

A Comprehensive List of Reasons Why People Leave or Stop Believing in the LDS Church

Note: Most participants note that instead of a single issue (i.e., “silver bullet) being the cause of LDS disaffection, instead the disaffection was caused by a large number of issues piling up “on the [metaphorical] shelf” until the “shelf collapsed.”

1. Were Never Converted

- a. Were never really converted/integrated in the first place. Probably the largest single group (e.g., low-income converts who were never active, or who go inactive almost immediately...if they were ever active to begin with)

2. Foundational Scriptures

a. Bible

i. Historicity problems

1. Bible likely not written by many of the people whose names are on the books (e.g., Moses couldn't have written about his own death; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John didn't write their books)
2. Little to no evidence that early Old Testament characters existed

ii. Scientific issues (only a small sampling)

1. Age of the earth must be greater than 6,000-10,000 years (conflicting with lineages mentioned in the Bible)
2. Dinosaurs and other animals existing and dying for millions of years before “the fall”
3. Human evolution doesn't allow for a literal Adam/Eve around 6,000 – 10,000 years ago
4. Noah's story
 - a. No evidence of a Global flood (where would the water come from?)
 - b. Organic Evolution/speciation/basic laws of physics don't allow for all animals to be kept in a single arc
 - c. Human population genetics don't allow for the differentiation that would be required following death of all mankind (save Noah's family)
5. Tower of Babel not feasible from a linguistic perspective

b. Book of Mormon

i. Problems with scientific evidence

1. Overwhelming majority of DNA evidence for Native Americans comes from Asia, not Israel.
2. Lack of a reliable geography

3. Lack of adequate and/or credible linguistic evidence (e.g., Hebraisms or Reformed Egyptian amongst native American languages)
 4. Lack of adequate cultural evidence (e.g., teachings of Christ amongst native Americans)
 5. Virtually all the animal and plant species mentioned in the Book of Mormon existed exclusively in Europe until Columbus (e.g., cows, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, wheat, barley)
 6. No mention of many known indigenous animals (e.g., jaguar, turkey, tapir) and plants (e.g., cocoa) in Book of Mormon
 7. No mention of any of the disease issues (e.g., massive deaths of natives) that accompanied European migrations to the new world
 8. Many/most of the technologies and resources mentioned in the Book of Mormon (e.g., steel swords, chariots, helmets, breastplates, coinage, silk, glass) were likely non-existent in Native American culture.
- ii. Isaiah passages included and quoted verbatim in the Book of Mormon (alleged to be quoted from the “Brass plates”) that were actually written *after* Lehi and his family left Jerusalem.
 - iii. Similarities to other books (e.g., View of the Hebrews, Spaulding manuscript, The Late War)
 - iv. Book of Mormon theology (e.g., God and Jesus are one, no polygamy), perfectly reflecting Joseph’s theology at the time it was written and called “the most correct book” and containing “the fullness of the gospel,” but completely neglecting later doctrinal innovations from Nauvoo period (e.g., celestial marriage, celestial kingdom, plural marriage, proxy work for the dead, Word of Wisdom)
 - v. **Book of Mormon witnesses viewed as dubious.**
 1. Later claims by Martin Harris to have seen the plates with his “spiritual eyes” and not his physical eyes.
 2. Three witnesses later either fell away from the church, or followed leaders like James Strang

c. Book of Abraham

- i. Papyri not matching up with Egyptian translations (e.g., Book of Breathing)

d. Joseph’s Translation Problems

- i. Usage of peep stone/hat in translation process, while the golden plates were not use (e.g., why were the plates preserved if not used? Why wasn’t the Urim and Thummim used instead of the stone/hat?)

