous, self-denying, and, as a community, possess every moral excellence, yet we must be looked upon as ignorant and unworthy, and as the offscouring of society, and be hated by the world. What is the reason of this? Christ and Baal can not become friends. When I see this people grow and spread and prosper, I feel that there is more danger than when they are in poverty. Being driven from city to city or into the mountains is nothing compared to the danger of our becoming rich and being hailed by outsiders as a first-class community. I am afraid of only one thing. What is that? That we will not live our religion, and that we will partially slide a little from the path of rectitude, and go part of the way to meet our friends. (JD 12:272.)*

This last reference should perhaps be of particular concern to us considering that certain cities in Utah have taken great pride in recent years for being classified among the best places to live in America.

Notice how the statements by President Hinckley almost sound like a fulfilling of these prophecies made by President Young more than 100 years earlier. What President Hinckley perceives as a “blessing,” President Young clearly viewed as a curse, placing the very priesthood itself in jeopardy.

In addition to Brigham Young, Joseph Smith also gave us some guidelines regarding how the world generally treats true prophets and false prophets.

*The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets, and these had to hide themselves “in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth,” and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished them from their society as*

*vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men. (TPJS Pg. 205)*

This seems to match Samuel the Lamanite's assessment as well. He told the wicked, church-going Nephites,

*...if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.*

*But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth--and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.*

*Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. (Helaman 13:25-28)*

As already mentioned, in more recent years Elder Boyd K. Packer has also expressed his concern about becoming popular as a church.

*Both Alma and Helaman told the church in their day. They warned about fast growth, the desire to be accepted by the world, to be popular, and particularly they warned about prosperity. Each time those conditions existed in combination, the church has drifted off course. All of those conditions are present in the church today. (Helaman 6:32; 7:6; 11:26) ("Let Them Govern Themselves," Reg. Rep. Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)*

In addition to statements such as these, it seems clear from the scriptures themselves that the Lord's people are seldom very popular when they are truly living and preaching the word of God. In fact, a good argument could be presented to show that the higher the doctrines lived by the people of God, the more persecution they generally receive from the world. There seems to be a direct relationship between righteousness and persecution. There has seldom, if ever, been a time when the Lord's people were praised and accepted by those around them. Why should we believe that Latter-day Saints today are any different than all the other examples of God's people throughout history?

The conclusion we come to on this subject is that although we may enjoy our current popularity in the world and a general lack of persecution, this may be nothing more or less than an indication that the LDS people "have apostatized and joined hands with the wicked,"

as President Young put it. This should be of great concern to us as we consider the possibility of apostasy within the LDS church.

### ***Prophecies About Salt Lake City***

In connection with the problems associated with becoming popular, there are also other prophetic statements suggesting that Salt Lake City will become one of the wicked cities of the world. For example, Elder Heber C. Kimball once prophesied that,

*After a while the gentiles will gather to this place by the thousands and Salt Lake will be classified among the wicked cities of the world. A spirit of speculation and extravagance will take possession of the saints, and the result will be financial bondage. (Amanda Wilcox records, BYU. See also *Prophecies of the Latter Days*, p.86 compiled by Ogden Kraut.)*

It is important to note in this prophecy that Elder Kimball is associating this wickedness with “the saints.” He isn’t referring to those who are not members of the LDS church. Rather, it seems clear that his concern is focused on those within the LDS church.

Mosiah Hancock also tells of President Brigham Young’s views on “the saints in the mountains.”

*He (Brigham Young) conversed freely on the situation of the saints in the mountains, and said that he dreaded the time when the saints would become popular with the world; for he had seen in sorrow, in a dream, or in dreams, this people clothed in the fashions of Babylon and drinking in the spirit of Babylon until one could hardly tell a saint from a black-leg. ...Many of this people for the sake of riches and popularity will sell themselves for that which will canker their souls and lead them down to misery and despair. (Mosiah Hancock Journal, p.73)*

In another account from Mosiah Hancock, we find similar concerns about the saints in Salt Lake City. This time Brother Hancock is quoting the Prophet Joseph Smith on the subject.

*...you will travel west until you come to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. ...you will live to see men rise in power in the church who will seek to put down your friends and the friends of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Many will be hoisted because of their money and the worldly learning which they seem to be in possession of; and many who are the true followers of our Lord and Savior will be cast down because of their poverty. (Mosiah Hancock Journal, p.19)*

It seems clear from these references that the early brethren were quite convinced that Salt Lake City would become ranked among the wicked cities of the world and that this wickedness would be among the members and leaders of the LDS church. It is difficult to interpret these prophecies any other way.

## **Scriptural Prophecies About The Latter-Day Apostasy**

In addition to statements made by the leaders of the church, there is ample support from the scriptures regarding a latter-day apostasy within the Lord's church. As has already been established by Elders Perry, Anderson and others, Mormon chapter 8 contains a prophecy by Moroni that applies directly to the "holy church of God" in the last days - the LDS church. Other prophecies spell out this falling away with equal or greater clarity. For example, in 3 Nephi 16 we find a prophecy about the Gentiles to whom the gospel is given in the last days. It tells us that these Gentiles will eventually reject the fulness of the gospel and that it will be taken away from them and given back to the house of Israel.

*And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them.*

*And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.*

*And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:10-12)*

Notice that these verses talk about a day "when" the Gentiles "shall" sin against His gospel. These verses tell us that a day will come when the Gentiles shall reject the fulness of the gospel. Verse 10 even provides a list describing these latter-day gentiles that is unmistakably similar to the list found in Mormon chapter 8 mentioned earlier. (See page .) The result of this rejection will be that the fulness of the gospel will be taken from the Gentiles and given to the house of Israel. This rejection of the gospel is not conditional, it is prophetic. This can be seen from the verses that immediately follow.

*But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.*

*And I will not suffer my people, who are of the house of Israel, to go through among them, and tread them down, saith the Father. (3 Nephi 16:13-14)*

Notice that even if there are Gentiles who repent after rejecting the gospel, they will be numbered among the house of Israel - those to whom the gospel will be given after it is taken

away from the Gentiles. In addition, the blessing to those Gentiles who repent will be that they will not be trodden down by the house of Israel. Clearly the house of Israel will become the covenant people in these verses, not the Gentiles to whom the gospel was first given.

Just in case there is any doubt that the Gentiles spoken of here are, indeed, the members of the LDS church in the latter days, the Lord continues by telling us what will happen to those Gentiles who do not repent.

*But if they [the Gentiles] will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel. (3 Nephi 16:15)*

Notice in this verse that those Gentiles who are trodden down “shall be as salt that hath lost its savor.” In the Doctrine and Covenants we are given a clear definition of what this means.

*When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men;*

*They are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. (D&C 101:39-40)*

It seems clear from the scriptures that the Gentiles referred to in 3 Nephi 16 are those Gentiles in the last days who have been called unto the everlasting gospel and have made an everlasting covenant with God. According to these scriptures, these covenant people will then reject the fulness of the gospel and have it taken away from them and given to the house of Israel. When read in context, it is difficult to interpret these scriptures any other way.

The scriptures also speak of a point in the last days when the times of the Gentiles shall come in and the gospel shall break forth among them. However, in almost the same breath, the Lord declares that the Gentiles of the last days will reject that gospel. At that point, the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled.

*And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of my gospel;*

*But they receive it not; for they perceive not the light, and they turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men.*

*And in that generation shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (D&C 45:28-30. See also D&C 45:25, Luke 21:24, JST Luke 21:25-30.)*

These verses are often used as a reference to those outside the church - those who are never baptized in the first place. However, given the evidence in chapter 16 of 3 Nephi, it is easy to see how the verses in D&C 45 are more likely referring to those Gentiles within the church. We should keep in mind that synonyms of the word “fulfilled” include “finished,” “completed,” “consummated,” and “terminated.” To say that the times of the Gentiles is “fulfilled” suggests an end of those times. It suggests finality, as if the Gentiles will no longer be a major part of the gospel plan in the last days.

The scenario in 3 Nephi 16 also matches other scriptures on the same subject. For example, in chapter 5 of Jacob we find the allegory of the vineyard. This allegory discusses the history of the Lord’s people clear up to the millennium. A careful reading of the chapter indicates rather clearly that the gospel will be given to the Gentiles (the wild branches) and that they will eventually “overrun the roots” and bring forth “evil fruit.” (Jacob 5:37) The Lord deals with this problem by restoring the house of Israel (the natural branches) to the gospel. (Jacob 5:54-56) The allegory goes on to say that as the house of Israel receives the gospel, the apostate Gentiles are “cast away.” (Jacob 5:65, 69, 73-74) This seems to match the prophesy in 3 Nephi 16 very well.

That these prophecies were understood this way by the early brethren of the church can be seen in the words of Elder Orson Pratt when he said,

*What says the Book of Mormon in relation to the building up of the New Jerusalem on this continent--one of the most splendid cities that ever was or ever will be built on this land? Does not that book say that the Lamanites are to be the principal operators in that important work, and that those who embrace the Gospel from among the Gentiles are to have the privilege of assisting the Lamanites to build up the city called the New Jerusalem? This remnant of Joseph, who are now degraded, will then be filled with the wisdom of God; and by that wisdom they will build that city; by the aid of the Priesthood already given, and by the aid of Prophets that God will raise up in their midst, they will beautify and ornament its dwellings; and we have the privilege of being numbered with them, instead of their being numbered with us. It is a great privilege indeed (and we are indebted to their fathers for it,) that we enjoy of being associated with them in the accomplishment of so great a work. (JD 9:178, underline added)*

As 3 Nephi 16:10-15 suggests, the only way that the covenant Gentiles will “have the privilege of being numbered” with the house of Israel is if they repent from rejecting the fulness of the gospel as restored through the prophet Joseph Smith.

Another important prophecy about the latter-day apostasy can be found in the Doctrine and Covenants. Notice in the following verses that the calamities of the last days will actually begin upon the Lord’s house.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face.*

*Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.*

*And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord;*

*First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord. (D&C 112:23-26)*

Now, regardless of how we define “my house” in this verse, there are few Latter-day Saints who would say that these verses are talking about anything other than the LDS church. Notice the sins that accompany those who belong to the Lord’s house. They are described as a people who “profess” to know God’s name but who have not really known Him. They are a people who have blasphemed against God in the midst of His house. Can this be interpreted as anything other than apostasy within the LDS church?

On another occasion the Lord told Joseph Smith that He will send one mighty and strong to “set in order the house of God.”

*And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God; (D&C 85:7)*

It seems reasonable to assume that the house of God would only need to be “set in order” if it were somehow out of order to begin with. President Brigham Young once said the following about this scripture:

*Brethren, this church will be led onto the very brink of hell by the leaders of this people, then God will send the one mighty and strong spoken of in the 85<sup>th</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants, to save and redeem this church. (Truth, March 1, 1936, 1:10, p. 135)*

Is it any wonder that the Book of Mormon offers us the following depiction of the people who have gone astray (apostatized) in the last days?

*They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they*

*are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men. (2 Nephi 28:14)*

Notice that even the humble followers of Christ will “err because they are taught by the precepts of men.” We must remember that President Ezra Taft Benson associated this scripture with those who are members of the LDS church, not those outside the church.

*Not only are there apostates within our midst, but there are also apostate doctrines that are sometimes taught in our classes and from our pulpits and that appear in our publications. And these apostate precepts of men cause our people to stumble. As the Book of Mormon, speaking of our day, states: “They have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 28:14). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89-90)*

The scriptures seem clear and consistent regarding the apostasy of the Lord’s house in the latter days. As Elder H. Verlan Anderson put it, the scriptures “foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles.”<sup>2</sup> Denying this apostasy or making believe that it couldn’t happen to us, seems to place us in the same basic category as the Pharisees, Zoramites, Nephites, or other religious groups who thought they were somehow infallible or immune to apostasy.

## **Changes To The Temple Ordinances**

Most of those who have held a temple recommend in the LDS church for any length of time generally know that there have been recent changes made to the temple ordinances. In addition, those who have seriously studied LDS church history or who have made an in-depth examination of the temple ordinances know that there have been multiple changes made to these ordinances over the years. There are at least three major issues to consider when we discuss the changes made to the temple ordinances:

- 1) Do these changes represent a move towards higher or lower gospel awareness?
- 2) What are the reasons behind these changes?
- 3) At what point does an ordinance cease to accomplish what it was originally designed to accomplish?

With regard to the first question, the fact that changes have occurred, in and of itself, is perhaps of little consequence to our discussion of apostasy. It is safe to assume that changes made to any ordinance can be either an improvement or a regression. Certainly the Lord can alter the ordinances given to his people via one of his authorized prophets. In Joseph Smith’s time the ordinances were frequently changed according to new revelation and the faith of the

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<sup>2</sup> The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 169-170.

saints. Likewise, President Brigham Young made other significant changes to certain ordinances. These changes for the better were spoken of by Elder Orson Pratt when he said,

*When the Temple was built, the Lord did not see proper to reveal all the ordinances of the Endowments, such as we now understand. He revealed little by little. No rooms were prepared for washings; no special place prepared for the anointings, such as you understand, and such as you comprehend at the period of the history of the Church! Neither did we know the necessity of the washings, such as we now receive. (JD 19:16)*

However, it is also important to note that even though the ordinances have changed from time to time to accommodate more or less righteousness among the Lord's people, the requirements for exaltation and the fullness of the ordinances do not change. Every person must eventually experience the fullness of the ordinances in order to be exalted. Hence, a change in a given ordinance does not mean that the rules for exaltation have changed. It simply means the Lord has given us either more or less of what we need in order to be exalted. Of this fact, Joseph Smith once said,

*Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles. (TPJS 308)*

Since there was a difference between the ordinances performed in the Kirtland temple and those performed in the Nauvoo temple, we can assume that Joseph Smith was referring to the complete set of ordinances in their fullness - those required to take us all the way to the Celestial Kingdom. The fact that Joseph Smith himself changed the ordinances from time to time, according to his knowledge and the instructions of God, indicates that the above statement was talking about what is necessary to be saved, rather than what portion of the ordinances the Lord will allow his people to possess at a given time. President Brigham Young went into even greater detail with regard to what things can and cannot change and the effects those changes have on our efforts towards salvation.

*The Ordinances of the Kingdom of God on the Earth are the same to the children of Adam from the commencement to the end of his posterity pertaining to the carnal state on this Earth, and the winding up scene of this mortality. With regard to the Bible; we frequently say, we believe the Bible, but circumstances alters cases, for what is now required of the people may not be required of a people that may live a hundred years hence. But I wish you to understand, with regard to the ordinances of God's House to save the people in the Celestial Kingdom of our God, there is no change from the days of Adam to the present time, neither will there be until the last of his posterity is gathered into the Kingdom of God. . . I can tell you that no man from the days of Adam, no woman from the days of Eve to this day, who have lived, and who are now living upon the Earth will go into the Kingdom of their Father and God, to be crowned with Jesus Christ, without passing through the same Ordinances of the House of God, you and I have obeyed. I wish you distinctly*

*to understand that. There are many duties, and callings spoken of in the scriptures, and there are many not written, those for instance which are handed out to you by your President as circumstances require. Those imposed by the President of the Church of God, or by the president of any portion of it, are duties as necessary to be observed as though they were written in the Bible; but these requirements, duties, and callings change with the circumstances that surround the people of God.*

*But when you speak of the system of salvation to bring back the children of Adam and Eve into the presence of our Father and God, it is the same in all ages, among all people, and under all circumstances, worlds without end.*  
*Amen. (TPBY 3:347-348, underline added)*

This presents us with a difficult situation when trying to explain the reasoning behind the recent changes in the temple ordinances. What is perhaps particularly significant to us is that the changes made to the ordinances since the time of Brigham Young have been largely comprised of omissions rather than additions. In other words, with almost every change made to the endowment since the late 1800's - teachings once considered as important - have been removed and the ordinance has been consistently shortened. Considerably less information is shared with us in our current temple ceremonies than was shared in the early church. In addition, there seems to have been a shift in the function or purpose of certain ordinances over the years, especially celestial marriage. The new and everlasting covenant of marriage was viewed quite differently in the early church than it is today.

These omissions or deletions from the original ordinances do not necessarily render them false or of no value. For example, the ordinances performed in the times of Moses or the Kirtland temple were fairly abbreviated versions of what transpired in the Salt Lake temple during the time of Brigham Young. Yet, these “lesser ordinances” were authorized and recognized by God inasmuch as they lead the people to a certain point in their salvation. They didn’t take them all the way by providing everything necessary for exaltation. But they did provide as much truth as the Lord saw fit to give his people at that time. They were valid and true “in so far forth.”

However, it would be difficult to defend the idea that the current endowment offers as much valuable information to us as it did in Brigham Young’s time. With this in mind, the real problem with the changes in temple worship today doesn’t seem to be an issue of true or false. Rather it seems to be largely an issue of more or less. Simply stated, we have less of the original endowment today than we used to. Hence, we may have less of the “system of salvation” than we used to.

This issue is comparable to holding up a copy of the Book of Mormon and asking, “Is this book the word of God?” Assuming a positive response is returned, suppose we opened the book and tore out the entire book of Alma and asked the same question again, “Is this book still the word of God?” The answer should still be, “Yes, what is contained in that book is still the word of God.” However, it would clearly be less of the word of God than it was before. From a certain perspective we could with honesty say that it is “less true” than it

was when it contained the book of Alma. But it would still be a true record with valuable information to offer.

To some extent, it seems to be just so with the ordinances of the temple. If we compare the original endowment ceremony with what we have today and ask, “Is today’s ceremony still true, even with all the changes that have taken place?” I believe the honest answer would be something akin to, “Yes it is. However, it contains less truth than it used to.” It seems clear that since the time of Brigham Young much has been removed from our temple ceremonies and little has been added. People who receive their endowments today don’t receive nearly as much information as previous temple goers have received. In addition, it seems reasonable to assume that Joseph Smith and Brigham Young considered those omitted portions to be important and of worth to our salvation, otherwise they would not have included them in the first place. Because almost all of the changes made to the temple ordinances over the years involve omissions instead of additions, I feel we can safely say that this has been a move towards lower gospel awareness, not higher. The ordinances simply contain less truth than they once embraced. Likewise, it is not a far stretch to conclude that some of those changes may affect the results or purposes of those ordinances. It is certainly possible that, just as in the days of Moses, the ordinances we have today do not provide us with all we need for our salvation.

When we consider the second question regarding possible reasons for these changes and omissions, few legitimate options seem to arise. It seems unlikely that the Lord would remove knowledge as a reward for increased righteousness. Generally the Lord gives more knowledge to His righteous followers and less to the wicked. Therefore, it is more reasonable to assume that He would remove spiritual knowledge because of our wickedness. Via the Book of Mormon, the Lord has warned us about the results when we don’t give sufficient heed to the things He has reveals to us.

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:30, underline added)*

Given all the evidence for a latter-day apostasy in the LDS church, it is not hard to believe that omissions made to the temple ordinances may be a literal fulfillment of this scripture. This scripture clearly states that the Lord will “give more” to those who hearken unto his precepts and “take away” from those who do not. Which has He done with respect to the temple? As far as the temple is concerned, it would be difficult to argue that the Lord has given us more rather than less. It would also be difficult to view this as a result of righteousness. It is far more likely that these changes are the result of neglect or apostasy within the LDS church.

This brings us to our third question. As far as trying to discern when a given ordinance ceases to accomplish what it was originally designed to accomplish, we are perhaps only able

to make educated guesses or take the matter to the Lord. Clearly if we continue to remove portions of an ordinance, it will sooner or later become nothing more than a worthless ritual. This has happened before from apostasies in other dispensations and it can certainly happen again. However, at what point this occurs can perhaps only be answered via personal revelation. It is important that we view the changes in the temple as various shades of gray, rather than a black and white issue. Just like the Book of Mormon example mentioned earlier, it is likely a case of more truth vs. less truth, rather than all truth vs. no truth. However, it is equally important to view these changes as negative, rather than positive. The evidence seems to suggest that these changes have occurred due to a lack of diligence among the Latter-day Saints. They seem to support the idea of apostasy within the church.

## ***Celestial Marriage***

One of the more obvious contradictions between early Mormonism and modern Mormonism is found in the doctrines surrounding celestial marriage. There are at least two main issues to consider during a discussion about celestial marriage. One is whether or not the plural marriage is a doctrine of the restoration and essential for exaltation. The second is whether or not the Lord's authorized servants can revoke this law for a given time and people.

The latter issue of whether or not the Lord can revoke certain laws for certain people seems clear from the scriptures. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 56 the Lord states,

*Wherefore I, the Lord, command and revoke, as it seemeth me good; and all this to be answered upon the heads of the rebellious, saith the Lord. (D&C 56:3-4)*

In addition, the Book of Mormon provides us with a clear example of the Lord temporarily revoking plural marriage for a particular group of people.

*Wherefore, my brethren, hear me and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none. (Jacob 2:27)*

It seems certain that the Lord can revoke the law of plural marriage "as seemeth Him good." However, it is the issue of whether or not plural marriage is an essential doctrine for exaltation that provides us with a more difficult challenge to modern Mormonism.

In recent years it has been clearly taught that plural marriage is neither "doctrinal" or essential for exaltation. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley has recently stated,

*I condemn it [polygamy], yes, as a practice, because I think it is not doctrinal. It is not legal. And this church takes the position that we will abide by the law. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, magistrates in honoring, obeying and sustaining the law. (Larry King Live, Aired September 8, 1998, underline added)*

Likewise Elder Bruce R. McConkie has taught that,

*Plural marriage is not essential to salvation or exaltation. Nephi and his people were denied the power to have more than one wife and yet they could gain every blessing in eternity that the Lord ever offered to any people. In our day, the Lord summarized by revelation the whole doctrine of exaltation and predicated it upon the marriage of one man to one woman. (D. & C. 132:1-28.) (Mormon Doctrine, p.578, underline added)*

In addition, President Spencer W. Kimball has taught the following about plural marriage,

*Plural marriage ended through revelation. We warn you against the so-called polygamy cults which would lead you astray. Remember the Lord brought an end to this program many decades ago through a prophet who proclaimed the revelation to the world. People are abroad who will deceive you and bring you much sorrow and remorse. Have nothing to do with those who would lead you astray. (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.447)*

There are at least three main points that can be derived from these quotes by modern leaders of the church. They are:

1. Plural marriage is not doctrinal,
2. Plural marriage is not essential to exaltation, and
3. Plural marriages were no longer authoritatively solemnized in the church after the 1890 manifesto by President Wilford Woodruff.

Those who have taken the time to study the history of the church and its doctrines in detail know that none of these statements are entirely true. For example, it was clearly taught in early Mormonism that plural marriage was essential for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. When carefully studied, this can be derived from the scriptures themselves, especially section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants which states:

*For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory. (D&C 132:4)*

We must ask ourselves what this verse was talking about. Was it talking about monogamy or polygamy? In this we should turn to Joseph Smith himself. The prophet had a “key” by which we can gain further understanding of certain scriptures. He said,

*I have a key by which I understand the scriptures. I enquire, what was the question which drew out the answer, or caused Jesus to utter the parable? (TPJS, p.276)*

Now, if we apply Joseph Smith’s “key” to the verse above, it is easy to determine what the Lord is talking about in this verse. The question the Lord was answering for the prophet was specifically about polygamy, not monogamy.

*Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines— (D&C 132:1)*

Since the question specifically dealt with plural marriage, using Joseph Smith’s own key for understanding scriptures, we can only interpret the answer as dealing with plural marriage as well. If the answer dealt with monogamy then it wouldn’t serve as an answer to the original question. In addition, the whole point of writing down the revelation(s) found in section 132 was to convince Emma, Joseph’s wife, that plural marriage was a true doctrine of God.<sup>1</sup>

Another clue concerning the relationship between plural marriage and exaltation rests in the fact that the word “exaltation” appears only 12 times throughout the entire canon of LDS scriptures. 11 of those 12 occurrences are found in section 132.<sup>2</sup> Surely this is more than just a coincidence.

In section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants we read the following regarding the requirements for obtaining the highest degree of the celestial kingdom:

*In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;*

*And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];*

*And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.*

*He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase. (D&C 131:1-4)*

It is clear from the historical documents of the early church that the leaders of that time, including Joseph Smith, understood the new and everlasting covenant of marriage to include plural marriage. Hence, according to these verses, in order to obtain the highest degree of the celestial kingdom one must “enter into” plural marriage. “If he does not, he cannot obtain it.” The abundance of statements in support of this conclusion are not hard to find. For example, William Clayton once wrote,

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<sup>1</sup> For a good explanation of some of the circumstances involving Emma and the revelation on plural marriage, see “Mormon Polygamy: A History” page 57 by Richard Van Wagoner.

<sup>2</sup> See D&C 124:9; 132:17, 19, 22, 23, 26, 29, 37, 39, 49, 57, 63.

*From [Joseph Smith] I learned that the doctrine of plural and celestial marriage is the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to man on the earth, and that without obedience to that principle, no man can ever attain to the fulness of exaltation in celestial glory. (WC, Historical Record 6:225-7, as quoted in MHP 4:214)*

President Brigham Young had much to say about the importance of plural marriage. The following series of quotes all come from President Young.

*Now, where a man in this Church says, "I don't want but one wife, I will live my religion with one," He will perhaps be saved in the celestial kingdom; but when he gets there he will not find himself in possession of any wife at all. He has had a talent that he has hid up. He will come forward and say, "here is that which thou gavest me, I have not wasted it, and here is the one talent," and he will not enjoy it, but it will be taken and given to those who have improved the talents they received, and he will find himself without any wife, and he will remain single for ever and ever. But if the woman is determined not to enter into a plural marriage, that woman when she comes forth will have the privilege of living in single blessedness through all eternity. (JD 16:166).*

*...[men] who did not have but one wife in the Resurrection that woman will not be his but [will be] taken from him and given to another. (Wilford Woodruff Journal, Typescript 7:152)*

*I wish here to say to the Elders of Israel, and to all the members of this Church and kingdom, that it is in the hearts of many of them to wish that the doctrine of polygamy was not taught and practiced by us. It may be hard for many, and especially for the ladies, yet it is no harder for them than it is for the gentlemen. It is the word of the Lord, and I wish to say to you, and all the world, that if you desire with all your hearts to obtain the blessings which Abraham obtained, you will be polygamists at least in your faith, or you will come short of enjoying the salvation and the glory which Abraham has obtained. This is as true as that God lives. (JD 11:268-269)*

*If any of you will deny the plurality of wives and continue to do so, I promise that you will be damned. (Deseret News, 14 November 1855)*

*Monogamy, or restrictions by law to one wife, is no part of the economy of Heaven among men. (JD 9:322)*

In line with Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, President John Taylor also taught that plural marriage was essential to returning to our Heavenly Father.

