

# THE GODS OF MORMONISM

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly referred to as the Mormon Church) now claims to have 9,000,000 members and proclaims itself to be the only true church. Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie emphatically declared:

This Church is “**the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth**” (D. & C. 1:30), the **only organization** authorized by the Almighty to preach his gospel and administer the ordinances of salvation, **the only Church** which has power to save and exalt men in the hereafter. . . . There is **no salvation outside this one true church**, the Church of Jesus Christ. (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1979, pages 136, 138)

## JOSEPH SMITH'S VISION

Besides claiming that the Mormon Church is the only true church in existence today, Mormon leaders also assert that they alone have the correct understanding regarding the Godhead. Joseph Smith, the first prophet of the Mormon Church, affirmed that he had a vision in 1820 which demonstrated that the Father and the Son were two separate and distinct personages:

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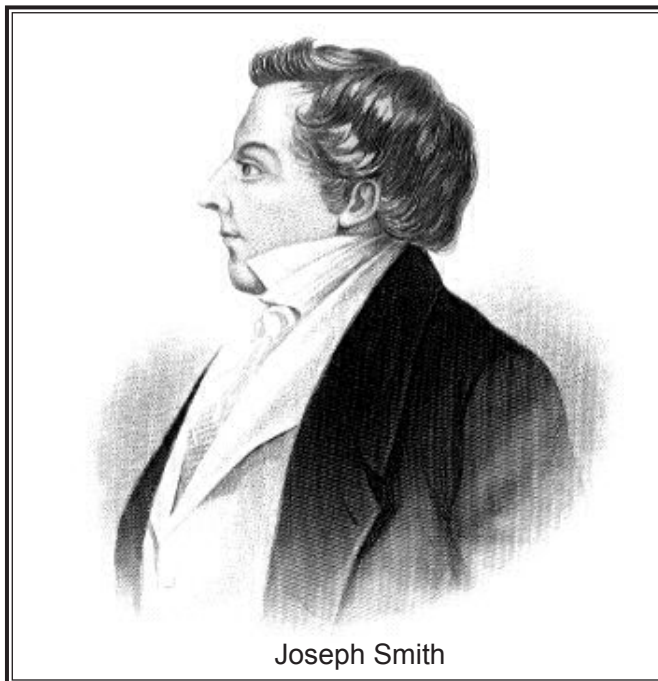
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Joseph Smith

So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods . . . I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw **two Personages**, whose brightness and glory defy all descriptions, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. . . . I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart **that all were wrong**)—and which I should join.

I was answered that I must join **none of them, for they were all wrong**; and the Personage who addressed me said that **all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that:** “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”

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He again **forbade me to join with any of them** . . . I went home . . . I then said to my mother, “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.” (*The Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:14, 16-20)

Because of Joseph Smith’s story of the First Vision, and other statements made by him, Mormons believe that God Himself is **actually an exalted man**. In 1883, George Q. Cannon, a member of the First Presidency of the Mormon Church, emphasized the importance of Smith’s vision:

The first account we have of the visitation of divine beings in this dispensation, is the account that is given to us by the Prophet Joseph Smith himself, concerning the visit of the Father and the Son. . . . the very conception of the nature of God—that is, of His characteristics—had entirely faded from the human mind, and He was deemed to be something other than He is. . . . There was no man scarcely upon the earth that had a true conception of God; the densest ignorance prevailed; and even ministers of religion could not conceive of the true idea, and there was mystery associated with what is called the Trinity—that is, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. But all this was swept away in one moment by the appearance of the Almighty Himself—by the appearance of God, the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, to the boy Joseph . . . In one moment all this darkness disappeared, and once more there was a man found on the earth, embodied in the flesh, who had seen God . . . Faith was again restored to the earth, the true faith and the true knowledge concerning our Creator . . . This revelation dissipated all misconceptions and all false ideas, and removed the uncertainty that had existed respecting these matters. The Father came accompanied by the Son . . . Joseph saw that the Father had a form; that He had a head; that He had arms; that He had limbs; that He had Feet; that He had a face and a tongue with which to express His thoughts . . . it seems that this knowledge had to be restored as the basis for **all true faith** to be built upon. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 24, pages 371-372)

Although Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision sounds very impressive to those who do not know the whole story regarding this vision, a thorough historical investigation has demonstrated conclusively that it cannot be used to support the Mormon doctrine regarding God. Surprisingly, in 1965 we learned that there was another account of the First Vision written by Joseph Smith himself. When this account is compared with the official version published by the church, it becomes glaringly apparent that there are irreconcilable differences.

Moreover, this account was written in 1832, which is several years **prior** to the official version Joseph Smith dictated to his scribe. The official version was written about 1838, but it was not published until 1842. Consequently, the 1832 account is considered by historians to be the most accurate account of Joseph Smith’s story.

We first published this early account of the First Vision in 1965 under the title, *Joseph Smith’s Strange Account of the First Vision*. Because the document was so unusual, some members of the Mormon Church doubted its authenticity. Although the Mormon leaders would make no public statement concerning the document, Professor James B. Allen, who later became Assistant Church Historian, admitted that the document was genuine. In an article published in 1966 he commented:

One of the most significant documents of that period . . . is a handwritten manuscript . . . by Joseph Smith. It contains an account of the early experiences of the Mormon prophet and includes the story of the first vision. . . . the story varies in some details from the version presently accepted . . . The manuscript has apparently lain in the L.D.S. Church Historian’s office for many years, and yet few if any who saw it realized its profound historical significance. (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Autumn 1966, page 35)

Mormon leaders suppressed this account of the First Vision for over 130 years, but after we printed it thousands of copies were circulated throughout the world. Finally, four years after we published the document, Dean C. Jessee of the Church Historian’s Office made a public statement confirming the authenticity of the manuscript:

On at least three occasions prior to 1839 Joseph Smith began writing his history. **The earliest** of these is a six-page account recorded on three leaves of a ledger book, written between the summer of 1831 and November 1832. . . .

The 1831-32 history transliterated here contains the **earliest known account of Joseph Smith’s First Vision**. (*Brigham Young University Studies*, Spring 1969, pages 277-278)

In an article written in 1971, Dean Jessee confirmed that the account was actually penned by Joseph Smith: “This is the **only known account of the Vision in his own hand**. Most of his writings were dictated, which is not to say that other accounts are less authentic” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1971, page 86).

A careful examination of this document reveals why the Mormon leaders never published or referred to it. Below is the important portion of this account of the First Vision taken directly from a photograph of the original document. The reader will notice that while this early account speaks of Jesus appearing, **it never even mentions God the Father**:

. . . the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in the attitude of calling upon the Lord in the 16th year of my age a pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying

Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy way walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life behold the world lieth in sin at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not my commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them according to this ungodliness and to bring to pass that which hath been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Apostles behold and lo I come quickly as it was w[r]itten of me in the cloud clothed in the glory of my Father . . .

A complete transcript of this document is found in *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, 1989, pages 3-8.

Although there are a number of contradictions between Joseph Smith's 1832 account and the official account published by the church, the most serious discrepancy involves the number of personages in the vision. In the later version, published in the *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith said: "I saw **two** personages." In Joseph Smith's 1832 handwritten account, however, he only mentioned one personage: "I saw **the Lord** . . ." The context makes it very clear that the personage was Jesus Christ and that Joseph Smith did **not** include God the Father in the first handwritten account of the vision.

Mormon historian James B. Allen observed: "In this story, only one personage was mentioned, and this was obviously the Son, for he spoke of having been crucified" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Autumn 1966, page 40).

The only reasonable explanation for God the Father not being mentioned in this account is that Joseph Smith did **not** see the Father, and that he embellished the story **after** he wrote his first manuscript. This, of course, raises the question of whether Joseph Smith had any visitation from heaven when he was a boy.

Joseph Smith seems to have decided that the story he wrote in 1832 needed some new elements to impress people with how important the vision actually was and to bolster up his own role as a prophet of the living God. What would catch the audience's interest better than to have both the Father and the Son come down and personally visit him? Joseph Smith, therefore, decided to embellish his account.

Mormon Apostle John A. Widtsoe was highly impressed with Joseph's final product:

It was an extraordinary experience. **Never before had God the Father and God the Son appeared to mortal man.** It was more astonishing in that it came to a half-grown boy. . . .

