

Joseph Smith's Role as 'Prophet' in View of the King Follet Discourse

By Sandra Tanner

Today there are approximately 50,000 LDS missionaries going door to door throughout the world to announce that the true church has been restored by the prophet Joseph Smith. But how are we to determine if Smith's claims are true? One of the ways is to examine his teaching on the nature of God.

In the Ten Commandments God declared:

Thou shalt have none other gods before me.... Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.... (Deut 5:7-9)

Then in Deuteronomy 6:4 we read:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD

Turning over to chapter 13, verses 1-3, Israel was warned about false prophets who would try to lead them after strange gods.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. 13:1-3)

In fact, it was such an offense that God decreed the false prophet should be put to death.

Seeing how important it was for Israel to only worship the true God we should give great diligence to insure that we are not following a false god or a false prophet.

The Bible declares the following about God—

- *There is only one God.* (Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6; 45:5; 46:5 & 9)
- *God is "from everlasting to everlasting."* (Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17)
- *God does not change.* (Malachi 3:6; Psalm 119:142)
- *He created the universe and all that is within it.* (Isaiah 44:24; 66:1-2; Psalm 33:6-9; Colossians 1:17)

With that in mind, let us look at Joseph Smith's doctrine of God and see how it measures up. We will show that Joseph Smith taught just the opposite of the above:

- *There are many gods.*
- *Heavenly Father advanced from being an imperfect mortal to a perfected god.*
- *God is a resurrected being.*
- *Our God did not create everything.*

Most Mormons assume that Joseph Smith's teaching on the nature of God was the same from the beginning of the church. However, history shows that his story and doctrines changed over time.

In the early 1830's Joseph Smith taught a fairly Biblical doctrine of God. The Book of Mormon teaches that there is only one God. In 2 Nephi 31:21 it states:

*... this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, **which is one God**, without end.* (2 Nephi 31:21)

When the Book of Mormon prophet Amulek was asked "Is there more than one god?" He answered "No." (Alma 11:26-29, 44)

The Book of Mormon also teaches that God has eternally been the same.

Moroni 8:18 says:

*... God is not a partial God, **neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.*** (Moroni 8:18)

In agreement with the Bible, Mormon 9:9 proclaims:

God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and in him there is no variableness, neither shadow of changing. (Mormon 9:9-10)

In fact, Mormons often use the Book of Mormon to counter criticism that they believe in many gods. The problem is that the Book of Mormon contradicts Joseph Smith's later doctrine of a plurality of gods.

Shortly after the Book of Mormon was published Smith started on his Inspired Version of the Bible. But interestingly he did not change the Isaiah passages on God. Isaiah 44:8 in Smith's revision is the same as the King James Version.

Is there a God beside me: yea, there is no God; I know not any.

One change Smith made in his Inspired Version is of particular interest. Revelation 1:6 states:

*And hath made us kings and priests unto **God and his Father.***

In 1844 Joseph Smith appealed to this verse as it appears in the King James Bible to prove that God the father has a father. In his June 16, 1844 sermon he said:

I will preach on the plurality of Gods. . . . Our text says “And hath made us kings and priests unto **God and His Father.**” The Apostles have discovered that there were Gods above, for Paul says God was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 474)

But Smith totally ignored his earlier revision of that verse. Revelation 1:6 in his Inspired Version was changed in such a way that one can not twist it to mean that God has a father:

*and hath made us kings and priests unto **God, his Father.***

By dropping the “and” and inserting a comma it is obvious that Smith originally intended to make the text even clearer that only Heavenly Father was intended. This is another example of how Smith’s doctrine of God evolved from one to many.

In 1835 the LDS Church published the Lectures on Faith as part of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Lecture 3 clearly lays out the importance of a “correct idea of his [God’s] character, perfections and attributes.” Yet it presents the standard view that God is a spirit. It contains nothing about God once being a man, plural gods or that God has a physical body. Lecture 5 contrasts God the Father with Jesus by stating that the father has a body of spirit while Jesus has a body of tabernacle. Obviously there was no understanding in Mormonism at that time about God the Father being a resurrected man.

