

ARE MORMON TEMPLES Christian?

The Mormon Church, known officially as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, operates over 100 temples worldwide. It claims that these impressive looking buildings serve the same purpose as the Jerusalem temple described in the Bible. It also claims that Jesus and His apostles instituted and practiced the secret rituals performed in Mormon temples, including baptism for the dead and eternal marriage. Further, the Mormon Church claims that it is the only true Christian church on the face of the earth, because it alone has "restored" these lost temple practices of original Christianity.

But are these Mormon claims credible? Are they supported by historical evidence? Most importantly, are they supported by the Bible, God's Holy Word?

This brochure will show that there is no basis or support in the Bible or early Christian history for Mormon temples and the rituals performed in them. They are the invention of Mormon founder Joseph Smith, not something taught in the Bible for Christians of the New Testament age.

No Common Purpose

A comparison of the activities of the Biblical temple and Mormon temples shows clearly that the two have nothing in common. Consider first the purpose of the biblical temple. Its sole function was to teach the need for atonement of sins as a precondition for authentic worship of the true and living God. The location of the altar of burnt offering immediately in front of the only entrance to the Jerusalem temple (see Figure 1) illustrates this. It emphasized that God's love and acceptance can only be extended to the sinner whose transgressions have been borne by His lamb of sacrifice. Solomon expressed this

singular purpose of the temple in 2 Chronicles 2:6: "who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?"¹

By contrast, Mormon temples exist as places to perform unusual rituals, such as baptism for the dead and eternal marriage. Mormons are also taught secret handshakes there and are given secret names that are said to be necessary to enter heaven. Through these temple rituals men and women can become gods and goddesses, according to the Mormon Church.² It claims that these rites were a part of early Christianity but were sabotaged by false teachers. It claims that all other churches are false and apostate;³ that Mormonism is the only true form of Christianity in the world. However, these Mormon temple rituals are not supported by the Bible, ancient Jewish literature, or early Christian history.

Inside each Mormon temple there is an impressive baptismal font mounted on the backs of twelve life-size, sculpted oxen (see Figure 2). This font is modeled after a description in the Bible of a large basin (also called a "laver" or "sea") that was located just outside the door of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 4:2, 15, see Figure 1). However, the basin at the biblical temple was not used for baptisms, as the Mormon Church teaches (for Christian baptism is a New Testament ordinance). Rather, the Scriptures plainly state that it was used by the priests to wash themselves after offering animal sacrifices in preparation for ministry in the sanctuary (Exodus 30:18-20; 2 Chronicles 4:2-6). *The Mormon practice of baptism for the dead is neither a Jewish nor Christian practice, but rather contradicts New Testament teaching regarding baptism and salvation.*

Likewise, the Mormon temple rite of eternal marriage was never practiced in the biblical temple. Again, there is not one mention of such a temple rite anywhere in the Bible, ancient Jewish literature or early Christian history. To the



Hong Kong, China

contrary, in Romans 7:2 the apostle Paul clearly teaches that marriage is only for mortal life: "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth." Likewise, Jesus taught us that, "in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). *The Mormon temple rite of eternal marriage is not a Christian or biblical practice.*

Biblical Rules Violated

A second point to consider is that many of the rules God revealed for the biblical temple are violated in Mormon temples. Here are four examples:

1. **God appointed only one temple** to reflect the fact that there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 12:5,13-14; 16:5,6). *By contrast, the Mormon Church operates scores of temples, in violation of this divine mandate.*
2. **Only priests were allowed to enter the biblical temple.** Worshippers — even the king of Israel⁴ — came no further than the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard. *Since non-priests are allowed to enter and participate in Mormon temple activities, this is another point at which Mormon temple practice violates biblical revelation.*
3. **All activities in the biblical temple were public knowledge.** They are spelled out in detail in Scripture (for example, Exodus 30:7-10; Leviticus 4:5-7; 16:1-34; 24:1-9).⁵ The Bible warns the Christian against participation in secret activities (Matthew 10:26-27; Ephesians 5:11-12). And Jesus affirmed that He had no secret teachings, "I spake openly to the world... in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). *In sharp contrast, the Mormon Church insists on keeping its temple rituals secret.⁶*
4. **The Bible sets forth strict lineage requirements for the Aaronic priesthood.** It teaches very explicitly that only men from the tribe of Levi and the family line of Aaron were qualified to serve as priests in the temple sanctuary (Numbers 3:10; Exodus 29:9; Numbers 18:1-7).⁷

The Mormon Church claims to have a restored Aaronic priesthood, but completely ignores this plain lineage requirement of Scripture.⁸

The Temple Made Obsolete

At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ predicted that the Jerusalem temple was about to be destroyed (Matthew 24:1-2). He told his disciples: "verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another."

