

Sects and Heresies

Understanding the deceptions that threaten authentic Christian faith through critical examination of false teachings and religious movements that lead believers astray from biblical truth.



How to Identify a Cult



Study the Warning Signs

Every believer has the right to practice their chosen religion, but not all religions are beneficial. Jesus himself warned against false prophets and taught that only two paths exist: the narrow way leading to eternal life, and the broad way leading to destruction.



Recognize the Threat

The first doctrinal attack against the Church was legalism. Some Jewish-Christians were pressuring new converts to practice Jewish laws, especially circumcision. This threatened the core Gospel message of salvation by grace through faith alone.



Understand Religious Plurality

Today thousands of cults and false religions exist worldwide. There are ten major world religions and over ten thousand sects, with six thousand located in Africa, twelve hundred in the United States, and the remainder in other countries.

Categories of Cultic Groups

Secret Societies

- Freemasonry
- Theosophy
- Rosicrucianism
- Esotericism

Pseudo-Christian Cults

- Mormonism
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Seventh-day Adventism
- Christian Science

Spiritist Groups

- Kardecism
- Legion of Good Will
- Christian Rationalism

Afro-Brazilian Religions

- Umbanda
- Quimbanda
- Candomblé
- Rational Culture

Why Study False Doctrines

Self-Defense

Various religious entities train their followers to go door-to-door seeking new converts. Some specialize in targeting evangelicals, especially new converts. Christians must be informed about what these groups teach to refute them biblically.

Flock Protection

A well-fed flock won't cause problems. We must invest time and resources in preparing church members through comprehensive Bible schools and extended baptismal courses that refute sectarian arguments.

Evangelization

Knowing the errors of cult members helps us present the truth they need. Among them are sincere people who need liberation and knowledge of God's Word. If we're prepared to approach them with biblical truth, we can win them to Christ.

Missions

Effective missionary work requires understanding the culture and native religiosity where we plant the Gospel. Prior knowledge of these elements enables us to reach people appropriately and effectively.

Biblical Discernment

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." - Matthew 7:15-16

Jesus didn't prohibit all judgment when He taught "judge not." The context shows He was warning against hypocritical judgment. In the same passage, He alerts us to "beware of false prophets." How could we guard against false prophets without identifying them through righteous judgment using Scripture as our standard?



