

## The New Mormon Challenge

The New Mormon Challenge is edited by Francis J Beckwith, Carl Mosser, Paul Owen (Zondervan).

The Mormon faith is an example of a truly ludicrous religion being so divorced from reality that it seems to be a cult. Whatever one thinks of Mormonism's truth claims, it shows that a false religion can have immense power over its people and be immune to refutation and disproof. If Mormonism has one million devotees that is the same as some other religion having ten million for Mormonism's devotees live eat and drink their faith more than you would see any other faith doing.

The book, The New Mormon Challenge, seeks to give scholarly reasons why this faith is not only untrue but implausible.

### *Mormon belief in many Gods is against the Bible*

The New Mormon Challenge: As C. J. Labuschagne points out, the Hebrew word for "one" (echad) in Deuteronomy 6:4 refers to "somebody who has no family, and, applied to Yahweh, this means that He does not belong to any family of gods. This aspect distinguishes him from all other gods. Furthermore the confession that Yahweh is a Single One was directed against the concept of divine families".

Comment: This refutes the Christian doctrine that God is a family of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Saying God does not belong to any family but is one single entity stresses not only that he does not belong to a family he is not a family either.

The New Mormon Challenge: This psalm is presented as a polemic against all other gods and perhaps specifically against the Canaanite pantheon. In contrast to texts that speak of Yahweh's council, there is no discussion here about a future action to be taken (e.g., Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; 1 Kgs 22:19-23). Furthermore, Yahweh invites no discussion and solely makes a decision to condemn the gods.

Comment: The implication is that he alone is really God for what he decrees is not to be questioned and no other god can object for it is not really a god in the first place. If God is three people you would expect God the Father to get discussion from the Son and the Holy Spirit. The logic refutes the idea of there being many gods or more than one person in God which amounts in practice to having a number of gods.

The New Mormon Challenge: It should be kept in mind that orthodox Trinitarianism has always been careful to maintain a functional subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. The Son and the Spirit are included within God's own identity precisely as the Son and Spirit of God.

Comment: Functional not actual! This functional idea is only an excuse to get around the fact that the New Testament does not treat the Father as God and the Son and the Spirit almost as not being God. They are certainly unequal to him. It is a core Mormon doctrine that the Father surpasses the Son in dignity and glory and the Holy Spirit falls far short of them both. They are not equally divine.

The New Mormon Challenge: DOES JESUS CALL HIMSELF GOD OR A GOD? Peterson claims that Jesus was only accused of making himself "a god," since the Greek word theos in John 10:33 lacks the definite article. Although this translation is grammatically possible, it is weakened by the fact that this is a response to Jesus' claim: "I and the Father are one" (10:30). Why would the Jews conclude that by claiming to be "one" with the Father, he was actually claiming to be a second god? On the other hand, Jesus' claim is naturally understood in terms of inclusion within the unique identity of the One God (Deut 6:4). Peterson is correct to insist that Jesus is not the Father, but he misses the fact that Jesus identifies the One God of the Shema as both the Father and the Son.

Comment: It can go either way. Jesus could be asserting that he is a God different from God the Father.

### *The claims of Joseph Smith*

The New Mormon Challenge says,

According to Joseph Smith himself, the first person to speak in tongues was new convert and future LDS president Brigham Young at Smith's parents' house in 1830. See Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (New York: Doubleday, 1977; repr., Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 152. There were two fascinating episodes in early LDS history that helped to perpetuate the idea that supernatural manifestations were following the Saints. The first involved prophesying, speaking in tongues, and visions for two days at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in March 1836,

although William McLellin seemed to think it had more to do with the amount of wine consumed and David Whitmer called it the “grand fizzle” (see Prince, Powers From on High, 127-29). The second legendary “manifestation” took place in August 1844 after the death of Joseph Smith. While Brigham Young was making the speech that helped confirm him as the successor of Smith, several people recalled that they saw Young's appearance and voice transform into those of Joseph Smith himself (see Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 84-85).

