



**WIN Program: Witnessing in Neighborhoods  
Advanced Class On Mormonism  
Week Three: Apostasy**

**MORMON SCRIPTURE—The Articles of Faith, Part XII  
WAS THERE A COMPLETE APOSTASY?**

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## **MORMON SCRIPTURE—The Articles of Faith, Part XII**

By Marvin W. Cowan

The sixth LDS Article of Faith declares, “We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, viz., apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.”

Since those are the same names mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, does this mean the Mormon Church is organized just like the New Testament Church? Those who have read our previous articles know that the LDS Articles of Faith often seem to say one thing while they mean something very different, which is true of this Article as well.

Since Mormonism teaches that there was a universal apostasy of the Primitive Church, they believe the only reliable record of that Church is found in modern revelation through their prophets. An official pamphlet published by the Mormon Church for missionary use declares, “As Latter-day Saints, we testify that shortly after the death of the Lord’s original twelve apostles, there came seventeen hundred years of apostasy and darkness. Then in 1820, the resurrected Savior appeared to Joseph Smith and called him to be a prophet to all the world. Through him came the restoration of the priesthood, the gospel, and the true church: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (Apostasy and Restoration, p. 15). Thus, Mormons believe the “Primitive Church” mentioned in the sixth Article of Faith was just like the Mormon Church today.

The tenth LDS prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, “What is the Church? It is a divinely organized government, with officers and unchangeable laws, whose King is Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to bring to pass the salvation and exaltation of its citizens, through their obedience to its divine laws” (The Church Restored, p. 76-77). There is no definition of the church anything like Smith’s in the Bible! Matthew 1:21, Luke 19:10, John 10:9, Hebrews 7:25 and many other texts teach that Jesus came to earth to provide salvation. If the church can provide salvation through teaching members to be obedient to divine laws, then Christ died in vain according to Galatians 2:21.

Mormon leaders don’t seem to understand the Biblical definition of the church. The apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth saying, “Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the Church...” (I Cor. 12:27-28). Thus, the Biblical church is the body of believers whom Jesus has saved! Paul also said in Ephesians 1:22-23 that God “hath put all things under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body....” In Ephesians 5:29-30, Paul said “No man ever yet hated his own body but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church; for we are members of His body....” And in Colossians 1:17-18 Paul said, “He [Christ] is before all things, and by Him all things consist [are held together]. And He is the Head of the body, the Church....” So the Biblical church or body of Christ is composed of those who truly believe in Christ as Savior. It is not some denomination which God recognizes as the “true church,” like Joseph Smith was looking for in the story of his First Vision.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He also said in Matthew 28:18, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” which shows that He had power enough to build His church! Acts 1:9 records Jesus ascension into glory, but Acts 2:47 declares, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Thus, He didn’t need to be physically present on earth in order to build His church. Ephesians 1:22-23 states that Christ is the Head of His body, the church. Just as your head and body are one inseparable body, so Christ, the Head of His body (the church), is inseparable from it.

If Christ’s body (the church) became universally apostate, as Mormonism claims, did Christ also become apostate? Ephesians 5:23 declares that “Christ is the Head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” Paul wrote this about 30 years after Christ ascended into glory, but he said that Christ still “is” (not was) the Head of the church and also is the Savior of the body, the church. So, Christ did not need to be physically present on earth to be the Head or the Savior of the church. If Christ is the Head of the church, how did it become universally apostate as Mormonism claims it did? After all, He has “all power in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25-27 that “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” That does not sound like Christ planned on the church becoming universally apostate!

Ephesians 5:29 also says “No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it even as the Lord the church.” That means that it is the Lord Who lovingly cares for and feeds the church! If He was doing that, how could the church become universally apostate?

Paul also prayed in Ephesians 3:21, “Unto Him [God] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Why would Paul pray that if he expected a universal apostasy, as Mormonism claims happened?

In Colossians 1:17-18 Paul wrote, “He [Christ] is before all things, and by Him all things consist [are held together]. And He is the Head of the body, the church.” Notice that Paul stated that Christ was before everything and that He holds everything together, then he immediately declared that Christ is the Head of the body, the church. From that context it is obvious that Paul was saying that it is Christ who holds the church together.

So, if there was a universal apostasy, was Christ responsible for it? The problem is that Mormonism has tried to make the Bible teach a universal apostasy when there isn’t a single verse to support such a doctrine! In fact, the King James Version of the Bible, which is Mormonism’s official Bible, doesn’t even have the word apostasy in it!

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# WAS THERE A COMPLETE APOSTASY?

## DID A COMPLETE APOSTASY OCCUR SHORTLY AFTER THE LORD DIED?

The Mormon Church teaches that a complete apostasy occurred shortly after the death of Jesus Christ. They say many of the major teachings of the Lord were lost (Joseph Smith-History 1:18; 1 Nephi 14:10; *Ensign*: Nov. 1985, page 82, Dec. 1984, pages 8-9; *Which Church Is Right?*, 1982). Are they correct? Was there a complete apostasy such that a restoration through Joseph Smith (the first president/prophet of the Mormon Church) was needed?