The LDS Church claims that in 1820 Joseph Smith went out into the woods to pray and received his first vision. Supposedly God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him and restored to him the true doctrine of the nature of God. From this vision they claim Smith learned that God has a resurrected body the same as Jesus.

However, this understanding of God is not present in any church publications until after 1835. Smith did not record his first vision until 1832 and in that account he only mentions Jesus as appearing. There is no mention of the Father. Then in 1835 he told his first vision to two different visitors. In these accounts he claimed that “angels” appeared, but no mention of an appearance of God the Father. (*Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, pp. 105, 112-113, 2002 ed.)

For the first five years of Mormonism the teaching on the nature of God was far closer to traditional Christianity than we find in the 1840’s. Also, early criticism of Joseph Smith did not include problems with his view of God. It

was after Joseph Smith studied Hebrew in 1836 that his doctrine of God became more radical.

By 1839 Smith was hinting at plural gods. While in Liberty Jail Smith dictated a long letter that has since been condensed into *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 121. In verse 28 we read:

*A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God **or many gods.** They shall be manifest.*

In verse 32 he continues:

*According to that which was ordained in the midst of the **Council of the Eternal God of all other gods** before this world was, . . . (Doctrine and Covenants 121:32)*

Then in 1842 Joseph Smith began the publication of his Book of Abraham which has a number of references to plural gods. For example, Abraham 4:1 states

. . . they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.

In 1843 Smith introduced the concept that God has a body. In the *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 130, verse 22, we read:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.

If Joseph Smith had been teaching since 1820 that God had a body there would have been no reason for this revelation.

Also introduced in 1843, although privately at first, was the doctrine of man’s progression to godhood. Sec. 132, verse 19 speaks of many “gods” and verse 20 says that those who are sealed in an eternal marriage will become “gods” themselves and be “from everlasting to everlasting.”

At the April 1844 LDS Conference Joseph Smith gave his most famous sermon, sometimes referred to as the King Follett discourse. At the 1994 unveiling of the sun stone for the reconstruction of the Nauvoo temple, President Hinckley commented on Joseph Smith’s doctrine of God presented in this 1844 sermon:

The text of that address has become **an important doctrinal document in the theology of the Church.** It is known as the King Follett Sermon. (*Ensign*, Sept. 1994)

Let’s look at a few of Smith’s statements about God from that sermon:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . **it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God**

and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you **how God came to be God**. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 305)

Further on he said:

The scriptures inform us that Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? **To lay down my life as my Father did**, and take it up again. . . . Here, then, is eternal life to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn **how to be gods yourselves**, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as **all gods** have done before you, . . . (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 305-306)

Skipping down further—

These are the first principles of consolation. . . . To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of **a god**, and ascend the throne of eternal power, **the same as those who have gone before**. What did Jesus do? Why, **I do the things I saw my Father do** when worlds came rolling into existence. **My Father worked out His kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same**; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to My Father, so that He may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt Him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take His place, and thereby become exalted myself. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 306)

Keep in mind that President Hinckley considered this sermon “an important doctrinal document in the theology of the Church.” Joseph Smith’s sermon is printed in the *History of the Church*, vol. 6, chapter 14, and *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. It was also published in the 1971 April and May issues of the *Ensign*.

(*The History of the Church* can be read online at the BYU site [<http://byustudies2.byu.edu/hc/hcpgs/hc.aspx?HC=/hc/1/4.html&A=10>]. Simply go down to vol. 6, then go to chapters 14 and 23 to read both of Smith’s sermons on God.)

On June 16th of 1844, and just a week before his death, Smith again preached on the plurality of gods:

Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many . . .

Some say I do not interpret the scripture the same as they do. They say it means the heathen’s gods. Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many; and that makes **a plurality of Gods** in spite of the whims of all men. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 474-475)

Further on in the same sermon Smith said:

If Abraham reasoned thus—If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that **God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also**. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way. Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly, **Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also?** (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 476)

Let me give a brief summary of Joseph Smith’s main points on the nature of God from his two sermons:

Summary of Joseph Smith’s Doctrine as Preached in April and June of 1844.