*If we do not embrace that principle soon (plural marriage), the keys will be turned against us. If we do not keep the same law that our heavenly father*

*has kept, we cannot go with him. A man obeying a lower law is not qualified to preside over those who keep a higher law. (Matthew Cowley, Life of Wilford Woodruff, p.542 -- as quoted in MHP 1:311-312)*

Given President Taylor's warning, we must ask ourselves, "Have we embraced plural marriage in the church today?" If we have not, which seems to clearly be the case, have the keys been turned against us?

Even President Wilford Woodruff, who issued the first manifesto in 1890, understood and clearly taught that D&C 132 refers to polygamy, not monogamy, and that we "must" abide this law in order to become heirs of God.

*The new and everlasting Covenant is marriage, plural marriage - men may say that with their single marriage the same promises and blessings had been granted, why cannot I attain to as much as with three or four, many question me in this manner I suppose they are afraid of Edmunds, what is the Covenant? It is the eternity of the marriage covenant, and includes a plurality of wives and takes both to make the law...Joseph Smith declared that all who became heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ must obey his law or they cannot enter into the fullness and if they do not they may loose the one talent, when men are offered knowledge and they refuse it they will be damned and there is not a man that is sealed by this priesthood by covenants to enter into the fullness of the law and the same with the woman she says she will observe all that pertains to the new and everlasting Covenant both are under the Covenant - and must obey if they wish to enter into a continuation of the lives or of the seeds. (Utah Stake Historical Record #64904/CH0/1877-1888. Quarterly Conference held March 3rd and 4th, 1883; Sunday, 2 PM, p.271, underline added)*

President Joseph F. Smith taught the following about plural marriage:

*Some people have supposed that the doctrine of plural marriage was a sort of superfluity, or non-essential, to the salvation or exaltation of mankind. In other words, some of the Saints have said, and believe, that a man with one wife, sealed to him by the authority of the Priesthood for time and eternity, will receive an exaltation as great and glorious, if he is faithful, as he possibly could with more than one. I want here to enter my solemn protest against this idea, for I know it is false. There is no blessing promised except upon conditions, and no blessing can be obtained by mankind except by faithful compliance with the conditions, or law, upon which the same is promised. The marriage of one woman to a man for time and eternity by the sealing power, according to the will of God, is a fulfillment of the celestial law of marriage in part--and is good so far as it goes--and so far as a man abides these conditions of the law, he will receive his reward therefor, and this reward, or blessing, he could not obtain on any other grounds or conditions. But this is only the beginning of the law, not the whole of it. Therefore,*

whoever has imagined that he could obtain the fullness of the blessings pertaining to this celestial law, by complying with only a portion of its conditions, has deceived himself. He cannot do it. (JD 20:28-29, underline added)

This doctrine of plural marriage is one of the most important doctrines ever revealed to man. Without it man would come to a full stop; without it we never could be exalted to associate with and become Gods, neither could we attain to the power of eternal increase. (JD 21:10, underline added)

In addition to the prophets of the church quoted above, it is clear that other leaders understood that this was the official doctrine of the church. These leaders also bore strong testimony of the importance of plural marriage. The following quotes are just a sampling of some of their teachings.

*The great question is this -- will we unite with the plurality order of the Ancient Patriarchs, or will we consent voluntarily to be doomed to eternal celibacy? This is the true division of the question. One or the other we must choose. We cannot be married to our husbands for eternity, without subscribing to the law that admits a plurality of wives.* (Elder Samuel Richards, Millennial Star 15:226)

*I bear my solemn testimony that plural marriage is as true as any principle that has been revealed from the heavens. I bear my testimony that it is a necessity, and that the Church of Christ in its fulness never existed without it. Where you have the eternity of marriage you are bound to have plural marriage — bound to; and it is one of the marks of the Church of Jesus Christ in its sealing ordinances.* (Elder George Teasdale, JD 25:21, underline added)

*Some quietly listen to those who speak against the Lord's servants, against his anointed, against the plurality of wives, and against almost every principle that God has revealed. Such persons have half-a-dozen devils with them all the time. You might as well deny "Mormonism," and turn away from it, as to oppose the plurality of wives. Let the Presidency of this Church, and the Twelve Apostles, and all the authorities unite and say with one voice that they will oppose that doctrine, and the whole of them would be damned. What are you opposing it for? It is a principle that God has revealed for the salvation of the human family. He revealed it to Joseph the Prophet in this our dispensation; and that which he revealed he designs to have carried out by his people.* (Elder Heber C. Kimball, JD 5:204-205)

*But, says the objector [to plural marriage], we cannot see how this doctrine can be embraced as a matter of religion and faith; we can hardly conceive how it can be embraced only as a kind of domestic concern, something that pertains to domestic pleasures, in no way connected with religion. In reply*

*we will show you that it is incorporated as a part of our religion, and necessary for our exaltation to the fulness of the Lord's glory in the eternal world. (Elder Orson Pratt, JD 1:54)*

It is obvious that plural marriage was an official doctrine of the church and that it was clearly viewed as being necessary in order to receive the full blessings of exaltation. One would have to be blind to miss these differences between the teachings of early Mormonism and modern Mormonism concerning plural marriage.

Another important issue involves the teaching that plural marriage officially ended in the church with the 1890 manifesto. Most social Mormons are unaware that there were two other manifestos given after 1890. This was in part due to the fact that plural marriages were still secretly being solemnized in the church and sanctioned by members of the first presidency for many years after the 1890 manifesto. There is good evidence to show that plural marriage was alive and well in the church for at least 20 years after 1890. In fact, many of the general authorities of that time entered into plural marriages after the manifesto, including President Wilford Woodruff, who issued the manifesto in the first place. These post-manifesto plural marriages were solemnized by members of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and others who were duly authorized to perform such marriages.

There are many publications in print today that provide this information to any who want to look for it. The book *Solemn Covenant*, for example, by B. Carman Hardy, provides a list of over 200 well documented, plural marriages that were authoritatively performed in the church after the 1890 manifesto.<sup>3</sup>

With such evidence available to us, it is easy for one to see how some have become frustrated and confused by the statements of modern church leaders regarding plural marriage. The public statements from modern LDS leaders simply don't match either the scriptures or the huge amount of historical evidence now available to the public.

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<sup>3</sup> Solemn Covenant, p. 394.

## **The Leadership Of The Church**

One of the areas of concern expressed by many Latter-day Saints today is the concept of infallibility of the church leaders. It seems to be generally taught in the church today that the General Authorities, and especially the prophet, can't make important mistakes or teach things which are incorrect. Yet, as we have already demonstrated, it is clear that there are contradictions between the teachings of the early prophets of the church and the later ones. In almost every major area of LDS doctrine, from the attributes and nature of God to the purpose and function of the ordinances, we find discrepancies that are difficult, if not impossible, to completely harmonize. This tends to give rise to debate by honest seekers of truth and doubt to those who would find fault with the church or the gospel. Given these apparent contradictions, an honest truth seeker should not be too heavily criticized for asking which position is correct, if any. It seems to be a legitimate question to ask.

Unfortunately, some of these apparent contradictions are easily demonstrated in the remarks of President Gordon B. Hinckley, especially when he talks to the press. For example, in an interview with President Hinckley given by the San Francisco Chronicle on April 13, 1997 the following exchanged was published regarding the LDS doctrine that God was once a man:

*Q: There are some significant differences in your beliefs. For instance, don't Mormons believe that God was once a man?*

*A: I wouldn't say that. There was a little couplet coined, "As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become." Now that's more of a couplet than anything else. That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don't know very much about.*

*Q: So you're saying the church is still struggling to understand this?*

*A: Well, as God is, man may become. We believe in eternal progression. Very strongly. We believe that the glory of God is intelligence and whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. Knowledge, learning, is an eternal thing. And for that reason, we stress education. We're trying to do all we can to make of our people the ablest, best, brightest people that we can. (San Francisco Chronicle on Sunday, April 13, 1997)*

Notice here that President Hinckley clearly states that he "wouldn't say" that Mormons believe God was once a man. This same issue came up again several months later in an interview with Time Magazine.

*On whether his church still holds that God the Father was once a man, he (President Hinckley) sounded uncertain, "I don't know that we teach it. I don't know that we emphasize it... I understand the philosophical background behind it, but I don't know a lot about it, and I don't think others know a lot about it." (Time Magazine, August 4, 1997)*

Statements such as these create certain problems for those who have spent the time to research this doctrine. Not only is this doctrine taught with great clarity in the church by both the Gospel Principles manual as well as the 1998 Priesthood/Relief Society manuals, it is clear that this doctrine has been an important part of LDS theology since the time of Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith himself had this to say about the doctrine:

*These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible. (TPJS p.345)*

Notice how Joseph Smith considered this to be part of the “the first principle of the gospel.” It was clearly a very important doctrine to him. This inconsistency is made even worse by the fact that President Hinckley claimed we don’t understand this doctrine. This seems to fit right in with Joseph Smith’s statement that although these are simple concepts, “these are incomprehensible ideas to some.” Understandably, this does not sit well with many of those who love this doctrine and view it as one of the “pearls of great price” of the restoration.

With perhaps even more force than Joseph Smith, President Lorenzo Snow once taught the following concerning this doctrine:

*I had a direct revelation of this. It was most perfect and complete. If there ever was a thing revealed to man perfectly, clearly, so that there could be no doubt or dubiety, this was revealed to me, and it came in these words: “As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be.” (Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.5)*

Given the teachings of the early leaders of the church, combined with what we are taught in our current manuals, it is difficult to reconcile President Hinckley’s remarks concerning this doctrine.

Other comments from President Hinckley seem equally alarming. Compare the following answers to the same basic question, first from Gordon B. Hinckley and then from Brigham Young 120 years earlier.

*Q: And this belief in contemporary revelation and prophecy? As the prophet, tell us how that works. How do you receive divine revelation? What does it feel like?*

*A: Let me say first that we have a great body of revelation, the vast majority of which came from the prophet Joseph Smith. We don't need much revelation. We need to pay more attention to the revelation we've already received.*

*Now, if a problem should arise on which we don't have an answer, we pray about it, we may fast about it, and it comes. Quietly. Usually no voice of any kind, but just a perception in the mind. I liken it to Elijah's experience. When he sought the Lord, there was a great wind, and the Lord was not in the wind. And there was an earthquake, and the Lord was not in the earthquake. And a fire, and the Lord was not in the fire. But in a still, small voice. Now that's the way it works. (San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, April 13, 1997)*

And now, the same basic question as answered by Brigham Young.

*Q: [Do] you, like the old prophets, receive direct revelation from God?*

*A: Yes, and not only me but my brethren also.*

*Q: Does that extend to all the church without reserve or rank?*

*A: Yes, and it is just as necessary for the mother to possess this spirit in training and rearing her children as for anyone else.*

*Q: It is not absolutely necessary, then, that each person receive revelations through you?*

*A: Oh, no; through the spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost; but to dictate to the church is my part of it. (Deseret News, May 23, 1877)*

It is easy to see a stark contrast in these two answers. There is a clear difference in not only the content, but the attitude with which these questions were answered.

As mentioned earlier, there are also differences regarding how the church should be viewed and accepted by the world. President Hinckley apparently likes the idea of the church becoming popular in the world.

*Ours is the blessing to live in a better season (than the early saints). The terrible persecutions of the past are behind us. Today we are looked upon with respect by people across the world. (Ensign, Conference Report, November, 1996)*

President Brigham Young, on the other hand, apparently viewed this quite differently when he said,

*And when the spirit of persecution, the spirit of hatred, of wrath, and malice ceases in the world against this people, it will be the time that this people have apostatized and joined hands with the wicked, and never until then; which I pray may never come. (JD 4:326-327)*

I dare say that anyone who fails to see a major difference in these two statements is simply not comprehending the obvious. They are dramatically different.

This list could go on to include many other examples of different doctrines and approaches between early Mormonism and modern Mormonism. These teachings are by no means restricted to President Hinckley. They can be and have been fairly easily documented over the course of many years of LDS church history. As the letter quoted earlier mentions, many have found a rather lengthy list of discrepancies between the teachings of the early LDS prophets and those of more recent years. How do we explain these discrepancies? Who is right and who is wrong? Or is it somehow possible that both groups are right or both are wrong? It seems unfair that many of those who are honestly asking such questions with sincere hearts are judged rather harshly and are often cast out as obvious apostates. Although some may be a little too hasty in their judgements of such issues, these are legitimate questions for which there are few good answers. One possible conclusion is that the leaders of the LDS church are, indeed, fallible and may not possess all the answers or revelation that we would like them to. We may not like that answer, but if we are honest with ourselves, it must be listed among our possible conclusions to this dilemma. If we accept the fact that they are fallible, then we must ask which are right, the early prophets or the modern ones.

It is interesting to note that the doctrine of infallibility itself seems to be one of the apparent discrepancies between the early brethren and the modern leaders. Although it is taught with great frequency and force in the LDS church today, most of the early brethren seemed to stay away from the doctrine of infallibility. For example, the Prophet Joseph Smith boldly taught,

*We have heard men who hold the priesthood remark that they would do anything they were told to do by those who preside over them (even) if they knew it was wrong; but such obedience as this is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme; and the man who would thus willingly degrade himself, should not claim a rank among intelligent beings, until he turns from his folly. A man of God would despise the idea. Others, in the extreme exercise of their almighty authority have taught that such obedience was necessary, and that no matter what the saints were told to do by their presidents, they should do it without any questions. When the Elders of Israel will so far indulge in these extreme notions of obedience as to teach them to the people, it is generally because they have it in their hearts to do wrong themselves. (Millennial Star, Vol. 14, Num. 38, pp.593-595)*

President Brigham Young was also very concerned about the saints blindly following their leaders.

*What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction! Are you afraid of this? I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation,*

*and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually. (JD 9:151)*

*The First Presidency have of right a great influence over this people; and if we should get out of the way and lead this people to destruction, what a pity it would be! How can you know whether we lead you correctly or not? Can you know by any other power than that of the Holy Ghost? I have uniformly exhorted the people to obtain this living witness, each for themselves; then no man on earth can lead them astray. (JD 6:100)*

*I do not want men to come to me or my brethren for testimony as to the truth of this work; but let them take the Scriptures of divine truth, and there the path is pointed out to them as plainly as ever a guideboard indicated the right path to the weary traveller. There they are directed to go, not to Brothers Brigham, Heber, or Daniel, to any apostle or elder in Israel, but to the Father in the name of Jesus, and ask for the information they need. Can they who take this course in honesty and sincerity receive information? Will the Lord turn away from the honest heart seeking for truth? No, He will not; He will prove to them, by the revelations of His Spirit, the facts in the case. And when the mind is open to the revelations of the Lord it comprehends them quicker and keener than anything that is seen by the natural eye. It is not what we see with our eyes they may be deceived but what is revealed by the Lord from Heaven is sure and steadfast, and abides for ever. We do not want the people to rely on human testimony, although that cannot be confuted and destroyed; still, there is a more sure word of prophecy that all may gain if they will seek it earnestly before the Lord. (JD 12:96)*

These remarks seem to be quite a different story from the “follow the brethren” rhetoric so often taught in the LDS church today. This teaching continued through President Joseph F. Smith’s day.

*I know of but One in all the world who can be taken as the first and only perfect standard for us to follow, and he is the Only Begotten Son of God. I would feel sorry indeed, if I had a friend or an associate in this life who would turn away from the plan of life and salvation because I might stumble or make a failure of my life. I want no man to lean upon me nor to follow me, only so far as I am a consistent follower in the footsteps of the Master. (Gospel Doctrine, Pg.4, underline added. See also the Juvenile Instructor, 1915, Vol. 50, pp. 738, 739.)*

One modern “standout” in an otherwise standard approach to following the brethren can be found in President Ezra Taft Benson. He warned us against “trusting in the arm of flesh” instead of trusting in God, even if that “arm of flesh” is a high-ranking church leader.

*The Lord strengthened the faith of the early Apostles by pointing out Judas as a traitor, even before this Apostle had completed his iniquitous work (see Matthew 26:23-25; Luke 13:21-26). So also in our day the Lord has told us of the tares within the wheat that will eventually be hewn down when they are fully ripe. But until they are hewn down, they will be with us, amongst us. (See D&C 86:6-7.) (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)*

Notice how President Benson is not referring to the general membership of the church as “tares within the wheat.” He seems to be referring to the General Authorities of the LDS church, perhaps even the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. These are the ones he refers to as “tares within the wheat.” Notice in the following remarks that President Benson not only opens the door for continued problems within the leadership of the church, but even goes as far as to equate the General Authorities with “the arm of flesh.”

*Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon left the Church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell--one even helped plot his death. A natural question that might arise would be that if the Lord knew in advance that these men would fall, as He undoubtedly did, why did He have His prophet call them to such high office? The answer is: to fill the Lord's purposes. For even the Master followed the will of the Father by selecting Judas. President George Q. Cannon suggested an explanation, too, when he stated, “Perhaps it is his own design that faults and weaknesses should appear in high places in order that his saints may learn to trust in him and not in any man or men.” (Millennial Star 53:658, 1891) And this would parallel Nephi's warning, put not your “trust in the arm of flesh.” (2 Nephi 4:34) (An Enemy Hath Done This, Pg. 290, underline added. See also Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)*

The entire verse in 2 Nephi quoted by President Benson reads as follows:

*O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm. (2 Nephi 4:34)*

With almost a prophetic voice, President Benson tells us that there will always be problems among the leadership of the church. And, along with most of the early LDS leaders, he also tells us in whom we should place our trust instead of any man on earth, including the leaders of the church - even Jesus Christ, the Savior.

*Certain individuals within the Church may go astray and even fall away. This may happen even to a person in the Church who is in a position of some influence and authority. It has happened in the past. It will happen in the future. If our faith is in Jesus Christ and not in the arm of flesh, then we will*

*know that we are members of the Church of Jesus Christ and not the church of men. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg. 90)*

In summary, for those who are informed about the teachings of the early church leaders, there is an unmistakable difference in both the doctrine as well as the manner in which LDS leaders teach us today. Some of this may be contributed to a simple lack of gospel scholarship among today's General Authorities. Some of it may also be due to a lack of revelatory experiences such as those found in early Mormonism. Perhaps there are other reasons as well. However, we should not overlook the possibility that there are "tares among the wheat" within the LDS church leadership. We must be open to the idea of apostasy existing even in "high offices" of the church "to fill the Lord's purposes...in order that his saints may learn to trust in him and not in any man or men." As Joseph Smith prophesied,

*...you will travel west until you come to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.  
...you will live to see men rise in power in the church who will seek to put down your friends and the friends of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Many will be hoisted because of their money and the worldly learning which they seem to be in possession of; and many who are the true followers of our Lord and Savior will be cast down because of their poverty. (Mosiah Hancock Journal, p.19)*

For those who believe in Joseph Smith as a true prophet of God, these words give cause for great concern in our day. If Joseph Smith was right, then we should have a legitimate fear of trusting too much in the arm of flesh known as the General Authorities of the LDS church. This is especially true given the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies between the teachings of the early leaders vs. those of the modern church. As Brigham Young warned, to overlook such possibilities is to "settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting [our] eternal destiny in the hands of [our] leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in [our] salvation, and weaken that influence [we] could give to [our] leaders, did [we] know for [our]selves, by the revelations of Jesus, that [we] are led in the right way."<sup>4</sup> Is it any wonder that President George Q. Cannon once taught,

*Do not, brethren, put your trust in man though he be a Bishop, an apostle or a president; if you do, they will fail you at some time or place; they will do wrong or seem to, and your support will be gone; but if we lean on God, He will NEVER fail us. When men and women depend upon GOD ALONE and trust in HIM ALONE, their faith will not be shaken if the highest in the Church should step aside. (DW 43:322 [Mar 7, 1891]).*

I fear that too many Latter-day Saints, including some fledgling ultra-Mormons, are making this mistake today by placing too much trust in church leaders, only to lose faith when they find those leaders saying or doing something which seems contradictory or conflicting. Too many people wrongly judge the church or the restoration as a whole, or even God himself

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due to this problem. It is clear that the modern Mormon's cry to "follow the brethren" is simply not the all-encompassing answer that we would like it to be.

### ***Holy Men That Ye Know Not Of***

Another issue that ought to be raised regarding the latter-day apostasy concerns the popular belief that the members of the LDS church are the only group of people recognized by the Lord as having proper authority. Within the LDS church we tend to believe that we are the only ones on earth through whom the Lord is working or who are authorized to act in the name of God. This not only seems somewhat arrogant and proud, but seems to place restrictions on the Lord that contradict both logic and prophetic utterances. For example, the Lord himself told Joseph Smith that there may be other righteous groups on the earth that we know little or nothing about.

*Wherefore, I will that all men shall repent, for all are under sin, except those which I have reserved unto myself, holy men that ye know not of. (D&C 49:8)*

Notice that the men spoken of in this scripture are not "under sin" and hence have no need to repent. I think it is safe to say that the LDS church has never achieved such a level of righteousness in its entire history. And according to this verse, not even Joseph Smith knew who these men were.

Likewise, the Savior himself had no problem allowing for proper authority outside of the main group of saints.

*And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us.*

*But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

*For he that is not against us is on our part.*

*For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. (Mark 9:38-41. See also Luke 9:50.)*

How would most Latter-day Saints react today if they "saw one casting out devils in [Christ's] name, and he followeth not us?" It is reasonable to assume that we would tend to forbid him as well or at least claim that he has no authority because he is not a member of the LDS church. Yet, in light of this passage in the New Testament, it is doubtful that the Savior holds this same view.

Is it possible that the Lord could reserve a righteous people unto himself in our day - a people apart from the mainstream LDS church? Remember the prediction of Elder Orson Pratt quoted earlier?

*There must be a reformation. There will be a reformation among this people, but He will plead with the stronger ones of Zion, He will plead with this people, He will plead with those in high places, He will plead with the priesthood of this church, until Zion shall become clean before him. I do not know but what it would be an utter impossibility to commence and carry out some principles pertaining to Zion right in the midst of this people. They have strayed so far that to get a people who would conform to heavenly laws it may be needful to lead some from the midst of this people and commence anew in the regions round about in these mountains. (JD 15:360, underline added)*

Of course, this is exactly what some of the fundamentalist groups claim - that they have been led out by the Lord from the midst of the LDS church to continue practicing the higher laws revealed to Joseph Smith. That this is a possibility seems obvious. The Lord can do whatever He wants to in this regard. It is even possible that a separate group is secretly living the higher laws under the direction of the First Presidency of the LDS church. Why not? What's so wrong with Elder Pratt's idea to keep the higher principles alive among those who are willing to live them?

This idea is neither inconceivable nor contrary to what the Lord has done in the past. There are many occasions in the scriptures where the Lord is dealing with different groups of people in various parts of the world. In fact, the entire Book of Mormon story, including both the Nephite and Jaredite accounts, is one of the Lord leading a people away from the prevailing religious group of the time and starting anew in a different part of the world while still actively working with the old group at the same time.

The real problem with this concept is that there are so many groups claiming to be the "one and only" authoritative group. Again, in many ways it is a situation closely resembling that of Joseph Smith's day. Some groups are crying "lo here" while others are crying "lo there."

If there are other groups of people who have proper authority from God and who have separated themselves from the LDS church under the direction of the Lord, who are they? Even the best of scholars can't determine for sure whether fundamentalist founders like Joseph Musser or Loren Wooley received the authority they claimed to have received. Although there are decent arguments on both sides, there is simply not enough evidence one way or the other to be converted via the historical data available.

It seems clear that if one is to know whether or not any of the fundamentalist groups are acting under the direction of the Lord, they would have to know this in the same manner that Joseph Smith came to know about the religious groups in his day, namely, through some kind of revelatory experience. I doubt that there is any other way to know for sure. I don't think it is too far out of line for us to take the route Joseph Smith took regarding the religious confusion experienced in his day.

*During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. ...so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong.*

*In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?*

*While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (Joseph Smith History 1:8, 10-11)*

There is precious little fault that can be found with Joseph Smith's manner of dealing with religious confusion. Investigate as often as occasion permits, stay aloof, realize that you can't figure it out on your own, and then pray to find out for yourself, not relying on the testimony of any other person for your conversion. It is just so today. Believing solely in the experiences of others is a poor means of conversion in these cases. Unfortunately, fundamentalist claims to conversion via personal revelation are just as common as they are within the mainstream LDS church. In order to know for sure, one must answer these questions for themselves via a personal experience with God or his messengers, just as Joseph Smith did. This is just as true for fundamentalist groups as it is for the LDS church itself. The following words of Brigham Young ring true for us whether we are talking about the LDS church or some other group out there who claims to be true followers of God.

*I do not want men to come to me or my brethren for testimony as to the truth of this work; but let them take the Scriptures of divine truth, and there the path is pointed out to them as plainly as ever a guideboard indicated the right path to the weary traveller. There they are directed to go, not to Brothers Brigham, Heber, or Daniel, to any apostle or elder in Israel, but to the Father in the name of Jesus, and ask for the information they need. Can they who take this course in honesty and sincerity receive information? Will the Lord turn away from the honest heart seeking for truth? No, He will not; He will prove to them, by the revelations of His Spirit, the facts in the case. And when the mind is open to the revelations of the Lord it comprehends them quicker and keener than anything that is seen by the natural eye. It is not what we see with our eyes they may be deceived but what is revealed by the Lord from Heaven is sure and steadfast, and abides for ever. We do not want the people to rely on human testimony, although that cannot be confuted and destroyed;*

*still, there is a more sure word of prophecy that all may gain if they will seek it earnestly before the Lord. (JD 12:96)*

My own experience has been that receiving these answers to prayer is often more difficult than either Brigham Young or the scriptures seem to indicate. I don't think I know anyone who claims to receive all the revelation they seek. And I fail to believe that every person out there who claims personal revelation is telling the truth or receiving it from the proper source. However, I also fail to believe that all are either liars or deceived. Some of them seem to be very honest, humble people who are sincerely trying to do what they believe the Lord has told them to do, whether they are members of the LDS church or not. Yet, it seems unlikely that all, or even most, are correct in their claims.

In general, I don't think we are aware of who has authority from God and who does not. Although we are not obliged to believe or accept another person's claim to personal revelation or authority, it is a claim that is impossible to refute without receiving revelation on the subject for ourselves. If you ask someone why they believe what they believe, and the answer is, "I received a personal witness from God," there is no adequate argument under heaven that can be used against this claim except that of personal revelation for yourself. It would be like trying to tell Nephi that he didn't really receive revelation to kill Laban because the scriptures clearly teach "thou shalt not kill." To make such an attempt without knowing from God yourself is futile.

It seems clear that throughout history the Lord has lead various groups of people at the same time, all receiving revelation through various prophets called by the Lord. In fact, it is difficult to find instances in the scriptures where there is only one active prophet at a time. It is much more common to find multiple prophets preaching to multiple groups of people. Why should we expect anything different in our day? It is also a common theme for the Lord to lead a people out from the midst of the main group in order to start anew. Whether or not He has done something similar today is certainly worth considering, but not readily apparent. Finding out whether a given group or other is actually led by the Lord seems to be purely a matter of personal revelation, and perhaps even a personal calling by God. Joining any of these groups without some sort of personal, spiritual experience seems to reduce that choice to simply a luck of the draw, or perhaps an educated guess, the results of which could be either exaltation or condemnation.

