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Am I a God in Embryo?

by

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AM I A GOD IN EMBRYO?

Introduction

"James, do you believe you can become a God?" the *Anti-Mormon* man asked. "No, that is ridiculous! The LDS Church does not teach that!" I answered. Among the thousands of books in his study, Marshall (the Anti-Mormon) reached up, and smoothly pulled down one very important LDS book. I was bewildered, wondering what Marshall was going to show me. I knew I did not know much about the Mormon Church I was about to join, but I was certain it did not teach that men could become gods. I was wrong.

I was a normal teenager growing up in the 80s. I was also an atheist who was somewhat open to the idea of God. At the time, I had a Mormon girlfriend; she joyfully introduced me to the missionaries for her church. I agreed to go through their lessons with mixed motives. For the most part, I just wanted to earn brownie points with my girlfriend and her parents, but, I must admit, I was intrigued by this religion thing. The missionaries were nice, and, in a way, I looked up to them, as they were a few years older than I. At the time (the late 80s), the missionaries had six discussions they would take *investigators* through. If you don't know what an *investigator* is in LDS culture, it is simply someone who is looking into the possibility of joining the church. At the time, my investigation really only consisted of listening to the missionaries and following their instructions. Nevertheless, after a few discussions I was ready to join, but my parents had another idea; they wanted me to talk to Marshall, the Anti-Mormon.

The book I mentioned that Marshall smoothly pulled down from his shelf, from among thousands of LDS books, was *History of the Church, Volume Six*. He had asked me a question that would change my course dramatically, "James do you believe you can become a god?" After I quickly answered in the negative, he opened the book to page 306 and read the words of Joseph Smith, the man I was beginning to believe was a true prophet. Joseph said in this recorded sermon:

Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves... the same as all gods have done before...¹

On the outside, my demeanor was that of an iron fortress. I had a testimony that the church was true, and Marshall thought I was not fazed by the quote that "you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves." Inside I was shaken, and thought to myself, "The missionaries did not tell me about this."

¹ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, ed. B.H. Roberts, vol. 6, *Period 1 History of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 306.

For me, this was the question that caused me to dig deeper, much deeper. When I asked the missionaries about this doctrine, they did admit they believed it, and showed me a handful of Bible verses they believed supported it. We will examine those verses later.

After Marshall showed me the initial quote from Joseph Smith saying "you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves...", I began a habit of buying LDS books, old and new. Today (2021) I have three bookshelves full from floor to ceiling of LDS books. This would be normal if I were LDS, but I am not. I'm simply a concerned Christian who wants to know stuff so I can communicate effectively with Latter-day Saints.

Perhaps you, the reader, are LDS and have never heard the teaching that men can become gods, or perhaps this is old news. The next section is devoted simply to what LDS leaders have said on the issue.

What LDS leaders have said about men becoming gods.

When Marshall the Anti-Mormon asked me "do you believe you can become a god?" I was stunned. Marshall is not against Mormons at all; he loves them dearly; but, at the time, the missionaries told me he was "Anti", so I rolled with it. Marshall proceeded to reach up and grab *History of the Church Volume Six* from his massive library of LDS books. When I think about it, I can still smell the smell of the basement full of books. Marshall turned to the famous *King Follett Sermon*; a sermon delivered by Joseph Smith in April of 1844 at the funeral service for Elder King Follett. Mr. Follett was crushed in a well by the falling of a tub of rock, not the best way to go. Here are some excerpts from this famous sermon Joseph said was "inspired by the Holy Spirit."