- ii. Inconsistency between claims of how the Book of Mormon was produced (word for word?) vs. all of the errors contained within
- iii. Kinderhook plates
 1. Some evidence suggesting that Joseph treated fake plates as if they were real, and provided a translation of them

3. Historical Reasons

- a. Joseph's general credibility problems
- b. Treasure digging/use of folk magic
- c. Multiple and varying first vision accounts
- d. Eloping w/ Emma
- e. Continued allegations of sexual impropriety
- f. Continued legal problems
- g. Kirtland bank scandal
- h. Joseph's commanding the destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor printing press in an attempt to cover up
- i. Many interpret many of Joseph's actions to be motivated by a desire to obtain or grow power, wealth, influence, and sexual access to women.
- j. Polygamy
 - i. Lack of any explicit revelation before Joseph practiced it
 - ii. Joseph's coercion of young girls into marrying
 - iii. Joseph's marrying of under-aged women
 - iv. Joseph and others lying about polygamy
 - v. Joseph's polyandry
 - vi. Joseph sending men off and approaching their wives
 - vii. Post-manifesto polygamy (church deceit), 2nd manifesto
- k. Clear connections between the Masonic temple rituals and the LDS church temple ceremonies, with Joseph being a Mason himself.
- l. Lack of evidence for the receipt of the Melchizedek priesthood, with key early witness denying its receipt.
- m. Danites
- n. Succession crisis after Joseph's death (e.g., Brigham Young vs. Sidney Rigdon vs. Joseph Smith III vs. several others)
- o. Mountain Meadows Massacre
- p. Blacks/Priesthood

4. Science

- a. Coming to view science as a more credible way of "knowing" than religion.
- b. Opposing the church's antagonism towards science
- c. Realized through science how much of human cognition and behavior was a result of biology (e.g., genetics, hormones) and environment/context – and how many members/leaders judge and punish the "disobedient," and think of ourselves as "better," when in

reality much of our choices are highly pre-conditioned and contextual.
Determinism?

5. Theological Reasons

- a. Stopped believing in God and/or mystical stories/powers. Became atheist/agnostic/secular humanist.
- b. Stopped believing in Jesus (or an immortal Jesus)
- c. The problem of God + extensive pain/suffering/evil in the world (i.e., theodicy)
- d. The inefficiency of the LDS plan of salvation: very low percentage of active LDS church members in the world (.08% at present)
- e. Objected philosophically to the principle of being “tested” by God to prove one’s worthiness. Some perceive this as inhumane.
- f. Converted to mainstream Christianity, or another religion/faith tradition.

6. Doctrinal Reasons

- a. No clear source/standard for what is actually Mormon doctrine (very amorphous)
- b. Loss of belief in the “one exclusively true but relatively small church” or “religion-as-a-franchise” concept.
- c. Unwilling to believe that all of the other churches are an abomination in God’s sight (e.g., Joseph Smith History 1)
- d. The perceived rejection by the church of Jesus’ New Testament teachings and embracing the Pharisees’ New Testament positions (prophylactic rules are good, obedience without understanding is good per se rather than interpreting and using religious laws to achieve good, etc.)
- e. Belief that LDS doctrine did not “line up” adequately with Biblical Christianity.
- f. Rejection of the doctrine of eternal families, which some experience as actually de-unifying families in this life, or unfairly and unnecessarily creating fear about the separation of families in the afterlife – often through coercive means.
- g. Teachings that God curses people based on dark skin (e.g., Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Fielding Smith/Bruce R. McConkie)
- h. Losing belief in the need for ordinances to be performed for all mankind, via proxy. Feelings that this is a huge waste of time, money, and resources.
- i. Proclamation on the Family
- j. Constantly changing doctrine (e.g., no polygamy, then polygamy, then no polygamy again; blacks can have the priesthood, then they can’t, now they can again; blacks were less valiant in the pre-existence, now they weren’t)
- k. Significant doctrinal conflicts within the scriptures

- l. Current church theology not matching early church theology
- m. Noticing that the church claims to value free agency, but perceiving that it fights too often to squelch it.
- n. Disagree w/ church's position on standards (e.g., wine, beer, masturbation, pre-marital sex) and/or unrealistic expectations
- o. Weird doctrines (e.g., blood atonement, God having sex w/ Mary, Adam/God theory)
- p. Teachings that depict God as merciless/cruel (e.g., most of the Old Testament, angel threatening Joseph with a sword forcing him to practice polygamy, God threatening Emma with damnation if she didn't accept polygamy).
- q. Loss of belief in the idea of a "Satan", hell/damnation, and a final judgment that divides people and families.
- r. No doctrinal/theological accommodations for LGBT individuals.