Defining Key Terms

Sect and Heresy Origins

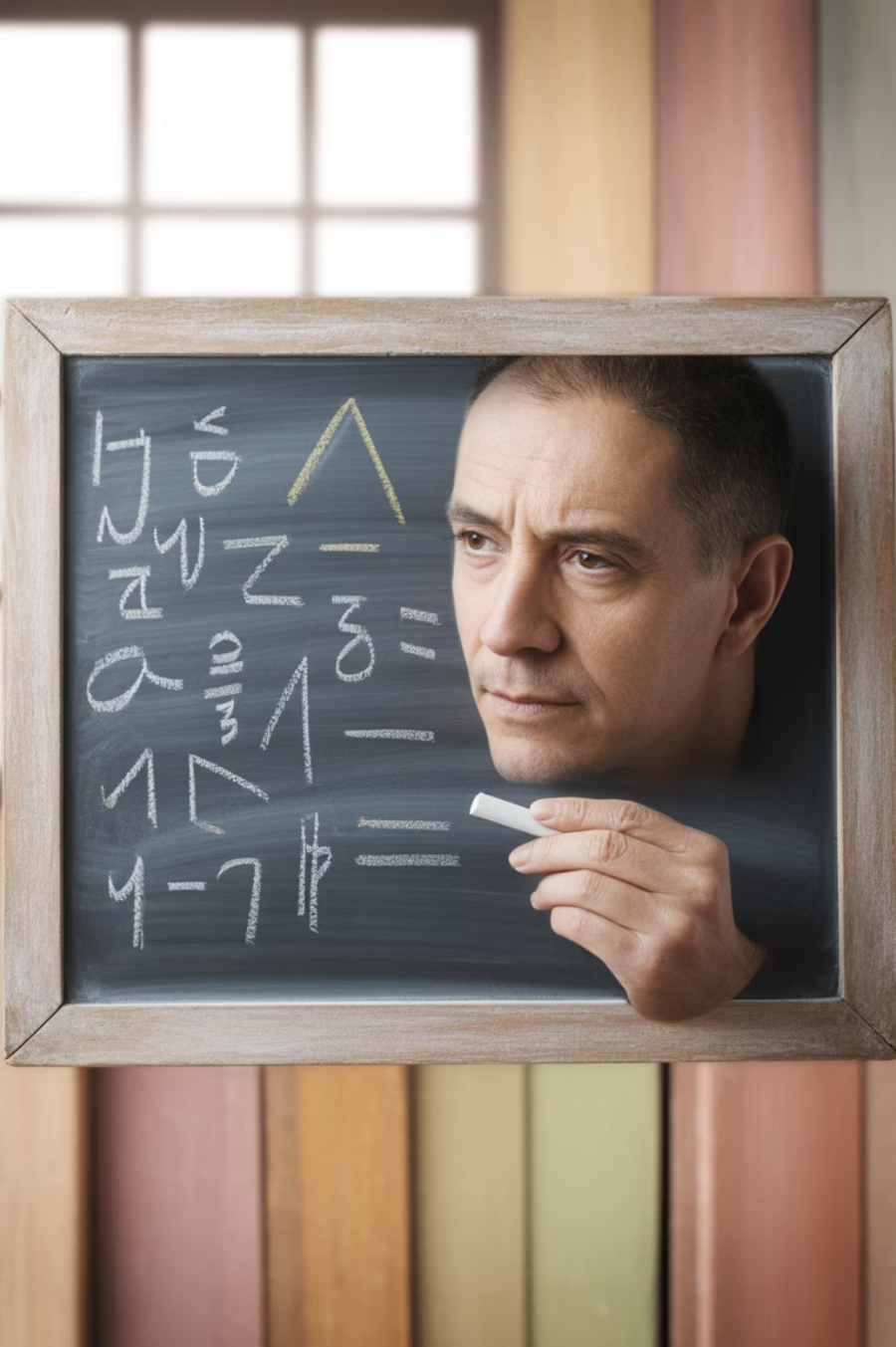
Both words derive from the Greek *hairesis*, meaning choice, party taken, current of thought, division, or school. Originally, the word had no pejorative sense. When Christianity was called a sect in Acts 24:5, it wasn't meant disparagingly.

Over time, *hairesis* assumed negative connotations. In theological terms, a sect refers to a group of people, while heresy indicates the anti-biblical doctrines defended by the group.

Three Forms of Doctrine

1. **Doctrine of God** - Acts 13:12; Titus 2:10 (Good)
2. **Doctrine of Men** - Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:22 (Harmful)
3. **Doctrine of Demons** - 1 Timothy 4:1 (Harmful)

We must distinguish God's doctrine from human and demonic teachings, or the consequences can be fatal.



The Four Mathematical Operations of Cults

The most efficient method for identifying a cult is recognizing the four paths they follow: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Cults know mathematical operations but never achieve satisfactory results.

Addition

The group adds something to the Bible. Their source of authority doesn't consider the Bible alone sufficient.

Seventh-day Adventists

Consider Ellen White's writings as inspired as Scripture itself. They declare: "We believe Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and her writings have special application and authority for Seventh-day Adventists."

Jehovah's Witnesses

Believe only through their governing body's mediation can the Bible be understood. They claim: "Merely having God's Word and reading it isn't sufficient to acquire exact knowledge that puts one on life's path."

Mormons

Say they believe in the Bible only when correctly translated. They consider the Book of Mormon more perfect than the Bible and use additional books as inspired scripture.