My first object is to find out the character of the only wise and true, God, and what kind of a being He is... I am going to inquire after God; for I want you all to know Him, and be familiar with Him... I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of being God is... **God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man**, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret... 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....** 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.... Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God; **and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves... the same as all gods have done before you...** This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ... **I tell you of these which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet....**²

When Marshall showed me the above quote, I was shocked because the LDS missionaries did not tell me about this doctrine. Now when I talk to recent converts to the LDS church, I ask them if they were told this. Usually they say no and are likewise shocked when I show them. However, most missionaries

² Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, ed. B.H. Roberts, vol. 6, *Period 1 History of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 302-312.

and longtime Latter-day Saints know about it, embrace it, and defend it. Recently I spoke with a nice lady outside the St. George Temple; she had an Evangelical Christian background but had just joined the LDS church. I asked her, "How many real gods do you believe exist?" She said, "One." Like me, the missionaries did not tell her about the existence of other real gods.³ I then paraphrased to her what Joseph Smith said; it piqued her interest, but here is an actual quote:

I will preach on the **plurality of Gods...** I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the **plurality of Gods...** I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: **and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods... if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also?**⁴

The title of this chapter comes from the next quote by LDS Apostle James Talmage. He was widely known as a brilliant man; I have several of his books.

But "Mormonism" is bolder yet. It asserts that in accordance with the inviolable law of organic nature--that like shall beget like and multiplication of numbers and perpetuation of species shall be in compliance with the condition "each after his kind," the child may achieve the former status of the parent, and that in his mortal condition **man is a God in embryo....** a mortal being may attain the rank and sanctity of **godship**, nevertheless man carries in his soul the possibilities of such achievement...⁵

Many of my books are old and have that old book smell that I love. One of them is from 1945 by Milton R. Hunter who was of the First Council of the Seventy at the time. Here is what he said:

Mormon prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. **He became God--an exalted being-- through obedience to the same eternal Gospel truths that we are given opportunity today to obey....** As early as February 16, 1832, the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith the sublime truth that "**men may become**

³ The average Latter-day Saint is not maliciously hiding this information but when I ask why they don't tell this to people at the start they often say, "We don't feed steak to babies."

⁴ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, ed. B.H. Roberts, vol. 6, *Period 1 History of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 474-476

⁵ James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-day Saints, 1978), 530.

gods....” In the words of Dr. John A. Widtsoe, **“God and man are of the same race, differing only in their degrees of advancement.”**⁶

I often encourage people to read the complete King Follett sermon by Joseph Smith to get the full picture of things. However, below is a summary of what I have read from LDS sources and heard from many Latter-day Saints.

1. God was once a man like us.
2. God has **not** always been God but was once just a man.
3. God had to **become** God.
4. We have only **imagined** and supposed that God has always been God.
5. We must **learn how to become Gods** just like all the **other Gods** before us.
6. God and man are of the same race, differing only in degrees of advancement.
7. There is a **plurality** of Gods.
8. Joseph Smith taught that this was given to him by the **inspiration of the Holy Spirit**.

The concept of men becoming Gods is shocking, to say the least, to the ears of Christians. One of the simple foundational convictions Christians hold is that there is only one real God in existence, not many. Monotheism (the belief in the existence of only one God) is at the heart of Christian belief. When Latter-day Saints ask Christians why we don't believe Mormons are Christian this is at the top of the list of answers. Christianity is monotheistic while the Latter-day Saint religion teaches a “plurality” of Gods.⁷

Although the idea of men becoming gods is shocking, Latter-day Saints do have ways of “proving” this belief, and use the Bible and non-LDS Church history to do it. The next sections are devoted to presenting these arguments as faithfully as possible with Christian responses.

Bible Verses and arguments often presented to demonstrate that men can become Gods.

I meet Latter-day Saints in various ways. With the advent of Facebook, I have entered into conversations with Mormons all over the country, even though I live in Utah and just have to walk out my front door. Recently, on Facebook, I met an LDS Sister missionary who is serving in Oregon. Our messages have been brief, and light, but I did ask her about Eternal Progression (men becoming Gods). This is part of what she said:

There's a scripture in Romans [Rom. 8:17] that says, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified

⁶ Milton R. Hunter Of The First Council Of The Seventy, *The Gospel Through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis Inc, 1945), 104-108.

