



Jehovah as the Father

The Development of the Mormon Jehovah Doctrine

By Boyd Kirkland

Today in Mormon theology, Jesus Christ is considered to be Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets. Elohim is considered to be God the Father, the father of Jehovah (or Jesus Christ) and of the human race. The Church promotes this point of view in all of its current lesson manuals, periodicals and literature.¹ While there

is a natural tendency to assume that this current theology has been the position of Mormonism from 1830 to the present, actually several divergent views have been held.

In fact, Mormon perceptions about God and the Godhead have passed through several phases of development.² Mormon historian Thomas Alexander has pointed out that "before about

1835 the LDS doctrines on God and man were quite close to those of contemporary Protestant denominations.³ Joseph Smith's earliest statements and scriptural writings describe God as an absolute, infinite, self-existent, spiritual being, perfect in all of his attributes and alone in his supremacy.⁴ The Godhead was regularly defined with the trinitarian but nonbiblical formula, "the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, which is one God."⁵ The Book of Mormon speaks of only one God who could manifest himself either as the Father or the Son.⁶ While Book of Mormon theology does not reflect a truly orthodox trinitarian view as codified in the Athanasian creed, it does reflect the common Christian layman's perception that in some manner, the Father and the Son were both representations of one God.⁷

Several scriptural passages given through Joseph indicate clearly that he saw no contradiction in having one god simultaneously be the Father who sent Jesus, as well as be Jesus.⁸ For example, Ether 4:12 plainly states, "He that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father."

A close examination of Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible also reveals his early monotheistic beliefs. He consciously attempted to remove all references to a plurality of gods from the King James Bible.⁹ He also changed several passages to identify the Father and the Son as the same god. For example, he revised Luke 10:22 to have Jesus teaching that "no man knoweth that the Son is the Father, and the Father is the Son, but him to whom the Son will reveal it." These observations provide significant insight into understanding Book of Mormon passages which

identify Jesus Christ as "God Himself," the "Holy One of Israel," the "Lord Omnipotent," the "Father of heaven and earth" who revealed himself to Moses and many of the ancient patriarchs. Apparently, Joseph's own early theology is reflected in his translation of the Book of Mormon. Similarly, some of Joseph Smith's early revelations freely switch the role of the God of Israel from the Son to the Father.¹⁰

Evidence indicates that by 1835, Joseph and other Mormon leaders began to make more of a distinction between the roles and natures of the Father and the Son. This is reflected perhaps most clearly in the Lectures on Faith published in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. The fifth lecture defined the Godhead as consisting of two personages: the Father, a personage of spirit, and the Son, a personage of tabernacle. The Holy Ghost was not considered to be a personage, but rather was defined as the "mind" of the Father and the Son.¹¹ Also, revelations Joseph received after 1833 contain less crossover in the roles and titles of the Father and the Son.¹² In fact, it appears that after May of 1833, Joseph never again referred to Jesus as the Father in any of his writings.

Predictably, prior to his study of Hebrew in

Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph's usage of *Elohim* and *Jehovah* reflects marked similarity to the King James Bible's (KJV) usage of these divine names. *Elohim* and *Jehovah* appear thousands of times in the original Hebrew Bible. However, they are generally translated as "God" and "Lord" in the KJV. The divine name *Jehovah* appears only six times in the KJV, while the name *Elohim* does not appear at all.¹³ Accordingly, *Jehovah* appears in the Book of Mormon only twice, one reference being an excerpt from Isaiah.¹⁴ The name *Elohim* appears nowhere in the LDS standard works.

After Joseph's study of Hebrew in 1835-36, he began to use the name *Elohim* for the first time; he also began to use the name *Jehovah* more often. *Jehovah* appears for the first time in the Doctrine and Covenants after 1836. It appears twice in the first two chapters of the Book of Abraham, which was translated in 1835.¹⁵

With the interchangeability of the roles of the Father and the Son in earliest Mormon theology, it is impossible to identify specifically Joseph's first few *Jehovah* references as either the Father or the Son. However, after the identities of the Father and the Son were more carefully differentiated in Mormon theology around 1835, Joseph clearly began to use the divine name *Jehovah* to refer to the Father.¹⁶ Significantly, he apparently never specifically identified *Jehovah* as Jesus, nor *Jehovah* as the Son of *Elohim*.¹⁷ Rather, the Prophet followed the biblical Hebrew usage of the divine names and either combined them or used them interchangeably as epithets for God the Father. The following prayer, which he wrote in 1842, demonstrates this: "O Thou, who seest and knowest the hearts of all men—Thou eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent *Jehovah*—God—Thou *Eloheim*, that sittest, as saith the

Psalmist, 'enthroned in heaven,' look down upon Thy servant Joseph at this time; and let faith on the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ, to a greater degree than Thy servant ever yet has enjoyed, be conferred upon him."¹⁸ On a few occasions, Joseph referred to the Father by just the title *Elohim* alone.¹⁹

Other Mormon writers during the 1830s followed this same pattern. They most often used *Jehovah* as the name of God the Father, and only occasionally used the name *Elohim*. They evidently also considered the Father to be the god who appeared in the Old Testament.²⁰ For example, the following was published in the *Times and Seasons* as the Mormon belief in 1841: "We believe in God the Father, who is the Great *Jehovah* and head of all things, and that Christ is the Son of God, co-eternal with the Father."²¹

During the Nauvoo period of Church history (1839-44), Joseph Smith's theology of the Godhead once again changed dramatically.²² He began to denounce and reject the notion of the trinity. He emphasized that God the Father, as well as the Son, both had tangible bodies of flesh