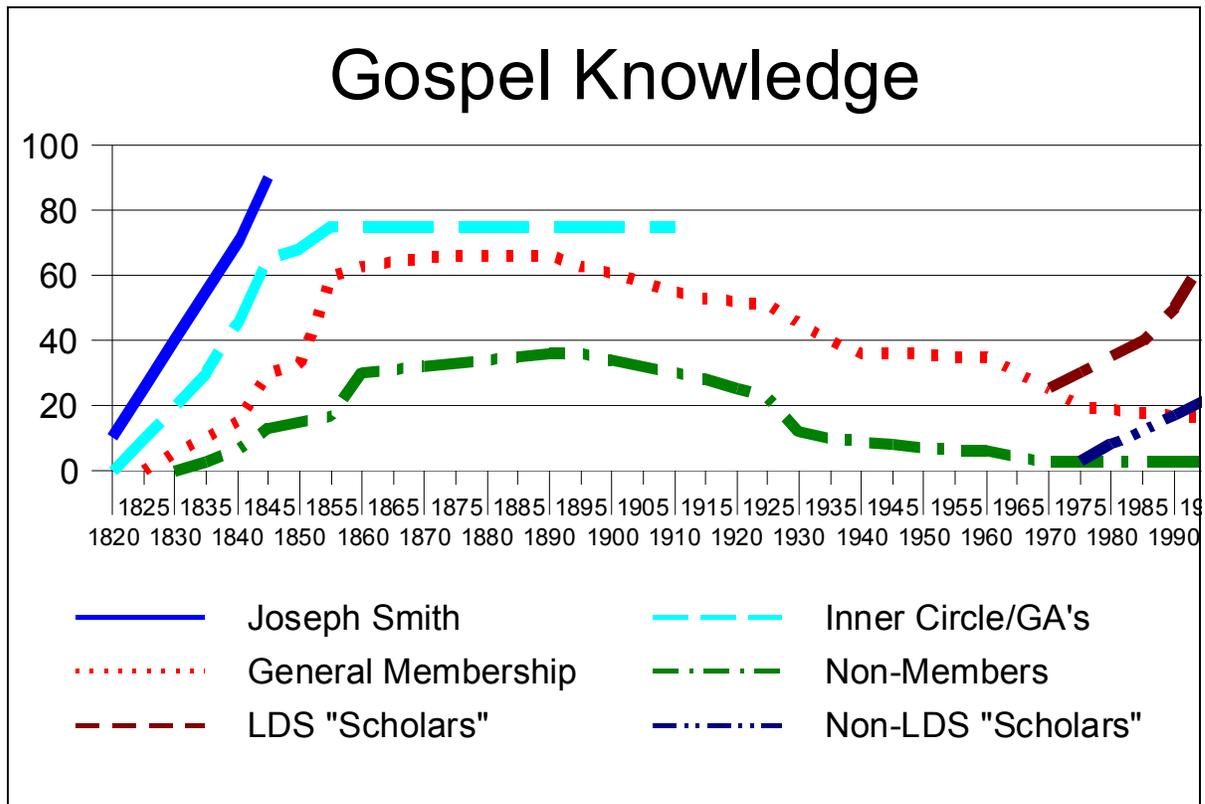
## **Summary**

It will be said by some who read this work that there are many more issues that could have been covered to show that the LDS church has taken a downward path. These people are correct. We have only scratched the surface. However, these issues can be found by any who honestly seek them. The purpose of this work so far has been to convince the reader that there are, indeed, legitimate concerns within the LDS church - that it is entirely possible, even probable, that the LDS church is taking a downward path of apostasy. I have raised only a few issues that I hope will lead people to this conclusion.

The graph below attempts to illustrate what we've discussed so far. It suggests that knowledge was dispensed rather quickly to Joseph Smith, who shared much of this knowledge with his "inner circle" of faithful followers. However, less knowledge was dispensed to the general membership of the church and less still to the non-Mormon community or mission field.

After the prophet's death, Brigham Young and others began to openly teach many of the doctrines previously given only to the inner circle. The general membership of the church was raised to a whole new level. However, since the late 1800's, this higher knowledge has been gradually and consistently "taken away" from the general membership of the church.

Beginning in the 1970's, church historical records were more freely released to the public. Since that time, the history and doctrines of early Mormonism have begun to be published with more accuracy and frequency. This milestone, combined with modern technology which allows for easy access to a great deal of LDS information, has resulted in somewhat of a subculture of Latter-day Saints who understand far more about these early doctrines than most members of the church, and who are having difficulty reconciling many of their findings with the teachings of modern Mormonism. Likewise, non-Mormon scholars, as well as the media, can now access this information rather quickly and easily. Indeed, many non-Mormons are emerging who now know more about LDS history and doctrine than do the rank and file members of the church.



For the honest, truth seeking Latter-day Saint, the church presents some significant puzzles to solve. These puzzles are now readily available to any who will take the time to study the history and doctrines surrounding the restoration. Indeed, there is no hiding them. We must face the fact that the LDS church has changed in significant ways since its early days. With few exceptions, these changes tend to reflect a downward path, one of increased apostasy and ignorance of God's ways and laws as revealed through the prophet Joseph Smith and other key figures of early Mormonism. This fact is becoming as clear as any story of apostasy found in the scriptures. As President Joseph Fielding Smith put it, "It is easy for one who observes to see how the apostasy came about in the primitive church of Christ. Are we not traveling the same road?"<sup>5</sup> The undeniable answer is that we clearly are. We are finally at a point in the history of the LDS church in which we can no longer cover up the problems that exist.

If the course of the LDS church is to be corrected, as Elder Packer suggested, there are at least two possible scenarios for the LDS church to follow. One involves the calamities that are prophesied to come upon the Lord's house in the last days.<sup>6</sup> As we've seen from the many scriptures on the subject, calamities are a common way for the Lord to deal with his unrighteous children. They often have the effect of humbling them towards repentance. The other option for the church involves a "reformation" as mentioned by Elder Orson Pratt.<sup>7</sup> However, it seems evident that such a reformation would have to be led by a rather powerful and charismatic prophet of God. Such a reformation or "course correction" would have to involve revelation directing us to higher levels of righteousness regarding a great many issues. If it did not include prophetic leadership then it would be no different than the other protestant reformations that have occurred since the time of Christ. Without divine revelation, it would be unlikely to produce the results we seek. Hence, the need for "one mighty and strong" is essential. Under such a reformation, it is probable that severe persecution from the world would begin again against the saints. In addition, a reformation of this nature would almost certainly mean leaving the weaker members of the church behind. Many would simply leave the church because the higher doctrines and persecutions would be more than they could endure.

Whatever happens, if no action is taken soon, there may be little left of the foundation Joseph Smith once established. We must begin to face the fact that the LDS church is in trouble and that we need to repent and start the process of progression anew. If we don't, little will separate us from the Pharisees and Zoramites of past dispensations. Like them, most members of the LDS church will tend believe that "all is well in Zion, yea Zion prospereth"<sup>8</sup> - that they and the church are on the correct path of righteousness, when in fact they have apostatized from the truth.

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith Journal, 28 December 1938

<sup>6</sup> D&C 112:26

<sup>7</sup> JD 15:360

<sup>8</sup> 2 Nephi 28:21 (20-31)

## IS THE LDS CHURCH STILL TRUE?

With all the evidence against the LDS church, the question must be asked, “Is the LDS church still true?” Is it still of worth to us in our search for spiritual guidance? Or is it in a more or less worthless state of apostasy, similar to that of other Christian denominations in the world?

In order to properly address these questions it is important that we have an accurate understanding of what apostasy is and is not. I fear most people misunderstand the true nature of apostasy and sometimes jump to conclusions too quickly. Many people have a tendency to view apostasy as an all or nothing, black and white issue. If we don't understand what apostasy is and is not, how can we accurately judge any church or group?

### **What Does “Apostasy” Mean?**

This question is more complex than most people realize. Generally, when we think of apostasy, we think in terms of either being “in” apostasy or “out of” apostasy. We tend to deal with apostasy as somewhat of a black and white issue. For example, many Latter-day Saints believe that there was a specific time in history when the “great apostasy” occurred after the time of Christ. We often believe that we should be able to find one significant event or date when the great apostasy took place. This, however, is clearly an incorrect view of how apostasy happens. If there is one thing that we should understand about apostasy, it is that apostasy is not an event. It is a process. If we study the apostasy that occurred after the time of Christ we will never be able to find a single event or date that “flipped the switch,” so to speak, and changed Christ's church from true to false. Rather, what we find is that it was slowly dismantled and corrupted over a long period of time. This is true of most apostasies. Generally speaking, we find that during most apostasies, knowledge is lost in much the same way that it is gained during a restoration. That is, apostasy usually occurs line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. This is important to understand as we discuss apostasy in the LDS church.

Via the Book of Mormon the Lord has outlined what will happen to us when we hearken unto His counsels and when we don't.

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:30)*

This is again outlined by the Savior in the New Testament.

*And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*

*He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*

*For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. (Matthew 13:10-12)*

This concept of giving more to some and less to others is reaffirmed later in the Book of Mormon.

*It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)*

This is also taught in the Doctrine and Covenants.

*And I command you that you preach naught but repentance, and show not these things unto the world until it is wisdom in me.*

*For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish. (D&C 19:21-22)*

And again,

*And now I say unto you, keep these things from going abroad unto the world until it is expedient in me, that ye may accomplish this work in the eyes of the people, and in the eyes of your enemies, that they may not know your works until ye have accomplished the thing which I have commanded you; (D&C 45:72)*

Thus, the gospel is given to us “precept by precept, here a little and there a little.” It seems reasonable to assume that during an apostasy, the Lord will take the gospel away in much the same manner. In addition, these scriptures seem to indicate that the Lord will teach people according to their own level of acceptance and faith, different people being at different levels and hence being taught at different levels of the gospel accordingly. This creates no small problem for the church. How can the church adequately teach all people at different levels? It’s like teaching first graders and college students in the same class.

We should notice in each of the scriptures above that the Lord clearly doesn’t give everything to those who begin to hearken unto Him. Rather, He gives us a portion of His word to see how we will react. Then, according to our diligence, or lack thereof, He will either give us more or take some away. I think it is a fair assumption that the Lord will not

take away everything all at once. It is more reasonable to assume that this happens line upon line and precept upon precept. However, it seems clear from these scriptures that He will give more to those who hearken to His precepts while taking away from those who don't want to go any further with what they've been given. In addition, it seems He will reveal "mysteries" to some people, while keeping the rest in the dark on certain issues "lest they perish." Yet it is also clear that the Lord is still very active among those who do not receive the mysteries. He is still revealing truth to them on their level. This seems to be how apostasy works, as well as restoration. Contrary to popular belief, it's not an all or nothing condition of either having God's word or not having God's word. It seems to be more of a continuum that deals with various degrees of righteousness and wickedness, more truth and less truth, and hence, various degrees of knowledge, ignorance, and authority to match. Indeed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell when "total apostasy" occurs. Just as there are different levels of righteousness and wickedness, there are also different levels of apostasy and restoration.

In addition to variations in the quantity of truth the Lord reveals to us, another important point to recognize regarding apostasy concerns the quality of revealed truths, or the existence of higher and lower laws. Not only does God give and take away his laws on a quantitative basis (i.e. a higher number of laws to the righteous and a lower number to the wicked), he also gives and takes away from us on a qualitative basis. Some laws of God are even intended to completely replace other laws, whether higher or lower.

For example, if we compare the law of tithing with the law of consecration, we find two similar, but somewhat opposing laws of God. Basically, the law of tithing is intended to be replaced by the law of consecration. It is fair to say that where one exists, the other will not. If you are living the law of consecration, there is no need to live the law of tithing. What is giving 10% of your income compared with giving all of your time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed you? Once you begin to live the law of consecration, the law of tithing becomes obsolete. Yet, both of these laws came to us by God through revelation via proper authority. One is simply "higher" than the other. You might accurately say that one law is of higher "quality" than the other. A reasonable question could be raised as to whether those people living the lower law of tithing are "in apostasy?" The answer might be "yes" when compared to those living the law of consecration, but "no" when compared to those living no law at all. Thus we can see how apostasy is a relative issue.

Another example of higher and lower laws is found in the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses is clearly a lower law. This lower law was given to the children of Israel because they rejected the higher law. Then, when Christ came to earth in the meridian of time, this lower law was replaced by a higher law. It is not that the Law of Moses was false or incorrect. Nor is it the case that Moses was a fallen prophet because he taught such low laws. It is simply a lower law, given by God according to the faithfulness and diligence of the people at that time.

Again, we should ask ourselves, "Were the children of Israel under the Law of Moses in apostasy?" I believe the answer to this question is, "Yes, in that they were only worthy of the lower law, but no in that they were living a law given to them from God, by revelation, and

via proper authority.” When viewed in this manner, we quickly see that a people can be authoritatively led by God and still be in some form of apostasy. In fact, a quick inspection of the Lord’s people throughout history will show that this is the case most of the time. With very few exceptions the Lord’s chosen people have always been at some level of apostasy. This is true even when they were lead by and obeyed true prophets.

With this in mind, whenever we speak of apostasy, we should always be careful how we think about it and how we choose our words and actions. We should be cautious that we don’t view it as purely a black and white issue. Questions such as, “Is the LDS church still true?” or “Are we in apostasy?” may be too simplistic to give an adequate response. A better, more accurate question might be, “Are we in the process of apostasy?” In other words, which direction are we headed? Are we moving up the ladder towards higher truths or down the ladder towards lower truths? We should also ask, “At what level of apostasy are we?” Where are we on the continuum of righteousness and wickedness? Are we currently teaching and trying to live the higher principles as revealed by Joseph Smith or lived by the City of Enoch, or are we shying away from such things and becoming more and more like other Christian churches who possess and live spiritual truths on a fairly low level? I feel these are more meaningful questions to ask about the current state of apostasy in the LDS church, or any other religious group for that matter.

So we see that apostasy is a process, not an event. It is a continuum rather than a line that either has or hasn’t been crossed. In addition, we should see that there are both quantitative and qualitative aspects associated with the various degrees of apostasy and righteousness.

### ***The Four Main Areas Of Apostasy***

Another aspect of apostasy worth adding to our definition is that it can be broken down into four main areas. These areas are:

- Revelation
- Authority
- Doctrine/Principles
- Actions/Attitude

Most of the time when we speak of the apostasy of a given group or person, the issues that concern us can be categorized into one or more of these four general areas. Whenever apostasy occurs it is always because of a lack of revelation, authority, doctrine, or conformance to what God has told us to do or be. It may include only one of these areas or it may involve all of them. But it will always deal with at least one of these four general areas.

It is important to note that although all four of these areas of apostasy are important, they are not equal in significance. As far as the church is concerned, it is reasonable to assume that revelation and authority are more important than doctrine and actions. This is because regardless of whether we are currently living higher laws or lower laws, if we are doing it without God’s approval, we are wrong. As the Lord himself explained in the Doctrine and Covenants,

*Behold, I, the Lord, command; and he that will not obey shall be cut off in mine own due time, after I have commanded and the commandment is broken.*

*Wherefore I, the Lord, command and revoke, as it seemeth me good; and all this to be answered upon the heads of the rebellious, saith the Lord. (D&C 56:3-4)*

Likewise, the prophet Joseph Smith once said,

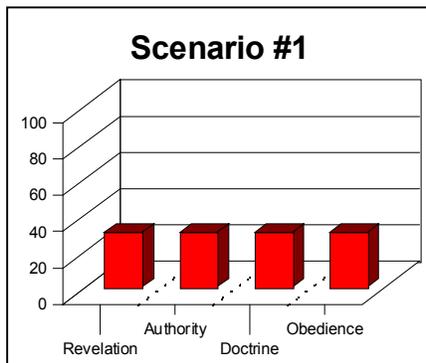
*Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. (Sangamo Journal, August 19, 1842)*

God always knows best. It is clear that the Lord sometimes commands us to live higher laws and other times He commands us to live lower laws. For example, if the Lord says, “live plural marriage,” then we should live it. However, if He says, “don’t live plural marriage,” then we should not live it, even if it has been commanded previously and can be shown to be a higher principle of the Celestial Kingdom. As far as our actions are concerned, the question isn’t merely whether or not a given doctrine is a higher or lower principle. The more important question is always whether or not God condones or approves of it in our particular situation or at this particular time.

If we look at the various possibilities regarding these four areas of apostasy, as outlined in the graphs below, we see that there are various combinations or types of apostasy.



There are clearly more possible variations than the four listed above. However, these should be sufficient to make the point at hand. A close inspection of each scenario provides us with some better insight and should help us to make better judgements regarding the apostasy of the LDS church or any other religious organization. Let’s look at each scenario in more detail and see how they compare to the LDS church.



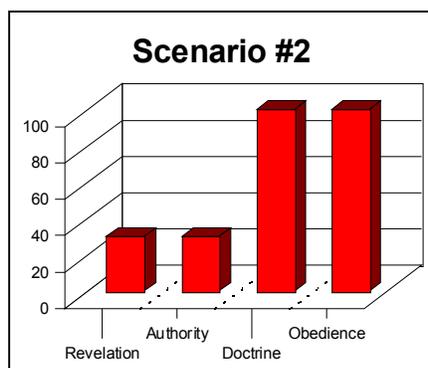
Scenario #1 is what we might refer to as a “complete apostasy.” It represents a state of little or no revelation, authority, doctrine, and obedience. It is how most Mormons would describe other Christian religions. For example, we politely say that the Catholic and protestant denominations have some truth, but that it is at a relatively low level and that they have lost the authority to act in God’s name or be divinely led by their leaders. Religious organizations that are

at low levels of revelation, authority, doctrine, and obedience are generally considered to be “in apostasy.”

It is certainly possible that the LDS church today matches this scenario. As we have already shown, the church has fallen dramatically in the areas of doctrinal purity and obedience. We have also shown earlier that this can be easily demonstrated by comparing the doctrines of the restoration, as taught by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early LDS leaders, with what is taught and lived today in the church. The question remains, however, as to whether or not the church is led by revelation or whether it still has proper authority and recognition from God. These two issues are far more difficult to determine via a simple comparison or study.

An interesting thing often occurs when members of the LDS church come to the conclusion that the church has fallen into a state of “complete” apostasy. It has been my experience that such people tend to be much more lenient and forgiving of other apostate churches than they are of the LDS church. It is as if they are saying, “You were once my best friend and I trusted you. But you betrayed me and now you are my worst enemy.” It seems to be somewhat of an all or nothing attitude. However, they don’t often express this attitude towards other denominations - those who were never trusted as a “best friend” to begin with, but who also never really offered them anything more than the LDS church. Some will even go as far as to claim that the LDS church has become the Great and Abominable Church of the Devil spoken of in the scriptures. It seems that for some people, either they want the LDS church to be “everything” to them or they want it to be “nothing.” It is either their best friend or their worst enemy with no middle ground or gray area. Yet they will gladly allow this gray area to exist in other churches that have been in a far greater degree of apostasy for centuries.

Although this black and white attitude is perhaps understandable under the circumstances of their experience, it hardly seems fair or accurate to view the LDS church as being worse than other apostate churches. Even if the LDS church is in “complete” apostasy, it still has such things as the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, the greater portion of the temple ceremonies, access to the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others, etc. Access to these things alone would seem to place it in a position much higher than most other religious organizations. It certainly wouldn’t be all we want or look forward to in a church, but I think it’s fair to say that it is head and shoulders above any other Christian church we know of, at least in the area of doctrine.



hardship on their part. There are also many other doctrines clearly taught by Joseph Smith and

Scenario #2 is also a common theme in religious history. It suggests that an organization may not have the proper authority or be lead by revelation, but that they are trying their best to live the higher laws as best they can. Many LDS fundamentalist groups likely fall into this category. For example, it seems reasonable to assume that not all fundamentalist groups (if any) have the authority they claim to have. Yet, many of these groups try to live according to the higher principles of the gospel, especially plural marriage and the united order. This often comes with great sacrifice and

Brigham Young that are common among fundamentalist groups. Hence, in many respects, it can be said of these groups that they are more doctrinally sound than the general membership of the LDS church and that they have made a better attempt to live by the higher principles. Yet, as already stated, it seems clear that in spite of their good intentions and sacrifices, it is unlikely that all of these groups receive revelation from God and have proper authority to practice and preach the doctrines they espouse. It is important to note that this may separate them little from other Christian churches who also have no authority to practice and preach the doctrines and ordinances they espouse. However, if God has truly revoked these laws, as seemeth him good, then all this “obedience” may end up being answered upon the heads of these rebellious people.<sup>1</sup>

The key to righteousness is clearly to do as you are told by God. This can be seen from the examples of the ancient patriarchs as mentioned in section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Some of these patriarchs were justified in living plural marriage while others were not. In each case they were judged according to their obedience to God, not according to their adherence to higher principles independent of God’s will. Notice in the following verses why living plural marriage was accounted as righteousness in the cases of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

*Abraham received all things, whatsoever he received, by revelation and commandment, by my word, saith the Lord, and hath entered into his exaltation and sitteth upon his throne. (D&C 132:29)*

*God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law; and from Hagar sprang many people. This, therefore, was fulfilling, among other things, the promises.*

*Was Abraham, therefore, under condemnation? Verily I say unto you, Nay; for I, the Lord, commanded it. (D&C 132:34-35)*

*Abraham received concubines, and they bore him children; and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, because they were given unto him, and he abode in my law; as Isaac also and Jacob did none other things than that which they were commanded; and because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods. (D&C 132:37)*

Now notice the differentiating factor for those who “sinned” because they lived plural marriage.

*David also received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon and Moses my servants, as also many others of my servants, from the beginning of creation until this time; and in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not of me. (D&C 132:38)*

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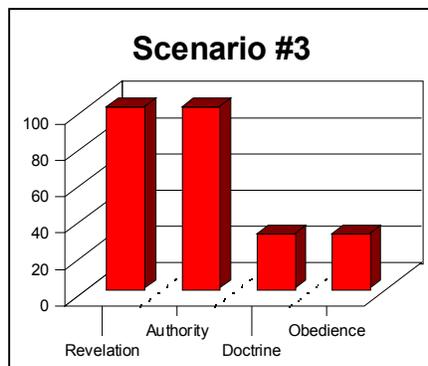
<sup>1</sup> D&C 56:4

Again, the key to righteousness is clearly to do as God tells us to do, not to simply live the higher laws independent of his will. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were exalted because they “did none other things than that which they were commanded,” but David and Solomon sinned against the Lord in “those things they received not of [Him].” Likewise, the Lord told the Nephites that “there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, those among them who took only one wife were clearly doing “none other things than that which they were commanded,” while those among them who took plural wives were receiving things not of the Lord. It is very doubtful that those Nephite monogamists will be damned while those Nephite polygamists are saved. It is more likely to be just the opposite.

The same is true of our day as well. Just because plural marriage is a requirement for exaltation doesn’t mean that it is always a righteous act for all people to live it at all times. Again, the issues of authority and revelation are far more important than the issues of doctrinal knowledge and obedience to higher principles. The Lord has provided a way for those who miss the opportunity to accept the ordinances in this life to accept them in the next life. This includes plural marriage as much as it includes baptism.

It seems clear that scenario #2 is unlikely to apply to the LDS church today. If Joseph Smith and other early leaders of the church were true prophets of God, then there is little or no chance that the LDS church today is living, or even knowledgeable about, the higher doctrines of the gospel, as taught by those leaders. In fact, you will most often get into some trouble by even discussing those doctrines with the general membership of the LDS church today. Hence, regardless of the questions involving revelation and authority, scenario #2 doesn’t seem to fit “modern Mormonism.”

It should be reiterated, however, that even though the LDS church has fallen from the lofty goals of Joseph Smith and the restoration, it is still far and away more doctrinally sound than any other Christian church on earth, barring, perhaps, some Mormon fundamentalist groups. Even if scenario #2 doesn’t apply when comparing modern Mormonism to early Mormonism, it certainly could apply when comparing modern Mormonism to any other modern Christian church. I feel this is important to realize when comparing the apostasy of the LDS church with that of other churches. If one leaves the LDS church because of doctrinal impurity, he or she is unlikely to find any satisfaction among any other church of our day.



Scenario #3 suggests that although a people may be receiving proper revelation and have proper authority from God, they are largely ignorant of the revealed doctrines and struggle obeying them.

Examples of scenario #3 are common throughout the scriptures. The Law of Moses and the Children of Israel were excellent examples of this. Even though the Law of Moses was a very low law, intended for a people who had difficulty

<sup>2</sup> Jacob 2:27

understanding and obeying even the simplest instructions from God, it was still revealed from God and given to the people through an authorized prophet. The key to its truthfulness was not a matter of higher or lower laws. Rather, it was a matter of authority and revelation. Likewise, the question of whether or not the children of Israel should have followed those lower laws and the organization that promoted them cannot be reasonably refuted. It cannot be said, for example, that Moses was a fallen prophet because he taught the lower laws instead of the higher ones. Nor can it reasonably be argued that the children of Israel should have tried to live higher laws instead of the lower ones given to them by God at that time. It seems clear that they were expected to strictly live the lower laws first. Any deviation from this course brought about the swift judgements of God.

In addition to the Old Testament, this scenario also plays out in much of the Book of Mormon. For example, the prophets Lehi and Jacob both preached against the higher law of plural marriage, even though Joseph Smith and others clearly taught its necessity for exaltation.<sup>3</sup> Likewise the prophets Abinadi and Ammon taught doctrines about the nature of God that were a far cry from the higher truths restored through Joseph Smith.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that some of these prophets even misunderstood the higher doctrines themselves - not having had the full account revealed unto them at the time of their preaching. Such seemed to be the case with Alma the younger and his understanding of the resurrection, for example.<sup>5</sup> Yet, all of these prophets clearly received revelation and had the authority to teach these lower doctrines as inspired by God. It is also fair to say that the people they taught were under obligation to follow the teachings of these prophets.

As far as “modern Mormonism” is concerned, it is certainly possible, perhaps even likely, that scenario #3 applies to the LDS church. Even if the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is currently teaching and living lower laws, this fact, by itself, is no indication that the Lord’s involvement has been removed or that he is no longer at the helm, as some would suggest. Clearly, the higher and more important question deals with revelation and authority, which are often closely tied to one another. Just as God directed Moses to bring down the lower laws after having already brought down the higher laws, so also the Lord could easily be directing a similar effort today by taking away even that which was previously given to the Latter-day Saints in this dispensation. We seem to have a fairly clear precedent concerning this issue. It seems that God does not always use his prophets to take his people to a higher level. Sometimes He uses them to bring the doctrine down to match the level of the people. In fact, part of the very purpose of the Book of Mormon seems to be to prove the people of the latter-days with lower doctrine in order to see if we’re prepared for the higher teachings.

