

"... Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error"

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EXAMINING A MORMON CLAIM: WAS THERE A UNIVERSAL APOSTASY?

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The question asked in the title of this article is a crucial one, for without a universal apostasy of the primitive church, the Mormon claim to being the restored church, falls. The teaching that there was such an apostasy and its significance is presented in many LDS publications. It is the contention in this brief study that the Mormon claim that there was a universal apostasy—which required a re-establishment of the Church—is unscriptural and unhistorical, and that Mormons often misuse the sources which they cite in support of their views.

In the Preface to his work, **The Great Apostasy**, Apostle James E. Talmage stated his Church's position and the importance of the universal apostasy to its existence:

"The restored Church affirms that a general apostasy developed during and after the apostolic period, and that the primitive Church lost its power, authority, and graces as a divine institution, and degenerated into an earthly organization only. The significance and importance of the great apostasy, as a condition precedent to the re-establishment of the Church

in modern times, is obvious. *If the alleged apostasy of the primitive Church was not a reality, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not the divine institution its name proclaims*" [Italics added].

Mormons find important confirmation for their universal apostasy in Joseph Smith's First Vision which he claimed took place in the spring of 1820. He reported that in answer to his prayer as to which of the churches he should join, he was told that he "must join none of them, for they all were wrong . . ." (see **The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony** for a complete account). The significance of Joseph's experience is explained in the Introduction to **History of the Church** (p. XL):

"This is a tremendous arraignment of all Christendom. It charges a condition of universal apostasy from God. . . . *Nothing less than a complete apostasy from the Christian religion would warrant the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* [Italics added].

In a colorful mass-distribution brochure, **The Falling Away and**

Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ Foretold, quotations are taken from the New Testament (Paul and Peter), Martin Luther, John Wesley, Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson to support the Mormon claim of a total apostasy and a restoration.

On the basis of the sources mentioned above, the Mormon arguments for apostasy and restoration may be summarized as follows: (1) The Bible predicts such an apostasy and restoration, (2) Various observers (primarily churchmen) agree that such an apostasy took place, and (3) Joseph Smith's experience in 1820, the First Vision, is the ultimate confirmation.

On the other hand, if the universal apostasy is not proven, in the words of Talmage, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not the divine institution its name proclaims." Mormon claims will be examined under the three major arguments presented above.

The Bible Predicts a Universal Apostasy

The Bible does predict an apostasy (a "falling away") and Bible writers even gave warning that it had already begun during the first century (2 Thess. 2:3; I Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:3-4; I John 2:18-19; 4:3). Mormon writers cite a number of Bible references in an attempt to prove a universal apostasy (for example see *The Great Apostasy*, pp. 23-28; *A Marvelous Work and A Wonder*, pp. 30-33), but an examination of each of these reveals that not one of them speaks of the apostasy as being total, and some do not even apply to the Church or the Church Age.

It is significant to note that Mormon Heber C. Snell, identified as a

former LDS Institute Director and teacher of courses in the Bible at Utah State University, even questioned the interpretation of some of the same texts:

"Numerous texts of the Bible (e.g., Is. 24:5; Amos 8:11, 12; II Tim. 4:3, 4; II Pet. 2:1-12) are said by Mormon writers to point toward the complete apostasy of the ancient Christian Church. Thorough study of such texts, taking into account their history, will usually show that they are descriptive of conditions in the writer's own time or of events which, in his view, will shortly occur. It would be difficult indeed to prove that the Bible writers had their eyes fixed on specific events to take place centuries after their own day. If space permitted, many examples of questionable interpretations of biblical texts could be cited from Mormon writings" [Dialogue: *A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1967, p. 62].

After stating that he was not questioning LDS doctrines, Snell explained:

"My one objective has been to question the validity of the biblical support claimed for certain theological teachings held by Church writers and so to lead to a better way of dealing with Scripture in the interest of truth. The Bible, in my view, has been too much used by Church theologians as a repository of proof texts, with little or no regard for the historical background or context for the sections cited" [p. 63].