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and bone (D&C 130:22). He also began to teach the plurality of gods and the related concept that men could become gods. God himself had a father upon whom he depended for his existence and authority. The Father had acted under the direction of a "head god" and a "council of gods" in the creation of the worlds. The plurality of creation gods is dramatically depicted in the Book of Abraham, chapters 2-5, which Joseph translated in 1842. All of these ideas were summed up by Joseph in April, 1844, in perhaps his most famous sermon: The King Follett Discourse.²³

In connection with these ideas, the Prophet began to use the title *Elohim* as the proper name for the head god who presided at the creation of the world. He also taught that *Elohim* in the creation accounts of Genesis should be understood in a plural sense as referring to the council of the gods, who, under the direction of the head god, organized the heaven and the earth. Once the earth had been organized, "the heads of the Gods appointed one God for us."²⁴ From the context of Joseph's discussions of this head god, it is apparent that the Prophet considered this being to be a patriarchal superior to the father of Jesus.²⁵

The gods involved in the creation were designated in Joseph's temple endowment ceremony as *Elohim*, *Jehovah*, and *Michael*.²⁶ Joseph had previously identified *Michael* as "Adam . . . the ancient of days" (D&C 27:11). Whether he identified either this *Elohim* or *Jehovah* to be God the Father as he had previously used these titles is unclear. We have seen that he used the title *Elohim* in various modes, none of which included Jesus, and he also used the name *Jehovah* to refer to the Father. Given all of these possibilities, Joseph's endowment ceremony, then, did not seem to include Jesus among the creation gods. This is a curious situation, since many scriptural passages previously produced through Joseph, as well as the Bible, attribute a major role in the creation to Jesus.²⁷ Unfortunately, Joseph Smith was killed before he was able to elaborate further on these newer, more esoteric ideas.

As Joseph Smith's successor and certainly one of his most devoted disciples, Brigham Young continued to teach Joseph's Nauvoo theology to the Church.²⁸ On numerous occasions, he clearly designated the God of the Old Testament as the Father.²⁹ He delighted in citing the theophanies of the Old Testament as evidence of the Father's physical, anthropomorphic nature:

Our former religious traditions has [sic] taught us that our Father in heaven has no tabernacle, that his centre is everywhere and his circumference nowhere. Yet we read that "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran." "Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet," "And the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool." "Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?" "And I will

take away mine hand and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face thou shalt not see." "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry." The idea that the Lord our God is not a personage of tabernacle is entirely a mistaken notion. He was once a man.³⁰

Brigham likewise sometimes combined the names *Elohim-Jehovah* or used them interchangeably as designations for God the Father: "We obey the Lord, Him who is called *Jehovah*, the Great I Am, I am a man of war, *Elohim*, etc."³¹

But if Brigham Young used these names interchangeably, how did he perceive the identities of *Jehovah* and *Elohim* in the temple ceremony? This question can be answered by examining his teachings concerning *Michael*, the third figure in the temple creation story. Significantly, President Young considered *Michael*, or *Adam*, to be God the Father. Though not without controversy, this point has been extremely well documented.³² For example, in one of his less ambiguous statements concerning his belief about the paternity of Jesus, Brigham Young said, "Who did beget him? . . . His Father; and his Father is our God, and the Father of our spirits, and he is the framer of the body, the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is he? He is Father *Adam*; *Michael*; the Ancient of Days."³³

The fact that *Elohim* and *Jehovah* preside over and direct *Michael* in the temple creation account implies that, in this context at least, Brigham Young considered the pair to be patriarchal superiors to God the Father. Like Joseph, then, Brigham Young apparently did not see Jesus as being among the temple creation gods. References indicating who exactly Brigham Young did consider this *Elohim* and *Jehovah* to be, and their relationship to *Michael-Adam* are sparse and ambiguous.³⁴ However, the temple scenario itself depicts *Elohim* as the father of *Adam* and *Eve*. This coincides with Brigham's designation of *Elohim* as the grandfather of mankind.³⁵ It is also consistent with Joseph Smith's teaching that the creation was directed by a head god superior to our Father in Heaven.

Since President Young considered the Father to be *Adam*, and since he consistently designated the God of the Old Testament to be the Father, it is logical to suppose that he believed *Adam* to be the God of Israel. Indeed, on several occasions, he implied that this is the case:

We begin with the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our spirits—who is he? . . . [He is] that great and wise and glorious being that the children of Israel were afraid of, whose countenance shown so that they could not look upon him . . . that man [who] put his hands out before Moses in the cleft of rock until his glory passed by and would not suffer Moses to see his face but his parts only . . . I tell you this as my belief about the personage who is called the Ancient of Days, the Prince, and so on.³⁶

In general conference, 8 October 1854, Brigham Young specifically applied the title *Jehovah* to *Adam*, calling him "*Yahovah Michael*,"

who carried out the behests of Elohim in the creation of the world.³⁷

President Young apparently believed that while God the Father was on the earth in the role of Adam, Elohim (the Grandfather in Heaven), assumed Adam's role as the Father of mankind. After his death Adam returned to his exalted station as God the Father, and as such presided over Israel designated by the divine names *Elohim* or *Jehovah*. He later begot Jesus, his firstborn spirit son, in the flesh.³⁸

Thus a certain flexibility characterizes the way Brigham Young used the divine names: First, he never referred to Jesus as Jehovah. Second, he referred to God the Father variously as Jehovah, Elohim, Michael, Adam, Ancient of Days, I Am, and other Old Testament epithets. Finally, he also referred to gods superior to the Father as Elohim and Jehovah. Brigham's application of the titles *Elohim* and *Jehovah* to several different divine personalities has led to much confusion in understanding his true beliefs, especially with respect to the Adam-God doctrine.³⁹

Scriptures contradicting the Adam-God doctrine, such as the accounts of Adam's creation, were dismissed by President Young as being "baby stories" given to men because of their spiritual immaturity and weakness.⁴⁰ During a discussion of the Adam-God doctrine at the Salt Lake City School of the Prophets, Brigham Young responded to the question of "why the scriptures seemed to put Jesus Christ on an equal footing with the Father" by explaining "that the writers of those scriptures wrote according to their best language and understanding,"⁴¹ indicating that Brigham did not feel obligated to accept literally all scriptural accounts of the role of Christ.