*And these things have I [Mormon] written, which are a lesser part of the things which he [Jesus] taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they*

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob 2:23-35

<sup>4</sup> Mosiah 15:1-5; Alma 18:5, 24-28

<sup>5</sup> See Alma 40:20.

*may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken.*

*And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them.*

*And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation.*

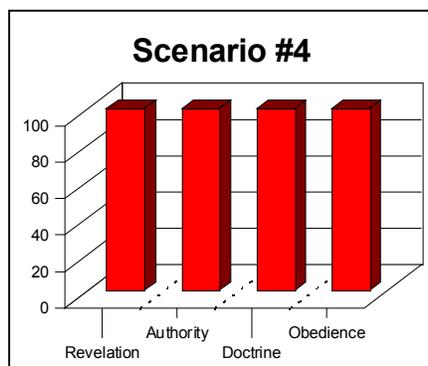
*Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people. (3 Nephi 26:8-11, underline added)*

Again, we must ask ourselves how the Lord would withhold the greater things from us today, especially after some of them have been revealed apart from the Book of Mormon. Given the general disregard the members of the church have for “lesser things” found in the Book of Mormon, what charge would the Lord likely give to the leaders of His church today regarding these greater things? The guidance of Alma is again very applicable to this situation.

*And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)*

Given all the scriptural evidence, it is certainly possible, perhaps even probable, that the leaders of the LDS church are doing exactly what the Lord has told them to do, that is, teach the lower doctrines and encourage the members to stay away from the “mysteries.” This, however, would not be so much a reflection or statement on the leaders as it would the members. Perhaps the leaders are simply obeying what the Lord has told them to do under the circumstances.

When comparing modern Mormonism with early Mormonism, scenario #3 offers the best possible hope for the LDS church. Again, it is important to not only compare the LDS church with its early beginnings, but also to compare it with the rest of the world’s churches. If the LDS church still has proper authority and is still receiving revelation and guidance from God, then it is still head and shoulders above all other churches on earth, both authoritatively and doctrinally.



Scenario #4 represents the ideal. It is what we tend to expect from a “true church of God.” It represents a situation in which there is plenty of communication between God and man, plenty of working priesthood authority from God, a high level of doctrinal purity, and a people who obey that doctrine well. This is the ultimate goal. Unfortunately, this level of spirituality has only been accomplished a few times in the history of the world. Barring the city of Enoch and perhaps a

few other instances, the Lord's chosen people have seldom come close to achieving these goals.

As we have already established, it seems highly unlikely that the LDS church in its current state fits this scenario. I believe any serious observer would agree that the LDS church is lacking in several key areas. However, it is also fair to say that the LDS church has never achieved this level of righteousness throughout its entire history. Even during its early years, the LDS church continually fell short of the Lord's desires and expectations in one or more of these same areas. The point made in the first half of this work is simply that the LDS church is worse now than it was in its early years. This, again, seems to suggest a continual change in the degree of righteousness and apostasy during the history of the church rather than a black and white scenario.

When compared to the early LDS church, it seems clear that scenarios one and three are more likely to apply to modern Mormonism than scenarios two and four. In other words, there is a large amount of evidence to indicate that the LDS church has gone astray in the areas of higher doctrine and obedience to higher principles. However, it is much more difficult to show that revelation and priesthood authority are lost. And, as we have mentioned, these last two issues, revelation and authority, are the real keys to the issue of apostasy. Yet, barring personal revelation on the subject, it may be impossible to determine whether the church is acting with proper authority and direction or not. It is not something that can be easily determined by study alone.

As already mentioned, in addition to comparing modern Mormonism with its early roots, we should remember to always compare it with other religious organizations in the world today. When all is said and done, I think it is fair to say that modern Mormonism still compares extremely well against most other churches of our time. Even with all its flaws and its apparent downward path, the LDS church still offers its members a much higher level of doctrine than most churches on earth. Today, it is relatively easy for almost anyone to acquaint themselves with the "mysteries of Mormonism." The church has little or no control over the vast amount of information available to both Mormon and non-Mormon alike. However, as in the past, few people today seem to be either interested in or prepared for these doctrines.

These graphs help to point out that whenever we talk about apostasy we should always address the issues of authority and revelation. When discussing the possibility of apostasy within any religious group, the lower and less important question is, "Does this church/group currently teach and live the higher principles of the gospel?" The higher and more important question is, "Does this church/group have the proper authority from God and is it receiving revelation to teach the principles and ordinances God wants them to receive at this time?" If any church or person has authority from God then they are right, regardless of whether they are teaching higher doctrines or lower doctrines. It is that simple. In fact, if God tells one group to live plural marriage and another group to live monogamy, then they are both right, even though they are living two different sets of laws. The important issue is not which law they are living, but whether or not God told them to live it. On the other hand, if any group or person lacks this authority from God, regardless of what they are living, then they are no different than any other gentile philosopher commenting on religious issues. To follow such a group merely because you like their doctrine, without questioning their authority, is to potentially make one of the biggest mistakes of your

life. As far as religious organizations are concerned, proper authority will always be more important than proper doctrine.

Whenever any religious organization exists it can generally be placed somewhere along the continuum of truth and apostasy. Unfortunately, most churches seem to be digressing, rather than progressing. Because of this, they all tend to fall short of the goal to one degree or another. They are all less than perfect and therefore in some form of apostasy.<sup>6</sup> The LDS church is no exception. Yet, wherever there is authority and revelation, there is truth and goodness worth following.

Is the LDS church in apostasy? Yes, it always has been to one degree or another, in that it has never achieved a celestial way of life. Nor has it ever achieved what the City of Enoch did. In fact, it has seldom come close to it. The real questions are, “How far into apostasy is it?” “Which direction is it headed?” and “Is the Lord still in charge of the LDS church?” These are the real issues that need to be considered.

If we think of doctrines and ordinances as more or less and higher or lower instead of simply true or false, we will possess a far more accurate concept of apostasy. At what level the Lord removes all authority and revelation is certainly a significant issue and perhaps only determined via prayer and personal inspiration. Although there are significant scriptural comments on this subject that we will discuss later in this work, I’m not sure that it can be completely discerned by study alone. However, as the scriptures indicate, it seems that God will often stoop to quite low levels in order to redeem his people. We should not be too surprised to find that He is very much involved with teaching His children at all levels of gospel instruction, not just at the highest ones. And given the state of the world today, a generally low level of gospel instruction clearly seems to be necessary if we are to have any affect at all on most people. As the Lord explained to Joseph Smith many years ago regarding the people in his day:

*For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish. (D&C 19:22. See also D&C 45:72; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 and Hebrews 5:12.)*

However, it also seems clear that a time must come when the Lord will raise his level of expectation, gather the elect from the four corners of the earth, and destroy the wicked who could not even accept the lower laws given to them. The scriptures seem to clearly teach that those who continue to be satisfied with, and even desire, the milk over the meat will eventually be swept from the earth prior to the millennium. And perhaps of even more significance than being swept from the earth is the apparent fact that these people will never qualify for a higher exaltation until they start to spend more time thinking about and accepting the higher principles of the gospel, even if they can’t live them at this time. As the Lord has taught,

*And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.*

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<sup>6</sup> Mormon 8:36. See also 2 Nephi 28:3.

*All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified. (D&C 88:38-39)*

*For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. (D&C 132:5)*

It seems that no person can enter the Celestial Kingdom without accepting the laws and principles of that kingdom during some point of their existence. To assume that we can receive the higher blessings without conforming to the higher principles, at least in our hearts, is to believe in something that is simply not true. Yet, if the Lord tells us to live lower laws, we must live them according to His word.

The first step of repentance is recognition. If the process of repentance applies to the LDS church as it does to individual people, then it may be high time the church recognizes and accepts the seriousness of its current direction of apostasy. Without this recognition it is doubtful that the church will be able to correct its course and move towards a Zion society. However, this seems to be in the hands of the Lord and not any self-proclaimed scholar.

The remainder of this section deals with evidence that the LDS church still has the proper authority and that the Lord is still very much involved with it. Evidence will be given to support the idea that, although modern Mormonism is digressing in the areas of doctrine and obedience to higher principles, it is still very much the Lord's church and will be redeemed at some point in the future.

### ***The Calamities Will Begin Upon The Lord's House***

One of the scriptures that has a direct bearing on the status of the modern LDS church is found in section 112 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It reads,

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people, and all flesh has become corrupt before my face.*

*Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.*

*And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord;*

*First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord. (D&C 112:23-26)*

These verses talk about the calamities of the last days. Verse 25 makes it clear that these calamities will begin upon the Lord's house. To what is the Lord referring when He says the calamities will begin "upon my house?" If it is not the LDS church then what is it?

This scripture is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it seems clear from these verses that the Lord's house has major problems. The Lord seems very upset with those hypocrites and blasphemers within his house. This clearly seems to point to at least a partial apostasy within the LDS church. In fact, the Lord is apparently so displeased with his church that the calamities of the last days will actually begin within the LDS church and spread from there. On the other hand, the Lord still seems to refer to the LDS church as his house, indicating that he still owns it and is actively involved with it at the time of these calamities. This would suggest that there is no complete apostasy taking place.

An experience I once had helps to bring the significance of this scripture into focus. I once entertained a couple of missionaries from a well-known fundamentalist group in Utah. They were attempting to show me that the LDS church was in apostasy and that their group was the "true organization" with authority recognized by God. During our discussion they asked me to read the verses above from D&C 112. Upon reading them, we had a conversation that went something like this:

- Me: What do you think the words "my house" refer to in these verses?  
Them: It obviously refers to the LDS church. This clearly shows that the LDS church is off course and in a state of apostasy.  
Me: So you believe the Lord's house, as spoken of in this scripture, refers to the LDS church?  
Them: Certainly. What else could it refer to?  
Me: So this scripture is not talking about your church?  
Them: No.  
Me: So, you're saying that this scripture clearly states that "His house," the Lord's house, is the LDS church and not your church. Is that right?  
Them: Right.  
Me: So, why would I want to join your church when I clearly belong to the Lord's house already, even if it is having problems?  
Them: (No response.)  
Me: Where in the scriptures is your organization referred to as the "Lord's house?"

The two missionaries had no answer. Not only were they unable to overcome the fact the Lord referred to the LDS church as His house, but they could provide no scriptures to indicate that any other organization had become the Lord's house other than the LDS church. The point was made that although these verses speak poorly of the LDS church, the Lord still clearly regards it as his own. This caused a paradox for my fundamentalist friends that is not easily overcome. On the one hand, they were proud not to be among the blasphemers who would be the first to experience the calamities of the last days. On the other hand, they would have really liked to claim that they were a part of the Lord's house in the last days. Yet, based on this scripture, they simply couldn't have it both ways. It is truly a lose-lose scenario.

Another interesting point worth mentioning is that this scripture does not condemn the whole LDS church. Rather, it suggests that the Lord is only displeased with a subset of “those among” his house. Note that He did not say that the calamities would come “first among all those within my house.” Rather, He said the calamities will come “first among those among you...who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house.” Given the wording of the scripture, this apparently does not condemn the entire LDS church or even the church itself. It apparently condemns only that subset of people within the church who are guilty of these specific offenses.

We can learn at least three important truths from these verses in D&C 112. First we learn that the LDS church has some major problems - problems so large that the Lord will send calamities first to those within the church. Second, we learn that the Lord is only displeased with a subset of those within the LDS church, rather than the whole church or even the church itself. And third, we learn that even with these apparent problems, the Lord still refers to the LDS church as “my house,” indicating that He is still at the helm of the organization. These factors are significant factors to consider as try to develop a clear view of the situation within the church.

### ***John Taylor’s Vision***

The basic scenario found in D&C 112 is also supported by a dream or vision President John Taylor had regarding the calamities of the last days. The events in his vision seem to have been given to him in chronological order, beginning in Salt Lake City, the headquarters of “the Lord’s house.” Notice the situation President Taylor observes in Salt Lake City.

*I was immediately in Salt Lake City wandering about the streets in all parts of the city and on the door of every house I found a badge of mourning, and I could not find a house but what was in mourning. I passed by my own house and saw the same sign there, and asked, “Is that me that is dead?” Something gave me answer, “No you’ll live through it all.”*

*It seemed strange to me that I saw no person on the street in my wandering about through the city. They seemed to be in their houses with their sick and dead. I saw no funeral procession, or any thing of that kind, but the city looked vary still and quiet as though the people were praying and had control of the disease whatever it was. I then looked in all directions over the territory, east, west, north and south and I found the same mourning in every place throughout the land. (Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, June 5, 1878, underline added. See also Unpublished Revelations, pp.119-123.)*

It is interesting to note that although President Taylor witnesses great distress and mourning in Salt Lake City, his impression is that “the people were praying and had control of the disease whatever it was.” This seems to contradict some who believe that Salt Lake City will be completely destroyed in the last days. It suggests that there will be those who, through prayer and righteousness, will survive and overcome these early calamities pronounced upon the Lord’s house.

President Taylor's dream continues in what appears to be chronological order:

*The next I knew I was just this side of Omaha. It seemed as though I was above the earth, looking down on it as I passed along on my way east. I saw the roads full of people, principally women, with just what they could carry in bundles on their backs traveling to the mountains on foot. And I wondered how they could get there, with nothing but a small pack upon their backs. It was remarkable to me that there were so few men among them. It did not seem as though the cars were running. The rails looked rusty and the road abandoned and I have no conception how I traveled myself. (Ibid.)*

If the calamities of the last days are to come mostly upon the wicked, then we have reason to believe that these people spoken of by John Taylor were spared because of their righteousness. That said, it is significant that these people were traveling towards the mountains, not away from them. They were going towards Salt Lake City, not towards Jackson County. These are apparently righteous people who were headed to a place they considered to be safe - a place they were likely instructed to go by the Lord. This suggests that the Rocky Mountains will become a safe haven for the righteous who survive these difficulties.

President Taylor continues to travel east in his dream, witnessing "horrid" sites in Missouri, Illinois, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Then, after seeing the massive destruction along the east coast, he returns to the states of Missouri and Illinois, which he now found "were a complete wilderness with no living human being in them." At this point he sees the beginnings of the building of the New Jerusalem and rejoices in it.

Interestingly enough, the dream ends with him back in Utah.

*Instantly I found I was in the Tabernacle at Ogden and yet I could see the building going on [in Jackson County] and I got quite animated in calling to the people in the Tabernacle to listen to the beautiful music that the angels were singing. I called to them to look at the angels as the house seemed to be full of them and they were saying the same words that I heard before "Now is the Kingdom of Our God and His Christ established forever and ever." And then a voice said, "Now shall come to pass that which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, That seven women shall take hold of on man saying etc..." (Ibid.)*

Notice that the dream ends in Utah under favorable circumstances. That this is the Utah of the post-calamity period receives support from at least two remarks. The first is that President Taylor is still viewing the building of Zion in Jackson County and is trying to call the people's attention to it. It is as though it is still happening while he is in the tabernacle at Ogden. The second bit of evidence comes from the mentioning of Isaiah's prophecy being fulfilled. This is clearly a reference to an event that will not happen until after the calamities, not before.<sup>7</sup> The voice heard by President Taylor seems to be saying, "Now that the wicked have been swept off

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<sup>7</sup> See Isaiah chapters 3 and 4

the earth, the saints in Utah have recovered, and the New Jerusalem is being built, Isaiah's prophecy about plural marriage will be fulfilled."

Not only does this dream collaborate with the story in D&C 112, it also indicates that the calamities which begin at the Lord's house in Utah will eventually be controlled and recovered from in Utah, and that the Utah region will become a safe haven for the righteous survivors. It indicates that there will be congregations of saints meeting together in Utah after the worst is over. Again, these issues should be considered when judging the church, its members, or the region in which the church predominantly resides.

### ***The Church Will Be Set In Order***

Another scripture that seems to support these same ideas is found in section 85 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It reads,

*And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God;*

*While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning. (D&C 85:7-8, underline added)*

This scripture also seems to indicate that at some point in the last days there will be a need to "set in order the house of God." The fact that it needs to be "set in order" suggests that it is out of order to begin with - that there are problems that require attention. However, even though these problems exist in the Lord's house, these verses also clearly suggest that the Lord still considers it His house and that He will send someone to fix the problem at some point.

President Brigham Young, commenting on these verses once stated,

*Brethren, this church will be led onto the very brink of hell by the leaders of this people, then God will send the one mighty and strong spoken of in the 85<sup>th</sup> section of the Doctrine and Covenants, to save and redeem this church. (Truth, March 1, 1936, 1:10, p. 135, underline added)*

Although many people have claimed to be this "one mighty and strong," it seems clear that this is still a future event. It seems clear that the house of God has not yet been set in order, saved, or redeemed. However, as already indicated, the church may very well have already been led onto the very brink of hell. It is unclear in Brigham Young's statement whether the "leaders of this people" to whom he referred were church leaders or government leaders. Either may apply. Perhaps he was referring to both. The point is that the Lord plans to save his church at some future point in time.

It is important to note that this scripture isn't saying that the Lord will abandon his church and start over again. Rather, it states that He will fix the house that already exists, the one that needs to be set in order. This again seems to cause problems for those who want to have it all. It seems we can belong to the authorized house of God with all its problems or we can belong to some other organization that is not the house of God or we can belong to no organization at all. Unfortunately, the scriptures don't seem to talk about a house of God in the last days that is problem free.<sup>8</sup> It is also reasonable to assume that the Lord would want us to belong to "his house," even with all of its problems. When the Lord does set his house in order, where will you want to be? With what organization will you want to be affiliated? What will you be in a good position to support?

It should also be noted that verse 8 speaks of those who are "called of God and appointed" in the last days. It suggests that in spite of their calling and appointment from God, there will only be one man called to "steady the ark" and "set in order the house of God." He is referred to only as "one mighty and strong." We can only speculate about who those are who are called of God and appointed. However, it is not too far fetched to assume that at least some of them are leaders of the LDS church. If this is the case, then according to this scripture, even though these leaders are called and appointed by God, they would not be allowed to fix the problems with the church, for it is not their calling. In fact, verse 8 suggests that if they try to fix the problems within the church they "shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning."

When viewed in this light it is easier to see a potential dilemma for LDS church leadership. On the one hand, they are called and appointed by God to lead this church. On the other hand, they are not allowed to fix many of the problems of apostasy within the church. If this is a true scenario, then it would be clear why they haven't taken a stronger stand against the apostasy going on within the church. It would tend to make us confused by many of their words on the subject, or lack of words, as the case may be. It would be a frustrating situation for both the leaders as well as those members of the church who see these problems and wonder why nothing is being done to correct them.

In addition to the general authorities, this scripture also indicates that anyone else, whether appointed church leader or otherwise, who tries to set the house of God in order, will also meet the same fate. This seems to be true even if they are called of God and appointed to perform some other important work in the last days. Apparently the only person who is allowed to "set in order the house of God" is the one mighty and strong. All others will be struck down if they try to steady the ark.

Interestingly enough, the counsel that immediately follows the verses regarding the calamities and problems in the church in D&C 112 is this:

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<sup>8</sup> One possible exception to this might be found in D&C 49:8.

*Therefore, see to it that ye trouble not yourselves concerning the affairs of my church in this place, saith the Lord.*

*But purify your hearts before me; and then go ye into all the world, and preach my gospel unto every creature who has not received it; (D&C 112:27-28)*

Perhaps this is exactly what the leaders of the church are doing today. It seems to be the mission of the church at this time to focus mainly on missionary work, rather than perfecting the saints. Perhaps this is counsel that all of us should consider as we try to sort out all of the problems and purposes of the church. While the church seems to be here mostly to do missionary work, purifying our hearts seems to be largely an individual effort, at least for now. There is wisdom in following this counsel, both on a church level as well as an individual level. Instead of troubling ourselves concerning the affairs of the Lord's church, perhaps we should simply be trying to purify our own hearts and then join in the effort to preach the gospel until called by God to do something else. The Lord will take care of his church in due time. We need to recognize what our responsibilities are and are not.

We learn many of the same basic truths from D&C 85 as we did from D&C 112. As with D&C 112, section 85 tells us that the LDS church has some major problems - problems so large that the Lord will have to send "one mighty and strong" to set his house in order again. We also learn that even though the Lord is displeased with how His house is ordered, He still refers to it as "the house of God" and will eventually take action to correct the problem. This indicates that He is still at the helm of the organization and that He does not plan to completely abandon His house or start over again with a different organization. Rather, He plans to fix this house at some future point. In addition, these verses tell us that the Lord disapproves of just anyone trying to set His house in order. This work will be done by the one mighty and strong who will be sent to set the house of God in order in the Lord's own due time, probably at or near the same time that the calamities are sent upon the Lord's house. Even the General authorities of the church will find themselves in ill favor with the Lord if they try to perform this work.

### ***The Priesthood Restored For The Last Time***

Later in section 112 of the Doctrine and Covenants we find another statement by the Lord that sheds light on the apostasy in the latter-days. Speaking of restoring the priesthood in the last days the Lord has said,

*For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given, for the last days and for the last time, in the which is the dispensation of the fulness of times.*

*Which power you hold, in connection with all those who have received a dispensation at any time from the beginning of the creation;*

*For verily I say unto you, the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and last of all, being sent down from heaven unto you. (D&C 112:30-32, underline added)*

These verses seem to indicate that the priesthood that was given to the 12 Apostles and First Presidency of the church has been restored to the earth for the last time in this dispensation. This suggests that this priesthood will not be restored again prior to the second coming of Christ. Hence, if this priesthood exists on earth today, it finds its origin in the LDS church. We should not look to any other restoration of this priesthood, as is claimed by some.

Concerning this, the prophet Joseph Smith once said,

*No true angel from God will ever come to ordain any man, because they have once been sent to establish the priesthood by ordaining me thereunto;...the priesthood once being established on earth, with power to ordain others, no heavenly messenger will ever come to interfere with that power by ordaining any more...You may therefore know, from this time forward, that if any man comes to you professing to be ordained by an angel, he is either a liar or has been imposed upon in consequence of transgression by an angel of the devil for this priesthood shall never be taken away from this church. (Millennial Star, 20 Nov. 1846, p.139, underline added)*

There are a few key points made in this statement by the prophet. The first is that the priesthood will never be restored again. The second is that anyone claiming that the priesthood was restored to them apart from the church is either a liar or has been deceived. And third, the priesthood “shall never be taken away from this church.” This says much about which of our graphs discussed earlier likely applies to the LDS church. It seems to give rather good support for scenario #3.

Decades later, President George Q. Cannon reiterated these same points.

*Men have pretended that angels have visited them, and that, in consequence they must have authority. This was the pretense made by James J. Strang. But he did not understand that the oracles had been given through Joseph, according to the revelation given in March, 1833, to the Church. Others had also had the keys given unto them to enable them to exercise the power and authority which Joseph held. Now we may come to this conclusion; that God, having once bestowed the keys of the holy Priesthood on man here on the earth for the up-building of His Church, will never take them from the man or men who hold them and authorize others to bestow them. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.13, p.46 - p.47, December 5, 1869, underline added)*

President Brigham Young also taught that the priesthood will not be taken from the earth again.

*The Government of the United States and all the kings of this world may go to war with us, but God will preserve a portion of the meek and humble of this people to*

*bear off the Kingdom to the inhabitants of the earth, and will defend His Priesthood; for it is the last time, and the last gathering time; and He will not suffer the Priesthood to be again driven from the earth. They may massacre men, women, and children; but the Lord will not suffer them to destroy the Priesthood; and I say to the Saints, that, if they will truly practice their religion, they will live, and not be cut off. (Journal of Discourses 2:184, underline added)*

These quotes seem to provide a fairly strong argument in favor of the church still having the priesthood. First, the Lord tells us that the priesthood will never be restored again. Then, Joseph Smith adds that the priesthood shall never be taken away from this church. Next, Brigham Young teaches that the priesthood will never again be driven from the earth. Now, if we take these statements to heart and recognize that they come from some of the early founders of the church - the men who likely understood these issues the most, then we must come to the conclusion that the priesthood will never be taken from the church, nor will it be restored to any other person or people. It is difficult to come to any other conclusion from these statements.

Coinciding with these thoughts, Joseph Smith also taught,

*I will give you a key that will never rust,--if you will stay with the majority of the Twelve Apostles, and the records of the Church, you will never be led astray. (William G. Nelson, Young Woman's Journal 17 (1906), p.543, underline added)*

Because he referred to this as “a key that will never rust,” it is clear that the prophet was not referring only to the Twelve Apostles of his day. He apparently uttered this statement with the long-term status of the church in mind. “Never” is a long time. It is important to note what is and is not said in this statement. For example, the suggestion that we stay with the “majority” of the Twelve Apostles indicates that the “minority of the Twelve” may not always be worth following. In addition, the prophet encourages us to stay with the “records” of the church. This seems to imply that we should possess a knowledge of the doctrine, history, and origins of the church in order to avoid deception. I feel both of these points are significant if we are to avoid being led astray.

That said, what these statements do not indicate is whether or not a small group may be properly authorized by God, through the leaders of the church, to live certain principles apart from the main body of the church. It is certainly possible, for example, that a group of men was properly ordained by some president of the church to carry on with the work of plural marriage. This would not involve a restoration of this priesthood, nor would it conflict with any of the statements just cited. If such a group does exist, they would have to be called of God and authorized via the Lord’s chosen servants in the last days. They would have to have received their priesthood from the leadership of the church.

It is clear that there are many major events in the last days that are still future events, not the least of which is the coming of the one mighty and strong to set in order the house of God. It also seems clear that this person, as well as many others in the last days, are going to have to be properly authorized by God to perform many important works. We must ask ourselves, “If the priesthood was restored in the days of Joseph Smith for the last time, and if it will exist within

the church right up to the coming of Christ, how or from whom will these people in the very last days get their priesthood authority?” Given the teachings from sections 85 and 112, as well as the statements from Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and others, the only possible answer is that it will be passed down from person to person until all those who have a mission in the last days are bestowed with proper authority. In other words, latter-day servants of God will not have the priesthood restored directly to them. They will receive it from those who have already had it bestowed upon them in the latter-days.

This tends to limit the field of possible of latter-day prophets a little bit. Whenever we talk about authority in the last days, these scriptures tell us that we need to be able to trace that authority to the leaders of the LDS church on whom it was originally restored. It tells us that there will be no more “restorations” of the priesthood in the last days. Hence, anyone claiming that they have received this priesthood authority directly from God may find it difficult to reconcile their claims with the teachings of the early church leaders.

If the LDS church is the only source for proper authority in the last days, then we have a limited number of options available to us. The possible options include,

- 1) The authority has gone away entirely and there are no authorized servants of God in the last days. However, this seems to contradict the statements above by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. It also contradicts prophecies concerning the priesthood power needed for future events and future servants of God in the last days. Hence, this does not seem to be a legitimate option for most ultra-Mormons.
- 2) The authority has been conferred onto another people by those within this church and either,
  - a) The LDS church has authority in addition to this group(s) outside the church, or,
  - b) The LDS church has lost its authority altogether after conferring it upon other people outside the church. This, however, also contradicts the statements by Joseph Smith.
- 3) The authority stays with, and only with, the LDS church and is never taken away.