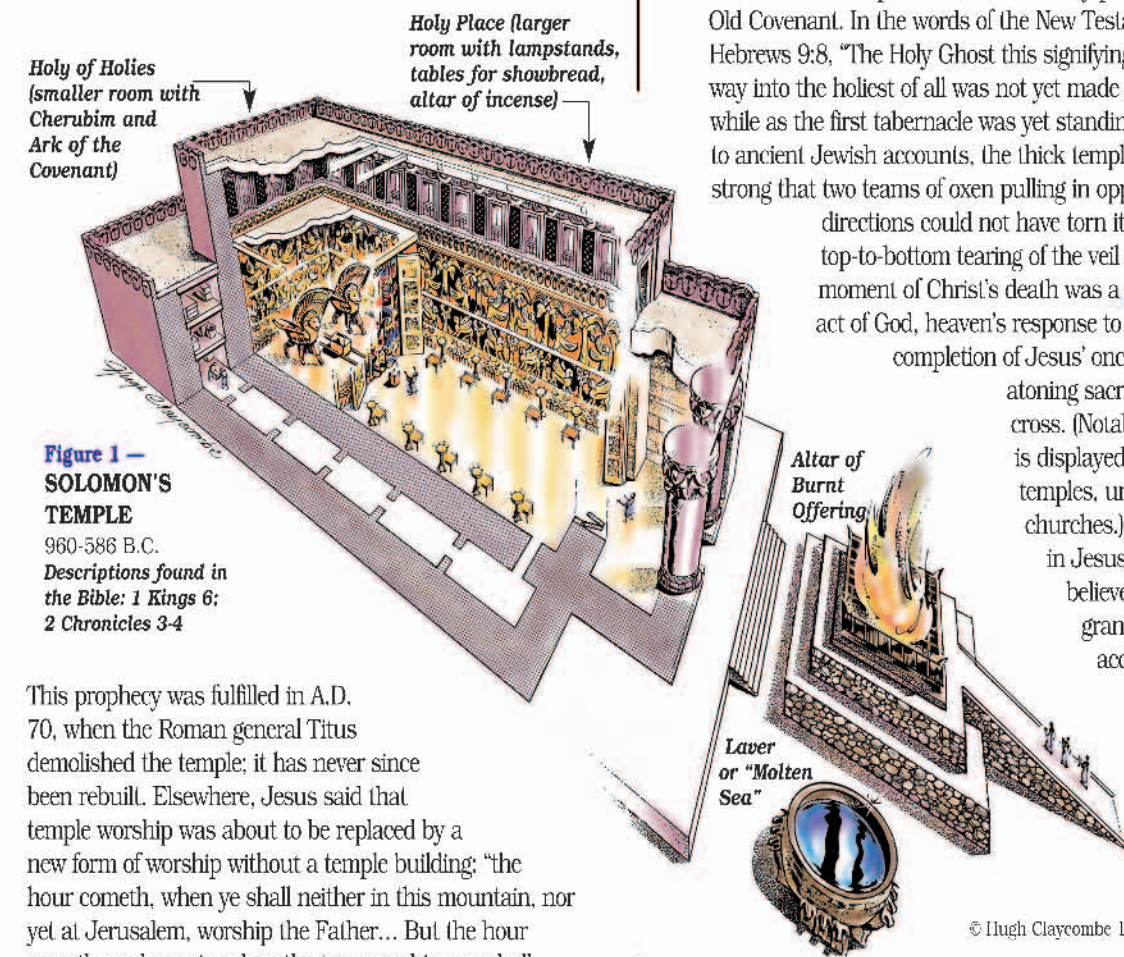


Figure 1 — SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

960-586 B.C.
Descriptions found in the Bible: 1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3-4

This prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70, when the Roman general Titus demolished the temple; it has never since been rebuilt. Elsewhere, Jesus said that temple worship was about to be replaced by a new form of worship without a temple building: "the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:21,23).