While not all General Authorities contemporary with and succeeding Brigham Young agreed with his teachings concerning Michael, many of them did speak of Jehovah as the Father. John Taylor consistently did so in numerous sermons, as well as in his book, *The Mediation and Atonement*, which he wrote as President of the Church.⁴² The following hymn, written by President Taylor, clearly identifies Jehovah as the Father:

*As in the heavens they all agree
The record's given there by three,*

*...
Jehovah, God the Father's one,
Another His Eternal Son,
The Spirit does with them agree,
The witnesses in heaven are three.*⁴³

In some 256 references to Elohim and Jehovah and the God of the Old Testament, in the *Journal of Discourses* (representing sermons of many of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve), the title *Jehovah* is only specifically applied to Jesus once. This occurred in 1885, when the new doctrine identifying Jesus as Jehovah was just beginning to be developed.

Not surprisingly, some confusion arose among members of the Church who had trouble reconciling their reading of the scriptures with Joseph's and Brigham's later doctrinal innovations. For example, the Book of Mormon's explicit identification of Jesus as God the Father led some members of the Church to believe that Jesus was literally the father of the spirits of mankind. This, coupled with Brigham Young's Adam-God doctrine, apparently led other Church members to identify Adam and Christ as the same being. Also, because of the Book of Mormon's equating of Jesus with the God of Israel, some General Authorities in the 1880s and 1890s began to speculate that all Old Testament appearances and revelations of God were in reality manifestations of the premortal Jesus. This concept eventually led to the identification of Jesus as Jehovah.

As early as 1849, Orson Pratt observed that there were "some [Saints] . . . who believed that the spirit of Christ, before taking a tabernacle, was the Father, exclusively of any other being. They suppose the fleshly tabernacle to be the Son, and the Spirit who came and dwelt in it to be the Father; hence they suppose the Father and Son were united in *one* person, and that when Jesus dwelt on the earth in the flesh, they suppose there was no distinct separate person from himself who was called the Father."

This was apparently a Book-of-Mormon-influenced idea which Elder Pratt resolved by demonstrating from other scriptures (mostly biblical), that the Father and Son were two separate personages. As part of his harmonizing technique, Elder Pratt qualified the sense in which Jesus is called the Father in the Book of Mormon. Interestingly, however, he still referred to God the Father as Jehovah in this same presentation.⁴⁴

Apostle George Q. Cannon was one of the first Mormon leaders to assert that Jesus was "the Being who spoke to Moses in the wilderness and declared, 'I am that I am.'"⁴⁵ Eleven years after this 1871 declaration, Apostle Franklin D. Richards also identified Jesus Christ as "the same being who called Abraham from his native country, who led Israel out of the land of Egypt . . . and who made known to them his law amid the thunderings of Sinai."⁴⁶

Furthermore, President John Taylor, who throughout his life consistently referred to the Father as Jehovah, listed Jehovah among several other titles of the Father which might be applied to Jesus, since Jesus was perfectly obedient to and united with the Father.⁴⁷

In August of 1885, Franklin D. Richards made the leap from merely considering Jesus to be Jehovah's representative (and thus worthy of the latter's title) to the position that Jesus' premortal name was Jehovah: "We learn that our Savior was born of a woman, and He was named Jesus the Christ. His name when He was a spiritual being, during the first half of the existence

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of the earth, before He was made flesh and blood, was Jehovah. . . . He was the spirit Being that directed, governed, and gave the law on Mount Sinai, where Moses was permitted to see Him in part."⁴⁸ That this was a new idea is indicated by the fact that just four months prior to this sermon, this same Apostle spoke of Jehovah as the Father.⁴⁹

At these earliest stages of the development of the Jehovah-Christ doctrine, the major consideration seemed to be the identity of the divine being who appeared to Moses and gave him the law for Israel (cf. 3 Ne. 15:5). The Adam-God doctrine, with its concept of a divine being named Jehovah who presided over God the Father (Michael-Adam) in the creation, was not a consideration. This is indicated by the fact that both George Q. Cannon and Franklin D. Richards, major proponents of the Jehovah-Christ idea, also believed that Adam was God the Father.⁵⁰ In June 1889 George Q. Cannon, then a member of the First Presidency, related his beliefs on the Adam-God doctrine as well as the Jehovah-Christ doctrine to his son, Abraham H. Cannon, who wrote in his diary, "He believes that Jesus Christ is Jehovah, and that Adam is His Father and our God. . . . Jesus, in speaking of Himself as the very eternal Father speaks as one of the Godhead, etc."⁵¹

It is unclear whether George Q. Cannon and Franklin D. Richards considered the Jehovah of the temple ceremony to be Christ. They both, however, positively believed that Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, was Christ, which they continued to teach on several occasions.⁵²

