

## **Jehovah's witnesses and Mormonism**

When I first went home at the age of 20 and told my parents that I had become a Christian and that to go to heaven the only way was to believe in Jesus Christ, I think they thought that I had joined a cult. Like they thought I'd become a Hare Krishna or something. Little did I know that dad went to investigate and was much relieved to find that I'd joined an Anglican church in Carlton – not much harm can come from that they thought – he'll probably give it up in a year.

Today though I want to talk about what I want to call cults. In effect they are other religions but they are probably better called cults because sometimes on the surface level they look a bit like another Christian denomination – like Anglican or Uniting or Baptist.

### **Words**

And that's the first point I want to make today more generally – just because people use similar words doesn't mean they believe the same things. Both Mormons and JW's talk about Jesus, about the bible, about the resurrection, about God, about the Holy Spirit, about atonement, about angels, about ransom, about sin, about judgement and about many other things using words that we recognise. But don't make the mistake of thinking that because people use the same words they mean the same things by them. Resurrection might mean bodily resurrection or it might mean spiritual resurrection or it might mean resuscitation or it might mean to become a god. Those things are not the same in these cults and Christianity, even if the word used is the same. Cults are often attractive because they use words that sound like they are Christian, but they actually mean something different.

### **JW's background**

The cult was started by **Charles Taze Russell** in the USA. He was the owner of a retail store who decided he didn't like any of the religions he saw, so he took on the title of pastor and founded his own. One of the most attractive bits being the non existence of hell.

He published a series of **prophecies**. Firstly that all the public institutions, like schools and banks and governments in the US would be destroyed by October 1914. This was then amended to be destruction by instalments ending in 1925. This was then amended to have words like 'near the end' of 1925. His major work was 6 volumes called studies in the scriptures which help people interpret the bible.

After Russell's death **J.F. Rutherford** took over the leadership and 'Jehovah's witnesses' was adopted as the name. The organisation grew rapidly through **door to door** evangelism and through the vast amounts of **published material** being made available.

**Stats.** In the year 2000 it was estimated that JW's make up about 6 million people world wide. In 1997 they produced 20 million copies of the watchtower magazine. In Australia, in 1996 there were 83400 (.5%) and in 2001 there were 81100 (.4%) – so in slight decline – just like the Anglicans! Famous JW's are Dweigt Eisenhower, Venus and Serena Williams, Michael Jackson, Prince.

What they believe I'll talk about in a minute.

### **Mormon background**

If Jehovah's witnesses are a cult then Mormonism seems to me to be even more so.

Again their strident **missionary** activity has helped it expand all over the world. I guess I want to say at the start too that while some of what Mormonism teaches or has been involved in in the past is quite immoral, many young Mormons live quite

exemplary lives and usually do the door to door work all over the world at their own expense.

The founder of Mormonism was **Joseph Smith**. He was according to his mother an illiterate man who hardly read before being an adult. Both his parents laid great emphasis on dreams and visions. He joined with a defrocked Baptist minister called Sidney Rigdon who together collaborated to produce the **book of Mormon**.

The story goes that on September 21, 1823 Smith was visited by the angel Moroni, who revealed to him that in 420AD there had been hidden underneath New York **several golden plates** on which were inscribed the history of the Nephites who came to America from Jerusalem in 600BC. Smith went to the spot revealed to him and found a large pair of glasses which enabled him to translate the tablets.

I have to say this simply looks like a great made up story to me. The book actually contains direct quotes from the authorised version of the bible and yet the tablets were meant to be 1200 years older than the authorised version. It also contains direct quotes from the Westminster confession which was 1300 years later than the so called tablets. It seems more likely that the book of Mormon is based on a fictional book written by a presbyterian on the history of people who inhabited America called 'The manuscript found'.

In real terms the book of Mormon is given more weight than the bible.

Joseph Smith was killed in 1844 at the hand of an angry mob at Carthage. Brigham Young then took on the leadership who then led the immigration of the Mormons to Utah.

I should also say something about **polygamy**. Polygamy was practiced in the early days by Mormons but it was officially abandoned in 1889, not because they disbelieve it, but because it is contrary to state laws.

One of the reasons that Mormonism has done so well is that it has often had strong **leadership** often of dynamic men who have some ability – of course it is not a very democratic style of leadership. Their order of government is by so called divine authority.

### **The person of Christ**

I want to then talk about what Jesus is believed to be for both JW's, Mormons and Christians.

#### **JW's believe:**

1. Jesus is a created being – the chief of angels and the highest of God's creation – but on the created side of things not on the God side of things. To defend their argument they appeal to their **emphatic diaglott** version of the bible. So John 1:1 becomes in the beginning was the word and the word was a god. Not the word was God. They would say, again being tricky with their language, that Jesus is a mighty god but not the Almighty God who is Jehovah. Again perhaps that Jesus was created mortal, but became divine after his resurrection.
2. Jesus death on the cross did not achieve salvation for people but the right of continued existence. They have talked about the possibility of a further 100 year trial after death. The cross is effectively for them a guarantee of a second chance. People are left to be their own saviour. You need to prove your worthiness of eternal life through obedience.
3. Jesus did not rise again physically, but spiritually. From the book 'Let God be true', they argue that 'So the king Christ Jesus was put to death in the flesh and was resurrected an invisible spirit creature.'