A dramatic event at the time of Christ's death on the cross signaled the end of temple worship. The Gospels record that at the very moment Jesus expired, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matthew 27:51; also Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Before its rending at the time of Jesus' death, the thick temple veil (see Figure 1) had served as a barrier to prevent the priests from seeing into the temple's inner room, the Holy of Holies. This inner sanctum represented the place of God's holy and glorious presence. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). This restriction signified that access into God's presence was not truly provided by the Old Covenant. In the words of the New Testament book of Hebrews 9:8, "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." According to ancient Jewish accounts, the thick temple veil was so strong that two teams of oxen pulling in opposite

directions could not have torn it.⁹ Surely, this top-to-bottom tearing of the veil at the moment of Christ's death was a supernatural act of God, heaven's response to the completion of Jesus' once-for-all

atonement sacrifice on the cross. (Notably, no cross is displayed on Mormon temples, unlike Christian churches.) Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are now granted free access into the very presence

of God. In the words of the New Testament book of Hebrews: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God... Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16; see also 6:19;10:19-22).

The rending of the veil signified the end of the temple worship system. That system is now obsolete, and we no longer need a human priest or temple. Under the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ, He is the believer's High Priest in the very sanctuary of Heaven itself. Thus, a "Christian temple" such as the Mormon Church proposes, is a contradiction in terms.

— Luke P. Wilson

Notes

1. All Bible quotations are from the King James Version.
2. A complete transcript of the Mormon temple endowment ceremony is available online at www.lds.org/jair/endowment.html. On the Mormon teaching that humans can become gods, see Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20; Gospel Principles, 1997 ed., p. 302; Achieving a Celestial Marriage, p. 190.
3. Mormon scripture includes the first vision account of Mormon founder Joseph Smith. He claimed that God told him all other Christian churches "were wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight" — *Aut of Great Price*, Joseph Smith - History, 1:18-19.
4. The exclusion of all but the Aaronic priests from the sanctuary is dramatically illustrated in an incident from the life of the Jewish king, Uzziah. He presumably entered the holy place and proceeded to burn incense. The priests confronted the king and ordered him out of the temple: "Uzziah smote not unto thee, Uzziah to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense go out of the sanctuary for thou has trespassed: neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God" (2 Chronicles 26:18). When Uzziah ignored this rebuke, the text records that God struck him with leprosy, whereupon the priests hastily removed him from the temple.
5. The openness and honesty of the common people in the priestly sanctuary ministry is illustrated in Luke 1:10. One of the priestly daily duties in the holy place was burning incense, symbolic of prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:4), on the altar of incense which stood immediately before the veil (see Figure 1). The Bible records that, as the priests, Zacharias performed this duty, "the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of the incense" (Luke 1:10). Their prayer was doubtless that Zacharias' service on that behalf would be found acceptable to the Lord.
6. The Mormon Church refers to these rituals as "sacred, not secret." However, this is a distinction without a difference, since in fact it instructs its members that "We do not discuss the temple ordinances outside the temples." Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple*, Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982, p. 20.
7. Male Levites from family lines other than that of Aaron performed subordinate temple duties under priestly supervision (Numbers 35-39). A recent scientific article published in the prestigious British journal *Nature*, found a genetic link among contemporary Jewish men claiming priestly lineage; this lends support to their claim of common ancestry dating back over 3,000 years to the biblical Aaron. The study, headed by Prof. Karl Skorecki of Ramat Hashikma Medical Centre, Tel Aviv, Israel, found clear differences in the frequency of Y-chromosome haplotypes between Jewish priests and their lay counterparts. This genetic commonality was found in those claiming priestly ancestry from both the Sephardic and the Ashkenazic communities. The Y-chromosome is found only in men and is transmitted through the father. See "Y Chromosomes in Jewish Priests," *Nature*, vol. 385, 2 January 1997, p. 32.
8. This also constitutes a major objection to the Book of Mormon. For the people it describes (pre-Columbian Hebrew immigrants to the Americas, called "Nephites") are said to have had temples and to have received "all things according to the law of Moses" (2 Nephi 5:10, 25-24). Yet they are described as descendants of Joseph; 11 Nephi 5:10; or Manassah, one of the "half tribes" associated with Joseph, Alma 10:3; and not the tribe of Levi. For this reason the Book of Mormon people and their laws have had no valid Aaronic priesthood. Although the name "Aaron" appears 46 times in the Book of Mormon, it is never used with reference to the biblical Aaron or the Aaronic priesthood. There is a list of other tabernacle/temple-related terms used in the Old Testament (with number of times used in parentheses) that are not mentioned even once in the Book of Mormon: "laver" (13), "incense" (121), "ark of the covenant" (49), "sons of Aaron" (67), "mercy seat" (23), "Day of Atonement" (21), "Feast of Tabernacles" (17), "Passover" (69), "house of the Lord" (627).
9. Cited by M. R. DeHaan, *The Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 115.