The First Vision was a challenge to the religious vagaries of the day. It **shattered many a false doctrine** taught throughout the centuries. . . .

A few, and a very few, had conceived God to be a person, not merely a personage. This view had ordinarily been laid aside, since it made God more nearly like man in body and powers. . . .

The First Vision . . . answered the centuries' old query about the nature of God. The Father and the Son appeared to Joseph as persons, like men on earth in form. They spoke to him as persons. . . .

From the early days of Christianity, the erroneous doctrine of the nature of God had led to . . . the conception that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the Godhead, were One, a unity. . . .

**This false doctrine was laid low by the First Vision. Two personages, the Father and the Son, stood before Joseph.** The Father asked the Son to deliver the message to the boy. **There was no mingling of personalities in the vision. Each of the personages was an individual member of the Godhead.** Each one separately took part in the vision. (*Joseph Smith: Seeker After Truth, Prophet of God*, 1951, pages 4-7)

Now that Joseph Smith's 1832 handwritten account of the First Vision has come to light, Apostle Widtsoe's arguments come crashing to the ground. It is clear that the official account Smith wrote six years later was embellished to fit his changing view of God. When Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon in 1830, his views concerning God were similar to those held by Christian ministers of his day. Although Smith believed that there was only one God when he "translated" the gold plates of the Book of Mormon, he later decided that there were two Gods and eventually concluded that there were many Gods.

The fact that Joseph Smith's first written account of the First Vision only mentioned **one** personage is consistent with what he believed about God when he dictated the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon, proclaimed that Christ was God Himself manifest in the flesh:

And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that **God himself** shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being **the Father and the Son** . . . And thus the **flesh** becoming subject to the **Spirit**, or the **Son** to the **Father, being one God**, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation . . . (Book of Mormon, Mosiah 15:1, 2, 5)

The Book of Mormon tells of a visitation of the Father and the Son to the "brother of Jared," but the account is **not** speaking of two separate personages. Only **one** personage appears, and this personage says:

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold I am Jesus Christ. **I am the Father and the Son.** In me shall all mankind have light . . . they shall become my sons and my daughters. (Ether 3:14)



Mormon scholar Melodie Moench Charles acknowledges that it is difficult to reconcile the teachings regarding God found in the Book of Mormon with the present teachings of the church. She argues, in fact, that at least some of the teachings of the Book of Mormon regarding God go even beyond the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine in emphasizing the oneness of God:

Recently when I was teaching the Book of Mormon in an adult Sunday school class we discussed Mosiah 15. . . . I said that I saw no good way to reconcile Abinadadi's [*sic*] words with the current Mormon belief that God and his son Jesus Christ are separate and distinct beings. I suggested that perhaps Abinadi's understanding was incomplete.

The class response included defenses of revelation and prophets . . . and accusations that I was crossing the line of propriety and wisdom to suggest that a prophet could teach incorrect doctrines about God. Some people appreciated a public acknowledgment of an obvious difference between Book of Mormon doctrine and current church doctrine. A few friends said things like, "I don't care what they say about you. I've wondered about that passage for a long time, and I'm glad somebody pointed out that it's not what we teach today." But many class members thought the lesson inappropriate and upsetting, and soon I was demoted to teaching nursery. . . .

When we explore what the Book of Mormon says, its christology or doctrines concerning Christ differ from the christology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since at least the 1840s. . . .

Book of Mormon people asserted that the Father and Christ (and the Holy Ghost) were one God. When Zeezrom asks Amulek, "Is there more than one God?" Amulek, who learned his information from an angel, answers, "No" (Alma 11:28-29). At least five times in 3 Nephi, Jesus says that he and the Father are one. Emphasizing that oneness with a singular verb, Nephi, Amulek, and Mormon refer to "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which *is* one God" (2 Ne. 31:21; Alma 11:44; Morm. 7:7, emphasis added).

This is common trinitarian formula. . . .

In isolation the Book of Mormon's "which is one God" statements sound like orthodox trinitarianism, but in context they resemble a theology rejected by orthodoxy since at least 215 C.E., the heresy of modalism (also known as Sabellianism). Modalists believed that for God to have three separate identities or personalities compromised the oneness of God. Therefore, as Sabellius taught, "there is only one undivided Spirit; the Father is not one thing and the Son another, but . . . both are one and the same" (Lonergan 1976, 38). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three labels for the different functions which the one God performed. . . . The Book of Mormon often makes no distinction between Christ and God the Father. For example, Jesus in 3 Nephi talked about covenants which *his father* made with the Israelites, and yet beyond anything he claimed in the New Testament he also claimed that *he* was the God of Israel who gave them the law and covenanted with them . . .

The Book of Mormon melds together the identity and function of Christ and God. Because Book of Mormon

authors saw Christ and his Father as one God who manifested himself in different ways, it made no difference whether they called their god the Father or the Son. They taught that Jesus Christ was not only the one who atoned for their sins but was also the god they were to worship. He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God of Israel and the Book of Mormon people. . . .

Like the Book of Mormon, Mormonism before 1835 was largely modalistic, making no explicit distinction between the identities of the Father and the Son. Yet Mormonism gradually began to distinguish among different beings in the Godhead. This means the christology of the Book of Mormon differs significantly from the christology of the Mormon church after the 1840s. . . .

The current theology that most Mormons read back into the Book of Mormon is tritheism: belief in three Gods. Joseph Smith and the church only gradually came to understand the Godhead in this way. When he translated the Book of Mormon, Smith apparently envisioned God as modalists did: he accepted Christ and Christ's father as one God. In his first written account of his "first vision" in 1832 Smith told of seeing "the Lord"—one being. . . .

Later, in 1844, Smith said, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage—Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and or Spirit, and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods". . . Mormon history does not support Smith's claim about what he taught earlier. Documents from early Mormonism reflect that Smith went from belief in one god to belief in two and later three gods forming one godhead. . . .

Book of Mormon theology is generally modalistic. In the Book of Mormon, God and Jesus Christ are not distinct beings. (*New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 1993, pages 82, 96-99, 103-104, 110)

When all the evidence is carefully examined it becomes obvious that Joseph Smith interpolated his later view regarding God the Father into his story of the First Vision. Consequently, Mormons who are not acquainted with the evidence still rely on the later account to prove that God the Father is an exalted man.

There are other serious problems with the official account of the First Vision. For example, Smith's reworked version stated that the vision followed a revival which had taken place in his neighborhood in 1820. Wesley P. Walters, however, conclusively established that no such revival took place in Palmyra in 1820. The revival actually began in the fall of 1824 and continued into 1825 (see *Inventing Mormonism*, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, pages 15-41). The 1832 account, of course, did not even mention such a revival.

In addition, Joseph Smith's 1835-36 diary contains **other accounts** of his First Vision which tend to add to the confusion. For instance, in one account Joseph Smith told Erastus Holmes regarding his "juvenile years, say from 6 years old up to the time **I received the first visitation of**

**Angels** which was when I was about 14 years old” (*An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, page 59).

Mormon leaders were apparently embarrassed that Smith spoke of **angels** but neglected to mention either the Father or the Son in this account! Therefore, in the published History of the Church, vol. 2, page 312, the statement has been changed to read: “. . . **I received my first vision**, which was when I was about fourteen years old . . .” Another account in the same diary (page 51) has Joseph Smith saying that he “saw **many angels in this vision**.” (For a thorough examination of the many conflicting statements in Joseph Smith’s accounts of the First Vision see our book, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 143-153.)

Marvin S. Hill, professor of American history at the church’s Brigham Young University, tried to defend the idea that Joseph Smith had an important religious experience in the grove, but he had to admit that Joseph Smith’s official 1838 account has some real problems. He, in fact, suggested that the 1832 account of the vision was probably more accurate than the official account and that Joseph Smith may have changed his theological views concerning God:

It seems to me that everybody has approached the issue **from the wrong end**, by starting with the 1838 official version when **the account they should be considering is that of 1832**. Merely on the face of it, the **1832 version** stands a better chance of being **more accurate and unembellished than the 1838 account** . . . I am inclined to agree that **the religious turmoil that Joseph described** which led to some family members joining the Presbyterians and to much sectarian bitterness **does not fit well into the 1820 context** detailed by Backman. For one thing, it does **not** seem likely that there could have been heavy sectarian strife in 1820 and then a joint revival where all was harmony in 1824. In addition, as Walters notes, Lucy Mack Smith [Joseph Smith’s mother] said the revival where she became interested in a particular sect came after Alvin’s death, thus almost certainly in early 1824. . . . **An 1824 revival creates problems for the 1838 account**, not that of 1832. . . .