7. Socially Progressive Reasons

a. Race

- i. Church's racist teachings regarding native Americans and other dark-skinned people
- ii. Church's exclusion of blacks from the priesthood and temple until 1978, after allowing blacks to have the priesthood during Joseph Smith's day.

b. Women

- i. Excluded from priesthood, leadership
- ii. Unequal treatment of men/women, often leading women to feel inferior
- iii. Women taught a very limited set of roles/responsibilities in life (e.g., motherhood, housewife), often feeling discouraged from pursuing professional careers
- iv. Unhealthy messages about female modesty, body, responsibility

c. Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender (LGBT) Individuals

- i. Harmful past advice/policies
 - 1. Teaching that same-sex attraction was a choice and/or a sin.
 - 2. Encouraging LGBT individuals to engage in reparative therapy, or to "pray the gay away"
 - 3. Encouraging LGBT individuals to enter into mixed-orientation marriages, often without disclosing their same-sex sexuality with their spouse
 - 4. Encouraging celibacy
 - 5. Incredibly homophobic statements made in the past by LDS church leaders (e.g., Kimball, Wilkinson, Packer), Sometimes encouraging violence against LGBT individuals (e.g., Boyd K. Packer)

- ii. Church's lack of support/revelation regarding LGBT individuals today

8. Cultural Reasons

a. Cult-like characteristics in the church.

- i. Leader worship/cult of personality.
 - ii. Obedience to leaders and the institutional church is often equated with obedience to God.
 - iii. Culture of conformity, indoctrination, obedience. Insular thinking.
 - iv. Culture of certainty, and the assertion of faith/emotion-based positions as facts and absolutes.
 - v. Suspicion/suppression of learning, questions, dissent.
 - vi. Culture of superiority, viewing the rest of the world as inferior or evil.
 - vii. Culture of defensiveness. Bunker mentality.
 - viii. Culture of vindictiveness (e.g., Nauvoo expositor, labeling doubters as "apostate," "heretic," "sinner," "adulterer," "dark," "sons of perdition")
 - ix. Criticism (especially public criticism) of the institutional church and its leaders is condemned
 - x. Shunning of dissenters or non-conformists
 - xi. Teaching that some truths are not useful
 - xii. Use of emotional manipulation (Treks, 4-hour testimony meetings), and associating crying/socially-motivated emotion with truth.
- b. Culture of anti-intellectualism and anti-science.
 - c. Culture of fear, negativity, apocalyptic doom, global/environmental fatalism.
 - d. Culture of perfectionism
 - e. Culture that is sometimes overtly hostile to the poor (e.g., welfare recipients), and to immigrants (e.g., Hispanics).
 - f. Black and white culture, relatively incapable of seeing or respecting nuance/grey.
 - g. Culture of judgment.
 - h. Culture of political conservatism (e.g., Republican party)
 - i. Emphasis on obedience/rules/policies /dress/leader-worship is greater than the emphasis on Christ.
 - j. Culture of shame. This could include modesty/dress, masturbation, pornography, sexual activity, etc....often making these problems worse (not better). Examples: "Licked cupcake," "Better return home from mission in a pine box than without honor."
 - k. Theology, doctrine, and church affiliation held by many members as being more important than family or friend relationships.
 - l. Demonization of counter-culture (tattoos, piercings)
 - m. Pressure to get married early, have tons of kids, and to stay married at all costs.

