

Overview of Mormonism

Key Person, Date, Location

Joseph Smith Jr. (1805–1844) organized what is now the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in 1830 near Rochester, New York. The church's headquarters are located in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Key Writings

LDS doctrine is based on several key texts: *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*, along with the Bible (King James Version only or Smith's "Inspired Version"), which is considered less reliable. Authoritative teachings also come from Mormon prophets and other LDS "General Authorities," as published in *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines.

Who Is God?

According to LDS belief, God the Father was once a man who "progressed" to godhood. He has a physical body, as does his wife, known as Heavenly Mother. The LDS church does not affirm the Trinity; instead, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are viewed as three separate gods. Worthy members may one day become "exalted" to godhood themselves.

Who Is Jesus?

Jesus is considered a separate god from the Father (Elohim). He was created as a spirit child by the Father and Mother in heaven and is regarded as the "elder brother" of all humans and spirit beings—including Lucifer.

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Who Is the Holy Spirit?

In LDS theology, the “Holy Spirit” is distinct from the “Holy Ghost.” The Holy Spirit is not God but is understood as an influence or electricity-like emanation from God, sometimes referred to as the “Light of Christ.”

How to Be Saved

Resurrection is granted by grace, but exaltation to godhood is earned through works. These works include faithfulness to church leaders, Mormon baptism, tithing, ordination, marriage, and participation in secret temple rituals. According to LDS teaching, there is no eternal life without membership in the church.

What Happens After Death?

Eventually, nearly everyone goes to one of three separate heavenly “kingdoms,” with some achieving godhood. Apostates and murderers are sent to “outer darkness.”

Other Facts, Beliefs, or Practices

LDS members participate in secret temple “endowment” rituals and “celestial marriage,” which are available only to those in good standing. The church practices baptism on behalf of the dead. The “Word of Wisdom” prohibits tobacco, alcohol, and (previously) caffeine drinks. A two-year missionary commitment is encouraged, and tithing is considered essential. Members are expected to engage in door-to-door proselytizing and benefit from an extensive social network. Notably, people of African ancestry were denied full access to the Mormon priesthood and its privileges until 1978.