At any rate, **if Joseph Smith in 1838 read back into 1820 some details of a revival that occurred in 1824**, there is no reason to conclude that he invented his religious experiences. . . .

Giving **priority to the 1832 account** also makes it more understandable why Oliver Cowdery got his story tangled. . . . **If initially Joseph said one personage came to him in 1820**, it became easier for Oliver Cowdery to confuse this visit with the coming of Moroni than it would have been a few years **later when Joseph taught emphatically that there were three separate personages in the Godhead**.

The Tanners make much of the argument that Joseph Smith **changed his view of the Godhead**. **There is a good deal of evidence that his understanding grew on**

**many points of theology** . . . If, as the Tanners argue, **Joseph grew in his understanding of the nature of the Godhead**, this does not provide evidence of his disingenuousness . . .

It seems to me that if the Latter-day Saints can accept the idea that **Joseph gained his full understanding of the nature of God only after a period of time, instead of its emerging fullblown in 1820**, then most of the difficulties with chronology can be resolved . . . As James Allen shows, Joseph never cited his vision with respect to the nature of the Godhead. This use of the vision came long afterward. (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1982, pages 39-41)

Since the Mormon Church canonized the 1838 account of the First Vision in the *Pearl of Great Price* (one of the four standard works of the church), it seems very doubtful that the church will follow Professor Hill’s suggestion about giving “priority to the 1832 account” of the vision. In any case, Thomas G. Alexander, who is also a professor of American history at BYU, agrees that a theological shift in Joseph Smith’s view concerning the Godhead caused him to change his story from one to two personages:

One of the barriers to understanding Mormon theology is the underlying assumption by most Latter-day Saints that doctrine develops consistently, that ideas build cumulatively on each other. As a result, older revelations are usually interpreted by referring to current doctrinal positions. This type of interpretation may produce systematic theology and may satisfy those trying to understand and internalize the current doctrine, but it is bad history since it leaves an unwarranted impression of continuity and consistency. . . .

The Book of Mormon tended to define God as an absolute personage of spirit who, clothed in flesh, revealed himself in Jesus Christ (see Abinadi’s sermon to King Noah in Mos. 13-14). . . . there is little evidence that early church doctrine specifically differentiated between Christ and God. Indeed, this distinction was probably considered unnecessary since the early discussion also **seems to have supported trinitarian doctrine**. Joseph Smith’s 1832 account of his first vision spoke only of one personage and did not make the explicit separation of God and Christ found in the 1838 version. The Book of Mormon declared that Mary “is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh,” which was changed in 1837 to “mother of the Son of God.” Abinadi’s sermon in the Book of Mormon explored the relationship between God and Christ . . .

The “Lectures on Faith” differentiated between the Father and Son more explicitly, but even they did not define a materialistic, tritheistic godhead. In announcing the publication of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which included the lectures, the *Messenger and Advocate* commented that it trusted the volume would give “the churches abroad . . . a perfect understanding of the doctrine believed by this society.” The lectures declared that “there are two personages

who constitute the great matchless, governing and supreme power over all things —by whom all things were created and made.” They are “the Father being a personage of spirit” and “the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made, or fashioned like unto man, or being in the form and likeness of man, or, rather man was formed after his likeness, and in his image.” The “Articles and Covenants” called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost “one God” rather than “Godhead,” a term Mormons use today to separate themselves from trinitarians.

The doctrine of the Holy Ghost in these early sources is even more striking compared to our point of view today. The “Lectures on Faith” defined the Holy Ghost as the mind of the Father and the Son, a member of the Godhead but not a personage, who binds the Father and Son together (D&C [i.e., *Doctrine and Covenants*], 1835 ed., 53-54). This view of the Holy Ghost likely reinforced trinitarian doctrine by explaining how personal beings like the Father and Son become one god through the noncorporeal presence of a shared mind. (*Line Upon Line*, edited by Gary James Bergera, 1989, pages 53-55)

### TRILLIONS OF GODS?

The Bible teaches the oneness of God. In the book of Isaiah 44:8 we read: “Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is **no God; I know not any.**” In addition, the Bible reveals that “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). The Book of Mormon also says that God is a Spirit. In Alma 18:26-28, the following is found:

And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a **Great Spirit**? And he said, Yea, And Ammon said: **This is God.**

By the year 1844, however, Joseph Smith had completely abandoned the teachings regarding God which he had incorporated into the Book of Mormon. In the Mormon publication, *Times and Seasons*, he boldly proclaimed that God was just an exalted man and that men could become Gods:

First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, **is a man like unto one of yourselves**, that is the great secret. . . . I am going to tell you how **God came to be God**. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. . . . God himself; the Father of us all **dwelt on an earth** the same as Jesus Christ himself did. . . . You have got to **learn how to be Gods yourselves**. . . . No man can learn you more than what I have told you. (*Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, pages 613-614)

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt, who received his teachings regarding the nature of God from Joseph Smith, made this statement regarding the plurality of Gods:

If we should take a **million** of worlds like this and

**number their particles**, we should find that there **are more Gods than there are particles of matter in those worlds.**” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, page 345)

Apostle Pratt’s comments make it very clear that there are at least trillions of Gods.

The Mormon Church teaches that God the Father **had a Father**, and that God’s Father **also had a Father**, and so on. Brigham Young, the second prophet of the church, declared:

He [God] is our Father—he Father of our spirits, and was **once a man in mortal flesh** as we are, and is now an exalted being. . . . there never was a time when there were not Gods . . .

It appears ridiculous to the world, under their darkened and erroneous traditions, that God has once been **a finite being**. . . . (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, page 333)

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt made it clear that God was once in a fallen state, died and was redeemed from the grave:

The Gods who dwell in the Heaven have been **redeemed from the grave** in a world which existed before the foundations of this earth were laid. They and the Heavenly body which they now inhabit were once in a **fallen state**. . . . they were exalted also, from **fallen men** to Celestial Gods to inhabit their Heaven forever and ever. (*The Seer*, January 1853, page 23)

We were begotten by our Father in Heaven; the person of our Father in Heaven was begotten on a previous heavenly world **by His Father**; and again, He **was begotten by a still more ancient Father**; and so on, from generation to generation, from one heavenly world to another still more ancient, until our minds are wearied and lost in the multiplicity of generations and successive worlds, and as a last resort, we wonder in our minds, how far back the genealogy extends, and how the first world was formed, and the **first Father** was begotten. But why does man seek for a first. . . . why then, do you seek for a **first personal Father in an endless genealogy?** (*Ibid.*, September 1853, page 132)

In a speech published in the Mormon Church’s publication, *The Ensign*, November 1975, page 80, Spencer W. Kimball, the twelfth president of the church, made some revealing comments which were broadcast to those serving in the priesthood:

Brethren, 225,000 of you are here tonight. I suppose **225,000 of you may become gods**. There seems to be plenty of space out there in the universe. And the Lord has proved that he knows how to do it. I think he could make, or probably have us help make, worlds for all of us, for every one of us 225,000.

The Mormon Apostle LeGrand Richards commented as follows in a letter written in 1966: “There is a statement often repeated in the Church, and while it is not in one of the



Standard Church Works, it is **accepted as Church doctrine**, and this is: “**‘As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become.’**” (Letter from Apostle LeGrand Richards to Morris L. Reynolds, dated July 14, 1966)

Marion G. Romney, who was second counselor in the First Presidency, referred to God as follows: “God is a perfected, **saved soul** enjoying eternal life” (*Salt Lake Tribune*, April 3, 1977).

### DOES GOD HAVE A WIFE?

Because of their belief that God is only an exalted man, Mormon leaders teach that He had **a mother** as well as a wife. President Brigham Young preached:

The idea that the Lord our God is not a personage of tabernacle is entirely a mistaken notion. He was **once a man**.

