

It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God. ~ Joseph Smith, Jr., 11 weeks before his death (History of the Church, Vol. 6, p. 305)

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ~ Jesus Christ (Praying in John 17:3)

## How Many Gods Exist?

Mormonism and biblical Christianity are at their core theistic systems. In this we agree that atheism is not true. Beyond this we depart down two dramatically different paths, never again to unite.

*Since we agree on the basic tenant of theism, one might ask a Mormon and a Christian the simple question: **How many gods exist?***

Before answering this question I want to make an observation which will help avoid some common objections. Whereas atheism is the denial of the existence of God, monotheism is the belief in the existence of one God only, and polytheism is the belief in the existence of many gods. All humans worship something or someone, whether it is themselves, an activity, a spouse, their children, a god (whether real or perceived), or many gods, etc.

An atheist is not called an atheist because they don't worship anything or anyone. They are called an atheist because they deny the existence of any and all gods (whether real or perceived). A monotheist is called a monotheist, not because they only worship one God (for at times, devout monotheists will place people or things higher than God), but because they consciously grant the existence of one true deity to the exclusion of all other (so-called) deities.

A polytheist, is not a polytheist because they worship every god or goddess which they assert truly exists. They are called polytheists because of the fact that they believe in the existence of many real deities. In the same way that a devout Hindu might believe in the existence of over 3 million gods without knowing each of their names, powers, characteristics and so on, a devout Mormon grants the existence of millions of deities. *Polytheism does not require that you worship every god or goddess that exists, only that you believe in their existence as true, actual deities.*

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Assuming here (and throughout the rest of this presentation) that both the Christian and the Latter-day Saint (Mormon for short) are well read and able to accurately represent their religious leaders' teachings, you would receive a reply:

In Mormonism, there exists a plurality of Gods. Joseph Smith preached the following words in a sermon 11 days before his death:

### Plurality of Gods

I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have selected this text for that express purpose. I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preach on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years.

I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! we have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural; and who can contradict it? (History of the Church, Vol. 6, p. 474; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 370)

Joseph Smith's importance in LDS theology can not be overemphasized. If he was not a prophet of God who taught the truth then one could rightly call into question the legitimacy of the Book of Mormon, the majority of the Doctrine & Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

Smith goes on in his sermon to assert that the doctrine of polytheism which he was preaching was taught by Paul.

In the Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith allegedly translated a version of the creation account in the Book of Abraham, Chapter 4. A cursory reading of this chapter reveals many similarities to the story of creation in Genesis 1, but the glaring difference is that every time God is referred to it is in the plural:

And they went down at the beginning, **and they, that is the Gods**, organized and formed the heavens and the earth. (Book of Abraham, 4:1, emphasis mine)

**And they (the Gods)** said: Let there be light; and there was light.

(Book of Abraham, 4:3 emphasis mine)

**And the Gods took counsel among themselves** and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness; (Book of Abraham, 4:26, emphasis mine)

This chapter alone contains the word “Gods” no less than 32 times. Every use of the term is a direct affirmation of the existence of multiple, true, deities.

## **Eternal Progression, the blurring of theology and soteriology**

When discussing the person of God in Mormonism it can be difficult for Christians who understand a fundamental truth, that God and man are two entirely separate species. In Mormonism, Joseph Smith taught that the best case scenario for man is to become a god himself.

I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth, for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and to tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race, and why He interferes with the affairs of man.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible, -- I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form -- like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.

In order to understand the subject of the dead, for consolation of those who mourn for the loss of their friends, 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.

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible. (History of the Church, Vol. 6, p. 305; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345-346)

Whereas in biblical theology it is clear that god is not a man, exalted or otherwise, in Mormon theology this distinction is denied. God declares in Hosea 11:9

...I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst...

Again in Numbers 23:19, Balaam rightly says of Israel's God,

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.

There are other statements in Scripture which become difficult to interpret when the God/man distinction is abandoned. Look at the following examples (emphasis mine for each):

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup> a minister in the holy places, in **the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.** (Hebrews 8:1-2)

Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards **not man but God**, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:8)

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> **What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.**" (Mark 10:7-9)

In Christian (biblical) theology, soteriology is the study of salvation. It examines the question of how men and women are saved. Theology (in its proper sense) is the study of the person of God. It aims to answer questions like, Who is God? What is God like? What is the nature of

God? These tried and true terms are the outgrowth of a biblical view of man and God.