From this we can see that, unless we are willing to simply throw out the statements on the subject by the Lord and early church leaders, the only legitimate options available to us are 2a and 3, both of which include the LDS church still possessing the priesthood spoken of in the scriptures. I believe it would be difficult to formulate an argument stating that the authority will go away from the church entirely at some point prior to the second coming.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned earlier, it is certainly possible that the Lord has provided for multiple organizations to be duly authorized from the same original source and yet to operate separately from each other. In fact, this is exactly the claim of some fundamentalist groups. With the

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Smith History 1:69 also seems to provide some support for this claim.

possible exception of “staying with the majority of the Twelve Apostles,” this view provides no apparent contradictions with the early teachings of the church and actually tends to receive some support. As already referred to earlier, Elder Orson Pratt once stated,

*There must be a reformation. There will be a reformation among this people, but He will plead with the stronger ones of Zion, He will plead with this people, He will plead with those in high places, He will plead with the priesthood of this church, until Zion shall become clean before him. I do not know but what it would be an utter impossibility to commence and carry out some principles pertaining to Zion right in the midst of this people. They have strayed so far that to get a people who would conform to heavenly laws it may be needful to lead some from the midst of this people and commence anew in the regions round about in these mountains. (Journal of Discourses 15:360, underline added)*

An argument clearly exists for some (not all) fundamentalist groups who claim authority from early church leaders. There is evidence that President John Taylor gave authority to certain men regarding the continued practice of plural marriage and that this authority has been passed down to the present day apart from the mainstream LDS church. It is claimed by some that President Taylor authorized these men to practice plural marriage in secret until it could be openly practiced again without persecution.

However, even if this turns out to be the case, we still have basically the same issues surrounding the LDS church. Regardless of these claims to authority, does the LDS still have priesthood authority as well? Given the scriptures in D&C sections 85 and 112, and the comments as outlined above, it seems that it must.

When we say that the LDS church is the house of God referred to in these scriptures, it is important that we understand what we mean. What makes the LDS church the house of God? Is it revelation, authority, doctrine, or actions? As we have established, doctrine and actions seem to be suffering. In fact, this is exactly what D&C 85 and 112 are saying. That leaves revelation and authority. If the LDS church is referred to as the house of God, even in its apostate condition, then it is reasonable to assume that it is because it still has the authority of God and is still directed to some extent by Him. If it did not have proper authority then it would make little sense to refer to it as “the house of God.”

If there is a group outside of the mainstream LDS church that has proper authority in addition to the church, then they would tend not to be an enemy to the mainstream church. Rather, they would likely be looking forward to the time when they can be reunited with the church again. They would likely view themselves as somewhat of a secret part of the mainstream LDS church. They would understand their role as supporting the basic cause of the LDS church, rather than fighting against it and claiming that it is in complete apostasy. These are important principles to take into consideration.

In any case, it seems clear that option three is potentially true. It is possible that the LDS church is the only group on earth today in possession of the restored priesthood referred to in D&C 112. As we’ve discussed, the Lord will “save and redeem” his church at some future point and he will

still refer to it as “the house of God” even during its most troubled times. The authority of God, in some shape or form, will apparently continue with the mainstream LDS church right up to the millennium. As Elder H. Verlan Anderson correctly pointed out,

*Some may assume that a "Gentile apostasy" in these latter days cannot occur because Christ's Church is here to stay this time. They may assume that widespread departure from gospel principles by Church members is contrary to prophecy. While the scriptures do assure us that the Church will continue to exist and be divinely led by prophets of the Lord right up until his Second Coming, they do not state that all, or even a majority of its members will follow those prophets. On the contrary, they foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles. (The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 169-170, underline added)*

This statement seems to agree completely with the scriptures we've been discussing. The scriptures seem to “foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles” within the church. As we have established, this seems to be happening today. However, the scriptures also “assure us that the Church will continue to exist and be divinely led by prophets of the Lord right up until his Second Coming.” This seems to include both revelation and priesthood authority.

This discussion also has great significance with regard to certain events of the last days. For example, we are told in the Book of Mormon that in the last days, when the times of the gentiles are fulfilled,<sup>2</sup> the fullness of the gospel of the Father will be taken away from the gentiles and given back to the house of Israel.

*And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them.*

*And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.*

*And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fullness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:10-12, underline added)*

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<sup>2</sup> D&C 45:26-33

By reading all of 3 Nephi, chapter 16, it is easy to see that the Savior is talking about the last days, after the gospel has been restored through Joseph Smith. By comparing 3 Nephi 16:15 with D&C 101:39-40 we can also see that the Gentiles spoken of here are the covenant people. Notice how the Lord refers to the Gentiles in this verse as "salt that hath lost its savor."

*But if they [the Gentiles] will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among them, and shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel. (3 Nephi 16:15, underline added)*

To help us better understand these words, the Lord has given us a definition of "salt that hath lost its savor."

*When men are called into mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men;*

*They are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. (D&C 101:39-40, underline added)*

We can clearly see from these verses that the Gentiles spoken of by the Savior are not those who reject the missionaries, they are those who have made an everlasting covenant with God and then reject that covenant. The Savior seems to be referring to us, the members of the holy church of God<sup>3</sup> in the latter-days.

As far as our discussion of the LDS church is concerned, here is the key question: "If God is going to take his gospel away from the gentiles and give it to the house of Israel, then what affect does this have on the house of God in the last days? What effect does it have on the church?" When we combine these scriptures with our other verses from D&C 85 and 112, and the references from Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, it seems likely that this church will also be taken away from the gentiles and given to the house of Israel. The priesthood will remain in tact within the church and the church will remain in tact among the house of Israel.

Elder Orson Pratt has said,

*What says the Book of Mormon in relation to the building up of the New Jerusalem on this continent--one of the most splendid cities that ever was or ever will be built on this land? Does not that book say that the Lamanites are to be the principal operators in that important work, and that those who embrace the Gospel from among the Gentiles are to have the privilege of assisting the Lamanites to build up the city called the New Jerusalem? This remnant of Joseph, who are now degraded, will then be filled with the*

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<sup>3</sup> Mormon 8:38 (34-38)

*wisdom of God; and by that wisdom they will build that city; by the aid of the Priesthood already given, and by the aid of Prophets that God will raise up in their midst, they will beautify and ornament its dwellings; and we have the privilege of being numbered with them, instead of their being numbered with us. It is a great privilege indeed (and we are indebted to their fathers for it,) that we enjoy of being associated with them in the accomplishment of so great a work. (Journal of Discourses 9:178, underline added)*

Where will this remnant of Joseph get the authority to perform this important work? They will get it from the gentiles within the LDS church. It will not be restored to them separately by God or angels. And if that same priesthood will never be taken away from the church, and the church is going to be set in order by the one mighty and strong, it stands to reason that it will have its place among the righteous house of Israel in the latter-days. The LDS church will not go away or fall into complete apostasy. But it will evidently undergo some dramatic changes before the second coming of Christ.

All the evidence seems to suggest that this church has priesthood authority now and that it will continue to have it right up through the second coming. Whether or not that priesthood is fully functional is another question. However, as we've discussed, there is every reason to believe that it will become fully functional again at some future time between now and the millennium. This suggests that even though we will experience tough times of severe apostasy, the LDS church is not altogether lost and is even a fairly good place to be when all is said and done.

### ***What About President Benson?***

As we have already established, among the list of recent prophets there are several who have apparently contradicted the teachings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Statements made by these leaders are often confusing to those who are aware of the issues. As a result, teachings from many of these more recent leaders have tended to give ammunition to the claims that the LDS church is in a state of apostasy. The conclusion many have come to is that it is impossible to have a true church if the leaders either don't understand or disagree with the original doctrines of the restoration. They claim that since the leaders have "fallen away," the church has fallen away as well. Yet, in the midst of these claims of false or "lesser" prophets, one prophet seems to stand out. That prophet is President Ezra Taft Benson.

President Benson is one of the interesting phenomenons of recent church history. Among those ultra-Mormons who rigidly criticize the church and its leaders, most have found a friend in President Benson. There are even compilations of President Benson's talks put together in book form by the leaders of certain fundamentalist groups. In fact, fundamentalists in general seem to have mostly kind words to say about President Benson, as do most other types of ultra-Mormons.

The reason for President Benson's popularity among ultra-Mormons seems clear. Among other things he had the tendency to speak out rather harshly about certain issues. He called us to repentance in several unpopular, even controversial areas. His sermons were more about repentance and traditional values than about conformity and acceptance in the world. He also questioned, perhaps even attacked, both the church and the government in very direct and straightforward ways. He even declared that the church is "under condemnation" for the way in

which we have neglected the Book of Mormon.<sup>4</sup> He spoke as one having authority - as one who knew. To a large extent, he sounded like the prophets in the scriptures and seemed to echo the attitude and strength of many early LDS leaders.

The fact that President Benson stands out has no small affect on those claiming apostasy within the church. If the church is in a state of “complete” apostasy, then we are left with the question of how to explain President Benson. If the other recent prophets have all been false prophets, was President Benson a false prophet as well?

It seems that regardless of how one views the church or its leaders, most ultra-Mormons would be inclined to say that President Benson was a true prophet who spoke with the authority of God. If this is true, then we must also admit that the Lord was recently very active with both the church as well as its leadership. We would have to admit that it was not in a state of complete apostasy a very short time ago. To say the least, it seems to be difficult reasoning to accept President Benson as a true prophet of God and throw away many others before and after his time. It seems more likely that we are dealing with “greater and lesser” prophets and that different prophets have different callings in the last days. It may even be the case that the Lord is prohibiting most of His prophets from speaking due to the unrighteousness of the saints. We must remember that even a man who is “called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the experience of the prophet Mormon among the apostate Nephites has bearing on this discussion, both with regard to President Benson as well as other, recent prophets.

*And I did endeavor to preach unto this people, but my mouth was shut, and I was forbidden that I should preach unto them; for behold they had wilfully rebelled against their God; and the beloved disciples were taken away out of the land, because of their iniquity.*

*But I did remain among them, but I was forbidden to preach unto them, because of the hardness of their hearts; and because of the hardness of their hearts the land was cursed for their sake. (Mormon 1:16-17)*

Perhaps, just as in the days of Mormon, many of our modern prophets have been forbidden to truly preach the higher laws unto the people today. Perhaps this silence tells us more about the members of the church than it does about the leaders of the church. To some extent, it probably tells something about both. I believe that only personal revelation can answer these questions fully. Yet, some people continue to have a “guilty until proven innocent” approach to church leadership.

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<sup>4</sup> Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.63-64; A Witness and a Warning, Pg. vii-viii

<sup>5</sup> D&C 85:7-8

It should be mentioned that President Benson is not the only recent general authority who has spoken out boldly against the church. As quoted earlier in this work, others such as Elder L. Tom Perry, Elder Boyd K. Packer, and Elder H. Verlan Anderson have made rather significant remarks about the status of the LDS church. To completely discount the contributions of these other brethren is to take a rather close-minded and one-sided approach to the issue.

Whatever the status of the church, it seems those who assume that church leadership is in a complete state of apostasy have difficulty explaining President Benson. In addition, such people may also be neglecting some of the scriptural precedents of the past regarding both the existence of lesser prophets as well as true prophets who have been silenced by the Lord for one reason or another. It is an extremely important issue. On matters of such significance, we ought not to judge with too much haste or too little personal revelation.

### ***What Constitutes A Prophet?***

If we can accept Joseph Smith's words that the priesthood will never be taken from the church or restored to another group, then we must begin the process of reconciling some of the statements of the modern prophets with those from earlier leaders of the church. We must look to the scriptures and the early leaders of the church to see if we can figure out what the modern prophets might be doing or trying to accomplish. Surprisingly, it is relatively easy to find examples of righteous prophets who have done and said things similar to the modern leaders of the church. Some of these examples are worth mentioning.

Perhaps part of our concern about church leadership comes from a misunderstanding of what it means to be a prophet of God. If our definition of what a prophet is and does is not accurate, then our perceptions of true and false prophets are likely to be flawed as well. Joseph Smith clearly recognized the problem of discerning the true prophets from the false when he said,

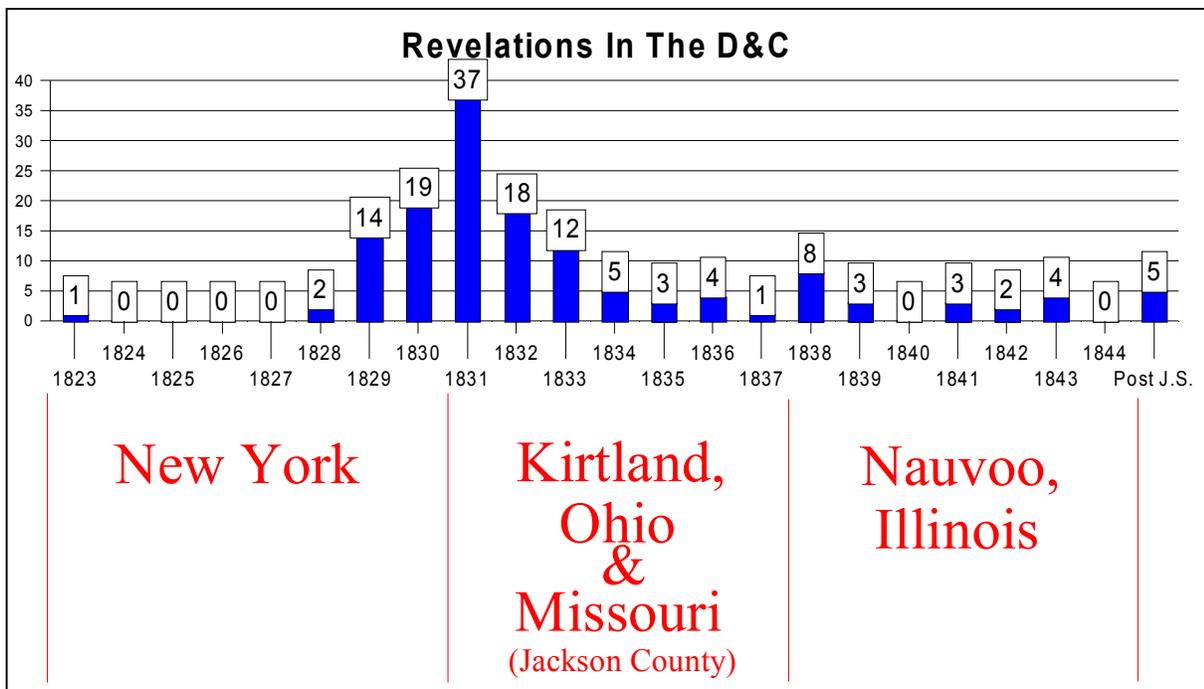
*The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets, and these had to hide themselves "in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth," and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished them from their society as vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men. (TPJS Pg. 205)*

This seems to be true in any age, including our own. Most of the true prophets, both ancient and modern, were thought to be false prophets by at least some of the people. Joseph Smith was all too familiar with this problem. Of necessity he had to curb his tongue to keep the people from falling away or even killing him. Because of this, Joseph Smith sometimes taught things that he knew were false. In other instances he told the people that he wasn't living certain principles, such as plural marriage, even though he clearly was and a few others knew it. Even his own wife was kept from knowing about many of Joseph's plural marriages. He openly taught one thing, knowing that another was true. By most people's definition, he lied, plain and simple. When some people found out the truth about these issues, they often left the church, accusing Joseph of being either a false prophet or a fallen prophet. Some even became strong enemies to the

prophet and to the church in general. Yet, I believe Joseph’s motives were pure. I believe he was acting on behalf of the greater good of the church and the saints in general.

Another interesting aspect of the prophet’s revelatory responsibility is found by investigating the dates of his published revelations as found in the Doctrine and Covenants. As indicated in the graph below, the number of canonized revelations hit a sharp peak in 1831. From that point on, Joseph Smith apparently began to share less and less of his revelations with the general membership of the church.

Given the rich abundance of new doctrine taught in the Nauvoo era, it is reasonable to assume that the prophet was still receiving a great deal of new revelation during the latter part of his life. Yet, he apparently chose not to openly publish or canonize this information. Why not? The most reasonable explanation is that it is not always in the best interests of the people or the work of God to reveal all things to all people. Joseph had to keep most of these higher truths secret.



Although the prophet frequently “tested the waters” to see how the saints would react to the higher doctrines, such teachings as plural marriage, the true attributes of God, the temple ordinances, certain aspects of the priesthood, and other difficult doctrines were generally taught only to a select few. The prophet would often have to be somewhat misleading, if not outright dishonest in order to bless the people in the best possible manner. Yet, all this “dishonesty” was done with an eye towards building the kingdom of God in the best possible manner. It is a difficult problem - one that all prophets have faced in every dispensation of the gospel. Of this problem Joseph Smith once said,

*But there has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle. Even the Saints are slow to understand. I*

*have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen. (DHC 6:183-185, Jan. 20, 1844.)*

On another occasion the prophet stated,

*If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (TPJS Pg. 111)*

Hence, it is clear that Joseph Smith didn't teach all that he knew was true. In fact, given the statement above, it is possible that he gave less than half of the commandments he knew of to the church. He apparently only taught that measure of the truth that would help the people progress at a level they could reasonably handle.

There is undoubtedly an argument that the modern leaders of the church are doing exactly the same thing. Unfortunately, the members of the church today are even less prepared to handle the higher doctrines than were the members in Joseph Smith's day. Hence, we can expect our prophets today to teach on a much lower level than the early prophets. What else would we expect them to do? We tend to want more revelation from our modern prophets. What for? Most of the members can't even handle what we've got now. What possible motive could there be in giving us more than what we've got now? If anything, we don't deserve what we currently have. As Joseph Smith recognized, giving the saints more than they can handle will cause them to "fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all." It is simply a difficult problem - one that our current prophets are just as ill prepared to deal with today as any prophet in any dispensation of the gospel. In addition to the difficulties of teaching higher doctrines within the church, we also have the problem and responsibility of teaching those outside the church. The church is much more public today that it ever has been in the past. Official teachings of the church are spread all over the world via TV, radio, various publications, and now, the Internet. It is virtually impossible to teach the difficult doctrines to the members of the church without them reaching the far corners of the planet. Given the pattern set forth by Joseph Smith and the scriptures, it should be no surprise that very few "mysteries" are taught from the pulpit anymore. It would simply destroy the missionary effort around the world, as well as the faith of many of the long-time members, and probably the church itself. At some point in the future, these mysteries will have to come forth. But it likely won't happen until the Lord is ready to do so. From a scriptural standpoint, it probably won't happen until the wheat and tares are fully ripe.<sup>6</sup>

Another important aspect of all of this deals with the fact that we want to view prophets as perfect - as our examples to look to in all things. And yet, we should seriously ask what we can

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<sup>6</sup> D&C 86:7

reasonably expect from them. Anytime you place a prophet on a pedestal, the only thing they can generally do is fall off - the only direction they can go is down. It is reasonable to assume that eventually they will fall off in some way or other. As President George Q. Cannon once taught,

*Do not, brethren, put your trust in man though he be a Bishop, an apostle or a president; if you do, they will fail you at some time or place; they will do wrong or seem to, and your support will be gone; but if we lean on God, He will NEVER fail us. When men and women depend upon GOD ALONE and trust in HIM ALONE, their faith will not be shaken if the highest in the Church should step aside. (DW 43:322 [Mar 7, 1891]).*

Unfortunately, we seem to have difficulty following President Cannon's advice. People in general want to view prophets as perfect - as the ideal examples for us to follow. This is often one of the first challenges new ultra-Mormons face. If they were previously faithful social Mormons, then they generally held the prophets and apostles in very high regard. Indeed, to a large extent their faith was likely directed at these men, rather than the Lord. When they discover that these men may not be as perfect as all that, it becomes a difficult challenge to their misdirected faith. Good men, who probably have far fewer flaws than most, can become viewed as hypocrites and deceivers. This is not because they are bad people or have terrible flaws, but mostly just because they are decent people with normal flaws. One could even say that they possess characteristics and attributes of above average people. Yet, they will never be able to live up to our expectations or remain on the pedestal upon which we have placed them. Hence, we tend to judge them far more harshly than we should.

Prophets are men who happen to be called of God to perform some work or other. They are not to be viewed as the perfect standard for us to follow. Often, in our efforts to avoid trusting in the arm of flesh, we slingshot to the other end of the spectrum by not allowing these people to be both men and prophets at the same time. If such a study could ever be made, I think we would find that those people who viewed Joseph Smith as a prophet first and a normal man second, often fell away from the church. Their expectations were simply too high for any man, even a great prophet of God. On the other hand, I think we would find that those people who viewed Joseph Smith as a normal man first, who also happened to be a prophet of God, were most likely those who were able to overlook his faults and weaknesses while respecting his role as a great prophet and remaining faithful to the church in spite of any problems or faults among its leadership. The same is likely true regarding how we view the leaders of the church today.

The fact is, there were many things said and done by Joseph Smith that many people don't generally associate with a prophet of God. Just ask any anti-Mormon. They'll be happy to provide an entire list for you. I think the response given by many ultra-Mormons would be something like, "If Joseph Smith did things that we don't generally associate with a true prophet of God, perhaps it is because we do not yet understand what it means to be a true prophet of God." It seems reasonable to assume that much of this misunderstanding comes from the fact that God's ways are higher, and hence different than our ways. God and his prophets do not always speak or act in accordance with our expectations or personal beliefs, which are generally based on our culture and traditions. In our arrogance, we usually choose our perceptions of

reality over God's chosen course, through his chosen servants. Many people choose the "traditions of our fathers" over the traditions of our God. Many anti-Mormons seem to take this course with a full conviction that the traditions of our fathers are so obviously correct that they couldn't possibly be questioned. Hence, the "great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation."

I believe we make potentially the same mistake with many of the modern prophets of the church. There are things we either don't like or don't understand or both. And we are often quicker to place blame than we are to search for possible answers. We must ask ourselves what the role of a prophet of God is. What must he endure in order to accomplish the things commanded of him? What must he say and, perhaps more importantly for this discussion, what must he not say? What precedents do we have in the scriptures regarding these issues?

A good example of this problem can be found in some recent statements made by President Gordon B. Hinckley. For instance, in a recent interview, President Hinckley made the following remarks:

*Q: And this belief in contemporary revelation and prophecy? As the prophet, tell us how that works. How do you receive divine revelation? What does it feel like?*

*A: Let me say first that we have a great body of revelation, the vast majority of which came from the prophet Joseph Smith. We don't need much revelation. We need to pay more attention to the revelation we've already received. Now, if a problem should arise on which we don't have an answer, we pray about it, we may fast about it, and it comes. Quietly. Usually no voice of any kind, but just a perception in the mind. (Interview with President Gordon B. Hinckley, as published on the Web site of the San Francisco Chronicle, April 13, 1997)*

These comments, and others similar to them, left a bad taste in the mouths of many ultra-Mormons. What we want is a prophet who gives us new revelation and who does not defer to past prophets. This answer by President Hinckley seemed to be somewhat of a "cop-out" to some. Yet, there is clearly a scriptural precedent for such a course found in the Book of Mormon.

*And as these plates are small, and as these things are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites, wherefore, it must needs be that I write a little; but I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have not they revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me. (Jarom 1:2. See also Omni 1:11.)*

These words by the prophet Jarom seem to differ little from the words of President Hinckley. Yet it seems clear that Jarom was a true prophet and did have prophecies and revelations. The fact that other prophets, both before and certainly after Jarom, contributed greatly to the record is no evidence in and of itself that Jarom was a false prophet or that he did anything other than what God wanted him to do, or not to do, as the case may be. I've often wondered how we

would view Jarom if he were President of the LDS church today and made similar statements to us that he made in his day. Undoubtedly, some would have difficulty with his approach to revelation. The same could be said of Moses, Jacob, Abinadi, and many other prophets who either withheld the higher laws from the people and/or openly taught the lower laws in preference to the higher.

It is also important to note that other presidents of the church have made rather direct comments about their prophetic callings. For example, the following statement by President Joseph F. Smith is generally quite alarming to those who have placed their faith in the leaders of the church, rather than God and Christ.

*I have never pretended nor do I profess to have received revelations. I never said I had a revelation except so far as God has shown to me that so-called Mormonism is God's divine truth; that is all...Well, I can say this: That if I live as I should in the line of my duties, I am susceptible, I think, of the impressions of the spirit of the Lord upon my mind at any time, just as any good Methodist or any other good church member might be. And so far as that is concerned, I say yes; I have had impressions of the spirit upon my mind very frequently, but they are not revelations. (President Joseph F. Smith before Congress during the Reed Smoot Hearings Vol.1, p.483 1904).*

Does this mean that Joseph F. Smith was not called of God or was not a righteous man? Does it mean that he was an imposter or a fraud? Does it mean that he was unable or unworthy to receive visions from God regarding important matters? I think not. In fact, given section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants, it seems that he found a decent amount of favor before the Lord and was used as an instrument in God's hands for receiving revelation sufficient to direct and guide the church. However, as far as being a prophet is concerned, it is not likely that Joseph F. Smith was in the same league as the prophet Joseph Smith. Few prophets are, either today or in the past. To shun Joseph F. Smith as an authorized leader of Christ's church in the latter days simply because he wasn't the prophet others may have been, seems a little irrational to say the least.

The point to be made is not that President Hinckley, or any other modern president of the church, is perfect or even that they are great prophets. The point is that much of what modern presidents of the church are criticized for saying (and not saying) has a clear precedent in either the scriptures or early church history or both. Again, this does not mean that they are great prophets. It merely suggests that they might be justified and that we should be cautious when judging them. How President Hinckley is viewed by God is something that can perhaps only be discerned by personal revelation. I have heard people criticize the brethren for a lack of new revelation while openly admitting to receiving no revelations themselves. I have also heard people claim revelation about the brethren from both sides of the argument. Some saying "yea" and others saying "nay." Clearly not all are correct. We need to find out for ourselves, not from the experiences of others. And we need to be aware of false impressions, visions, and dreams - a difficult challenge indeed.

It seems clear that some of the modern prophets are saying things that are out of harmony with earlier prophets of the church. It may also be the case that they are saying things that they know are not really true. Given the evidence available to us, these facts, I believe, are difficult to dispute. However, I think it is fairly shortsighted to automatically assume that this reflects poorly on them in any way. Those who have studied church history in any detail know that this was clearly the course taken by Joseph Smith and other early leaders of the church. They often had to conceal the truth in order to save the church and redeem the saints. This approach is also found throughout the scriptures. Christ himself deliberately said certain things in such a way that some wouldn't understand what he was talking about. He purposely concealed the truth from those who could not handle it.