The identities and roles of the temple creation gods became the focus of a controversy between Bishop Edward Bunker and his counselor Myron Abbott in Bunkerville, Nevada in 1890. This controversy culminated in 1892 in a Stake High Council meeting attended by Church President Wilford Woodruff and his counselor George Q. Cannon. Bishop Bunker and his father, Edward Bunker, Sr., felt that the "Lecture before the Veil," as it was then presented in the St. George Temple, contained false doctrine. This lecture, dictated by Brigham Young in 1877, clearly implied that Adam was God the Father by explaining that prior to coming to this earth, Adam and Eve had been resurrected and exalted on a former world. In their exalted state they begot the spirits of all mankind. Under the direction of Elohim and Jehovah, gods of the creation council, Adam then created this earth and brought Eve here with him to fall in order to provide their spiritual offspring with physical tabernacles.⁵³ The Bunkers maintained that these ideas contradicted the scriptures and Joseph Smith's teachings. Father Bunker also argued that Jesus Christ was Jehovah, the God of Heaven, who presided over Michael in the creation and in the Garden of Eden. According to this argument, Michael could not possibly be the Father of Christ since he was subject to Jehovah-

Christ whom Bunker apparently also considered to be the Father.⁵⁴

Presidents Woodruff and Cannon defended Brigham Young's Adam-God temple teachings, but did not expound upon them or force them upon the Bunkers. Rather, they instructed them to "let these things alone," and not to "spend time [arguing] over these mysteries." Scriptural contradictions to these ideas were swept aside by President Cannon with the observation that "God had, and would yet reveal many glorious things men could not prove, and search out of the old Bible."⁵⁵

Although as a counselor to President Wilford Woodruff George Q. Cannon often preached that Jesus was Jehovah, President Woodruff was more noncommittal on the subject. As late as 1893, he still referred to Jehovah as the Father.⁵⁶

Latter-day Saints were thus confronted with a confusing array of different authorities on the question of God's identity and roles. Apparently, many of these Church members wrote letters to the First Presidency, asking them for help in sorting out and understanding these matters. President Wilford Woodruff responded to these inquiries over the pulpit at general conference in April 1895 by simply telling Church members not to worry. Interestingly, he too remained noncommittal, neither condemning the Adam-God doctrine, nor endorsing the Jehovah-Christ doctrine:

Before I sit down I want to say a word to the Elders of Israel on another subject. . . . Cease troubling yourselves about who God is; who Adam is, who Christ is, who Jehovah is. For heaven's sake, let these things alone. Why trouble yourselves about these things? . . . God is God. Christ is Christ. The Holy Ghost is the Holy Ghost. That should be enough for you and me to know. I say this because we are troubled every little while with inquiries from Elders anxious to know who God is, who Christ is, and who Adam is. I say to the Elders of Israel, stop this. . . . We have had letter after letter from Elders abroad wanting to know concerning these things. Adam is the first man. He was placed in the Garden of Eden, and is our great progenitor. God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are the same yesterday, today, and forever, that should be sufficient for us to know.⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, President Woodruff's advice did not end the controversy. In 1896, Edward Stevenson, one of the Seven Presidents of Seventy, had "a deep talk" with President Lorenzo Snow about the Adam-God doctrine. Afterwards, Stevenson wrote in his diary concerning the temple creation gods: "Certainly Heloheim and Jehovah stands before Adam, or else I am very much mistaken. Then 1st Heloheim, 2nd Jehovah, 3d Michael-Adam, 4th Jesus Christ, Our Elder Brother, in the other World from whence our spirits come. . . . Then Who is Jehovah? The only begoton [*sic*] Son of Heloheim on Jehovah's world."⁵⁸

This reference clearly distinguishes between

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the Jehovah who presided over Michael at the creation and Jesus. Unfortunately this distinction was not clearly made by General Authorities who were publicly promoting the idea that Jesus was the Jehovah-god of the Old Testament. Naturally, Church members continued to be confused.

With the passing of the Mormon practice of plural marriage around the turn of the century, anti-Mormon critics began to attack other doctrinal issues, notably the Adam-God doctrine.⁵⁹ Church leaders responded mainly by claiming that Brigham Young's published statements on the subject had either been misinterpreted, or were wrongly transcribed.⁶⁰ President Joseph F. Smith, who as an Apostle had earlier endorsed the doctrine, permitted Charles Penrose, his counselor in the First Presidency, to pursue this line of defense.⁶¹

While General Authorities had previously asserted that the Adam-God doctrine need not be justified scripturally, the First Presidency now moved to abate public criticism and internal controversy by citing the scriptures as the final, official word on this matter. For example, in 1912, they stated, "Dogmatic assertions do not take the place of revelation," and that "Prest. Brigham Young . . . only expressed his own views and that they were not corroborated [sic] by the word of the Lord in the Standard Works of the Church. . . . Now all doctrine if it can't be established by these standards is not to be taught or promulgated [sic] by members."⁶²

At the same time, the *Improvement Era* carried a First Presidency message cautioning Church members not to speculate on "the career of Adam before he came to the earth." This was followed by an editorial responding to members who apparently considered Christ and Adam to be the same god: "From these statements, and from many others that might be quoted, it is clear that Adam and Christ are two persons—not the same person. It is erroneous doctrine to consider them one and the same person, for Jesus is the Christ, a member of the Trinity, the Godhead, and to whom Adam, the father of the human family upon this earth is amenable."⁶³ Many statements similar to this followed in Church publications.⁶⁴

A major advancement in the identification of Jehovah as Jesus took place in September of 1915, when James E. Talmage's book, *Jesus the Christ*, was published under the direction and commission of the First Presidency. In his book, Elder Talmage asserted that:

Jesus Christ was and is God the Creator, the God who revealed Himself to Adam, Enoch, and all the antediluvial patriarchs and prophets down to Noah; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the God of Israel as a united people, and the God of Ephraim and Judah after the disruption of the Hebrew nation; the God who made Himself known to the prophets from Moses to Malachi; the God of the Old Testament record; and the God of the Nephites. We

affirm that Jesus Christ was and is Jehovah, the Eternal One.