My Comment: The second event reaches the same standard of the resurrection evidence. No it is better for at least we know something of the witnesses as in having definite information about them. And yet it is still false. Young was seen morphing into Smith but nobody saw Jesus' corpse morphing into a risen body. Even Jesus is not on record as testifying that he witnessed his resurrection - he seems to have assumed it!

The second betters the resurrection appearances of Jesus if only that we have better personal information about the witnesses - something that is lacking with the twelve apostles of Jesus.

We see that strong reports of miracles can happen and still be untrue. In reality, we know that as Mormonism is spurious and Joseph Smith was one of the vilest ever to claim the title of prophet and head of the Church that this context overrides the testimonies no matter how good they are. Evidence is important but sometimes it is not everything.

The New Mormon Challenge tests Smith's alleged power to translate scriptures miraculously. He put Bible mistranslations into the Book of Mormon. This proves it is not an ancient document so his claim that he translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates thousands of years old is false.

"When they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." As Young points out, in Palestine the leaves of the oak (quercus), of which is a species, are narrow and (unlike those of other “oaks”) do not naturally fall from their branches. Without this knowledge, AV Isaiah's rendering of 6:13 must have seemed to Smith as likely as any; therefore, it is hardly surprising that he unquestioningly incorporated the AV translators' misinformed rendering into his own text (2 Nephi 16:13).

My comment: Good!

The Mormon Experience discusses how Isaiah 6:13 was mistranslated in the AV Bible thus "as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." If the translators had known that the oak in question are thin and narrow and cannot naturally just let their leaves fall, they would have found it a help. Smith when writing the Book of Mormon goes and puts the mistranslation in 2 Nephi 16:13 where he quotes the text as given in the AV.

My comment: Good! Smith could not translate the Bible never mind the Book of Mormon! Its a clear example of anachronism and plagiarism.

Again Smith got it wrong. He followed the AV in an another instance where it failed to detect two better translations.

The book goes on to say, "As in the case above, scholars disagree on the correct understanding of the final word/phrase of Isaiah 8:20b: “Surely, those who speak like this aser en lo sahar”. Both Wildberger and Watts are convinced by Driver's suggestion to read as “magic” or “power to overcome” while Clements and Kissane seem also to favor a translation of similar derivation (“witchcraft”). However, not all commentators on Isaiah are convinced, and for whatever reason, the opinions cited above have failed to find a place in current English translations, where the straightforward understanding of as “dawn” is retained. But neither of the above options are taken by the AV translators of Isaiah, who instead prefer to provide "light" as their equivalent for sahar..." It is not known why the AV translators chose as they did - it is not a translation so much as an intrusion. Smith used this wrong verse in his 2 Nephi 18:20.

I would add that if the word translated dawn can mean witchcraft then that affects Bible doctrine. The verse becomes, "Direct everybody who needs it to the teaching and to the testimony! If their teachings are not matching this word, it is surely because there is no magic and no morning for them." This would teach that you need to be an occultist of some sort. This contradicts the doctrine that the occult is a sin.

The New Mormon Challenge: Joseph Smith is presented as telling the Church: "I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods."

Comment: That is definitely absolutely untrue and disproven. He was a liar. What is disturbing is that there was no Church uproar thus proving that if religion is not ideology Mormonism is ideology acting like a religion. Ideology can be adequately and tellingly defined as that which does not tell the full story. A sincere religion, or a religion that really loves and seeks truth, will protest if its faith is altered or tampered with by leaders.

The New Mormon Challenge: Why Mormons should not ignore the contradictions in their religion and should not argue that seemingly contradictory revelations are okay:

Joseph Smith himself seemed to hold a different view. On one occasion he determined that a bad angel had appeared to a woman rather than a true angel of light because it gave her a revelation that contradicted a former revelation (See TPJS, 214-15).

Comment: Good!

Conclusion:

Theological heavyweights make mincemeat of Mormon claims and pretensions!