*And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*

*He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*

*For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. (Matthew 13:10-13, underline added)*

In fact, even God himself has told his children things that were not wholly true in order to “work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name’s sake.”<sup>7</sup> Why would we expect anything different from our current prophets? Again, the goal is the salvation of man. And whether we like it or not, the ends often justify the means in the sight of the Lord. Fortunately, the Lord is wise enough to know when and how to do this. Unfortunately, most of us trying to figure it out are not wise enough to do so with any great accuracy. Hence, many mistakes are made in our judgements of how the Lord governs and instructs his people. This is especially true for those who are in the process of becoming ultra-Mormons. If an individual learns the mysteries and difficult doctrines before they have a solid testimony or a foundation of faith in God, they will often fall by the wayside and wither as seeds who have no root.<sup>8</sup> As we have already mentioned, the Lord is quite clear about how he shares knowledge with his children.

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:30, underline added)*

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<sup>7</sup> D&C 19:7 (6-12)

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 13:20-21

If the Latter-day Saints are struggling with righteousness, as this work claims they are, then we must ask ourselves how the Lord would go about taking away that which has already been revealed to them. What has been revealed that can easily be taken away from us? How would He do it? How would He use his prophets under such circumstances?

As mentioned earlier, one seemingly obvious area involves the temple ordinances. It is fairly easy for the Lord to take away parts of the endowment, for example. This He has done multiple times and, for the most part, most social Mormons are relatively unaware of these changes. Generations of Mormons have grown up without any knowledge at all about the teachings in the early temple ceremonies. Most of these teachings are available to those who search for them, but generally only those who search for them will find them. Thus, it seems a likely place for the Lord to take away even that which they have been given.

But what about the other doctrines that were plainly taught during the early years of the church - doctrines with associated “thus saith the Lord” authority attached to them? It seems to be a difficult chore for the Lord to completely take these truths away from his people. How do you stop talking about or, in some cases, completely discount, doctrines that are clearly accessible and even published within our own canon of scriptures? How would you handle it if you were the Lord? How would you handle it if you were the prophet of the church?

What seems ideal would be to take the higher doctrines away from some while somehow making them available to others. This seems to be what the verses in 2 Nephi indicate. Ideally, the Lord would want to find a way to meet the need for milk among the masses, while at the same time allowing the meat to be available to those few who truly seek it, thus allowing all people to progress as much as possible and at their own level without “perishing” due to too much or too little meat. The fact that the LDS church has difficulty accomplishing both goals seems obvious. In fact, the ability to successfully deal with both the milk and the meat seems to be almost impossible - a task the Lord has never been able to accomplish with any of the churches he has organized throughout history. Why should we expect any more from the Lord’s church today? Yet, as we follow Joseph Smith’s council to “search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness,”<sup>9</sup> we are faced with a dilemma regarding our responsibility to the Lord. What do we do about these higher doctrines and the apparent state of the LDS church? What do we do when Joseph Smith said one thing and the current prophet says another?

At this point a story from the Old Testament may help to evaluate our current situation. In 1 Kings, chapter 13 we find a story about two prophets of God. The first prophet was told directly by God not to eat or drink in the kingdom of Israel, nor to linger in that land after his mission there was completed. Yet, as he was leaving Israel, the second prophet stopped the first and invited him to tarry in the land of Israel and to eat with him there. The first prophet explained that he was not allowed to do so, as commanded by God. At this response, the second prophet explains,

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<sup>9</sup> TPJS Pg. 364

*I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. (1 Kings 13:18)*

Having no reason to doubt the old prophet or the angel who spoke with him, the first prophet obeys or “follows” the admonition of the second and went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water.<sup>10</sup> But then a strange thing occurs.

*And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back:*

*And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers. (1 Kings 13:20-22)*

The first prophet was actually cursed for following the counsel of the second prophet, even though he was a true prophet and stated that this counsel came from an angel of God. He was actually deceived by the second prophet on purpose as a test to see what he would do. To put it another way, the first prophet was punished because he placed his trust in the “arm of flesh” rather than his own personal knowledge of God’s commandments.

There are a few lessons to be learned from this story. The first is that we should always look directly to God for our surest answers, not to any man on earth, even if he is a true prophet. We should place God’s word above anything we hear or see from any of his servants. Personal revelation has always been the highest form of authority and truth. It reigns above the words of other prophets. This thought was echoed by the words of President George Q. Cannon when he stated,

*Perhaps it is his own design that faults and weaknesses should appear in high places in order that his saints may learn to trust in him and not in any man or men. (Millennial Star 53:658, 1891)*

As strong as this lesson is, we also learn other important truths from the account in 1 Kings. According to this story, is it possible that a true prophet of God might actually say things that are not true in order to test us? Is it possible that the Lord may use this approach to find out who will be faithful to what they know is true and who will blindly “follow the brethren?” According to this story, I think this possibility clearly exists.

Could the Lord take an approach similar to this today? Could He be using his prophets today in such a way as to appease and progress the masses with milk, lest they perish,<sup>11</sup> while at the same

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 13:19

time testing those who know better to see what they will do? I think this is clearly possible. Would this mean that they are false prophets? No it would not. In fact, it would be a great way to meet the needs of the social Mormons while providing a very good test for the ultra-Mormons - those who are truly interested in the higher principles. This approach may meet multiple needs the Lord has today in helping his children progress on different levels.

It is important to note that both of the prophets spoken of in 1 Kings were true prophets of God. The second prophet was obeying the Lord when he said things that were not altogether true. The fact that he “lied” to the first prophet is no indication whatsoever that he was a false prophet.

That said, it should also be recognized that believing a principle and openly living and/or preaching it are two different things. It is one thing, for example, to gain a testimony of plural marriage or the Adam-God doctrine. It is completely another to begin living or preaching these principles without God’s approval or calling. This should be clear by now. Yet, the choice of what one believes, prays about, and desires in his heart, regardless of what “the brethren” are saying about it, provides for an excellent test of our character, testimony, and willingness to accept what God has revealed.

When modern prophets make statements that seem contradictory to the revelations given to earlier prophets, it usually has to do with higher or difficult doctrines. Whenever this happens we have a choice. We can choose to simply reject one or both of the prophets. We can “settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting our eternal destiny in the hands of our leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in our salvation.”<sup>12</sup> Or we can choose to study, ponder, and pray about the issues, as the scriptures direct us to do, realizing that contradictory or even false statements do not necessarily imply that a false prophet is at work and that we may have a similar responsibility when it comes to living or preaching these doctrines. I feel the latter choice is clearly the wisest.

In past dispensations the Lord has often used his prophets to preach lower doctrines to his people. In many cases He has used them to enforce lower doctrines even when knowledge of higher laws existed. Such was the case with Moses as well as several of the Book of Mormon prophets. That the Lord can use modern prophets in this same manner should go without saying. In our day, taking this approach would provide a way for some truths to be “taken away” from the masses while still allowing those who “hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel” to receive more, just as Nephi stated. In fact, the current course of the church may be the only way to allow for both milk and meat to exist on earth at the same time. It may be the only way to do worldwide missionary work while still allowing some saints to pursue the path of perfection, at least to some extent.

Here lies the great choice for the modern church and its leaders, namely, to choose between missionary work and perfecting the saints. You simply can’t have it both ways. Within the

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<sup>11</sup> D&C 19:22

<sup>12</sup> Brigham Young, JD 9:151

entire canon of scriptures and throughout all dispensations of the gospel you will not find an adequate solution to this problem. You can either preach milk and put off perfecting the saints, or you can teach meat and leave people behind. The LDS church seems to have clearly chosen the former at the expense of the latter, at least for the time being. This, however, is no indication of apostasy among church leadership. The Lord has taken this approach countless times in the past. And, given the prophecies concerning the church in the last days, there is every reason to believe that He is taking this approach again in our day. The greatest prophets on earth, including Joseph Smith and the Savior Himself, never overcame this problem of milk vs. meat. Some people they exalted and others they lost. It is just so today.

Again we must cry for personal revelation on the matter. The modern leaders of the church simply cannot be pronounced as false prophets based solely on their teachings or apparent contradictions alone. There is a scriptural and/or historical precedent for almost everything the modern prophets have said and done.

That the church is on a downward path is clear. That some of the modern leaders of the church are contributing to this downward path seems equally clear. What is less clear is the will of the Lord concerning his church and what the roles of the modern prophets are regarding the church. Are they commanded to reach higher to perfect the saints, as was Enoch? Or have they been commanded to lower themselves to the masses, as was Moses? If the latter, are they true prophets or false prophets? If the latter, what is our responsibility regarding the church and its leaders? What is our responsibility concerning the higher doctrines of the gospel as taught by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others? These are important questions, the answers to which may be as unique and individual as the role of a prophet itself.

Ultra-Mormons are like the young prophet in Israel, instructed by God in certain principles restored through Joseph Smith. At the same time, perhaps they are in the midst of true prophets - leaders called of God to both teach the masses and try their faith. If this is true, what a grand way to lead the people towards God! What a perfect plan to introduce the milk to the masses while determining who will truly seek and believe in the meat of the gospel in spite of the teachings of the arm of flesh. At some point there is no choice but to place your whole trust in God. It is not that His prophets are false. Rather, it is that his prophets can only take you so far. From there you are forced to let go of the iron rod and walk by what God has allowed you to see with your own eyes. We must now decide whether we want to proceed by partaking of the fruit of the tree of life and helping others to find their way through the darkness, or give in to pride and criticize the iron rod because it didn't take us the whole way. At some point there is no progression other than that which occurs between God and myself. However, this may still have a lot to do with God's church and its leaders in the last days, even if they are a fair distance from Zion. At some point along my path towards perfection, the church will cease to be there for me in the same manner that it has in the past. Perhaps it is at that point when I should stop asking what it can do for me and start asking what I can do for it.

We can learn a lot from one of the changes Joseph Smith made to the New Testament. In the original King James version of the Bible we read,

*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,*

*Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

*And this will we do, if God permit. (Hebrews 6:1-3)*

Some people have used this scripture to indicate that we should leave the lower principles of the church, and even the church itself, behind in favor of the higher principles. However, Joseph Smith recognized this inconsistency and felt impressed to correct it. In the Joseph Smith Translation, these same verses read as follows:

*Therefore not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.*

*Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

*And we will go on unto perfection if God permit. (JST Hebrews 6:1-3, underline indicates changes made by the prophet)*

At least two important points should be gleaned from these changes. The first is that in our efforts to move on to perfection, we should NOT leave the basic doctrines of the gospel behind. Although we don't want to remain solely in the areas of lower doctrines and ordinances, continually repeating and emphasizing the same fundamental principles over and over again as if they were all we needed for salvation, we also should not abandon them as if they never came from God in the first place. What Paul and Joseph Smith seem to be saying is, "Yes, we absolutely need the basic ordinances and principles of the gospel and we always will. They are a major part of God's plan. Yet, if that is all you ever deal with, you will never move on to perfection."

The second point to be noted is that our effort to "go on unto perfection" is dependant upon whether or not God permits it, not whether or not we desire to do so. The question should be raised, "Why would God not permit someone to go on unto perfection?" The clear answer seems to be that there is often a greater good to be accomplished by keeping the masses on a lower level of gospel awareness. Unfortunately, those who are prepared and who desire to move on to higher things tend to be held down by the masses. Hence, God does not always permit the few to move forward as they would like to. The good news is that we live in a time when the few are free to learn about and gain testimonies of the higher principles, if they so desire. This has not always been the case. I also think it is safe to say that the time will come when all who are worthy will be given the opportunity to move forward towards perfection by acting on their knowledge. Eventually, all those who prove themselves worthy will be allowed to actually live the higher principles that they can only gain testimonies of during our present circumstances.

However, this will likely not be in the manner or at the time we may desire. In the meantime, while we wait upon the Lord, we should not leave the basic principles behind. We should use them to bless and serve others as best we can, while at the same time, seeking the higher principles for ourselves with equal intensity. Both of these pursuits have a great deal to do with our activity and participation in the LDS church. In fact, it is perhaps only through taking an active part in “modern Mormonism” at all levels, that we are able to fulfill our responsibilities in both of these areas.

## **WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

What we have proposed so far is that the LDS church is in a downward process of apostasy but is still accepted by God as his church, that it still holds proper authority from God, that it is still led mostly by righteous men who hold that authority, and that it will someday be saved, redeemed, and set in order again. This places honest followers of truth in a difficult situation. What should our role be in a church that is “falling away” but not “fallen away” from the truth?

To some extent, the frustration of an ultra-Mormon can be expressed by the familiar saying, “Lead, follow, or get out of the way.” Why are many ultra-Mormons frustrated? Because even with all of their knowledge and love of truth they are seldom called to lead, yet they have difficulty finding anyone they truly want to follow, and just getting out of the way is generally not very satisfying or exalting. What is left for them to do but hang around and be frustrated?

We have already formed an argument warning us not to “steady the arc” unless we are called to do so by God. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that most people should not “attack” or try to correct the church or its leaders. But this is only half of the question. What if you know enough to recognize false statements, lower laws, and prohibiting programs or policies of the church? Where should the line be drawn concerning what we should follow and what we should not? How much allegiance should one give to a falling church? How can those who want to progress further find a satisfying place in a church that offers only milk?

The answers to such questions are likely to be different for different people. Some may be used by the Lord to teach within the LDS church. Some should perhaps remain quiet and simply wait upon the Lord. Still others may be led to fulfill other needs that the Lord may have. As with many other issues, questions such as these might only be fully answered via personal revelation.

This section is an attempt to address some of these difficult issues. Again, what to do about the current state of the church must be a personal issue. I don’t believe there are any “one size fits all” answers. Yet, there are some things that ought to be considered as we try to make decisions about our relationship with the church. There are some simple truths and scriptural precedents that may apply to our current situation that ought to be taken into consideration. It is important to note that we are not unique in this problem. This problem has existed in all ages and during every dispensation of the gospel.

## ***Dealing With Local Leaders***

One of the reasons many ultra-Mormons become anti-Mormons stems from the fact that church leaders are generally unable to address their needs, especially when both sides are encountering the difficult issues for the first time. The transition from social Mormon to ultra-Mormon is a difficult process. Most people are fairly vulnerable during this transition and often become anti-Mormons because their needs are not being properly met. When a social Mormon first becomes aware of some of the difficult doctrines or events in church history, they generally want to talk to someone about it. This is often a bishop or stake president. Unfortunately, these leaders usually provide very little understanding or insight on the matter. In some cases all they provide is criticism and rebuke. The new ultra-Mormon is left unto himself to decide how to deal with this dilemma. At this point they may leave the church, either due to pride, a lack of good information, or just a simple desire to find the truth elsewhere because they couldn't find it here. They can't lead. They no longer feel they have anyone worth following. So, they simply get out of the way.

It's not very hard to understand why the church has such difficulty addressing issues regarding the meat of the gospel. As strange as it may sound to some, church leaders in general are fairly unprepared to deal with these issues. It simply isn't their primary calling. In most cases, bishops and stake presidents are comprised of social Mormons. They are often called because of the goodness of their hearts and their willingness to act rather than their doctrinal prowess. This is not a criticism. Their stewardship simply requires a great deal of goodness and action, much more so than gospel scholarship. The church has no choice but to call such people to these positions. Yet, the fact remains that there are relatively few local leaders who can intelligently discuss the higher doctrines or give constructive feedback to ultra-Mormons searching for answers to difficult questions. Elder Boyd K. Packer explained this problem well when describing the life of a typical, faithful member of the church to a group of regional representatives.

*He [the faithful member] will be a bishop for perhaps six years, then he will be thirty-three years old. He will then serve eight years on a stake high council and five years as a counselor in the stake presidency. At forty-six he will be called as the stake president. We will release him after six years to become a regional representative, and he will serve for five years. That means he will have spent some thirty years as an ideal, the example to follow, the image, the leader.*

*However, in all that time, he will not have attended three gospel doctrine classes in a row, nor will he have attended three priesthood quorum lessons in a row.*

*...Unless he knew the fundamental principles of the gospel before his call, he will scarcely have time to learn them along the way. Agendas, meetings, and budgets are not usually overlooked.*

*But the principles are overlooked - the gospel is overlooked, the doctrine is overlooked. When that happens, we are in great danger! We see the evidence of it in the church today. (Principles, Ensign, March 1985, p.9)*

As Elder Packer indicates, this is a real problem within the church today. One of the main difficulties for those seeking the higher truths of the gospel comes in that they often expect too much of their local leaders. Quite often, an honest seeker of truth either confronts or is confronted by their bishop and/or stake president in an effort to address doctrinal or historical concerns. These discussions can vary greatly in their scope, content, and effectiveness in addressing the real issues. Quite often, local leaders of the church are viewed as those who should be able to adequately answer all of our doctrinal questions. It usually doesn't take very long to determine that this is not the case and we are left to deal with these issues pretty much on our own.

Much of the problem deals with our own pride. Years ago, for example, when I first started to learn about the law of consecration, I determined that I was not even close to living the covenant that I had made in the temple. With a strong resolve to do what's right, I decided to begin answering questions more accurately during temple recommend interviews. When asked if I lived up to all the covenants I made in the temple, I would say, "No, I don't live the law of consecration as I understand it." Having done this with several different bishops over several years, I received all kinds of responses. Some became very concerned for my welfare. Some tried to explain the issue away with all kinds of differing justification. Still others simply said, "Yep, me neither," and moved on to the next question.

As time passed, I began to answer other questions with equally disturbing, yet honest, responses. Without going into lengthy explanations of each issue, the more I studied, the less I found my answers to conform with what was expected of the rank and file Mormon. At some point I found myself looking forward to these interviews, just so I could bring up these troublesome issues. It wasn't until I had a bishop who really didn't understand a lot about the gospel that I realized my self-righteous approach may have been doing more harm than good. Not only was I causing unnecessary problems for my bishops and stake presidents, who were usually unprepared to deal with such issues in the first place, but I noticed that I found great pleasure in displaying my doctrinal prowess to those who were supposed to be my spiritual leaders. I was showing off. I was no longer concerned about what was right and wrong, I was concerned about showing them how much more I knew about the gospel than they did. In my effort to become intellectually superior, I had abandoned common sense. In my hopes of becoming an expert on the laws of God, I had neglected the spirit of the law, in preference to the letter. I was accomplishing nothing with my witty responses. To this day, I still believe the answers I gave were doctrinally accurate. They simply weren't spiritually appropriate.

Since that time, my answers have once again become more conventional - only venturing into deeper discussions with those leaders who I feel will appreciate a more detailed discussion of the issues. Am I telling the whole truth with each temple recommend interview? No, I am not. Am I fulfilling the purpose and intent of the interview? Yes, I believe I am.

On a more severe level, I know people who have had church action taken against them because of their beliefs and/or attitude. Whether they simply had their temple recommend taken away or were excommunicated, there are those ultra-Mormons who seem to relish the idea of being at odds with the church. In many cases, they seem to want to view themselves as some sort of martyr for righteousness' sake. There are, undoubtedly, some who have had action taken against

them who have humbly and prayerfully done their best to do what is right and who have been wrongfully excommunicated. However, there are also many people who are clearly doing little more than letting their pride lead them away from the church. They don't see the big picture and tend to be worried mostly about themselves. They are not sad about the state of the church. In fact, in an odd sort of way, they actually relish it. They actually find joy in the idea that they are somehow above or better than the church. To me, the attitude of many of these people seems more like that of Korihor and Nehor, who criticized and condemned, rather than Jesus Christ or Joseph Smith, who humbly condescended, taught, and rebuked with wisdom, love, and firm patience that tended to elevate and exalt at all levels of the gospel.

It has been my experience that many of these would be martyrs are not as truly interested in building up the kingdom of God as they are in building up themselves. They're not so much interested in helping the church or the cause of righteousness as they are in showing off their superior knowledge - the fact that they are right and others are wrong. In many cases, they are simply defending themselves in a fairly self-serving way. They often find more pleasure in selfishly being right than they do in unselfishly doing right.

In many cases people who fall into this category are doctrinally correct. They often understand the higher doctrines and the situation in the church better than those who are taking action against them. However, this matters little in an honest pursuit of God's will. Many of these people are excommunicated not because of their beliefs, but because of their selfish and proud "look at me" attitude and their inability to know when and with whom they should share their knowledge. We must remember that Satan was cast out because of rebellion and selfishness, not necessarily because he was doctrinally incorrect. In our pursuit of knowledge and our efforts to truly become pure in heart, we must be as concerned about other people as we are about truth. These two major parts of the gospel are not one and the same. Yet, both are necessary to achieve exaltation in the eternities. Progression in the gospel comes only when truth and people are mixed together in the proper proportions - not all at once and not only one or the other exclusively. Brigham Young put it well when he said,

*There is one principle that I wish the people would understand and lay to heart. Just as fast as you will prove before your God that you are worthy to receive the mysteries, if you please to call them so, of the kingdom of heaven--that you are full of confidence in God--that you will never betray a thing that God tells you--that you will never reveal to your neighbour that which ought not to be revealed, as quick as you prepare to be entrusted with the things of God, there is an eternity of them to bestow upon you. Instead of pleading with the Lord to bestow more upon you, plead with yourselves to have confidence in yourselves, to have integrity in yourselves, and know when to speak and what to speak, what to reveal, and how to carry yourselves and walk before the Lord. And just as fast as you prove to Him that you will preserve everything secret that ought to be--that you will deal out to your neighbours all which you ought, and no more, and learn how to dispense your knowledge to your families, friends, neighbours, and brethren, the Lord will bestow upon you, and give to you, and bestow upon you, until finally he will say to you, "You shall never fall; your salvation is sealed unto you; you are sealed up unto eternal life and salvation, through your integrity."*

Let every person be the friend of God, that whatever He reveals to you, you can wisely handle without asking Him whether you shall tell your wife of it or not...I say this that you may learn to reveal that which you ought, and to keep the rest to yourselves. By so doing you prove to God that you are His friends, and will keep His secrets.

The world may howl around you and plead for the secrets of the Lord which he has given you, but they will not get them. When the Lord has proved His children true to what He has given into their charge, and that they will do His bidding, He will tell such persons anything that they should know. A great many desire just enough of knowledge to damn them and it does damn a great many. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.4, Pg.371, underline added)

Notice how Brigham Young emphasizes doing what's right over knowing what's right. Notice also that he's more concerned with people saying too much than he is about them saying too little. According to Brigham Young, our very ability to gain knowledge depends upon our ability to keep that knowledge to ourselves. This means that we sometimes allow others to be wrong. It means that we should sometimes teach half-truths and withhold what to us may be some of the sweetest doctrines our hearts have ever known. It means that in order to exalt and bless our neighbor, we sometimes have to be more concerned about them than we are about the whole truth. President Young clearly teaches that how you deal with your knowledge is far more important than having the knowledge in the first place.

If ultra-Mormons would humbly follow this counsel from President Young, there would be far less action taken against them in the church. But unfortunately, many give in to their pride and selfish insecurities. Some ultra-Mormons wear their church action on their sleeves as if it were some sort of red badge of courage. In reality, most are like the Pharisee who "prayed thus with himself" and thanked God that he was not as other men are, for he is righteous and they are not. And yet, this Pharisee, in spite of being technically correct, went away unjustified before the Lord. While the lowly publican, who undoubtedly knew much less about his religion than did the Pharisee, found favor in the sight of the Lord.<sup>13</sup> How many technically correct ultra-Mormons are there who are unjustified before the Lord because of their Pharisee-like attitude? At the same time, how many Bishops and Stake Presidents are there who know very little about the mysteries of God, but who are justified before the Lord because of their humble, loving, caring attitudes?

I feel these examples apply directly to many of our dealings with local leaders. We must understand that when we tread into the mysteries of the gospel, we can't expect everyone else to go there with us. The fact is that most won't. This includes the local leaders of the church. It wasn't that way in the time of Enoch, Christ, or Joseph Smith and it won't be that way in our day either. This does not mean that they are bad people. If our goal in studying the mysteries is to serve God and truth by further purifying our own hearts and helping others to do the same, then

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<sup>13</sup> Like 18:10-14

we will do a better job of judging people by their intentions rather than their knowledge. We won't be quite as hard on our local leaders just because they have not studied the things we have. We will teach them "here a little and there a little" by the spirit, rather than blasting them with our pride and with things they've never heard of before. We won't say in our hearts, "Those of you who think you know what you're talking about are annoying to those of us who really do." I believe most experienced ultra-Mormons are familiar with these principles. It is usually the new ultra-Mormons or those leaning towards becoming anti-Mormons who have the greatest difficulty controlling their pride in these matters. Just like the scriptures teach, pride is our greatest enemy, even within our honest efforts to progress in and teach the gospel.

Local leaders are no more perfect than anyone else. And, just like anyone else, some are good ones and some are bad ones. However, in our pride I fear many ultra-Mormons have become confused as to which are which. One of the more difficult lessons to learn in life is that not everyone should be corrected, even when they are wrong. Likewise, not everyone who is wrong, is evil. We always say this in our minds. But we seem to have difficulty living it with our hearts.

### ***They Who Sit In Moses' Seat***

An interesting scripture that sheds light on our relationship with the leaders of the modern LDS church is found in the New Testament. From an LDS point of view, it is fairly safe to assume that the Jewish religious leaders were in a state of apostasy during the time of Christ. The Savior spent considerable time contradicting and criticizing them. Yet, it is clear that Christ held some respect for the authority and position of these leaders, as well as the organization they represented. Consider the following counsel from the Lord to the people of His time:

*Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,*

*Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:*

*All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

*For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

*But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,*

*And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,*

*And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. (Matthew 23:1-7, underline added)*

Notice how the Savior clearly recognizes the problems and wickedness among the scribes and Pharisees. He doesn't see them as the ideal leaders in any way. Yet, because they "sit in Moses' seat," He teaches his followers to observe and do all that these mediocre leaders tell them to do.

This is significant. Here we have a case of religious leaders being in a state of apostasy but still deserving respect and obedience. With no other group did the Savior disagree more than with the scribes and Pharisees. Yet, because of their position and apparent authority, He taught his disciples to follow their counsel.

It certainly seems that we can liken this scripture unto our own times. Even if some of the LDS leaders are not all that we think they should be, perhaps we should still recognize and follow this counsel from the Savior by having respect for both their position as well their teachings.

One of the key questions seems to be, “Do the leaders of the LDS church still sit in the modern version of Moses’ seat?” As we have already outlined, the scriptures seem to indicate that they do. If they contradict the teachings of the early brethren, I think the Savior might say that we don’t have to follow suit and do “after their works.” But when they teach good, wholesome doctrine such as making public proclamations against child abuse and encouraging fidelity within the family unit, we should certainly recognize such statements for the good that is obviously there. In most cases, an honest observer will find that most of what the general authorities say is righteous and good in nature. They may be speaking about tithing instead of the united order and adherence to monogamy instead of plural marriage, but their teachings are generally a large step up from where our society currently lives. It is clear that it is the right direction for most people, most of the time. I think the honest observer clearly must admit that this is the case.

One of the contributing factors to the problem of having to teach only the milk is the increase in public speaking engagements from the leaders of the church in recent years. Their words are appearing in the media far more than they have in the past. This naturally brings with it some very difficult questions - questions dealing with tough subjects like plural marriage, revelation, and priesthood. It has been fascinating to watch the reaction to these interviews and other media events. Different types of Mormons tend to react quite differently to these media events.