Lima, Peru

IS MORMONISM *Christian?*

This question may be accurately resolved by a careful comparison of the basic doctrines of the Mormon religion with the basic doctrines of historic, biblical Christianity. In making this comparison we have used standard Mormon doctrinal books to represent their teaching.

1. Is there more than one true God?

The Bible teaches that there is only one True and Living God and apart from Him there are no other Gods (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10,11; 44:6,8; 45:21,22; 46:9; Mark 12:29-34).

By contrast, the Mormon Church teaches that there are many Gods (Book of Abraham 4:3ff), and that human beings can become gods and goddesses in the Celestial Kingdom (Doctrine and Covenants [D&C] 132:19-20; Gospel Principles [GP], 1997, p. 245; Achieving a Celestial Marriage [ACM], p. 130). It also teaches that those who achieve godhood will have spirit children who will worship and pray to them, just as we worship and pray to God the Father (GP, p. 302).

2. Was God the Father once a man like us?

The Bible teaches that God is Spirit (John 4:24; 1 Timothy 6:15,16), He is not a man (Numbers 23:19; Hosea 11:9; Romans 1:22, 23), and has always (eternally) existed as God — all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present (Psalm 90:2; 139:7-10; Isaiah 40:28; Luke 1:37).

By contrast, the Mormon Church teaches that God the Father was once a man like us who progressed to become a God and has a body of flesh and bone (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). Joseph Smith taught, "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder



Mexico City, Mexico

heavens!" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith [TPJS], pp. 345-347; GP, p. 9). Indeed, the Mormon Church teaches that God himself has a father, and a grandfather, ad infinitum (TPJS, p. 373).

3. Are Jesus and Satan spirit brothers?

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the unique Son of God. He has always existed as God, and is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father (John 1:1,14; 10:30; Colossians 2:9). His incarnation was accomplished through being conceived supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:34-35).

By contrast, the Mormon Church teaches that Jesus Christ is our elder brother who progressed to godhood, having first been procreated as a spirit child by Heavenly Father and a heavenly mother, and later conceived physically through intercourse between Heavenly Father and the virgin Mary (ACM, p. 129; Mormon Doctrine [MD], pp. 546-547,742). It affirms that Jesus and Lucifer are brothers (GP, pp. 17-18).



Seoul, Korea

4. Can we make ourselves worthy before God?

The Bible teaches that apart from Jesus Christ we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1,5) and powerless to save ourselves. By grace alone, apart from self-righteous works, God forgives our sins and makes us worthy to live in His presence (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6). Our part is only to cling to Christ in heartfelt faith.

By contrast, the Mormon Church teaches that eternal life in the presence of God (the "celestial kingdom") must be merited and earned by obeying various Mormon laws and temple rituals (GP, pp. 303-304).

5. Is the Bible the unique and final Word of God?

The Bible teaches it is the unique, final and infallible Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1,2; 2 Peter 1:21) and that it will stand forever (1 Peter 1:23-25).

By contrast, the Mormon Church teaches that the Bible has been corrupted, and is missing many "plain and precious things." (Book of Mormon — 1 Nephi 13:26-29). It also holds that the Book of Mormon and two other volumes produced by Mormon founder Joseph Smith are inspired scripture of equal or greater authority than the Bible.