Brother Kimball quoted a saying of Joseph the Prophet, that he would not worship a god who had not a **Father**; and I do not know that he would if he had not a **mother**; the one would be as absurd as the other. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9, page 286)

Although Brigham Young made this statement in 1862, Mormon leaders still proclaim that God’s wife is the “Eternal Mother” of all people on the face of the earth. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie explained the doctrine:

Implicit in the Christian verity that all men are the spirit children of an **Eternal Father** is the usually unspoken truth that they are also the offspring of an **Eternal Mother**. An exalted and glorified Man of Holiness (Moses 6:57) could not be a Father unless a **Woman** of like glory, perfection, and holiness was associated with him as a Mother. . . .

This **doctrine** that there is a **Mother in Heaven** was **affirmed in plainness by the First Presidency of the Church** . . . they said that “man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of **heavenly parents**, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father,” that man is the “offspring of celestial parentage,” and that “all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and **Mother**, and are **literally the sons and daughters of Deity**.” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1979, page 516)

The reader will notice that in the quotations above Apostle McConkie capitalizes the words “Eternal” and “Mother” in the same way that he capitalizes the words “Eternal Father.” Capitalization, of course, is often used when referring to the true God.

Christian theology teaches that males and females will be equal in the resurrection: “But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20: 35-36).

Mormon leaders teach that both men and women can attain godhood. Apostle McConkie said that **godhood** “is not for men only, it is for men and **women** together” (*Mormon Doctrine*, page 844). While at first glance it appears that this would make men and women equal, a careful examination of the doctrine reveals just the opposite.

According to Mormon theology, church members follow the same plan of eternal progression as God the Father. Now, if the “Eternal Mother” had really gained equality with her husband, we would expect Latter-day Saints to pray to her. Although there are a small number of Mormons who actually do pray to the Eternal Mother, the vast majority of the church look with disdain at such a practice. Furthermore, church leaders have strongly rebuked those who engage in such a practice.

Apostle Pratt made it plain that the Eternal Mother’s godhood is rather insignificant when compared to her husband’s power. She, in fact, is to be in “the most perfect obedience” to her “great head”—her husband:

But if we have a **heavenly Mother** as well as a heavenly Father, is it not right that we should worship the **Mother** of our spirits as well as the Father? No; for the Father of our spirits is at the **head of His household**, and his wives and children are required to yield **the most perfect obedience to their great Head**. It is lawful for the children to worship the King of Heaven, but not the “Queen of heaven.” . . . we are nowhere taught that Jesus prayed to His heavenly Mother . . . (*The Seer*, page 159)

It would appear, then, that in Mormon theology the claim that a woman can obtain “godhood” amounts to very little. Like the present “Heavenly Mother,” she will be required to “yield the most perfect obedience” to her “great Head.”

Mormon theology seems to teach that women who enter into “godhood” will find themselves serving their own husband in eternity rather than the God of the Bible. The more one studies the church’s teaching concerning the Mother God, the more obvious it becomes that women are considered to be spiritually inferior in Mormon theology.

Joseph Smith taught that heaven is divided into three different kingdoms—the celestial, terrestrial and telestial. The celestial is the most glorious of the three, and it, in turn, is divided into “three heavens or degrees” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 131:1). Only those who marry in the Mormon temple and live a worthy life can enter into the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. In the resurrection these faithful Mormons become Gods and Goddesses.

All those who do not make it into this highest level are not allowed to marry or engage in sex. They “remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 132:17).

On the other hand, those who are accounted worthy of the highest glory remain married and are allowed to

procreate children forever. These Gods and Goddesses give birth to spirit children throughout all eternity, and these spirits eventually take physical bodies on other worlds.

Milton R. Hunter, who was a General Authority in the church, wrote the following: “. . . Joseph explained . . . that **the Gods were to be parents of spirit children** just as our Heavenly Father and Mother were the parents of the people of this earth” (*The Gospel Through the Ages*, 1958, page 120).

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt set forth some important details and problems concerning the birth of spirit children to celestial beings:

In the Heaven where our spirits were born there are many Gods, each one of whom has his own wife **or wives**, raises up a numerous family of sons and daughters . . . each father and mother will be in a condition to **multiply forever and ever**. As soon as each God has begotten **many millions** of male and female spirits, and his Heavenly inheritance becomes too small, to comfortably accommodate **his great family**, he, in connection with his sons, organizes a **new world**, after a similar order to the one which we now inhabit, where he sends both the male and female spirits to inhabit tabernacles of flesh and bones. . . . The inhabitants of each world are required to reverence, adore, **and worship their own personal father** who dwells in the Heaven which they formerly inhabited. . . . The number of the sons and daughters of God, born in Heaven before this earth was formed, is not known by us. They must have been exceedingly numerous . . . The amount of population now on the globe, is estimated in round numbers at **one thousand million**. If we take this estimation for the average number per century, during the seven thousand years of its temporal existence it will amount to **seventy thousand millions [i.e., 70 billion]**. . . . It will be seen, from this estimation, that about **seventy thousand million sons and daughters were born in Heaven**, and kept their first estate . . . If we admit that one personage was the Father of all this great family, and that they were all born of the same Mother, the period of time intervening between the birth of the oldest and the youngest spirit must have been immense. If we suppose, as an average, that only one year intervened between each birth then it would have required, over one hundred thousand millions of years for the same Mother to have given birth to this vast family. . . . Should the period between each birth, be one hundred times shorter than what is required in this world, (which is **very improbable**.) it would still require **over one thousand million of years** to raise up such a numerous progeny. . . . But . . . it is altogether probable that the period required for the formation of the infant spirit, is of the same length as that required in this world . . . **If the Father of these spirits**, prior to his redemption, had secured to himself, through the everlasting covenant of marriage, **many wives** . . . the period required to people a world would be shorter . . . if it required one hundred thousand million of years to people a world like this . . . it is evident that, with a hundred wives, this period would be reduced to only one thousand million years. (*The Seer*, March 1853, pages 37-39)

Apostle Pratt’s description of the function of a Mormon woman who advances to godhood reminds one of the role played by a queen bee. The queen bee, of course, produces swarms of offspring—as many as 2,500 a day! Her main purpose appears to be to produce more bees.

Brigham Young University scholar Eugene England is repelled by the concept concerning spirit children taught by Apostle Pratt and other “influential Mormons and teachers of religion.” He maintains that God must have a better way “to produce spirit children than by turning celestial partners into mere **birth machines**. To anticipate such a limited, unequal role for women in eternity insults and devalues them” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1987, page 148).

While many Mormon women would agree with England, the teaching seems too deeply embedded in Mormon theology to be torn out without endangering the entire doctrine of “eternal progression.”

Many Mormon women have serious reservations about the idea of having billions of spirit children every time their husbands decide to people another world. They believe that this teaching smacks of confusion and mass production. Mormon scholar Melodie Moench Charles has publicly expressed her opposition to the teaching:

Nineteenth-century Mormon theology shows a pre-occupation with attaining power and status in the millennium and in heaven. . . . I find this heavenly structure neither reasonable nor appealing. . . . Creating includes not only making a world, but peopling it with one’s spouse. . . . From Joseph Smith he [Parley P. Pratt] “learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God . . . It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring” . . .

Our theology currently gives women no hope that their participation in priesthood will ever be great enough to allow them to create anything but children. Some women might be excited by the possibility of providing the womb through which a never-ending stream of children would be born, but I am not. . . . England rightly called this limited, unequal role for women in eternity ‘absurd’ ‘humiliating’ and ‘degrading’ . . .

Our temple ceremony has some further limiting, unequal, and degrading implications for women’s heavenly existence. . . . people being married [in the temple] are symbolically brought into heaven by a male playing the role of God. A man is brought into heaven by an anonymous male temple worker playing that role. But a woman is brought into heaven **by her husband playing the role of God to her**. So not only does the temple ceremony suggest that women reach God through their husbands, but that husbands, on some level, **act as god to their wives**. . . .

An essential part of this theology of marriage in



heaven is polygamy. While it is unlikely that the Church will again promote polygamy in mortality, it is still a vital part of Mormon heaven. . . . As long as *Doctrine and Covenants* 132 remains in our scriptural canon, heavenly polygamy is a part of Mormon theology.

Heavenly polygamy, more than anything else in our theology, reduces people to things. . . . The greater the number of wives and children a man has in heaven, the greater his power, kingdom, and eternal glory. In the worst materialistic sense rather than in the best metaphorical sense, wives and children were a man's riches. Benjamin F. Johnson remembered that "the Prophet taught us that Dominion & power in the great Future would be Commensurate with the no[.] of 'Wives, Children & Friends' that we inherit here". . .