Various Observers Support a Universal Apostasy

Because it contains a manageable and representative sampling of

claimed verifiers of the Mormon universal apostasy view, the brochure mentioned above, *The Falling Away and Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ Foretold*, will be used to present the Mormon argument on this point.¹

Martin Luther. The following Luther quotes in the LDS brochure are captioned, "CHRISTIANITY HAS CEASED TO EXIST." "I have sought nothing beyond reforming the Church in conformity with the Holy Scriptures... I simply say that Christianity has ceased to exist among those who should have preserved it." (In E. G. Schweibert, *Luther and His Times*, p. 509; and John M. Todd, *Martin Luther*, p. 188).²

An examination of these two sources revealed that neither supported the view that Luther believed that "Christianity Has Ceased to Exist." The Schweibert (not Schweibert) quote is accurately cited, but this reference alone says nothing about a universal apostasy. The key words are "reforming the Church"—not restoring the Church—as the Mormons require. One cannot reform that which no longer exists (see *Luther's Works*, Vol. 39, p. 172).³

The Todd quote has been edited in such a way as to conceal the focus of Luther's statement. The complete sentence here reads, "I simply say that Christianity has ceased to exist among those who should have preserved it—the bishops and scholars" [Italics added]. It should also be noted that this deletion of words was not indicated by the use of ellipses in the brochure. The Todd quote actually comes from Heinrich Boehmer's book, *Martin Luther: Road to Reformation*, p. 392, in which

Luther's very next statement is: "But I have no doubt that the truth has always continued to live in some, if only in the souls of children in the cradle. I do not repudiate the Church Fathers. (See also *Luther's Works*, Vol. 32, p. 10.) The misuse of the Luther material not only illustrates an unscholarly or dishonest handling of sources, but it also reveals a total ignorance of Luther's doctrine of the Church which could easily be discovered by consulting such sources as *Luther's Works*. Several Luther quotations should suffice. "For the Church is ruled by the Spirit of God and the saints are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8 [14]). And Christ remains with his Church even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:20); and the Church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15)" (Vol. 33, p. 85). "Thus under the papacy there have always been and still are some believers whom we do not know, whom God preserves by means of the Word and the Sacraments, against the will of the devil and the pope" (Vol. 12, p. 297). "But it is impossible that there has been no church for fourteen hundred years" (Vol. 54, p. 243). "Who, then, even at the present time would venture to deny that... God has preserved for himself a Church among the common people..." (Vol. 33, p. 86).

John Wesley. Under the caption, "GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST NO LONGER FOUND," a portion of one of Wesley's sermons is quoted:

"It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were common in the Church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the

Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian. . . . From this time they almost totally ceased. . . . The Christians had no more of the Spirit of Christ than the other heathens. . . . This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian Church; because the Christians were turned Heathen again, and had only a dead form left." (*Wesley's Works*, Vol. 7, Sermon 89, pp. 26, 27).

This sermon has also been quoted by other Mormons such as Elder B. H. Roberts, in a lecture given on January 28, 1884 (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 25, p. 133) and the Apostle James E. Talmage in his books *The Articles of Faith* (pp. 201-202) and *The Great Apostasy* (pp. 120-121).

In citing Wesley in an effort to support the Mormon viewpoint, his statements must be lifted from their context and misinterpreted. Wesley here was dealing with the disappearance of the "extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost" which he had just explained as referring to such gifts as "healing the sick, prophesying . . . speaking with strange tongues . . . and the miraculous interpretation of tongues." He then proceeded to explain that these were not essential for Christianity to continue, but that there was "a more excellent way" (quoting I Cor. 12:31). The interested reader should read the entire sermon.⁴

What other evidence might be cited to prove that Wesley did not believe in a total apostasy of the Church? First, he never gave up his ordination or membership in the Anglican Church (R. Burtner and R. Chiles,

eds., *A Compend of Wesley's Theology*, p. 253). Second, although he was aware of the weaknesses and flaws in the Church, he specifically denied that apostasy was universal in another sermon, citing the very reference used in the brochure:

"Is not this the falling away or apostasy from God, foretold by St. Paul in his second epistles to the Thessalonians, chap. 2, vs. 3? Indeed, *I would not dare to say*, with George Fox, *that this apostasy was universal; that there never were any real Christians in the world, from the days of the apostles till this time*. But we may boldly say, that wherever Christianity has spread, the apostasy has spread also: insomuch that, although *there are now and always have been individuals who were real Christians*, yet the whole world never did, nor can at this day, show a Christian country or city" [Italics added—*Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 2, p. 65].

In his sermons, "The Wisdom of God's Counsels," he stated that even in the first century there was a falling away from God's standards revealed in the Bible itself, and

"from this time, for fourteen hundred years, it was corrupted more and more, as all history shows, till scarce any, either of the power or form of religion, was left.

Nevertheless it is certain, that the gates of hell did never totally prevail against it. God has always preserved a seed for himself; a few that worshipped him in spirit and in truth" [Italics added—*Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 2, p. 110].

