

# Do I Belong to a Cult?

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In their book, *How Wide the Divide, A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation*, Steven Robinson and Craig Blomberg make the following statement,

*"Many of these characteristics [of what define a 'cult'] no longer apply to Mormonism" (p. 193)*

"No longer apply", suggests that they once did apply. Exactly what "cult-like" characteristics did at one time apply in the past that "no longer apply" now? This is the question I intend to address in this article.

The reasoning for the statement is based on a broad definition of "cult" given by Walter Martin.

"In his book *The New Cults*, Walter Martin defines a cult as 'a group, religious in nature, which surrounds a leader, or a group which either denies or misinterprets essential biblical doctrines.'"

(LetUsReason.org, Eight Marks of Organized Heresy Which Make a CULT,  
<http://www.letusreason.org/cults1.htm>)

*"Unless the term 'cult' is to be so broad as to be meaningless (that is, equivalent to anything that is not Evangelical—including most Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and liberal Protestantism, not to mention entirely separate world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam), then it should be reserved for the kind of small, bizarre fringe groups sociologists more technically label as cultic (such as those led to their deaths by Jim Jones or David Koresh)."*  
(*How Wide the Divide*, p. 193)

I am less interested in a definition of cult as anything that disagrees with someone's definition of Christian teachings from the Bible, and am more concerned with the very real danger of finding myself aligned with something legitimately insidious. After all, the victims caught in the Jim Jones or David Koresh traps were, like me, innocent sincere seekers of truth. How does one remain open to truth (as scripture tells us, "like a child"), without becoming vulnerable and susceptible to the evils of someone or some institution with an agenda?

To address this I would rather trust a less biased source for information on how real cults work.

## International Cultic Studies Association

*"Founded in 1979, the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) is a global network of people concerned about psychological manipulation and abuse in cultic or high-demand groups, alternative movements, and other environments. ICSA is tax-exempt, supports civil liberties, and is not affiliated with any religious or commercial organizations."*  
(<http://www.icsahome.com/aboutus>)

ICSA has developed a list of characteristics associated with cultic groups [<http://www.icsahome.com/articles/characteristics>] that can be used as a tool to evaluate an organization against a standard of what can be considered a cult.

*“Concerted efforts at influence and control lie at the core of cultic groups, programs, and relationships. Many members, former members, and supporters of cults are not fully aware of the extent to which members may have been manipulated, exploited, even abused. The following list of social-structural, social-psychological, and interpersonal behavioral patterns commonly found in cultic environments may be helpful in assessing a particular group or relationship.*

*Compare these patterns to the situation you were in (or in which you, a family member, or friend is currently involved). This list may help you determine whether there is cause for concern. Bear in mind that this list is not meant to be a “cult scale” or a definitive checklist to determine whether a specific group is a cult. This is not so much a diagnostic instrument as it is an analytical tool.” (Michael D. Langone, ICSA Today, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2015, 10.)*

## Characteristics Associated with Cultic Groups Compared with Early Mormon Church

Below is the ICSA list of *Characteristics Associated with Cultic Groups* alongside comparative notes about the Mormon Church<sup>[1]</sup> at the time of Joseph Smith. Nothing exhaustive is attempted here. This is a list of observations that come to mind to demonstrate cult/non-cult like behavior of the church at the time of Joseph Smith.

No attempt has been made here to compare cult-like characteristics and patterns to modern-day Mormon or LDS churches.

List of Cult-Like Characteristics and patterns	Comparative notes and observations about the Mormon church at the time of Joseph Smith
The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.	Church Government with checks and balances in place <sup>[2]</sup> Example of church government in action, Joseph Smith opposes Sidney Rigdon <sup>[3]</sup> Joseph Smith preaches against depending on the Prophet <sup>[4]</sup>
Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.	Example of Elder Palatial Brown on teaching false doctrine <sup>[5]</sup> Creeds discouraged, all truth embraced <sup>[6]</sup> Members encouraged to worship how, where, or what they may <sup>[7]</sup>
Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).	There was an emphasis on the importance of spiritual gifts <sup>[8]</sup> Sensational and unnatural gifts discouraged <sup>[9]</sup>