Rather than seeing any compelling reason to think that we must populate heavenly kingdoms into existence so that these kingdoms can be our eternal reward, I see a compelling reason not to believe that God authored this system. It again reduces people to things. . . . Each spirit child is one more being for its parents to be sovereign Lords over. . . .

Heavenly Mother is not an equal partner with Heavenly Father in any sense. . . . Since she has no sphere of operations, she has no power. . . . I can't see any reason now to let such a degrading concept of the female deity continue to exist without protest. . . . She has no self apart from her husband. . . .

I can't change the reality of what heaven is. My wishing, hoping, and needing won't make it what I want it to be. But neither does Brigham Young's or Joseph Smith's. I believe that they and other Mormon males projected their own needs and desires into heaven, and that their heaven probably does not resemble actual heaven any more than my ideal heaven does. . . .

I have said all of this not to complain, but rather to encourage Church members and leaders to rethink our theology of heaven. The nineteenth-century Mormon men who fleshed out the theological skeleton provided by scriptures and revelation fleshed it out according to their own cultural prejudices. . . . their prejudices and their needs should no longer be misread as representing heavenly reality: they are time-bound, not eternal. It is time to reject those aspects of Mormon heaven that are uninspired, unreasonable, unfair, damaging, and serve no virtuous end. (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Autumn 1988, pages 76, 78-82, 84-86)

While some Mormons are disturbed with the idea that women who reach the highest exaltation in the hereafter become "mere birth machines," it seems evident that church leaders are not interested in changing the doctrine. In the Mormon Church's publication, *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*, Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth prophet of the church, was quoted as saying:

"Parents will have eternal claim upon their posterity and will have the gift of **eternal increase**, if they obtain

exaltation. . . . *a man and his wife when glorified will have spirit children* who eventually will go to an earth like this one . . . **There is no end to this development; it will go on forever. We will become gods** and have jurisdiction **over worlds**, and these worlds will be peopled **by our own offspring**. (*Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*, Church Educational System, 1986)

## GOD AND CHRIST POLYGAMISTS?

On July 12, 1843, the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith claimed that the Lord gave him a revelation stating that polygamy should be practiced in the church:

Verily, **thus saith the Lord** unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord **justified** my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and **doctrine** of their **having many wives and concubines**—

Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter.

Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions . . .

For behold, I reveal unto you a new and everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory. . . .

And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith [Joseph Smith's wife] receive **all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph**, and are virtuous and pure before me; and those who are not pure, and have said they were pure, shall be **destroyed**, saith the Lord God. . . .

And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another . . . he is justified; he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else.

And if he have **ten virgins** given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified. (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 132, verses 1-3, 52, 61-62)

Although the revelation only specifically mentions that a man can have "ten" wives, the favorable reference to the wives of king Solomon (a noted polygamist mentioned in the Bible who had a vast number of wives) leads to the conclusion that a man can have more than ten wives. Joseph Smith certainly did not limit himself to ten wives. In fact, in 1887, Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson made a list of 27 women who were sealed to Joseph Smith. (*Historical Record*, vol. 6, page 233). More recent research, however, demonstrated that the number 27 was too small. Mormon author John J. Stewart disclosed: ". . . he married Louisa Beaman at Nauvoo . . . he married many other women, perhaps **three to four dozen or more** . . ." (*Brigham Young and His Wives*, 1961, pages 30-31). On page 96 of the same book, Stewart noted that Joseph Smith also had "**150 dead**

women . . . sealed to him; also a few women who were sealed to him **after his death.**”

Since the leading authorities of the Mormon Church believed that polygamy was commanded by God, it became easy for them to believe that both God and Christ were polygamists. Jedediah M. Grant, Second Counselor to Brigham Young, asserted: “A belief in the **doctrine of a plurality of wives** caused the persecution of Jesus and his followers” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, page 346).

In 1961, Mormon writer John J. Stewart affirmed that “**plural marriage is the patriarchal order of Marriage lived by God** and others who reign in the Celestial Kingdom” (*Brigham Young and His Wives*, page 41).

Even though the current Mormon leaders are very quiet about the matter, a belief in the doctrine of Celestial Marriage almost compels a person to also believe that God is a polygamist. While church leaders no longer allow the practice of polygamy here on the earth, they maintain that **it will be lived in heaven.** President Joseph Fielding Smith remarried after the death of his first wife, and in his book, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, page 67, he remarked: “. . . **my wives will be mine in eternity.**” Harold B. Lee, the eleventh president of the church, also remarried after his wife’s death and was looking forward to a polygamous relationship in heaven. He, in fact, wrote a poem in which he reflected:

My lovely Joan was sent to me:  
So Joan joins Fern  
That **three might be**, more fitted for eternity.  
“O Heavenly Father, my thanks to thee”  
(*Deseret News 1974 Church Almanac*, page 17)

The reader will remember that Apostle Pratt proclaimed that a God who had a hundred wives would far outdistance a God with just one wife. In *The Seer* he made mathematical calculations to prove his point:

Therefore, a Father . . . could increase his kingdoms with his own children, in a **hundred fold ratio above that of another who had only secured to himself one wife.** As yet, we have only spoken of the hundred fold ratio as applied to his own children; but now let us endeavor to form some faint idea of the multiplied increase of worlds peopled by his grandchildren, over which he, of course, would hold **authority and dominion as the Grand Patriarch of the endless generations of his posterity.** If . . . only one million of sons were redeemed to the fulness . . . they, in their turn, would now be prepared to multiply and people worlds the same as their Father . . . While their Father, therefore, was peopling the second world, these millions of redeemed sons would people one million of worlds. . . the number in the third generation amounts to **one billion three million and three worlds.** The fourth generation would people over **a trillion, and the fifth over a quadrillion of worlds;** while the one-hundredth generation would people more worlds than could be expressed by raising one million to the ninety-ninth power. Any mathematician who is able to enumerate a series of 595 figures will be able to give a

very close approximation to the number of worlds peopled by the descendants of one Father in one hundred thousand million of years, according to the average ratio given above. Now this is the period in which only one world could be peopled with one wife. While **the Patriarch with his hundred wives, would multiply worlds on worlds,** systems on systems, more numerous than the dust of all the visible bodies of the universe, and people them with his descendants to the hundredth generation of worlds; **the other, who had only secured to himself one wife,** would in the same period, **just barely have peopled one world.** (*The Seer*, March 1853, page 39)

Using Apostle Pratt’s reasoning and the fact that Mormonism teaches that those who go through the temple ceremony can become Gods, it is clear that **if** God the Father is a monogamist, Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Harold B. Lee, with their two wives will eventually have more spirit children and more kingdoms than the God of Israel! Since Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had hundreds of women sealed to them, their power would increase much more rapidly. According to the “Journal of Abraham H. Cannon,” April 5, 1894, President Wilford Woodruff, the fourth president of the church, said he had himself sealed to “about four hundred of my femal[e] kindred.” Apostle Cannon also noted in his journal that a man could have up to “**999**” wives sealed to him for eternity. If anyone actually did take that many wives, he would by-pass them all!

Some Mormons who believe that God is married seem to be shocked when they find out that the early church leaders taught that He was a polygamist. The fact that they are embarrassed by the matter seems to show that they do not really believe that polygamy is a righteous practice.

In spite of unrelenting pressure from the Federal Government, the Mormons continued practicing polygamy into the first decade of the twentieth century. (The Manifesto of 1890 was supposed to end the practice, but church leaders continued to secretly perform plural marriage ceremonies until 1904.)

Before yielding the practice Mormon leaders had uncompromisingly proclaimed that the church would never cease the practice of polygamy on earth. For example, Apostle Orson Pratt argued that “if plurality of marriage is not true or in other words, if a man has no divine right to **marry two wives or more in this world,** then **marriage for eternity is not true, and your faith is in vain,** and all the sealing ordinances and powers pertaining to marriages **for eternity are vain, worthless, good for nothing;** for as sure as one is true the other also must be true” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 21, page 296). (For more on this subject see our book *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 202-244F)

Although Mormon Church leaders no longer sanction the practice of polygamy on earth, it remains an important part of their doctrinal view regarding the hereafter. In Mormon doctrine all women who marry for eternity in the temple have to face the possibility that they could end up

living in polygamy in heaven **without their consent**. If the wife should die before her husband, he is allowed to be sealed to another woman for eternity. The woman, however, is not allowed to be sealed to two husbands for eternity. Joseph Fielding Smith, who served as the tenth prophet, explained how the rules of the temple discriminate against women: “When a man and a woman are married in the temple for time and all eternity, and then the man dies and the woman marries another man, she can be married to him **for time only**” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, page 78).

