
Christian Restoration

Part 6: Mormonism: Decline and Fall

As Narrated by Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.

Mormonism started, and in the last years of Joseph Smith's life, returned to restoring a religion older than Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians that "God ... preached before the gospel unto Abraham[.]" Joseph Smith was recovering that gospel, which was also known to and practiced by Adam and the patriarchs.

Joseph continually made additions, expansions and development of the religion from revelations given by Christ.

Joseph Smith hoped that the fullness of the gospel and the fullness of the priesthood could be regained.

In January 1841 Christ promised He would restore the lost fullness, but commanded a temple be built for that restoration. The Lord said Mormons had sufficient time to build His Holy House, but if they disobeyed the commandment, they would be rejected.

Mormons disobeyed. Instead of the temple, they diverted resources and instead built a Masonic Hall, brick homes, and improved their personal property. Three-and-a-half years later Joseph Smith was killed and the unfinished temple was built only to the second floor, less than half of the planned structure. The Mormon city of Nauvoo, however, had been built into a prosperous community.

As soon as Joseph Smith was killed, the expanding religion he founded began to both contract and splinter. Internal disagreements divided the Mormons. Of the approximate 15,000 people Joseph gathered, only about half followed Brigham Young to the Salt Lake wilderness. Other factions left for Wisconsin, Texas and some remained in the Midwest, years later reorganizing in Missouri.

Since the murder of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, all the Mormon sects have either abandoned or outright rejected much of what Joseph Smith began. Only the sect Brigham Young led kept building temples, but hardly knew how to use them or how rites were to be organized. Young borrowed more heavily from Masonry ritual than had Joseph Smith in order to finish out a Mormon temple ritual.

Brigham Young characterized himself as a “Yankee Guesser” rather than a prophet like Joseph Smith. But he ruled over followers by claiming to have priesthood keys that authorized him to dictate.

He instituted plural wives, claimed apostates should be slain, and led a reign of terror in the Intermountain West. His violent teaching culminated in the murder of over 200 men, women and children at Mountain Meadows. The Mountain Meadows Massacre aroused national anger and the US Army was dispatched in 1858 to Utah to unseat Brigham Young as the territorial governor.

Other Mormons who reorganized in Missouri in 1860 were the second most successful sect. They began to languish in the 1960s, and today hardly believe the Book of Mormon, and entertain doubts about Joseph Smith.

Small polygamist groups splintered from Brigham Young’s Mormons. They claim to have preserved Joseph Smith’s original teachings, but they are uniformly authoritarian and often violate marriage and child-protection laws in their perverse beliefs and practices.

What began as a noble endeavor to recover God’s original pure religion and to have Jesus Christ come to visit with believers in a House built for God degenerated quickly following the death of Joseph Smith.

Today Mormonism is divided into competing factions that no longer hope to recover the fullness of the gospel and fullness of the priesthood. Mormon meetings, conferences and preaching focus more on hierarchies, authority and “keys” than heaven. Mormonism fell victim to this preoccupation much more quickly than Catholicism. When the New Testament apostles and witnesses died it took three centuries for Christianity to embrace a central hierarchy. When Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered it only took from June 27 to August 8 for an elected body headed by Brigham Young to gain control. Three years later Brigham Young was elected president, gaining sole management over his people. Both in 1844 and 1847 no voice from heaven

guided Mormonism as they elected replacement leaders. Hierarchy displaced revelation and heavenly guidance. Mormon sects today show more signs of decay than of life.

So much has been lost that it requires another restoration to return to the religion begun by Joseph Smith.