He also explained that "Elohim, as understood and used in the restored Church of Jesus Christ, is the name-title of God the Eternal Father, whose firstborn Son in the spirit is Jehovah—the Only Begotten in the flesh, Jesus Christ." A subtle rejection of Brigham Young's Adam-God doctrine seems to be present in Talmage's assertion that Adam was one of the prophets to whom the Father had revealed himself to attest "the Godship of the Christ."⁶⁵

Members of the First Presidency continued to reinforce these ideas in conference talks and Church publications.⁶⁶ In addition to accommodating Book of Mormon theology (which described Jesus as the God of Israel), defining *Jehovah* exclusively to be Jesus, and *Elohim* exclusively to be God the Father permitted Church leaders to argue more effectively that the Adam-God doctrine had never been taught. The thrust of this argument was that since Elohim was the Father, and Jehovah was Jesus, and they both presided over Michael or Adam in the creation, Brigham Young therefore could not possibly have imagined that Adam was God the Father.⁶⁷

This argument was effective, but it obviously would not suffice for Church members who had heard Brigham Young publicly preach the Adam-God doctrine, had read his sermons on the subject, or had witnessed the temple lecture he authored. As a result, many Church members continued to write to the First Presidency, apparently protesting their efforts via Charles Penrose and James E. Talmage to redefine and overturn the theological views of previous Mormon leaders. Charles Penrose referred to this resistance in the April 1916 general conference:

The Church of Christ . . . should be perfectly united, especially in doctrine and principle, yet like it was in the early Christian church there are sometimes divisions among us in regard to many important things. . . . The reason I know about this is because I frequently personally receive letters from good friends in different parts of the Church, asking questions, and declaring that there is a division of opinion among our brethren in regard to them. And the First Presidency frequently receive communications from the brethren asking for a decision on certain points that are really not worth discussing. . . . There still remains, I can tell by the letters I have alluded to, an idea among some of the people that Adam was and is the Almighty and Eternal God.

He also noted that some Church members still believed that Jesus and Adam were the same God:

Now who is this person, this Jesus Christ? Is He Adam or a son of Adam? Not at all, except in the sense that Jesus of Nazareth was born of Mary . . . who was it that gave the law to Moses? We are told it was Jehovah. Well, was Jesus

The controversy over the identities of the temple creation gods culminated in a meeting with Wilford Woodruff and George Q. Cannon.

Jehovah? Yes, according to the scriptures, both ancient and modern, and that seems to be a stumbling block in the way of a few of our brethren.

Penrose then combined the newly developed theology of Elohim as the Father and Jesus as Jehovah with the temple account of creation in a classic apologetic use of these ideas to refute the Adam-God doctrine:

We are told by revelation that in the creation of the earth there were three individuals personally engaged. This is more particularly for the Temple of God, but sufficient of it has been published over and over again to permit me to refer to it. [The title] Elohim . . . is attached to the individual who is the Father of all, the person whom we look to as the Great Eternal Father. Elohim, Jehovah and Michael were engaged in the construction fo this globe. Jehovah, commanded by Elohim, went down to where there was space, saying to Michael, "Let us go down." . . . You see, do you not, that Michael, became Adam, and that Adam was not the son Jehovah, and he was not Elohim the Father. He occupied his own place and position in the organization of the earth and in the production of mortal beings on the earth. Jesus of Nazareth was the Jehovah who was engaged with the Father in the beginning . . . I want to draw a clear distinction between these individuals that we may stop this discussion that is going on to no purpose.⁶⁸

Many members wrote to the First Presidency, protesting their efforts to overturn the theological views of previous Mormon leaders.

The theological problems concerning the Book of Mormon's identification of Jesus as the Father, the identity of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and the roles and identities of the temple creation gods as connected with the Adam-God doctrine were all finally "resolved" in a carefully worked out statement written by James E. Talmage. This statement was submitted to the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve for their approval on 29 June 1916. It was corrected and then issued the following day as "A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve" on "The Father and the Son."⁶⁹ This exposition minimized the sense in which Jesus is called the Father in the Book of Mormon through harmonizing techniques. These same techniques were used to support the position that Jesus Christ was Jehovah, the God of Israel, and that Elohim was his father. Little biblical support for these ideas could be given, as the exposition was mainly dealing with problems inherent in the early LDS scriptures and the theology of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.⁷⁰ Achieving harmony was the chief goal of the 1916 doctrinal exposition. It therefore contains no historical, critical analysis and understanding of the problems it addresses. Its definitions of *Elohim* and *Jehovah* still remain the official position of Mormonism.

Today, Mormons who are aware of the various teachings of LDS scriptures and prophets are faced with a number of doctrinal possibilities. They can choose to accept the Book of Mormon theology, which varies from biblical theology, as well as from Joseph Smith's later plurality-of-gods theology. Adding to this con-

fusion is Brigham Young's Adam-God theology with its various divine gods using the names *Elohim* and *Jehovah* interchangeably. Finally, they are left to resolve the teachings of current General Authorities who identify Jesus as Jehovah with former-day General Authorities who spoke of Jehovah as the Father. While most are blithely unaware of the diversity that abounds in the history of Mormon doctrine, many Latter-day Saints since 1916 have, despite the risk of heresy, continued to believe privately or promote publicly many of the alternative Godhead theologies from Mormonism's past.⁷¹

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NOTES

1. See, for example, Bruce R. McConkie, "Christ and the Creation," *Ensign* 12 (June 1982): 11; *Old Testament Part Two: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Supplement* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), pp. 102-5; *Old Testament: Genesis-2 Samuel* [Religion 301 student manual] (Salt Lake City: LDS Church Educational System, 1980), pp. 45-48. See also the entry "god" in the Bible Dictionary in the LDS edition of the King James Bible.