For example, social Mormons generally love to see church leaders in the media. They think its great and have a tendency to either ignore or, in many cases, not even recognize potentially incorrect statements being made. To the social Mormons there is only good and nothing bad in any of these interviews. No matter what is said, it tends to make the social Mormon proud to be a part of it all.

On the other hand, anti-Mormons tend to go the opposite direction. Anti-Mormons will generally see nothing of value in these interviews. They tend to see them as all bad, with no good thing being accomplished whatsoever. To them, it is a corrupt church, with nothing but corrupt leaders, sending a corrupt message.

Ultra-Mormons’ opinions tend to vary greatly on this issue, depending on what is said and which end of the spectrum they find themselves. As with most things in life, it is not so much a question of all bad or all good, as the socials and antis would have you believe. It is clearly a question of various shades of gray. I believe a realistic ultra-Mormon will generally come to this conclusion about public statements made by church leaders. They will have problems with some things that are said while completely admiring other things. In addition, they will understand

why some half truths and complete falsehoods had to be uttered during those situations. In fact, they often come to the conclusion that the Savior or Joseph Smith would do pretty much the same thing under similar circumstances.

It seems clear that the truth of the issue lies somewhere between the two polarities of the social and the anti. In most cases, a fair assessment of these media events is that they generally promote good. For the most part, what is said is true and wholesome and difficult to throw stones at. However, it is also fair to say that some percentage of each interview is little more than public relations rhetoric and some portion is just plain misleading or false. It has been my experience that most people tend to only see what they want to see and are relatively black and white on this issue. The cry is generally one of “all bad” or “all good.” There seem to be relatively few who have the objectivity to see both the good and the bad which clearly exists in almost every interview.

Regarding the “bad” or incorrect statements made during these interviews, the real question at hand deals not so much with the statements themselves, but more with the motivation behind those statements. In spite of what is actually said, are these people trying to do good or evil? Are they trying to raise people towards God and promote a higher degree of righteousness as best they can, or are they making a conscious effort to deceive and bring people down to bondage and a lower level of righteousness? Are they honestly trying to serve God or are they knowingly fighting against God? These are important questions that cannot be answered by simply pointing out the inconsistencies of some of the statements made.

Again, Joseph Smith did basically the same type of thing in his day. For example, similar questions could be asked of Joseph Smith when he publicly denied living plural marriage. Why he said it is far more important than what he said. Should we expect any less from our leaders today? How did Joseph Smith answer some of the questions directed at him regarding some of the difficult doctrines, such as polygamy? How did he publicly deal with other higher doctrines - doctrines which most of the people listening to him were unprepared to receive? Did he ever cover things up? Did he ever say one thing to the learning masses and another to the faithful minority? Those who have studied the prophet’s life know that he did all of these things and more. Yet, the real question deals with why he did so. This point cannot be overstated. As far as judging the statements of church leaders is concerned, motivation is far more important than content. Joseph Smith’s motivation seemed to be to exalt some of the saints without destroying the rest in the process. However, the prophet faced the same challenge back then that the current church leaders also face today, namely, how do you give meat to those who are ready to progress while providing milk to those who are not? How do you help each person progress when they are all at different levels?

Again, motivation seems to be the key. What motivates the leaders of the church, both past and present, to say some of the half-truths and complete falsehoods they have said? If their motives are good, then we should be satisfied, for they are better than the scribes and Pharisees of Christ’s time. However, even if their motives are corrupt in some way, like the scribes and Pharisees mentioned by Christ, we should probably still view their role as those with authority who “sit in Moses’ seat.” We should perhaps do as the Savior instructed the disciples in His day to do by giving honor to their position as leaders of God’s house, while at the same time,

recognizing that “all is not well in Zion” and that there will be problems among them. As President Benson stated on this issue,

*The Lord strengthened the faith of the early Apostles by pointing out Judas as a traitor, even before this Apostle had completed his iniquitous work (see Matthew 26:23-25; Luke 13:21-26). So also in our day the Lord has told us of the tares within the wheat that will eventually be hewn down when they are fully ripe. But until they are hewn down, they will be with us, amongst us. (See D&C 86:6-7.) (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)*

*Certain individuals within the Church may go astray and even fall away. This may happen even to a person in the Church who is in a position of some influence and authority. It has happened in the past. It will happen in the future. If our faith is in Jesus Christ and not in the arm of flesh, then we will know that we are members of the Church of Jesus Christ and not the church of men. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg. 90, underline added)*

President George Q. Cannon seemed to agree.

*Do not, brethren, put your trust in man though he be a Bishop, an apostle, or a president; if you do, they will fail you at some time or place; they will do wrong or seem to, and your support will be gone; but if we lean on God, He will never fail us. When men and women depend upon God alone and trust in him alone, their faith will not be shaken if the highest in the Church should step aside. (DW 43:322, Mar 7, 1891, underline added)*

The fact that there are tares among the leadership of the church places us in a situation no different from any other time on earth, even Christ’s time. As president Benson suggests, it is likely that they will remain with us for a while yet. In spite of this, the LDS church will continue to have authority right up through the second coming and at some point these tares will be hewn down and separated from the wheat. Until then, however, our duty seems to be to recognize the authority of the church, live according to the commandments of God, and try to understand our role as it relates to these events.

### **To Whom Shall We Go?**

As already mentioned, barring personal revelation on the subject, we are left with whatever other gifts the Lord has given us to find the truth. If we become disgruntled at the modern LDS church or any of its leaders, we must carefully evaluate our options. From a certain perspective, this places us in a setting similar to that of the time of Christ, when people became disgruntled with what Christ was doing and saying. One such instance was recorded in the book of John. It reads,

*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?*

*Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

*And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.  
(John 6:66-69)*

A similar type of reasoning can be applied to the LDS church. If we decide we don't care much for the teachings or activities of this church, for whatever reason, to which church should we go? Which other church has the words of eternal life? If we truly believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the restoration was a reality, then we must also accept his prophecies regarding the authority within and the future cleansing of this church. If we believe and are sure that this church is the one spoken of as being "set in order" by the one mighty and strong, then where else do we plan to go?

There really aren't very many other options available to us. We can join another Christian church with much less doctrine and authority to offer than the LDS church. We can search out the various fundamentalist groups to see if we can determine whether or not any of them have proper authority. Or, we can just quit and cease having any affiliation with any religious organization. Beyond that, there aren't very many other options.

When considered carefully, it doesn't make much sense to join another Christian church. I doubt that this is a legitimate option for most ultra-Mormons, or even many of those who used to be ultra-Mormons and who are now anti-Mormons. This option holds little satisfaction to one who loves Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel. When looking closely at the areas such as doctrine, revelation, authority, and self-improvement, as found within Mormonism, other Christian churches tend to pale by comparison.

When considering the various fundamentalist groups, there are really only two major issues at hand. The first is whether or not they have the authority they claim. The second issue deals with whether or not God wants you to join such a group, even if they have the authority they claim. If these two issues can be verified by personal revelation, without deception, then this is a legitimate option. As already explained, however, this should be an option that includes the idea that the LDS church will be redeemed and set in order at some future time. Any fundamentalist group that views the LDS church as being entirely lost - with no hope for its future redemption, is likely to provide little or no long-term satisfaction. The fundamentalist groups worth researching the most should be those who believe that the LDS church is still recognized as Christ's authorized church on earth with a specific mission to perform in the latter days. They will likely hold to some type of concept that they are temporarily fulfilling a special calling in the last days and will someday become a part of the mainstream LDS church again. Regardless of their relationship with the LDS church, without personal revelation on the topic it is extremely difficult to make good decisions regarding any fundamentalist group. However, this clearly must be an individual decision, made solely between an honest truth seeker and God.

That said, it doesn't seem reasonable to assume that the Lord wants us to simply quit and cease having any affiliation with any religious group. In the first place, it is clear that the Lord likes to

work through a church or organization of some kind. During his ministry in Israel, as well as his visit to the Nephites, one of the Savior's primary activities dealt with the establishment of a church. Likewise, when restoring the gospel to Joseph Smith, establishing a church was a major part of the restoration effort. In addition, there is no argument that churches are only for the weak or those with little faith. For example, as we move up the chain of righteousness, beyond the lower laws of the church of Jesus Christ, we find the Church of the Firstborn, entered into by receiving and obeying the higher ordinances of the gospel. This indicates that even if we can achieve a higher level of personal righteousness, churches will likely be a major part of the Lord's plan for us. It seems reasonable to assume that, barring a special calling outside the church, He would want his followers to be members of these churches, regardless of His displeasure with these organizations or the level of doctrine they may be teaching.

Another important issue for "quitters" to consider involves our desires for righteousness and our love for other people. If we're prepared to leave the LDS church because we feel it is no longer meeting our needs, perhaps we need to reevaluate our priorities to see if they are righteous. Perhaps this is merely an indication that we should continue progressing by seeking to help others instead of seeking to help ourselves. Perhaps we misperceive our real needs as far as the next step in our progression is concerned. If the only thing we ask of the church is, "What's in it for me," we likely misunderstand both the purpose of church as well as our own readiness for something better. Perhaps we could rephrase the famous saying by President Kennedy to make it applicable to our relationship with the church: "Ask not what your church can do for you. Ask what you can do for your church." As silly as this may sound, the concept is worth consideration.

If we feel that we are somehow better than or above the general membership of the church or that our hearts are so pure and our knowledge so great that this church has little more to offer us, then perhaps it is time to do as the Savior did and begin serving those within the church who would be benefited by our knowledge and goodness. Perhaps we should take on the role of other servants of God, Joseph Smith included, who, in spite of their desires for and knowledge of the higher things, were just as concerned about teaching and helping other people as they were about their own perceived needs. If this church doesn't offer everything we want in the way of higher laws and ordinances, surely it offers most ultra-Mormons us a means to teach and help others in meaningful ways, that someday we can become worthy of those higher things. If you are still allowed to do so (some are not), why not take advantage of these opportunities? They will likely be no more frustrating for us today than they were for the Savior or Joseph Smith in their days.

Being pure in heart includes the idea of being more concerned about others than you are about yourself. I feel those ultra-Mormons who leave the church because of its problems are probably thinking more about themselves than they are about serving others. Which, in turn, indicates that they are probably not ready for the higher principles of the gospel in the first place. Often, such people choose not to do anything with their knowledge and desires for righteousness. Since the work and glory of God is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, and since this work, by its very nature, requires that we condescend to lower levels in order to raise up the weak and the faithless, I doubt that the Celestial Kingdom or the Church of the Firstborn has a lot of room for such people. Leaving the church because of its frustrations and low level teachings may be a great indicator of who is and is not ready to move on to higher things.

If men such as Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Moses, and others lowered themselves to serve and teach the people on a fairly low level, even though they were ready for more, then it seems clear that this attitude is the one that we should foster as well. In order to prepare for the higher things yet to come, we must first show our worthiness of these laws by serving and blessing people on the lower level we've current been given. We must first show our willingness and ability to condescend to those who don't know as much as we claim to know. The LDS church provides an excellent avenue for this attitude of service - an attitude which must be had by any who honestly desire to move to higher levels of righteousness and knowledge. What other organization or group is there that offers as many privileges and opportunities to teach the true gospel of Jesus Christ and build up the kingdom of God in the way the modern LDS church provides? Although there are a lot of good, worthwhile organizations out there, I maintain there are none that equal the modern LDS church in these areas.

### ***Who Are The Real Apostates?***

One of the problems with all of this talk about latter-day apostasy comes in trying to determine who among us is an "apostate" and who is a true follower of Christ. In other words, are the apostates those who buck the system or those who go with the flow? Are they those who point out the problems in the church or those who don't even see them in the first place?

The social Mormons are probably the most confident and calm on this issue. For them, anyone who questions or doubts any part of the church or its leadership is generally on the road to apostasy. I hope it is obvious by this point that the issue is more complicated than that.

Likewise, the anti-Mormons often take a similar black and white approach to the issue, claiming that anyone who likes the church and wants to be a part of it is deceived and gullible. As we've already discussed, both of these extremes are little more than that - extreme. Yet, it can be quite difficult to determine who is an honest seeker of truth and righteousness and who is just out to satisfy their own pride or insecurities.

History provides us with a good platform for discussing this issue. For example, if you were a member of the primitive church of Christ, at what point after Christ's death would you start to stand up against the apostasy creeping into that organization? At what point, if any, would you have left that organization because you could no longer be a part of the false doctrine, hypocrisy, and lack of authority? Would it have been right after Christ died? After all of His apostles died? After the Nicean Creed was established? Or at some other point? Is it possible that you would have never stood up and raised objections about the gradual changes in doctrine and ordinances? Would you have gone along with all those changes and even supported them in an attempt to follow the church or its leaders? These are very difficult questions.

When we consider the apostasy of the primitive church, we have to ask ourselves, "Who were the real apostates back then?" Were they those who stood up and fought against (or at least questioned) the changes being made to the gospel and the church, or were they those who simply went along with those changes, never standing up for the truth by challenging the new directions? Of these two types of people, which of these potential "apostates" was more

interested in truth? With which was God more pleased? Which of them sacrificed more for righteousness' sake? If one is really concerned about God and truth, these same types of questions simply must be applied to our day as well. Recalling the words of Joseph Smith, as quoted before, we can perhaps apply his words to apostates as well as prophets.

*The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets, and these had to hide themselves "in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth," and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished them from their society as vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men. (TPJS Pg. 205)*

Perhaps these same words can be said of the difficulty in discerning true and false apostates, both in the past as well as in our day. Maybe it is more difficult than we think. Samuel the Lamanites words to the Nephites apply to us as well in this regard.

*And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out.*

*Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.*

*But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth--and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.*

*Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. (Helaman 13:25-28)*

I think this scripture applies well to some of the comments made about "apostates" in the church today. We generally like to hear that "all is well" in the church. We like to hear flattering words. But if someone comes along and begins to testify of our sins and potential problems in the church, we tend to find fault with that person. The church in general, especially the social Mormon, tends to view such people as sinners or apostates of some kind. The problem is that apostasy almost always deals with a very religious people. In most cases, it involves a people who believe they are following the right path of God. Yet, these words by Samuel the Lamanite seem to give us some clues as to what we should be looking for. In general, repentance seems to

be the cry of most true prophets while flattery often seems to be spoken by false prophets or apostates. As President Benson once pointed out:

*As I have sought direction from the Lord, I have had reaffirmed in my mind and heart the declaration of the Lord to “say nothing but repentance unto this generation.” (D&C 6:9; 11:9) This has been a theme of every latter-day prophet, along with their testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.*

*Repentance was the cry of our late and great prophet, Spencer W. Kimball. This theme permeated his talks and the pages of his writings, such as his marvelous book the Miracle of Forgiveness. And it must be our cry today, both to member and to nonmember alike - repent.*

*Watchmen - what of the night?<sup>14</sup> We must respond by saying that all is not well in Zion. (Conference Report, May 1986, Pg. 4.)*

In light of this, we should probably tend to be more open to those who are crying repentance than we are to those who are declaring that all is well in Zion. I don't believe that this should be viewed as a black and white way of judging people, but rather as a general guideline. For example, in high school I once had a fairly wise seminary teacher who had a philosophy of teaching that I've always admired and tried to emulate. He said that his goal in teaching was to “calm the disturbed and disturb the calm.” I think this attitude is reflected by the Savior and the way he taught. To the proud (the calm), the Savior was usually fairly ruthless and harsh. To the humble sinner who had lost all hope (the disturbed), He was generally fairly forgiving and kind. In the midst of calling people to repentance, we must remember that we are trying to do what's best for the individual. Unfortunately, there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to teaching and helping others in their spiritual progress. In general, the true follower of Christ will likely tend to display a few key characteristics:

1. First, he will tend to claim that all is not well in Zion. He will talk about the problems, the “sins” if you will, among us rather than how wonderful we are. True prophets tend to “say nothing but repentance” unto the people of their time.
2. Second, a true follower of Christ will not generally teach doctrine so high or deep that the majority of his listeners will perish. With a few exceptions, he will not teach to destroy, but rather to uplift and challenge at a level that people can handle. He will find more joy in the concept of people repenting than he will in people being destroyed because of wickedness. Hence, he will reveal only that which he ought to reveal for the salvation and blessing of those around him and no more.

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<sup>14</sup> See Isaiah 21:11. See also Isaiah 21:6; Isaiah 52:8; Isaiah 62:6; Jeremiah 6:17; Jeremiah 31:6; Jeremiah 51:12; Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33:6-7; Mosiah 12:22; Mosiah 15:29; 3 Nephi 16:18; 3 Nephi 20:32; D&C 101:45-46, 53-54.

3. Third, in his efforts to cry repentance, a true follower of Christ will tend to speak harshly against the proud and softly against the humble. He will tend to take this course regardless of whether the proud or humble are “sinning” or not.

These are difficult concepts for us to learn, regardless of what type of Mormon we are. They are harder still for us to incorporate into our daily attitude and actions.

It is true that few, if any, are currently called to “set in order the house of God.” However, each of us is called to pursue our own salvation as best we can and perhaps to “warn our neighbor” as the D&C directs.<sup>1</sup> If a person stands up and makes negative comments about some portion of the church, it does not necessarily mean that this person is an apostate. In fact, it may be much more of an indication of apostasy if people just go with the flow and question nothing within the church or its leadership.

On the other hand, if people stand up and defend the church or promote a lower law, it is no evidence that they are apostates either. It should be clear by now that all knowledge is not for all people. The Lord calls people to teach his children at all levels of the gospel. The motive behind teaching is often more important than the teaching itself. “Why” is often more important than “what.” A wise and faithful servant of God will always seek the mysteries and deeper doctrines but will seldom reveal more than he should. As already cited, President Brigham Young expressed this principle as well as anyone.

*There is one principle that I wish the people would understand and lay to heart. Just as fast as you will prove before your God that you are worthy to receive the mysteries, if you please to call them so, of the kingdom of heaven--that you are full of confidence in God--that you will never betray a thing that God tells you--that you will never reveal to your neighbour that which ought not to be revealed, as quick as you prepare to be entrusted with the things of God, there is an eternity of them to bestow upon you. Instead of pleading with the Lord to bestow more upon you, plead with yourselves to have confidence in yourselves, to have integrity in yourselves, and know when to speak and what to speak, what to reveal, and how to carry yourselves and walk before the Lord. And just as fast as you prove to Him that you will preserve everything secret that ought to be--that you will deal out to your neighbours all which you ought, and no more, and learn how to dispense your knowledge to your families, friends, neighbours, and brethren, the Lord will bestow upon you, and give to you, and bestow upon you, until finally he will say to you, "You shall never fall; your salvation is sealed unto you; you are sealed up unto eternal life and salvation, through your integrity."*

*Let every person be the friend of God, that whatever He reveals to you, you can wisely handle without asking Him whether you shall tell your wife of it or not. You can recollect the backhanded blow I gave to some of the brethren last winter. They were in pain, because they knew something which they could not tell to their*

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<sup>1</sup> D&C 88:81

wives. *I would not trust such men out of sight of my dinner. God will not trust the least thing to such persons. Sisters, if you are in pain, because you cannot tell your husbands everything, you had better take a little catnip tea, and get over it, if you can. What will God reveal to such persons? Just enough to keep them from the gulf of despair, and lead them along until they get a little sense. I say this that you may learn to reveal that which you ought, and to keep the rest to yourselves. By so doing you prove to God that you are His friends, and will keep His secrets.*

*The world may howl around you and plead for the secrets of the Lord which he has given you, but they will not get them. When the Lord has proved His children true to what He has given into their charge, and that they will do His bidding, He will tell such persons anything that they should know. A great many desire just enough of knowledge to damn them and it does damn a great many. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.4, Pg.371, underline added)*

It is clear that the ultra-Mormon's zeal for the gospel often leads him to say things that ought not to be said. If the definition of an apostate includes the notion of destroying the faith of the weak by giving them meat when they really need milk, then there are many apostates among the ultra-Mormons. Knowing what to say or not say to people is a difficult task. There are no clear guidelines or instructions concerning the matter. It is a judgement call. Unfortunately, many ultra-Mormons don't use good judgement in these matters, believing that all truth should be poured out in great abundance among the masses, blatantly disregarding the Lord's admonition to provide milk instead of meat. Even among those with nothing but pure intentions, mistakes will be made and people will "perish" because they were fed meat too early and too quickly. I speak to you as one who has experienced this first hand, and who will perhaps be held accountable for destroying souls with too much truth. It is a burden I hope others will avoid.

That said, we must also be cautious about not giving enough meat to the people. We sometimes feel that if one soul is lost due to teaching the higher doctrines, a mistake must have been made. This is simply not the case. Every prophet who ever lived lost people because of what they taught. Even the Savior himself, the greatest teacher ever, was continually losing followers because he taught them more than some could endure. This is just part of teaching the gospel. We should be cautious not to make the mistake of always teaching to the weakest among us for fear of offending them. There is no progression in this approach. If you teach the true gospel of Jesus Christ for very long, eventually you will offend someone. If you don't, then you're probably not doing a very good job of teaching the gospel. And you're certainly not following the pattern set forth by the Savior and his prophets.<sup>2</sup>

As far as personal apostasy is concerned, the hardest part seems to be making the transition from being a social Mormon to becoming an ultra-Mormon. During this stage people feel that they should be able to discuss their views on the church openly and honestly, expecting to be corrected by authoritative "thus saith the Lord" kinds of statements which are consistent and make sense. But these tend to come all too seldom. Most of the time these people don't even get

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:57; Matthew 15:12; John 6:66; Moses 6:37

a discussion worth taking part in. So, they tend to get themselves in trouble by speaking out about “the mysteries” or by asking the hard questions. Usually it isn’t because they are apostates, but because the gospel is very important to them. From a certain perspective, this seems to be exactly the type of person God and Christ would have us be. Yet it is difficult to manage in a church of 10 million people, most of whom are social Mormons.

The question as to who is an apostate today and who is not is a difficult issue. I don’t think it can be automatically associated with either the social Mormons or the ultra-Mormons. There are apostates in each group - both among those who don’t say or do enough as well as among those who say or do too much. Both are problems and both can be damaging to our progress in the gospel.

### ***Rules Of Thumb For Ultra-Mormons***

At the risk of belittling the significance and complexity of these issues, there are a few simple guidelines that I’ve found helpful when trying to keep things in perspective. These rules do not pretend to solve the problems at hand. But a brief discussion of them may help the ultra-Mormon cope with the church and all of its problems with a little bit better attitude.

*Rule #1: Learn to love people as much as you love truth.* The Savior once taught that the Sabbath was for man, not man for the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> The same could be said of truth and the gospel in general. Truth is for people, not people for truth. Truth is there to bless people, not the other way around. Without people, truth has no meaning or significance. It is a great thing to love the truth and to seek the higher things of the gospel. But if we can’t find room in our hearts to properly bless others with that truth, we will find it may leave us empty and cold in the end. For those who honestly love truth and the higher things of the gospel, there is a real decision to be made between our love for truth and our love for people. Which do we love the most? In general, the higher we go with truth, the more people we will lose along the way. Yet, the more we lower ourselves to the people, the more truth we leave behind. Because many ultra-Mormons find themselves loving truth more than they love people, they have the tendency to say or do things that may spiritually harm individuals or groups who are not prepared for such things. They have difficulty leaving part of the truth behind in order to bless the individual. Our love of truth often blinds us concerning the special needs of others. There clearly must be a balance of affection between truth and people. We cannot choose wholly in favor of one side or the other and we can’t have it both ways, at least not in this lifetime.

*Rule #2: Nothing is all good or all bad.* We have to start seeing issues in the church as various shades of gray rather than simply black or white. The church and its leaders are not all good, as the social Mormons would have us believe. Nor are they all bad, as the anti-Mormons tend to preach. There is good and there is bad. Like truth, righteousness is where you find it. I think all of us know this deep inside. We even verbalize it on a regular basis. But I don’t think we actually live it very often. When we encounter problems or difficult issues, we tend to be all or nothing in our judgements of the church and its leaders. For some reason, it is very difficult for

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 2:27

us to accept the good that is left in the temple, in spite of the changes. It is difficult for us to accept the good that President Hinckley does and says, in spite of his apparent contradictions. And it's hard for us to be a part of a church that is not what it used to be - a church that is on a downward path. When it comes to our religion, we seem to either want everything to be perfect, or we don't want any part of it. This is a tendency we should fight against. There is always good and there is always bad in every person and every organization. That's just the way life is. If we are sincere truth seekers we will try to separate the good from the bad and avoid making rash judgements that place people and things in either extreme category.

*Rule #3: All truth is not for all people.* This thought has been expressed in multiple ways throughout this document and it is simply true. Knowledge is a great asset - a great blessing. However, knowledge can either exalt you or damn you. The wisdom to control our knowledge and the love we develop for others will determine what effect our knowledge will have on our salvation.

*Rule #4: Help the church, perfect yourself.* Some may see these as two separate, perhaps even opposing, issues. I don't believe they are, at least not completely. Even if the church no longer provides you with the new doctrines or higher principles and ordinances you crave, there is much to gain by sharing yourself with an organization that has access to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, the principles of Zion, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants, just to mention a few. The fact that there is room for improvement only tends to emphasize the need for those with knowledge and a sincere love for the gospel to take an active part. It is true that we can't preach all we would like to. It is also true that there will be many frustrations. However, these are the same frustrations faced by the likes of Moses, Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, and others. Their perfection came in that they learned how to be humble and loving enough to teach and serve others at various levels of gospel understanding and acceptance - not always at their own level. It should be just so with us today. To not take this course only shows our unworthiness of the knowledge and gifts God has given us. It only shows our own imperfections and weaknesses, not theirs.

*Rule #5: Be careful how you judge.* There are a lot of loving leaders in the church who honestly do their best. I am convinced that these people as a whole are generally good people. They pray for guidance often and they try hard to do what is right as best they know how. Many of these men and women are working out their salvation with fear and trembling just like everyone else. The fact that they've been called to a position of leadership shouldn't make us judge them more harshly. If anything, it should make us sympathize with them to a greater degree. They need our help, not our condemnation. Leaders of the church will make many mistakes in all their varieties. Yet, I have to believe that the Savior is pleased with a great many of them - much more than He is with the intellectual fence-sitter who does little more than complain and criticize. I've sat in bishopric and quorum meetings in which I've watched loving bishops and quorum leaders break down and cry over the welfare of those in their stewardship. I've listened to them pray from the bottom of their hearts on behalf of others. Surely, in spite of their weaknesses or lack of gospel scholarship, their efforts generally bode well before the Lord. We must remember that it is charity that "endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the

last day, it shall be well with him.”<sup>4</sup> Although knowledge is important, it never receives a praise as high as charity does in the scriptures. A decent argument could be made in favor of those with great charity and little knowledge over those with great knowledge and little charity. May we never let one defeat or overpower the other in our search for salvation. Both are requirements and should work together to promote the kingdom of God at all levels of gospel awareness and obedience.