4. Lots of strange and amazing prophecies seem to be a mark of Jehovah's witnesses. And I think the whole nuclear thing really helped highlight their prophecies. For them Jesus returned to earth in 1874. Later they say he returned to the temple in 1914 and cleansed it by 1918. Of course they argue that since Christ wasn't raised physically then he didn't return physically either.

### **Mormons Believe:**

1. That Jesus was not always God, but that he is the firstborn spirit of God the Father. Mind you, you also need to understand that they think that God himself started out as the man Adam and became a God as well.
2. They believe that Jesus is a created being, the spirit brother of Lucifer as well as all mortals and angels – here a bit like Jehovah's witnesses, that is Christ is akin to the head angel.
3. They believe that Jesus had a literal father in the same way that we have fathers. They think that God the Father was the lawful wife of the Virgin Mary and somehow had a relationship together that produced Jesus. They also think like in the Dan Brown book, that Jesus was married at Cana to the Marys and Martha – like all three.
4. Jesus death does not save souls but only delivers the earth from the power of death. To be saved again, people have to make special effort of repentance and continued works of righteousness. Jesus is the great example of what we should be like.
5. Jesus death does not cleanse some serious sins such as murder; People must have their own blood shed to atone for their sins.

## Christians Believe:

### Turn up Hebrews 1 (pg 970)

- Jesus is God's prophetic voice (1-2) – he is the way God has now spoken to us.
- Jesus is God's Son (2) – he is different to the prophets
- Jesus is God's appointed heir (2) – he gets everything. You know a few years ago Joy's great aunt died and we inherited a nice rosewood cabinet – we keep our glasses in it. But not just one bit of furniture – imagine if you were a king and everyone in the whole planet left everything to you in their will. Jesus inherits all things. Like psalm 2 says, 'I will make the nations your inheritance.'
- Jesus is God's creative agent (2) - John 1 says 'All things came into being through him...' – Jesus does the creation.
- Jesus is exactly like God (3) – Do you ever have that thing where you are looking into a mirror and you go – oh yeh – that's me and you start thinking about what it means to be you. Jesus is the reflection of God's glory. Like Philip's question, <sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, "Lord, **show us the Father**, and we will be satisfied." <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, "**Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?**"
- Jesus sustains the Universe (3) – you know I find it hard to sustain 1 church – imagine what it must be like – how much power you must have to be able to sustain the universe. He sustains all things by his powerful word.
- Jesus is God's unique sacrifice (3). The clear plan of Jesus in the New Testament is to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. He purified us – we don't do it to ourselves. [In baptism we are celebrating that these

children and all of us have only one hope of forgiveness and eternal life and that is through Jesus sacrificial death of which baptism is a symbol]

- Jesus is better than the angels: - Both JW's and Mormon's think of Jesus something like the head angel. But the writer to the Hebrews deliberately shows us that Jesus is far superior to any angel
- -superior name (4-5) – that is Jesus is the only one called son.
- -superior dignity (6) – all the angels have to worship Jesus. You know that it is blaspheme to worship anything that isn't God. The second commandment only allows worship of God and nothing else. If we worship Jesus then he has to be god.
- -superior nature (7-8, 10-12) – There's that verse – verse 8 – about Jesus it says, 'your throne o God is forever and ever. Jesus is not a servant he is God. He is everlasting – forever and ever – he is not something fleeting.
- -superior role (8) – It's not angels that rule the universe, who judge the universe – its Jesus.
- -superior example (9) – that is he alone is the righteous one.
- -superior achievement and destiny (13) – God never said to an angel, 'sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' Imagine that Jesus sitting on the throne, while God the father is up and about serving Jesus – putting his enemies under his feet.

Angels are servants – Jesus is God. [In baptism we are saying that these children will grow up believing that Jesus is nothing less than God. He is the son of God, of the same very substance as God the father. We've just affirmed that we believe that by saying the creed together.]

**Summary**

Please see that you can't believe in all three of these things. Either Christianity is right or Jw's or Mormons are right. Jesus is either God or he isn't. Jesus either saves us or he doesn't. Now there are lots of other contrasts we could make, but these should be enough to see that not all cults are the same in the end. JW's and Mormons and Christians believe fundamentally different things even if they use similar words.

**Meeting at the door**

1. Always use your own bible.
2. Insist that they listen to you as well as you listen to them.
3. Don't let them just take up all your time.
4. Use Hebrews 1 to show how Jesus is God.
5. Our evangelism

-door to door v. big meeting v. friendship