- God has not always been God.
- God was once a mortal.
- God performed the role of a savior on his world when he was a mortal.
- There was a different Heavenly Father in charge of that world.
- There are multiple gods above our Heavenly Father.
- Our Heavenly Father worked out his kingdom in the same way we are to do it.
- Men may become gods like Heavenly Father.
- God becomes more powerful and achieves a higher exaltation as his children advance to godhood.

That the doctrines taught in Smith’s 1844 sermons were new to the church is made plain when one reads the charges against Smith in the one and only issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor*:

Among the many items of **false doctrine** that are taught the Church, is the doctrine of **many Gods**, one of the most direful in its effects that has characterized the world for many centuries. We know not what to call it other than **blasphemy**, for it is most unquestionably, speaking of God in an impious and irreverent manner. It is contended that **there are innumerable gods as much above the God that presides over this universe, as he is above us . . .** (*Nauvoo Expositor*, June 7, 1844)

Smith’s teaching that God was once a man inspired Lorenzo Snow, who became the 5th President of the LDS Church, to write the following couplet:

As man is, God once was; as God is man may be.
(*The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, pp. 8–9)

The 1984 LDS Priesthood manual, *Search These Commandments*, printed the following endorsement by Joseph Smith of Lorenzo Snow’s couplet:

Elder Snow expressed this new found understanding in these words: “As man now is, God once was: As God now is, many may be.” Later the Prophet Joseph Smith assured him: “Brother Snow, that is true gospel doctrine, and **it is a revelation from God to you . . .**” (*Search These Commandments*, Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide, 1984, pp. 151-152)

Apostle James E. Talmage mentioned Snow’s couplet in his book, *Articles of Faith*:

We believe in a God who is Himself progressive, whose majesty is intelligence; whose perfection consists in **eternal advancement**—a Being who has attained His exalted state by a path which now His children are permitted to follow, whose glory it is their heritage to share. In spite of the opposition of the sects, **in the face of direct charges of blasphemy**, the Church proclaims the eternal truth: “**As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be.**” (*Articles of Faith*, by James E. Talmage, Deseret Book, 1981 ed., p. 390 [p. 442, 1899 ed.]

While Smith’s sermons on God and Snow’s couplet are not referenced as often as in the past, that is not a signal of the demise of the doctrine. Speaking at the October 2001 LDS Conference President Hinckley emphasized that Mormonism is not changing:

Those who observe us say that we are moving into the mainstream of religion. We are not changing. The world’s perception of us is changing. **We teach the same doctrine.** (*Ensign*, Nov. 2001)

Then we have to assume that Joseph Smith’s doctrine of a plurality of gods is still believed. Remember that this doctrine has consistently been taught by every president of the LDS Church since Joseph Smith.

Some people have felt that Mormonism is moving away from Smith’s doctrine of multiple gods and that God was once a mortal. However, the importance of Smith’s 1844 sermon can be seen in the many references to it in official LDS literature. In the 2003 *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual* we find a quote from Joseph Smith’s sermon on the nature of God, including the portion “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man.” Following the Smith quote is a statement by Apostle Bruce R. McConkie:

Knowledge of God is the greatest truth in all eternity. . . . **Joseph Smith came to reveal God**, in a day of almost total spiritual darkness, in a day when men no longer knew the **nature and kind of Being** whom they should worship. (*Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual*, Lesson 32)

In other current LDS manuals are similar statements teaching a finite god. *Gospel Principles*, a manual used in

LDS meetings and given to converts, includes a quote from Smith’s 1844 sermon:

This is the way our Heavenly Father **became** God. Joseph Smith taught: “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God. . . . He was **once a man** like us; . . . God himself, the Father of us all, **dwelt on an earth**, the same as Jesus Christ himself did” . . . (*Gospel Principles*, 1997 ed, p. 305)

Not only that, the manual also teaches that God has a wife.