<p>The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).</p>	<p>Men should not be commanded in all things<sup>[10]</sup>  Ministers of other sects invited to speak to Mormons in Nauvoo<sup>[11]</sup>  See also footnotes 3, 4, and 5</p>
<p>The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s), and its members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).</p>	<p>Joseph Smith was regarded as a prophet<sup>[12]</sup>  The members regarded themselves as "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth". (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30)<sup>[13]</sup>  Will everybody be damned, but Mormons?<sup>[14]</sup>  All are invited, black and white, bond and free<sup>[15]</sup></p>
<p>The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.</p>	<p>The practice of claiming to be elected and saved while others around you are damned was lamented<sup>[16]</sup></p>
<p>The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).</p>	<p>"We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law." (Article of Faith 12)  See also notes 2, 3, and 4  Joseph Smith declared "king" in a secret Council of Fifty.<sup>[17]</sup></p>
<p>The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviors or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before they joined the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).</p>	<p>"We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men"<sup>[18]</sup>  This characteristic brings to mind the phrase "lie for the Lord" and the sentence from the Oct 24 1838 Thomas Marsh affidavit, "They have among them a company consisting of all that are considered true Mormons, called the Danites, who have taken an oath to support the heads of the Church in all things, that they say or do, whether right or wrong". I give here a brief account of history from this period. The interested reader will need to research deeper and determine for himself about Joseph Smith's involvement in these events. Personally I take Joseph at his word and do not believe he lied about these things.<sup>[19]</sup></p>
<p>The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.</p>	<p>The leadership were held to a system of checks and balances. See note 2. (See also notes 3 and 4.)  Example of Elder Palatial Brown. Instead of being shamed, Joseph encouraged liberty of thinking and believing as one pleases. See note 5.</p>

Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and to radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before they joined the group.	Though conversion often resulted in ties being cut with family and friends it was not “required”, and certainly not out of “subservience to the leader”, see note 4. Joseph Smith was rarely mentioned in the teaching of early missionaries. <sup>[20]</sup>
The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.	Teaching and converting new members is true for any proselytizing religion. It is interesting to note that initial missionary efforts were to the Lamanites and locating the remnant, not gentile converts. <sup>[21]</sup>
The group is preoccupied with making money.	<p>The need for funds in any organization or religion is necessary. Determining to what extent the raising of money becomes a “preoccupation” is subjective, but certainly worth evaluation. If there was a preoccupation in Joseph Smith’s day it was with a Temple, not money (except as it was necessary for the building of the Temple etc.).<sup>[22]</sup></p> <p>It was taught that “the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish.” (2 Nephi 26:31). When they failed to do this they were chastised.<sup>[23]</sup></p> <p>When tithing was instituted, the use for the funds were designated for a specific purpose.<sup>[24]</sup> The use of funds were transparent and managed by the voice of the people.<sup>[25]</sup> Mormons in Joseph Smith’s day sacrificed<sup>[26]</sup> to build temples,<sup>[27]</sup> purchase lands,<sup>[28]</sup> organize a march to Missouri,<sup>[29]</sup> and even buy mummies.<sup>[30]</sup> Parents were taught to take responsibility for the maintenance of their families.<sup>[31]</sup></p> <p>The failure of the Kirkland Safety Society can be seen as a good example of a “preoccupation with making money”.<sup>[32]</sup></p>
Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.	<p>Time and labor of the saints were not “inordinate” beyond anything required for the maintenance of a healthy society. Although sacrifice was part of the religion (see note 26), saints were taught “Do not expect to eat the bread or wear the garment of the laborer in Zion.” (D&amp;C 42:42. See also note 31)</p> <p>This teaching is consistent with the example of King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon, “even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you”.<sup>[33]</sup></p>
Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.	<p>There is nothing found in the early church teachings that would justify living and/or socializing “only with other group members”. What we do find is Christ teaching the Nephites not to forbid any from meeting together.<sup>[34]</sup></p> <p>See also notes 7 and 11</p>

<p>The most loyal members (the “true believers”) feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.</p>	<p>Joseph encouraged searching for truth no matter where it be found.<sup>[35]</sup> Not all of God’s words are in the Bible.<sup>[36]</sup> God has spoken to every nation. Truth is everywhere, among all people.<sup>[37]</sup></p> <p>In Liberty Jail Joseph Smith stripped priesthood of all its right to exercise control and dominion. Joseph Smith revoked the right of priesthood to govern, and replaced it with the priesthood’s obligation to teach and inspire.<sup>[38]</sup></p> <p>See also notes 5 and 11</p> <p>Many left without fear of reprisal including church leaders. In many cases the opposite was true, where those who remained true to the faith feared reprisal from the disaffected. Joseph Smith’s worst critics were Mormons. They abused him, led mobs against him, conspired to have him imprisoned and ultimately murdered. (see notes 19 and 32)</p>
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[1] There are nearly 100 denominations claiming Joseph Smith as its founder. [\[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_denominations\\_in\\_the\\_Latter\\_Day\\_Saint\\_movement\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_denominations_in_the_Latter_Day_Saint_movement). I use the term “Mormon” (instead of “LDS” or something else) to identify a common term by which most will recognize the original sect founded by Joseph Smith.

