

## A New Discussion on Mormonism

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### Introduction

After inquiring about what Mormons believe for three years by engaging in numerous conversations with Mormon missionaries, reading the *Book of Mormon* and their other sacred writings, and surveying some of the reputable and historical LDS literature, I ultimately drafted the conclusions I drew in my very first essay, "A Discussion on Mormonism" (1989). As an undergraduate work and a very basic assessment of the popular criticisms of historic Christianity, I essentially left it alone to be an accessible "quick reference" read for other pilgrims seeking to know the contrast between Mormonism and Evangelical Christianity.

Recently, I had the opportunity to lecture to a group of college students on the primary doctrines of Mormon theology. Prior to that, I was interviewed for a local radio broadcast examining Christian and non-Christian doctrines back in 2003. Before those occasions, I hadn't been asked to formally discuss Mormonism since I personally ran a college ministry back in 1994. In addition, over the years I have forwarded my "Discussion" link to those who wished to know more about Mormonism. But when I reviewed this vestige of my early academics, I was sorely disappointed with its structure and terribly brief content. Moreover, it did not take into account contemporary responses to the traditional approach I took. Every Mormon has essentially been briefed on most of the material I represented in one form or another. And in the wake of the "new Mormon challenge" under development over the last two decades,<sup>1</sup> I had to finally overhaul my original piece to conform to the current climate of Mormon and Evangelical apologetics. Just as "Discussion" did before the present essay, it will only concentrate on what I consider to be essential and important points of division between Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals.

### A Brief Biographical History of Joseph Smith Jr.

Joseph Smith, Jr., was born in Sharon, Vermont on the 23rd of December, 1805 as the fourth son to Lucy Mack and Joseph Fielding Smith. Smith attended a local Protestant church as a youth until one day he had decided that the divisions of mainstream Christianity were too problematic for him. This led Smith (in 1820) to a nearby forest where he allegedly began praying for divine guidance as to "which of all the sects was right".<sup>2</sup> The Father and Son allegedly appeared to Joseph and declared that he "must join none of them, for they were all wrong" because "their creeds were an abomination in his sight".<sup>3</sup> This led to the establishment of Joseph Smith as divine revelator and translator of the *Book of Mormon*.<sup>4</sup>

In 1823, Smith received another visitation. The angel Moroni (the angel's name was changed to *Nephi* in subsequent writings<sup>5</sup>) appeared to him and informed him of a history that had been recorded on golden plates. With this revelation in mind, and shortly after his trial in 1826 in *The People vs. Joseph Smith The Glass Looker*<sup>6</sup>, Smith unearthed the gold plates via angelic guidance on the Hill Cumorah in Manchester, New York. On May 15, 1829, John the Baptist allegedly appeared and conferred the Aaronic Priesthood on Smith and his scribe Oliver Cowdery. Toward the end of 1829 and the

beginning of 1830 Joseph Smith, Jr. received the Melchizedek Priesthood. 1830 marked the publication date of the first printing of the *Book of Mormon*. 1833 was the publication year of Smith's first 65 revelations under the title, *Book of Commandments* which has since been edited dramatically and published under its new title *Doctrine & Covenants*.

Even though Joseph Smith, Jr. publicly denied practicing polygamy,<sup>7</sup> according to Mormon Elder William Berret in his book, *The Restored Church* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, 1956), pp. 247 & 249, Smith did secretly marry other wives. Later, around the time of the first and only edition of *The Nauvoo Expositor* in 1844, Smith, under the orders of the Nauvoo City Council and Mayor Joseph Smith, accompanied the city marshal and a handful of Mormon men to destroy the printing press and the office of *The Nauvoo Expositor*.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Smith was arrested and jailed in Carthage, Illinois on the charge of "treason." June 17, 1844 was the date of the assassination of Joseph Smith, Jr.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, Brigham Young led a Mormon migration from Illinois. Shortly after the printing of the *Pearl of Great Price* (in 1851), Young was appointed by Millard Fillmore as governor over the Utah Territory. These events sum up the biography of the early Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and give us background information on the source of this self-appointed "restoration" of the Christian church.

### **The Mormon Concept of God**

When the Apostle Paul preached in Athens, he noted that their altar displayed the object of their worship which, for Paul, summed up the very problem:

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.<sup>10</sup>

So Paul proceeds to administer the Gospel to his listeners and explains that they "should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us."<sup>11</sup> For those worldviews that deviate from the traditional orthodox message of Christian antiquity, those gods become "unknown." And those that follow them "should seek the Lord." Jesus Himself stresses the importance of knowing God:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.<sup>12</sup>

Mormonism recognizes the importance of this question as well. Joseph Smith, Jr., the founding prophet of the Latter-Day saints, unequivocally reflects on John 17:3 when he says

If any man does not know God, and inquires what kind of a being he is,--if he will search diligently his own heart--if the declarations of Jesus and the Apostles be true--*he will realize that he has not eternal life; for there can be eternal life on no other principle.*<sup>13</sup>

Unquestionably the nature of God is paramount in the discussion of which world view embraces the truths of not only the Gospel message but of the entire panoply of Scripture.

It is no large secret that Mormons do not accept the mainstream Christian understanding that God exists as a trinity of persons:

There is much said about God and the Godhead. ... The teachers of the day say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and they are all in one body and one God. Jesus prayed that those that the Father had given him out of the world might be made one in them, as they were one. ... If I were to testify that the Christian world were wrong on this point, my testimony would be true. ... I say that is a strange God anyhow – three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization. ... It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God – he would be a giant or a monster.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, God the Father “was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! ... I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form – like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man.”<sup>15</sup> And God’s lineage, despite traditional orthodox conceptions of God’s being eternal, was progressive – that God was once human who apparently had made the same journey as Jesus did in the first century:

We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. ... [H]e 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.<sup>16</sup>

Mormonism’s scriptures underscore the present condition of the overall reality of the Godhead for faithful Mormon adherents:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.<sup>17</sup>

Contemporary scholarship within Mormon circles is no exception to the physically-bound, limited version of God. On the backs of speculative cosmology, we are now given a theological context for some of these spurious models of the universe’s origin alleged to be in sync with this finite Godism.<sup>18</sup> For example, Dr. David Paulsen argued in his doctoral thesis at the University of Michigan that

Although God is never explicitly characterized in the datum discourse as finite, His finitism is plainly entailed by the doctrine of eternalism. It is not the case that everything other than God is ontologically depending on Him. He did not create everything *ex nihilo*. God has always acted within a physical environment of uncreated mass-energy, a social environment of other selves, and within a

framework of eternal laws and principles. These aspects of the world which are coeternal with His condition and limit Him.<sup>19</sup>

Of course if God Himself is a corporeal being then we should expect a preexisting space-time universe for Him. Professors Robert L. Millet and Noel B. Reynolds of the Maxwell Institute in Provo, Utah argue that God's physical attributes can be concluded from certain passages in Scripture:

Latter-day Saints take literally the many passages in the Bible that describe God as having a physical form. God created Adam "in his own image" and "after [his] likeness" (Genesis 1:26–27), and Paul taught that ordinary mortal men were in the "image" of God (1 Corinthians 11:7). During his earthly life, Jesus Christ was said to be "the express image" of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3).<sup>20</sup>

And what was thought to be peculiar to Greek mythology and some aspects of Hinduism, Mormonism itself acquiesces to belief in *polytheism* (the view that there exists more than one God) implicit in their aversion to Trinitarianism:

In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.<sup>21</sup>

[Abraham and Isaac] have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.<sup>22</sup>

And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.<sup>23</sup>

## Response

*The Doctrine of the Trinity is true.* Most aversions to the Doctrine of the Trinity center on one's *comprehension* of it (or lack thereof). Once we apprehend an appropriate ontology of God, the ideas suggested in this doctrine are no longer incoherent. The biblical case for the Trinity is an inference based on two well-established facts: (i) monotheism (that there is only one God) is true, and (ii) each Person is identified as God. Regarding (i), see the last response in this section for a defense of monotheism. With respect to (ii), no Mormon doubts that the Father Himself is called God. The same can be said of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Mormons wholeheartedly concur with this premise. No doubt it is premise (i) that will shoulder the controversy. But if (i) and (ii) are true, then the conclusion that the three Persons must be the same God is inescapable.

