

Origin and History of Mormonism

by Marvin Cowan

Mormonism's validity hinges on the truthfulness of Joseph Smith's first vision story, which is contradicted by the Bible and challenged by historical evidence.

Scripture: 1 John 4:12

Topics: "Mormonism", "Apologetics"

Description

Marvin Cowan preaches about the story of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, detailing his account of the religious revival in 1820 and his first vision where he claimed to have seen God and Jesus Christ. The sermon delves into the inconsistencies and historical evidence against Joseph Smith's claims, including the conflicting accounts of his first vision, the angel Moroni, and his involvement in practices like treasure hunting. The sermon also explores the events leading to Joseph Smith's death in 1844 and the subsequent splintering of Mormon factions, challenging the validity of his prophetic claims and the unity of the LDS Church.

Transcript

THE STORY AS TOLD BY MORMONS

Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism recorded his own story this way:

I was born in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five, on the twenty third day of December, in the town of Sharon, Windsor County, State of Vermont... My father, Joseph Smith, Sen., left the State of Vermont, and moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) County, in the State of New York, when I was in my tenth year, or thereabouts. In about four years after my father's arrival in Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester in the same county of Ontario.... Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of the country. Indeed, the whole district of the country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, 'Lo, here!' and others, 'Lo, there!' Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.... In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: 'What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or are they all wrong together? If any of them be right, which is it and how shall I know it?' (P. of G.P. J.S. History 1:3, 5, 10).

Joseph said this revival happened in 1820 when he was 14 years old. After reading James 1:5, he went alone into the woods near his home to pray. While praying, Smith said he was first overcome by some power of darkness, then a pillar of light appeared over his head (Ibid., vs. 7, 11, 14-16, 22-23). Smith recorded:

When the light rested upon me I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spoke unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other - 'This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!' 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 in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that they were all 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 abomination in His sight; that those professors were all corrupt (Ibid., vs. 17-19).

Joseph said a few days later he told a Methodist preacher who was involved in the revival about his vision. But, the minister rejected it and said it was of the devil (Ibid., v. 21). Then Smith said:

I soon found, however, that my telling the story excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects - all united to persecute me (Ibid., vs. 22).

About three and a half years later on September 21, 1823, Joseph said he was in his room praying and asking God for forgiveness of all his sins and follies when a bright light again appeared. It was the angel Moroni who told him that God had a work for him to do. The angel also told Joseph about a book written on gold plates by the former inhabitants of the American continent which contained "the fulness of the everlasting gospel." With the plates were "two stones in silver bows - and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim." The angel said God prepared these for the purpose of translating the book. Moroni quoted several Bible verses and vanished, only to re-appear two more times that night giving the same message each time (Ibid., vs. 29-46).

For four consecutive years on the anniversary of his first visit, Moroni met Joseph at the Hill Cumorah where the gold plates were buried. Then on September 22, 1827, Joseph got the plates and began translating The Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God, using the Urim and Thummin. Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the B. of M., said he took copies of the characters on the plates to Professor Anthon of Columbia University and to Professor Mitchell who both pronounced the translation correct (Ibid., vs. 53-65).

Later, in May of 1829 while Oliver Cowdery was writing the English translation as Joseph dictated it to him, they went into the woods to pray about baptism for the remission of sins. John the Baptist then appeared in a cloud of light and laid his hands upon them and ordained them with the Priesthood of Aaron. After that, Joseph and Oliver baptized each other and then ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood (Ibid., vs. 66-75). The Joseph Smith story in the P. of G.P. ends here, but it is continued in the D.H.C.

Joseph said that Peter, James, and John also appeared (probably between May 15 and June 30 of 1829) and conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood on him and Oliver Cowdery, which gave them the power of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then on April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith and five other men organized the LDS Church (D.H.C., Vol. I, pp. 40-41, 75-80). Under Smith's leadership the Church began in New York, moved to Kirtland, Ohio, then to Independence, Missouri, and finally to Nauvoo, which by 1844 was the second largest city in Illinois.