[2] Comparing the government of the Church to the U.S. Constitution, Duane Crowther writes that “A revealed system of checks and balances exists within the Church also... The Lord has even provided for the trial of the President of the Church if he should transgress. (referencing Doctrine and Covenants 107:81-84).” (*Thus Saith the Lord*, 1980 pg 19)

[3] At a conference in October of 1843 Joseph complained of Rigdon’s diminished role in the First Presidency. “On a motion seconded by Hyrum, the conference voted to retain Rigdon in the First Presidency. Frustrated, Joseph told the conference he still lacked confidence in Rigdon’s ‘integrity and steadfastness.’” (Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling*, 2005, pg 511)

[4] On 17 March 1842, at the organization of the Relief Society in Nauvoo:

"President Joseph Smith read the 14th chapter of Ezekiel--said the Lord had declared by the Prophet, that the people should each one stand for himself, and depend on no man or men in that state of corruption of the Jewish church--that righteous persons could only deliver their own souls--applied it to the present state of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--said if the people departed from the Lord, they must fall--that they were depending on the Prophet, hence were darkened in their minds, in consequence of neglecting the duties devolving upon themselves, envious towards the innocent, while they afflict the virtuous with their shafts of envy." (*Teaching of Prophet Joseph Smith* p. 237-238.)

[5] In Nauvoo Illinois in March of 1843 there is an account of Elder Palatial Brown being hauled up for trial before the High Council "for teaching false doctrine". Joseph Smith lamented, "I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodist, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine. (DHC 5:340)

[6] Joseph felt that creeds set limits, “and say ‘hitherto shalt thou come & no further’ — which I cannot subscribe to.” He explained that the difference between the Christian sects and The Latter Day Saints was that the sectarians “were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members the privilege of believing anything

not contained therein; whereas the Latter Day Saints had no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.” (*Rough Stone Rolling*, Bushman, p. 285)

[7] “We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may. (Article of Faith 11)”

[8] “Because faith is wanting, the fruits are. No man since the world was had faith without having something along with it. The ancients quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, women received their dead, etc. By faith the worlds were made. A man who has none of the gifts has no faith; and he deceives himself, if he supposes he has. Faith has been wanting, not only among the heathen, but in professed Christendom also, so that tongues, healings, prophecy, and prophets and apostles, and all the gifts and blessings have been wanting” (*Teaching of Prophet Joseph Smith*, 270). See also Moroni 7:37, 10:24-25, Doctrine and Covenants 46.

[9] “Visionaries were a variant of a restless seeker population that wanted more religion than conventional Protestantism offered. Some seekers looked for a return to the exact forms of the New Testament church; others sought a bestowal of divine authority. The greatest hunger was for spiritual gifts like dreams, visions, tongues, miracles, and spiritual raptures, making the visionaries the natural audience for the Mormon missionaries and the new revelation.” (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 2005, p. 113)

“The Kirkland Saints’ antics were unlike anything Joseph had known in New York. Howe said he ‘appeared astonished at the wild enthusiasm and scalping performances, of his proselytes there.’ Joseph later wrote that ‘some strange notions and false spirits had crept in among them’ which had to be ‘overcome.’ But, of course, he could not discredit visionary experience. When Levi Hancock told about his vision of Christ after baptism, Joseph said it showed the Lord’s favor. He could scarcely say otherwise when the promise of visions and gifts was one of Mormonism’s great appeals. Corral said Mormons ‘believe rather more firmly ... than others do’ in biblical promises ‘that these signs shall follow them that believed; in his name they shall cast out devils, heal the sick, &c.’ Joseph had to restrain the excesses without discouraging spiritual gifts altogether... Spiritual gifts were meant to instruct, not merely to excite... Joseph Smith turned visions away from sensation toward doctrine.” (*ibid*, p. 152)

