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Why Practically Nobody—including You, Former Mormon—Will Ever End Up in Outer Darkness

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For many years, those who have forfeited their membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may have been told by other Mormons that they were “Sons of Perdition” destined for [Outer Darkness](#). Although this is an obvious scare tactic, this accusation is not true according to important LDS leaders.

What is Outer Darkness?

Outer darkness is a eternal place of torment reserved for those who are “sons of perdition.” According to LDS scripture, this will be a place that “where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:91; also see 133:73). Tenth President Joseph Fielding Smith—a [general authority](#) who spoke more about this issue than any other leader—stated,

The extent of this punishment none will ever know except those who partake of it. That it is the most severe punishment that can be meted out to man is apparent. Outer darkness is something which cannot be described, except that we know that it is to be placed beyond the benign and comforting influence of the Spirit of God — banished entirely from his presence (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:220).

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In the rest of the article, we're going to have to assume that Mormonism is true (of course, I don't think it is!) so we will be able to realistically discuss the likelihood that a person who left the church could ever end up in Outer Darkness.

What qualifies a person to be a "Son of Perdition"?

There are two categories for those who should be considered sons of perdition. The first example would be spirits from the [preexistence](#) who sided with [Lucifer](#) rather than [Jesus](#) at the [Council in Heaven](#) where it was decided who would become the Savior of the World. Smith described these spirits who were the first to display rebellious ways:

Lucifer became perdition by rebellion. If Lucifer had not known the effects of his rebellion, how would he ever become perdition? If he were ignorant, he could not have become perdition. He was not ignorant, and therefore *he became perdition*, and they who followed him were *sons of perdition*, because he and *they sinned knowingly*. They did what they did with their eyes open, and were in rebellion against God. However, Lucifer did not know all the purposes of the Father as we learn from the Pearl of Great Price, Moses 4:6. Therefore the Lord used Satan's evil acts to accomplish his own purposes. [DS 2:225.] (*Selections of Doctrines of Salvation*, p. 462. Bold and italics in original).

Because of their disobedience, these spirits ended up not receiving bodies, a necessary ingredient to progress to mortality and be qualified for one of the three kingdoms of glory. Twelfth President Spencer W. Kimball wrote,

Those who followed Lucifer in his rebellion in the premortal life and those who in mortality sin against the Holy Ghost are sons of perdition. The ex-mortal sons of perdition will be resurrected, as will everyone else; but they will finally suffer the second death, the spiritual death, for "they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness." (Hel. 14:18.) (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 125).

While many Latter-day Saints bristle at the doctrine of hell (i.e., "How could a loving God send His children to such a place?"), they may have not considered the fact that these spirits were never given the chance to have a physical body because of the wrong choice they made in the preexistence. Just one sin. Just one rebellion. When I bring this issue up with some Latter-day Saints, I sometimes get defensive arguments. "They knew better but still chose wrong," one told me. "So get what they deserve." Yet how many sins and wrong choices has every human—including me and you—made? So why don't we get outer darkness too?

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The second possible “sons of perdition” are mortals. To look closer at this possibility, let’s break humans into two categories: 1) Those who have never been Mormon; 2) Those who are or once were Mormon.

It is impossible for those who never joined Mormonism to become sons of perdition. Hence, the very worse lot in their lives will be the [telestial kingdom](#). (To see the differences between the three kingdoms of glory, click [here](#).) Smith told a general conference audience:

I think I am safe in saying that no man can become a Son of Perdition until he has known the light. Those who have never received the light are not to become Sons of Perdition. (*Conference Reports*, October 1958, p. 21. Ellipsis mine).

Thus, the only mortals who can possibly become “sons of perdition” must be Latter-day Saints who fall/fell away. A church manual reports, “To become a son of perdition one must sin against the Holy Ghost, but before that is possible, one must receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (*Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual Religion 324 and 325*, 2001, p. 161). To become a church member, [baptism](#) and [confirmation](#) are required. Another manual states,

Baptism is the first saving ordinance of the gospel (see Articles of Faith 1:4). Through baptism and confirmation by priesthood authority, you became a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*, 2004, p. 21

So, even if you attended LDS Church services, sang the hymns, and even partook of the weekly [sacrament](#), yet you were never baptized and confirmed into the faith, you can *never* become a son of perdition. That ought to bring a sigh of relief to many who are reading this article! Even Nazi dictator Adolph Hitler will get nothing less than the telestial kingdom since he was never baptized/confirmed into the church; work was done in proxy for him in the London, England temple several decades ago. (To see his baptism for the dead record and other temple work done for him, click [here](#).)

For those who once were baptized and confirmed into Mormonism, what is your status? It is true that the only mortals who had once been members are eligible to become sons of perdition, a fact that may worry some former Mormons who wonder if they might be destined for outer darkness. However, based on the teaching of church leaders, I believe it is *utterly impossible* for any mortal to become this despised son of perdition.

First of all, to become a son of perdition, you need to have been baptized into the church, then turned from the religion in order to fight against it, all the while *knowing it is true*.

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That last part of the previous sentence is very important. You not only need to have been a Mormon, but you have to have “full knowledge” that this is the *restored* church of God and still fought against it. This is what was taught by several important church leaders, including founder Joseph Smith. He once said that a person

has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 358).

