
Joseph Smith, Jr.

1805-1844

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Roger Williams believed the Protestant Reformation could not fix Christianity. He taught that a Restoration would be necessary, and could only happen if Jesus Christ sent another apostle to reestablish the original Christian church. Joseph Smith claimed that Jesus Christ visited him and gave him authority to restore the original Christian church.

Smith grew up in a poor New England family and received only a limited education. He claimed God the Father and Jesus Christ visited him in 1820, John the Baptist visited both him and Oliver Cowdery conferring the authority to baptize, and other angels visited him, conveying heavenly information and authority.

Smith was a controversial figure while alive. Editorial pages in the United States and Britain praised or condemned him, and he was often the target of newspaper cartoon caricatures. Despite the controversy, he attracted tens of thousands of followers. He is regarded as a prophet of God by followers, and anything from a cynical manipulator to a deluded simpleton by his critics.

Smith was the first religious figure to publish new scriptures since Mohammed, and was frequently compared to Mohammed. Smith added to the Bible other volumes of scripture: *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and, posthumously the *Pearl of Great Price*.

Smith solved problems inherent in the Protestant Reformation. Protestantism is predicated on Catholic failure, apostasy and error. But if Catholicism erred, and Protestantism grew from and is dependent upon Catholicism for its scriptures, Creeds and fundamental theology, how can an error be “reformed” back to a whole and correct original? If men failed to preserve the original, how can you reclaim from a broken part the whole original? And if the original body of beliefs can be reclaimed, how can Protestants

ever obtain the original authority? It cannot be derived from Catholicism, since the Roman Catholic Church refused to convey authority to the Protestants? Joseph Smith claimed to have reestablished the original Christian church, with authority from heaven and increased knowledge required for salvation. His efforts produced, he believed, something other than Catholicism and Protestantism, it was a Restoration of Jesus Christ's church.

Over eighty different sects claim Joseph Smith as their founder. The largest is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. None of them have retained the original teachings, nor been faithful to the church model Smith established.

Joseph was opposed, mobbed, imprisoned, tarred and feathered, and sentenced to die by a Missouri Military courts martial. Much of the persecution he faced came from disaffected former Mormon believers. It was a conspiracy between renegade former Smith-believers and local anti-Mormons that led to his murder in Carthage, Illinois on June 27, 1844. His brother, Hyrum Smith, was slain in the same attack.

Smith's claims can be summarized by a testimony he declared, jointly with Sidney Rigdon, of Jesus Christ: "the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about. And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever. And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father— That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God."