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# Joseph Smith and the Bible: "Extending the Text and Filling the Silences"

Sylvan Eugene Needham  
*Utah State University*

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JOSEPH SMITH AND THE BIBLE: “EXTENDING THE TEXT AND  
FILLING THE SILENCES”

by

S. Eugene Needham, III

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

Approved:

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Norman Jones  
Major Professor

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Philip Barlow  
Committee Member

---

Richley Crapo  
Committee Member

---

Byron Burnham  
Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2008

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## ABSTRACT

Joseph Smith and the Bible: “Extending the Text and Filling the Silences”

by

S. Eugene Needham, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2008

Major Professor: Dr. Norman Jones  
Department: History

In the first chapter, the underlying argument of the thesis indicates that Smith was very familiar with the Bible. His written work that reflects the scriptural nature of the Bible and is today canonized by Mormons is argued that it “extends the Bible's text and fills [many of] its [doctrinal] silences.” A complete reading of this thesis could make some readers think that the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is integral to the sense of the Bible and a novel explanation for the existence of the universe.

The second chapter indicates that many have grappled with the summary doctrine of the Mormon Godhead, the plurality of Gods teaching, as taught by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) in last weeks of his life. This doctrine was accepted by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) during the lifetime of those who knew Joseph Smith personally. First Presidency leader Franklin Richards championed

the teaching in his writings. Church president John Taylor is quoted supporting the teaching. At the beginning of the twentieth-century, leaders felt uneasy with the plural Gods doctrine. The teaching began to be left out of the Mormon discourse and to this day is not mentioned in official writings, meetings, and conferences of the church.

The final two chapters contain a detailed listing of and commentary on the concepts within Joseph Smith's unique explanation for the nature of God. While Smith said that he had ever been teaching the ideas relative to this final doctrine throughout his ministry, their summary presentation in two final discourses caused his listeners to find his teachings surprisingly unconventional. Two sermons contain Smith's teachings, the better known "King Follett Discourse" and the lessor known "Sermon in the Grove." While the first discourse is familiar to many, the complete doctrine cannot be understood without the supplementary information in the second lessor known sermon. In his last discourse, Smith taught of a hierarchal progression of Gods, indicating endless Gods. The nature of the Gods is for the Son to become a Father and produce a new God the Son, who will in turn become a Father. Smith explained, "Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also?" Smith further paraphrased the concept by saying, "where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son?"

(145 pages)

All Bible texts are from the King James Version.

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## CHAPTER I

## MORMONISM: JOSEPH SMITH'S SIZABLE EXTENSION OF THE BIBLE

The subtitle to this thesis in quotations, “Extending the Text and Filling the Silences,” comes from an unpublished speech presented by Philip Barlow at a Mormon theology and history seminar at Yale in 2003. Barlow's phrase suggests that there is a built-in potential of more to the Bible that is encouraged by Mormonism, expressive of the Latter-day Saint belief in an open and unfinished canon. Belief in the Bible-like scriptures of their prophet, Joseph Smith, allows members a unique sense of fluidity to the Hebrew tradition. The Latter-day Saint scriptures make for a “biblical continuity” not afforded elsewhere.

Mormon scriptures do indeed represent themselves as “extensions of the Bible.” This thesis explores one obscure part of Smith's extension of the Bible text, the teaching of a plurality of Gods. Basing himself in the plural nature of a major name of God, *elohim*, in the Hebrew Bible, Joseph Smith, in the final months of his life, essentially taught the concept that, while there was but one God for this earth, there were many Gods in the universe. The historical experience with these ideas, that is, the background to the unusual doctrine among the Mormons, has interest in itself. However, to enter into Smith's argument of a plural Gods teaching, originating in the Bible itself, has substance worthy of reflection within the history of ideas. Smith's suggestion of endless Gods parallels knowledge of the immensity of the universe theorized today by science, the expanded explanation of which cosmos has rapidly advanced since Smith died.

In a recent text that doubts Mormonism, a writer, using frequently read verses in Joseph Smith's modern scriptures, suggests that Smith plagiarized the Bible. From Section Four of the Latter-day Saint book of scriptures, the Doctrine and Covenants, Smith joined together multiple verses, from widely different parts of the Bible; they still constitute an often-used text for the members of Smith's church. The writer thereby suggests a use of the Bible text on Smith's part to create his whole modern day, distinctively Bible-based set of scriptures. Nevertheless, without having had any formal training, Smith's entry into "scripture creation," also makes him into a curiously knowledgeable person regarding the Bible, as can be seen from the variety of verses bracketed in Smith's work,

Now, behold, a marvelous work [Isa. 29:14] is about to come forth among the children of men [Ps. 12:1], therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God [Ezra 6:18], see that ye serve him with your heart [Deut. 11:13], might, mind and strength [Luke 10:27], that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day: therefore, if ye have desires to serve God, ye are called to the work, for behold, the field is white already to harvest [John 4:35], and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle [Rev. 14:16] with his might, the same layeth up in store [1 Tim. 6:19] that he perish not [Jonah 1:6], but bringeth salvation to his soul, and faith, hope, charity [1 Cor. 13:13] and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualifies him for the work. Remember temperance, patience, humility, diligence [2 Pet. 1:5-6] &., ask and ye shall receive [John 16:24], knock and it shall be opened unto you [Matt. 7:7]: Amen. (D&C, Section Four)<sup>1</sup>

The successful pastiche of scriptures quoted above, having been collected when Smith was twenty-three-years-old, can reasonably be used as evidence for Smith having an unusual grasp of the Bible. As Palmer indicates, each line can be traced back to a distinctive verse, each from a different text of the Bible. From either side of the "Mormon question," one must admit that, early on, Smith knew the Bible well and was able to

construct a satisfying synthesis of scriptures. He has done it so well, here and elsewhere, that people have had difficulty recognizing how fully Smith's Mormonism replicates, recreates, and extends the culture of the Bible.

Those who read daily Smith's modern scriptures are seemingly unaware of textual incongruities. They find the doctrinal additions, such as baptism for the dead and a pre-existence for man, consistent with what the Bible might allow. For example, baptism for the dead is mentioned but once in the Bible, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all" (I Corinthians 15:29)? From the mind of Joseph Smith, this otherwise obscure verse becomes a lively ordinance for Mormons. Regarding pre-existence, a hint of it appears in the Bible, "...before thou comest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and...ordained thee..." (Jeremiah 1:5). With just this bare indication, pre-existence can be justified as a Bible teaching by Latter-day Saints to other faiths. These prominent teachings have other parallel "Bible teachings" that are "acceptable additions for Mormons" that Joseph Smith furnished his believers.

