

Note: this is the third of a three-part series on Elder McConkie and the Adam-God theory, and is part of a larger six-part series reviewing explanations about the theory by Elders Lee, Petersen, and McConkie. The six-part series is in turn part of a larger blog series on Determining Doctrinal Authority in Mormonism. The final and sixth blog on the theory is next (#25). Extra attention has been given to this false theory because it provides opportunity to examine in-depth and in detail the true position of Adam in the plan of salvation and also some of the exceptions, subtleties and nuances within the fallible yet inspired nature of prophets of God.

Below is further frank and clear explanation from Elder Bruce R. McConkie on the Adam-God theory, some of which is and some of which is not found in [Determining Doctrine](#). Also given is a spiritual experience from the ministry of Elder McConkie about the theory. Further commentary about President Brigham Young follows, concluding with true teachings from him about Adam:

Bruce R. McConkie:

[Summary of facets of the Adam-God theory:]

- (1) The false claim that Adam is our Father and our God;
- (2) That Adam lived on a prior earth as a mortal and had been resurrected;
- (3) That Adam and Eve are the parents of our spirits;
- (4) That Adam created this earth as a home for his spirit children;
- (5) That he and Eve came here to provide mortal bodies for their spirit children;
- (6) That they came here as resurrected beings and were not made from the dust of this earth, but of the prior earth on which they had their mortal probation;
- (7) That they did not die but returned to the celestial realm from whence they came where they now preside in glory and dominion;
- (8) That Adam is the Father of the mortal body of Christ;
- (9) That all persons who gain exaltation will, after their resurrection, create an earth, have spirit children, and then go down on the earth they have created, there to be an Adam and an Eve in providing mortal bodies for their spirit children.

This doctrine was diametrically opposed, not only to the scriptures, but to the philosophizing's of Orson Pratt [that particles of intelligence should be worshipped], which also were unscriptural.

Many have supposed that President Young taught only portions of the above recitation and that he was misquoted in what he did say. This simply is not true. He preached enough sermons on the subject to fill a volume; they cover at least the 25-year period from 1852 to his death in 1877; and they are correctly transcribed and accurately represent his views. ((As was shown in the first blog in this series, this statement is now known to be inaccurate and in doubt.))

It is true that for many years our enemies used quotations from the famous 1852 sermon only. These quotations are capable of dual interpretation, and our apologists [defenders] have spent their time trying to show how the statements in this 1852 sermon conform to the over-all patriarchal system. Now, however, literally hundreds of quotations from Brigham Young and those around him have been dredged up, which we can no longer brush aside as in the past.

In the 1852 sermon he said that Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. "Jesus, our elder brother," he said, "was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven." In the past our brethren have always maintained that this had reference, not to Adam but to Elohim. The fact is, as subsequent sermons attest, Brigham Young meant that Adam was the Father of Christ.

It was in this 1852 sermon that President Young made the famous declaration: "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."

The best illustration of which I know that explains what President Young should have meant was given by President Charles W. Penrose.

President Penrose said: "As to Adam, he taught that he was God in the sense of being at the head of the human family. That he was Michael, the Ancient of Days, and in the resurrection would be at the head. In that way the whole human family will be related to him as his children, and in the Patriarchal order he will be the personage with whom they will have to do, and the only one in that capacity. President Young taught faith in that Eternal Being to whom Adam and all of his race should bow in humble reverence, who is our Eternal Father and the Father of our elder brother, Jesus Christ, and is the Great Elohim."

"And it should be understood that the views entertained by that great leader and inspired servant of the Lord, were not expressed as principles to be accepted by mankind as essential to salvation. . . . That which President Young put forth in the discourse referred to, is not preached either to the Latter-day Saints or to the world as a part of the creed of the Church."

"The views then expressed were uttered *in a single sermon*, which created so much comment that the speaker did not afterwards enter into further details or explanations.

President Penrose explained the sermon this way:

The substance of President Young's declaration was, that the person who was placed in the Garden of Eden and became the great progenitor of the human race, is "our Father and our God." He said further, "and is the only God with whom we have to do." Careful reading of the entire address will show that President Young comprehended much more on this subject than he then made known, and that he regarded our Father Adam as the being who will stand, in eternity, at the head of the human family as the great Patriarch and ruler over all his posterity, and the Parent with whom they will have personal association and intercourse, as the representation and embodiment to them of all that constitutes the individuality of the Godhead.

President Joseph Fielding Smith and Elder John A. Widtsoe and a number of the other Brethren have taken a similar approach. Even the First Presidency of the Church (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund) in a widely circulated letter to Samuel O. Bennion, which sets forth in a marvelous way what we do believe about Adam, fell into the trap of trying to explain away the statements of President Young and make them seem to be in harmony with the true doctrine.

