**Mormonism: From God or Man? (1)**

*by Robert H. West*

**[Editor’s Note**: This week’s bulletin will be the first of a four-part series on Mormonism. Brother Robert West wrote these articles in 1977, but they are still an excellent introduction to the errors of Mormon doctrine. They include Bible teaching that exposes the errors of Mormonism as well as quotations from Mormon materials that manifest them to be from man, not divinely inspired by God. Several families from this congregation have had studies with Mormons canvassing their neighborhoods. No doubt, more will have them knock at the door as part of the “Latter-Day Saints” efforts to gain converts. These articles are being re-published here in hope that they will provide some help with material for further study on this subject. HRO]

The religious system popularly known as "Mormonism" looks to Joseph Smith, Jr., as it founder. Smith, born in Vermont in 1805, claimed to have received visitations from the Father and the Son, and the angel Moroni in 1820 and 1823, respectively. The first alleged appearance was for the purpose of warning young Smith not to join any of the religious groups in his area. During the second visit he was supposed to have been advised that God had selected him for a divine purpose. He was further advised, we are told, of an ancient book written on golden plates which was hidden in a hill near Palmyra, New York. He was allowed to visit this location once each year until September, 1827, when the plates, according to his claims, were delivered to him.

In April, 1829, assisted by a local school teacher, Oliver Cowdery, Smith began to translate the peculiar characters on the golden plates into English. This, it is claimed, was accomplished by "the gift and power of God." The result of these supposed labors was published in 1830 under the title, The Book of Mormon. This highly ungrammatical and tedious work claimed to be an account of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent-their origin, religion, and wars. But far more than just a historical work, it claimed to be the word of God - the "fulness of the everlasting gospel."

The same year this book was published, Joseph Smith, claiming to be a divinely appointed prophet, organized a church which, in 1834, was officially called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From that time until now, this group claims to be the "one true church," divinely restored to the earth.

In the ensuing years before the violent murder of Smith in 1844, he produced two other books, Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price. Both of these works, like The Book of Mormon, purported to be the word of God.

After the death of Joseph Smith, his followers were divided into warring camps. The largest of these, under the brilliant leadership of Brigham Young, made the famous exodus to the Salt Lake Valley, from which headquarters Young's successors still govern the people we know as the Mormons.

Although there have been some ninety Book of Mormon-believing groups formed since 1830, the one centered in Salt Lake City is by far the largest. It is to its tenets that we shall be primarily addressing our remarks. However, much of the material will also have application to the other "Mormon" groups.

**Why Examine The Claims Of Mormonism?**

The answer to the above question can be best seen in the words of Orson Pratt, one of the original "apostles" of the Latter-day Saint Church. Speaking of the Book of Mormon, he wrote:

"If after a rigid examination, it be found an imposition, it should be extensively published to the world as such; the evidences and arguments upon which the Imposture was detected should be clearly and logically stated, that those who have been sincerely yet unfortunately deceived, may perceive the mature of the deception, and be reclaimed, and that those who continue to publish the delusion, may be exposed and silenced, not by physical force, neither by persecutions, bare assertions, nor ridicule, but by strong and powerful arguments-by evidences adduced from scripture and reason" (Orson Pratt's Works, 1899 Edition, p. 69).

Pratt further wrote:

"This book must be either true or false. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent from God to man, affecting both the temporal and eternal Interests of every people under heaven .... If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the word of God. . ." (Ibid., p. 63).

We agree emphatically with both of these statements which clearly present justification-more than that, a challenge, to examine and, if possible, prove whether the claims of Mormonism are from God or men.

We enter this examination not only with the approbation of a Mormon spokesman, but by the eminently higher authority of the Bible. On its pages we are told to, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11) and, "Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they be of God, for many false prophets axe gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Having established both Mormon and Biblical authority to pursue this study, we direct your attention to the consideration of the principal question - IS MORMONISM FROM GOD OR MAN?