Joseph was Mayor of Nauvoo and a candidate for President of the United States when some apostate Mormons stirred up sentiment against him through publishing the Nauvoo Expositor newspaper. Nauvoo authorities declared the press a nuisance and had it destroyed. For that, the state had Joseph arrested, but he was freed by the Nauvoo Municipal Court. Later, he was again arrested and charged with treason. He was jailed in Carthage, Illinois, where on June 27, 1844, an angry mob stormed the jail and shot and killed Joseph and his brother Hyrum (Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 268-270, 432-434, 453-574, 612-622). Brigham Young, who was President of the Twelve Apostles, was chosen as Joseph's successor and led the Mormons west to Salt Lake City, Utah. The Church headquarters has been there since 1847. These brief highlights of Mormonism's origin come from official LDS records. But, there is historical evidence that conflicts with Smith's claims.

THE EVIDENCE AGAINST THE JOSEPH SMITH STORY

President Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth LDS prophet said:

Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false, for the doctrines of an impostor cannot be made to harmonize in all particulars with divine truth. If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions, which would be easy to detect (D. of S. Vol. 1, p. 188).

Since Pres. Joseph Fielding Smith declared that the story of Joseph Smith is so important that Mormonism "must stand or fall" with it, it needs to be examined carefully. He also said if Joseph Smith's claims were built upon fraud, it would be easy to find errors and contradictions. The following is an examination of Joseph Smith's claims.

The 1820 Revival and Joseph's First Vision

Joseph Smith's story claims that in 1820 there was a religious excitement in Palmyra in which "great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties." He said that revival caused him to ask God which church was right and that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared and told him they were all wrong. If a 14-year-old boy who had no witnesses claimed that God told him the LDS Church was apostate, would Mormons believe his story? Yet, Mormons want the Christian world to believe Smith's story when he had no witnesses! Is there any way to check Smith's story? He did mention specific historical facts that ought to be able to be substantiated by other historical records. For example, he mentioned his age, where he was living, when his brother Alvin died and the churches involved in the Palmyra revival in 1820. All of these things are linked to the time of Smith's first vision.

Smith said in the P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:3-5, that his family moved to Palmyra, New York, when he was about ten (or in 1816 since he was born December 23, 1805). About four years later (1816+4=1820) the family moved to a farm in Manchester township. Then, he said in the second year after their move to Manchester (1820+2=1822), there was an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. Thus, Smith's chronology indicates the revival and first vision took place in 1822. But, his official story says his vision came in the spring of 1820 after the revival (Ibid., v. 22).

Since Smith said the revival and first vision happened in 1820 during their second year in Manchester, Mormon writers date Smith's move there in 1818. But in 1970, Brigham Young University microfilmed the road tax lists of Palmyra township for Smith's era (Microfilm 900, reel #60 at Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, Provo, UT; or Microfilm #812869 in the LDS Family History Library, Salt Lake City, UT). Joseph Smith, Sr., was listed among the property owners and other males over 21 who were required to keep the roads in Road District No. 26 repaired from April, 1817, through April, 1822. Thus, any move to Manchester had to be after April, 1822.

Joseph's mother, Lucy, said that they contracted to purchase 100 acres of Lot #1 from the Everson estate in Manchester (Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, p. 70; CHC, Vol. I, p. 31). Wesley Walters, a Presbyterian minister known for his research on Mormonism, found the Manchester property assessment records for the Smith's era in the Ontario County Records Center and Archives in Canandaigua, NY. They show that the heirs of Nicholas Everson owned and paid property taxes on all 300 acres of Lot #1 in July 1820. But in the summer of 1821, 100 acres of Lot #1 were taxed to Joseph Smith, Sr., at the raw land rate of \$7.00 per acre or \$700.00. They paid the same amount in 1822. But in 1823, that assessment went up to \$1000.00 which indicates that a cabin was built between the summers of 1822 and 1823. That supports the information in the Palmyra road tax records which showed that the Smiths lived in Palmyra at least until April of 1822. If the revival happened two years after the Smiths moved to Manchester, it had to have been in 1824 or 1825. For further information on this subject, see *Inventing Mormonism* by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, published by Smith Research Associates and distributed by Signature Books, Inc. of Salt Lake City, UT.