Third, Wesley viewed the eigh-

teenth century as one specially blessed by God, "For whoever makes a fair and candid inquiry, will easily perceive that true religion has in no wise decreased, but greatly increased in the present century . . . (*Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 2, p. 362).

It is obvious then, that the Mormon use of Wesley, as with Luther, reveals an unscholarly or dishonest handling of a source as well as an ignorance of his beliefs.

Roger Williams. The caption, "WAITING FOR NEW APOSTLES," is placed over the following quote:

"There is no regularly constituted church on earth, nor any person qualified to administer any church ordinances; nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the Great Head of the Church for whose coming I am seeking." (*Picturesque American*, p. 502)

The book from which this quote was taken can in no sense be viewed as a primary source or even a good secondary source. *Picturesque America* contains a collection of articles dealing with rivers, lakes, forests, cities, etc. and the article of a few pages from which this quotation was taken deals with "Providence and Vicinity." It is disturbing to find that in this quote of less than three lines, there have been a number of word changes in the Mormon brochure.

While it is true that Roger Williams came to believe that "no apostolic or pastoral ministry and hence no true church of Christ existed or was possible," because of his position on the necessity of apostolic succession, "he did not conclude that all preaching of the gospel and all

assemblies of worship must cease during the reign of Antichrist. Throughout this period, he thought, God had raised up 'prophets in sackcloth' to lead His people through the wilderness" (E. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State*, p. 50). It is significant, as Edmund S. Morgan observed, that "though Williams' arguments often provide the logic for the conclusion, none of his voluminous publications and none of his surviving private letters were written for the purpose of persuading others that the church was dead" (p. 55). And further,

"When his opponents accused him of denying the church altogether, he compared himself to one who suffers the night or an eclipse of the sun without denying the sun's existence. He never urged men to stop worshipping God together; he kept discussing the proper form for the church as though it still existed; he even seemed to suggest that men should continue the search for a pure church and go through the motions of church worship while waiting the return of Christ. But he could not conscientiously join with any group of worshippers who took upon themselves the name of a church.

Williams longed to think that this problem would shortly be solved by Christ Himself" (pp. 55-56).

Roger Williams' view of the millennium differs from the Mormons, for "when he spoke of the millennial rule of Christ, he referred quite specifically to a restoration of the church to what he conceived to be its apostolic form" (W. Gilpin, *The Millenarian*

Piety of Roger Williams, p. 61). Mormons claim that their Church is the restored Church—but in their view of the millennium it is yet future (B. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed., p. 493). Williams' Puritan theology would never have allowed him to view the Mormon Church as a fulfillment of his restoration hopes.

Thomas Jefferson. Under the caption "SEES A RESTORATION OF CHRISTIANITY," Jefferson is quoted as follows:

"The religion builders have so distorted and deformed the doctrines of Jesus, so muffled them in mysticisms, fancies and falsehoods, have caricatured them into forms so inconceivable, as to shock reasonable thinkers. . . . Happy in the prospect of a restoration of primitive Christianity, I must leave to younger persons to encounter and lop off the false branches which have been engrafted into it by the mythologists of the middle and modern ages." (*Jefferson's Complete Works*, Vol. V. pp. 210, 257)

It is surprising that anyone professing Christianity would quote anything that Jefferson wrote in support of a "restoration of Christianity," for Jefferson was not a Christian. One would have to be ignorant of his religious views in order to use him in this way. Adrienne Koch identified Jefferson as a "Unitarian," a "deist" and as a "conservative materialist" (*The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson*, pp. 25-34). As to his religious views, he "rejected miracles, inspiration, and revelation without compromise: he was acridly critical of the ignorance and fallibility of the apostles, particularly denouncing St. Paul as the

principal corrupter of the doctrines of Christ" (Koch, p. 35). He rejected any supernatural interpretation of Jesus' person or inspiration—he was only a man (Koch, p. 25). While Jefferson did believe in a "'Fabricator of all things . . . a Superintending power,'" he also wrote that "'of the nature of this Being we know nothing'" (Koch, p. 37). His was a humanistic interpretation of Christianity.

What, then, did Jefferson mean by a "restoration of primitive Christianity?" Certainly it was not a restoration of the church, apostles, ordinances, etc.—the Mormon view of restoration—but a return to "the genuine and simple religion of Jesus . . . such as it was preached and practiced by himself" (S. Padover, ed., *Thomas Jefferson on Democracy*, p. 118). Jefferson's loyalty to Jesus' ethics "was somewhat akin to personal religion. But it is important to realize," as Adrienne Koch cautioned, "that this 'religiousness' of Jefferson was not based upon a point-by-point agreement with everything Jesus had taught" (Koch, p. 33). In fact, Jefferson even edited "the Gospels by selecting only the 'genuine' statements of Jesus and rejecting the 'spurious' ones written by his misguided or dishonest disciples," which he published in a book, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (Koch, p. 23).