### NO VIRGIN BIRTH?

The idea that God is merely an exalted man has led Mormon leaders to proclaim a doctrine about the birth of Christ which is very shocking to orthodox Christians. Since Christians believe that God is a Spirit, they view the conception of Christ as a miraculous event having nothing to do with sex or any physical act. Mormon theology, on the other hand, teaches that God is an exalted man and that Christ was conceived through a sexual act between Mary and God the Father. In other words, the birth of Christ is considered a **natural**, rather than a miraculous occurrence.

Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., made this plain in his book, *Religious Truths Defined*, page 44: “The birth of the Savior was a **natural occurrence** unattended with any degree of mysticism, and **the Father God was the literal parent of Jesus in the flesh** as well as in the spirit.”

President Joseph Fielding Smith declared: “Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the **aid of Man**, and that **Man was God**” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, page 18)!

Apostle Bruce R. McConkie did not hesitate to make this matter crystal clear:

These name-titles all signify that our Lord is the only Son of the Father in the flesh. Each of the words is to be understood **literally**. Only means **only**; Begotten means **begotten**; and Son means **son**. Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father **in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers**. (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1979, pages 546-547)

And Christ was born into the world as the **literal** Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and **literal** sense that **any mortal son is born to a mortal father**. **There is nothing figurative** about his paternity; he was **begotten, conceived** and born in the **normal and natural course of events** . . . Christ is the Son of Man, meaning that his Father (the Eternal God!) is a Holy **Man**. (*Ibid.*, page 742)

It would be extremely difficult to side-step the serious implications of Apostle McConkie’s statement. When he states that Christ was “**begotten, conceived** and born in

the **normal and natural course of events**,” this could only mean that he was conceived by a sexual act with Mary, not through a miraculous operation of God.

Mormon writer Carlfred B. Broderick discussed the sexual element regarding the birth of Jesus:

There are two basic elements in the Gospel view of sexuality as I interpret it from the scriptures. The first is that sex is good—sexuality, far from being the antithesis of spirituality, is actually an **attribute of God** . . .

In the light of their understanding that **God is a procreating personage of flesh and bone**, latter-day prophets have made it clear that despite what it says in Matthew 1:20, the **Holy Ghost was not the father of Jesus**. . . . The Savior was **fathered by a personage of flesh and bone**, and was **literally** what Nephi said he was, “Son of the Eternal Father.” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Autumn, 1967, pages 100-101)

President Brigham Young implied that Mary was actually the wife of God: “The man Joseph, the husband of Mary, did not, that we know of, have more than one wife, but **Mary the wife of Joseph had another husband**” (*Deseret News*, October 10, 1866). Apostle Orson Pratt confirmed that Mary was, in fact, the “wife of God” and also went on to try to justify what would seem to be an immoral act:

The fleshly body of Jesus required a Mother as well as a Father. Therefore, the **Father and Mother of Jesus, according to the flesh**, must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and Wife; hence the Virgin Mary must have been, for the time being, **the lawful wife of God the Father**: we use the term lawful Wife, because it would be blasphemous in the highest degree to say that He overshadowed her or begat the Saviour unlawfully. It would have been unlawful for any man to have interfered with Mary, who was already espoused to Joseph; for such a heinous crime would have subjected **both the guilty parties to death**, according to the law of Moses. But God having created all men and women, had the most perfect right to do with his own creation, according to His holy will and pleasure: He had a lawful right to overshadow the Virgin Mary in the **capacity of a husband**, and beget a Son, although she was espoused to another; for the law which He gave to govern men and women **was not intended to govern Himself**, or to prescribe rules for his own conduct. It was also lawful in Him, after having dealt with Mary, to give her to Joseph her espoused husband. Whether God the Father gave Mary to Joseph for time only, or for time and eternity, we are not informed. Inasmuch as **God was the first husband to her**, it may be that He only gave her to be the wife of Joseph while in this mortal state, and that He intended after the resurrection to again take her as one of his own wives to raise up immortal spirits in eternity. (*The Seer*, October 1853, page 158)

Brigham Young maintained that “The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it



was the result of **natural action**. He partook of flesh and blood—**was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers**” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 8, page 115).

Some Mormons, who are either not well informed on church doctrine or are so ashamed of the church’s doctrine on the birth of Jesus that they try to deny its existence. Unfortunately for these apologists, President Ezra Taft Benson, the thirteenth prophet of the church, came down firmly on the side of Brigham Young and the other prophets and apostles. In *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, a book published in 1988, President Benson steadfastly maintained that God was the father of Christ “in the most literal sense”:

A fundamental doctrine of true Christianity is the divine birth of the child Jesus. This doctrine is not generally comprehended by the world. The paternity of Jesus Christ is one of the “mysteries of godliness” **comprehended only by the spiritually minded**. . . .

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most **literal sense**. **The body** in which he performed His mission in the flesh **was sired by that same Holy Being** we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, **nor was He Begotten by the Holy Ghost**. He is the Son of the Eternal Father. (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 1988, pages 6-7)

The LDS doctrine concerning the birth of Christ certainly raises more questions than it answers. For instance, in Mormon theology we learn that prior to coming to earth both Jesus and Mary were born to God the Father and His wife in a pre-existent state. From this it is clear that Jesus was the spirit brother of Mary. It has been suggested that since Mary was the spirit daughter of the Father, it would be an act of incest for God the Father to have had a sexual relationship with her.

While Apostle Orson Pratt probably would have argued that God’s laws were “not intended to govern Himself,” the idea of God having relations with **his own spirit daughter**, who was at that time betrothed to Joseph, seems to be out of step with the teachings of the Bible and morally repugnant. A careful examination of the Mormon teaching concerning the conception of Christ reveals that it is far closer to paganism than it is to Christianity!

## SWITCHING GODS

The Adam-God doctrine was a natural outgrowth of the teaching that God is merely an exalted man and that there are a vast number of Gods. Although the doctrine was not publicly proclaimed until 1852, Adam was held in high esteem at the very beginning of the Mormon Church. Joseph Fielding Smith said that he did not “accuse Adam of a sin. . . . it is not always a sin to transgress a law” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, page 114). Sterling W. Sill, who served as

an Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, made this defense of Adam’s transgression: “Under Christ Adam yet stands at our head. . . . Adam fell, but **he fell in the right direction**. **He fell toward the goal**. . . . Adam fell, but **he fell upward**” (*Deseret News*, Church Section, July 31, 1965).

It was on April 9, 1852, that Brigham Young, the second prophet of the Mormon Church, startled the Christian world by publicly proclaiming that God had revealed to him that the Mormons were to switch Gods. According to President Young, Adam was “the only God with whom we have to do”:

Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, **one of his wives**, with him. He is MICHAEL, the Arch-angel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken—**He is our FATHER and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do**. Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, and will know it sooner or later. . . . the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Eloheim, Yahovah, and Michael, these three forming a quorum . . . perfectly represented in the Deity, as **Father, Son, and Holy Ghost**. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pages 50-51)

Although some members of the Mormon Church had a hard time accepting Brigham Young’s revelation concerning Adam, the church’s publication *Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, vol. 16, page 534, made it very clear that it was indeed a doctrine which had to be accepted:

Concerning the item of **doctrine** alluded to by Elder Caffall and others, viz., that **Adam is our Father and God**, I say do not trouble yourselves . . . If, as Elder Caffall remarked, there are those who are waiting at the door of the Church for this objection to be removed, tell such, **the prophet and Apostle Brigham Young has declared it**, and that it is **the word of the Lord**.