Joseph's brother, William, was one of the original Twelve Apostles of the LDS Church. He said Reverend Lane, a Methodist elder, led the revival in 1822 and 1823 when Joseph was 17 (William Smith on Mormonism, pp. 6-7; CHC, Vol. I, pp. 51-53). William also said another leader of this revival was Reverend Stockton, a Presbyterian who had previously preached Alvin Smith's funeral indicating Alvin went to hell (Deseret News, January 20, 1894). Alvin was the brother of William and Joseph. Because of this Joseph Smith, Sr., refused to join the Presbyterian church with others in his family during the revival. If the revival was after Alvin's death, it could not have been in 1820 since Alvin's tombstone shows that he died on November 19, 1823. Until 1981 Alvin's death was printed erroneously as November 19, 1824, in the P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:4 and in all other LDS histories. Since Joseph Smith, Sr., placed an ad in the Wayne Sentinel newspaper in Palmyra, New York, dated September 25, 1824, stating that he had dug Alvin's body up, in order to put to rest rumors that it had been removed and "dissected," Alvin could not have died November 19, 1824!

The Methodist and Presbyterian church records also show that neither Reverend Stockton nor Reverend Lane were assigned to Palmyra until 1824. Reverend Lane came in July, 1824, and left in January, 1825, because of health problems. Reverend Stockton pastored the Presbyterian church in Skaneateles, New York, until June 30, 1822. He was visiting Palmyra when he preached Alvin's funeral, but he did not become the pastor there until February 18, 1824. Thus, the revival in Palmyra led by both of these men

could only have taken place in the latter part of 1824, not 1820! Smith claimed that in 1820 in the Palmyra area "great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties" including the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists (P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:5). But the records kept by those churches in Palmyra show the Presbyterians had revivals in 1817, 1824, and 1829; the Baptists gained only six by baptism in 1820; and the Methodist circuit which included Palmyra lost 23 members in 1819, six in 1820 and 40 in 1821. That is not the picture of a great revival in 1820! But, those same records show a revival led by Reverend Lane and Reverend Stockton in the fall of 1824. By the time it ended in September of 1825, the Presbyterians had increased by 99, the Baptists by 94, and the Methodist circuit by 208!

The Wayne Sentinel reported the 1824-1825 revival in Palmyra, but none in 1820. Nor did any newspaper report Smith's vision or the persecution from the churches which he claimed to suffer when he told others about it. If the churches were contending with each other as Smith said (P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:5-6, 9-10), would they all unite that same year to persecute 14-year-old Joseph (Ibid., 1:22)?

Since Smith said his "first vision" was "early in the spring" (Ibid., 1:14), after the revival, the evidence shows it could not have been before the spring of 1825. But, Smith also said that the angel Moroni visited him on September 21, 1823. In the light of the evidence just given, that would make Moroni's visit be Smith's "first vision." But, Mormon leaders have taught that Smith's first vision was of God the Father and Jesus for so long that to teach that Moroni came to Smith first would not be acceptable. Moroni's visit would need to be moved up to at least September, 1825, to be in September after the official first vision. Smith said Moroni told him about the gold plates and visited him for four consecutive years before allowing him to begin translating them (P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:29, 53, 59). Four years after September, 1825, would be September, 1829, before Smith could begin to translate the plates. But, the first edition of the B. of M. has a copyright date of June 11, 1829 (D.H.C. Vol. 1, p. 58 or page prior to the preface in the original 1830 B. of M.). If Smith did not even get the "gold plates" until September, 1829, how could the B. of M. have a copyright date of June 11, 1829? These facts show that the date of the revival is critical in evaluating the Joseph Smith story. If there was no revival in 1820, the first vision story is very questionable, and Mormon history and scripture are untrustworthy!

The importance of Joseph Smith's story was emphasized by Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth LDS prophet, when he said, "Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith... He was either a prophet of God divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground" (D. of S., Vol. I, p. 188).

Therefore, Mormons should seriously consider the evidence of Joseph Smith's first vision because their eternal destiny will be adversely affected if it is not true. But, if it is true, it has nothing to fear from investigation!

A Biblical Response

Smith's first vision in which he claims to have seen God, also conflicts with the Bible, which says, "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18, I John 4:12). In Exodus 33:20, God also says, "There shall no man see me and live." Men cannot see God because He is Spirit (John 4:24), and spirit is invisible (Col. 1:15, I Tim. 1:17). Invisible means it cannot be seen. Therefore, anyone who claims to see the invisible, claims to see that which cannot be seen, which is a contradiction! I Tim. 6:16 also says He "dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see." Since Joseph Smith was a man, did he see God?