In conclusion, Jefferson cannot be legitimately used to support the Mormons concept of apostasy and restoration or any other genuinely Christian teaching.

Peter and Paul. Under the captions, "A FALLING AWAY PROPHESIED" and "ALL THINGS TO BE RESTORED," the brochure quotes

two Bible references often used by Mormons in support of their teaching: 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3 and Acts 3:20-21.

Briefly, how might the Mormon use of these passages be answered? Second Thessalonians does teach that the Second Coming of Christ would be preceded by an apostasy, but it does not teach that genuine Christians would fall away or that the apostasy would be universal. (See such passages as Matt. 24:10-13; John 6:37-40; John 10:28; Rom. 5:6-10; Rom. 8:38, 39; I Tim. 4:1; II Tim. 4:18.)

The "restitution of all things" mentioned in Acts 3:20-21 is interpreted by Mormons to mean that after universal apostasy the gospel was restored by divine agency through Joseph Smith (L. Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 1975 ed, p. 35). To interpret the reference as the Mormons have is to lift it from its biblical context. The "restitution" spoken of in verse 21 is limited by that "which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." In examining this passage and the Greek words translated "restoration of all things," Hans-George Link explained, "This sentence accords with the eschatological messianic hopes of OT prophecy and Judaism. . . . The *apokatastasis pantōn* does not mean the conversion of all mankind, but the restoration of all things and circumstances which the OT prophets proclaimed, i.e. the universal renewal of all the earth" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 148). This restoration would see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of a "new heaven

and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1) with the Second Coming of Christ and the Messianic Age.

Joseph Smith's First Vision

Space does not allow more than a brief mention of the First Vision. The importance of this event to the Mormon Church was reviewed by Rev. Wesley P. Walters, "Mormon leaders have repeatedly asserted that the foundation of their church rests on the truthfulness of Joseph Smith, Jr.'s First Vision story. If the story is false, they have declared, the whole of Mormonism is a fraud (*The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. 4 (1980) p. 92).

Realizing the importance of this event to the Mormon Church, in the mid-1960's Walters began a historical investigation of the Palmyra Revival (Spring 1820) which Joseph Smith claimed confused him and caused him to pray to God to seek His answer as to which church he should join. After his investigation, Walters concluded that Smith's account did not square with historical fact. His findings were published in the Fall 1967 issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. This study was later reprinted in booklet form by the Utah Christian Tract Society (*New Light on Mormon Origins*). This treatment was expanded and published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1969) along with a rebuttal by Dr. Richard Bushman, and a reply by Walters. Dr. Milton V. Backman, Jr., argued in defense of the 1820 revival and the First Vision account in *Brigham Young University Studies* (Spring 1969) and in his book, *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Bookcraft 1971, revised 1980). An update on the subject was

published by Walters in 1980 in *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* (Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 92-109), in an article entitled "Joseph Smith's First Vision Story Revisited."

In this last article Walter surveyed the three major Mormon responses to his original study: (1) to ignore the evidence and assert that there was a revival, (2) to attempt to verify an 1820 revival, and (3) to claim that Smith's account was too ambiguous to ascertain what he meant. After an examination of each of these, Walters concluded, "In our judgment none of these have shaken the evidence that proves Joseph's story a fabrication" (p. 109). The concerned or interested reader would do well to look over all the treatments mentioned in this article to see if Walter's judgment is warranted. He has done his homework. His research is sold.⁵

In summary: no 1820 revival—no First Vision—no confirmation of apostasy, and no restoration.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article it was stated that the Mormons claim there was a universal apostasy—which required a re-establishment of the Church—was unscriptural and unhistorical, and that Mormons often misuse the sources which they cite in support of their views. Although the examination of these charges has been brief, they have been verified. Much more evidence could have been

presented if space permitted. The Mormon's teaching of a total apostasy is false. Therefore, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is not the divine institution its name proclaims."

NOTES:

1. For further information the reader of the brochure is directed to contact the Missionary Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

2. The quotations and documentation used here represent an improved revision of an earlier version. Rev. John Juedes, while a student at Concordia Seminary, tried to find one of the references as originally given, and failed, even after consulting those with expertise on the subject.

