

Pastors' Perspective!

Supporting Christian Witness to Mormons

Because "some men...are...wanting to change the Gospel of Christ." Galatians 1:7

Monthly since 1997

July
2007

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MORMONS STUDY THE NEW TESTAMENT. CHRISTIANS CAN HELP.

2007. This year Mormons study the New Testament in their Sunday School classes.

1. Background.

Each year the Mormon church directs members throughout the world to concentrate their study on one of the books they consider to be scripture: The Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. This year all Sunday School classes for ages 14 and up have been directed to study the New Testament. The church publishes materials to support teachers and students.

That's a good start, reading the New Testament. It's also an opportunity for Christians concerned about their Mormon friends — a natural avenue for focused, modulated, and nonconfrontational presentation of New Testament truths.

Mormons need help, and you can see why, in item 2, below. And Christians can help in the same way Philip helped (see Acts 8): He was sensitive to the Spirit, obeyed eagerly, offered his help, sat down with his new acquaintance, focused on scripture, spoke of Jesus.

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. ...And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speakest the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? ...Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

2. The problem. Here's how their church guides Mormons in their "study" of the New Testament.

The church publishes a "New Testament Class Member Study Guide" with 46 lessons for 46 weeks of the year. Each lesson assigns a New Testament reading, other scripture references, suggestions for simple family discussion or activities, and about 130 words of instruction.

Here's a look at some of the lessons.

Lesson 1 The reading assignment: Verses from Isaiah, Luke, and John. Students are directed to the Joseph Smith Translation of Luke and John, where the content has been altered significantly by supposed revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, without benefit of manuscripts or other normal translation resources. Changes include addition of four

entirely new verses in Luke, and in John 1:1 the clear statement that "the Word was God" has been removed.

Other suggested references include two from the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price. In the Book of Mormon, students learn that 124 years before Christ people in the Americas knew the Savior's name: "And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God..., and his mother shall be called Mary." From the Pearl of Great Price, students learn about a conversation, first revealed to Abraham, among Elohim (the Father), Jehovah (the Son), and the Devil before creation, in which Elohim chose Christ instead of the Devil to eventually become the Savior.

Lesson 2 The reading assignment: Luke 1 and Matthew 1. Other suggested references include four verses from the Book of Mormon, where students learn that people in the Middle East about 600 B.C. knew about John the Baptist and that he would baptize the Messiah.

Lesson 21 The reading assignment: Matthew 24, as rewritten by revelation to Joseph Smith. Other references include Doctrine and Covenants, where students learn how their church fits into the last days. (It will build New Jerusalem, or Zion, in Missouri in preparation for the Second Coming. Only there in those last days will there be peace, refuge, and "safety for the saints of the Most High God.") The church suggests family members "look in the newspapers and magazines for signs of the Second Coming [and] discuss how to prepare for the Second Coming."

Lesson 36 The reading assignment: Romans. The Study Guide offers less than 50 words on justification. It refers to Romans 3:28 and other verses to help students answer the question, "What did Paul teach about how we are justified?" That question and one other ("Why do we need to be justified?") will likely elicit subjective and speculative answers. Other references include six from other of the church's latter-day scriptures.

— And so it goes through the 46 lessons.

3. Christian opportunity and responsibility. A Christian can say to a friend, "I understand that your church is studying the New Testament this year." Maybe that will get the verbal foot in the door; maybe the friend will invite discussion of scripture, or accept an invitation. But a Christian is responsible, too, to ensure that discussion of faith rests on the Bible alone, and avoid the Mormon church's promotion of itself and Joseph Smith and its claim for unique knowledge and authority to minister for Christ.

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