For the persuasive purposes of this study, Smith must be seen capable of creating a new and cohesive Jewish-Christian religious statement, not just from the joining of a few disparate parts, but from all of Smith's substantial extensions that expand the total information of the Bible tradition. Indeed, to count pages added, his complete scriptural expansions represent 886 pages or an increase of fifty-five percent of new pages to the 1590 pages of the Bible.

It has been difficult to explain Mormonism. A clearer recognition of Smith's skills

with adapting and extending the concepts of the Bible might best indicate what is not usually used to define Mormonism. Certainly, Joseph Smith's extensions of the biblical tradition indicate that he was not illiterate, nor unskilled in the verbal ways of the Bible, nor a stranger to Jewish/Christian theological possibilities. Contrary to his followers, who see his scriptural additions as supernaturally received, non-Mormon observers deny him his claim to being a prophet. However, the position that refuses the divine source to Smith's scriptures nevertheless forces the conclusion that Smith was unusually skilled in fulfilling complementary Bible hopes and expectations. Undeniably, his Bible extensions indicate a skill in making conclusions to ancient Bible propositions unexpected and foreign to past Bible readers.

Unlike Smith, luminaries of the religious past, including such scholars as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, only translated or commented on the Bible. Smith added what can appear as "Bible-like knowledge" to the Hebrew past that is the basis of Mormonism. Smith can be seen creating a new Christianity, a "Mormon Bible-extension" Christianity. Reduced to only its scriptural contributions, Mormonism could be viewed as a composite of additions to the Hebrew dialogue. The Mormon point of view sees these additions based on unique God-inspired insights into the theology of the Bible. To build credibility for Smith's ability with Bible matters, the plural Gods doctrine, that he said was to be found in the Bible, would be an important way to show Smith's mastery of the Bible. For, Smith emphasized that "...all the Bible is equal in support of this doctrine [the plurality of Gods teaching], one part as another." <sup>2</sup>

Again, using the Bible as his source, it is clear that Smith found support for his teaching of plural Gods in the Hebrew name for the God of the Old Testament, *elohim*. His interpretation of *elohim* distinguishes him from other commentators, who have thought of it in terms of a plural form that “designates the one God of Israel” and is for them a “plural of majesty.”<sup>3</sup> Smith said that the name for God, *elohim*, means simply “the Gods,” and “ought to be in the plural all the way through [the Bible] – Gods.”<sup>4</sup> An example of how Smith might have translated all the Bible using “the Gods,” consistent with the information of his last two sermons, is indicated throughout chapters four and five of the canonical Mormon text, the “Book of Abraham,” found in the Pearl of Great Price, verse one of chapter four states, “And then the Lord said: Let us go down, And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is *the Gods*, organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (italics added).

Even though Smith was only one among many who have revered the sacred book, he saw himself particularly empowered to correct the book and to expand it beyond its traditional covers. An acquaintanceship with Smith, through journals and from his own speeches and writings, grants readers confidence in Smith’s Bible immersion or Biblicism. Biblicism is an attitude towards the biblical text that recognizes in its concepts an absolute authority for the conduct of human life; it presents a destiny for all mankind evolving over time. Biblicism further involves the study of the Bible, its clarification, and the altruistic need for the promulgation of its tenets. The Protestant Reformation held the Bible in high esteem; the Protestants waged their wars of words and arms over the

infallible nature of the text that justified for them their truancy against Catholicism.

Protestantism is the major expression of Biblicism of the last five hundred years.

Going beyond the Protestant admiration of the Bible, Smith's Mormonism subsumes the Bible, adding to the text generous extensions of its own. It not only accepts the Bible, it affirms it by spreading the Bible's very borders, offering additions that could seem to confirm the Biblical canon and direct anew, for all people, the eschatological vision founded in the Hebrew past. Smith restructured the Hebrew religious future, endowing men with newly refined expectations for their salvations.

As this study will indicate, Smith's plural Gods doctrine's primary contribution to theology is a vision of the future, beyond the usual apocalyptic of Judaism and Christianity. Joseph Smith's notable teaching presents a satisfying time when earth life's most righteous men are gods, or kings and priests, with kingdoms in which to rule; Smith's explanations skip over the doom and gloom of apocalyptic Bible scenarios and beckon believers to dwell and co-work with a God who is a merciful, but exalted human being

The religious resentment, to the degree that Christians and Jews might feel enmity towards Mormons, is caused in part by the effrontery of Mormonism having a second Bible of its own, the Book of Mormon. Indeed, the very large additions of the Book of Mormon and other scriptural materials extending the text of the Bible, constitute a criticism of incompleteness and inadequacy in the traditional text. Thus, Mormonism has been unsettling to other Bible traditions through its extensions, what Mormons call "doctrinal restorations." For Latter-day Saints these restorations constitute lost or forgotten

knowledge and information essential for understanding the full implications of human salvation, that were taken out of the original content of the Bible.

Therefore, to better contextualize the plural Gods teaching of Joseph Smith, this thesis indicates that Mormonism is a new Biblicism of an “extended text and filled in silences,” one that speaks with knowledge of the original Bible position, but then adds substantial adjustments. Individual changes and perceptions are seen in other forms of Christianity, such as that of baptism by immersion, a concept of Zion, and the laying on of hands. But then, other practices and concepts are unique to Mormonism, such as, the idea of a pre-mortal existence for mankind, the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood and a new Melchizedek priesthood, a re-implementation of polygamy, a theological form of church government like ancient Israel with a prophet, and the teaching of a plurality of Gods. Invariably, whatever they might be, the concepts and ordinances of Mormonism can be traced to Bible sources. Many things not clear or strangely absent in the Bible tradition were reviewed by Joseph Smith and made biblically real to many enthusiastic Bible readers of his day. Otherwise, those who did believe in the Bible and became Mormons would not have converted nor stayed faithful to his new religion

While it is reasonable therefore to explain Mormonism by its reliance on the Bible, in spite of its Bible heritage and how some people may perceive its presence, it is still today an uncommon way to present the nature of Smith’s faith. The detractors of Mormonism’s prophet would not reference the Bible to his favor. However, despite the common bias, one can see reliance on the Bible in studying Smith’s extensions. In his

final, stunning doctrine, the plural Gods teaching, surprisingly, it may be affirmed to have a lively presence in the Bible. The recognition of Joseph Smith finding the plurality of Gods doctrine in the Bible will help readers appreciate him in all his method of making daring additions to the Bible. The plural Gods expansion is then not necessarily the higher emphasis of this study, but rather the thesis whole is an effort to show that Joseph Smith may be seen to have taken thoughtful liberties with the Bible story taken by no one else in the history of the text. These liberties may have no historical precedence, but by virtue of their literary and ideological significance could be worthy of general praise. This latter assertion is only viable to the extent that Smith's doctrines do satisfactorily fulfill expectations by "filling silences" in the Bible.