2. See Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *SUNSTONE* 5 (July-August 1980): 24-33, especially n. 23; Van Hale, "The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 215-16 and "Trinitarianism and the Earliest Mormon Concept of God," essay presented at Mormon History Association annual meeting, Omaha, Nebraska, May 1983; Marvin Hill, "The First Vision Controversy: A Critique and Reconciliation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Summer 1982): 31-46; Mark Thomas, "Scholarship and the Future of the Book of Mormon," *SUNSTONE* 5 (May-June 1980): 25, 26, 28 n. 5.

3. Alexander, "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," p. 24.

4. See, for example, 1 Ne. 10:18-19; 2 Ne. 9:20; Alma 18:18, 28; 22:9-11; 26:35; Morm. 9:9, 17, 19; Moro. 7:22; 8:18; D&C 20:17, 28; 38:1-3; 76:1-4, 70; Moses 1:3, 6.

5. 2 Ne. 31:21; Mosiah 15:4; Alma 11:44; 3 Ne. 11:27, 36; 28:10-11; Morm. 7:7; D&C 20:27-28. The only passage in the Bible containing the formula, "The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one," is 1 John 5:7, which is not found in any of the best and most ancient manuscripts or in the early church fathers. It was added to the text during the trinitarian controversies of the fourth century, and was carried in a few late Greek manuscripts upon which the KJV was based. All modern critical translations of the New Testament omit the passage (*Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1982], p. 939). Thus its appearance in the Book of Mormon, recounting events in the pre-Christian era, presents an interesting dilemma.

6. Book of Mormon, 1st ed., 1 Ne. 11:21, 28; in current editions, See Mosiah 3:5-8; 7:27; 15:1-5; Alma 11:28, 29, 38, 39, 44; 3 Ne. 1:14; Morm. 5:17; 9:9-12; Ether 3:14f; 4:12.

7. Some scriptural passages given through Joseph Smith imply that the Father and the Son, although one god, coexist eternally and are numerically distinct (3 Ne. 11-28; Ether 3:14-19; Moses 1:6; 2:26; 4:1-3; D&C 19:24; 20:24; 45:3-4; 76:13-14, 22-25, 39; 93:7-11, for example). This is confusing in light of the passages cited above in note 6. However, trinitarian theology permits such a paradox as having the Son on earth while the Father is in heaven as is depicted in

the New Testament and in 3 Nephi, while at the same time proclaiming there is only one God. I believe the more specific Book of Mormon statements on the relationship between the Father and the Son should serve as the framework for understanding the theology of 3 Nephi rather than vice-versa. (See Van Hale, "Earliest Mormon Concept of God," pp. 5, 7-8, 12-13.)

8. Ether 4:12; 2 Ne. 11:7; 3 Ne. 1:14; Moses 7:50f; JST, Luke 10:22.

9. Compare, for example, the JST revisions of the following KJV passages: Gen. 11:7; Ex. 7:1; 22:28; 1 Sam. 28:13; Matt. 9:15-16; 11:27; Mark 2:28; Luke 10:22; 1 Tim. 2:4; Rev. 1:6.

10. D&C 1:20; 6:2, 21; 11:2, 10, 28; 14:2, 9; 17:9; 18:33, 47; 19:1, 4, 10, 16, 18; 27:1; 29:1, 42, 46; 34:1-4; 38:1-4; 49:5, 28; etc. Book of Mormon, 1st ed., 1 Ne. 11:18, 21, 32; 13:40; in later editions also see 1 Ne. 19:10, 13; 2 Ne. 10:3-4; 11:7; 25:12; 26:12; 30:2; Mosiah 3:5, 8; 5:15; 7:27; 13:28, 33, 34; 15:1-5; 16:15; Alma 11:28-32, 35, 38, 39, 44; 42:15; Hel. 9:22-23; 14:12; 3 Ne. 1:14; 5:20; 11:14; 15:5; 19:18; Morm. 3:21; 9:11-12; Ether 3:14; 4:7, 12; Moses 1:16-17; D&C 84:19-25.

11. Because these teachings on the Godhead contradicted Mormon Godhead theology developed later, the Lectures on Faith were removed from the Doctrine and Covenants in 1921. See Leland H. Gentry, "What of the Lectures on Faith?" *BYU Studies* 19 (Fall 1978): 11-12; Alexander, "Reconstruction," pp. 26, 29-30.

12. Alexander, "Reconstruction," p. 25. See also Hill, "First Vision Controversy," pp. 33, 35, 40, 42; Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), pp. 157, 159, 163,

13. Gen. 22:14; Ex. 6:3; 17:16; Judges 6:24; Psalms 83:18; Isa. 12:2.

14. 2 Ne. 22:2; Moro. 10:34.

15. D&C 109:34, 42, 56, 68; 110:3; 128:9; Abr. 1:16; 2:8.

16. D&C 109:4, 10, 14, 22, 24, 29, 34, 42, 47, 56, 68; Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932-51), 5:94, 127; hereafter cited as *History of the Church*.

17. Many Latter-day Saints would point to D&C 110:3 as evidence that Joseph Smith identified Jesus as Jehovah. But the fact that Joseph called the Father Jehovah several times in his dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland temple just seven days earlier than this revelation (see note 16 above) suggests that other possible interpretations of this verse are more likely. Perhaps Joseph had not yet made a clear separation of the Father and the Son in his theology. Or, this verse in the Doctrine and Covenants might be describing the sound of Christ's voice as being like that of Jehovah's voice (rather than actually being Jehovah's voice). This interpretation is suggested by the previous parallel phrase which states "his voice as the sound of the rushing of great waters," not literally understood to be the sound of rushing waters.