- n. Poor treatment of those who don't fit the "mold" (e.g., singles, LGBT, divorced, mixed-faith marriages, disabled, liberals).
- o. Dissolution of marriages/families over faith issues
- p. Picking and choosing of teachings from scriptures and prophets selectively
- q. No place for vocal religious liberals and non-literalists in the church (e.g., demonization of Sunstone, Dialogue, symposia). Feeling as though you have to believe "all of it or none of it."
- r. Preferential treatment of members in wards or stakes due to family relationships
- s. Cliquishness or favoritism in wards (i.e., popularity culture)
- t. Material culture (e.g., high prevalence of materialism, appearance, elective cosmetic surgery)
- u. Feeling like they didn't fit in with the culture.
- v. Church not as respectful about other cultures/beliefs/perspectives. There is so much to learn from in this world, and the church continues to think and behave in such insular ways.
- w. Racial balance demographically wasn't comfortable (e.g., not enough blacks, Hispanics)
- x. Over-emphasis on or over-saturation of U.S. /Western/Utah culture.
- y. Under-emphasis on or respect for local cultures.
- z. Poor treatment of those with disabilities.
- aa. Shallow/fake relationships at church. Unwillingness to share and speak about "real" things amongst membership.
- bb. Culture of shallowness and checkboxes, not of depth, enlightenment, and growth.
- cc. Being accused of adultery, pornography, "wanting to sin," "being weak," "reading anti-Mormon literature," "not reading the scriptures and praying," or "never having a testimony to begin with" when expressing legitimate doubts/concerns.
- dd. Noticing that "service projects" in the church are often self-serving, either to current members (e.g., cannery), or to create good publicity/photo ops. for the church (e.g., Mormon Helping Hands yellow vests).
- ee. The church developing a culture of "tattling" on fellow members, such as at Brigham Young or Brigham Young-Idaho (e.g., Honor Code office).
- ff. Rape culture (e.g., blaming victims)

9. Spiritual Reasons

- a. Never received a spiritual witness, after really trying.
- b. Personal revelation simply didn't work (for individual or for the church), even when in leadership positions.
- c. Did not feel spiritually edified at church. Experienced church as boring, mind-numbing, waste of time and energy, draining, uninspiring.

- d. Felt spiritually led elsewhere (e.g., other churches, nature, no church).
- e. Stopped believing in spirituality and/or “magical thinking.”
- f. Promises and/or blessings made by family, church leader(s), patriarchal blessings, etc. (in prayer or in interviews) did not come true.

10. Experience-Based Reasons

- a. Development of critical thinking skills, or developing the willingness to apply critical thinking skills to Mormonism
- b. An instinctual feeling that “something isn’t quite right”
- c. Didn’t experience happiness overall as a member
- d. Experienced chronic or severe depression/anxiety as a devout church member, while living the gospel, and realized that church activity/belief wasn’t working well for you.
- e. Lost your certainty.
- f. Experienced church as an emotionally unhealthy environment
- g. Bad experience with a new or existing ward congregation and/or ward leadership specifically.
- h. Bad fruits of membership/participation: Guilt/shame/self-loathing/loneliness/misery after following church teachings
- i. Mistreated by leaders or members.
- j. Defrauded of money and/or time.
- k. Experienced abuse by members/leaders
- l. Being single in the church
- m. Met amazingly inspirational non-members, and realized that there are many paths to goodness.
- n. Exposure to church leadership dynamics led to disillusionment/disenchantment.
- o. Damaging missionary experiences
 - i. Didn’t choose to go, or wasn’t allowed to go
 - ii. Baseball/soccer/cheeseburger baptisms
 - iii. Authoritative mission presidents
 - iv. Came home early
- p. Noticing that many members simply aren’t that happy/healthy.
- q. Noticing similarities between multi-level marketing organizations and the church
- r. Close family, friend, or respected church member either left the church (e.g., LGBT, feminist, intellectual, scientist, politically progressive) or was damaged (e.g., suicide, bad mission experience, OCD/scrupulosity, anxiety, depression), and it caused me to question.
- s. Bad experiences in the temple
 - i. Not edifying and/or boring
 - ii. Issues with initiatory ceremony
 - iii. Offensive (e.g., blood oaths, gruesome penalties, women being required to submit to husbands)
- t. Ongoing changes in the temple ceremony

- u. Hated wearing garments (e.g., uncomfortable, controlling, made them feel un-sexy)
- v. Infertility, leading to bad feelings at church.
- w. Over-worked in ward/stake callings, wasn't worth the sacrifice.
- x. Talents/abilities were under-utilized at church
- y. Bad apologetics (e.g., FARMS, FAIR, Maxwell Institute) reinforced suspicions that church wasn't what it claimed to be
- z. Seeing the world as more expansive/inclusive/beautiful than the church-encouraged perspective.
- aa. Excessive cognitive dissonance
- bb. Studied and deconstructed the psychology and neuroscience of belief (e.g., confirmation bias, psychology of conformity/obedience)
- cc. Experiencing severe hypocrisy in the home, where parents were high-level church leaders/well-respected, but did not treat each other or the family well, or were living duplicitous lives.
- dd. Returned home early from mission and was treated terribly.
- ee. Experimented with leaving the church, and health/happiness/spirituality actually improved.
- ff. Excessive idealism. Felt as though the church and/or its membership didn't live up to its stated values/standards/doctrines.