⁷ My LDS friends often will tell me they only worship one God. This may be true, but what Christians object to is the teaching that more than one real God exists.

together." Just like any child has the potential to grow to be like their parents, we are sons and daughters of a God so our progression will follow suit.

The Sister missionary from Oregon expressed what I have heard and read many times. There is a handful of Bible verses quoted and put together that, on the surface, seems like logical thought. I will get to those in a little while, but, before I do, it would be beneficial to understand that, with a little effort, we can make the Bible say just about anything. For example, did you know the Bible teaches we are all to go commit suicide right now! Here are the verses that prove it.

"Then [Judas] threw down the pieces of silver... and went and hanged himself." (Matt. 27:5)
 Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:37) "Then Jesus said... 'What you do, do quickly.'" (John 13:27)

Obviously, God does not actually want us all to commit suicide, but I was using this funny illustration to make a point. Below are many of the Bible verses I have seen and heard put together to support the teaching that there are many *real gods* and men can become gods.

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above **all gods**. (Ps. 95:3)

I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the **gods** will I sing praise unto thee. (Ps. 138:1)

For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be **gods many**, and lords many,) (1st Cor. 8:5)

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, **Ye are gods**? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; (John 10:34-35)

I have said, **Ye are gods**; and all of you are children of the most High (Ps. 82:6)

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Rom. 8:17)

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is. (1st Jn. 3:2)

It is not difficult to understand how the above verses can be assembled to support the teaching that there are many real gods, and that men can become gods as well. Not long ago I had a set of LDS missionaries in my home. They brought with them a return missionary (RM) who lives in my neighborhood. After our discussions ended, the RM and I kept in contact and met a few times a

month to talk further. We talked about this issue of Eternal Progression and I showed him the above verses; he agreed they are the ones he believed supported LDS doctrine. I shared with him the illustration that the Bible teaches we are to all commit suicide; he thought it was funny and he understood the point. I proceeded to give him a more serious illustration of how the LDS church functionally interprets Bible verses to support its claims. The illustration is as follows.

With the Bible open I point to each verse quoted and read them. Then I shut the Bible and set it on a table far away. I purposely exaggerate the shutting of the Bible and putting it far away. I then read quotes from LDS leaders interpreting those verses. I point out that with the Bible shut and far away, it was not able to speak for itself. After doing this exercise, it seems perfectly clear the Bible does indeed teach we are to commit suicide... I mean that men can become gods.

It is very easy for a "teacher" to string Bible verses together to prove a point and often people will fall prey to it. It only takes a few seconds to accomplish. It can be very time-consuming and challenging for a legitimate Bible teacher to unwrap or untangle those verses for someone who has been deceived. At the risk of being redundant, I will use the same illustration again. A false teacher could convince someone in a few seconds that the Bible teaches us to commit suicide by quoting these verses.

"And he [Judas] threw down the pieces of silver... and went and hanged himself." (Matt. 27:5) Jesus said, "Go and do thou likewise." (Luke 10:37) "Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly." (John 13:27)

The legitimate Bible teacher has a huge task before him to unwrap these verses for the deceived person who is convinced he must hang himself. It can take a lot more than a few seconds. It requires knowledge of the contexts of each verse, the historical setting, the story they were said in, the type of literature they were said in, *et cetera*. In the next section we will *re-examine* the Bible verses used to support the LDS teaching that men can become gods. For you, the reader, it would be good to have your Bible open. It will take some time and effort, but we will unpack these verses in their contexts. When we keep the Bible at hand and open, we can allow it to speak for itself. We will examine the Bible verses used, LDS quotes that interpret them, and then reopen the Bible and let it speak for itself.

Examining the Bible verses used to support the belief that men can become gods.