“[M]any ridiculous things were entered into, calculated to bring disgrace upon the church of God, to cause the Spirit of God to be withdrawn, and to uproot and destroy those glorious principles which had been developed for the salvation of the human family. But when the authorities returned, the spirit was made manifest, those members that were exercised with it were tried for their fellowship, and those that would not repent and forsake it were cut off... We have also had brethren and sisters who have had the gift of tongues falsely. They would speak in a muttering, unnatural voice, and their bodies be distorted like the Irvingites before alluded to, whereas, there is nothing unnatural in the Spirit of God... [N]o person through the discerning of spirits can bring a charge against another — they must be proven guilty by positive evidence, or they stand clear.” (From editorial by Joseph Smith, published in *Times and Seasons*, 1 Apr. 1842 entitled *Try the Spirits*)

[10] “For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:26-27)

[11] “He did not intend to force his religion on anyone. He thought of himself as the champion of free worship. Nauvoo’s ordinance for religious freedom listed a dozen religions allowed to practice in the city. Josiah Quincy was surprised to hear Joseph invite a Methodist to preach from a Mormon pulpit. The socialist John Finch noted that ‘Joe Smith was in the practice of inviting strangers who visited Nauvoo, of every shade of politics and religion, to lecture to his people.’ Joseph could honestly say that ‘it is one of the first principles of my life and one that I have cultivated from my childhood, having been taught it of my father, to allow every one the liberty of conscience.’ He made it an article of faith to allow people to ‘worship how, where, or what they may.’ He declared, ‘I am an advocate of unadulterated freedom.’” (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 2005, p. 522)

[12] "Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ" (Doctrine and Covenants 21:1)

[13] Over 2 years prior to this revelation the "church" was defined as "whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church." (Doctrine and Covenants 10:67). In other words, the church was not considered an organization or club that people join. The church was the people, not the structure. This definition is consistent with how the word "church" has been translated from the Greek in our bibles. "Ecclesia" loosely means "assembly".

With this definition of church in mind, note that rather than an "elitist special exalted status" the context of this revelation is inclusive to "every man", "all flesh" and without respect to persons.

"But that every man might speak in the name of God, the Lord, even the Savior of the world that faith also might increase in the earth that my everlasting covenant might be established, that the fullness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world and before kings and rulers. Behold, I am God and have spoken it.

These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants, in their weakness, after the manner of their language that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known, and inasmuch as they sought Wisdom it might be instructed, and inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened that they might repent, ... And also, those to whom these commandments were given might have Power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole Earth with which I the Lord am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually... For I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh, for I am no respecter to persons" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:20-35).

[14] "Will everybody be damned, but Mormons?

Yes, and a great portion of them, unless they repent, and work righteousness." (From Joseph Smith's "FAQ" from *History of the Church*, Vol.3, Ch.3, p.28-30)

[15] "For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile." (2 Nephi 26:33)

[16] A practice of claiming to be elected and saved while all around others are elected to be cast down to hell was lamented by Alma in the Book of Mormon. (see Alma 31:13-26)

[17] The Council of Fifty was an organization established by Joseph Smith in 1844 to symbolize and represent a future theocratic or theodemocratic "Kingdom of God" on the earth.

"In short, Joseph Smith ordained the council to be the governing body of the world, with himself as its King." (Opening paragraph, Council of Fifty, <http://www.mormonthink.com/glossary/council-of-fifty.htm>)

This is one area I'm not qualified to write on. There is a lot of information on the subject. I have not read it. What I have read leads me to conclude that what was meant by "king" by Joseph and the council is not the same thing we typically attribute to that word. I think of it as being more like King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon. He was more of a servant under the people rather than a ruler *over* the people.

Joseph did not crown himself king; he was declared a king by the men on the council. He was not declared to be King of the Mormons or King of America or King of the World. Joseph Smith was declared to be a king. What that means is a topic that requires its own study (See referenced books below).

One other thing to note as it relates to this topic (about cults), is that this council (of fifty) was made up of both Mormons and non-Mormons, indicative of Joseph's insistence that the kingdom of God was not to be an auxiliary of the Church.



"There are men admitted members of this honorable council who are not members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, neither profess any creed or religious sentiment whatever, to show that in the organization of this kingdom men are not consulted as to their religious opinions or notions in any shape or form whatever and that we act upon the broad and liberal principle that all men have equal rights, and ought to be respected...Hence the importance of thrusting from us every spirit of bigotry and intolerance towards a man's religious sentiments, that spirit which has drenched the world in blood -when a man feels the least temptation to such intolerance he ought to spurn it from him." (*The Joseph Smith Papers: Administrative Records*, Council of Fifty Minutes pg 97-100)

The prophet continued,

"I will appeal to every man in this council beginning at the youngest that when he arrives at the hoary age he will have to say that the principles of intolerance and bigotry never had a place in this kingdom."