3. The volumes of *Luther's Works* quoted here are the "American Edition," ed. by J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, published by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press.

4. The sermon identified in the Mormon brochure as number 89 is the same as that numbered 94 in *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 2, (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1854), pp. 266-273.

5. An extensive examination of the First Vision account is presented in Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*, enlarged ed. 1982, pp. 143-162D.

THE FINAL TESTIMONY OF HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG

by Dr. Roy E. Knuteson
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Herbert W. Armstrong is dead. The founder of one of the most influential cults of our time, The World-Wide Church of God, has met his Maker.

The man who denied the reality of hell and a present heaven now knows the difference.

Just before he died at age 93, he published his last book entitled: "MYSTERY OF THE AGES," which is a summary of the main tenets of his preaching and writing for the last 53 years. In the PLAIN TRUTH magazine and over the WORLD TOMORROW radio and television broadcasts, most of these same heresies have been regularly promulgated. However, some new information emerges in this final book which should also be considered and refuted.

In typical Armstrong style, he boasts that this book "may be the most important book written in the last 1,900 years!" In a promotional letter introducing this book, he stated: "This is the most important book ever written, next to the Bible." He claims he was "inspired of God" to write this 300-page volume. We shall see. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word (The Bible) they have no light of dawn" (Jeremiah 8:20 NIV).

What is the final testimony of the man who claimed to be the one and only "apostle" for these last days? He tells us that "seven mysteries" were revealed exclusively to him by Almighty God, whom he calls "The Eternal." In addition, he tells for the first time, of a dream his wife had in 1916 in which Christ is purported to have manifested Himself to them, and called him to prepare the world for the Second Coming. He rejects dream revelations "99,999 out of 100,000" times except on this one occasion! He sincerely believes that he was singled out in the same way that Jeremiah or Paul was called. He states: "No world religious leader ever arrived at his teachings as I

did." "I was taught by Jesus Christ." Interestingly, Joseph Smith made similar claims.

Here, then, is a review of these so-called "mysteries that have bewildered all mankind," except, of course, Herbert W. Armstrong.

The Nature of God

Armstrong teaches what he calls the "God Family" idea, which family was originally composed of God and "another person who later was begotten as Jesus Christ." He rejects the fact of a distinct third person of the Godhead called the Holy Spirit. He, therefore, rejects the Trinity . . . , which he says "destroys the very gospel of Jesus Christ." God, he tells us, is not limited to two persons because His purpose is to "reproduce himself into billions of God-Persons." This is the Mormon error with a newer twist.

In addition, he says, God, the Father has form and shape, including "hands, fingers, hair on his head, and arms and legs." This, he claims, is the only way man could be made in God's image. Armstrong's view of God is simply a continuation of age-old heresies like Monarchianism and Arianism, which numerous cults have embraced over the last 1,900 years. There is no "mystery" or new revelation in his view of God, as any Bible believer can plainly see.

Angels and Spirit Beings

Armstrong claims that he and his first wife had personal angelic visitations in which these created spirit beings spoke audibly to them, and on several occasions actually overpowered him and steered his car! Angels, he claims, were placed here on earth under Lucifer to rule this planet. However, sin entered through Satan and his demons, and these spirit beings then refused to do the work they were commissioned to do.

Armstrong claims to have cast out many of these demons and says that "some are silly, like spoiled children; some are crafty, sharp, shrewd, subtle, and some are sassy, sullen, and morose, but all are perverted, warped, and twisted." With no mention of the human sinful nature, Armstrong blames these fallen angels for all the evil in the world, including every evil thought. The holy angels, he says have a special ministry to "help in the righteous character development of the myriads of humans who shall yet become members of the great God family." Members of the World-Wide Church of God will assist these angels as "co-saviors" in the coming kingdom of God! Some of what Armstrong writes about angels and demons is scripturally true, but many new ideas have been injected that have no biblical support whatever.

The Purpose of Man

"Man," he writes, "was created to finish the creation of the physical earth, which sinning angels deliberately refused to do." This work includes subduing the entire universe! Armstrong belabors the point that man does not have an "immortal soul" and then goes on to repeat his heresy that we were created to become "God-Beings." "The sole value of human life," he says, "lies in the human spirit and the potential of later being born VERY GOD." To such beings has been given the "incredible human potential of finishing the creation of the vast universe." Mormonism again!