Biblical Response to Addiction

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Paul states that the Holy Scriptures make one wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. If someone reads only the Bible, they will find salvation's formula: believing in Jesus. The Bible is absolute and true in emphasizing that human salvation comes exclusively through Jesus Christ.

Subtraction

The group subtracts something from the Person of Jesus Christ.



Freemasonry

Views Jesus simply as another religious founder alongside mythological, occultist, or religious personalities like Orpheus, Hermes, Krishna, and Mohammed.



Legion of Good Will

Subtracts Jesus' human nature, claiming He possessed only an apparent or fluidic body, while denying His divinity.



Jehovah's Witnesses

Teach that Jesus is an angel, Jehovah's first creation, not divine God incarnate.

Biblical Response to Subtraction

Jesus' Full Divinity

Scripture teaches that Jesus is God (John 1:1; 20:28; Titus 2:13; 1 John 5:20). Therefore, He cannot be equated merely with human beings, mythological figures, or even angels who worship Him (Hebrews 1:6).

Jesus' Complete Humanity

The Bible attests to Jesus' authentic humanity: He was born as man (Luke 2:7), grew as man (Luke 2:52), felt hunger and thirst (Matthew 4:2; John 19:28), ate and drank (Matthew 11:19), slept (Matthew 8:24), and sweated blood (Luke 22:44).



Multiplication

They preach self-salvation. Believing in Jesus is important, but not everything. Salvation is by works.

Seicho-No-Ie

Denies the efficacy of Jesus' redemptive work and His blood's value for sin remission, claiming that if sin really existed, not even all the Buddhas in the universe could extinguish it, nor could Jesus' cross accomplish it.

Mormons

Affirm belief in Jesus' atoning sacrifice but insist that without fulfilling church laws, there will be no salvation. Prophet Brigham Young declared: "No man or woman in this dispensation will enter God's celestial kingdom without Joseph Smith's consent."

Jehovah's Witnesses

Teach that Christ's redemption merely offers opportunity for someone to achieve their own salvation through works. Jesus simply opened the way; the rest is up to man.