Here are three highly recommended sources of information on the subject of the Council of Fifty.

For those seeking a very good overview without getting bogged down by the minutiae of the minutes, there's *The Council of Fifty: What the Records Reveal About Mormon History*. Weighing in at less than 200 pages, This is a collection of essays from LDS scholars who have already waded through the minutes of the council so you don't have to. It is arranged roughly by topics such as The Separatist Impulse; Injustices Leading to the Creation of the Council of Fifty; Constitution Writing in the counsel of Fifty; Lost Teachings of Joseph Smith; and more. Plus photos.

Next is *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History*, edited by Jedediah Rogers. Here you'll find a complete history of what we know about the council in the words of those who were part of it. This volume will give you more of a narrative read, which you can't really get from the minutes. I highly recommend this one for those wanting to dig a little deeper while still not ready to bite into the big book. The Forward and Preface are invaluable summaries, plus you get a list of every member of the council along with a short bio of each. This is helpful, because although some of the names are familiar (all twelve apostles sat on the council), there are several people among that group of fifty-plus you may not have heard of. With maps and pictures.

Finally, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Administrative Records*, Council of Fifty Minutes. This is the big one, full of intimate details regarding what was discussed at these meetings and why. Even the editors of the multi-volume Joseph Smith Papers strongly suggest that if you can only afford one book from the set, this is the one you should have. The discussions of how the kingdom should be established are extremely insightful, but there is one caveat: we don't always get every word that was spoken in these meetings. Sometimes the recorder merely tells us that Joseph Smith lectured at length to the council, and he leaves it at that. With maps, photos, drawings, and tables.

[18] Article of Faith 13: "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things."

[19] In October 1838, responding to the outbreak of hostility between Mormons and Missourians, Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs issued an "Extermination Order" directing that Mormons be slain or driven from the State of Missouri. The Order gave violence against Mormons legitimacy and made Mormon responses an act of war against the state.

On October 24 1838, Thomas Marsh, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, signed an affidavit condemning and blaming Joseph Smith for causing all the violence. The Marsh allegations were endorsed by a second affidavit from fellow apostle Orson Hyde. The affidavits identified Joseph Smith as the one responsible for Mormon violence directed at Missouri citizens. After recounting circumstantial evidence of thefts by Mormons that he claimed were supervised by Joseph, the Marsh affidavit stated,

"They have among them a company consisting of all that are considered true Mormons, called the Danites, who have taken an oath to support the heads of the Church in all things, that they say or do, whether right or wrong. ... On Saturday last, I am informed by the Mormons that they had a meeting at Far West, at which they appointed a company of twelve, by the name of the Destruction Company, for the purpose of burning and destroying; ... they



passed a decree that no Mormon dissenter should leave Caldwell county alive; and that such as attempted to do it, should be shot down, and sent to tell their tale in eternity. In a conversation between Dr. Avar and other Mormons, said Avar proposed to start a pestilence among the Gentiles, as he called them, by poisoning their corn, fruit, &c., and saying it was the work of the Lord; and said Avar advocated lying for the support of their religion, and said it was no harm to lie for the Lord!! The plan of said Smith, the Prophet, is to take this State; and he professes to his people to intend taking the United States, and ultimately the whole world. This is the belief of the Church, and my own opinion of the Prophet's plans and intentions... The Prophet inculcates the notion, and it is believed by every true Mormon that Smith's prophecies are superior to the law of the land. I have heard the Prophet say that he should yet tread down his enemies, and walk over their dead bodies; that if he was not let alone, he would be a second Mahomet [Mohammad] to this generation, and that he would make it one gore of blood from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean; that like Mahomet, whose motto, in treating for peace, was "Al Koran or the Sword," so should it be eventually with us, "Joseph Smith or the Sword." These last statements were made during the last summer." (Thomas B. Marsh Affidavit, Richmond, Mo., October the 24th 1838 <http://www.tungate.com/TBMarsh.htm>)

In calmer days, both Marsh and Hyde would recant their sworn affidavits. But in 1838 their statements were thought to be entirely truthful, and provided justification for the Missouri political leaders, militia and general population to see Joseph Smith and Mormons as a clear and present danger to them and their property.

The first skirmishes between Mormons and Missourians began in August 1838 at a polling station when Mormons tried to vote. A band of Mormons led by Sampson Avar confronted election judge Adam Black about the failure to protect Mormon voting rights. Joseph Smith was among these Mormons. Judge Black attributed threats of violence to Avar, and said Joseph did not approve and instead possessed no such heart for violence.