## **Polytheism: The consistent position of the Mormon Church**

Mormonism has held from the beginning that a countless myriad of gods and goddesses exist. Joseph Smith made that clear in the quotations above. If anyone would think to label such statements as reflecting his personal opinion and not the core of LDS theology I offer the following as evidence that Joseph's polytheism is alive and well in the LDS Church.

Lorenzo Snow, the 5<sup>th</sup> Prophet and President of the LDS Church coined the popular phrase:

As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.

Ronald Huggins, associate professor of historical and theological studies at Salt Lake Theological Seminary tells the story behind the couplet:

In May 1836 Lorenzo Snow visited Kirtland, Ohio, where his sister Eliza R. Snow had moved the previous year after converting to Mormonism. At a blessing meeting in the Kirtland Temple, Snow met Joseph Smith Sr. (the father of the Mormon prophet) who predicted that he would soon be converted to the LDS faith. Smith Sr. went on to make the astonishing prediction that afterward Snow would “become as great as you can possibly wish – EVEN AS GREAT AS GOD.”

Snow was unable to make anything of this remarkable prediction until shortly before embarking on a mission to England in the spring of 1840. He reports that one day as he sat listening to Elder H.G. Sherwood's explanation of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16),

the Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon me – the eyes of my understanding were opened, and I saw as clear as the sun at noonday, with wonder and astonishment, the pathway of God and man. I formed the following couplet which expresses the revelation, as it was shown to me, and explains Father Smith's dark saying to me at a blessing meeting in the Kirtland Temple, prior to my baptism, as previously mentioned in my first interview with the Patriarch.

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As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be.

At first Snow did not share his couplet with anyone besides his sister Eliza, and Brigham Young, with whom he served in England. But in January of 1843, after returning from his mission, Snow mentioned it to the Prophet Joseph Smith, who said to him: "Brother Snow, that is true gospel doctrine, and it is a revelation from God to you." (JETS, Vol. 49, No. 3, p 550)

Joseph Fielding Smith, the 10<sup>th</sup> Prophet and President of the LDS Church wrote:

Joseph Smith taught a plurality of gods, and that man by obeying the commandments of God and keeping the whole law will eventually reach the power and exaltation by which he also will become a god. (Doctrines of Salvation, Vol 1, p. 98.)

He cites D&C 132:17, 19-25, 29-32, 49 in the footnote for this statement.

Spencer W. Kimball, the 12<sup>th</sup> President of the LDS Church said the following in a public address (recorded in the Ensign, Nov. 1975):

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. (available at <http://lds.org/ensign/1975/11/the-privilege-of-holding-the-priesthood?lang=eng>)

Gordon B. Hinkley, the 15<sup>th</sup> Prophet and President of the LDS Church, spoke the following words 4 months before his promotion from 1<sup>st</sup> counselor to Church President:

There is a better way, my brethren. Do you want to drop the ball in your lives? Do you wish to help Satan score? There is no surer way than to become engulfed in the tide of pornography that is sweeping over us. If we succumb to it, it destroys us, body and mind and soul.

On the other hand, the whole design of the gospel is to lead us onward and upward to greater achievement, even, eventually, to

godhood. This great possibility was enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the King Follet sermon (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 342–62; and emphasized by President Lorenzo Snow. It is this grand and incomparable concept: As God now is, man may become! (See *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, comp. Clyde J. Williams, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984, p. 1.)

Our enemies have criticized us for believing in this. Our reply is that this lofty concept in no way diminishes God the Eternal Father. (Available at <http://lds.org/ensign/1994/11/dont-drop-the-ball?lang=eng>)

More quotations could be adduced but the point is clear. The doctrine of polytheism is alive and well in the Mormon Church. It has been held and taught by not only lay persons, but from the highest position in the hierarchy of the LDS Church.

