

Why I don't believe the church is true

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I no longer believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one true church of God on the face of the earth. This will come as a shock to some of you. Those of my family and friends who have already learned this over the past six months or so have treated me with a great deal of love and respect for which I am grateful beyond words or tears—I have many friends who have not been so lucky.

I am writing this short document to summarize my reasons for not believing. They are both rational and spiritual in nature. All I ask from anyone is to treat me with love and respect, and I will do my best to do the same. You don't need to read this to do that; I offer it only as an explanation and invitation and I will not be offended if you don't choose to explore my beliefs.

1 The problems

There are a lot of problems with LDS history and the present-day LDS church. Some are small, some are large. For me, the effect was cumulative and though I did put problems small and great on the shelf for decades and especially the past two years, eventually the propensity of evidence was too strong and I was forced to stare down the barrel of decision and address them. I never entertained anti-mormon literature in this journey. Balanced research looks at all facts with an equally skeptical eye, and I have been skeptical both of sources with any reason to be unfavorable toward the church, or a reason to be apologetic. Everything I list is well-supported by LDS-friendly or neutral sources. Let us not confuse truth that is unfavorable to the LDS worldview with the label “anti-mormon” and all the emotional charge that comes with it. For each item I reference either an LDS-friendly source or at least both a skeptical and apologetic source, and you can judge for yourself.¹

Good sense demands that I not recount all the problems here, because most people would be bored to read such a laundry list. But if you are interested in learning more there are references provided at the end. I will discuss a short list of major problems as a representative sample of the things that left me doubting.

¹There is no shortage of information available on the internet from anti, skeptical, liberal, conservative, and apologetic sources on any given issue

For the same reason I will not go into a lot of detail about the problems, but provide references for further study.

1.1 The Book of Mormon

Let us start with the keystone of the LDS faith: the Book of Mormon. Again for brevity I am not going to list all the problems great and small with the Book of Mormon, but a few that stand out to me.

1. Deutero-Isaiah. There are lengthy passages from “Isaiah” in 2 Nephi that are actually not written by Isaiah and not written before 600 B.C. when the Lehighites were to have left Jerusalem. [Ada10, Sch]
2. Chronology problems. The first few generations of the Book of Mormon are a genealogical improbability in today’s world, let alone 600–300 B.C. in the wilderness. The population growth rate is beyond reason. It is full of anachronisms such as horses, steel, the words of Paul, etc. [Lam09, Pal02]
3. DNA and other anthropological evidence including physiology and linguistics shows that Native Americans come from East Asia thousands or tens of thousands of years ago, not the Middle East with Egyptian language in 600 B.C. (or the Jaredite story) [Lam09, Mur04, VM02]

Jeffrey Holland would have me crawl over the Book of Mormon [Hol09], and I took that challenge seriously in both the spiritual and rational realm. It is a remarkable work, but it is not unique in its remarkability in human history. As a musician I find Mozart and Bach to be the best example: I cannot fathom how they could write such amazing music so prolifically. But they did it.

To paraphrase the old joke, I find that if you ask any two post-Mormons how the Book of Mormon originated you will get 3 answers. There are several plausible explanations, and I am most satisfied by Joseph being a gifted “automatic writer” with a lot of imagination [Lam09], a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and a host of hot doctrinal issues popular at the time. [Pal02]

1.2 Joseph Smith

As missionaries we taught that a testimony of the Book of Mormon confirmed that Joseph Smith is a prophet and that the restoration of the church and its authority follows. Without the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith and authority claims must stand on their own (already deeply weakened by the fall of the Book of Mormon). In fact, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young are the greatest source of historical problems for the church. Again for brevity I list only a handful of the historical issues about Joseph Smith. For a taste of Brigham Young peruse the Journal of Discourses. [You54]

1. Polygamy. Joseph had about 30 wives. About ten were young teenage girls, about ten were already married to other men, and although Emma knew about some of the later ones he mostly did it all behind her back.