"No one is saved now," he asserts. "We are not saved through the death of Christ. God," he says, "has closed off salvation to mankind for 6,000 years and salvation cannot be opened

to humanity until Jesus unseats Satan and restores the government of God to this planet." The "good news" he preaches is not salvation from sin, but the government of God in the millennium, which is also the heretical doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Believing that salvation is only through a future resurrection, which he calls the "new birth," Armstrongism also teaches that at the Great White Throne judgment on Revelation 20, all who have ever lived will be given a chance to repent and then "be begotten to eternal life." Most all will accept future offer of allegiance he says, since "today is not the day of salvation." And what of those who claim to be "born-again Christians" today? "They are all deceived," he says.

Origins of Civilization

"The world," we are told, "was recreated in six days" and somehow, although not explained, the various races emerged from the beginning and went through the Tower of Babel experience of dispersion. Quoting from one of his own associates, he "proves" that Semiramis (the supposed wife of Nimrod), is the founder of much of the world's pagan religions—including, of course, all the so-called "Christian observances of Christmas, New Years and Easter." But, in order to explain the continuation of false religion and the races after the flood, Armstrong states that Noah was "perfect" (Genesis 6:9) meaning he was of "unmixed lineage in his generations and undoubtedly that happened to be white." Then he tells us, without Bible documentation, that Noah's sons, Ham and Japheth, intermarried with a black and an oriental, and that this

is how the primary races were perpetuated. God's purpose, we are informed, is to "create humanity to become supremely happy and joyfully successful in eternal life." Since all civilization will be saved, according to his theory, everything is headed toward the wonderful "World Tomorrow." "These are the very last days of Satan's evil world. God's utopian civilization will be started with the present generation," he asserts.

The Identity of Israel

One of the main features of Armstrongism has been the old heresy of "British-Israelism," or the doctrine that Great Britain is really the lost tribe of Ephraim, and that the United States is Manasseh. This means that we are really "Israel" and that all the Old Testament covenants, promises, and judgments apply directly to us! The identity of "true Israel" he says, "is a mystery that few understand." Therefore, since Britain and America are the recipients of the "birthright" of Jacob, we are also to experience the Great Tribulation, or the "Time of Jacob's Trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7).

Armstrong denies the rapture, since it does not fit into his picture of America as Israel. His logic rules out many times the revelation of God. Since the tribulation is appointed to Israel primarily, he concludes, therefore, that "God will strike down America and Britain first, and He will use a United Europe to punish Britain-America." He claims that it will "happen in this generation." He insists upon this time of reference because he also believes that all history must culminate before the year 2,000, since "God works in a 7,000-year time frame."

The Nature of the Church

Anyone acquainted with Herbert W. Armstrong's cult knows that he considers "The World-Wide Church

of God" as the one and only true church. He claims that "the gospel of Jesus Christ was not proclaimed to the world from about 50 A.D. until the year 1933 (when he began broadcasting on a 50-watt station in Oregon).

The true church, he claims, will be recognized by the name (Church of God); by the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday); by the recognition of the seven annual festivals of ancient Israel (Pentecost, Tabernacles, etc.) and by the "true gospel" (which he alone preaches). He claims that his church has had "at least 18 basic and essential truths restored to it" which absolutely no others have!

Armstrong says that the real purpose of the church is "not to get people saved," but rather to be the "spiritual Mother of converts." This means that his members are "not to go out and preach the Good News," but rather to support Christ's Apostle (Armstrong) who single-handedly "takes the gospel to the whole world." Thus the Great Commission is by-passed, and one wonders who will be preaching the "Good News" now that the divinely appointed "Apostle" has died?

Every religious body in the world is "counterfeit Christianity," except his organization. He claims that this is now the "Philadelphia Era" and that the "open door" of Revelation 3:8 is his radio, T.V. and literature ministry. Likewise he claims to be fulfilling personally Matthew 24:14, which states that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come."

Armstrong takes time out in his last book to castigate the members of his church who have left his organization. "They are apostates and are the ones that will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire, unless they return to the fold," he warns.

The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God, we are told, is the 1000-year reign of Christ upon the earth. Most Christians would agree. But, the heresy he calls a "mystery" is that his church members alone will be the future rulers of that kingdom. Since almost everyone will be saved at the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the millennium, it follows that his faithful people alone will be the earth rulers before that time.

Armstrong claims, for the first time, that he is the "Elijah to come" prophesied in Malachi 4:5. This means that in the millennium he will be in charge of the "Headquarters Church," which will be "located at Christ's world capital in Jerusalem." He claims that he will personally "administer the world's new educational system," in a position directly under Jesus Christ! He says that his college campuses in California and Texas are a "modest example" of the educational systems of the future kingdom.