Biblical Response to Multiplication

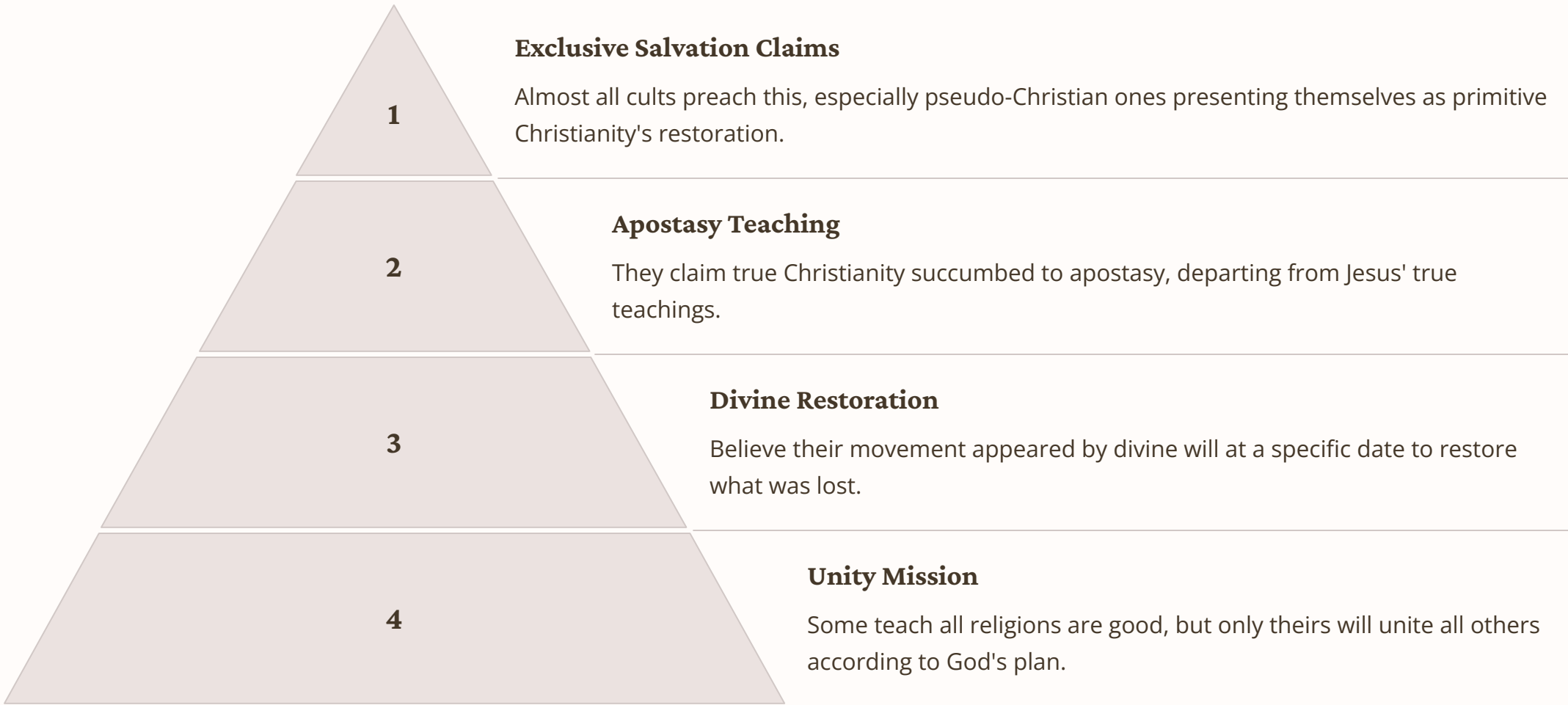
"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." - Ephesians 2:8-9

Scripture declares that anyone denying sin's existence is in league with the devil, the father of lies. Christ's blood's efficacy for canceling sins is presented as the Bible's central message. We practice good works not to be saved, but because we are saved in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Division

They divide loyalty between God and their organization. Disobeying the organization equals disobeying God. No salvation exists outside their religious system.



Biblical Response to Division



The repentant thief beside Jesus entered Heaven without being a member of any sect (Luke 23:43). The sinner is saved when they repent (Luke 13:3) and accept Jesus as their unique and personal Savior (Acts 16:30-31).

Teaching that a religious organization can save is preaching another gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:8). This divides loyalty to God with loyalty to organization and removes Jesus' exclusivity in leading us to the Father (John 14:6).

There is no salvation without Jesus (Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 3:11).

Additional Cult Characteristics



False Prophecies

Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, Mormons and others have proclaimed the world's end for specific dates. The Bible warns against those who set dates or events (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).



Denial of Bodily Resurrection

Many deny Christ's bodily resurrection, admitting only spiritual resurrection: Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Unification Church, Kardecism. Others deny He even died on the cross.

Regarding Christ's death and resurrection, Scripture affirms Jesus truly died through agony, brutal scourging, crucifixion, and burial. He bodily resurrected, appearing to disciples with nail marks as proof of His physical resurrection.



Know Your Faith

"If there were no sects by which the devil awakens us, we would become too lazy and sleep snoring to death. Faith and God's Word would be obscured and rejected in our midst." - Martin Luther

Before entering theological discussions, we must be secure in our foundation. The response "I know, but can't explain it" only deceives the student. If we can't answer the sectarian's argument, it's because we don't master the facts. Our inadequate knowledge forces us to abandon the field defeated, dishonoring the Lord.

Mormonism

Mormon history begins with Joseph Smith, born December 23, 1805, in Windsor County, Vermont, United States. To understand Mormonism, we must study its foundation through its founder's life.