Thus, to be able to justify the fully unanticipated plural Gods doctrine as having a presence in the Bible as a teaching among Smith's many additions to the Bible would reinforce the assertion that Smith properly commanded the Bible text. Smith wrote many "fill-ins" to the silences of the Bible, as in the cases of the completions to the histories of Enoch and Melchizedek. In another example, considering David's salvation after his affair with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah, Smith clarified David's present standing by renewing God's judgment by the prophet Nathan against the famous king. Beyond his books of scripture, full of biblical allusions and allegories, there are expansions of doctrine in other writings still not canonized by the Mormons themselves. Chief among these expansions would be the non-canonical "King Follett Discourse" and the "Sermon in the Grove," that both deal in great substance with the plurality of Gods teaching; these

addresses would likely be the most important examples of his novel approach to extending teachings and other information in the Bible.

Joseph Smith did not have school training in theology. All Smith knew of the Bible text was by virtue of his amateur and solitary Bible studies, or from the lips of generally unschooled fellow religionists. Up until now, Smith has not been considered a master of the Bible by outsiders. However, it is the Bible substance and relevant continuities within questions of faith and a holy life created by Smith that should allow him an unambiguous legacy among many who value the Bible and would like better explanations of its paradoxes.

Mormons indicate that Smith's Bible additions have much greater credibility than the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works that have been excluded from the Bible and are also not accepted by Latter-day Saints as canonical. On the other hand, for them, the modern Mormon scriptures, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price are legitimate additions to the Hebrew past. On a par with the Bible, these neo-Biblical writings are read by Mormons daily as the life-long support of their faith and moral behavior. While the Bible frames the LDS religion, Mormonism broadens and supplies information missing from the Bible's pages and gives new life to the Hebrew hope through its renewed affirmation of the ancient text's promises.

Moreover, Smith's Biblicism has to do with ideas that give new understandings to the human condition; these novel understandings form their own discursive polemics. As in the case of Smith's cosmological ideas about a plurality of Gods, he based himself on

them from his reading of the Bible. They certainly offer new theological understandings for the nature of this world and other parallel worlds in a new speculation on the origin and nature of the universe. These ideas show the Biblicism of Mormonism to be an idealistic extension of the Hebrew past through Joseph Smith affirming basic understandings of the Bible. The promise given to Abraham anticipates an increase of his descendants, becoming as numerous as the stars in the heavens or the sand of the seas, in a new and broadened destiny for all mankind: all men are not only resurrected but placed into spheres of eternal activity compatible with their personalities.

By assuming connections to Abraham and the history of Israel, Latter-day Saints believe they possess a renewed inheritance and right to join in on the original, ancient Hebrew past. Mormonism claims a strong connection to the Abrahamic covenant, evidenced through a special blessing, the patriarchal blessing, given to all interested LDS members, designating them spiritual members of the house of Israel. They see themselves as modern Israelites, continuing where their “spiritual ancestors” left off, even having written hymns they often sing, which celebrate their “Biblical Israelite status.” Some of the titles of current LDS hymns express a clear Israelite connection, “Israel, Israel, God is Calling,” “Redeemer of Israel,” and “Ye Elders of Israel.”

Mormons accept Smith’s Bible additions as progressive discourses in the evolving mystery of the nature of man. The additions were for Smith and his followers revelations, equal in value to and fulfilling expectations of the Bible. Before Christianity, the Hebrew cosmology appeared to involve only Abraham’s direct posterity as an “Elect People.”

However, the New Testament hope of an extension of human life included all mankind, Israelite and Gentile. Similarly, the new Mormon scriptural canon, Joseph Smith's additions to the Bible tradition, reinforces a vision of world-wide relationships harmoniously connecting all holy men and women to Abraham and to Jesus that is summarized in the Mormon concept for "Zion," as a place where dwell "the pure in heart" (Doctrine and Covenants 97:21).

To create his new-Biblicism, Smith took bare ideas and elaborated them into Biblical expansions, recognizably belonging, especially for LDS believers, to the deep religious past. To Latter-day Saints, Smith's extensions appear as credible additions to Bible information. His extensions are deeply embedded within the text so that often only readers consciously looking for the Bible extensions would think of them as such. He consistently enhanced brief and otherwise incomplete textual concepts.

Joseph Smith found evidence for a teaching of a plurality of Gods in the Bible and said that everyone might find indications of it for oneself. Thus, one could expect to find such a doctrine in the text without even using an example suggested by Smith. The following is such a concept from the Bible that offers a status for the universe, embedded but not explained by the Hebrew tradition or directly alluded to by Smith, "God...hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...by whom also *he made other worlds* (Hebrews 1:1-2) (italics added). It could be presumed that Smith would have had thought this obscure Bible concept of "other worlds" was an indication of his plural Gods teaching and a way of indicating that there were things "outside this world" beyond what had been

presumed.

Smith's idea of multiple Gods, as will be made clearer in later chapters, indicate that these "other worlds" are governed by other Father Gods. It is in a plurality of Gods that the God of the Bible is identified as acting in concert with others, progressing a human-type life, throughout the entire universe. Smith connected the God of the Bible with a dynasty of Gods, even "other Father Gods" or *elohim*, associate Gods with presumed hierarchal connections to each other in "other worlds." According to Smith, all obedient men are also gods (small "g") and whether of this world or another and would also form part of the term *elohim*, "the Gods," or the hosts of the heavens.

The leap from the Bible concept of "other worlds," to the unorthodox, but otherwise logical appointment of a new Father God for this and every other "finished world," bears Smith's progressive, midrashic seal of "increasing the fund of Bible knowledge." In the creation of novel information, he seemed to have had *text-internal* authority. As one Jewish writer has written, "Joseph Smith....was an authentic religious genius, and surpassed all Americans, before or since...in religion-making imagination.... Smith's insight could have only come from a remarkably apt reading of the Bible."<sup>5</sup>

Smith's special reading of the text confirms in different ways past tradition, such as, the "one God" of the Bible being the manifestations of Jehovah of the Old and Jesus of the New Testament. According to Smith, Jehovah was a spirit being in the Old Testament and Jesus of the New Testament, as Jesus put on a mortal body. Mormons do after all believe in but *one God*; he is the God of Israel and of all the earth, but that does not

preclude there being other Gods, in other worlds. Jehovah/Jesus is holder of the office of “Son.” It is by the office of the “Son” that all worlds are created. While Jesus is the God of this world, it does not mean there are not other Sons or other Fathers in other worlds. Smith could argue that it is in the awareness of this calling for Godhood that one can understand the dialogue and the relationship between Jesus and his “Father in heaven,” and the fact that he assured readers that the Father had not been seen on this earth “at any time.” This is Smith’s explanation of “other Gods;” they are united creators of other worlds. For Smith, each world is created by a Son, under the direction of a Father, thus, his dynasty of Fathers would go on forever and make up the plurality of Gods as suggested in the term, *elohim*.