His martyrdom was largely a result of his having destroyed a printing press which was exposing his polygamous practices. [Com97, BW05]

2. Multiple differing first vision accounts. Morphing from already having concluded that no church was true and Jesus or an angel telling him his sins were forgiven, to asking which church was true and seeing Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ who call him to restore the church. [BW05, Pal02, Lam09]
3. He made many testable and time-limited prophecies which have not come true. [Pac05]
4. To me the Book of Abraham is the largest and heaviest stumbling block against believing that Joseph Smith was a prophet. The papyri that Joseph Smith acquired were found in a museum in 1967, and have been analyzed and translated by Egyptologists. They are not the writings of Abraham, they are run-of-the-mill Egyptian funeral texts that postdate Abraham by 1600 years. None of the facsimiles and Egyptian characters or depictions mean what he said they mean. [Lar92, Lam09]

1.3 The modern LDS church

The true church of God led by revelation and priesthood should lead the world in coming closer to Christ and living Christian principles. The LDS church lagged behind the rest of the world by a decade on civil rights. It is happening again with homosexuality. The way the church and its members conducted itself with Proposition 8 horrify me. Humanitarian aid given by the church is modest to say the least when compared with estimated tithing revenues and business ventures like the City Creek Mall.² Though the importance of families is touted as of supreme importance, the rhetoric strongly encourages people to abandon or persecute spouses, children, friends, and ward members who are not “safe” because they doubt the church teachings or do not live up to its standards.

2 The test of truth

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (James 1:5)

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni 10:4-5)

²One estimate is <1% of annual tithing funds is spent on humanitarian aid, and City Creek Mall is estimated to cost at least \$3 billion—not from this year’s tithing fund but from interest income from what was originally tithing funds. [Fla11]

Oh say, what is truth?
'Tis the fairest gem
That the riches of worlds can produce,
And priceless the value of truth will be when
The proud monarch's costliest diadem
Is counted but dross and refuse. (Hymn 272)

Humans have an amazing ability to disregard facts presented as evidence against a strongly-held belief. [Moo11] As I learned each of these things, I maintained my belief that underneath it all the church was true and I just needed to come to understand it. Truth would prevail! But as I felt my testimony eroding I scrambled to strengthen it with the truth test that Moroni and James outline. I read the Book of Mormon cover to cover. I fasted, prayed, attended the temple, and prayed some more. I didn't get a spiritual witness. I thought perhaps I was expecting too much, so I adjusted my expectations. Then I prayed for the opposite, e.g. to know the truth of drinking coffee or the truth of Joseph being a fraud, etc. I had no stupor of thought, nor unshakeable feelings of truth—the feelings were the same. Highly variable depending on my mood, and never unshakeable.

The problem is not only with me, though, for even if I had clear answers there are others who get similar answers to their prayers about Mohammed, Buddha, the Pope, and Zeus or Thor. The literature is replete with interchangeable descriptions of spiritual witness, but the belief systems are so incompatible as to render the spiritual witness test of truth unreliable at best. [Lam09, Pal02] It can be a great, meaningful, and spiritually nourishing experience to receive answers to prayer, but I think that it is inferior to reason and evidence when it comes to determining truth. If they are in conflict, then it is my vague spiritual feelings that I do not trust.

3 Conclusion

I don't believe, but I am comfortable if you do. I hope that we can continue to have a wonderful relationship based on mutual respect and affection. Every issue I have described has an apologetic response. Some of them are fairly good, others stretch credulity. To me, the probability is just too small that all of the issues (including the majority which I did not list in this paper) are explained by improbable apologetic responses. Lamborn has a good discussion of applying probability theory to these claims, with I think very conservative estimates of probability that cover only a fraction of the issues. If you're a geek like me you might enjoy it.[Lam09] If you would like to learn more about the issues, I recommend starting with Lyndon Lamborn's book "Standing for Something More" and Grant Palmer's book "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins". They are accessible and not long, and in my view they cover the biggest issues with the church and give reasonable explanations for the voids that remain when LDS faith is cast into question. Though they both are direct and ultimately

unflattering to the church, they are not written from an antagonistic position and both authors are explicit in their non-aggression toward the church. I will be happy to lend or purchase these inexpensive books for my friends or family. If your research is limited to the internet for financial or practical reasons, I recommend starting with [Deh08], [Mor] and [Pac11]. Also know that I am always willing to have a civil discussion about any of these issues, no matter how much knowledge or faith you have, or your position or conclusions.

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