Brigham Young continued to teach the Adam-God doctrine until his death in 1877. In 1873, he publicly declared that the doctrine had been revealed to him by God Himself:

How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular **doctrine** which I revealed to them, and which **God revealed to me**—namely that **Adam is our Father and God** . . . Our Father Adam helped to make this earth . . . He brought one of his wives with him . . . Then he said, “I want **my children who are in the spirit world** to come and live here. . . . I once dwelt upon an earth something like this, in a mortal state. . . . I want my children that were born to me in the spirit world to come here and take tabernacles of flesh that their spirits may have a house, a tabernacle, or a dwelling place as mine has,” and where is the mystery? (*Deseret Evening News*, June 14, 1873)

Brigham Young’s declaration that the inhabitants of

earth were in reality Adam's spirit children demonstrates beyond all doubt that he intended to strip God the Father (Elohim) from his rightful place and put Adam in charge of the world. Young seems to have believed that Elohim was the Grandfather God. Consequently, he felt that Mormons should direct their prayers to Adam.

President Brigham Young not only taught that Adam was the God whom Mormons should worship, but he also claimed that Jesus Christ was his son. In his notorious address delivered on April 9, 1852, Young asserted:

When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? **He is the first of the human family** . . . Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh **by the same character that was in the garden of Eden**, and who is our Father in Heaven. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pages 50-51)

Wilford Woodruff, who became the fourth prophet of the church, recorded these interesting statements in his journal:

He [Brigham Young] said that **our GOD was Father Adam** He was **the Father of the Savior Jesus Christ—Our God was no more or less than ADAM**. (“Wilford Woodruff Journal,” February 19, 1854)

. . . [Orson Pratt] could not belie[ve] that Adam was **our God or the Father of Jesus Christ—President You[n]g said that he was** . . . (*Ibid.*, September 17, 1854)

. . . President Brigham You[n]g . . . said Adam was Michael the Ar[c]h angel & he was the **Father of Jesus Christ & was our God** & that Joseph [Smith] taught [word illegible] this Principl[e] (*Ibid.*, December 16, 1869)

Just before his death, Brigham Young reaffirmed his teaching that Adam was God the Father and that Jesus was his son. On February 7, 1877, L. John Nuttall recorded the following in his journal:

Wed 7 . . . Prest Young was filled with the spirit of God & revelation & said . . . **Father Adam's oldest son (Jesus the Savior)** who is the heir of the family is Father Adam's **first begotten in the spirit world**, who according to the flesh is the only begotten as it is written. (In his divinity he having gone back into the spirit world, and **come in the spirit to Mary and she conceived** . . . (“Journal of L. John Nuttall,” vol. 1, pages 18, 21; a photograph from the original journal is found in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* page 178-D)

Mormon leaders continued to believe in the Adam-God doctrine after Brigham Young's death. As late as June 23, 1889, George Q. Cannon, a member of the First Presidency, was still teaching that “Jesus Christ is Jehovah” and that “**Adam is His Father and our God**” (“Daily Journal of Abraham H. Cannon,” vol. 11, page 39). Fortunately, the doctrine fell into disrepute, and members of the church who

continued to believe it were actually excommunicated. In a speech given on June 1, 1980, Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie declared that “**The devil keeps this heresy alive** . . . anyone who has received the temple endowment and who yet **believes the Adam-God theory does not deserve to be saved.**”

Church leaders became very embarrassed by the Adam-God doctrine and tried to cover up the fact that it had been taught for many years. While the General Authorities of the Mormon Church emphatically denied that earlier leaders taught the Adam-God doctrine, we marshaled a great deal of evidence in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* which was absolutely irrefutable. A number of other scholars gathered even more material. Finally, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie caved in under the weight of the evidence and admitted almost everything we had written in our book. In a letter to Eugene England, written in 1981, McConkie conceded that Brigham Young taught the Adam-God doctrine and also acknowledged that it was a false doctrine:

This may be the most important letter you have or will receive. . . . I want you to know that I am extending to you the hand of fellowship though **I hold over you at the same time, the scepter of judgment.** . . .

On Sunday, June 1, 1980, I spoke at one of the multi-stake firesides. . . . I, of course, indicated the **utter absurdity** of this [Adam-God] doctrine and said it was **totally false**. . . . I have received violent reactions from . . . cultists in which they have expounded upon the views of Brigham Young and others . . . They have **plain and clear quotations** saying all of the things about Adam which **I say are false. The quotations are in our literature** and form the basis of a worship system followed by many of the cultists who have been excommunicated . . . As it happens, I am a great admirer of Brigham Young . . . He was called of God. . . . He completed his work and has gone on to eternal exaltation. . . .

Yes, President Young did teach that **Adam was the father of our spirits**, and **all** the related things that the cultists ascribe to him. . . . He expressed views that are **out of harmony with the gospel**. But, be it known, Brigham Young also taught accurately and correctly, the status and position of Adam in the eternal scheme of things. What I am saying is, that **Brigham Young, contradicted Brigham Young**, and the issue becomes one of **which Brigham Young we will believe**. . . . **As for me and my house, we will have the good sense to choose between the divergent teachings of the same man** . . . If we believe false doctrine, we will be condemned. If that belief is on basic and fundamental things, it will lead us astray and we will lose our souls. . . . **people who teach false doctrine in the fundamental and basic things will lose their souls. The nature and kind of being that God is, is one of these fundamentals.** I repeat: **Brigham Young erred in some of his statements on the nature and kind of being that God is and as to the position of Adam** in the plan

of salvation, but Brigham Young also taught the truth in these fields on other occasions. . . . he was a great prophet and has gone on to eternal reward. What he did is **not a pattern for any of us**. If we choose to **believe and teach the false portions of his doctrines**, we are making an election **that will damn us**. . . . it is my province to teach to the Church what the doctrine is. It is your province to **echo what I say or to remain silent**. . . . If I err, that is my problem; but in your case if you single out some of these things and make them the center of your philosophy, and end up being wrong, **you will lose your soul**. . . .

Now I hope you will ponder and pray and come to a basic understanding of fundamental things and that unless and until you can on all points, **you will remain silent** on those where differences exist between you and the Brethren. (Letter from Apostle Bruce R. McConkie to Eugene England, dated February 19, 1981; photographically reproduced in our book *LDS Apostle Confesses Brigham Young Taught Adam-God Doctrine*)

It seems strange that Apostle McConkie would write such a threatening letter to Eugene England. As far as we know, England never taught the Adam-God doctrine. He merely had a disagreement with McConkie over the issue of whether God continues to progress in knowledge. McConkie apparently digressed onto the subject of the Adam-God doctrine because he was deeply disturbed about that matter. In any case, now that Apostle McConkie has admitted that “President Young **did** teach” the Adam-God doctrine, Mormons should seriously consider the grave implications of the matter.

According to Mormon prophet Brigham Young, his teaching that Adam was “the **only God** with whom **we have to do**,” was a “**doctrine**” which **God Himself revealed to him**. The reader will remember that he first publicly proclaimed the doctrine in 1852. Twenty-one years later he emphatically declared that the Adam-God doctrine was revealed to him by the God of heaven. As we have shown above, the Mormon Church’s own newspaper reported that President Brigham Young spoke of “one particular **doctrine** which I revealed to them [the Latter-day Saints], and which **God revealed to me**—namely that **Adam is our Father and God** . . .” (*Deseret Evening News*, June 14, 1873).

To admit that Brigham Young, the Prophet, Seer and Revelator of the church, could attribute a false revelation to God and cling to it so tenaciously for a period of **25 years** undermines the church’s claim that the living prophet cannot lead the Saints astray.

The teaching of the Adam-God doctrine is clearly a violation of the commandment, “Thou shalt have **no other gods** before me” (Exodus 20:3). In his book, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1979, page 270, Apostle McConkie said: “There is **no salvation** in the worship of false gods. For such false worship the Lord imposed the death penalty in ancient Israel (Deut. 13:6-11).” Since McConkie himself admitted that Brigham Young taught the Adam-God doctrine and said that those who have been through the temple ceremony and

believe that doctrine do “not deserve to be saved,” we do not see how he can still maintain that Brigham Young was “a mighty prophet.” It is obvious that an unbiased person can only reach one conclusion—i.e., that Brigham Young was a false prophet who tried to lead his people into serving another god.