Smith can be seen to have based his various additions to the Bible in the very fabric of the Hebrew tradition. A prime example in the promise of endless posterity for Abraham, as numerous as the sand of the seashore, is suggestive of endless other humans from potentially numberless other worlds. As an addition to the discussion of “other worlds,” as suggested in Hebrews of the New Testament, the following is a supplement to the Bible text by Smith, in which the realms of “the Gods” become even more vast by virtue of “other things” Smith indicated Moses learned on the Mount:

The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine. And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works, neither to my words (Moses 1:37-38, Pearl of Great Price).

These are interesting expansions of the Hebrews 1:1-2 verse, “creation of other worlds,” especially in the light of what is now known in astrophysics of an infinite space

filled with billions of stars. Smith adds to the Bible text an explanation of how Moses began learning of man's relative insignificance, "Now for this cause I know that man is nothing, which I never had supposed." for the "worlds...[are] not only unnumbered to man," but "others will come" for there is "no end to God's works (PofGP, Moses 1:11, 37-38)." In reading these scriptures, one must put in mind Smith's injunction that each time God is written, it is more properly written, "the Gods," to best understand the sense of who is "creating endless worlds."

As indicated, Implied in the concept of "many worlds" are numberless people for each world. In recognizing these many peoples and their need for leadership, Smith goes further, stating that for each world's population there will be a Father God. Smith, interpreting the name *elohim*, to mean "the Gods," emphasized that when God is written in the singular in English, it should nearly always can be understood in the plural as "the Gods." Written in 1830, the above Book of Moses sequence about numberless worlds forms, along with other scriptural passages that he came to in time, a basis for the plural Gods doctrine long before the full doctrine was made public in 1844. Having deepened his perspectives from where they were at the beginning of his theological understandings, Smith was to exclaim near his death, "...the doctrine of a plurality of Gods...is all over the face of the Bible." <sup>6</sup>

Smith, in the complexity of concepts that are sprinkled throughout his writings and speeches, presents the human nature of an "Almighty God," rather than an "omnipotent, incomprehensible spirit God." He saw God's human nature from within the Bible's

context of potentialities. Since for Smith, God is a man. He has concern for his “fellow-men” and makes possible mans eternal life, even to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” With “one after another earth passing away [or the perfecting of worlds],” there is “no end to Gods [the Gods’] works (PofGP, Moses 1:35,39).” All of Smith’s extensions regarding the plurality of Gods add to a continuing story identifiable in the aspirations held by the original Israelites. They saw the future of their posterity in numbers unheard of in the ancient world, as promised in a blessing given to the wife of Isaac, “And they blessed Rebekah and said unto her...be thou the mother of thousands of millions” (Genesis 24:60).

In summary of the above, the Bible’s influence on Mormons and their Prophet is known best intuitively among the Latter-day Saints. Mormonism has its own self-understood authenticity and logical authority that is innately derived from the distant reaches and expanses of the ancient books of the Bible; this early connection further deepens the faith’s mystery. Mystery is not a concern that bothers regular Mormons, but is recognized by observers.

The strangeness of the Mormons occupied many minds during the nineteenth century and they continue today to experience particular scrutiny as they continue to spread throughout America and the world and gain prominence. However, whatever has been recognized as different about the Latter-day Saints, up until Philip Barlow’s insights regarding Mormons and the Bible, has not been identified as “extended Biblicism.” Jan Shipps, a Methodist and a scholar of Mormonism, in 1984 wrote an essay entitled, “The

Prophet Puzzle,” in which she challenged Mormon scholars to uncover the mystery of Joseph Smith, stating, “I don’t know everything about Joseph Smith, but I do know that the mystery of Mormonism cannot be solved until we solve the mystery of Joseph Smith.”<sup>7</sup>

From his own actions, it is obvious that Smith felt it was his duty towards the God of the Bible to teach people to practice polygamy, but he kept the practice quiet during his lifetime. However, he came to teach the doctrine of plural Gods openly. The theocratic nature of Mormonism has a parallel in the theocracy of the prophet Moses, who also ruled his people in the desert as a God. But, to fully understand the provenance and nature of Mormonism, one must come to recognize that Joseph Smith paralleled his own religious deliberations with what the Bible contained. It was in Smith’s giving new substantive innovations to biblical thought that made his pronouncements even more relevant to his convert followers. The structure of his biblical thought and literalistic loyalty to *all* the teachings of the Bible is likely the best explanation for the nature of Mormonism as a religion: it is a religion of such a Biblical literalism that it finds its own identity in its new and faithful extension of the text. It is in the context of Joseph Smith’s Bible immersion that the teaching of a plurality of Gods may be seen as one more of his Bible doctrines.

The Bible was the most profound influence on the mind of Joseph Smith. From his Bible immersion, he can be seen to have produced renewed possibilities for a tenacious new Biblicism. Renewed credibility for the text could allow people in a post-Enlightenment era to have greater belief in the promises made to Abraham and in the

resurrection of Jesus. It could offer reasons to believe as were held by the Essenes, Masorites, Puritan Protestants, and other enthusiasts of the Bible.

When reconsidering his Bible extensions, Joseph Smith reintroduced less bold and innovative Bible teachings than polygamy, such as having all things in common, called among Latter-day Saints, the United Order. An even more identifiable re-insertion, but one with an emotional recollection of the past, was the reintroduction of the Bible office names of prophets, elders, priests, deacons, seventies, patriarchs, and the twelve apostles. Another distinctive renewal and logical expansion was a revisiting of the orders of priesthood, the Aaronic Priesthood after the name of the Hebrew priesthood of Aaron, and a higher priesthood Smith called the Melchizedek Priesthood, named for the prominent high priest figure of the Bible.

Also biblical, Smith's creation of a theocratic government was for him what Jesus intended when speaking of a kingdom of God. According to Smith's sense of "the Messiah," Jesus is going to be the kingdom's theocratic Lord. Smith's Tenth Article of Faith indicates that "...Christ will reign personally upon the earth;" an anthropomorphic reality for God from Joseph Smith's unique interpretation of the nature of God from the Bible, again, a defensible Bible position. However, with other faiths believing their God to be an immaterial spirit, the idea of Smith's God "ruling personally," in the flesh, is not admissible by other religions.