First Vision Versions

The official version of Smith's first vision was first published in the Times and Seasons in 1842, which was 22 years after Smith said it happened (Improvement Era, July, 1961, p. 490). Smith successor, Brigham Young and other early Mormons either do not mention it or they tell it very differently from the official version. But, its usage has grown until it is now the basis for teaching that: 1) God the Father and Jesus Christ are two separate gods, 2) both the Father and Son have bodies of flesh and bone, and 3) Joseph Smith was a prophet because he saw the Father and Son.

In 1965, Paul R. Cheesman, a graduate student at BYU, published an account of the first vision recorded in Smith's own 1832-1834 diary. In that diary, Smith said he was in his 16th year when he saw the Lord, who said, "Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee." Smith did not mention God the Father, which is quite an oversight if he actually saw Him! Nor did he mention that he was told that all the churches were wrong. Copies of this diary are available at Utah Lighthouse Ministry. Several different accounts of Smith's first vision are published in Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Vol. I, Autumn, 1966, p. 29ff.

In the official "first vision" story, Smith said he was visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ. But, Brigham Young said when Mormonism began, "The Lord did not come - but He did send His angel" (J. of D., Vol. II, p. 171). Wilford Woodruff, the fourth LDS prophet, also said that Mormonism "commenced by an angel of God flying through the midst of heaven and visiting a young man named Joseph Smith, in the year 1827." He said that Smith was confused by sectarian claims, so he read James 1:5 and then prayed and asked God which church to join. He then said, "The Lord heard his prayer and sent his angel to him, who informed him that all the sects were wrong, and that the God of heaven was about to establish His work upon the earth" (J. of D., Vol XIII, p. 324).

If the Lord Himself gave that message to Smith in 1820, why did an angel give it to him in 1827? The following references in the J. of D. also conflict with the official "first vision" story: 2:196-197; 6:29, 355; 10:127; 12:333-334; 13:65-66, 77-78, 294; 18:239; 20:167; 14:261-262. The J. of D. contains "the discourses of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles of this (LDS) Church. To the Saints their words are as the words of God" (Ibid., Vol. 4, Preface). "The Journal of Discourses deservedly ranks as one of the standard works of the Church" (Ibid., Vol. 8, Preface). Mormons cannot reject the messages of earlier LDS apostles and prophets without affecting the validity of their current prophet and apostles. Mormons often quote Amos 3:7 to teach that we need prophets today. It says, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." But, LDS Prophets Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff told the first vision story incorrectly, if the official version is correct. If LDS leaders told the first vision story wrong, could they also be wrong about other LDS doctrines? Mormons claim their apostles and prophets clarify God's message, but instead they have taught contradictory things about the first vision. Is God the author of confusion? (I Cor. 14:33.)

Moroni or Nephi

The angel Moroni story has also been changed since the first edition of the P.of G.P. was published in 1851. That edition said that the angel "Nephi" revealed the gold plates to Smith (p. 41). Other early Mormon sources which mention the angel Nephi are: The Millennial Star Vol III, pp. 53, 71 and Times and Seasons Vol. III pp. 749, 753. In the latter volume on page 710, Joseph Smith said, "This paper commences my editorial career. I alone stand responsible for it." Thus, if the angel's name is wrong, Smith is at fault. In 1853, Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, also said the angel's name was Nephi

(Biographical Sketches, p. 79). Most Mormons today have never heard that the angel Nephi revealed the gold plates to Joseph Smith. But, Mormons assume the B. of M. must have come from God if an angel revealed it to Joseph Smith. However, the Bible warns that even "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14). The apostle Paul also said in Gal. 1:8, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Did Moroni (or Nephi) preach the same gospel that Paul did in Galatians and the other epistles? If Moroni did preach the same message as Paul did, we already had the message and therefore we do not need the B. of M. But, if Moroni preached a different gospel than Paul did, he is under the curse of Gal. 1:8-9.