11. Ethical/Moral Reasons

- a. Felt lied to/betrayed by the church or its leaders
- b. Feeling as though the church was not a healthy place to raise children
- c. Felt like they were complicit in the lies/damage being done to others (gays, feminists, intellectuals, youth, children). Did not want to support the perceived evil.
- d. Felt particularly concerned about the disparity between the audacious claims the church makes (e.g., "one true church," "leaders communicate directly with God/Christ in a privileged way") and the incompetence and/or damage that the institution often does.
- e. Coercion via requiring tithing/obedience and the removal of temple recommends/ability to perform ordinances as coercion.

12. Leadership

a. Systemic Concerns (Q12 through ward level)

- i. Patriarchy
- ii. Leaders uninformed about complex historical and/or doctrinal issues
- iii. Very poorly trained as pastors/mental health/marital/sexuality counselors.
- iv. Leaders extended calling to people who are unworthy (e.g., in adulterous relationships, abusers)
- v. Pressure/coercion from leaders.
- vi. Protection of abusers at the expense of the abused.

- vii. Disproportionate emphasis on wrong things (e.g., a beer or a glass of wine are bad even though both Joseph Smith and Jesus drank alcohol, and yet rampant meat-eating, obesity, leading fraudulent pyramid schemes, war, and environmental destruction are not serious concerns)
- viii. Concentration on letter of the law vs. spirit of the law
- ix. Leaders (as older men) interviewing young women and men about sexual matters in a closed room, without supervision. Often asking about sexual details, masturbation, etc.
- x. Sometimes perceived as not being good listeners.
- xi. Sometimes perceived as “leaving the 1 to protect the 99”

b. 1st Presidency / Q12 / General Authorities

- i. Lack of continuing revelation, and instead being perceived as led by public pressure and/or public opinion and/or public relations concerns.
- ii. Perceived to be more like lawyers/accountants/bureaucrats than as prophets, seers and revelators.
- iii. Punishing of intellectuals/dissidents/scientists/LGBT individuals (e.g., Hyrum Page, B.H. Roberts, Fawn Brodie, Juanita Brooks, Leonard Arrington, Lowell Bennion, September 6, Grant Palmer, Thomas Murphy, Buckley Jeppson)
- iv. Bad direct experiences with leadership/top leadership, with expectations that they would be exceptionally Christlike as apostles

v. Top leadership deception / history

1. Joseph Fielding Smith hiding Joseph Smith’s first vision account
 2. Paul H. Dunn
 3. Attempts to secretly purchase and shelve Mark Hofmann papers
 4. Warning of the public about possible “repercussions” or Proposition 8
 5. Continuing to portray BOM translation visually without stone/hat
 6. President Hinckley saying of theosis: “I don’t know that we teach it. I don’t know that we emphasize it.”
 7. President Hinkley saying of polygamy, “It’s not doctrinal.”
- vi. Church’s direct involvement in both national (ERA, Prop 8, etc.) and local local/Utah (liquor laws, immigration) politics.
 - vii. Church’s history of theocracy in Utah.
 - viii. Dishonest handling of political involvement (e.g., deceptions about involvement and funding of Proposition 8 efforts)
 - ix. Church’s opposition to civil rights movement, and support of segregation.

- x. Church's unwillingness to apologize/repent (e.g., confess, forsake, make restitution). Church acting hypocritical.
- xi. The church's correlation program
- xii. Struggling to be trust apostles and prophets now when so many have been so wrong in the past about so many important things (e.g., Brigham Young with Adam/God theory, blood atonement, racist teachings; Spencer W. Kimball and many others referring to all Native Americans as direct descendants of Laman; Ezra Taft Benson and others opposing the U.S. Civil Rights movement; Bruce R. McConkie's "Mormon Doctrine" being removed from publication)
- xiii. Watching a "prophet" become psychologically incompetent (e.g., Ezra Taft Benson, Thomas Monson), and the church refusing to acknowledge this (and instead, covering it up).
- xiv. Speaking directly and candidly with top-level church leaders and discovering that they did not have good answers to any of the tough questions.
- xv. Leadership practice of patronage (e.g., construction contracts going to family or friends of church leaders).