Smith can be seen to have chosen religious practices and teachings, almost because of their inherent Bible nature and in spite of their difficulties. Considering it to

be a Bible teaching, it is reasonable to believe that, if Joseph Smith had lived, he would have made the plurality of Gods teaching a fixed doctrine of the church. Nevertheless, whether it is only a quasi-doctrine of the church now or not, accepting a Bible-oriented mind for Joseph Smith, allows one to better assess the origin of this plurality of Gods teaching, as well as put into perspective the other concepts he presented that came to constitute Mormonism as coming from the Bible. The arcane and ancient biblical natures of his teachings illuminate Smith's accomplishment, if they do not resolve much of his mystery.

In his translation work, Joseph Smith can best be represented as a student, interpreter, and expositor of the Bible. The progression of the ideas he took from the Bible was particularly evident when he was immersed in Bible translation during the years from 1830 to 1833. At this time, he performed what he considered to be a God-required English to English translation of the Bible. This intense rereading and translating process of the Bible, occurring as it did during the same years together, has to be seen as a great influence on his book of revelations, the Doctrine and Covenants, which was also written in large measure during 1830 to 1833.

Smith's translation of the Bible constitutes a reassessment, an unprecedented grappling with and manipulating of Bible ideas and materials with an intent to improve on the content of the text. He attempted to render the original text more understandable and consistent. In summary, Smith's Mormonism is, in reality, a clarified Bible concepts reenactment, an expanded Biblicism. In its status as a new Bible based tradition, Mor-

monism has taken to itself new discursive rights.

The concept of Mormonism as “a Hebrew religion of extended Biblicism” would likely explain what Shipps meant when she wrote her book naming Mormonism, “a new religious tradition.”<sup>8</sup> To call Mormonism “extended Biblicism” solves a definition problem, or at least assists Shipps’s concern for undoing the “prophet puzzle.” The teaching of a plurality of Gods is one of Joseph Smith’s most important extensions of the Bible. In its not yet “accepted status,” it at least allows a rethinking of how Joseph Smith did use guidelines of faith, spirituality and doctrine to make the “extended Mormon Bible text” and “revive or reinvent” the Jewish/Christian past. What follows gives evidence to the fact that Smith was influenced to create the plural Gods doctrine as well as all of doctrinal Mormonism from a gradually developed interpretation and extension of Bible concerns. Over many years and through many cultures, people have had their own agendas for explaining the meaning of the Bible. They have developed concepts and changed teachings in ways that are not consistent with what was originally said in the Bible, as has been recently confirmed in recognizing scribal changes in the Bible made during translation.<sup>9</sup> For Mormons, a major misreading of the text was perpetrated in the teaching of a “One God” for all the universe. In the scientific context of today, with a universe now known to have billions of suns, divine reality, made up of a plurality of Gods, just as Joseph Smith proposed, is seen among Mormons as the most reasonable explanation for a fathomless cosmos needing endless concern for detail and chaos management.

## Notes

1. Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake city: Signature Books, 2007). Palmer's example in his text is from the Book of Commandments, Smith's text of revelation prior to the Doctrine and Covenants. He suggested that the Book of Commandments version be compared with the currently used Doctrine and Covenants version; he cites scriptures for additional evidence of Smith's use of the Bible, Ps. 21:10; Rom. 9:4; Heb. 9:6; Josh. 22:5; Rev. 14-19; Jonah 3:19.
2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 424.
3. David Noel Freedman, editor/author, "Names of God in the Old Testament," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, vol. 4, K-N, 1992), 1001.
4. Joseph Fielding Smith, 420.
5. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1992), 84, 96.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, p. 418.
7. Jan Shipps, ed. Bryan Waterman, *The Prophet Puzzle* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 43.
8. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

9. Bart Ehrmann, a popular writer and lecturer, has written of men able to manipulate the text of the Bible, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, Fourth Edition (with Bruce Metzger), (New York: Oxford, 1998) and *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford, 1993).

## CHAPTER II

## CONTROVERSY: JOSEPH SMITH'S DOCTRINE OF A PLURALITY OF GODS

Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, is possibly the best known and most enigmatic of all American religionists. Smith was paradoxical to people from before the church was founded in 1830 and has remained ambiguous up to the present. On one side of the question, challenges to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon arose in the small towns of Smith's youth in upstate New York before anyone had read it. Today, on the side of faith, the membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints still attests that the Book of Mormon is a text authored by a group of ancient writers in America, edited by a prophet, Mormon, and delivered to Smith by an angel of the God of Israel.

Over the years, much of the criticism and the reactionary polemic has concerned Smith's character and presumed ways that he made up or was inspired to create the phenomenon that is Mormonism. After the complexity of theological concerns caused by the Book of Mormon, the most controversial teachings of Smith's church have been polygamy and the plurality of Gods doctrines. This thesis confirms Smith's use of the Bible in his creation of the teachings of Mormonism, and most particularly of the doctrine of many Gods. In the formulation of this unique teaching is evidenced Smith's persistent ability to recreate early Israelite beliefs, as if what he added were a continuity to or a clarification of some ancient aspect of the Bible. It is not uncommon for Jewish writers to recognize this "early Bible quality" in Joseph Smith's deep reading of the Bible,

“...So strong...that it...found its way back to elements...censored out of the stories of the archaic Jewish religion.”<sup>1</sup>

Smith’s concept of many Gods straddles an unsteady middle position between Jewish and Christian monotheism and the Classical world’s vision of a hierarchy of multiple Gods. Whereas monotheism has been honored as a kind of intellectualism, the ancient world’s concept of plural gods is mocked as barbaric myth. Moreover, Mormonism in a theological mid-point between Judaism and Christianity has a curious affinity to Judaism’s Hebrew Bible. Smith can be shown to have approached it in an unbiased way that neither of the older religions can do. Both Christianity and Judaism base themselves in their faith in One God for this earth and for the heavens. It is most commonly thought that Mormons believe in three separate Gods, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Joseph Smith points out that this itself is a plurality of Gods. However, he makes clear that he teaches that there is but one God *for this earth*, Jesus Christ, and a Father God in heaven.

In other ways, Smith adds congruence to otherwise ambiguous teachings. He builds a doctrinal platform for Mormons borrowing from both Christianity and Judaism. In his text, *Mormons and Jews*, Steve Epperson confirms a theological affinity between Mormons and Jews, noting that the Book of Mormon “...reconfirmed Israel’s covenant.”

[It] ...demonstrated [what could be seen as] Smith’s enduring interest in the Jewish people and a restored Israel.... [that would include] the coming of a messianic kingdom of righteousness and peace, the gathering of the dispersed of Israel, and the ending of enmity between Judah and Ephraim.”<sup>2</sup>

The closeness of modern-day Latter-day Saints to Israelite beginnings expresses

Joseph Smith's conscious or unconscious concern for connection with the Bible.

A modern readers' unawareness of the Bible's covenant nature makes difficult an appreciation of the completion that Mormonism offers the Bible and its fundamental identity in Old Testament promises given to Abraham.