In the aftermath of the fight at the polling station, Avar's authority to direct the Mormon militia was removed by Joseph Smith and Avar was reassigned as a surgeon. The re-assignment was because Joseph did not want violence to be used to resolve conflicts and Avar thought otherwise. Avar testified in November 1838, "I once had a command as an officer, but Joseph Smith, Jr., removed me from it, and I asked him the reason, and he assigned that he had another office for me. Afterwards Mr. Rigdon told me I was to fill the office of surgeon, to attend to the sick and wounded." (Testimony before Judge Austin A. King, 5th District Court of Missouri, November 12, 1838.)

Avar continued to support violence against perceived enemies, and formed a group that came to be known as the "Danites." Joseph denied that he approved or supported Avar's group or violent actions. Historians have debated the question of Joseph's involvement with the Danite organization and activities. Joseph's denials have been questioned largely because of testimony against Joseph given by Avar in late 1838 before Judge King.

Sampson Avar led the Danites, a secret Mormon, quasi-military organization that terrorized Missourians and exacted revenge against them. They burned houses and engaged in assaults to retaliate against the local non-Mormons. Avar was responsible for Joseph, Hyrum and others being held on the charge of treason. Without Avar's testimony it was unlikely for enough evidence to be shown for probable cause to hold them on the charge of treason. Joseph wrote from jail about Avar the following:

We have learned also since we have been in prison that many false and pernicious things which were calculated to lead the saints far astray and to do great injury (have been taught by Dr. [Sampson] Avar) as coming from the Presidency taught by Dr Avar and we have reason to fear (that) many (other things) designing and corrupt characters like unto himself (have been teaching many things) which the presidency never knew of being taught in the church by anybody until after they were made prisoners, which if they had known of, they would have spurned them and their authors from them as they would the gates of hell. Thus we find that there has been frauds and secret abominations and evil works of darkness going on leading the minds of the weak and unwary into confusion and distraction, and palming it all the time upon upon the presidency while mean time the presidency were ignorant as well as innocent of these things, which were practicing in the church in their name[.]" (*Joseph Smith Papers*, Documents Vol. 6, p. 306)

[20] On the subject of the teachings of early missionaries, Richard Bushman relates, "McLellin noted the sermon's topic in his journal. 'After reading a portion of the Saviour's teaching in the book of Mormon,' Elder 'B. Young ...

spoke about 1-1/2 hours contrasting the religions of the day with the truth.' Others spoke about the nature of the priesthoods, judgments, the power of the resurrection, the Kingdom of Christ, or 'faith &c.' Even if the sermons ranged widely under these headings, it is doubtful any one preachment covered the whole story of the Church. Joseph Smith was never a topic, and no explicit mention was made, so far as can be told, of the gathering to Zion. The missionaries apparently aimed not to convey the broad idea of the restoration, but rather to make an impression." (Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 280)

[21] If the original missionary efforts by Joseph Smith were about a "preoccupation with bringing in new members", then it's unlikely the focus would have been with Native Americans.

In Doctrine and Covenants 28:8 there is a revelation given to send the first group of missionaries "unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them". It would have been a nearly preposterous proposition in that day to target Native Americans by the first missionaries, yet that was the audience to whom they were called.

The reason for this requires it's own discussion, but in short it involves going into the western mountains, the Rocky Mountains, locating the remnant of Lehi's seed (Doctrine and Covenants 3:16-18), and establishing Zion (see 3 Nephi 21:23-29).

In a letter to N.C. Saxton, Joseph Smith said, "Our Western tribe of Indians are descendents from that Joseph that was sold to Egypt, and that the land of America is a promised land unto them, and unto it, all the tribes of Israel will come with as many of the Gentiles as shall comply with the requirements of the new covenant." (*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, compiled by Dean C. Jesse, p. 273)

The first missionaries were sent to "Lamanites", not Gentiles. They were on their way to "the borders by the Lamanites" (Doctrine and Covenants 28:9) when they ran across and managed to convert an entire congregation in Kirtland, Ohio, but their target was Native Americans.