The challenging task of re-examining Bible verses used to support the LDS teaching will be handled in two stages. First, we will look at Bible verses which immediately cause problems for the LDS interpretations. Then, we will take a *closer* look at verses LDS leaders use to support the belief that men can become gods. Below are a handful of verses that cause serious problems for the LDS interpretations of the other:

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. (Isa. 43:10)

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God...Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any. (Isa. 44:6-8)

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me. (Isa. 46:9)

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. (Psalm 90:2)

The above verses cause some problems for the LDS interpretations. Some simple things to see are:

1. God was never just a man who had to earn his Godhood.
2. There was never a time when God has been anything less than fully God.
3. He is the first and last God (which means no one else can progress to become a God.)
4. There is not a "plurality" of real gods.
5. The LDS interpretations make the Bible contradict itself, thus demonstrating those interpretations are flawed.

In my years of talking with Latter-day Saints I have heard a common response to the above. It goes like this, "There is only one God for this earth, and we only worship one. But there are other gods of other worlds." Thankfully, the God of the Bible did not leave that door open. He is clear that He made every planet everywhere. There are no planets anywhere created by other Gods. He made them all. See John 1:3; Col. 1:16,17; Heb. 1:2,10; Isa. 45:18 and Amos 5:8. The Bible simply closes the door on the possibility that there could be other real Gods doing creative work somewhere else.

Now for the difficult part, unwrapping the contexts of the verses LDS leaders have used. We will start with the easiest and work to the most difficult.

1st Corinthians 8:5

For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be **gods many**, and lords many,)

Joseph Smith himself commented on the above verse. This is what he said:

Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many; and that makes a plurality of Gods.... You know and I testify that Paul had **no allusion to the heathen gods**. I have it from God, and

get over it if you can. I have a witness of the Holy Ghost, and a testimony that Paul had **no allusion** to the heathen gods in the text.”⁸

The above is the easiest of all the verses to unwrap. In this example, all we have to do is read the short chapter and it becomes abundantly obvious that Joseph Smith was wrong when he said "Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods." I have quoted the whole chapter for you to read. I count at least seven direct references to heathen gods (idols) in the chapter.

1Co 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto **idols**, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

1Co 8:2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

1Co 8:3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

1Co 8:4 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto **idols**, we know that an **idol** is nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one.

1Co 8:5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

1Co 8:6 But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.

1Co 8:7 Howbeit *there is* not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the **idol** unto this hour eat *it* as a thing offered unto an **idol**; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

1Co 8:8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

1Co 8:9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

1Co 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the **idol's** temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to **idols**;

1Co 8:11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

1Co 8:12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

1Co 8:13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

To say that 1st Corinthians 8:5 supports the idea that many *real Gods* exist and that men can become Gods is a huge stretch of the text. Just by simply reading the passage it becomes clear there is only one real God; the others are only idols.

⁸ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, ed. B.H. Roberts, vol. 6, *Period 1 History of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 475.

Psalm 95:3 and 138:1

For the LORD is a great God, and a King above **all gods**. (Ps. 95:3)

I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the **gods** will I sing praise unto thee. (Ps. 138:1)

Do these verses really teach that there are many real Gods? No, not at all. God is not confused. He would not say in one place that He is "the first and the last" and then in another say there are others. Man can make anything into a god. An example today is the man whose god is in the form of a beautiful red Corvette in his driveway. The man worships his god by washing and waxing it twice a week and by letting it consume his thoughts. This is called an idol. Is the Corvette a real god in the sense that the God of the Bible is? No, not even close.

The Israelites were continuously surrounded by pagans who worshipped false gods or Idols. The Egyptians represented their false deities in various human-animal forms. The many Mesopotamian cultures used idol representations of their deities, as did the Hittites in ancient Asia Minor. More of a threat to Hebrew worship were the Canaanite Baal and Asherah fertility images.⁹ When the Psalmist mentions "gods" in the Psalms he is not talking of real Gods but false gods such as Baal and Asherah. These are nothing more than idols like a Corvette, not references to faithful Latter-day Saints ~~that~~ who had achieved godhood themselves.

Romans 8:17

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Rom. 8:17)

The sweet LDS Sister missionary I wrote of earlier in this chapter used this verse as her support for her belief that men can become Gods. She said:

There's a scripture in Romans [Rom. 8:17] that says, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Just like any child has the potential to grow to be like their parents, we are sons and daughters of a God so our progression will follow suit.