Every person who was ever born on earth was our spirit brother or sister in heaven. The first spirit born to our **heavenly parents** was Jesus Christ . . . Because we are the spiritual children of **our heavenly parents** we have inherited the potential to develop their divine qualities. (*Gospel Principles*, p. 11)

In the 2004 edition of *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual* we encounter the same teaching. On page 8 is a quote from Joseph Smith that “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man.” Further down on the same page is a quote from Spencer W. Kimball, 12th president of the LDS Church, that “God made man in his own image and certainly he made woman in the image of his **wife-partner.**”

On page 14 of *Doctrines of the Gospel* is a quote from the 1909 First Presidency statement that

All men and women are in the similitude of the universal **Father and Mother**, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity. (*Doctrines of the Gospel*, p. 14)

At the end of the 1909 doctrinal statement, although not included in the 2004 manual, is the following:

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of **celestial parentage** is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of **evolving into a God.** (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 4, p. 1669)

Keep in mind that this is an official statement signed by the First Presidency which puts it on the level of binding doctrine.

This doctrine is also presented in the 2003 LDS lesson book *Eternal Marriage Student Manual*. It teaches that we have “heavenly parents” and that man’s goal is to achieve godhood (see pp. 65, 82, 83, 167-180, 202, 259).

Their official manuals *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (pp. 15-17, 19, 29-31, 34) and *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* (pp. 2-3, 8, 13, 40, 59) both teach that our Heavenly Father was once a mortal, that man has the same capacity to achieve godhood

and there are multiple gods. While LDS leaders seldom mention these doctrines in public interviews, they are repeatedly taught in the manuals given to the membership.

Even though these doctrines have appeared over and over again in official LDS literature I often encounter LDS members who never understood these things.

Recently I had a Mormon woman in the store who asked me why I didn't believe Mormonism any more. I explained to her that I couldn't accept Joseph Smith's teaching that God was not always God, that he had a father who had a father, etc. and that man can progress to godhood, the same as Heavenly Father did. She said she had never heard that before.

I told her that those teachings are in Smith's famous King Follett discourse, which is printed in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. But this doctrine completely contradicts the Bible, which repeatedly teaches that God is eternal and has always been God. I then told her that I believed she had heard the plural god doctrine but may not have thought it through.

So I asked her if she had ever heard Lorenzo Snow's couplet, "As man is, God once was; As God is, man may be." She said that she was familiar with it. So I asked her to explain the first half of that statement to me, the part that says "As man is, God once was." She seemed confused by the question, so I asked her if she believed God once lived as a mortal on an earth. She said "yes," so I followed up with the question, "Who was the god in charge of that earth when our Heavenly Father was a mortal?"

She admitted she had never thought about it before. I then challenged her to read the Biblical passages on the nature of God and compare them with Joseph Smith's doctrine of God. Either the Bible is right or Joseph Smith is right, it can't be both.

On Thursday, May 22nd, 2008, I received an email from a Christian who had been talking with the LDS missionaries in his area. He wrote:

I've been talking to some Mormon missionaries in California. . . . I asked them if Joseph Smith taught that there is more than one god and they said no. Where can I find a copy of Vol. 6 [of the *History of the Church*]?

I sent him an email with links to the BYU site that has the whole *History* online and a link to the 1971 *Ensign* printing of Joseph Smith's King Follett sermon. This is another example of the lack of understanding of basic LDS doctrine among the members. These doctrines are in the LDS manuals but obviously many Mormons do not comprehend the implications of the statements.

Over the last several years we have heard much from Dr. Robert Millet, of the BYU, discussing the LDS doctrines. While he sometimes speaks of God in ways that sound like evangelical teachings, a close examination of his writings

shows that he, too, holds to the standard LDS doctrine of a god who achieved godhood, not one who has eternally existed as God.

In his 1998 book, *The Mormon Faith: A New Look at Christianity*, Dr. Millet candidly states:

First, the Latter-day Saints believe that God the Father is **an exalted man**, a corporeal being, a personage with flesh and bones. . . . Joseph Smith taught in 1844 that God our **Father was once a mortal, that he lived on an earth, died, was resurrected and glorified, and grew and developed over time to become the Almighty that he now is**. To say this another way, they teach that God is all-powerful and all-knowing, **but that he has not been so forever**; there was once a time in an eternity past when he lived on an earth like ours. (*The Mormon Faith: A New Look at Christianity*, by Robert L. Millet, 1998, pp. 29-30)

Since writing that book, Dr. Millet seems to have been more reserved in his statements. However, the same teaching can be seen in the book *Bridging the Divide*, where he described God the Father as follows:

Joseph Smith taught that God is **an Exalted Man**, a Man of Holiness, and that while He is God and possesses every power, every divine quality, and every **perfected attribute**, He is not of a different species with mortal men and women. Now don't misunderstand me here: the chasm between man and God is immense, but **we do not believe it is unbridgeable**, nor do we hold the same Creator-creature dichotomy that most Christians do. For us God is a man, a person, an actual being with a **glorified and exalted** personality. (*Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation Between a Mormon and an Evangelical*, by Dr. Robert L. Millet and Rev. Gregory C.V. Johnson, 2007, p. 58)

These words, "perfected" "glorified" and "exalted", point to the very issue of God's nature. A perfect God does not arrive at perfection. To say that God has "glorified" and "exalted" traits is to say he did not always have these qualities, but achieved them. I refer you back to Millet's 1998 statement that "God is all-powerful and all-knowing, **but that he has not been so forever.**"

When discussing the doctrine of God in the book *Claiming Christ: A Mormon and Christian in Dialogue*, Dr. Millet mentions Joseph Smith's King Follett discourse and the "idea that the Almighty was **once a mortal man** who lived on an earth" (page 82). In a seeming effort to deflect the problems encountered in claiming God was once a mortal, on page 84 he mentions President Hinckley's statement "I don't know that we teach it. I don't know that we emphasize it."

In fact, Millet complains that he hears far more about the LDS doctrine of God advancing to godhood from Evangelicals than he does from his own church. But I notice that he never repudiated the doctrine.

The reason he hears so much about it from the Evangelicals is because to those who look to the Bible as their rule of faith, Joseph Smith's doctrine of God is a great blasphemy.

Continuing on with the discussion on page 85, Millet switches to a discussion of Christ having a body and asks if it would be as much of a problem for Evangelicals if

“As man is, Christ once was;
As Christ is, man may become.”
(*Claiming Christ: A Mormon and Christian in Dialogue*, p. 85)

The answer is, “Yes, it is an equal problem.” Jesus and men are not the same species with the same potential. Christians believe Jesus and the Father exist eternally as God, both in the past and the future. What is said of one is true of the other, but not of man. Christians reject the LDS doctrine that God, Jesus and men are all the same species, that Jesus is literally our older brother and that man has the potential to become a God. Millet goes on to state:

I may believe that God and man are not of a different species, but the last thing in the world I want to be accused of is **shortening the distance** between a frail, weak, and imperfect mortal and an omnipotent, omniscient, and **perfected** God. (*Claiming Christ*, p.85-86)

Notice the phrase “shortening the distance.” He can claim the distance is beyond our understanding but he is still saying that God and men are traveling the same path, they are the same species with the same potential. It would also imply that God at one time was in the same situation as man, “a frail, weak, and imperfect mortal.” Thus the only true difference between man and God would be a matter of time, obedience and moral perfection.

The Bible does not present man and God as being on the same progression track with God light years ahead of us. He is our creator, not our literal parent with a wife.

When Prof. Millet refers to God as “perfected” he is teaching a doctrine of God that is totally foreign to the Bible. Perfection is not an attribute that God acquired. He is perfect, past and future. To be “perfected” implies God was not always “perfect.” Notice also, the misuse of “omnipotent” and “omniscient.” A being that acquired perfection can not also be “omniscient” and “omnipotent.”

This reminds me of a statement by Apostle James E. Talmage:

To **become** perfect as God is perfect is to attain the state, power, dignity, and authority of **godship**. Plainly there is a way provided by which the child of God may **follow the footsteps of the Father**, and in time—**sometime in the distant eternities**—be as that Divine Father is. **Even as Christ**, the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh, endured

the experiences of mortality, passed the portals of death and became a resurrected Being, **so the Father before Him had trodden the same path of progression from manhood to Godhood**, and today sits enthroned in the heavens **by right of achievement**. He is the Eternal Father and with Him, crowned with glory and majesty, is the **eternal Mother**. (*The Essential James E. Talmage*, edited by James P. Harris, pp. 132-133)

Notice the statement that man may achieve godhood “sometime in the distant eternities” as God did and God is God “by right of achievement.” This is totally unbiblical.