Joseph Smith's First Vision

1815 - Early Life

Smith was about ten years old when his family moved to Palmyra, Ontario County (now Wayne), New York. Four years later, they moved again to Manchester, also in Ontario County.

Divine Condemnation

According to Smith, God said: "They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach men's commandments as doctrine, having a form of godliness but denying my power."

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1820 - The Vision

Raised in ignorance, poverty, and superstition, young Smith became disappointed with churches he knew. He claimed to receive his first vision where the Father and Son appeared, denouncing all churches as false.

Smith's Second Vision and the Golden Plates

The Angel Moroni

According to Smith's account, angel Moroni appeared to him, claiming to have lived in that region 1,400 years earlier. Mormon, Moroni's father and a prophet, had recorded his people's history on golden plates.

When facing extermination by enemies, Moroni allegedly buried these plates at a hill near present-day Palmyra.

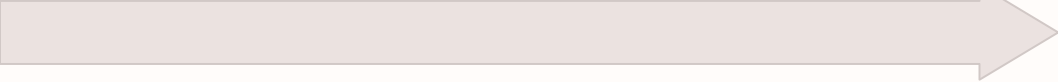
Translation Process

Moroni supposedly showed Smith where the plates were hidden and lent him special stones called "Urim" and "Thummim" to decipher and translate the writings.

Smith, sitting behind a curtain, dictated the translation to a friend. After completion, he returned the plates and stones to Moroni. The work was first published in 1829 as the Book of Mormon.



Foundation of the Mormon Church



Early Followers

Smith soon found those who accepted him as prophet and founded the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." It was established as doctrinal principle that this was the only true church.



Developing Revelations

A series of Smith's "revelations" developed the church's doctrine, transforming it through years into a form of polytheism. Believers were to build a theocracy with twelve apostles' counsel.



Political Ambitions

Smith's dominion pretensions were so elevated he launched himself as candidate for United States president. Suffering persecutions, they wandered seeking to establish a colony and found God's kingdom.



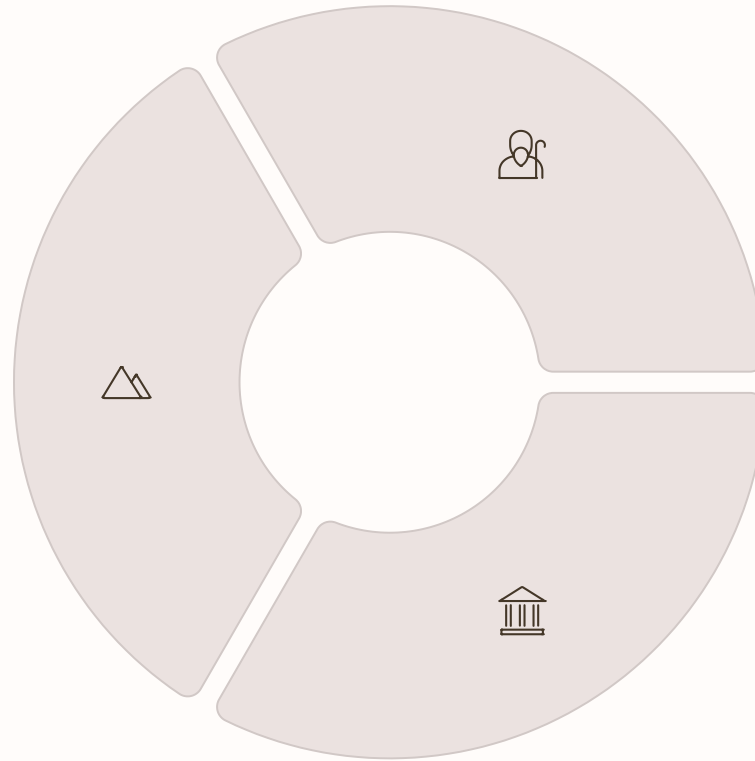
Death in Prison

Finding welcome in Illinois, they erected Nauvoo city. There, accused of gross immorality and forgery, Smith was imprisoned. An enraged mob invaded the jail and shot Smith and his brother Hyrum to death.