The Sister missionary was repeating what has been said before by LDS leaders. Member of the First Council of the Seventy, Milton R. Hunter, commented:

Paul also taught that all the members of the true Church who lived righteous lives were "heirs, heirs of God, and to be joint-heirs with Christ." Since Jesus has attained Godhood, to be a joint-

⁹ Trent C. Butler and Ph.d, eds., *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Homan Bible Publishers, 1991). 686

heir with Him would be to attain a similar glory. Thus there are a plurality of Gods, and it is possible for men to become like the Supreme Being.¹⁰

Take special note of Mr. Hunter's phrase "Jesus has attained Godhood." Jesus did not have to attain Godhood, He has always been God, never was there a time when He was less than God. Consider the following Biblical statements about Jesus and the fact that He has always been deity, thus not having to attain it.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting. (Micah 5:2)

Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:5)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

A few comments on the above verses may be helpful. The old King James English of Romans 9:5 is awkward to modern English readers. The New King James version translates the phrase as "...Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." The word "was" in John 1:1 is very important in the original Greek. It means "was eternally."¹¹ Jesus did not attain or inherit godhood; He has always had godhood.

On many occasions while discussing the Bible with LDS missionaries and my LDS friends, they have said that to be a "joint heir with Christ" means that we will be like him, being gods. Considering what has already been presented, this interpretation should be suspicious. We already know that the God of the Bible said, "*before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me*" (Isa.43:10). The question at this point is what does the phrase "joint heirs" mean since it does not mean attain or inherit godhood? I think the truth is far more appealing to me personally. I really don't want to become a God. He has too much responsibility and must put up with ~~us~~ sinful creatures like us.

1 Peter 1:4, John 14:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 speak of our future inheritance. Like Jesus, we will have resurrected bodies that cannot be corrupted like the ones we have now. We will be immortal! Heaven will be our new home (assuming we have received Jesus as our savior) and we have been adopted children into the family of God (Rom 8:15; Gal. 3:29). Revelation 21:1-5 also tells us that we will no longer experience tears, death, sorrow or pain because all things have become new. As adopted children of God we will be joint heirs of heaven, not godhood, with Jesus. These things we will inherit but not deity for that would cause the Bible to contradict itself.

¹⁰ Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel Through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Stevens And Wallis, Inc, 1945).
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¹¹ Noted Bible Scholar, John MacArthur commented on this. "The imperfect tense of the verb *eimi* (was), describing continuing action in the past.... But even more significant is the use of *eimi* instead of *ginomai* (became). The latter refers to things that come into existence (cf. 1:3,10,12,14). ((John Macarthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, , (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 16.))

1st John 3:2

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1st John 3:2)

LDS Apostle Bruce McConkie commented on this verse and said, "We shall have exaltation [become a god], for that is what he has; and he is like his Father [a god]."¹² Is that true? No, it is not true. We have seen clearly that God has said there is only one God. Notice the verse does not say we can become gods, which would be to bring a foreign statement into the text. It says we will be "like" Him. A huge question must be asked. How much like Him will we be? The Bible does set a limit on how much like Him we will be. Like Jesus, we will have glorified resurrected bodies. Like Him, we will no longer suffer the pains of life and death (See 1st Cor. 15:52-54 and Phil. 3:21). But we cannot be like Him in His deity because He has set the limit on the number of Gods; the limit is one.

Keep in mind that there is no Biblical passage, verse, phrase that explicitly says something like "men can progress and become gods." Nor is there any text that says any of the Biblical characters achieved godhood, such as Adam, Noah, Matthew, John, etc. However, there are passages, verses and phrases that say just the opposite, as we have seen. The best the leadership of the LDS church can find is vague phrases like "joint-heirs" and impregnate them with foreign meaning.