## Adam-God Doctrine

Brigham Young taught that Adam was God. He preaches the following on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1852:

**"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 helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, 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. They came here, organized the raw material, and arranged in their order the herbs of the field, the trees, the apple, the peach, the plum, the pear, and every other fruit that is desirable and good for man; the seed was brought from another sphere, and planted in this earth. The thistle, the thorn, the brier, and the obnoxious weed did not appear until after the earth was cursed. When Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, their bodies became mortal from its effects, and therefore their offspring were mortal." (Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, volume 1, p. 50, bold print mine, all caps is from the source)

Again, on August 28<sup>th</sup> of the same year:

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"After men have got their exaltations and their crowns -- have become Gods, even the son of God --are made Kings of kings and Lords of lords, they have the power then of propagating their species in spirit; and that is the first of their operations with regard to organizing a world. Power is then given to them to organize the elements, and then commence the organization of tabernacles. How can they do it? Have they to go to that earth? Yes, **an Adam will have to go there, and he cannot do without Eve**; he must have Eve to commence the work of generation, and they will go into the garden, and continue to eat and drink of the fruits of the corporeal world, until this grosser matter is diffused sufficiently through their celestial bodies to enable them, according to the established laws, to produce mortal tabernacles for their spiritual children. **This is a key for you. The faithful will become Gods, even the sons of God; but this does not overthrow the idea that we have a father. Adam is my father; (this I will explain to you at some future time;) but it does not prove that he is not my father, if I become a God: it does not prove that I have not a father.**" (Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, volume 6, p. 275, bold print mine)

This will be addressed later, as it is worthy of a video of its own.

## Mother Goddess

The Mormon Church teaches the existence of a mother goddess who is married to God the Father:

"By definition, exaltation includes the ability to procreate the family unit throughout eternity. This our Father in heaven has the power to do. His marriage partner is our mother in heaven. We are their spirit children, born to them in the bonds of celestial marriage."  
(Achieving a Celestial Marriage Manual, p. 129)

## Problem with Mormon Polytheism in Book of Mormon: Zeezrom's question

In the Book of Mormon there is the story of an interrogation which directly addresses our

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initial question. Alma records the story of Amulek answering Zeezrom's questions (Amulek being the missionary companion of Alma, i.e. the "good guy"). Alma 11 provides the following in verses 26 through 31:

26 And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God?

27 And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God.

28 Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God?

29 And he answered, No.

30 Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things?

31 And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me.

Zeezrom asks point blank if there is more than one God. Not if Alma or Amulek worshiped more than one god, but whether or not more than one God exists. In the Book of Mormon Student Manual (copyright 1996) the LDS Church puts the following question to their college students:

Suppose you were answering Zeezrom's questions. Without looking at Amulek's response, how would you have answered the question in Alma 11:28? Many Church members would have said yes. Why did Amulek say no? In 3 Nephi 19:23 Christ spoke of the oneness of the Godhead. How does this help explain Amulek's answer? (Book of Mormon Student Manual Religion 121 and 122, 1996 ed., p. 76)

It is interesting to note that the 184 page manual cited above has since expanded into a 433 page long manual for LDS Students. In it's current (2009) edition, this paragraph is omitted. The earlier discussion of Nephite coinage is retained and revised, but the question relating to the number of gods that exist was removed (It would have been on p. 186 or 187 in the 2009 edition).

## Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Separate Gods

Gordon B. Hinckley commented in 2006

I am aware that Jesus said they who had seen Him had seen the Father. Could not the same be said by many a son who resembles

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his parent?

When Jesus prayed to the Father, certainly He was not praying to Himself!

**They are distinct beings**, but They are one in purpose and effort. They are united as one in bringing to pass the grand, divine plan for the salvation and exaltation of the children of God. (Ensign, July 2006, in "In These Three I Believe," emphasis mine)

next week's Topic: The Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

## The Bible's Answer to Zeezrom's Question

The Bible makes it absolutely clear that only one true God exists.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.  
(Deuteronomy 6:4)

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. (Isaiah 43:10)

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; **besides me there is no god.** <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. <sup>8</sup> Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! **Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.**" (Isaiah 44:6-8, emphasis mine)

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, (Isaiah 44:24)

**I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no**

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**God**; I equip you, though you do not know me, <sup>6</sup> that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that **there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.** (Isaiah 45:5-6, emphasis mine)

For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:18)

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And **there is no other god besides me**, a righteous God and a Savior; **there is none besides me.** <sup>22</sup> "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For **I am God, and there is no other.** (Isaiah 45:21-22, emphasis mine)

[R]emember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, (Isaiah 46:9)

There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty. <sup>27</sup> The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. And he thrust out the enemy before you and said, Destroy. (Deuteronomy 33:26-27)

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since **God is one.** He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (Romans 3:29-30, emphasis mine)

Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one (Galatians 3:20)

For **there is one God**, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Timothy 2:5, emphasis mine)

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Mark 12:29)

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And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and  
Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

(This document was made for Episode 3 of Mormonism Monday! Which was recorded on  
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