Mormon Church Division

Utah Faction

The first faction followed Brigham Young's leadership. After arduous pilgrimage, they arrived in Utah Territory in July 1847, founding Salt Lake City headquarters.



Missouri Faction

The majority decided to remain under Joseph Smith's son's leadership, staying in Missouri. They reorganized as "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Temple Lot Church

Another faction became "Church of Christ of the Temple Lot" in Bloomington, Illinois, believing Zion (Christ's return place) is in Bloomington, not Israel.

Problems with the Book of Mormon

Is the Book of Mormon God's Word?

The answer to this question is definitively: **NO!**



Plagiarism Evidence

The most common scholarly opinion is that the Book of Mormon's content was largely taken from Solomon Spaulding's romance, a retired Presbyterian pastor who wrote fictional history of America's first inhabitants.



Archaeological Contradictions

Archaeological discoveries and historical studies prove the region's first inhabitants described in the Book of Mormon were vastly different from its descriptions regarding customs, names, character, and languages.



Anachronistic Content

The book contains approximately 10,000 direct quotations from the King James Bible published in 1611, yet claims to be translated from plates buried from 420 to 1823 AD.

More Book of Mormon Problems

Literary Issues

- Written in poor language, but shows erudition when citing the Bible
- Places pre-Christ characters speaking words attributed to Jesus
- Contains numerous grammatical and content errors

Witness Problems

- Only three witnesses claimed to see the golden plates
- Smith later called these witnesses "thieves and liars, too wicked to mention"

Physical Impossibilities

For such voluminous Book of Mormon content, the golden plates Smith described would require microscopic work or something miraculous.



Testing Joseph Smith as Prophet

"When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." - Deuteronomy 18:22

God provides criteria for judging a prophet: 1) If the spoken word doesn't come to pass, or 2) If the word comes to pass but the prophet leads people away from the true God to follow other gods.



Smith's Failed Prophecies

New Jerusalem Temple

Prophesied that New Jerusalem and its temple must be erected in Missouri "in this generation" (Doctrine & Covenants 84:1-5). This prophecy failed completely.

Nauvoo House

Prophesied his house in Nauvoo would remain and belong to his family forever (D&C 124:56-60). After his death, Mormons left the city and his house doesn't belong to his family.

Jesus' Birthplace

Said Jesus should be born in "Jerusalem" (Alma 7:10), when the Bible says Jesus would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2).

Moon Inhabitants

Predicted moon inhabitants "about 6 feet tall, dress like Quakers, and live nearly 1,000 years." Space exploration proved this completely false.

Mormon Doctrinal Errors

Their View of God

Brigham Young declared: "When our father arrived in the Garden of Eden, he came with a celestial body and brought Eve, one of his wives. He is Michael the Archangel, the Ancient of Days—he is our father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to deal."

Their View of Christ

They claim: "Jesus was not begotten by the Holy Spirit" and "Jesus Christ was polygamous: Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, were his plural wives, and Mary Magdalene was another. The wedding feast at Cana was one of his own weddings."

These teachings present a Christ foreign to the New Testament and constitute serious heretical departures from biblical Christianity.

Biblical Refutation of Mormon Doctrines



About God

God and Adam are distinct persons. God is the Creator (Genesis 1:26) while Adam is God's creature (Genesis 1:27). God is not man (Numbers 23:19), God is Spirit (John 4:24), immutable (Malachi 3:6), and eternal (Psalm 102:26-27).



About Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit's work (Luke 1:35). Claiming Jesus was married and that Cana's wedding was his own demonstrates ignorance of biblical exegesis and constitutes abominable outrage against Christ's Person.