Conclusion: Mormons and Christians share some important moral precepts from the Bible. However, the above points show that there are many fundamental and irreconcilable differences between Mormonism and historic, biblical Christianity, and that Mormonism is not an authentic expression of the apostolic Christian gospel.

DID JESUS ESTABLISH BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD?

The Mormon Church claims that its temple ritual of baptism for the dead was established by Jesus Christ and was part of earliest Christianity. It points to 1 Corinthians 15:29 — the sole biblical reference to the practice — as support for this claim. The verse reads: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?"

Even the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (a 1992 work published under the supervision of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church¹) admits that this is the only biblical mention of the rite: "He [Paul] refers to a practice of vicarious baptism, a practice for which we have no other evidence in the Pauline or other New Testament or early Christian writings."²

Clearly in this verse the practice is merely mentioned, not taught. The theme of 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection of the body as a central doctrine of the Christian gospel. Some among the Corinthian congregation were denying this central tenet of the faith (verse 12). Against them, Paul marshals a series of arguments for the reasonableness of the doctrine. His mention of baptism for the dead in



Figure 2 — Mormon Baptismal Font

verse 29 is one in this series of arguments for resurrection. The apostle's point is to show the logical inconsistency of those who deny the resurrection, yet engage in a practice — baptism for the dead — which is based on the hope of resurrection. Notably, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* espouses this same interpretation of the verse: "...Paul clearly refers to a distinct group within the Church, a group that he accuses of inconsistency between ritual and doctrine."³

The fact that Paul's mention of the rite is not an endorsement is signaled by the impersonal manner in which he refers to those who practice it: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why then are they baptized for the dead?" If the practice was truly a part of apostolic teaching, we might have expected him to say "what shall we do..." or "what shall you do..."⁴

Notice also that in verses 30-32 the apostle immediately contrasts the (likely Christian) fringe group practicing baptism for the dead with himself and the broader Christian community: "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour... what advantageth it me if the dead rise not." Indeed, everywhere else in the chapter Paul consistently addresses his readers as "you" (vv.1,2,3,11,12,14,17,31,34,36,51,58), or (including himself), "we" or "us" (vv. 3,15,19,30,32,49,51,52).

It is clear from Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1-4 that the apostle Paul was acutely conscious that many among his own Jewish kinsmen were outside the gospel fold. If Paul taught baptism for the dead, as the Mormon Church claims, it is inexplicable that he would exclude himself from those who practiced the rite, as he surely does when he writes, "what shall they do which are baptized for the dead?"

But would the apostle Paul use a practice of which he disapproved (baptism for the dead) to support something he wanted to affirm (resurrection)? On thoughtful study, this objection proves to have much less basis than first meets the eye:

◆ First, Paul has already associated the rite with a fringe group. So in this sense, it had no positive standing and needed no special refutation.

◆ Second, history has amply vindicated the apostle's inspired judgment. The practice of baptism for the dead in fact never became widespread.

◆ Third, the apostle's statement in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel" (1:17), is a reminder that it is not baptism but faith in Christ that is essential for salvation. This is an indirect slap at the logic of baptism for the dead, which implies that baptism is essential. (We can also detect in 1:17 a clue that the Corinthian Christians over-rated baptism, which probably helps explain the development there of this aberrant practice.)

Conclusion: The Mormon temple ritual of baptism for the dead was not established by Jesus or his apostles. It is not a biblical or Christian practice. — Luke P. Wilson

Notes

1. See "Encyclopedia of Mormonism Released," *Ensign* (March 1992), p. 79. The *Ensign* is an official publication of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
2. "Baptism for the Dead — Ancient Sources," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992) 1:97.
3. "Baptism for the Dead — Ancient Sources," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:97.
4. In an *Ensign* article on baptism for the dead ("I Have a Question," August 1987, p. 19), it appears that Robert L. Millet tried to shade this point by restating 1 Corinthians 15:29 and changing the pronoun "they" to "we."

Would you like more information?

Longer versions of the three articles in this brochure are available on the internet at: www.irr.org/mit/biblepage.html. Also available is a non-denominational Bible study course — www.irr.org/mit/bibstudy.html, and many other items. These items are also available free on request by writing to the Institute for Religious Research.

For more information, contact:



ARE MORMON TEMPLES CHRISTIAN?



Mormon Temple, Salt Lake City, Utah