Can there be a sound construction of the Trinity that would permit the logical coherence of "three in one"? I think that there can be. In order for the doctrine to be *logically* coherent it need only be *compossible* with a hypothesis that secures their individuality – every bit as supportive by Scripture as the divinity of the Father and Son. I think such a construction can be afforded. Two philosophy professors out of the Talbot School of Theology, J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, have proposed that "God is a soul which is endowed with three complete sets of rational cognitive faculties,

each sufficient for personhood. Then God, though one soul, would not be one person but three, for God would have three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality and volition, as social Trinitarians maintain.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, some rudimentary parallels to this concept abound in nature in what Augustine called the image of the Trinity among creatures which analogously may be an “inadequate image, which yet is an image ... for our feeble mind perhaps can gaze upon this more familiarly and more easily.”<sup>25</sup> Think of a single triangle possessing three angles. Each angle would possess certain properties not indicative of the whole – among them would be individuality and distinctiveness. As long as God is not to be envisaged as a corporeal being, the ensoulment of three centers of consciousness should not at all appear unacceptable.

Finally, a philosophical case can be made in defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity apart from theological considerations. God, as traditionally defined, is the greatest conceivable being.<sup>26</sup> His attributes exist in a maximal way. He does not merely possess *some* power and *some* knowledge, but He has *maximum* power and knows *all* truths. But this maximal attribution also applies to God’s goodness. God is not merely a good being, but as the locus and source of all objective moral value must be a *maximally* good being. Should God not be maximally good (and if it can be imagined that someone else could be *better*) then *that* conception of God would be appropriate for “the greatest conceivable being.” Prior to creation, God existed wholly in isolation and for any singular mind would only be capable of self-directed love which would not be love in any meaningful sense. Love requires that it be *other*-directed. This would necessitate that more than one mind must exist. Furthermore, a better conception of love goes beyond merely that one mind direct love at another but that a perfect love would also be *cooperative* toward yet another mind. This entails that *at least three minds must exist for God* in order for a maximally robust concept of love to be realized. The Oxford University Professor of philosophy, Richard Swinburne, reflects on this and notes:

[L]ove is a supreme good. Love involves sharing, giving to the other what of one’s own is good for him and receiving from the other what of his is good for one; and love involves co-operating with another to benefit third parties. ... I conclude (tentatively) that necessarily if there is at least one divine individual, and if it is logically possible that there be more than one divine individual, then there are three and only three divine individuals.<sup>27</sup>

*God is eternal and not finite.* Scripture makes it clear that God is beyond physical time and has no beginning:

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting  
(Psalm 41:13)<sup>28</sup>

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth  
and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God  
(Psalms 90:2)

Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting

(Psalm 93:2).

... thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting  
(Isaiah 63:16)

Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?  
(Habakkuk 1:12)

to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty,  
dominion and authority, *before all time* and now and forever. Amen  
(Jude 25; emphasis mine)

These passages do not speak merely of God's being everlasting *from here on out* but that God is decisively said to be *from* everlasting. Jude speaks decisively of God as transcending time and thus was not a part of its parameters prior to creation.<sup>29</sup> Such similar usage would later in the New Testament come to be a description of Jesus himself (Hebrews 13:8) and would reflect the anticipated eternity of the Messiah as foretold by Micah (Micah 5:2).

Philosophically, if it is possible (let alone plausible) that a maximally great being exists then it may be that such a being *necessarily* exists. But this being would not – indeed *cannot!* – be finite for this would be to betray possessing necessary existence. This argument is based on the classic Ontological Argument for God's Existence. Regardless of one's personal aversion to the classical Anselmian presentation, if we consider one of the contemporary revisions of this argument – I'm thinking of Alvin Plantinga's formulation – then we may have good grounds for surmising that God must necessarily be eternal. Plantinga's formulation goes something like the following:

1. A being with maximal greatness (having the property of being maximally great in every possible world) is possibly exemplified.
2. If a being with maximal greatness is possibly exemplified then such a being would exist in every possible world.
3. There is a being of maximal greatness that exists in the actual world.<sup>30</sup>

The inference is successful once the reader understands that the actual world is in fact one of those possible worlds. Now, not everyone is prepared to be impressed by this argument for God's existence – even Plantinga himself is careful to say that its key premise (premise 1) can be rationally denied. But this is not relevant to the present discussion since both the Mormon and the Christian affirm that premise 1 is true. What the Mormon will deny, though, is the conclusion (once the identification of this maximally great being is God our Father). But if the premises are true, and its most questionable one would be embraced by Mormons, then the conclusion is actually inescapable. Thus God must exist necessarily and there would never be a moment in which God did not exist. Hence, God cannot be finite. The Mormon then would have two possible outs here. First, she may argue that premise 1 is just not convincing. But if there are *any* reasons to think that *any* god exists, then we have grounds for thinking that premise 1 is true as long as there are not mitigating factors *against* such a being.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, some serious philosophical problems arise in the discussion of whether or not a being whose origins are finite and whose power and knowledge are finite can ever attain an infinite maximum. That is, can a finite value for God's total sum of propositions He knows ever *accumulate* to an actual infinite value? There is a good reason to think that it cannot. Suppose you were going to travel from Los Angeles to San Francisco. The distance between these two cities is approximately 382 miles. But suppose that we are able to stretch the plane of these two cities such that the distance between the two cities could be increased. Now imagine you are given the unusual task of stretching the cities so far from each other that they are actually an *infinite* number of miles apart. Conceptually, this does not sound impossible (as long as the *mechanism* for such a feat is available to you). However, despite physical limitations on the ability to actualize such a task, there is no good reason to think one could make the distance an infinite number of miles apart *even if you did possess the mechanism for doing so*. Consider that no matter how many miles apart you stretch the cities, you could always stretch it one more mile! It would not be feasible for one to attain an actually infinite number of miles by successively adding one more mile to the stretch. Why? Because the addendum of +1 would always be a property of the highest number achievable in the count. But this means that if an actual infinite cannot be achieved via successive addition, then no being can come to know *an infinite number of true propositions*. For no matter how many propositions a being comes to know, you could always add one more to the mix (for example, the propositions "It is now September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12:03", "It is now September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12:04", "It is now September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12:05", ... "It is now X, Y" could always have yet another value). There is no "completed set" of counting no matter how high one goes. Therefore, God could not possibly have attained a state of infinite knowledge by means of successive addition through exaltation and glorification.<sup>32</sup>

The Mormon might respond here by either denying the conclusion (which would require a counterargument to be sure) or by attacking the orthodox understanding of God as infinite. The Mormon might complain that the Evangelical is in no better position since she agrees that God does *in fact* know the total sum of all true propositions. But how could God have come to know these if such a destination is unattainable? The problem here is that orthodox Christians do not suggest that God somehow *attained* omniscience. And the argument here is specifically against the idea of one's ability to *attain* anything quantitatively infinite. So the Evangelical could assert that God knows in a single, all-embracing vision the totality of truth.<sup>33</sup> Return to the stretching of the distance between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Though one cannot make the distance in between *arrive* at an actual infinite, there is nothing logically incoherent in imagining the cities to *have always been an infinite distance apart*. This means that either one cannot attain an actual infinite through successive addition or the infinite set must already exist as a totality. Imagine a midway point between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Before one could arrive at that midpoint, you would have to arrive at the midpoint to that midpoint. And before you arrived at *that* midpoint, you would have to have arrived at that midpoint's midpoint. This could go on forever. So despite the fact that the finite distance between the two cities can potentially be divided an infinite number of times, the fact that it exists in totality already precludes this from being a problem for the traveler. Thus God's knowledge must already be an all-at-once

property of God (and not discursive).<sup>34</sup> But this means that the Mormon god does not (cannot!) exist in the manner in which its doctrines envisage.<sup>35</sup>

*God is not a corporeal being.* One of the major blunders of contemporary "street" interpretations of the Bible include assuming that the Bible is a singular genre. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible exists as a collection of different works assembled together from geographically, chronologically, and ethnically diverse authors. Not surprisingly, each author (or authors) have their own purposes in mind when authoring their respective works. The New Testament, for example, contains letters of correspondence with individual churches as well as biographies and apologetic works. The Old Testament contains stories about their personal experiences with the God of Israel in addition to eschatological compositions and chronologies. Of course this entails the occasional use of poetry and prose in making theological points underscoring the magnificence of God. For example, Psalm 91:4 contains a Davidic song about people being entrusted under the "wings" and "feathers" of God. Yet, God is not an avian creature. Likewise, Jesus is not a light bulb (John 1:7), a loaf of bread (6:51), a crematory (Hebrews 12:29), a fruited vine (John 15:5), or a human well (4:14). Thus, the language used cannot be anything but metaphorical in the expression of intimate qualities possessed by God.