## APOSTLES HAVE "KEYS", THE AUTHORITY

Who has the authority in the Mormon Church? The first presidency (the prophet/president and his counselors) along with the men who are under them are called the General Authorities. Each gets his authority for assigned responsibilities from the president/prophet while he is living. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, twelve men, just under the Prophet, also have the same authority and "keys" as the President, but can only partially use them as authorized by the President. President Joseph F. Smith, in *Gospel Doctrine*, page 142, said: "What is a key? It is the right or privilege which belongs to and comes with the Priesthood, to have communication with God." They can only be fully used by the apostles when there is no president, and that historically has seldom happened for long periods. With no prophet (or when Jesus died) the apostles had the keys, all the authority (*Mormon Doctrine*, pages 591, 49). When the priesthood was allegedly restored to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery it was done by Peter, James and John, three apostles.

The Apostle John is allegedly the only apostle, of the original twelve, left on earth. According to Mormonism he was to live until the Lord came (see D&C 7). It is logical that he has all the "keys," all authority. Therefore he could appoint and ordain new apostles and keep the Lord's church going on earth. Brigham Young seems to agree when he said:

How vain are the imaginations of the children of men, to presume for a moment that the slaughter of one, two or a hundred of the leaders of this church could destroy an organization, so perfect in itself and so harmoniously arranged that it will stand while one member of it is left alive upon the earth. Brethren be not alarmed, for if the Twelve should be taken away still there are powers and offices in existence which will bear the kingdom of God triumphantly victorious in all the world. This church may have prophets many, and apostles many, but they are all to stand in due time in their proper organization, under the direction of those who hold the keys. (Brigham Young, *History of the Church*, Aug. 15, 1844, 7:250)

But according to the Mormon Church he didn't and some say he couldn't. Why not? Why didn't all the other original apostles, while living, hand on their knowledge and authority, and those to others and so on. Were they all bunglers? Did the Holy Ghost fail to do his job? Was he a bungler also? Did the Lord fail to build his church as he promised in Matt 16:18 "...I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

## **CAN THE LORD RAISE UP PEOPLE TO SERVE HIM?**

Some correctly say that we have our free will and that the Lord, in his plan of salvation, does not force people to do his work. Some Mormons say this is why the Lord's church was gone for 1,800 years. True, the Lord will not force people, but, I also believe that he can and does present opportunities to people and remove obstacles from their path to enable his will. What he did with Saul (Who became the Apostle Paul, see Acts 9:1-9) illustrates what the Lord will do to raise people up to achieve his plan. There is also a Book of Mormon example of a similar incident with Alma the younger, see Mosiah 27:8-23. Revelation 17:16-17 is another example of how God can enable events to meet his plan.

The Bible does speak about a falling away and wolves creeping into the flock (Matt 24:11; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Cor 2:17, 4:4, 11:4; Gal 1:7-9). But there is NO biblical evidence that says there would be a complete apostasy. There is nothing that says the Lord's church would be lost and destroyed such that it could not operate and would need to be restored.

## **BIBLICAL PROMISES WERE WRONG?**

Mormonism would have us believe that the many biblical promises that the Lord's church would always go on and would never be lost were wrong, in error. What happened to the clear statements in Isa. 40:8; Matt. 16:18, 18:20, 28:20; John 10:29, 14:26, 16:7, 13, 17:20; Eph. 6:17? Are these in error or misunderstood?

If Mormonism is correct that these statements were meaningless for 1,800 years while waiting for Joseph Smith to come along then the apostles and the Holy Ghost were dismal failures and the Lord's Church was lost. For about 1,800 years the Lord could not find anyone to restore his Church on earth, he stopped building his church (Matt 16:18). Does any of this even make sense?

## **BIBLICAL PROMISES WERE HONORED!**

The answer is a clear "No!" It does not make sense. The Lord's promises in the Scripture verses given above were always honored. The apostles the Lord appointed were not bunglers. The Holy Ghost was not a bungler. He was always there to teach and guide people (John 14:26, 16:7). The Lord did build his church and the gates of hell did not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). Where two or three were gathered together the Lord was always there (Matt 18:20).

### **SOME LDS TEACHINGS ALSO AGREE**

According to the reference given above even Brigham Young said that the Lord's church would survive persecution. Power and offices would remain even if only one person were alive. According to Doctrine and Covenants 7 the original Apostle John is still alive on earth. He certainly had all the necessary authority to continue the Lord's church.

## **THE LORD'S CHURCH IS ALIVE!**

The Lord's church is alive. But, it is not a denomination or building. It is a group of people (Matt 18:20; Col 1:24; Eph 4:11-12; Heb 12:23) who have accepted Jesus Christ, not only as their Savior, but also as their Lord. You cannot restore what was never lost!

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