In spite of the Jewish concerns of the Old Testament that form a foundation for them, the LDS have a high New Testament interest for Jesus Christ. On the one hand, Mormons and Jews share teachings and perspectives, such concepts as covenants, temples, and people-hood. On the other hand, most Latter-day Saints feel an even more intimate connection to the New Testament explanation of Jesus. Therefore, a double allegiance binds Latter-day Saints to Jews as well as to Christians, making Mormons fully Bible literalists, having reason to accept with nearly equal enthusiasm both testaments.

This thesis suggests that the whole of the theological work of Joseph Smith saw a complexity latent in the Bible. This complexity is relieved in many ways through his completed teachings on the plural nature of God and gives a particular identity to Smith's followers. Overall, the Mormon appropriation of the Bible makes Latter-day Saints distinctively what they are. The assumption of theocratic people-hood, manifest among them by the presence of a single leader, recognized as a prophet after the order of Bible prophets, expresses an connection to the Bible. Smith's scriptural additions challenge the theologies of Christianity and Judaism, but indicate a continuing relevancy to the Bible.

In the history of ideas that concern the Bible, its complexity is developed on many intellectual levels for disputation. Among a few examples, there has been a debate as to

whether the Bible can be read metaphorically or only as a book of history and mythology. The underlying concern of this controversy leads into another example of the Bible's complexity, that of whether there are existing supernatural powers that support the Bible's claim to miracles. Rudolf Bultmann in his text, *Mythology and Jesus Christ*, could be used as a spokesman for representing those who oppose the supernatural vs Bible fundamentalists of all persuasions who experiment with the interaction of divinity in their lives. <sup>3</sup> The quasi-agnostic position of Bultmann suggests another example, that of the modern stance of nineteenth century positivists and all others who see science as the solution to the "spiritual dilemma" of religion and the supernatural claims of the Bible. The scientific approach supports Darwin's proposal of man's descent from lower animals and is a parallel statement with the scientific example of an examination of the Bible known as the "Higher Criticism" of the Bible. Julius Wellhausen is the best known advocate of what has led into a multi-aspect analysis of the Bible. <sup>4</sup> The modern study of the Bible has become expanded by questions that base themselves on archaeological, semantic, historical, as well as cultural issues, etc., involving thousands of researchers the world over.

A basic polemic of the above "Bible complexities" concerns matters that can be "seen and touched" versus those things that are "unseen and felt." In either case, the usual controversies over Bible issues are earthbound in their visions. Joseph Smith brings a new "heavenly vision" to the situation. Smith's teaching of a plurality of Gods represents a unique intellectual idea that adds a peculiar structure to the side of "unseen truth."

Smith's doctrine concerns celestial aspirations that have to do with another order, that of a heavenly kingdom beyond earth knowledge. Most human concerns deal with deity as in the individual "getting help from God for themselves in the here and now" and the questions of theologians that are also involved with the eschatological or end time aspects of the Hebrew tradition. Smith's most cosmic ideas go beyond earth's concerns; his concepts suppose endless numbers of earths before the existence of this one, while his doctrine speaks to all that which is after the earth period is over. The idea of a hierarchy of Gods goes outside of mundane matters and tells more pointedly how life "in the universe" is and thus gives a basis for present-day dwellers on earth for understanding their colonization of earth and the experience they have had here.

To summarize the newness of Smith's doctrine, it has concern with the earth as it is positioned in space and time going, past and future, beyond the frame of human history. It recognizes that this world is now undergoing what other earths have undergone before man's advent on this globe and indicates the human transforming processes that are currently occurring and will be in place again in other, not yet inhabited worlds, as they have been for past worlds. For Smith, the kind of historical development that has occurred here on this world over the last six thousand years is also the way it has been for other worlds, past and will be for the future. Therefore, Joseph Smith brings a new perspective of pattern and control to the question of evil and chaos. These latter elements, evil and chaos, seem to disturb greatly mankind. This "earth-life perturbation of evil and chaos" is broken up by Smith's plural Gods doctrine. Before him, as well as by all those

who presently exclude his teachings, the tunnel vision of a single earth had left man, in the history of ideas, from the religions of the world, a theology of a “vague salvation” or in worldly ideas, a philosophy of forms of “bleak existentialism.”

Smith’s grand concept of many Gods suggests a pattern of other worlds like this one. The future of this world, a paradisiacal Zion-globe, will consist more in a “Thomas Moore Utopia” where people continue a life similar to the present one. This Zion-Utopia will have people, whose characters will have gained gratitude due to the suffering of this pre-eternal life on the present earth. Then, God will not be a strange, incomprehensible Spirit essence, but a fellow being among “others,” that is, “other human-like gods.” He is the most high God...among other gods. He is the King, a perfectly just and merciful God, whose closest helpers are those who “appear to be like him.”

Considering the kinds of technologies that have rapidly developed over the last hundred years, man’s flight in the air, television, telephones, computers, etc., can it be any less questionable whether there could be other possible prior systems of peoples? Is there now some likelihood to see that there could have been prior worlds that form a “host of heaven” or that there are beings living in this world as spirits, that are making earth life on this world possible to be as it now is? Joseph Smith’s cosmic concepts would have us ask these questions. Some scientists suggest that the invisible unseen is a necessary foil to the palpableness of matter, that, indeed, there are parallel realities to the one that we experience, or as stated by a modern scientific writer on parallel dimensions, “...extra dimensions, not yet experienced and not yet entirely understood, might

nonetheless resolve some of the most basic mysteries of our universe.”<sup>5</sup>

A theological example, a curious space/time warp of biblical cosmology, is suggested in the story of Jesus’ resurrection. When he came from the tomb and spoke with Mary, he said, “touch me not; for I am not ascended to my Father (John 20:17):” By that same night, Jesus was telling his disciples “...handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have (Luke 24:39).” This means that Jesus went to his heavenly Father and back in one day. Readers, who are fascinated by Science-Fiction, wonder “if there is someone else in space?” The interest in travel in space requires for most people some kind of machine. Jesus’ journey to see his Father took but a day and would indicate that he not only can take back his life, but would be greatly delayed if he were to travel in an “earth-made, metal contraption” as man does his feeble space travel.

Undeniably, Joseph Smith, in developing his ideas about the nature of God, built a novel concept. In opposition to what has been taught by the Jewish and Christian faiths, Smith gave his God a human-like body and stressed they were plural and separate: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He endowed all men, as children of this God, with the potentials of becoming gods (small “g”) like him. It is clear why believers in a “Spirit God,” tradition, Jews and Christians, are bound, and to large extent have not accepted Smith’s anthropomorphic, plural God(s). However, the Mormon dilemma for presently not promoting the full plurality of Gods doctrine is more complicated.