On the other hand, references in the biographical descriptions about God forthrightly note that "God is spirit and those that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Such a text, however, is not readily accepted by Mormons. Mormons attempt to answer this verse by noting that the worshipers are "in spirit." The question that is then asked is, "Do you believe that God's worshipers are incorporeal beings?" Obviously the answer is "No." So what can we say about God's being "a spirit?" By observing the grammatical structure of 4:24, the meaning of the text can be elucidated. The subject "God" in this passage is in the nominative case. The object of predication, "spirit" (*pneuma*), is also in the nominative case but is conjugated in a neutral gender. Note that in the Greek text the phrase reads *pneuma ho theos* (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός). Sometimes when clauses of predication are written, the linking verbs are left out. When two subjects are given in a clause having the same declension they usually refer to one another. The interpretation of 4:24 is simple; God is to be described in terms of *being a spirit*. The verse is written in such a way that mere similarity or metaphor is not intended. Given the grammatical link, we are literally to picture 4:24 as "God = the one who is spirit." Now, when one worships *in spirit* one's ontology is not being described. The word "spirit" here is in the dative case thereby denoting the *medium* through which the worship is carried out. This is in response to the arguing Jews who were debating the appropriate location of where to worship God. Jesus' response then is based on the nature of God (that He is "spirit") in order to conclude that one's spatial location is *irrelevant* to their connection with God. Moreover, certain Old Testament passages suggest that God does not possess corporeality. For example, the Second Commandment received by Moses at Sinai states, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth."<sup>36</sup> Solomon's description of God also includes language indicative of God's transcendence from the physical when he writes:

[B]ehold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?<sup>37</sup>

There seems to be no indication that God was to be perceived in a physical or limited way – especially since this was one of the major deficits associated with idol worship.

Finally, we might also import a bit more of philosophical reflection here. Returning to the traditional conception of God being the greatest conceivable being, corporeality would also need to be dismissed. Such a maximally great being would not be limited by physical constraints but would be as omnipresent as feasible. Such ontological restraints diminish His locality as a great-making property. The same could be said about His being non-spatial (or transcending the space-time universe). If God created all things (as is evident from Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 44:24; Colossians 1:15) and other accumulated data supports the idea that the universe itself began to exist a finite time ago, then it follows that space did not always exist. But space is a prerequisite for one to possess corporeality. Aristotle once wrote:

Every sensible body is by its nature somewhere.<sup>38</sup>

The reason for this confession is that all physical objects have the property of location – location not only with respect to each atomic particle in the body but, by extension, of the physical body itself. For the implications of Aristotelian metaphysics, if one were to plot a point in a four-dimensional space-time block then upon granting a physical existential point in the diagram, it would immediately possess the attributes of space and time. The only resolution is to surmise a multi-verse or super-universe theory that houses our local space-time universe. This would permit both the finitude of our present universe and the spatial existence of beings beyond it. But this solution fails since it would require an infinite past which is both inconsistent with astrophysical cosmology and philosophical reflection (see my response above on the nature of God).

*There is only one God (monotheism).* The Scriptures are very explicit in support of a monotheistic world view. Such passages as Isaiah 43:10; 44:6; Jeremiah 10:11; Malachi 2:10; and 1 Corinthians 8:5 ("but to us there is but one God") seem to confess the ancient Jewish belief that only one Creator God exists and sustains the universe in being. The concept of polytheism has always been a feature of the religions of the Ancient Near East (the Akkadian, Egyptian, Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian religions all adhered to belief in more than one god). Thus the creation account in Genesis (specifically in its primeval history of chapters 1-11) attempts to contrast the God of Israel with the gods of the Near East by employing similar elements but through the vehicle of a Jewish theology of God's distinctive separation from creation – something the gods of the Near East didn't necessarily share. In the shared Jewish communities (primarily cultured in the synagogues) it was common to utter the Hebrew prayer *shema*, "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Again, this was a decisive affirmation of Jewish monotheism.<sup>39</sup> The aforementioned passages underscore the militant views of rigid monotheism adhered to by these Semitic tribes of Israel. Sometimes Jewish monotheism was so strongly embraced that

pronouncements were made against polytheism that condemned it under no uncertain terms:

But the LORD *is* the true God, he *is* the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.<sup>40</sup>

Talk about invoking the fear of God! God no doubt takes His uniqueness and status very seriously and admits His own jealousy with respect to appeal to other gods of any sort:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to [other gods], nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me.<sup>41</sup>

The point here isn't to accuse Mormons of *worshipping* other gods, but rather to show that one of the reasons why such alternative worship is unacceptable is precisely *because* of God's clutching attitude. Deuteronomy 32:21 makes this even more explicit when it notes that some "have moved [God] to jealousy with *that which is not God.*" Israel's ongoing sin was to in effect commit corporate adultery by engaging in idolatry and straying away from Yahweh. God's grace is shown time and again of His correspondingly ongoing forgiveness for their sins.

So, what do Mormons say in the wake of what appears to be a clear affirmation of biblical monotheism? Some Mormons simply assert that these apparent monotheistic passages merely express God's *supremacy*, not that God exists *in isolation*. For example, some Mormon apologists contend that "beside me there is no god" in Isaiah 44:6 is similar to the ancient city of Babylon's audacious status to proclaim that there is "none else beside me" (Isaiah 47:8). The criticism then is that this latter passage "use[s] the exact same phrase as Isa 44 and 45, yet they certainly do not exclude the existence of any city other than Babylon."<sup>42</sup> But this is factually incorrect for the Isaiah 44 passage uses *bil'adey* (בִּלְעָדַי) for "beside" to connote "apart from" whereas Chapter 47 uses *od* (עוֹד) for "beside" which connotes "a going around." Thus Isaiah 47 suggests something more like "there is none quite like me" whereas 44 means to say that "apart from me, none exists." Not only is the construction different (in comparing the Hebrew texts), but different Hebrew words are used! Regarding Isaiah 43:10, the same article argues:

The passage specifically says 'before' and 'after' Yahweh. Since Yahweh has always existed, and since He will always exist no man can ever be exalted 'before' or 'after' Yahweh. All men who are exalted to godhood will be contemporaries of Yahweh, and will never precede nor follow Yahweh's existence.<sup>43</sup>

This is novel spin to say the least! Verse 11 immediately continues, “I, *even I, am* the LORD; and beside (bil’adey) me *there is* no saviour.” No god alleged to be prior to, subsequent to, or contemporaneous with God can exist and it is precisely due to God’s being eternal and unique that precludes this reality!