The trouble with all this is that we are not dealing with "a single sermon," and Brigham Young did not mean what all of us wish he had meant. . . .

There are also [Adam-God] quotations from Heber C. Kimball, Orson F. Whitney, L. John Nuttall, W. W. Phelps, John Jaques, Eliza R. Snow and many others.

Our enemies publish the minutes (including Photostats in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock) of a seven and one-half hour meeting of the Council of the Twelve on April 5, 1860. The meeting considered at length the views of Brigham Young and Orson Pratt about Deity. Nine of the Twelve were present. Six spoke against Brother Pratt. He alone opposed the Adam-God views of President Young. The views of the other two (Ezra Taft Benson and Franklin D. Richards) are not recorded.

There is, of course, no question as to the true doctrine relative to Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael. The scriptures themselves are clear. The First Presidency in the days of President Joseph F. Smith made several express and pointed explanations, including the Doctrinal Exposition on the Father and the Son published in 1916.

Our problem is that over the years we have attempted to cover up and explain away things that have now become common knowledge. Our credibility is completely destroyed when we claim that Brigham Young was misquoted or meant something other than what his words clearly mean. (Bruce R. McConkie Correspondence, 1983.)

As a member of the First Council of the Seventy, Elder McConkie enjoyed a marvelous spiritual experience in which it was made known to him that the theory was false and that the interpretations that anti-Mormons and fundamentalist cultists placed on Brigham Young's teachings were false doctrine. While Elder McConkie's personal spiritual experience does not of itself constitute and define the position of the Church, it is certainly in full and complete harmony with it. Such rare disclosures are uplifting, edifying, enlightening, and helpful.

Bruce R. McConkie:

In the second mission-wide conference, I was talking with some power and fluency about this doctrine, explaining that these interpretations were false and defining how and where the Church stood on Adam and on the members of the Godhead. In the midst of this discussion, under circumstances where I was far more fluent and expressive than my normal capacity allows, it suddenly seemed to me as though a pillar of light extended up from me endlessly and the clear, unmistakable impression came from the Spirit of the Lord that what I was teaching was true, that the interpretations made by various people of Brigham Young's quotations was totally false [doctrine], and that if I felt so inclined I was perfectly at liberty to speak in the Lord's name as to the truths I was then declaring. I did not so speak, reasoning that under the circumstances there had been so much sensational and unusual matter presented to these particular missionaries that I did not want to say something outside the usual bounds. As I look back, it seems to me that this experience was given primarily for my benefit and enlightenment. (Cited in Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003], 366-67.)

If it so happened, unlikely that it may seem, that President Brigham Young went out of this mortal life and passed through the veil into the spirit world, still believing or theorizing that Adam or Michael was God our Father in Heaven or Elohim, then we can rest assured that he was soon thereafter disabused of that false notion.

When Jesus died on the cross after suffering for the sins of all of Adam's children (see Alma 40:18), he himself then passed through the veil and "the Son of God appeared" in the midst of an

“innumerable company of the spirits of the just” that included “Adam” and all other ancient prophets and faithful/righteous men and women. There, “our Redeemer spent his time during his sojourn in the world of spirits, *instructing and preparing* the faithful spirits of the prophets.” There and then in the spirit world, in a great conference, Jesus instructed and prepared and taught the prophets, including Adam, the first mortal man, who was not His father.

So, teaching and instruction continues in the spirit world, even for prophets and apostles. By President Joseph F. Smith’s day the ancient prophets, including Adam, had long since been resurrected (soon after Jesus) and gone on to their exaltation, and the great and noble prophets of our dispensation who had died were then there: “The Prophet Joseph Smith, and my father, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and other choice spirits who were reserved to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work.” (D&C 138) Would not these prophets also be taught and instructed, including Brother Brigham? As Elder McConkie stated—“in due course all the faithful brethren, whether in this life or in the spirit world, will have a perfect understanding and be united wholly and totally where the concepts are concerned” (Bruce R. McConkie Correspondence, 1972). If we don’t get it right in this life, they correct us in the next.

Confirming these truths is a personal experience in the life of J. Arthur Horne, who served for many years as a patriarch in the Seattle, Washington, area until he passed away in the late 1960s. Being a righteous and spiritual man of great faith, and having questions about the early death of a son, he prayed fervently and then in a special spiritual experience was given the opportunity to interview President Brigham Young, who had long since passed away. After asking various questions and receiving answers: “Now I asked the question that had been praying on my mind: ‘What do you do over there [in the spirit world], Brother Young? He sat back in his chair and threw one leg over the other. ‘Oh, mostly studying and preaching,’ he said.”