John 10:34-35 and Psalm 82:6

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken... (John 10:34-35)

I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. (Ps. 82:6)

In the attempt to support Eternal Progression, John 10:34 may be the most quoted verse. LDS Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie commented:

This, then, in effect, is our Lord's argument: 'Why accuse me of blasphemy for testifying that I was sanctified and sent into the world by the Father? Does it offend you to hear me say that I am the Son of God? Do you not know that every righteous person to whom the word of God comes, and who then obeys the fullness of that law, shall become like the Father and be a god himself?'¹³

John 10:34 is both easy and difficult to explain. It is easy to explain what it does *not* mean, and it does not mean what McConkie said. It is more challenging and time-consuming to explain what it *does* mean. For this reason, we will tackle it in two stages. First, we will examine what it does *not* mean; this is the easy part. Next, we will examine what it does mean; this is more challenging.

¹² Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, vol. 3, *Colossians to Revelation*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 385.

¹³ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, vol. 1, *The Gospels*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 491-492.

First, what does this passage *not* teach? This passage in no way teaches that men can become gods. Carefully notice the tense of the phrase "Ye are gods." It does not say, "Ye can become gods." This point cannot be stressed enough, don't miss it! Also, remember God said, "...before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isa. 43:10b). John 10:34 simply does not fit the LDS model of eternal progression to godhood.

Next is the challenging part. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Ye are gods."? This will require your full attention and willingness to exercise your fingers, and mind, as we dive deeply into the Bible. Keep in mind that this verse is not new to Christians. It is not like we have been skipping it for 2000 years.

When Jesus, and the Psalmist, said, "*I have said Ye are gods,*" did they really mean that they were Gods in the sense the LDS leaders have taught? Look at these verses; try to interpret them; remember what you already know. The Bible is clear; there is only one real God in existence, period! This means ~~that~~ there must be something off about the LDS interpretations.

These verses require some biblical background information to help us understand what is being said. In the Old Testament, Jewish leaders were sometimes called "gods." This was because God had put them in the place of *acting* for Him as His representatives. Moses is a perfect example of this. Exodus 4:16 and 7:1 read:

So he shall be your spokesman to the people, And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God... So the LORD said to Moses: See I have made you as God to Pharoah..."¹⁴

The Hebrew word translated "god" is in other places translated "judge." Exodus 22:8 and 9 read as follows:

If the thief is not found, the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods. For any kind of trespass whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.

These judges were acting "as God" in His place. They were commissioned to represent Him faithfully in His will, judgment, and mercy. Unfortunately, as we know from history, these Jewish leaders (gods) failed at their task.¹⁵ Psalm 82 is an inspired commentary on the failure of these judges, called gods in this Psalm. The Psalm reads as follows:

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. Defend the poor and fatherless:

¹⁴ New King James Version

¹⁵ See Ezekiel 34:1-31

do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked. They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations. (Psalm 82:1-8 KJV)

The Jewish leaders were to judge in accordance with the will of God, and his representatives were called “gods.” This Psalm tells us they failed in their task, and judged unjustly. LDS leaders used part of this passage to teach that men can in the future become real Gods, inhabiting and populating worlds of their own. Reading the whole passage reveals to us that the fate of these men is not to become real deities, but to “die like men.” This Psalm is not to be read as a hope for the future, but a condemnation of failure. As the Jewish leaders misrepresented the judgments of God, the LDS leaders have misrepresented His scripture.

With this background information we can come to John 10:34 equipped to make a proper interpretation. It would be wise to study thoroughly the context of this passage, especially 10:22-39. Christian authors Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes give us valuable insight into this passage:

Jesus is not speaking to polytheists (who believe in many gods). Rather, he is addressing strict Jewish monotheists who believe that only the Creator of the universe is God. So, his statement should not be wrenched out of this monotheistic context and given a polytheistic twist.