Are there indications in the Old and New Testament that many gods in fact exist? Some Mormons appeal to God’s being the “Lord of lords” and “God of gods.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Apostle Paul himself appears to acknowledge that there are “gods many and lords many” despite the supremacy of our own God and Father.<sup>45</sup> But the Mormon detractor is unlikely to be moved by this argument since the contexts of both of these references are clearly dealing with the atmosphere of idol worship. The significance of God being the God of gods and Lord of lords is simply to assert God’s uniqueness and superiority over the idols of the Ancient Near East. And Paul’s reference to “gods many and lords many” comes as a parenthetical remark to the first part of 1 Cor. 8:5. Paul prefaces with, “For though there be that are *called* gods” (Greek: γὰρ εἶπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοί) with λεγόμενοι emphasizing that some *have been deemed as such but aren’t necessarily so*. In other words, *anything* can be deemed a “god” but it does not follow that those things are in fact gods.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Deification of Man**

Another landmark concept in Mormon doctrine stands its contemporary assertion that human beings are equipped to be deified. Millet and Reynolds themselves note in the opening of their joint essay on the matter:

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe that human beings can grow and progress spiritually until, through the mercy and grace of Christ, they can inherit and possess all that the Father has—they can become gods.<sup>47</sup>

This echoes Mormonism’s traditional affirmation that

As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be.<sup>48</sup>

Mormonism’s own sacred works unapologetically and unequivocally underscore this core tenet of its faith:

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject to them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.<sup>49</sup>

Abraham ... Isaac ... and Jacob ... have entered into their exaltation according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.<sup>50</sup>

Mormon scholar Stephen E. Robinson is careful to point out what is *not* true about Mormon deification:

It should be noted here that the LDS doctrine of deification is often misrepresented. Despite what our critics claim, the Latter-day Saints do not believe that human beings will ever become the equals of God, or be independent of God, or that they will ever cease to be subordinate to God.<sup>51</sup>

What appears to be a unique doctrine of deification peculiar only to Mormons, their avid defenders are quick to cite the writings of Church history where seemingly equivalent references are made:

Do we cast blame on him [God] because we were not made gods from the beginning, but were at first created merely as men, and then later as gods? Although God has adopted this course out of his pure benevolence, that no one may charge him with discrimination or stinginess, he declares, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are sons of the Most High." . . . For it was necessary at first that nature be exhibited, then after that what was mortal would be conquered and swallowed up in immortality.<sup>52</sup>

Yea, I say, the Word of God became a man so that you might learn from a man how to become a god.<sup>53</sup>

The Word was made flesh in order that we might be enabled to be made gods. . . . Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are both deified through his flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life.<sup>54</sup>

But he himself that justifies also deifies, for by justifying he makes sons of God. 'For he has given them power to become the sons of God' [John 1:12]. If then we have been made sons of god, we have also been made gods.<sup>55</sup>

These affirmations become even more perplexing to Christians who have an aversion to the deification of man when we consider contemporary references that also seem to suggest this Mormon doctrine:

Deification (Greek *theosis*) is for Orthodoxy the goal of every Christian. Man, according to the Bible, is 'made in the image and likeness of God.' . . . It is possible for man to become like God, to become deified, to become god by grace. This doctrine is based on many passages of both OT and NT (e.g. Ps. 82 (81).6; II Peter 1.4), and it is essentially the teaching both of St Paul, though he tends to use the language of filial adoption (cf. Rom. 8.9–17; Gal. 4.5–7), and the Fourth Gospel (cf. 17.21–23). The language of II Peter is taken up by St Irenaeus, in his famous phrase, 'if the Word has been made man, it is so that men may be made gods' (*Adv. Haer* V, Pref.), and becomes the standard in Greek theology. In the fourth century St Athanasius repeats Irenaeus almost word for word, and in the fifth century St Cyril of Alexandria says that we shall become sons 'by participation' (Greek *methexis*). Deification is the central idea in the spirituality of St Maximus the Confessor, for whom the doctrine is the

corollary of the Incarnation: 'Deification, briefly, is the encompassing and fulfillment of all times and ages,' . . . and St Symeon the New Theologian at the end of the tenth century writes, 'He who is God by nature converses with those whom he has made gods by grace, as a friend converses with his friends, face to face.' . . . Finally, it should be noted that deification does not mean absorption into God, since the deified creature remains itself and distinct. It is the whole human being, body and soul, who is transfigured in the Spirit into the likeness of the divine nature, and deification is the goal of every Christian.<sup>56</sup>

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. . . . The command *Be ye perfect* is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were "gods" and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.<sup>57</sup>

And in a disturbingly poetic way, Mormon apologists point out that contemporary evangelists are no stranger to the doctrine of deification:

I am a little god. I have His name. I am one with Him. I'm in covenant relation. I am a little god. Critics, be gone.<sup>58</sup>

You don't have a god in you. You are one! . . . [M]an had total authority to rule as a god over every living creature on earth.<sup>59</sup>

With historical and contemporary statements made like these of self-proclaiming Christian teachers and evangelists it's no wonder that Mormon apologists balk at Christians who ridicule their teaching on deification. If Christian evangelicals pick up anything from these citations, it should be that there is some syncretism in language between mainline Christianity and Mormonism.

### **The Response**

I do not think that orthodox Christian affirmations of deification (*theosis*) are in any way like Mormon deification. Even Mormon scholarship recognizes the disparate nature between the two:

Now, in fact, the Latter-day Saints *would not agree with the doctrine of deification as understood by most of these evangelists*, for in the LDS view we receive the

full divine inheritance only through the atonement of Christ and only after a glorious resurrection.<sup>60</sup>

Keeping in mind the theological context under which these respective men wrote their works is paramount in understanding precisely what these teachers believed and taught about *theosis*.

The great patristic scholar Norman Russell explains:

The deification of man is the characteristic Byzantine way of expressing the goal of human life. Far from implying a heretical notion of man's absorption into God, as Western writers sometimes assume, the term encapsulates a number of widely differing approaches to the doctrine of salvation. Among the Greek Fathers deification is expressed variously as filial adoption through baptism, as the attaining of likeness to God through gnosis and dispassion, as the ascent of the soul to God, as the participation of the soul in the divine attributes of immortality and incorruption, as the transformation of human nature by divine action, as the eschatological glorification of both soul and body, and as union with God through participation in the divine energies.<sup>61</sup>

Here is a good example. Millet, Reynolds, and Robinson all use the same passages from Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4.38) in bolstering their case for the LDS doctrine of deification alleged to be envisaged in these ancient writings. But what they leave out in the ellipses that separate the two thoughts is important to understanding the historical view of deification *per* Irenaeus versus the Mormon view:

But since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, "But ye shall die alike men," setting forth both truths – the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness, and also that we were possessed of power over ourselves. For after His great kindness He graciously conferred good [upon us], and made men like unto Himself, [that is] in their own power; while at the same time by His prescience He knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences that would flow from it; but through [His] love and [His] power, He shall overcome the stance of created nature.

From Russell's commentary on Church history, we can appreciate Irenaeus' call to *theosis* to be nothing more than God graciously bestowing His grace, love, power, and goodness to human beings where such properties, despite the inevitability of sin, will culminate in the new created order. The Apostle Paul's description of the resurrected body in the Corinthian correspondence details the transformation of our bodies this new created order will bring:

So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.<sup>62</sup>

Unquestionably this is the right attitude in viewing those thinkers who influence and shaped Christian thought from Augustine to C.S. Lewis. But one more important note needs to be made. The latter references by Paul Crouch and Kenneth Copeland as Robinson's attempt at branding contemporary evangelicalism as believers in some form of deification require a separate mention. First, some Christian apologists and thinkers have unequivocally isolated these men from the mainline of Protestant evangelicalism – citing their teachings as heresy and cultic. Indeed, one could certainly walk away from these men sharing these views. One avid defender of these Word-Faith teachers wants his detractors to think about their criticisms based on various clips of information when he writes:

Do the snippets from Copeland's sermons prove he is a heretic? Do they prove that he believes – as Mormons do – that there is no essential difference between the nature of man and the nature of God? ... I don't think so. I believe he is trying to underscore what the Bible teaches: that when Jesus takes up residency within us, great spiritual changes take place and something happens to our humanity, namely that a new unsullied and godly nature is placed within us.<sup>63</sup>

Whether Spencer is correct or not is not the immediate point here. Rather, he is sure (and Paul Crouch himself wrote the Foreword to this book) that these Word-Faith teachers do not teach anything that resembles Mormon deification.