Studying—learning, being taught—and preaching. Again, if Brother Brigham still entertained any notions that Adam/Michael was God the father when he crossed the veil into the spirit world, such would have been quickly dispelled by his studies. He would have been corrected in his views, by Joseph Smith himself if necessary, for Brother Joseph presides in the spirit world as dispensation head. As President Joseph Fielding Smith said, Brother Brigham “will have to make his own explanations on the points there involved”—he will have to or has accounted for any errant teachings the same as anyone else. We will all be judged for what we believe and teach. Best to get it right—from the scriptures.

Selected doctrinally correct teachings about Adam from President Brigham Young:

“We believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ our elder brother. We believe that God is a person of tabernacle, possessing in an infinitely higher degree all the perfections and qualifications of his mortal children. We believe that he made Adam after his own image and likeness...” (*Journal of Discourses*, 10:230-31.)

“Adam was as conversant with his Father who placed him upon this earth as we are conversant with our earthly parents. The Father frequently came to visit his son Adam, and talked and walked with him...” (*Journal of Discourses*, 9:148.)

“The Bible declares God [the Father] has a corporeal body; that in his likeness, precisely, He created Adam.” (*Journal of Discourses*, 1:238.)

“We are the children of Adam and Even. So we also and they [Adam and Eve] are the

children of our heavenly Father,..." (*Journal of Discourses*, 13:311.)

"His mother Mary bore him... According to the flesh he [Jesus Christ] was of the seed of Adam and Eve." (*Journal of Discourses*, 6:95-96.)

"I want to tell you, each and every one of you, that you are well acquainted with God our heavenly Father, or the great Elohim. You are all well acquainted with Him, for there is not a soul of you but what has lived in His house and dwelt with Him year after year; and yet you are seeking to become acquainted with Him, when the fact is, you have merely forgotten what you did know. I told you a little last Sabbath about forgetting things.

"There is not a person here to-day but what is a son or a daughter of that Being. In the spirit world their spirits were first begotten and brought forth, and they lived there with their parents for ages before they came here. This, perhaps, is hard for many to believe, but it is the greatest nonsense in the world not to believe it. If you do not believe it, cease to call Him Father; and when you pray, pray to some other character." (*Journal of Discourses* 4:216.)

Some excellent counsel about truth and error from President Young:

"I want to say to my friends that we believe in all good. If you can find a truth in heaven, earth or hell, it belongs to our doctrine. We believe it; it is ours; we claim it. Is that right? If you find an error here, I ask you to leave it, pass it by, let it alone, do not embrace it in your faith, do not practice it in your lives. I say to all, to my brethren and sisters and to strangers, if we teach anything that is good, receive it, I beseech you. If we have any good in our doctrine, believe it and embrace it, it will do you good. *If we have errors, do not embrace them.* I have been trying, for almost forty years, to tell the people how to be saved. I have always made this proposition to every man I have conversed with on the subject of truth and error, 'If I have errors, I will give ten errors for a truth. Do you want to trade?'" (*Journal of Discourses* 13:335.)

It should go without saying that the principles taught by Elder McConkie and others that have been quoted relating to the Adam-God theory, are applicable to anything else incorrect that President Young or others of his day may have taught.

For instance, Brigham Young is sometimes referenced as teaching that those who become Sons of Perdition and are cast out into outer darkness, either do not receive a body in the resurrection, or die after being resurrected, and they go through a process of dissolution/annihilation or dissolving back into spirit element; thus they are no longer a living spirit or any other kind of being having agency, but become eligible, as the eons and ages pass, to be born again as a spirit child of God.

Presidents Brigham Young, George A. Smith, Heber C. Kimball, and others are also quoted as teaching a convoluted concept of blood atonement. The true doctrine of blood atonement is that by the shedding of His blood in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, Jesus Christ suffered for the sins of all mankind so that they can be saved if they will repent and follow Him. The false doctrine of blood atonement is that there are certain sins so serious, so grievous and heinous, that the sinners own blood must be shed to atone for their sins if they are to receive forgiveness.

These notions are found in the *Journal of Discourses* and other outlets from earlier times. Again, wherein they are out of harmony or contradict the scriptures, the principles taught by prophets and

apostles in the quotations found in these blogs apply. Such incorrect ideas are not doctrines of the Church. The scriptures prevail over such old quotations in matters of doctrine (see blog 19).