Jesus’ statement must be understood as part of his overall reasoning here which is an *a fortiori* argument: “If God even called human judges ‘gods,’ then how much more can I call myself the Son of God.” Christ had just pronounced himself one with the Father, saying, “I and My Father are one” (10:30). The Jews wanted to stone him because they thought Christ was blaspheming, making himself out to be equal with God (vv. 31-33). Jesus responded by quoting Psalm 82:6 which says, “I said, you are gods.” So, Jesus reasoned, if human judges could be called “gods,” then why can’t the Son of God be called “God.”

It is possible, as many scholars believe, that when the psalmist Asaph said to the unjust judges, “You are gods,” he was speaking in irony. He was saying, “I have called you ‘gods,’ but in fact you will die like the men that you really are.” If this is so, then when Jesus alluded to this psalm in John 10, he was saying that what the Israelite judges were called *in irony* and *judgment*, he is *in reality*. Jesus was giving a defense for his own deity, not for the deification of man.¹⁶

The basic point of John 10:34 and the surrounding context is simple. The Jewish leaders were to be *as God* to the people, faithfully representing Him to them. However, they failed. Jesus was certainly not teaching that men can become gods, just as all other gods have done. Why? Because there is only one God who is the first and the last.

¹⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 177-178.

Conclusions

We have taken a closer look at Bible verses LDS leaders have used to support the teaching that men can become gods. The key phrases in those verses were "all gods... the gods... gods many... ye are gods... joint-heirs... we shall be like him..." The only way those phrases can be used to support LDS theology is to 1) read them, 2) close the Bible, 3) put the Bible far away, 4) open up LDS books, and 5) apply LDS meanings to those phrases without asking what they mean in the Biblical contexts they came from. Paul the Apostle wrote young Timothy some great words of Godly wisdom about interpreting the Bible. Paul said to Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2nd Tim. 2:15). When we "rightly divide the word of truth" we can reach some correct conclusions about God. The main conclusion from this chapter is that men are *not* gods in embryo.

There is good news here. This awesome God of the Bible, who is the only real one, has provided the way of salvation. The bad news is we humans are all sinners who deserve punishment. The good news is Jesus paid our penalty when He was nailed to the cross.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us [our sins], which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; (Colossians 2:14)

Right now, as you read this, if you confess the Jesus as your Lord, you will be saved (Romans 10:9-10). If you have not already done this, I strongly encourage you to do it now.

Bonus Section--Did the early Church fathers teach that men could become Gods?

About 20 years ago I was dialoging with a knowledgeable Latter-day Saint. In our discussions he mentioned the early church fathers (guys who were alive shortly after the time of Jesus and the Apostles) believed men could become gods and he paraphrased some quotes from them. Of course, I was curious, as at that time no one had ever made that claim to me. I went to my library of LDS books, started looking things up, and found some more articulated accounts from LDS leaders. Also, very recently I was discussing Eternal Progression with a Return Missionary and he gave me a copy of *BYU Magazine*. In the magazine was an article he wanted me to read titled *Our Identity and our Destiny* by Elder Tad R. Callister. The article was a discussion about the doctrine that men can become gods and has a section titled *Early Christian Writers*. Elder Callister quoted early church fathers like Irenaeus (A.D. 115-202), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 160-200), and Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236). He quotes statements these guys made, that I admit are strange things, but keep in mind ~~that~~ he is getting quotes *not* from books published by the LDS Church, but by Christian Publishers like *Hendrickson Publishers*. Why is this important? Because they are quotes from our guys, not theirs, and should be interpreted through our eyes, not theirs.

Allow me to give an example of how easily statements can be misrepresented. Imagine you are a married man (perhaps you don't have to imagine). Last Sunday at church you put your hand on a lady's shoulder (not your wife) and told her, "I love you." Someone else overheard you say "I love you" to this

other woman and goes to the Bishop to tell him of the scandal in the congregation. The next Monday you get a call from the Bishop to come to his office. He says to you, "I was told by a reliable source you are in a relationship with a woman that is not your wife. Sister Maryweather even recorded you telling the woman you loved her. I'm sorry to say this, but unless you repent, we have no choice but to excommunicate you." Assuming you are innocent, you would say something like, "Yes, those words did come out of my mouth, but what you think I meant is not what I meant. I'm not *in love* with another woman. I just met her, and she told me she has always been made fun of, her parents abandoned her as a young child, and felt that no one loved her. So, I put my hand on her shoulder and said, "I love you." We would hope the Bishop would feel embarrassed for how he misrepresented the situation even though the words "I love you" were certainly said. Context is everything!