Mormons want to portray God's qualities as something all men can achieve, like learning everything there is to know about physics. God has not arrived at total knowledge; he is the embodiment of all knowledge. He did not acquire all the power needed to operate his world; he stands outside of time and space and is the creator of all that there is anywhere. He is the sum total of all power.

Hosea 11:9 declares:

I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee.

In Psalms 119:142 we read:

Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness.

It is obvious that the LDS leaders today continue to believe the same as their past prophets. I read on the LDS web site where Dallin Oaks, in his interview for the 2007 PBS special *The Mormons*, stated that God has a “resurrected” body:

Before the close of his ministry, in Illinois, Joseph Smith put together the significance of what he had taught about **the nature of God and the nature and destiny of man**. He preached a great sermon not long before he was murdered that **God was a glorified Man**, glorified beyond our comprehension, (still incomprehensible in many ways), but a glorified, **resurrected, physical Being**, and it is the destiny of His children upon this earth, upon the conditions He has proscribed, **to grow into that status themselves**. That was a big idea, a challenging idea. It followed from the First Vision, and it was taught by Joseph Smith, and it is the explanation of many things that Mormons do — **the whole theology of Mormonism**. . . .

Further on he states:

Eternal means Godlike and to become like God. One of the succeeding prophets said: “As man is, God once was. And as God is, man may become.” That is an extremely challenging idea. . . . but it explains the purpose of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . [http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/news-releases-stories/elder-oaks-interview-transcript-from-pbs-documentary]

Notice that Apostle Oaks sums up Joseph Smith's 1844 teaching on God and man as encompassing "the whole theology of Mormonism" and links it to Lorenzo Snow's couplet. Mormons need to face the implications of this claim. Clearly Mr. Oaks is teaching that God has not always been God and that man has the same potential to advance from mortality to become a deity.

One of the books on the LDS missionary approved reading list is *Jesus the Christ* by Apostle James E. Talmage. On page 39 Talmage explained that God the Father was once a mortal:

During that antemortal period there was essential difference between the Father and the Son, in that **the former had already passed through the experiences of mortal life, including death and resurrection**, and was therefore a Being possessed of a perfect, immortalized body of flesh and bones, while the Son was yet unembodied. (*Jesus the Christ*, by James E. Talmage, 1983, p. 39)

Since this is on the approved reading list for the missionaries it obviously represents the view of God sanctioned by the church. This teaching necessitates a god above our Heavenly Father to run that world when he was a mortal. Thus, we are faced with an eternal regression of gods where each Heavenly Father has a father. Or if there is an ultimate first God in Mormonism it couldn't be the god we are praying to since he was once a human. The LDS doctrine of God sounds a lot like Paul's warning in Romans 1: 22-25:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man,...who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. (Rom. 1:22-25)

The Bible clearly teaches that God had no beginning and there are no other gods, he didn't 'earn' the right to be our god. He has never been less than he is today. In Isaiah 44:6 God declared:

I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)

Therefore I know that Joseph Smith can't be a true representative of God and the Mormon doctrine of deity is not Biblical.

Now I would like to share with you a few thoughts on talking with a Mormon.

The missionaries have a lesson book, *Preach My Gospel*, that lays out the basic claims of Mormonism and instructs them on the basic concepts to be presented in each lesson. Part of Lesson One is the LDS claim of a total apostasy and the need for a restoration of the true church

through a prophet, namely Joseph Smith. I often start with questions relating to their first lesson:

1. How do we know if someone is truly a prophet of God?
2. Are there Biblical guidelines for testing someone claiming to be a prophet?

Yes. According to Deuteronomy 13 a prophet can't lead you after a false god. In order to consider Joseph Smith as a prophet of God I would need to know what he taught about the nature of God.

I don't get into the doctrine of the Trinity—I just focus in on the nature of God the Father. I also put the issue of whether or not God has a body aside, and stick to the main point—Has God the Father always been God, never less than he is today, and the only God anywhere.

Another question for the Mormon would be—

Do you believe all that Joseph Smith taught about God the father?