The argument for Mormon deification is not so much a matter of combing the New Testament for proof texts (though John 10:34 and Psalm 82:6 tend to stand out as common ones). Mormonism is based on the supposition that many of "true" Christianity's doctrines have been compromised or lost from the pages of Holy Writ by either careless Christian translators or malevolent emissaries of apostasy. Mormon apologist D. Charles Pyle says that

we do not know precisely what was revealed to the Church or even all the details concerning numerous doctrinal points because we have but a handful of extant texts. Others are yet missing, as the text of 1 Corinthians 5:9--a notable example of Paul referring his readers to a yet earlier but no longer extant letter he had written to them--demonstrates, while those extant collectively maintain that there was much more that was known by both Jesus and the Apostles than was committed to the Church or people in general via the writings we now possess in our current New Testament corpus.<sup>64</sup>

Now, I have to say that if it is true that "we do not know precisely what was revealed to the Church or even all the details concerning numerous doctrinal points because we have but a handful of extant texts" then I fail to see how Pyle himself *knows* that to be the case! But if he means to say that we know about the missing data of doctrine via the restored gospel to Joseph Smith, Jr. then we surely are begging the question here. For the proponents of "missing doctrine," the burden of proof lies strictly with them.

What about these citations of John 10:34 and Psalm 83:6? Now Pyle simply recapitulates in his presentation that “there are a great many writers who taught the selfsame things that I have presented to you here. Never let another critic of the Church tell you that so-called ‘Historic Christianity’ never taught that the saints could become gods via obedience to the gospel and the grace of the Almighty God.” However, he’s just repeating what we’ve already addressed above. But John 10:34 and Psalm 82:6 are in no way indicative of human deification as understood by Mormons. First, the declarations are in the *present* tense, not future. This is significant because *nobody* thinks that human beings are deified in the Mormon sense while still on this earth. Secondly, the *audiences* to whom these declarations are addressed are *not* believers! In Psalm 82 the recipient is “the congregation of the mighty ... gods” (v. 1) who are “unjust” (v. 2) and “know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness” (v. 5). Thus God pronounces that these so-called “gods” will “die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (v. 7). Thus deification couldn’t possibly be envisaged by this passage. But the ancient Church fathers knew quite well that to be “mighty” and in that vein “gods” was simply a matter of taking on those qualities of God communicable to us (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-44).

Jesus’ argument in 10:34 predicates its case on the Psalm just discussed. Jesus uses an *a fortiori* argument here (which is to say an “even more so” argument; that is, “if you think X, then *even more so* you should think Y”). The Pharisees certainly had an aversion to Jesus’ self-understanding and wanting nothing more than to condemn the man as a heretic. In one of their usual trappings of Jesus, they are (once again) appalled by his comments insinuating divinity. When Jesus demands a reason for their judgment, we are told in verse 33:

The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

At this point Jesus then counters with

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? (vv. 34-36).

The procession of Jesus’ counterargument is to say that if you Jews have been called “gods” for being entrusted with Scripture, even more so can I – someone set apart for God in a special way – be the Son of God. Thus once again we are lacking a biblical case for human deification once the contexts are properly understood. And Pyle himself is forced to admit toward the end of his presentation that “Latter-day Saints take it one step further than most of the early fathers were willing to go.” Indeed!

## Some Secondary Matters of Dispute

In this section we'll explore a couple of those lingering questions that relate to Mormonism as a distinctive religion apart from mainline or orthodox Christianity. Particularly, we want to shift gears and see if the Bible itself *anticipates* the eventual arrival of the Latter-day saints movement or if a universal apostasy warranting the restoration of the Gospel is in store.

### The Apostasy

One of the essential premises of the Mormon Church consists of its being the restored church here on earth. But in order for a restoration to have taken place, a complete apostasy must have ensued some time prior to the birth of the Mormon Church. In fact, having believed that a truly unadulterated Christianity has existed since the first century is not only factually false, says the Mormon, but also defiant of the predictive testimony of Scripture. At the birth of Mormonism through its founding prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., he recalls a visionary encounter he had with the Father and Son and, upon querying about the modern Christian church, reports:

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)—and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”<sup>65</sup>

LDS scholar Barry R. Bickmore of the Mormon think-tank FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information Research) thus remarks:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claims to primarily be a “restoration” of primitive Christianity. Implicit in that claim is the idea that prior to 1830, when the Restoration formally took place, Christianity had fallen away from the truth – i.e., the truth and authorized Church of Jesus Christ no longer existed upon the earth.<sup>66</sup>

Bickmore explains in another work that the New Testament is filled with warnings and references to an apostasy and “falling away”:

Paul spoke of this apostasy (“falling away”) when he told the elders at Ephesus that “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30) Thus the Church would be under attack both from without (persecution) and from within (heresy).<sup>67</sup>

Though Christians are unlikely to be moved by references to “falling away” and such (given that this expression likely encompasses a vast array of interpretations in the current context of global religions and the lack thereof), Bickmore assures his readers that there are grounds for thinking that a *total* and *complete* apostasy are predicted in the following passages:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find *it*. (Amos 8:11-12).

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

Anticipating what his objectors might say concerning the Amos passage, Bickmore writes:

It might be countered that Amos referred to the time of apostasy in Israel between the Old and New Testaments, when we have no further record of any prophets adding their witness to the Bible. However, the New Testament clearly demonstrates that Israel had not undergone a *total* apostasy, which is clearly what was predicted in this passage. For example, the case of Zacharias shows that the Aaronic priesthood was still operative (see Luke 1), and Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22) indicates that their laws and ordinances retained some efficacy. Indeed, Luke referred to Anna as a "prophetess" (Luke 2:36), so clearly the word of the Lord *could be found* during the intertestamental period, even though it was not generally accepted. Latter-day Saints do not argue that there was absolutely no inspiration or revelation during the period between the apostasy and Restoration, but post-Apostolic Christianity in general does not claim to have had any prophets who could speak the word of the Lord with authority.<sup>68</sup>

Bickmore argues here that since the Amos prophecy is about a *total* apostasy and Israel could not possibly be the subject of Amos' words, this must refer to post-Apostolic Christianity which admits an absence of “any prophets who could speak the word of the Lord with authority.” Bickmore's other argument from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians is also an inference he makes from the passage:

Here Paul noted not only that an apostasy was inevitable, but that the "son of perdition" would sit "as God . . . in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4) It is difficult to imagine how this prophecy was to be fulfilled if the Church was to remain.<sup>69</sup>

The complaint is that it would not be possible for the "son of perdition" to be enthroned as a false god in the presence of an extant Church. But neither of Bickmore's arguments are good here; Let's take a look at each to see why.

*Amos 8:11-12.* Bickmore seems to equate the "famine in the land" of God's Word with total apostasy. I fail to see the connection here. There is a substantial difference between *apostasy* (ἀποστασία) and a "famine in the land" (λιμὸν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν). The former envisages those entrusted with God's Word who later *abandon* or *compromise* it. The latter refers to a *scarcity* of supply – a hunger for what is lacking. To suggest that the difficulty of obtaining God's Word is tantamount to there being an apostasy is highly dubious. Consider the scarcity of the Gospel message in certain regions and tribes in the world. The reality of such a "famine" of God's Word there certainly does not entail that an apostasy has taken place (though it is conceivable that this could be the *cause* of the famine, but there would have to be an additional argument for this). Secondly, it's dubious whether "famine in the land" entails being "completely removed from the earth."<sup>70</sup> The Hebrew term *ra'ab* (רָעַב) signifies only a *deprivation* of product – in this case the Word of the Lord. Jews during this time period relied heavily on the daily utterances of the prophets. But perhaps due to their overindulgence on this provision, God had taken this away from them. It's not that Judaism had vanished from the earth, but that they no longer had teachers who could minister and apply it. As the commentator Matthew Henry poetically writes, the Israelites would have "water in the well, but nothing to draw with."<sup>71</sup> But to infer from a prediction of the deprivation of God's Word that this must refer to the Christian Church's post-Apostolic situation where "all their creeds were an abomination in [God's] sight" whose teachers were all "corrupt" with "hearts [that] are far from me" is completely non-sequitur. Hence the argument for a post-Apostolic apostasy of universal magnitude is spurious and unsupported by Amos 8.