Inconsistency about Church Membership

In the official first vision story Smith questioned, "Who of all these parties are right; or are they all wrong together?" (P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:10). Later he said, "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 they were all wrong) - and which I should join" (Ibid., vs. 18). The words in parentheses were in the original and then deleted until 1981, but now that they have been put back in the text, they contradict verse 10! In response to his question concerning which church was the right one to join, Smith said, "I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong... He again forbade me to join any of them" (Ibid., vs. 19-20). But, Fayette Lapham said that about 1830 Smith's father told him that Joseph had joined the Baptist church in about 1824 (Historical Magazine, Vol. 8, No. 5, May 1870, pp. 305-306) The P. of G.P. J.S. History 1:7 says that Joseph's mother and sister Sophronia as well as his two brothers, Hyrum and Samuel, joined the Presbyterian church when the revival came. They remained members until September, 1828. Wesley Walters found this information in the Sessions Records, Vol. II, for the Western Presbyterian Church of Palmyra, New York. He also found that in 1822 Joseph Smith "caught a spark of Methodism and became a very passible exhorter in the evening meetings" (History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, 1851, p. 214). In order to be teaching in a Methodist church, Joseph must have been accepted rather than persecuted as he claimed in the P. of G.P., J.S. History 1:21-22. In 1828, Joseph sought membership in the Methodist church where his wife, Emma, had belonged since she was seven years old. The death of their firstborn son on June 15, 1828, may have motivated him to do that.

Emma Smith's cousins, Joseph and Heil Lewis, were members of the Methodist church which Joseph tried to join in Harmony, Pennsylvania. They said, "Joseph presented himself in a very serious and humble manner, and the minister, not suspecting evil, put his name on the class book, in the absence of some of the official members" (The Amboy Journal, April 30, 1879).

Joseph Lewis later added,

I with Joshua McKune, a local preacher at the time, I think in June, 1828, heard on Saturday that Joe Smith had joined the church on Wednesday afternoon (as it was customary in those days to have circuit preaching at my father's house on week day). We thought it was a disgrace to the church to have a practicing necromancer, a dealer in enchantments and bleeding ghosts, in it. So on Sunday, we went to father's, the place of meeting that day, and got there in season to see Smith and talked to him some time in father's shop before meeting. Told him that his occupation, habits, and moral character were at variance with the discipline, that his name would be a disgrace to the church, and there should have been recantation, confession and at least promised reformation - that he could that day publicly ask that his

name be stricken from the class book, or stand investigation. He chose the former, and did that very day make request that his name be taken off the class book (The Amboy Journal, June 11, 1879).

Joseph Smith's brother-in-law, Michael Morse, said that Smith's name remained on the class book for about six months (Ibid., May 21, 1879). Since Morse was the class leader who enrolled Smith, he may be right. But why did Joseph Smith seek to join the Methodist church in 1828 if Jesus Christ told him not to join any church in 1820? (See Mormonism - Shadow or Reality?, pp. 161-162).

The 1826 Trial

Joseph Lewis said that Joseph Smith should not be kept on the Methodist Class roll because he was a "practicing necromancer" and "dealer in enchantments and bleeding ghosts." On March 20, 1826, Joseph Smith was brought to trial for deceiving people into thinking he could find buried treasures by looking through a certain stone. He was charged court costs of \$2.68 by Justice Albert Neely. (Fraser's Magazine, February, 1873, Vol. VII, pp. 229-230). LDS author, Francis Kirkham did not believe the report in Fraser's magazine and challenged it by writing:

If such a court record confession could be identified and proved, then it follows that his believers must deny his claimed divine guidance which led them to follow him... How could he be a prophet of God, the leader of the Restored Church to these tens of thousands if he had been the superstitious fraud which 'the pages of a book' declared he confessed to be? (A New Witness for Christ in America, Vol. I, pp. 486-487).

And on p. 386 of the same volume, he declared, "No such record was ever made." But Wesley Walters found it in the basement of the Chenango County jail in Norwich, New York! Photo copies of it are available from Utah Lighthouse Ministry.