More revelation comes from the self-deceived "Apostle" in the news that John the Baptist will be under Armstrong in the international kingdom rule. We are also informed that Britain and America will again assume the leading nation roles in that day, and that Joseph will be "director of the world's economy, its agriculture, industry, technology,

and commerce." He says that Job will be the "engineer of the vast and stupendous world projects," and that he will be assisted by Zerubbabel! But perched on top of the entire pyramid of rulership will be Herbert W. Armstrong! This, he says, is the "plain truth." Another mystery revealed!

The Future of Armstrongism

With the passing of "The Apostle," the World-Wide Church of God may be in jeopardy. No successor has been groomed or introduced, since his son Garner Ted was excommunicated in 1979 for adultery and insubordination. It will be difficult for anyone to claim the mantle of this unique cult leader since he says that he was Elijah, the final Apostle to the world. However, the organization is well-funded, and will continue for a while on the momentum of its fifty-year history, vast organization, and world-wide publications. No doubt the organization will continue to play reruns of Armstrong's broadcasts which they have been doing occasionally even while he was living. Perhaps Garner Ted will be recalled to rescue the World-Wide Church when the revenue begins to fall. He was recalled once before and then deposed. Cult-watchers will be very interested to see the continued developments of this one of the most unique religious deviations in recent American history.

A BIOLOGIST EXAMINES THE BOOK OF MORMON

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I have thoroughly enjoyed my many Mormon friends. It is so refreshing to be around people who will stand up for their convictions. So, it is not with malice but with deep love and respect that I point out a few of the numerous scientific problems in the Book of Mormon.

Language Problems

I. Nephi 1:2 and Mosiah 1:4 assert that the native language of the Hebrews between 600 B.C. and 91 B.C. was Egyptian. Mormon 9:32 differs in saying that it was Reformed Egyptian around 400 A.D. However, it is well established that in 600 B.C.

the Hebrews spoke Hebrew. As a result of the Babylonian captivity (560 B.C. - 538 B.C.) Hebrew was reduced to the language of the scribes, priests, and rabbis. Aramaic became the language of the Hebrews. Then in 70 A.D. Titus forced the Hebrews out of Palestine, and they acquired the languages of the nations to which they were scattered. The Hebrews had not spoken Egyptian since Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt many centuries earlier.

In consulting with professors of Semitic languages at the University of California and elsewhere I could find no evidence of the existence of "Reformed Egyptian," nor for the claim that the following words are Egyptian or Semitic at all: Shazer (I. Nephi 16:13, 14), Irreantum (I. Nephi 17:5), deseret (for "bee" in Ether 2:3), Liahona (Alma 37:38), or the numerous names that are unique to the Book of Mormon.

Geographical Problems

I. Nephi 17:5 is an interesting description of Arabia which is "called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey." Arabia is bountiful in sunshine, petroleum, sand, heat, and fresh air, but certainly not in "much fruit and also wild honey," nor has it been since Pleistocene times.

I. Nephi 18:1 indicates that the Jews made a ship from the ample timber of Arabia. The same objection above applies here also.

I. Nephi 2:6-9 speaks of an abundant Arabian river named Laman that flows continually into the Red Sea! There has been no river whatever in Arabia since the Pleistocene.

I. Nephi 17:26-27 speaks of the crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians. Any good Bible dictionary will point out that the KJV translators did not know their geography. The Israelites crossed the Reed or March Sea, not the Red Sea. Yet, Mormons insist that while the Bible may have errors of translation, there are no such errors of translation for the Book of Mormon.

Amazingly, the numerous and detailed descriptions of North America cannot be correlated with any distinct geographic features such as the Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Rockies, Niagara Falls, Appalachians, or any rivers.

II Nephi 5:15, 16 is self-contradictory about the presence of minerals.

Botanical Problems

According to the Book of Mormon, God led Nephi and other faithful Jews to leave the "land of Jerusalem" (*sic*) to go to the Promised Land of North America. We are faced at once with some serious botanical problems, for in I. Nephi 18:24 (591 B.C.) we read that upon arrival the Jews planted the numerous seeds that they had brought, and that the seeds "did grow exceedingly, wherefore, we were blessed in abundance." As is well known, the dominant crops of the Near East were grapes, olives, wheat, barley, figs, dates, flax, onions, leeks, garlic, certain kinds of beans, pomegranates, and sycamore figs, certain melons, various oranges, lemons, and peaches. Crops from the Americas such as potatoes, tobacco, blueberries, cranberries, eggplants, and maize (or what we Americans call "corn"), were unknown in the Old World until modern times.