[22] "During the course of his life, he never built a standard meetinghouse, even in Nauvoo, where the Mormon population exceeded 10,000. Although Sunday services were held regularly, the Nauvoo Saints met in houses, public buildings, and an outdoor 'bowery.' Wherever Joseph lived - in Kirkland, Independence, Far West, or Nauvoo - his architectural imagination focused on temples. Where he did not build a temple, he planned one." (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 216)

[23] After the failure of a rescue mission to Missouri (an organized march known as "Zion's Camp"), the saints were reprimanded for not sharing their substance and holding onto their money. In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord chastised the saints because "they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them; And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom ... And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer... But I speak concerning my churches abroad—there are many who will say: Where is their God? Behold, he will deliver them in time of trouble, otherwise we will not go up unto Zion, and will keep our moneys." (Doctrine and Covenants 105:3-8)

[24] On December 7, 1836, Bishop Edward Partridge and his counselors officially defined tithing as 2 percent of the net worth of each member of the church, after deducting debts. This money was put to covering the operating expenses of the Church, and it appears to have been adequate for a time. Still, this was man's law, not God's. Later, after the Church had been growing faster than anyone had anticipated, it was time to get the Lord's opinion on how to handle the financial end of things. Even though Bishop Partridge had declared tithing to be 2 percent of net, Partridge was not authorized to set doctrine; only God could do that. So in July of 1838, Joseph put the question to the Lord as to how all this was intended to work, and the answer is what we now know as the law of tithing. This law consists of the entire chapter of Doctrine and Covenants 119, and takes up all of seven short verses. You can read it here. (<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/119?lang=eng>) The use for these funds were specified to be "For the building of mine house, and for the laying of the foundation of Zion and for the priesthood, and for the debts of the Presidency of my Church." The words "surplus", "increase", and "interest" as used in 1838 had different meanings than how we use these terms today. This subject is worth

further study, I won't take space to elaborate on more here. (ref D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, chapter 6 on history of tithing in the Church)

[25] In 1838, when the Church was eight years old, some 15,000 converts had already emigrated from their homes and gathered to Missouri, the new Zion. Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, who constituted the First Presidency at the time, were spending all their time dealing with and settling this huge flow of immigrants, to the exclusion of being able to provide a living for their own families. Things were at a point where Joseph and Sidney must either be compensated for their time, or they were both going to have to stop what they were doing and go out and get a real job. On May 12th the two men took the matter before the High Council of the Church. George W. Robinson recorded the minutes:

"The Presidency laid before the High Council their situation as to maintaining their families in the situation and relation they stood to the Church, spending as they have for eight years their time, talents, and property in the service of the Church and now reduced as it were to absolute beggary and still were detained in the service of the Church. It now [had] become necessary that something should be done for their support, either by the Church or else they must do it themselves of their own labors. If the Church said, 'Help yourselves,' they would thank them and immediately do so, but if the Church said, 'Serve us,' then some provisions must be made for them." (Scott Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record*, Pg 182.)

The High Council voted eleven to one (George Hinkle vigorously opposed "a salaried ministry") to further contract the two men for their services, being careful to note that the money was "not for preaching or for receiving the word of God by revelation, neither for instructing the Saints in righteousness," but for work in the "printing establishment, in translating the ancient records, &c, &c." (*ibid.*)

Richard S. Van Wagoner, in his biography of Sidney Rigdon, further explains:

After negotiations, they agreed to offer Rigdon and Smith an annual contract of \$1,100 apiece, more than three times what the average worker of the day could earn. Ebenezer Robinson, the High Council's clerk, later wrote that "when it was noised abroad that the Council had taken such a step, the members of the Church, almost to a man, lifted their voices against it. The expression of disapprobation was so strong and emphatic that at the next meeting of the High Council, the resolution voting them a salary was rescinded." (Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, Pg 230.) What the High Council did instead was offer the men 80 acres for their families to live on.

[26] The early saints were taught in the School of the Prophets in Kirkland "that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things, never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation" (Lectures on Faith, Lecture 6, para 7). The "religion" that requires this sacrifice was not the Church, rather it was the personal connection the individual has between himself and God.

"For unless a person does know that he is walking according to the will of God, it would be offering an insult to the dignity of the Creator, were he to say that he would be a partaker of his glory when he should be done with the things of this life. But when he has this knowledge, and most assuredly knows that he is doing the will of God, his confidence can be equally strong that he will be a partaker of the glory of God." (*ibid*, para 6)

[27] "Economically, the temple was a disaster. The temple diverted funds needed for the City of Zion to a huge, costly building project. Construction artificially boosted the Kirkland economy for a time and then knocked out the props when the temple was completed. The project was far out of proportion to the Church's pitiful resources. Joseph Smith went deeply into debt and was hounded by his creditors ever after. But the economic realities gave Joseph no pause. In his determination to follow his inspiration, he extended himself and the Church far beyond their capacity. Beginning in Kirkland, temples became an obsession. For the rest of his life, no matter the cost of the temple to himself and his people, he made plans, raised money, mobilized workers, and required sacrifice." (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 217-218)