*2 Thessalonians 2:1-4.* This passage undoubtedly speaks of a coming age where Christ's return will be preceded by a falling away that shall take place after the arrival of the mysterious "man of sin." This "man of sin" will then proclaim himself to be "God" and will "sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Bickmore argues that this could not be possible "if the Church was to remain." There are two responses to this. First, not all New Testament scholars are in agreement that these events will take place in a completely literal sense – that there should be a literal geopolitical antichrist figure who will literally sit in the rebuilt Jewish temple of God. These scholars, under the banner of theological *amillennialism*, believe that these eschatological sayings are cryptic references to the defilement of the Church by either Roman emperors or the Roman government at large. The "Temple" is suggested to be a representation of the body of Christ or the presence of Christ Himself. The amillennialist would point to the following passages to underscore this point:

Then said the Jews [to Jesus], Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? *But he spake of the temple of his body.* When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.  
(John 2:20-22; emphasis mine)

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, *dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*  
(Acts 17:24; emphasis mine)

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?  
(1 Corinthians 3:16)

On the preterist interpretation of eschatology, the defilement of the "Temple" refers to either the defilement of the body of Christ or of Christ Himself. One eminent amillennial scholar, Robert B. Strimple, remarks:

Since Christ is the *true* temple, we are to look for no other. When the Apostle John is given that climactic vision of a new heaven and a new earth, and of "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21:2), he reports: "I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:22). ... No other temple can be erected on that foundation than that which is being erected, in which all the saints of God, Jew and Gentile, are being built as living stones (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5).<sup>72</sup>

With respect to the literal Temple of Israel, its destruction in 70 A.D. by Titus under Vespasian seems to be the setting for the falling away mentioned by Luke:

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.  
(Luke 21:20)

Luke notes the context here by explaining what Jesus said to His disciples in leading up to this:

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them."  
(Vv. 5-8)

The other Gospels do not specify what this “desolation” is other than a reference in Daniel to the sinister Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes who defiled the Jewish Temple centuries prior (cf. Matthew 24:15). But Luke seems to think that the “desolation” will center on the physical destruction of the Jewish Temple when “Jerusalem [is] compassed with armies” where “not one stone will be left on another.” Undoubtedly, this tips its hat toward thinking that this is a prophetic reference to the imminent (and infamous) destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.<sup>73</sup> If this is true, and given that Jesus says that “many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Matt. 24:11 – a true description of an apostasy to be sure!) prior to this event, then it follows that this apostasy could very well refer to those events prior to 70 A.D. But this would entail that no future apostasy of abandoning the “true” doctrines of Christianity would be predicted in Bickmore’s cited passage.

Secondly, particularly for those not aligned with amillennialist sympathies, there is no reason to think that Paul’s Thessalonian correspondence necessitates the removal of the Church *prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. All that follows from Bickmore’s argument is that the Church be removed prior to the “man of sin” taking power and exalting himself in the Temple. This could still be a *future* event as some dispensational detractors of amillennialism affirm:

... the true church of Jesus Christ has always been plagued by apostasy – but nothing like at present. ... The Bible makes it clear that doctrinal confusion will rise to a crescendo in the latter days, leading many to depart from the faith as they eagerly follow deceiving spirits and willingly adopt doctrines of demons. ... Israel’s temple plays an important role in several end-time prophecies of the Tribulation. The Antichrist is going to desecrate the temple halfway through the Tribulation – but to do so, it must first be rebuilt. ... Since the Tribulation is *especially* the time of God’s wrath, and since Christians are not appointed to wrath, then it follows that the church will be raptured *before* the Tribulation.<sup>74</sup>

This view need not be *true*, it need only be *possible* to show that Bickmore’s dilemma is false.

### A Biblical Prediction of the Book of Mormon?

When I originally wrote "A Discussion on Mormonism" back in 1989, it was commonplace apologetics amongst Mormons to assert that Ezekiel 37:15-17 is a reference to the coming of the *Book of Mormon* as the "stick of Joseph." The passage reads:

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

Unbeknownst to Mormon missionaries at the time (in my personal experience), the explanation of the passage follows just a few verses later:

And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

(vv. 20-22).

As I review the literature extant today on this subject, Mormon defenders have now come to acknowledge the traditional LDS view as a mistaken interpretation. I cite FAIR's assessment below in its entirety:

Latter-day Saints have historically interpreted Ezekiel 37:15–17 as being a prophecy of coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the last days. Elder Boyd K. Packer explained it this way in General Conference, October 1982:

I must tell you of a work that has moved quietly forward in the Church virtually unnoticed. It had its beginning in Old Testament times and is the fulfillment of a prophecy by Ezekiel, who wrote: "The word of the Lord came...unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand."

The sticks, of course, are records or books. In ancient Israel records were written upon tablets of wood or scrolls rolled upon sticks. The record of Judah and the record of Ephraim, according to the prophecy, were to become one in our hands. Two events connected with the fulfillment of the prophecy were centered in print shops. One of Joseph Smith's early revelations makes the connection between

the Book of Mormon and Ezekiel's "stick of Ephraim," so we *are* bound to this interpretation in some form:

...the hour cometh that I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth, and with Moroni, whom I have sent unto you to reveal the Book of Mormon, containing the fulness of my everlasting gospel, to whom I have committed the keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim. (D&C 27:5.)

Since the Book of Mormon makes clear that Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh, brother of Ephraim (Alma 10:3), it is less than straight forward to identify it as the "stick of Ephraim". Nevertheless some LDS general authorities have made such an attempt. Orson Pratt claimed another ancestor of the Book of Mormon peoples, Ishmael, was an Ephraimite in 1850. The late reminiscences of Franklin D. Richards and Erastus Snow attributed this teaching to Joseph Smith and the missing 116 pages. Joseph Fielding Smith additionally emphasized that Joseph Smith was a descendant of Ephraim and noted that this fits well with the alternative phrasing found in v. 19 of "the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim." In context, this portion of Ezekiel's record is a prophecy of the restoration and reunification of the divided house of Israel. Ezekiel sees a vision of a valley of dry bones that are miraculously reassembled with flesh, and the breath of life returns to them (37:1–10). The Lord promises Ezekiel that he will raise the people of Israel from the dead and give them rest in their own land (11–14). The Lord then gives the prophecy of the sticks (15–20). He explains the sticks represent the restoration of Israel to their homeland and reunification of the formerly separated nations of Judah and Israel (Ephraim) (21–22). They will live God's law, be purified from unrighteousness, and be ruled over by the heir of house of David (23–28). So what does the Book of Mormon have to do with the reunification of Israel and how does Lehi, descendant of Manasseh, fit into a prophecy of a "stick of Ephraim"? For Latter-day Saints this is an example of "likening the scriptures unto ourselves," as Nephi suggested (1 Nephi 19:23). The Book of Mormon is the restoration scripture for modern-day Ephraim—the people of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and a message that they take to the world so that Israel may be gathered a final time in preparation for the second coming of the Lord. Although Ezekiel was speaking directly of reunification, Latter-day Saints have applied their own modern application of this passage as it relates to the Book of Mormon's role in the restoration of the gospel and the gathering of Israel.<sup>75</sup>

In 1990, Mormon Assyriologist and expert in Babylonian languages Brian E. Keck had acknowledged this hiccup in Mormon hermeneutics, but his plea to the Mormon public-at-large apparently fell on deaf ears. In that article he concluded:

I do not intend the interpretation of Ezekiel 37:15-28 ... to cast doubts on the Book of Mormon. I question only the validity of the traditional Mormon interpretation of Scripture in general and of Ezekiel 37 in particular and attempts by Mormon scholars to build a "hedge" around those interpretations instead of

seriously and critically evaluating them to further our knowledge and understanding of the canonical literature and of Mormonism.<sup>76</sup>

But since Mormon scholarship and apologetic outfits have made this correction, we'll simply consider the matter now closed!

### **A Brief Tribute to "A Discussion on Mormonism"**

One final piece of information I decided to leave untouched was the contrast between the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* with itself. The pillars of inerrancy and inspiration seem to evaporate in light of contrary doctrines asserted by these two books proposed to be scripture:

[A] book alleged to be inspired by God must surely convey a clear and non-contradictory message on central theological issues since "God is not a God of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33). Below are some examples of the contradictions found in Mormon scripture:

- 1) God dwells in the hearts of the righteous (Alma 34:36).  
Yet, the idea that God dwells in the hearts of the righteous is false (D&C 130:3).
- 2) There are many Gods and more to come (D&C 132:20).  
Yet, there is only one God (Alma 11:26-29, 35).
- 3) The prophet Alma murdered many, repented, and was forgiven (Alma 36:14-20).  
Yet, murder is an unforgivable sin (D&C 42:18).
- 4) Jesus is both the Person of the Father and the Son (Mosiah 15:2-5).  
Yet, Jesus and the Father are two separate beings (D&C 130:22).