18. *History of the Church*, 5:127.

19. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps., and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), pp. 198, 221, 229, and 356.

20. Parley P. Pratt, *A Short Account of a Shameful Outrage, Committed by a Part of the Inhabitants of the Town of Mentor, upon the Person of Elder Parley P. Pratt, While Delivering a Public Discourse upon the Subject of the Gospel, 7 April 1835* ([Kirtland? 1835]), p. 8; idem, *Mormonism Unveiled: Zion's Watchman Unmasked; and its Editor, Mr. L. R. Sunderland, Exposed: Truth Vindicated: The Devil Mad & Priestcraft in Danger* (New York: Published by author, 1838), p. 43. See also the *Millennial Star* 1 (January 1841): 217; 2 (April 1842): 184, 187; *Times and Seasons* 2 (1 September 1841): 524; *History of the Church*, 4:256. In the *History of the Church*, the name *Jehovah* is used ninety-nine times to mean simply God, fourteen times to mean the Father, and three times to mean Jesus. The name *Elohim* is used nine times to

mean the Father and three times to mean "head god" or "council of gods."

21. *Times and Seasons* 3 (15 November 1841): 578.

22. Hale, "Doctrinal Impact," pp. 212-13.

23. Stan Larsen, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 198-208.

24. Larsen, "Newly Amalgamated Text," pp. 202-3. Strictly speaking, Joseph translated the phrase *ROSH-ITH BARA ELOHIM* as "The Head Father of the Gods." With regard to the word *Elohim* in Genesis, Joseph said, "The word *Elohim* ought to be plural all the way through—Gods." (See Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, pp. 343, 358-59, 379.)

25. In his sermons discussing the head god, Joseph's major theses are to explain "how God came to be God" (Larsen, "Newly Amalgamated Text," p. 201), and to teach the existence of "a God above the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, pp. 378, 380). Our Father in Heaven was distinguished by Joseph as having been "appointed for us" by "the head of the Gods" (Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, p. 379). Some Mormon expositors have misconstrued Joseph's teachings about this head god to claim that he was speaking only of our Father in Heaven, and that the "council of Gods [who] came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it" were the premortal spirits destined to come to this earth (e.g., Hyrum L. Andrus, *God, Man, and the Universe*, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], pp. 270-73). As indicated, however, a careful examination of Joseph's sermons on this topic does not substantiate this interpretation.

26. I am assuming here, in the absence of direct documentation, that the Nauvoo temple gods mentioned in Heber C. Kimball's journal in an entry dated 13 December 1845 (the year following Joseph Smith's death), were the same as had been given by Joseph himself. On the accuracy of Brigham Young's transmitting the endowment to the Church as it had been given privately by Joseph Smith, see Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), p. 255 n. 72.

27. For example, see 2 Ne. 9:5; Mosiah 3:8; 4:2; 7:27; 26:23; Alma 5:15; Hel. 14:12; 3 Ne. 9:15; Ether 3:15-16; 4:7; D&C 14:9; 38:1-3; 45:1; 76:23-24; 88:7-10; 93:8-10; Moses 1:32-33; 2:1.

28. Brigham Young enjoyed referring to himself as "an apostle of Joseph Smith" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saint's Book Depot, 1854-56; reprint ed., 1967], 5:296, 332; 9:364).

29. G. Homer Durham, ed., "Discourse by President Brigham Young Delivered in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, August 4, 1867," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 29 (1961): 68-69; *Journal of Discourses* 1:238; 2:30; 8:228; 9:240, 286; 11:327; 12:99; 13:236; 14:41.

30. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:286.

31. *Ibid.*, 12:99; see also James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75), 1:253.

32. The most unbiased and scholarly examinations of the evidence for Brigham Young's so-called Adam-God doctrine are Rodney Turner, "The Position of Adam in Latter-day Saint Scripture and Theology" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1953) and David John Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *Dialogue* 15 (Spring 1982): 14-58. See also Gary James Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies," *Dialogue* 13 (Summer 1980): 13, 14, 26-27, 30-33, 41.

33. Discourse by Brigham Young, 19 February 1854, Brigham Young Collection, Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

34. *Journal of Discourses*, 1:51; Diary of L. John Nuttall, 7 February 1877, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

35. *Journal of Discourses*, 4:215-19; 9:148; 13:311; Discourse by

The First Presidency moved to abate public criticism and internal controversy by citing the scriptures as the final, official word on this matter.

The theological problems were all finally “resolved” in a carefully worked out statement written by James E. Talmage.