CONCLUSION: In *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 163-178D, we show that although the Mormon leaders claim to have all the answers concerning the Godhead, a careful examination of their teachings reveals that they themselves are in a serious state of confusion. The honest investigator soon finds that the answers they give do **not** solve the real problems and that many of the answers are built upon the sandy foundation of change or falsification. The evidence clearly shows that the Mormon concept of God changed from a belief in one God to a plurality of Gods and finally culminated in the Adam-God doctrine—a doctrine that was later abandoned because it was considered blasphemous.

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## IN THE MAIL

Below are extracts from some of the hundreds of letters we have received during 1994:

This letter is sent to you as a voice of warning, to inform you that God will not permit you or your household to continue spreading wholesale destruction to the inhabitants of our society, through your militant aggression, by being in the same situation as Korihor placed himself in. Your fate will be just as dreadful. [Korihor was a Book of Mormon character who was so evil that he was “struck dumb” and was eventually “trodden down” by the Zoramites until “he was dead.”]

In the sight of God, your sins are worse than Benito Mussolini or Adolf Hitler, and your discipline will be much more severe, for you will be turned over to the buffeting of Satan both here and in the hereafter, where you will receive drastic punishment to where you will feel it’s greater than you can stand.

Hitler or Mussolini did not interfere with a persons endeavor to learn the genuine truth about the Gospel of Jesus Christ as you do. Their punishment will be much lighter than yours. . . . I am now a personal witness of your causing innocent living beings of being deceived. . . .

At this time, I being authorized by God, spiritually wash my hands and stamp the dust off my feet as a living testimony against you, because of your illiterate way of diverting souls from the truth. . . . you are turned over to the buffeting of Satan to suffer, in his power, and to receive your just due as God deems suitable for your situation. . . .

These things I now say and declare to you and your household by the authorization of God’s Holy Priesthood, and in the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.” (Letter from Utah, unsigned, but probably written by a Mormon Fundamentalist—i.e., a polygamist)

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Rejoice! With your help & God's power, another person is out of the LDS Church & he is raring to go to win other Mormons to Christ. As he told me, every time there was a dilemma, I was able to provide answers & that was only due to the literature you provided to me. You are truly a God send! (Letter from Washington)

We appreciate your ministry tremendously. You helped us & our two sons & families leave the Mormon Church. We were fifth generation members . . . (Letter from California)

You are in my prayers daily and I want to thank you for all the help your books etc have been for me. My 4 teenage boys have also left the church and my husband has stopped attending." (Letter from Texas)

Thank you more than I can express for your unswerving diligence in your ministry. Your book "Major Problems of Mormonism" was a real eye opener (mind opener) for me. I'll be blunt—the mormon church would have all mormons believe that you are evil people sent from hell . . . an a[c]quaintance of mine lent me the aforementioned book . . . Its not an easy book for a mormon to read. I believe most of the claims you make in your book and no longer intend to be a mormon. . . . I know that there is life beyond mormonism. (Letter from Canada)

I am a former mormon who was saved from darkness because people like you care enough to print the truth.(Letter from Washington D.C.)

Thank you so much for your book *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (And at such a good price!) That has got to be the best book of its kind on the market. (Letter from California)

It was your materials that enabled me to reject Joseph Smith as prophet and to leave Mormonism. The Brand I was a member of was the R.L.D.S. . . . I have since become a Christian . . . (Letter from Missouri)

. . . I am profoundly moved by your work. I . . . listen to your tapes over & over for it brings joy to my heart to know the truth. My wife & I sent three boys on missions . . . (Letter from Indiana)

I feel you people are a wonderful "support group." I have become very solid in my unshakable commitment to follow Christ . . . (Letter from Utah)

My wife, \_\_\_\_\_, has spent the last two years removing herself from the Mormon church and she has found your work very helpful during her studies. We both particularly like the balanced approach you bring to your research, as opposed to the vindictive style of some of the church's critics. (Letter from Australia)

**Please pray for our outreach to the Mormon people and for other ministries and individuals who are laboring to bring Mormons to the Lord.**



## THE NEW LIGHTHOUSE IS BECOMING A REALITY !

We are very happy to report that the new Utah Lighthouse Ministry building is now under construction on the property next door to our house. It is especially exciting to see work beginning on the second floor. The workmen are doing a very fine job. Unfortunately, a number of obstacles confronted us as the building project progressed. After the architect had completed the blueprints, a number of building regulations were changed. This made the building more expensive to construct than we had anticipated. In addition, the workmen ran into a serious problem with water before the basement was completed. These obstacles, and a few others, which we will not mention here, resulted in **an additional charge of about \$22,000** over the bid. We do not have the money to cover this extra expense and told the contractor to just complete the outside of the building. This, of course, will delay finishing the building for a season. Nevertheless, we do not feel that it is wise to borrow any more money at this time. We believe that God will provide the money in His own time. The Lord willing, however, the NEW UTAH LIGHTHOUSE will be in operation soon. We want to thank all those who have helped us reach this point.

Those who are interested in donating to either the building project or the general work of the ministry should be aware of the fact that Utah Lighthouse is a non-profit organization. In addition to our work with Mormons, we provide support for 44 children through World Vision. Those who are interested in helping this ministry can send their tax deductible contributions to UTAH LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY, PO Box 1884, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110. Both contributions and orders can be made over the phone (801-485-0312) with Visa, MasterCard or Discover Card.

## BOOKS AND TAPES

(Mail orders add 10% - Minimum postage \$1.50)

***Answering Mormon Scholars***, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner. Shows conclusively that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document. **Price: \$6.00**

***Inventing Mormonism***, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters. An important discussion of Joseph Smith's early years and the origin of Mormonism. **Special Price: \$27.00**

***New Approaches to the Book of Mormon***, edited by Brent Metcalfe. BYU professor Louis Midgley says this is "the most sophisticated attack on the truth of the Book of Mormon" that is currently available. **Special Price: \$25.00**

***Out of the Cults and Into the Church: Understanding & Encouraging Ex-Cultists***, by Janis Hutchinson. **Price: \$10.00**

## BOOKS AND TAPES

(Continued from page 15)

(Mail orders add 10% — Minimum postage \$1.50)

***Sandra Tanner Tape No. 3.*** Two radio interviews. Contains information about the 1990 changes in the Mormon temple ceremony and the false translation of the Book of Abraham. **Price: \$3.00**

***Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend: Challenging the Claims of Latter-day Saints in a Constructive Manner,*** by Bill McKeever & Eric Johnson. **Price: \$9.00**

***How to Rescue Your Loved One from Mormonism,*** by David A. Reed & John R. Farkas. **Price: \$9.00**

***Mormonism: The Christian View.*** A video narrated by Wesley P. Walters. Deals with Mormon history, doctrines, claim to authority, changes in doctrine and witnessing suggestions. **Price: \$24.00**

***Faithful History,*** edited by George D. Smith. This book contains D. Michael Quinn's speech which infuriated Mormon officials. **Price: \$18.95**

***The New Mormon History,*** edited by D. Michael Quinn. Mormon leaders are very distressed with historians who write "New Mormon History. Contains 15 essays. **Price: \$18.95**

***Divergent Paths of the Restoration,*** by Steven Shields. Brief history of over 100 churches and organizations claiming Joseph Smith as their founder. **Price: \$14.00**

***Mormon Polygamy: A History,*** by Richard Van Wagoner. Paperback (with index). **Price: \$12.95**

***Answering Mormons' Questions,*** by Bill McKeever. **Price: \$7.00**

***Why We Left Mormonism,*** edited by Latayne Scott. Personal testimonies of eight ex-Mormons, including Sandra Tanner. **Price: \$8.00**

***Basic Christianity,*** by John R. Stott. A brief examination of the claims of Christ and our response to His call. **Price: \$5.00**

***Mormons Answered Verse by Verse,*** by David Reed and John Farkas. **Price: \$7.00**

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***Know What You Believe—A Practical Discussion of the Fundamentals of the Christian Faith,*** by Paul E. Little. **Price: \$8.00**

***Know Why You Believe—A Clear Affirmation of the Reasonableness of the Christian Faith,*** by Paul E. Little. **Price: \$9.00**

***After Mormonism What? Reclaiming the Ex-Mormon's Worldview for Christ,*** by Latayne Scott. **Price: \$8.00**

***Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Re-Examined,*** by Rodger I. Anderson. Good response to LDS authors Hugh Nibley and Richard L. Anderson on early statements by Joseph Smith's neighbors. **Price: \$9.95**

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