I had then proceeded to show how *The Pearl of Great Price* seemed to be contrary to itself:

The Mormon scripture, *Pearl of Great Price*, includes the books of Abraham, Moses, an extract of Matthew as written by Joseph Smith, Joseph Smith - History, and the *Articles of Faith*. These books do not cooperate with each other as will be demonstrated below:

- 1) Only one God created the world (Moses 2:9-10).  
Many gods created the world (Abraham 4:9-10).
- 2) The whole world will be aware of Christ's second coming (JS-Matthew 1:26).  
Joseph Smith saw Christ in a vision – secretly (JS-History 1:18).
- 3) Moses 6:57 has internal problems by i) calling Jesus the Son of Man prior to having His incarnate nature, and ii) making Jesus' last name "Christ." In addition, the name "Jesus" was not given until shortly before his conception (Luke 2:21).

## Conclusion

In my 20 years of studying comparative religions alongside the philosophy of religion, I've come to realize that Christianity has received its fair share of criticism from a variety of sources. We have seen in this essay some important doctrinal issues relating to the nature of God, Jesus Christ, and the future hope of mankind. I humbly repeat what my original research uncovered and what my contemporary studies have confirmed – that Mormonism seems to be mistaken about its understanding of these issues. For Evangelicals reading this essay, my hope is that you have a sampling of the landscape of Mormon theology and apologetics and that you are savvier to the complications of these discussions that go well beyond skin deep. For Mormons reading this, my prayer is that you take the arguments presented by Mormon authorities and weigh them against the responses I've provided. I can only ask that you take the responses here seriously in your ongoing investigation in spiritual matters. If God should incite you to seek the portrait of God and Christ affirmed by Evangelicals and, in my opinion, taught in the Bible, then I'll consider this work to have accomplished its intended goal.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This expression is coined by Francis J. Beckwith for his recent scholarly contribution to answering Mormon apologists in his landmark book, *The New Mormon Challenge*, F. Beckwith, C. Mosser, and P. Owen, eds. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith – History 1:18, *The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1989 ed.).

<sup>3</sup> Verse 19.

<sup>4</sup> The *Book of Mormon* is one of four standard works of the Church. Among them are *The Pearl of Great Price*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, *Book of Mormon*, and the Holy Bible (King James Version).

<sup>5</sup> *Deseret News*, May 29, 1852 (Vol. 2, No. 15).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed treatment as to the history and conclusion of the trial of Joseph Smith, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, index under "Astrology."

<sup>7</sup> *History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 411.

<sup>8</sup> See Kenneth W. Godfrey, *Brigham Young University Studies*, Winter 1968, pp. 212-214.

<sup>9</sup> Most Mormons claim that Smith was a martyr. It is recorded, however, in the *History of the Church* vol. 6, pp. 617-618 that Joseph Smith possessed a six shooter and attempted to escape during a raid that ended his life. During this raid, Smith killed two men and wounded a third. Indeed, Smith was not a martyr.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 17:23.

<sup>11</sup> Verse 27.

<sup>12</sup> John 17:3.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1989), p. 344; emphasis mine.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311; 372. It seems evident that Smith does not understand the concept of the Trinity for he makes the anthropomorphic mistake of suggesting their unity "all in one body" as if we are discussing a physical being. More on this point later.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 345-346.

<sup>17</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.

<sup>18</sup> For a critique of these speculative models in cosmology, see W.L. Craig, "The Ultimate Question of Origins: God and the Beginning of the Universe," *Astrophysics and Space Science* 269-270 (1999): 723-740.

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<sup>19</sup> D. Paulsen, "Comparative Coherence of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism" (1975, University of Michigan).

<sup>20</sup> R.L. Millet and N.B. Reynolds, "What do Latter-day Saints believe about God?" (<http://farms.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=45&chapid=531>).

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Teachings*, p. 349.

<sup>22</sup> Doctrine & Covenants 132:37.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham 4:1; Actually, all of chapters 4 and 5 note the plurality of "Gods" on numerous occasions – all throughout the creation days paralleled in Genesis.

<sup>24</sup> J.P. Moreland and W.L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 594.

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book IX, Chapter 2.

<sup>26</sup> The Mormon will not concur with this premise since Mormonism's perception of God the Father is one that portrays Him as finite and bounded. What this argument attempts to do is infer that God must be a maximally great being upon an unadulterated conception of what the divine would necessarily be. If it turns out that God is finite and such, then our argument for the Trinity would apply to *his* creator or to the ultimate creator of the gods' ancestry – who himself would necessarily have to have these Anselmian attributes. So either our God the Father is Trinitarian or the Ultimate Creator is. In the spirit of Occam's Razor, we should suspect that God the Father simply *is* the Ultimate Creator – especially given the biblical data.

<sup>27</sup> R. Swinburne, "A Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity," from "The Trinity," *The Christian God* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 177-178.

<sup>28</sup> These passages speak of God being *from everlasting to everlasting*. A divorced reading from its historical and theological context might suggest what Mormons have attempted to argue: that this only speaks of God's *antiquity* and not His *eternality*. But the ongoing usage of this phrase, in the Hebrew written as עֶדְ-עוֹלָם וְיָמֵי עוֹלָם or some similar variation, suggests how an Israelite would have referred to God's eternity. In other words, it's the combination of עֶדְ-עוֹלָם וְיָמֵי עוֹלָם that bespeaks the eternality of God, not the isolated root word עוֹלָם. The same could be said for the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) with its usage of ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος.

<sup>29</sup> For a good contemporary and balanced discussion on God's relationship to time, see Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: 4 Views* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> I'm summarizing his case which is argued extensively in his 'The Ontological Argument', from 'God and Necessity', *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 196-221.

<sup>31</sup> Some philosophers have suggested that such maximally great properties cannot coherently exist in the same being (for example, see Michael Martin's *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1992) and Chapter 9 of Victor Stenger's *God: The Failed Hypothesis – How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (New York: Prometheus Press, 2008). This, they argue, suggests that such a being *cannot* exist. But these criticisms have been answered by the bulk of Christian philosophy and do not pose a problem for the Anselmian conception of God.

<sup>32</sup> Mormon apologist Blake Ostler attempts to blunt this objection, particularly given the similar difficulty of counting down to zero from an infinite set of negative numbers, by suggesting that

the argument ... would not apply to the infinite past since the infinite past has no beginning term. ... Yet if there is no beginning to the counting done by the counter, and in each new moment the counter counts a new number, it follows that the counter could have counted all of the negative numbers ending with zero (B.T. Ostler, "Do Kalam Infinity Arguments Apply to the Infinite Past?", [http://www.fairlds.org/New\\_Mormon\\_Challenge/TNMC01.html](http://www.fairlds.org/New_Mormon_Challenge/TNMC01.html)).

Ostler's premise then is to affirm that one does not begin from a singular point but merely counts down from some completed set of infinity. In short, the counter can assert a beginning point out of eternity but then counts down the *rest* of the numbers in order to arrive at zero. But why did the counter not finish *yesterday*, *10 weeks ago*, or *100 years ago*? Given an infinite time frame from which to count, no matter how far one recedes into the past, there will always have been an infinite count that has transpired since its count "from eternity." Thus the count could (should?) have finished already before the designated day.