### ***A Plea For More Revelation***

When all is said and done, we simply must have more revelation, both on a collective basis, as well as an individual basis. Perhaps the only way to fully answer some of these questions and know what the Lord would have us do is via personal revelation of some kind. I feel we should follow the example Adam set for us when he was faced with not knowing what to do. How did Adam go about the task of avoiding deception and determining what his course should be amidst all the confusion? He sought for messengers from his Father, pure and simple. And what’s more, he waited until he received them. Nothing else was satisfactory to him. When he became confused by the teachings of those around him, he did not succumb to those teachings. He was not pacified by the false doctrines taught to him, even though many others delighted in them. Even when his desire for messengers was belittled by the learned and powerful religious leaders, he remained steadfast to his goal of learning truth via revelation. He waited patiently in frustrating ignorance until he got his answer. Should our course be much different than this?

Nobody was more in favor of the saints receiving personal revelation than was Joseph Smith. Although he was recognized as the mouthpiece of God for an entire dispensation, producing by far more published revelations than any other prophet of our time, Joseph Smith was always trying to get the saints to obtain revelation for themselves. He said,

*Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject. (TPJS Pg.324, underline added)*

It could be easily argued that the entire endowment is little more than an effort to show us how to obtain personal revelation. Joseph Smith’s effort was always one to make saints out of sinners, and prophets out of saints. Concerning the latter effort, the prophet also taught that,

*The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching. (TPJS Pg.190)*

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<sup>4</sup> Moroni 7:47

*Salvation cannot come without revelation; it is in vain for anyone to minister without it. No man is a minister of Jesus Christ without being a Prophet. No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy. Whenever salvation has been administered, it has been by testimony. Men of the present time testify of heaven and hell, and have never seen either; and I will say that no man knows these things without this. (TPJS Pg.160)*

Could we likewise make a similar statement about our relationship with the LDS church? Could we, with honesty, say that many men of the present time testify of both the good and the bad within the church, and most have received a personal witness of neither? Could we further say that no man knows of these things without this? I believe we could.

In addition to teaching the importance of receiving personal revelation, Joseph Smith also taught the importance of avoiding a dependency upon our leaders. How appropriate the following words are for us considering the difficulty and confusion of our day.

*You need present revelation from God to your own dear self, in order to help you out of this nasty, confused labyrinth, and to set your feet firmly upon the solid rock of revelation. Mere flesh and blood cannot help you now. It requires an Almighty arm to effect your deliverance. Therefore, put no more trust in man, for a curse rests upon him that will be guided by the precepts of man.... You ... must know...for yourself, and not of another. (MS 15:276, underline added)*

President Brigham Young was no different in his teachings about the importance of personal revelation.

*Without revelation direct from heaven, it is impossible for any person to understand fully the plan of salvation. We often hear it said that the living oracles must be in the Church, in order that the Kingdom of God may be established and prosper on the earth. I will give another version of this sentiment. I say that the living oracles of God, or the Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God. (Journal of Discourses 9:279, underline added)*

*Now those men, or those women, who know no more about the power of God, and the influences of the Holy Spirit, than to be led entirely by another person, suspending their own understanding, and pinning their faith upon another's sleeve, will never be capable of entering into the celestial glory, to be crowned as they anticipate; they will never be capable of becoming Gods...They never can become Gods, nor be crowned as rulers with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. They never can hold scepters of glory, majesty, and power in the celestial kingdom. Who will? Those who are valiant and inspired with the true independence of heaven, who will go forth boldly in the service of their God, leaving others to do as they please, determined to do right, though all mankind*

*besides should take the opposite course. (Journal of Discourses 1:312, underline added)*

*How often it has been taught that if you depend entirely on the voice, judgement, and sagacity of those appointed to lead you, and neglect to enjoy the Spirit for yourselves, how easily you may be led into error, and finally be cast off to the left hand? (Journal of Discourses 8:59)*

Barring personal revelation on the matter, we seem to have no choice but to do the best we can with the information the Lord has already given us. We ought to do our best to understand what the Lord has told us through his prophets, both ancient and modern. Often, all we really need to seek is a confirmation or understanding of what has already been revealed. However, without direct revelation on the subject, we have no choice but to use what gifts God has given us to search the scriptures and words of the prophets to see if they can provide us with enough information to make an informed decision in the matter. For “whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived.”<sup>5</sup> That is what this manuscript attempts to accomplish. Yet, even with all the evidence the Lord has provided us, there is a better way to know what is true and what is not. That way is personal revelation.

In a world that largely shuns the concept of God talking to man, I cannot help but wonder if increased humility and a sincere plea to God from more people, more often, would call down the powers of heaven on our behalf and lift much of our current confusion. I cannot help but wonder if a collective outpouring of our souls would yield the revelatory results we seek and so earnestly need. I wonder what would happen if more people became knowledgeable of the higher doctrines, more sincere in their desires to unselfishly purify themselves before God, and collectively more devout in their efforts to look for messengers from our Father, as Adam did. I wonder if we, just like Adam, would experience a time of testing and trial - a time full of confusion, concern, and preachers of all manner of false doctrine, only to find that there is a light at the end of the tunnel in the form of more revelation - more true messengers sent to us from our Father.

I believe God hears the prayers of the people when they are gathered together in unity and faith. If there ever was a time when we needed to gather together and look for true messengers from our Father, that time is now. It is a time when the very elect are liable to be deceived, a time when even the humble followers of Christ err because they are taught by the precepts of men, and a time when the events of the last days and the second coming of Christ should be knocking at the door. The church of Christ is in turmoil and many of those who are sincerely seeking the will of God are confused and discouraged. There are many people crying “lo here” and “lo there.” Most of these people claim some sort of personal revelation in defense of their cries. Surely this is a time when we need to stop trusting in these people by turning our attention away from the arm of flesh and towards God himself.

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Smith - Matthew 1:37

As we seek for more revelation, we should also keep in mind that the Lord does not trivialize revelation for our own selfish desires. Revelation is to be sought after for the glory of God, the building up of His kingdom, and the blessing of mankind. It is intended for the purposes of righteousness, not selfishness. If sought after selfishly, the results may take us down paths of destruction and despair rather than exaltation and enlightenment. As President Brigham Young once warned us regarding our revelatory experiences:

*Now hear me, and I will try to talk so that you can understand. I will presume to go a little farther than I did, with regard to the President of the Church, and say to this people, a man might have visions, the angels of God might administer to him, he might have revelations, and see as many visions as you could count; he might have the heavens opened to him, and see the finger of the Lord, and all this would not make him the President of the Church, or an Elder, a High Priest, an Apostle; neither would it prove that he was even a Saint; something else is wanted to prove it. Why I mention this, is because of the frailty, weakness, and short-sightedness of the people. If a man should come and tell you he had a vision, and could appear to substantiate his testimony that he had had the heavens open to him, you would be ready to bow down and worship him; and he might be, at the same time, perfectly calculated to destroy the people -- one of the biggest devils on earth. He would appear to be one of the finest men, to be honest and unassuming, and come with all the grace and generalship of the devil, which is so well-calculated to deceive the people. Admit this to be the case.*

*If you ask me what will prove a man or woman to be a Saint, I will answer the question. "If you love me," says Jesus, "you will keep my sayings." This is the touchstone. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father, you will keep the commandments of the Son -- you will do his will. If you neglect to do this, you may have all the visions and revelations that could be bestowed upon a mortal being, and yet be nothing but a devil. Why I use this expression is because when a man's mind is enlightened, and he turns from that light to darkness, it prepares him to be a devil. A man never knew how to be wicked, until light and truth were first made manifest to him. Then is the time for man to make their decision, and if they turn away from the Lord, it prepares them to become devils. (Brigham Young, JD 1: 133-4)*

There is little sense in judging either the church leadership or any others who claim revelation and visions until we know for ourselves what is true and what is not true and what we should do about it. As Brigham Young has indicated, we must first understand the righteous principles of the gospel in order to judge whether or not a visionary man is righteous or worth following. We must be able to righteously judge the “whys” of the church and its leadership, not just the “whats.”

When all is said and done, only a few options exist concerning the professed revelations of others, whether in the church or out. Either they are receiving true revelations, or they are being deceived, or they are simply lying. There are no other options. How can we know which is the case? I believe we can know in the same manner that Adam knew, by making good judgements

regarding the reasoning of and motivation behind the “preachers” around us, by humbly remaining faithful to that which God has already given us, and by earnestly seeking messengers from our Father who will further teach us the ways of truth and light. We must also remember that there is much deception in the world today. Adam asked a legitimate question when he uttered, “How may I know that you are true messengers?” There can be nothing wrong with us asking the same questions regarding our own revelatory experiences or those of others. We must be cautious not to fall into the trap of loving revelation or gifts of the spirit more than we love God, righteousness, or the truth.

Let us place our trust in the Lord. Let us collectively begin pouring out our hearts to him in humble, but mighty prayer. And if He chooses not to answer our prayers in the manner or time frame we desire, let us continue to wait on Him, just as Adam did, before choosing a course that may harm either ourselves or Christ’s church in the long run. To abandon the church merely because it is not all that we want it to be seems to be the opposite of this course. Pray to see if the LDS church is the place the Lord wants you to be, in spite of all of the apparent contradictions, milky doctrines, and frustrations. You may just find that it is. In fact, you may just find that there is a lot of personal progression yet to be experienced within this falling church - progression which may be little more than a preview of what it’s like to be a God throughout all the eternities yet to come.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS AND TESTIMONY**

This represents the eighth manuscript I’ve written on gospel topics. I’ve written about eternal progression, the attributes of Zion, the importance of plural marriage, the attributes of deity, the nature of priesthood power, and much more. Yet, due to the nature of the topics discussed, I feel that only two of these manuscripts are appropriate for general consumption. This manuscript in particular is generally only given to those who I feel are prepared to read such things or who have a special need of some kind.

I’ve also been heavily involved over the years with what could legitimately be called “study groups,” both on the Internet as well as in person, both formal and informal. In spite of the negative connotations often given to such things by the church, these discussions have taught me a great deal and I am grateful to have been a part of them. Yet, in most of these groups I’ve watched people fall by the wayside because they couldn’t handle some teaching or other. I’ve also watched while others twisted and warped the simplest doctrines to fit their own particular desires or whims in life - desires which probably have little or nothing to do with truth, Zion, or the Celestial Kingdom.

It has been my pleasure to know people, both in and out of the church, who have tremendous gifts of the spirit. It has not always been clear to me whether these gifts were being used for good or evil, but the fact that some of these people have gifts can hardly be disputed in my mind. I’ve experimented with some of these gifts myself and have firsthand experience with some of them.

I've also spent time among some of the fundamentalist groups. I've sat in their homes and have invited them into mine. I've listened to their teachings and I've become familiar with some of their character, personalities, and convictions, which vary greatly in my opinion. I've even been invited to speak at their firesides and visit with them in their places of worship, which I've enjoyed very much. Given the right group, and becoming convinced of proper authority, I would probably make a great fundamentalist. Some of them are very much my kind of people.

I've placed my beliefs, and my ability to support myself financially, in the line of fire by studying philosophy in college, with an emphasis on religious philosophy. I've also made it a point to learn as much about other religions as possible. At one point in my life I used to collect anti-Mormon materials, which I read with great interest. I've home schooled my children. I've been into herbs and health foods. I've studied and experienced auras, chakras, pressure points, and kinesiology. I've listened to many people as they talked about many things and I've questioned and prayed about everything with a sincere desire to know the truth. I've wanted to know every point of view I could possibly find regarding my beliefs and have made sincere efforts to investigate all such things.

I've studied hard, I've prayed hard, I've fasted often, and I've spent a great deal of time thinking about, discussing, and teaching things associated with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ over the span of many years. In short, I feel I've had a relatively in-depth experience with spirituality, religion, and issues surrounding the restored gospel. It has been a major part of my life for many, many years and will likely continue to be so.

From a doctrinal standpoint, I've finally come to a point where I feel there isn't much more of great significance to learn until the Lord sees fit to reveal more to us. I don't say this to satisfy my feelings of pride or arrogance, but rather to express my frustration with our current situation. In fact, I'd love it if someone would prove me wrong. Of course there will always be new insights here and there. But it requires much more effort to find them than it used to and they are much more speculative in nature. In addition, I suppose there will always be more to learn regarding history and there will always be endless debates on the finer points of doctrine or possible truths outside of Mormonism, such as Kabbalah, mysticism, myths, Gnosticism, or other potentially apostate versions of once revealed truths. However, whose opinion is right regarding most of these discussions is anyone's guess. It is my belief that they are unlikely to be resolved without more revelation of some sort. I tend to grow weary of such endless, highly speculative debates. For the most part these debates are not that different than the preacher who teaches the philosophies of men, mingled with scripture. Which teachings are true and which are meant to deceive can only be truly discerned with the help of God.

All that said, I am still very hungry for more. I delight in the things of God. Yet, I weep and wail unto the Lord constantly about these depressive, telestial circumstances in which I find myself. I feel I can say in all honesty that I sincerely "hunger and thirst" after more knowledge and righteousness. And yet, very seldom do I feel that my hunger is being satisfied or my thirst quenched. Needless to say, I've spent an enormous amount of time over the years pondering and praying about my role within the church, the gospel, and life itself. The answers I feel I have found generally only serve to raise many more questions. It is difficult for me to accept the fact that this is all there is - that for some reason, the Lord has seen fit to give me this much and no

more...at least for now. It is hard for me to accept and live with this conclusion. A part of me will probably never accept it fully, which I believe is a good thing in the long run. However, I have no choice but to live in the circumstances or “sphere” in which God has placed me. And perhaps my role at this time is not so much to learn more, but to do more with what I have already learned, both with my family as well as with other adults.

A testimony can be a complicated thing. Due to differing capacities and experiences, it can be quite different for different people. Yet, as I recently wrote in one of my papers, true faith, as spoken of in the scriptures, should always be based on some sort of support or evidence in order to draw a conclusion. To believe in something for no reason is to place your life in the hands of random chance. It is like trying to read an eye chart in a completely dark room. Your chances for success are extremely low, if there is any chance at all. This principle applies to spiritual truth as much as it does to any other kind of truth. We must find “substance” and “evidence” to support our spiritual faith or it will be of little or no value to us. (See “Truth and People” p.7.)

With this in mind I’ve spent a great deal of time trying to pinpoint why I believe what I believe regarding the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith and Mormonism in general. As a result, I’ve categorized my reasons for belief into three major areas. These three areas are:

- 1) Spiritual Experiences,
- 2) Rational Explanations, and
- 3) Moral Principles.

These three areas combine to create the bulk of my testimony regarding Mormonism and the restored gospel. Each deserves some explanation and detail in order to be at least partially understood by those who have not personally experienced the same things I have had the privilege of experiencing.

### ***Spiritual Experiences***

My spiritual experiences have ranged from small, seemingly meaningless events to significantly deep and often profound incidents. One of the most significant and intense experiences occurred while reading the Book of Mormon in the Missionary Training Center. During the two months I was there I woke up earlier than the other missionaries for the sole purpose of gaining the spiritual testimony of the Book of Mormon of which so many have spoken. I prayed as sincerely as I ever had up to that time in my life. The result was an experience that was more powerful than my words will be able to communicate. The book came alive to me. Tears became common, even while reading portions that few people would consider terribly spiritual or emotional. Both my mind and my “heart” were affected by this experience, which lingered throughout my reading of the book. In fact, this experience had such a powerful effect on my mind that by the time I had finished reading the book this one time, I was able to ask others to begin reading anywhere in the book and I could tell them within a few chapters where they were reading. Regardless of what the Book of Mormon may or may not be, I could no more deny the experience I had at that time than I could that I exist. It has continued to influence my life ever since.

In addition to my experience with the Book of Mormon, I’ve been subject to many other

experiences that I can only describe as being primarily spiritual in nature. The most constant and reoccurring of these experiences have probably occurred during times when I was teaching, writing, and giving blessings. At these times I have often had feelings and/or thoughts that have clearly led me along some path or other – telling me what to say and how to say it. In many instances, words have come to my mouth very quickly, without thought or deliberation of any kind. It would be difficult for me to argue against the idea that I was being led by some unseen force. It has been as though the words have “flowed” through me to the audience for which they were intended. Again, these experiences have often involved both my thoughts and my feelings.

Less consistent, though no less meaningful, have been my experiences with certain gifts of the spirit. Some of these gifts are so remarkable and extraordinary that I would not have believed them possible had I not experienced them for myself. Without going into too much detail, included in these experiences have been such things as dreams of future events, feelings enabling me to predict certain events with repeated consistency, the ability to perceive what other people are feeling or thinking (which seems to be especially acute when I’m teaching), immediate and unmistakable answers to specific prayers, seeing beings from beyond the veil, and more. These experiences go way beyond the typical confirmation or “warm feeling” sometimes experienced by hearing a rousing speech or reading a heart-warming story. Many of these experiences have been predictable and able to be repeatedly tested by myself over the span of many years. Some of these experiences have been a part of my life since childhood. Others became more prevalent and recognizable later in life. In the end, I’ve experimented with them in ways that have not only amazed me but have satisfied my soul that they are real and involve powers beyond those with which mankind is typically aware. As with my experiences with the Book of Mormon and inspiration outlined above, I can only describe these “gifts” as being spiritual in nature.

In addition to these more concrete experiences I’ve had many other impressions to both my heart and mind that have helped to shape my system of beliefs. Many of these have been difficult to discern from other common feelings or thoughts that may or may not have their origins in anything truly spiritual. Yet, they likewise cannot be thrown out as true spiritual experience. It is simply difficult at times to tell the two apart.

### ***Rational Explanations***

From my youth my nature has always been to ask questions and try to figure things out. I’ve seldom been satisfied by pat answers or “status quo” rational. For better or for worse, I’ve challenged everyone from parents and other family members to school and university teachers to church leaders and friends regarding a great many issues. Truth and choosing the “right” way to do things is, and always has been, all-important to me. Studying philosophy in college was a relatively perfect fit for my naturally questioning and logical disposition.

As a result of this natural characteristic, I’ve always sought the best explanations I could find regarding the gospel and religion in general. I’ve never been satisfied with the standard answers – often resulting in difficult discussions with people regarding sensitive subjects. In my search for spiritual and moral truths I’ve seldom been content to answer only the “what’s” of an issue. I’ve always felt the need to answer the “why’s” as well. This has led me down many paths of discovery and reconciliation of otherwise apparent contradictions or difficult problems.

Through all of this relatively deep investigation and thought, I have almost unwaveringly been impressed with the solutions provided within Mormon theology. While studying philosophy at BYU, for example, I had a rare opportunity to compare the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, B.H. Roberts, and others to those of the great religious philosophers throughout history. In what can only be described as “amazingly brilliant,” these teachings from LDS leaders proved superior time and time again. Philosophical bottomless pits such as the problem of evil, the nature and character of deity, divine foreknowledge and human free will, and others are addressed far more adequately within LDS theology than any other religion with which I am familiar. This has been so much the case that I have become convinced that one of two scenarios must be true: Either Joseph Smith was the most underrated, dishonest genius of our time or he was a true prophet getting his thoughts from some power beyond his own. Given the spiritual experiences mentioned above, I can only opt for the latter explanation.

In addition to comparing LDS theology with other systems of belief, I’ve found even more credibility by comparing Mormonism against itself. “Mysteries” or apparent contradictions have fallen one by one as I’ve compared, prodded, and searched the scriptures and words of the leaders with an open mind and a certain amount of sincere prayer. As a result I’ve come to firmly believe that the greatest truths of Mormonism are those that both solve some of our greatest theological problems and are, at the same time, the least understood by both Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Simple teachings about the nature and character of God, for example, are both beautifully profound and, at the same time, amazingly offensive to most people, including members of the LDS church.

From an intellectual standpoint, studying Mormonism for me has been like putting together a grand puzzle with no complete picture to use as a guide and many unrelated pieces thrown into the pile that must be sifted through and either kept, set aside, or thrown out one by one. Although there are still plenty of loose pieces on the table and the picture is not yet completed – not by a long shot, I feel I’ve been able to fit too many of the other pieces together to abandon the puzzle now. I honestly feel much of the picture is there before me and I honestly like what I see. It is my firm belief that I will be able to continue adding more pieces to the puzzle and will someday have a complete, finished picture that is both beautiful and makes perfect sense – if not in this life then in the next. In the end I can only say that LDS theology not only offers a vast amount of breadth and depth, but also provides a rational basis for that content. To me, it is practical, rational theology.

### ***Moral Principles***

Finally, a large and significant portion of my testimony rests in the simple fact that Mormonism teaches good and wholesome principles as the core of the gospel plan. When all is said and done, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ through the prophet Joseph Smith is all about incorporating unselfish, moral, and righteous principles into the minds and hearts of its followers. All the rest is merely a means to that end. It is my belief that anyone who honestly and open mindedly seeks to embrace the wholesome principles outlined in the scriptures will also love Mormon doctrine and theology in its true form, for it is impossible to separate the two. Those who don’t care for such principles are likely to find little comfort within the confines of true Mormonism. Although mistakes and ulterior motives within the LDS church often muddy the water, I believe that the core principles of faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience,

godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, hope, love, humility, gentleness, meekness, diligence, holiness, lowliness of heart, long suffering, and all others found in the scriptures are at the heart of the restored gospel and are good and upright in and of themselves.

It is difficult for me to imagine anyone openly desiring to argue or fight against such principles. Although difficult to understand at times, the more I have studied the doctrines of the restored gospel and the history of the church, the more I have become convinced that Joseph Smith's motives were pure and wholesome – that everything he did was for the direct purpose of promoting and instilling these types of principles into the hearts and minds of the people. I am convinced that these principles describe both Zion and the Celestial Kingdom – the ultimate goals of all things LDS. Within every ordinance of Mormonism, from baptism to endowment to plural marriage, I see these unselfish, loving principles upheld and advanced. In every bit of doctrine, from simple faith to the united order and consecration, I only see a good and unselfish lifestyle that, if honestly lived, would bring about the very heaven we all claim to seek so badly. I could no more reject the truthfulness and goodness of these core principles than I could life itself. Without them, there is no hope. With them, all good things are possible. Inasmuch as these principles are the main focus and motivation behind Mormonism, I am, and will in all likelihood continue to be, a “Mormon.” I love them. I seek them. I wish I were a better example of them. And I am convinced that if all people would embrace and uphold them by keeping the commandments and honoring their covenants with all their heart, might, mind, and strength, we would experience the highest degree of joy and happiness available to any living soul.

In the midst of all the controversy and unsolved difficulties found among both early and modern Mormonism, fully recognizing the many challenges and trials involved with upholding such a testimony as that which I have born, these three areas of focus continue to be the foundation of my belief in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I am as certain of these things as I am of anything else holding conviction of any certainty in my life. These areas are solid to me. They are not flippant, naïve, or without reason. They are real and provide a solid foundation for both my current beliefs as well as any spiritual learning and growth I may realistically expect to experience in the future.

This is why I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored through the prophet Joseph Smith. If I honestly believed that there was anything better under the sun or that would explain the experiences I've mentioned to a greater degree, I feel I would pursue that course instead. However, as of the time of writing this testimony, I know of no such course that would offer an adequate response to the experiences and principles listed above. To me, Mormonism is verifiable, rational, morally beautiful, and unable to be adequately explained in any other way than to say that Joseph Smith was who he said he was, and the teachings he espoused and promoted are verily true, wholesome, and exalting in nature.

When all is said and done, I feel I must have some kind of personal witness before I will leave this church for any other option, including inactivity. Though I have prayed often about it, such a witness I have not yet received. To me, even with all of its flaws and problems, this church still offers me and my family a lot of good. It is discouraging that there are so many frustrations and problems within the church. The downward path of the church brings me a lot of sadness,

misery, and heartache. It has taken its toll on the zeal and commitment I am able to give to the church today. But in the midst of these negative aspects, I still find a good deal of joy, comfort, and progression with my activity in the church. Alongside the hypocrites and “ignorant faithful,” I’ve found some good, humble people with hearts full of love and faith in God. Along with the sadness I feel every time I go to the temple, there is still much to think about and learn there. In the midst of all the wildly incorrect talks and lessons, there is still the occasional good one that truly makes me think and encourages me to be a better person. And although I am frustrated when my children are taught false doctrines in primary and Sunday School, for the most part, I believe they are being blessed by their teachers and leaders. My children will be better because of the influence and efforts of some of these people. The church still provides a good basis for learning the basics about Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the gospel in general - which is pretty much what my children need at this time, as well as many adults I know. And even though I am not able to openly speak about or discuss everything I would like to in the church, I am still given a forum to speak about a lot of things. In fact, I feel I’ve had a hand in teaching many people things that they may not have ever heard about had I not been there to teach them - things that are higher and more exalting in nature. In short, even with all of its problems and frustrations, until the Lord tells me otherwise, I know of no better place for me and my family to be than in this church. Perhaps there is a better place, but I do not know where or what it is at this time. I feel the same is probably true for most other ultra-Mormons as well.

When all is said and done, perhaps the most accurate summary regarding the state of “modern Mormonism” was provided by Elder H. Verlan Anderson when he said,

*While the scriptures do assure us that the Church will continue to exist and be divinely led by prophets of the Lord right up until his Second Coming, they do not state that all, or even a majority of its members will follow those prophets. On the contrary, they foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles. (The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 169-170)*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is still true “in so far forth.” It is still the Lord’s house and will remain such until He says otherwise. In addition, I firmly believe that the Lord will eventually send “one mighty and strong” at some point in the future to save and redeem this church and to raise it to a whole new level of knowledge and righteousness in preparation for the second coming of Christ and the building of Zion. I believe these will be very difficult times for Mormons of all types. I believe a great many people will be left behind or destroyed due to their pride, ignorance, and foolish traditions. Yet, it seems that this may be the only way for the church to move forward. Unless the Lord directs me to other paths, I relish the idea of possibly being a part of this redeeming effort within the church. I love the idea of someday being called to help teach the higher truths of the gospel “to the masses” and helping to lay the foundations of Zion. I only hope that my pride or lack of patience and motivation regarding the current situation in the church doesn’t prevent me from being a part of this great effort when it finally happens. I worry that my lack of active participation in the church and my inability to serve people at all levels of gospel maturity may render me as unworthy to be a part of such a meaningful work.

I hope that we will all continue to seek and find true answers from God regarding our current dilemma with the church. I hope we will begin to judge more righteous judgement based on sound reasoning and true revelation from God rather than our own insignificant or selfish desires, and that we will continually and humbly seek only that which is true, good, wholesome, and uplifting for ourselves and our fellow man. May we find favor with God by patiently choosing to serve him in the manner in which He chooses for us, no matter how lowly, frustrating, or condescending it may seem, that we may become as the Lord himself when he taught, “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?”<sup>6</sup> May we collectively and earnestly beseech God to visit us with more truth, understanding, and righteousness, and may we be ever involved with making ourselves more worthy of such a visitation, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>6</sup> D&C 122:8