There is no evidence whatever that the Near Eastern crops ever "did grow exceedingly . . . in abundance" until modern Europeans brought them to the Americas. Admittedly, while modern European colonists did find grapes in the Americas, they are distinct from the Old World species.

Other botanical problems are encountered when III. Nephi 18:18 speaks of wheat in the Americas in 34 A.D. I. Nephi 13:7, Alma 1:29 and 4:6, Helaman 6:13, and Ether 10:24 speak of linen (cloth made from flax). Barley is mentioned in Mosiah 9:9; figs in III. Nephi 14:16, and olives in Jacob 5, I. Nephi 17:14, 15:7, 12, 16. None of these existed here at that time. "Neas" and "sheum" are mentioned in Mosiah 9:9 as two food plants that were prominent, and grew in abundance. Yet, if they were so prominent and important, why are there no references to them in Old World literature, and why have they not survived?

Plant grafting is mentioned in I. Nephi 15:16 and Jacob 5, yet there is no evidence that Indians practiced this in 600 B.C. to 421 A.D. Pruning is mentioned in II. Nephi 15:6, and faces a similar problem. To describe seed and plant growth as "swelling" (Alma 32:28-34 and 33:23) is naive and grossly inaccurate. It reflects the error of preformationism.

Zoological Problems

Contrary to what I. Nephi 18:25 asserts, North America had no cows, oxen, asses, horses, or goats "for the use of man" between 600 B.C. and the time European colonists brought them.

II. Nephi 21:6-8 plagiarize the KJV of Isaiah 11:6-8, and applies it to North America. (See also II. Nephi 30:12-14.) But, North America had no sheep, lions, leopards, or the two snakes (asps and cockatrices) at that time.

Ether 2:2-3 and 5:4 explain that

Jared and his family captured the birds, fish, and bees, and gathered seeds with which they populated North America. But American birds and fish are distinctly different from Old World species. Honey bees were first introduced by Europeans. Ether 6:1 claims that Jared and his small family kept alive for 344 days in the aquaria all of the species of fish that now inhabit the Americas.

Ether 9:18 and 19 contains several problems. First, it lists domestic cattle, oxen, and cows as separate species! Second, these did not exist in the Americas at that time. Third, domestic swine did not exist here then. Fourth, Jews would certainly not relish swine as "useful to man"! Fifth, horses, asses, and elephants did not exist in the Americas at that time. Prehistoric forms became extinct much earlier, and were not "useful to man." Sixth, "cureloms" and "cumoms" are not identified by Mormon scholars. Yet, it would be most unlikely for such supposedly useful and common domestic animals to go extinct.

(continued in next issue)

EDITOR JOHN DAHLIN IN HOSPITAL

On Tuesday, March 25, our editor fell in his backyard and broke his leg about six inches below the hip socket. An operation was performed and a pin put in to hold the broken bone in place. Mr. Dahlin is doing fine and getting about with the help of a walker. He will be released from the hospital by the time that you read this.

You may send cards, if you wish, to his home at 5917 Chicago Ave. So., Minneapolis, MN 55417.

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PERTINENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

John E. Dahlin, Editor

QUESTION . . . Who were the Four Cultic Leaders that died during the past year?

ANSWER . . . Among the principal leaders of these Major Cults who passed away in the past year were the following: **Victor Paul Wierville**, the founder and the head of **The Way International**. For several decades he built a strong constituency. The teachings of Wierville departed from several Biblical doctrines, which were substituted with a rationalistic interpretation. He died last year, and it is assumed his son will be the successor. Next in the list was **Lafayette Ron Hubbard**, founder of the **Church of Scientology**. He has offered certain so-called scientific methods for the solution of human problems. His whereabouts, in recent years, has been a mystery. His third wife was sentenced in 1979 to the penitentiary, for illegal activities by a Federal Court. The third who died in the recent period was **Spencer Kimball**, President of the Mormon Church, known officially as **The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints**. It is the largest cultic group in the country. He died at the age of 90 after a lengthy illness. His successor is **Ezra Taft Benson**, former Secretary of Agriculture in President Eisenhower's Administration. The last of the Four is **Herbert W. Armstrong**, founder of the **Worldwide Church of God**. Armstrong was 93 years old at the time of his death. For 50 years he dominated the movement. His son, a key person in the movement, was ousted a decade ago for his many irregularities. It is uncertain whether the new administrators will provide effective leadership. The key publication has been the magazine, **Plain Truth**.

(Note: We will return to the regular section Questions and Answers in *the next issue*.)