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In response, Ostler assures us that we simply “confuse ‘all negative numbers’ with ‘infinitely many negative numbers’” (*Ibid.*). But the cardinal number for the latter will be *identical* to the cardinal number for the former so Ostler’s resistance is surely a smokescreen – the fact remains, *an infinite set of numbers exist in the count!* And though Ostler is technically right with respect to indexicals, it’s *precisely* the fact that the totality of all negative infinite numbers is *not* the same as “infinitely many negative numbers” that conjures up the problem to begin with! It would be like saying “all of my infinite possessions” is not the same thing as “infinitely many possessions of mine.” But you see the problem? These two referents *should be the same thing!* It’s a classic case of a distinction without a difference.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Thomas Aquinas writes that

“In the divine knowledge there is no discursiveness. ...God sees all things in one thing alone, which is Himself. Therefore, God sees all things together, and not successively.”

(*Summa Theologiae*, I, 14. Thomas Aquinas (Anton C. Pegis ed.) (1997), *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas Volume One*, Indianapolis, Hackett, p. 416).

<sup>34</sup> Francis J. Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish make some similar points in their *See the Gods Fall: Four Rivals to Christianity* (Missouri: College Press, 1997), pp. 109-126.

<sup>35</sup> I have argued extensively not only that the problem of acquiring an actual infinite via successive addition is unattainable, but that the notion that having an actual infinite cannot exist altogether (see S.L. Guthrie, [Chapter 4](#), “Theism and Contemporary Cosmology,” 2002).

<sup>36</sup> Exodus 20:4.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Kings 8:27.

<sup>38</sup> *Physics*, Book 3, 205a:10.

<sup>39</sup> For a good discussion about the historicity of ancient Judaism’s monotheism in the face of theological speculations about angels, Patriarchs, and New Testament Trinitarianism see Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). Even the respected rabbinical scholar Jacob Neusner concurs in assessing all three primary world religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – as monotheistic in his *Recovering Judaism: The Universal Dimension of Jewish Religion* (Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Jeremiah 10:10-11.

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 20:5.

<sup>42</sup> “No God beside me,” [http://en.fairmormon.org/%22No\\_God\\_beside\\_me%22](http://en.fairmormon.org/%22No_God_beside_me%22)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 10:17.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:5.

<sup>46</sup> Moses himself was called “a god” to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1), but the context of the Mosaic account clearly means to affirm only that Moses engendered certain qualities of power, authority, and leadership. What this demonstrates is that Mormons tend to read the Old and New Testaments only against the backdrop of their contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of the English words. But prior to the Exile (and subsequent to it) it was not uncommon for positive descriptions of mighty men of God to be themselves deemed “gods” (cf. Psalm 82:6). This, no doubt, is at the heart of the Pauline affirmation that “though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth ... to us *there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things*” (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

<sup>47</sup> “Do Latter-day Saints believe that men and women can become gods?”

(<http://farms.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=45&chapid=534>).

<sup>48</sup> *Deseret Weekly* (November 3, 1894), p. 610; *Deseret Weekly* (October 8, 1898), p. 513; *Deseret News*, (June 15, 1901), p. 177; and *Journal History of the Church*, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (July 20, 1901), p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 132:20.

<sup>50</sup> Verse 37.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Utah: Bookcraft, 1991), p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38. These passages are noted in Millet’s and Reynolds’ defense of this doctrine in their “Do Latter-day Saints believe that men and women can become gods?”.

<sup>53</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation of the Greeks*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Aryans*, 1.39, 3.34.

<sup>55</sup> Augustine, *On the Psalms*, 50.2.

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<sup>56</sup> Symeon Lash, "Deification," *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 147–48.

<sup>57</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1980), p. 18, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952; Collier Books, 1960), pp. 174–75.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Crouch, "Praise the Lord," Trinity Broadcasting Network (July 7, 1986).

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Love* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland, n.d.), tape BCC-56, *The Power of the Tongue* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland, n.d.), p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*, p. 63; emphasis mine. Robinson does suggest that C.S. Lewis' view comes the closest to the Mormon position.

<sup>61</sup> N. Russell, "'Partakers of the Divine Nature' (2 Peter 1:4) in the Byzantine Tradition," *ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΡΙΑ, Porphyrogenitus*, Camberley UK, 1998 ([http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/Russell\\_partakers.html](http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/Russell_partakers.html)). Also see his *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) as well as his scholarly monograph *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

<sup>63</sup> James R. Spencer, *Heresy Hunters: Character Assassination in the Church* (Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1993), p. 108. Spencer's critique of Word-Faith detractors deserves much criticism, but the point here is not to suggest that he is correct in his overall defense of these teachers as much as he is correct to dissociate this cheap offshoot of *theosis* with Mormon deification.

<sup>64</sup> D. Charles Pyle, "'I Have Said, 'Ye are Gods'": Concepts Conducive to the Early Christian Doctrine of Deification in Patristic Literature and the Underlying Strata of the Greek New Testament Text" (1999 FAIR Conference presentation),

[http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR\\_Conferences/1999\\_Early\\_Christian\\_Doctrine\\_of\\_Deification.html](http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/1999_Early_Christian_Doctrine_of_Deification.html). Pyle's reference to "an earlier letter" by Paul is certainly a viable interpretation. But he is quite disingenuous with Evangelicals on this matter. Pyle says that the respected apologist and theologian Dr. Norman Geisler adamantly believes that 1 Cor. 5:9's mentioning "I wrote unto you an epistle not to company with fornicators" uses an epistolary aorist (which could suggest that the epistle is the one in fact being written at the moment). Pyle goes on to accuse Geisler of "giving his opinion as to why he believes the New Testament is complete, dogmatically insist[ing] that 1 Corinthians 5:9 could not possibly refer to a lost book of the New Testament" and that "[t]here is little room for Geisler's dogmatism when the stronger probability exists for a previous letter." But this is not necessarily Geisler's view in all honesty. Concerning 1 Cor. 5:9 he writes:

There are three possibilities here. First, it may be that not all apostolic letters were intended to be in the canon of Scripture. Luke refers to "many" other gospels (1:1). ... Second, others believe that the letter referred to (in 1 Cor. 5:9) may not be lost at all, but is part of an existing book of the Bible. For example, it could be part of what we know as 2 Corinthians (chaps. 10-13), which some believe was later put together with chapters 1-9. ... Third, others believe that Paul is referring to the present Book of 1 Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5:9 ... (N. Geisler, *When Critics Ask* (Illinois: Victor Books, 1992), pp. 452-453).

I see no "dogmatic insist[ing]" that the reference could not possibly be of a book outside of 1 Corinthians. He presents the three positions and leaves it to the reader to decide.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Smith – History 1:19, *The Pearl of Great Price*.

<sup>66</sup> B. Bickmore, "Were an Apostasy and Restoration Predicted?", FAIR paper (Mesa, Arizona: FAIR, 3 July 2001), p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> B. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity*, Chapter 2 (Ben Lomond, CA: Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research, 1999). Accessible online at [http://www.fairlds.org/Restoring\\_the\\_Ancient\\_Church/chap02.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Restoring_the_Ancient_Church/chap02.html).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> M. Henry, "Amos 8:11-14", *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (public domain).

<sup>72</sup> R. Strimple, "Amillennialism", *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, Darrell L. Bock, ed. (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), p. 99.

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<sup>73</sup> Postmillennialists are also likely to concur with this assessment. For example, see K. Gentry Jr., "A Postmillennial Response", *Ibid.*, pp. 245-247. Dr. Darrell Bock, a self-proclaimed premillennialist, admits that "the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is part of God's plan and judgment. This fall pictures the end" (*Luke 9:51-24:53* (Michigan: Baker, 1994), p. 1657. It's important to also note that there are moderate premillennialists who affirm a similar conviction. The late New Testament professor George Eldon Ladd writes: "New Testament exegesis (Hebrews 8) makes it difficult to believe that the Old Testament prophecies about the 'millennial temple' will be fulfilled literally" (G.E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism", *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, R.G. Clouse, ed. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 28).

<sup>74</sup> T. LaHaye and J. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), p. 73; 128-129; 112.

<sup>75</sup> "Book of Mormon as the stick of Ephraim"

([http://en.fairmormon.org/Book of Mormon as the stick of Ephraim](http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_as_the_stick_of_Ephraim)).

<sup>76</sup> B.E. Keck, "Ezekiel 37, Sticks, and Babylonian Writing Boards: A Critical Reappraisal", *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 23, Num. 1 (Spring 1990), p. 137.