As to the fate of sons of Perdition, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

Speaking of the Sons of Perdition, the Lord says this: "And the end thereof, either the place thereof, nor the torment, no man knows; neither was it revealed, neither is, neither will be revealed unto man except to them who are made partakers thereof." I don't think that Pres. Young is going to be a partaker thereof." . . . I give you one passage of scripture which declares definitely that they remain as though there had been no redemption [see D&C 76:45-48]; . . . The Prophet [Joseph Smith] says that they will endure. President Joseph F. Smith has said that. President John Taylor has said it. . . . They will endure. Their bodies and spirits will be united. . . . The fact is anyway, that they remain—their spirits and bodies. Now if the Lord revealed something to President Young about their final destiny and that they're going to be annihilated or the spirit and body dissolved, go back into the elements to be created over again somehow, President Young didn't say that the Lord had revealed anything to him, and these scriptures say, "no man knows" and no man will know but those who partake of it. So I don't know. I don't know their destiny. I don't know what's going to become of them finally, only that they have their spirits and bodies, and the scriptures say they can't die again. Now we do have that and in the words of the Prophet also—that they cannot die." (Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Fundamentals of the Gospel," unpublished lecture given at BYU, August 25, 1954, 11-12.)

In regards to blood atonement, Elder McConkie wrote:

You note that I and President Joseph Fielding Smith and some of our early church leaders have said [things] and written about this doctrine and you asked if the doctrine of blood atonement is an official doctrine of the Church today.

If by blood atonement is meant the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the answer is Yes. If by blood atonement is meant the shedding of the blood of men to atone in some way for their own sins, the answer is No.

We believe that the blood of Christ, shed in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary, cleanses all men from sin on condition of repentance. As expressed by a Book of Mormon scripture: "Salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent." (Mosiah 3:18.)

We do not believe that it is necessary for men in this day to shed their own blood to receive a remission of sins. This is said with a full awareness of what I and others have written and said on this subject in times past.

In order to understand what Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Charles W. Penrose and others have said, we must mention that there are some sins for which the blood of Christ alone does not cleanse a person. These include blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (as defined by the Church) and that murder which is the unlawful killing of a human being with malice. However, and this cannot be stressed too strongly, this law has not been given to the Church at any time in this dispensation. It has no application whatever to anyone now living whether he is a member or a nonmember of the Church.

There simply is no such thing among us as a doctrine of blood atonement that grants a remission of sins or confers any other benefit upon a person because his own blood is shed for sins. Let me say categorically and unequivocally that this doctrine can only operate in a day when there is no separation of Church and State and when the power to take life is vested in the ruling theocracy as was the case in the day of Moses. From the day of Joseph Smith to the present there has been no single instance of so-called blood atonement under any pretext.

Anything I have written or anything said by anyone else must be understood in the light of the foregoing limitation. Brigham Young and the others were speaking of a theoretical principle that operated in ages past and not in either their or our day. As I recall, Brigham Young's illustrations were taken from the day of Moses and the history of ancient Israel and could not be applied today.

This is no such a doctrine as blood atonement in the Church today nor has there been at any time. Any statements to the contrary are either idle speculation or pure fantasy. It is certainly not the current teaching of the Church and I have never in over 61 years of regular church attendance heard a single sermon on the subject or even a discussion in any church class.

You asked if the statements of our leaders of the past, including those found in the *Journal of Discourses*, represent the official stand of the Church. The answer, as indicated in the comments above set forth, is that they do not. The statements pertain to a theoretical principle that has been neither revealed to nor practiced by us. (Bruce R. McConkie Correspondence, 1978.)

Now, when it comes to anti-Mormon critics and fundamentalist cultists, none of these quotations and statements thoroughly explaining the true doctrines of the gospel will mean anything or help to correct their views and purposes. They cling to old false and incorrect notions with all their strength and resolve; they find them simply too useful as a means of destroying the faith of the uneducated, unwary, new converts, doubters, and curious nonmembers. For them the fact that they are not believed or taught by the Church is an inconvenience easily ignored or disputed. In their minds, any tool that might weaken or destroy another's soul is too good to pass up.

Thankfully, the Adam-God theory and other errant doctrines that occasionally percolate up from the past or blow with the latest wind of false doctrine are gradually losing their effectiveness and presence today—they are gradually losing their steam. Whatever the issue raised by the devil, the safe course is to stay in the mainstream of the Church, hold to the iron rod, and follow the living prophets.

I think of Orson F. Whitney, a supremely gifted and talented church leader of the past, with few equals and no superiors in certain ways. Yet, even as a bishop, he became caught up in the mysteries, was beguiled by a self-proclaimed prophet, and believed in reincarnation and exalted parents giving birth to resurrected babies, for the better part of 25 years. It took him two years of humble heartfelt and sincere repentance to overcome those false notions and then more years on a sort of unofficial probation before he could become "doctrinally" worthy to be called as an Apostle of the Lord. Yet he succeeded admirably. May others so ensnared in any errant or false doctrines do likewise.

[Cross posted with truthwillprevail.xyz]