LDS leaders have done the exact same thing as the fictional bishop in the previous paragraph. They have taken words and phrases from the writings of the early church fathers and used them to fit the LDS model of Eternal Progression. Below is a quote from Elder Tad Callister in *BYU Magazine*.

Early Christian writers likewise wrote of our divine destiny. As early as the second century, Irenaeus (A.D. 115-202) noted: "We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods."¹⁷

There are several quotes from the early church fathers like the above. If the reader does not know the theology of the early church fathers and is told by LDS leaders that the early fathers believed men could become gods, and are then shown quotes like this from Irenaeus, they take the bait and believe it. However, if you interpret the phrases of the early fathers through their own theology, and not LDS theology, you discover what they really meant. The doctrine Irenaeus and other fathers were expressing is still taught in Orthodox churches today, it is often called *Theosis*. It is not an easy subject to grasp, and that is okay for this discussion, but what must be grasped is that it is not the LDS theology of Eternal Progression.

Theosis is the understanding that human beings can have real union with God, and so become like God to such a degree that we participate in the divine nature. Primarily a term found in Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox theology, from the Greek meaning *deification* or *making divine*, theosis is a concept derived from the New Testament regarding the goal of our relationship with the Triune God. The terms *theosis* and *deification* may therefore be used interchangeably in this context.

This does not imply that we become gods, but rather, that we are to become the fullness of the "divine image" in which we were created (Gen. 1:26), i.e. **a perfect reflection of our God**, and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). It may be related to the Protestant concept of sanctification but goes further with what may be expected in this life, emphasizing the element of our mystical union with God in Christ. It may also be seen as something akin to the

¹⁷ Elder Tad R. Callister, "Our Identity And Our Destiny," *BYU Magazine* n.d, 48.

Wesleyan idea of "entire Sanctification." However, Theosis remains a mystical concept not easily grasped and subject to various interpretations.¹⁸

Elder Tad R. Callister, and other LDS leaders, have accurately quoted the physical words of the early church fathers but they have grossly misrepresented their meaning, much like our earlier illustration of the man saying "I love you" to a woman who was not his wife being misrepresented by his fictional bishop. I personally have taken the time to read the whole text from Ireneaus the quote comes from, and it is not easy reading. Even within the same chapter Elder Callister quotes, there is solid evidence Ireneaus did not believe in anything like the LDS theology of Eternal Progression. For example, in LDS theology, God is not really an uncreated being, he was created and begotten (or rather organized) by his father, who was created and begotten by his father, who was created and begotten by his father, *et cetera*. However, in the same chapter, Ireneaus makes a clear distinction between God and man. Here are some other statements Ireneaus made in the context. "God is indeed always the same and **unbegotten**... that of His own will He called into being and fashioned things having **no previous existence** [who] do reflect the glory of the **uncreated** One." The context of the chapter¹⁹ actually refutes several elements of the LDS theology of Eternal Progression, including the preexistence.

The title of this chapter is "Am I a God in Embryo?" From examining the Bible and early church history, the answer to that question is no.

¹⁸ "Theosis," Theopdeia, accessed December 1, 2013, www.theopedia.com/Theosis.

¹⁹ If you are interested in reading the text Elder Callister quoted from Ireneaus, it is Ireneaus, *Adversus Haereses* (Ireneaus Against Heresies), book 4, chapter 38, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Ireneaus*, Vol. 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson: Hendrickson Publishers, (Peabody, Mass.), 1994, p. 522.

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