c. Corporate Finances

- i. Massive commercial/corporate holdings
- ii. Perceived misuse of funds (e.g., City Creek mall, Florida forest preserves, Proposition 8)
- iii. Lack of financial transparency and accountability
- iv. Relatively low % spent on charity/humanitarian aid
- v. Requiring tithing from the poor/needy
- vi. Too much \$\$\$ absorbed into the corporate church, with too little being used locally.

d. Bishops and State Presidents

- i. Seemed to lack inspiration. Sometimes offered bad or even damaging/disastrous advice.
- ii. Ecclesiastical roulette (e.g., inconsistent treatment by local church leaders depending on where one lives)
- iii. Confidences violated by bishop or bishopric member.
- iv. Being spoken of negatively (gossiped about) in ward council or PEC meetings.

13. Policy Reasons

- a. Policies of exclusion and separation (e.g., temple recommends/weddings, missions, priesthood bans, dress standards, sacrament worthiness) : all formal markers that give the opportunity to exclude. "The desire to worship in simply not enough – you will be "othered" if you do not adhere to a strict set of arbitrary requirements that dictate everything...right down to what you eat and drink to the underwear you wear." This includes not allowing non-members or non-tithe-payers into temple sealings.

- b. Arbitrary selection (and omission) of temple recommend questions (e.g., you can't drink wine/beer, but you can eat meat all you want or be obese– See D&C 89)
- c. Requiring a year for sealings if marriage performed civilly in the U.S., but not requiring this in other countries
- d. Unequal sealing cancellation/re-sealing policies for men vs. women (i.e., men can get sealed to multiple women and women can only be sealed once)
- e. Deceptive or misleading curriculum content. Church doesn't teach its own history. Tries to avoid it. Church also doesn't take a scholarly approach to the Bible.
- f. Worthiness interviews (experienced as degrading, judgmental, inappropriate)
- g. Bad experiences with the church approach to disfellowshipment and excommunication (i.e., "courts of love).
- h. Church offers almost no support for people with difficult doctrinal or theological problems, and discourages meet-ups/groups.
- i. Learning that proxy work had been done for folks (e.g., Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun) – often up to 10x per person (massive duplication of efforts).
- j. Church insisting on control over funerals, weddings – that should be led/controlled by family.
- k. Church expelling, withholding the degrees, or holding up/obstructing the academic progress of BYU and BYU-I students who experience serious crises of faith.
- l. Lack of sex-positive perspectives/messages at church.
- m. Church interfering in the sex lives of married, consenting adults (e.g., President Kimball forbidding oral sex in the 80s , only to rescind the prohibition).
- n. Too much change.
- o. Too little change.

14. Epistemological Reasons

- a. Deconstructed emotion-based reasoning/belief. Concluded that spirit/emotions are not reliable means of determining truth.
- b. Had "spiritual experiences" in non-LDS context, began to wonder the real meaning of emotion/spirit.
- c. Realized that non-LDS believers (e.g., Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, LDS Fundamentalists) also base their beliefs on spirit/emotion.
- d. Identified the circular reasoning involved. Any confirmations conflicting with church authority are considered by the church to be invalid/bad (even if spirit/emotions confirm). Realizing that it ultimately comes down to obedience/conformity, not personal inspiration.

- e. Came to better appreciate rationality, critical thinking, science, evidence-based belief.

15. Family/Social Reasons

- a. Experienced (a) divorce after living the gospel, (b) watched children or other family/friends fall away from the church, or saw (c) close family members or friends be mistreated or abused at church.... and this led to disbelief and/or disaffiliation.

16. Other Reasons

- a. Lost interest in Mormonism/church activity (i.e., apathy)
- b. Broke a minor or major “commandment” and experienced debilitating guilt/grief and/or had a bad experience with membership and/or leadership, and decided subsequently to disaffiliate.

Copyright: John Dehlin and WhyMormonsLeave.com. All rights reserved.