Up until the forced rejection of polygamy in 1890, the plural Gods doctrine was among the aspects that helped create a strange and apart Mormon people. With the 1890

Wilfred Woodruff Manifesto that renounced polygamy, the other “strange” doctrine of Joseph Smith, the plural Gods teaching, also became suspect and was gradually put aside in the early twentieth century. While most Latter-day Saints say that they believe in the plural Gods doctrine, it is not presently officially discussed or promoted by the leaders of the church.

Many Mormons who look into the ramifications of the doctrine would agree that the acceptance of the teaching would give a completion to Mormon doctrine. Outsiders generally believe that Mormons have canonized this teaching. One observer feels there is an inconsistency between the Mormonism of Joseph Smith and its present leader, “If there is any spiritual continuity between Smith and Gordon B. Hinckley, I am unable to see it. ....Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor...were not monotheists, but henotheists: they believed in a plurality of Gods, as presumably the prophet Hinckley does not.”<sup>6</sup> It is likely that President Hinckley did reverence the concepts of Joseph Smith, but would have found them unsettling for the world to receive them in his time. Like polygamy is unlikely to be restored to Mormon practice, the doctrine of a plurality of Gods has a high enough degree of uncertainty about it that the leadership of the church would not want it promoted as “official to all the world,” unless it could find sufficient reason to agree with perspectives similar to those generated within this thesis.

Whether an acceptance on any level could come about at any future time, in anticipation of the doctrine’s usefulness, it is important to ascertain if the Bible does contain elements of Joseph Smith’s unusual teaching. Smith can be seen to have consis-

tently taught doctrines having ties to the Bible. He taught of a gathering of Israel and a messianic kingdom, as well as confirming the persisting Hebrew hope for the well-being of the Jews and their participating in the fulfillment of Bible understandings. Joseph Smith may be further confirmed as a “Bible person” by his insights into Bible information that allowed him to create extensions to the Bible as exemplified in the Bible-like Mormon scriptures he produced, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. This emphatic identification of Smith’s writings with the Bible illuminates the biblical nature of Mormonism. A recognition of his Bible penchants and insights gives credence to Smith’s ability to find the teaching of plural Gods in the Bible. But, one need not only “suppose” a Bible provenance for the teaching exemplified in this study of a plurality of Gods. Smith actively identifies in his own words the source of the plurality of Gods doctrine in his final speech when he said,

...the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy. A wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.<sup>7</sup>

From the canonical First Vision to his last controversial discourses, a final synthesis and a biblical complexity of concepts may be seen gradually arising from Smith’s ministry-long developed concept of God. The plurality of Gods teaching is generally believed, but still not officially accepted by his modern church. The plural Gods doctrine is a novel vision of man’s origin on this and other worlds and the his prophetic destiny. In any basic discussion of the Mormon Godhead, one learns of a human circumstance for God that contradicts the religious explanation of the Triune, monotheistic, spirit God

offered in Western culture, particularly as created in the creed-developing councils of the early Christian church.

The seed to the idea of plural Gods begins in the well-known 1823 First Vision with the presentation of separate and physical beings for the two Gods, Father and Son. To make clear how members had already accepted plural Gods, during the Nauvoo years, Smith affirmed that he had always taught of a plurality of Gods,

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. 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 that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage from God the Father, 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? <sup>8</sup>

Beyond the separate and physical natures of the beings represented in Smith's unique conception of deity, best represented by his First Vision, his most fully considered position, as indicated in his two last sermons, culminates with surprising, additional clarifications of the nature of the Godhead. These ideas about the nature of God astonish in their foreignness to past religious knowledge. From their audacity, it is not surprising that while the teachings are generally believed by Latter-day Saints, they are not yet canonized within LDS scripture in a comprehensive form.

As will be fully developed in the next two chapters, among the unusual additions, Smith's most central, innovative explanation leads into a web of associated understandings about the "Godly natures" of Fathers and Sons. He stated that Father in heaven,

Jesus' Father, has a Father, who was a Messiah on another world. Such a dynasty of Father Gods could appear to go endlessly backwards in time, one world after another. This would indicate that the Son, Jesus, in following in his Father's footsteps, and those of all past Father Gods, will become the Father God for this world. The repetition of a Messiah figure for each world becomes inherent in what is to be learned to achieve Godly Fatherhood and helps explain Jesus' concluding words on the cross, "it is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus' knowledge of an ordeal that could be for him "finished," suggests his completing a sacrificial act with fore-knowledge. The human nature of Jesus' actions within scriptural circumstances, as also brought forward by Smith in his explanations of God, gives compelling sense to Mormonism's man-like version of God.

Moreover, Smith's interpretations of the nature of righteous men, regarding their becoming "gods," (small "g" for men-gods) is that they are innately gods, raising themselves potentially to higher orders by continuing to make proper moral choices. But, it is evident by the primary choice of Jesus as Messiah of this world that neither individually or collectively, will ordinary exalted men ever supplant the Son's position as God of this earth, nor become a God of another earth. Latter-day Saints are to be deemed, by the logic of Smith's teachings, gods after the manner of kings and priests and will share in the work and the glory of the Son. Jesus was uniquely chosen to be the Father God, that is "the Head God" for this earth and he will not be supplanted. To read Smith's position on man, as indicated in Mormonism's most sacred dialogues and elsewhere in print, it would appear that while many will have high authority, no one will become a God equal to

Jesus, the most High God (see Hebrews 1:8-14; 2:1-17; 3:1-12 for biblical confirmation of Smith's perspective).

Joseph Smith's most mature concepts on the nature of God were publicly presented in his famous sermon of Spring Conference, 1844, the "King Follett Discourse." Eight weeks later, ten days before his death, it was expanded upon in the less well-known discourse, the "Sermon in the Grove." Thus, while Joseph Smith began his theology with the First Vision by indicating the man-like nature of *two separate* Gods, he concluded it, in the stormiest time of his life, ending in his martyrdom, with public representations of multiple Father Gods. Evidence of Smith's earlier indecision regarding the plurality of Gods, and a suggestion of a less than completed theology along the way, is indicated in a March 1839 scripture, "A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest." (D&C 121:28)

Nevertheless, as he came to present it, Smith's concept of Father and Son dynastic progression would seem to indicate an ideology/theology of endless Father in heaven Gods throughout all the billions of galaxies of a universe that is to have been organized and is maintained in an alliance between men-like Gods. For Smith, a hierarchic rule of the heavens, and their ordering of all things, is the accomplishment of many men-like Gods. They are named in the Hebrew Bible as the *elohim*, (literally in Hebrew, the Gods), the second most common name for God in the Hebrew Bible, being used 2500 times. Likely, this name has never been literally read that way by any other modern Bible readers, except for Joseph Smith. Only the Mormon prophet has seen *elohim* as a literal

name for men who are Gods, and who undertake the work of this earth as well as that of the greater cosmos.