About the Church

The Church was established by Jesus (Matthew 16:18), founded on Jesus (Matthew 16:16-18), victorious over hell through Jesus' power (Matthew 16:18), and will be glorified by Jesus (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Spiritism

Spiritism is undoubtedly one of the fastest-growing heresies in the world today. Brazil particularly holds the sad record of being the world's largest spiritist stronghold. Its growth occurs largely due to the fascination its teachings exert over minds deprived of true knowledge and alienated from God.



Historical Summary of Modern Spiritism

1847 - The Fox Sisters

Modern spiritism's resurgence began with Margaret and Kate Fox, ages 12 and 10, in Hydesville, New York. They began hearing knocks in different parts of their house and created communication with invisible entities.

Allan Kardec in France

Léon Hippolyte Rivail (Allan Kardec) was born in Lyon in 1804. Taking the pseudonym of a Celtic poet he believed himself to be reincarnated as, he introduced reincarnation doctrine into spiritism.

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Expansion to America

These events received extensive media coverage, spreading spiritist sessions throughout North America and eventually to England and Europe, where the soil was fertile for superstitious beliefs.

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Spiritist Literature

From 1857-1869, Kardec published "The Spirits' Book," "The Mediums' Book," "The Gospel According to Spiritism," "Heaven and Hell," and "Genesis," establishing spiritist doctrine worldwide.

Subdivisions of Spiritism

Common Spiritism Includes palmistry, cartomancy, graphology, hydromancy, and astrology - various forms of divination and fortune-telling practices.	Low Spiritism Also known as pagan, uncultured spiritism, including Voodoo, Candomblé, Umbanda, Quimbanda, and Macumba - syncretistic religions mixing African, indigenous, and Catholic elements.
Scientific Spiritism Called "High Spiritism" or "Professional Spiritism," including Eclecticism, Esotericism, and Theosophy - attempting to present spiritism with scientific respectability.	Kardecist Spiritism The form commonly practiced in Brazil, emphasizing communication with disembodied spirits, reincarnation belief, charity as unique virtue, and Jesus as merely a medium and reformer.

The Theory of Reincarnation

Reincarnation theory constitutes the core of all spiritist discussion. If this theory is destroyed, spiritism cannot subsist. Allan Kardec wrote: "Reincarnation was part of Jewish dogmas under the name of resurrection... Reincarnation is the soul's or spirit's return to bodily life, but in another body newly formed for it that has nothing in common with the old one."



The Bible Denies Reincarnation

Clear Distinctions

The Bible never references "reincarnation" nor confuses it with "resurrection." Reincarnation means plurality of existences with one spirit, while resurrection means rising, emerging, coming out from one location or situation to another.

Biblical Resurrection Cases

Eight resurrection cases are mentioned in Scripture: seven restorations to life (to die again) and one complete resurrection - Jesus. His was different because He rose never to die again, becoming the firstfruits of true resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).



Was John the Baptist Elijah Reincarnated?

"And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come." - Matthew 11:14



The Question

Spiritists use Jesus' words about John Baptist being Elijah to support reincarnation doctrine, claiming this is positive affirmation without figures or allegories.



Scripture Interprets Scripture

The Bible answers its own questions. When asked directly "Are you Elijah?" John Baptist responded clearly: "I am not" (John 1:21).



Spirit and Power

Luke 1:17 explains John would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah" - meaning similar ministry characteristics, not reincarnation.



Transfiguration Proof

At Jesus' transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared, not Moses and John Baptist, proving they were distinct persons.

Final Warning and Call to Truth

These cult movements represent the "depths of Satan" (Revelation 2:24), employing deception, false miracles, and counterfeit spirituality. Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and has power to perform lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Those involved with these false systems are caught in Satan's snare, risking never breaking free. But there is hope: Christ came to set captives free (Luke 4:18). Through careful biblical study, prayer, and unwavering commitment to Scripture as our final authority, believers can "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

"To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." - Isaiah 8:20

May we stand firm in biblical truth, equipped to defend the Gospel against all deception, always ready to give an answer for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15).