- Brigham Young, 5 February 1852, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives. See also Heber C. Kimball's comments in the *Journal of Discourses*, 1:356; 4:1.
36. Discourse by Brigham Young, 25 April 1855, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives; *Journal of Discourses*, 9:286; 327.
37. As cited in Culley K. Christensen, *The Adam-God Maze* (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Independent Publishers, 1981), pp. 274-75.
38. Diary of L. John Nuttal, 7 February 1877.
39. Turner, "The Position of Adam," pp. 54-58; Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," pp. 43, 57 n. 109. Buerger himself seems to be confused on this point, maintaining that "Mormons had always distinguished 'Elohim'" from Adam (i.e., Michael) (p. 42), and that Brigham Young "could not have equated Adam with Elohim, for the President clearly saw them as two separate personages" (p. 47 n. 18). But as indicated here, Brigham sometimes did apply the term *Elohim* to God the Father (i.e., Adam).
40. *Journal of Discourses*, 2:6; Christensen, *The Adam-God Maze*, pp. 275-76.
41. Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book, 9 June 1873, Church Archives.
42. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), pp. 150-51. Also see pp. 94, 123, 127, 138, 166, 192, and *Journal of Discourses*, 1:153-54, 223, 369-70; 10:50, 55; 11:22; 14:247-48; 15:217; 24:34, 125, 227; 25:305.
43. *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1891), p. 295, no. 262.
44. *Millennial Star* 11 (15 September 1849): 281-84; 11 (15 October 1849): 309-12.
45. *Juvenile Instructor*, 6 (30 September 1871): 155; see also Orson Pratt's comments reported in the *Deseret News Weekly* 25 (20 September 1876): 530.
46. Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little, *A Compendium of the Faith and Doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), pp. 78-79. Compare this with Richard's first edition of this book, where in a list of some forty-five "Names, Titles, and Characters Given to Jesus" in the scriptures, he does not even mention *Jehovah* (Liverpool: Orson Pratt, 1857), p. 150.
47. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement*, p. 138.
48. *Journal of Discourses*, 26:300.
49. *Journal of Discourses*, 26:172.
50. Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," pp. 20, 31, 33-34, 37-38, 52 n. 74.
51. Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 23 June 1889, Church Archives.
52. *Deseret News Weekly*, 47 (7 October 1893): 506; *Millennial Star* 57 (24 January 1895): 52, 65; *Juvenile Instructor* 35 (1 February 1900): 90-91.
53. Christensen, *The Adam-God Maze*, pp. 206-37; Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," pp. 32-34, 53 n. 76; St. George Stake High Council Minutes, 13 December 1890, Church Archives.
54. St. George Stake High Council Minutes, 13 December 1890; see also the letter of Edward Bunker, Sr., recorded in these minutes, 15 May 1891, and also in the Edward Bunker Autobiography, pp. 32-49, Church Archives; and Joseph F. Smith to Bishop Bunker, 27 February 1902, Joseph F. Smith Letterbooks, Church Archives.
55. St. George High Council Minutes, 11 June 1892; see also the Charles Walker Journal, 11 June 1892, Church Archives.
56. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 3:243.
57. *Millennial Star* 57 (6 June 1895): 355-56.
58. Edward Stevenson Diary, 3 March and 28 February 1896, Church Archives.
59. Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," pp. 36-42.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-43.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 47 n. 19; 52 nn. 61, 63, 65, 68.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
63. *Improvement Era* 15 (April 1912): 483-85; *Juvenile Instructor* 50 (October 1915): 649; Clark *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:267.
64. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), pp. 32-41.
65. *Juvenile Instructor* 50 (October 1915): 649; *Improvement Era* 18 (September 1915): 1011.
66. This argument has provided the main defense for Church apologists down to the present day against the proposition that Brigham Young taught the Adam-God doctrine (see Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," pp. 43-44); see also Mark E. Petersen, *Adam: Who Is He?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), pp. 13-16; Bruce R. McConkie, "The Seven Deadly Heresies," in *1980 Devotional Speeches of the Year: BYU Devotional and Fireside Addresses* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), p. 78. In a letter to me, Elder McConkie explained, "If you have been to the temple, you know perfectly well who Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael are" (B. D. Kirkland to Bruce R. McConkie, 25 March 1982 and Bruce R. McConkie to B. D. Kirkland, 9 April 1982, correspondence in private possession).
67. *Conference Report*, 6 April 1916, pp. 15-19.
68. Anthon H. Lund Diary, 29 June 1916, Church Archives; George F. Richards Diary, 29 June 1916, Church Archives; I am indebted to Thomas G. Alexander for pointing out this information. The doctrinal exposition was originally released in pamphlet form, and was later reprinted in the *Improvement Era* (19 [August 1916]: 934-42). Elder Talmage also reproduced it in his book, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1901), pp. 465-73.
69. Although the explanations of the 1916 statement concerning the application of the title *Father* to Jesus in Mormon scriptures are well thought out and presented, they probably do not reflect Joseph Smith's understanding of the title when he translated the scriptures in question. As Van Hale noted concerning the argument that the Book of Mormon only considered Jesus to be the Father in some limited sense, "thus allowing that He has a Father, and thus [allowing] the existence of two Fathers": "Although appealing, and supported by the First Presidency's 'Doctrinal Exposition' of 1916, I feel it must be rejected. The early scriptures nowhere present such an explanation, and the verses which call Jesus Eternal God, Eternal Father, Everlasting God, and Lord God Omnipotent seem to be speaking of him as the one and only Supreme Being." (Hale, "Earliest Mormon Concept of God," p. 12.) On the LDS misunderstanding of the Old Testament due to Book-of-Mormon-based theology and the 1916 definitions of Elohim and Jehovah, see Melodie Moench, "The Christianizing of the Old Testament," and Lowell Bennion's "Response," *SUNSTONE* 5 (November-December 1980): 35-40.
70. Heber Bennion, an LDS bishop and a brother-in-law to Heber J. Grant, had an open lively disagreement with Church leaders and specifically with James E. Talmage over their handling of the Adam-God issue: Heber Bennion, *Gospel Problems* ([1920]; reprint, Dugway, Utah: Pioneer Press, n.d.), and *Supplement to Gospel Problems* ([Salt Lake City: The Theatre Book Shop, 1922?]). Promoting the idea that Jesus was God the Father is Edward S. Rich, *Jehovah-Christ, Is He Our Elder Brother?* (Salt Lake City, Published by author, n.d.).