[28] "[O]bserve the commandment which I have given concerning these things — Which saith, or teacheth, to purchase all the lands with money, which can be purchased for money, in the region round about the land which I have appointed to be the land of Zion, for the beginning of the gathering of my saints;" (Doctrine and Covenants 101:69-70)

[29] “Therefore let my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., say unto the strength of my house, my young men and the middle aged—Gather yourselves together unto the land of Zion, upon the land which I have bought with money that has been consecrated unto me. And let all the churches send up wise men with their moneys, and purchase lands even as I have commanded them.” (Doctrine and Covenants 103:22-23)

[30] A Michael H. Chandler arrived in Kirkland on July 3, 1835 with four mummies and some rolls of papyrus that he claimed he had inherited from his uncle. He had come to Kirkland because he was told of Joseph’s translating powers.

“On inspecting the papyri, Joseph announced that one roll contained the writings of Abraham of Ur and another the writings of Joseph of Egypt. Excited by this discovery, he encouraged some of the Kirkland Saints to purchase four mummies and the papyri for \$2,400, a huge sum when money was desperately needed for other projects.” (Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 286)

[31] “All children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age.” (Doctrine and Covenants 83:4) See also 1 Tim 5:8, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

[32] Joseph Smith was a disastrous businessman. He created financial debacle after financial debacle. Joseph was not a particularly good businessman because he didn't care for business. When he ran the red brick store in Nauvoo, for example, he wound up giving away his inventory to needy folks, rather than trying to profit off the needs of the Saints.

“In 1836, Joseph Smith helped form a bank that failed to obtain a state banking charter and therefore could not legally operate as a bank. It dropped ‘bank’ from its name and was called the ‘Kirkland Safety Society.’ In January 1837 it began to issue notes that circulated as currency. Though not technically a bank, it operated exactly as a bank would, and investors likely did not regard it as anything else...

The Panic of 1837 began in May, and resulted in the failure of over half the banks in the United States. On May 10 of that year, New York chartered banks stopped paying in gold and silver coinage, and ill-liquid institutions like the Kirkland Safety Society were unable to survive the panic. Demands on the institution were impossible to satisfy, and like many other institutions, it went out to business.

The image of the Kirkland Safety Society was already tarnished by the failure to obtain a bank charter. It issued printed bills using the word ‘banking’ preceded by ‘Anti’ to reflect the lack of a bank charter. Most who trusted the institution did so because of their religious confidence in Joseph Smith. When it failed, many lost not only their money, but also their confidence in Joseph. In July 1837, the Kirkland Safety Society closed its doors. By late 1837 the church in Kirkland was in complete turmoil. Several hundred saints questioned Joseph Smith’s divine calling as they left the church. A number of angry dissidents tried to seize the leadership of the church. They wanted Joseph voted out of office and driven from Kirkland...

In January 1838, Joseph Smith had a revelation saying in part, ‘Thus saith the Lord, Let the presidency of my Church take their families as soon as practical, and the door is open for them and move on to the west as fast as the way is made plain before their faces and let their hearts be comforted for I will be with them.’ That very night (January 12, 1838), Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon fled Kirkland under cover of darkness. they were chased for 200 miles by an angry mob comprised largely of disaffected Mormons. The mob included members who had suffered significant financial losses as a result of the bank failure. They were intent on taking Joseph’s life as an act of revenge.” (Denver Snuffer, *A Man Without Doubt*, p. 86-88)

The failure of the Kirtland Safety Society can be used as an example of a lot of things, but one thing it is not, is an example of a cult leader with a tight grip on his followers. From what we read in the historical records, the “preoccupation with making money” appears to be something on display more among those disaffected with the failure than with Joseph Smith himself.

[33] “And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne...

And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?" (Mosiah 2:14,17-18)

[34] "And behold ye shall meet together oft; and ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together, but suffer them that they may come unto you and forbid them not;" (3 Ne 18:22)

"And ye see that I have commanded that none of you should go away, but rather have commanded that ye should come unto me, that ye might feel and see; even so shall ye do unto the world;" (*ibid.* v27)

[35] Mormonism is truth, in other words the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints, is truth. ...The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same. (Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, pp. 53-54.)

[36] "Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews? Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?" (2 Nephi 29:6-7. See entire chapter)

[37] "For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word; yea, in his wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true." (Alma 29:8)

[38] "Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson— That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned." (Doctrine and Covenants 121:34-41)