The Mormon might ask what you are getting at, at which point you could say something like this: In Joseph Smith's sermons in 1844 he taught that God was once a mortal on another earth, died and was resurrected and progressed to godhood, which implies God had a Heavenly Father as well. This would mean there are many gods. Do you believe this?

If they say yes, there are many gods, but they only pray to one, or there is only one over our earth, you can then bring up the various verses from the Bible about there only being one God over everything, not just our world. Remind them that God declared He alone is God and He knows of no others. Isaiah 44:8 says:

Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any. (Isaiah 44:8)

If they have never heard that the LDS Church teaches a plurality of gods you can ask something like this—Have you read Joseph Smith's 1844 conference talk, sometimes referred to as the King Follett sermon? It seems to be teaching a doctrine of God completely foreign to the God of the Bible. The Bible declares that God has always been God yet Joseph Smith taught that God progressed to godhood, the same as mortal men may do. When I read such Bible verses as Isaiah 43:10-11 where God says "before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" I feel I must reject Joseph Smith as a prophet.

When asked about Smith's sermons the missionary may counter that they are only bound by the four standard works, not every thing their leaders say, sometimes their leaders speak from personal opinion, etc.

I then point out—In order for me to believe Joseph Smith’s revelations in the LDS additional books of scripture I would first need to be sure that he was a true prophet and taught a right concept of God, regardless of whether his sermons were canonized or not.

I often relate my experience when I was in the 8th grade in California. A young girl came up to me and asked if I was a Mormon. I told her that I was. She then asked me what the Mormons believe about God. I assume that either her parents or church leaders had warned her that the Mormons have some pretty weird doctrines and she wanted to find out if that was true. In trying to think of the right thing to say I decided Snow’s couplet explained it as good as anything, so I said to her “We believe that as man is, God once was; as God is man may become.” She just looked at me with this horrified expression and said “That’s blasphemy” and walked away. It took me several years to figure out why she was so offended by my statement. But at least she got me thinking about it. It would have helped if she had referred me to Isaiah 43:10-11.

At this point the Mormon will often revert to his testimony, that he knows Joseph Smith is a prophet because he prayed about it and received divine confirmation. However, no amount of ‘prayer’ can change the fact that Joseph Smith taught a doctrine of God that contradicts the Bible.

If God has eternally been a Holy, all knowing, all powerful God, and has never been less than he is today, as taught in the Bible, then wouldn’t it be blasphemous to say he was once a mere mortal and progressed to godhood, the same as many others have done and as Mormons hope to do?

The question remains, Are Smith’s teachings about God Biblical? If not, he has led the LDS people after a false god and he can’t be a prophet. His sermons do not agree with either the Bible or the Book of Mormon as both teach one eternal God.

Then I quietly, lovingly say to them something to the effect that—Even your church leaders say it is important to have a correct understanding of who God is. What Joseph Smith taught about God is blasphemy and that is one reason I left Mormonism. I wanted to worship the true and living God of the Bible.

Then I challenge them—The Bible was here first, I must judge Joseph Smith and any others claiming to speak for God by what God has already revealed about himself.

In John 17:3 Jesus prayed that “this is life eternal, that they might **know thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” It is imperative that we know the true God. You may feel that your prayers have confirmed to you that you are following the true God, but is it the God of the Bible or the invention of man?

The Bible never says prayer is the way to test a prophet. Instead, it tells us to test the spirits, to check out doctrinal claims, to search the scriptures, to be wary of false prophets. I then give them several papers listing the verses I mentioned.

I realize this isn’t going to change a Mormon overnight, but it will give him something to think about. We are to plant the seed, God brings the harvest.

I owe a great deal to that girl who challenged me in the 8th grade. She was willing to step out of the crowd and speak to me about my faith. Yes, we need to be friends to our LDS acquaintances and approach them in love, but we also need to discuss the real issues. Joseph Smith was not honoring the God of the Bible when he taught that God and men are the same species and on the same trajectory. In Isaiah 42:8 God declared “I am the LORD: that is my name: and **my glory will I not give to another, . . .**”

There is only one God who has eternally been God. My prayer is that someday we will all be in the heavenly throng mentioned in Rev. 19:6 singing—

“Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”



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