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Joseph Fielding Smith who said that “this class is composed of all who have known the power of God in this mortal life and then, having *full knowledge of the power and purposes of God*, rebel against him, putting Jesus Christ to open shame” (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:219-220. Italics in original). Meanwhile, sixth President Joseph F. Smith, also taught that a “full knowledge” of the truth is necessary, adding that not even Judas Iscariot—the betrayer of Jesus—will be destined for Outer Darkness:

It is probable that only personages who have acquired similar full knowledge, who willfully and deliberately deny the truth, when they know it to be the truth, can commit the unpardonable sin and become sons of perdition. They are sons of perdition because, “Having denied the Holy Spirit after having received it, and having denied the Only Begotten Son of the Father, having crucified him unto themselves and put him to open shame” (D.&C. 76:35). They must have had a fullness of knowledge; a testimony which cannot be destroyed. One must be on a high eminence to fall so low; and few in world’s history have attained such a height. It is doubtful if even Judas, who betrayed Jesus, was sufficiently enlightened to become a son of perdition (*Gospel Doctrine*, p. 545).

The question is, what exactly does “full knowledge” entail? No exact details are given. Yet what kind of devious person would it be who knew “full” well that Mormonism was true—including the historicity of the [Book of Mormon](#), the authenticity of the restored church’s leadership that began with [Joseph Smith](#), and the accuracy of the [First Vision](#) event—and then fight against these truths?

In a general conference talk, Joseph Fielding Smith further explained that

The sons of perdition are those who have had a knowledge of the truth, have known that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, have had the testimony of the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Ghost, and these things have all been revealed so *that they know they are true*; and then they turn against them and fight them knowingly (*Conference Reports*, April 1942, p. 27. Italics in original).

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Notice very carefully Smith's sequence:

1. You "have *had* a knowledge of the truth" (or, as we mentioned, "full knowledge"—though again Smith didn't explain what the adjective "full" entailed)
2. You "have *known* that Jesus Christ was the Son of God"
3. You "*had the testimony* of the Spirit of the Lord"
4. You *had* revelation to let you "*know they are true*"
5. You continue to fight against the true church *knowingly* despite the four previous points being true.

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What's interesting is that there are many former Mormons who still believe "Jesus Christ was the Son of God" and have a "testimony of the Spirit of the Lord." However, their faith no longer is in the [Jesus of Mormonism but the Jesus of the Bible](#). Their theology was turned upside down!

As Joseph Fielding Smith put it, those mortals who fit into this nebulous category of "sons of perdition" will suffer permanently while the worst of the worst sinners will suffer only temporarily before receiving a kingdom of glory. He wrote,

Outer darkness is something which cannot be described, except that it is to be placed beyond the benign and comforting influence of the Spirit of God—banished entirely from his presence. This extreme punishment will not be given to any but the sons of perdition. Even the wicked of the earth who never knew the power of God, after they have paid the price of their sinning—for they must suffer the excruciating torment which sins will bring—shall at last come forth from the prison house. . . With the sons of perdition, however, even this blessing is denied. They have wilfully (sic) made themselves servants of Satan and servants to him shall they remain forever. They place themselves beyond the power of repentance and beyond the mercies of God. (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:220-221).

Does this description of God make it sound as if he is just (at least according to an LDS context)? Just because Hitler, Mao, and Stalin along with Judas Iscariot (as mentioned above) never became Latter-day Saints apparently provides them with a much higher privilege—a life in the telestial kingdom—over those who once believed but left the true fold, kicking and screaming in their continued fight against the restored church of Jesus Christ.

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Here is one more thing to think about: I work full time with a Christian ministry aimed at converting Mormons. Thus, many would say I “fight” against the church. Yet I never was baptized and confirmed into this church. Did I really have “full” knowledge? It doesn’t matter because I never joined. Yet I am certainly exempt from outer darkness, no questions asked. But suppose, deep down, I do believe the church is true. Even if I did, I still am not eligible for outer darkness. How unfair is this scenario?

In Review

1. Those spirits who rebelled against God in the preexistence are the original sons of perdition. These spirits never received a mortal body necessary to progress to a kingdom of glory. (You are not one of those spirits since you have a mortal body.)
2. Those mortals who never join the LDS Church (through baptism) cannot become sons of perdition. Even the most evil of people, including Adolph Hitler and those of his ilk, appear to have a place reserved for them in nothing less than the telestial kingdom.
3. Those mortals who did join the LDS Church in this lifetime must fit the following criteria to be classified as a son of perdition, with a destiny to outer darkness.
 - a. They once held membership in the church (through baptism/confirmation);
 - b. They had “full knowledge” of their apostasy from the true and restored church of Jesus Christ;
 - c. They continue to fight against the LDS Church despite their knowledge.

How impossible would it be for a former Mormon (with “full” knowledge, even!) to become a son of perdition? Over the 30 years in Christian ministry, I have met many former Mormons who once believed in Mormonism, but none has ever confessed that they still believe Mormonism to be true. True, some former Mormons have expressed doubts and wondered if the church might possibly be true, which is a completely natural response after having left the “one true church.” If they decided they made a mistake because they still believed the church were true, they would be more apt to rejoin it rather than stay excommunicated and fight against it.

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Meanwhile, I have known many who could be considered “fighters” against the church, including those who became involved in what could be considered “[anti-Mormon](#)” activities. However, not once have I ever suspected such a person to be a closet believer in Mormonism. A person would have to be very wicked to know the church was true yet still fight against it!

With the exception of those who left the church and later rejoined, every other former Mormon left the church because they believed it is *not* true. Thus, by the definition given by the leaders cited above, these people cannot be considered sons of perdition. If this is the case, the worst fate any former Latter-day Saint can anticipate is the telestial kingdom.

The conclusion: You (former Mormon), despite being baptized into this church, are not a son of perdition! You don't believe it is true, which is the reason why you left. Now go take a nap and rest well!

And, if you haven't come into relationship with the Jesus of the Bible, I encourage you to do some homework and meet Him. You'll never regret it.

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