Kirkham knew that Joseph Smith claimed the angel Moroni visited him annually from 1823 until 1827 when he received the gold plates and translated them by the gift and power of God. He also knew that angel visits and using magic stones to find buried treasure do not belong together. Jesus also said, "No man can serve two Masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

Joseph Smith's Death

This book is too brief to discuss many of the historical details of Mormonism, but Joseph Smith's death deserves some comment. At the time of his death, Smith was living in Nauvoo, Illinois, the second largest city in the state. Smith taught that the Latter Day Saints should be gathered to one place (D. & C. 29:7-8). Therefore, Nauvoo was a Mormon town and Smith dominated its government as well as its religion. In Nauvoo, Smith began to privately teach Mormon leaders the doctrine of polygamy. When some Mormons heard what their leaders were doing, they vigorously opposed it. But, they did not get much attention until June 7, 1844, when they published the first and only edition of the Nauvoo Expositor newspaper. In it, they exposed Smith's lifestyle and that made him angry. He, along with the Nauvoo City Council, declared that the Nauvoo Expositor was a nuisance and had the marshal of the city destroy the press (D.H.C. Vol. 6, pp. 448-454). Those who opposed Smith filed a complaint with the courts in Hancock County, Illinois, saying that Smith had infringed on the freedom of the press. Smith was arrested for riot, but appealed for a writ of Habeas Corpus. He was tried in Nauvoo where he was quickly released. That upset the opposition, who claimed Smith had manipulated the law. The opposition grew until Smith was afraid Nauvoo would be attacked, so he declared martial law. Illinois had granted Nauvoo governmental power like a city-state.

They had their own army, the Nauvoo Legion, and Smith was Lieutenant-General of that army. The opposition saw the declaration of martial law as an act of treason against the state of Illinois, so Smith was again arrested and taken to Carthage, Illinois, where he could not influence the court like he did in Nauvoo. It was while Smith was in jail at Carthage that he was killed by a mob.

Mormons often call Smith the "Martyred Prophet" and speak of his death much like Christ's death. Shortly before he died, Smith reportedly said, "I am going like a lamb to the slaughter" (D.& C. 135:4). Christ died without a fight (Luke 23:24; I Peter 2:23), but did Joseph Smith? On June 27, 1844, a mob came to the Carthage jail, where Joseph and Hyrum Smith were prisoners. Some of the mob entered the jail while others remained outside. As the mob started shooting,

Joseph sprang to his coat for his six-shooter, Hyrum for his single barrel, Taylor for Markham's large hickory cane, and Dr. Richards for Taylor's cane. All sprang against the door, the balls whistled up the stairway, and in an instant one came through the door...Hyrum was retreating back in front of the door and snapped his pistol when a ball struck him in the left side of the nose, and he fell on his back on the floor saying, 'I am a dead man'...Joseph reached round the door casing, and discharged his six-shooter into the passage, some barrels missing fire (D.H.C., Vol. VI, pp. 617-618).

The introduction of the same volume says on page XLI, "the Prophet turned from the prostrate form of his murdered brother to face death-dealing guns and bravely returned the fire of his assailants, 'bringing his man down every time,' and compelling John Hay (former Secretary of State) who but reluctantly accords the Prophet any quality of virtue to confess that he 'made a handsome fight' in the jail."

John Taylor, who was in the jail with Smith and who later became the third LDS Prophet, said Joseph "opened the door slightly, and snapped the pistol six successive times. Only three of the barrels, however, were discharged. I afterwards understood that two or three were wounded by these discharges, two of whom, I am informed, died" (The Gospel Kingdom, p. 360; D.H.C., Vol. VII, pp. 100-103).

While we do not condone the action of the mob in killing Joseph and Hyrum Smith, we cannot agree with the LDS that Joseph was a martyr who went "as a lamb to the slaughter."

When Joseph Smith was killed, Brigham Young assumed the leadership of most of the Mormons. But many other factions joined together in 1860 under the leadership of Smith's son, Joseph Smith III, to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They are the second largest "Mormon" group, but dozens of other factions still exist. Each one claims it is the only true church and all others are apostate. For a description of some of those sects, see *Little Known Schisms of the Restoration* by Russell R. Rich, published by Brigham Young University. Kate Carter, past president of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers said, "off-shoots from the original church are nearing the one hundred mark" (*Denominations That Base Their Beliefs On The Teachings Of Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet*, p. 1). Since that book was written, over 100 more Mormon schisms have been identified. *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* by Steven Shields, Published by Restoration Research, P.O. Box 547, Bountiful, UT 84010, identifies many of these schisms. By their existence, those schisms refute the LDS claim that a prophet will keep the church united and avoid factions and divisions.

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