One may ask why the Latter-day Saints have not fully accepted, nor researched in the last 100 years, even for their own doctrinal completion, a presence for this teaching in the Bible? Is it possibly from not recognizing a Bible authorization granted them by their Prophet that Mormons have seemed hesitant to champion Smith's strong doctrine? Or is it that they, considering the historical opposition of Christianity towards paganism, would be leery to have to consider plural Gods as a formal teaching, knowing in advance the additional public ridicule they would have to face? The teaching could appear as another biblical anachronism like polygamy, from which Mormons much suffered, and for the church's world-wide mission an undesirable distinction. Reasonably, Mormon leadership would not want to promote a plurality of Gods doctrine, desiring to lessen the "mystery of Mormonism" in the world rather than intensify it.

Another strike against the plural Gods doctrine has to do with its complexity. This study attempts to put some of its intricacies into a comprehensible whole being laid out with its entire elements from both final sermons, combined together for the first time for consideration from start to finish. In the course of this thesis, the Bible scriptures Smith used in his sermons are set out in sequence largely as they appear in his last discourses.

In note sixteen of this chapter, Apostle Franklin D. Richards' list of plural Gods scriptures is furnished as evidence of the fount of biblical information Smith could have seen available for the concept of plural Gods. In recent times, few, if any, Mormons have

asked whether or not Smith could find plural Gods scriptures in the Bible, as he emphatically said he could, “I will show from the Hebrew Bible that I am correct, and the first word shows a plurality of Gods.”<sup>9</sup> The near abandonment of interest in a canonical status for Smith’s doctrine of plural Gods is particularly curious, since, shortly after the death of the Prophet and for over a half of a century afterwards, Richards’ list of scriptures justifying a plurality of Gods teaching in the Bible was prominently circulated.

Mormon converts of the nineteenth-century came from Bible believing, Christian backgrounds. The dissident William Law, who more than anyone else, brought about Smith’s death, pressured Joseph Smith to confess to practicing polygamy while they were still in Nauvoo together. Smith felt justified in practicing polygamy because it was a Bible practice. After hearing of Smith delivering the “King Follett Discourse,” Law expressed indignation against the plural Gods doctrine and gave vent against this teaching as another reason to repudiate Joseph Smith. Those faithful members, who heard Smith’s sermons on a plurality of Gods, are those very believers who came west with the rest of the Bible believing, “Joseph Smith believing” Mormons; they saw his teaching as biblical.

However, it must be recognized that there would have been all shades of believers responding to Smith’s challenging ideas. In the final speech of his life, the “Sermon in the Grove,” Smith spoke with members who appeared to be skeptical and who must have heard his earlier “King Follett Discourse.” They were already to some extent aware of Smith’s teaching. Someone in the audience or among Smith’s acquaintanceships appears

to have equated the Prophet's teaching to that of the myths of the pagan gods of Rome and Greece. He defended his teaching of plural Gods with an ambiguous scripture, (1 Cor. 8:5-6), justifying himself, saying, "Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many. .... But if Joseph Smith says there are Gods many and Lords many, they cry, 'Away with him? Crucify him! Crucify him!'" Smith affirmed his unique doctrine, supporting religionists who insist on a Single God for the earth, in a vision of a God for this world alone, by indicating there was only one God...*for this earth*. He claimed plural Gods for the universe, but only one God for this earth, "...I say there are Gods many and Lords many, but to us only one, and we are to be in subjection to that one."<sup>10</sup>

A major assist to Joseph Smith's claim to a coherent teaching for the plurality of Gods doctrine lies in a recognition of the pertinence of the "Sermon in the Grove." One hundred and seventy-five pages distant from the "King Follett Discourse" in volume six of *The History of the Church*, the "Sermon in the Grove" has languished generally unknown and neglected. It has apparently been little associated with its sister sermon, The "King Follett Discourse." Yet, upon investigation, the well-known and often discussed "King Follett Discourse" contains only half of the arguments of Joseph Smith's plural Gods teaching, the other half lies in the final address, the "Sermon in the Grove."

Specific writings about the doctrine have been sparse and support from church leadership has been negligible. It could appear that Brigham Young did not promote the plural Gods doctrine, but his influence on temple information that contain plural God teachings indicates some interest in the doctrine or at least deference to his beloved

Prophet, Joseph Smith. His successors in the presidency of the church, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, were supportive of the teaching. Apostle Franklin D. Richards left the strongest voice in favor of the plural Gods doctrine with the chapter on plural Gods in his book, *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel*. After Richards died in 1899, others in leading positions, apparently questioning his views and those of Joseph Smith, began in concert to discard the teaching of plural Gods.

Evidence exists that the discourse came to be held in suspicion by the leading Brethren of the Church. In 1912, the already printed pages containing the “King Follett Discourse” were excised from the first edition of the *History of the Church*, compiled by B. H. Roberts, a supporter of Smith’s last sermons. Before its final binding, “nine pages, 302-317,” which constitutes the entire chapter fourteen, making up the complete “King Follett Discourse,” were removed from the edition before the final binding of this important work in LDS publishing. It would seem unlikely that such an action could not happen without the permission of the president of the Church, who at the time was Joseph F. Smith. It cannot be certain someone else did not act on his own. A future president of the church, George Albert Smith, expressed what appears to have been the strong feeling among those in leadership in a letter to Samuel Bennion, an acting mission president,

I have thought that the report of that sermon might not be authentic and I have feared that it contained some things that might be contrary to the truth... Some of the brethren felt as I did and thought that greater publicity should not be given to that particular sermon. <sup>11</sup>

From the wording of President Smith’s letter of the “report” of the sermon, one might wonder if he had himself read it? As an apparent culmination to some discussion

over the nature of God by the leadership of the church, in 1916, the “Father and Son” proclamation was published containing four summary statements regarding the nature of the office of “Father.” The proclamation could appear as the official statement of the church, standing from then until now, and responding to the information contained in the “King Follett Discourse,” as well as to other scriptures regarding Jesus as the Father,

1. “Father” as Literal Parent ...God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title “Elohim,” is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and of the spirits of the human race.
2. “Father as Creator.” [the]...meaning of “Father” is that of Creator, e.g. In passages referring to any one of the Godhead as ‘the Father of the heavens and of the earth, and things that in them are.’ ...Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ the Son of Elohim, is called “the Father,” and even “the very eternal Father of heaven and earth (Mosiah 16:15).” With analogous meaning Jesus Christ is called “the Everlasting Father” (Isa. 9:6; 2 Ne. 19:56)
3. Jesus Christ the “Father” of Those Who Abide in His Gospel. A third sense in which Jesus Christ is regarded as the “Father”...those who accept His Gospel and thereby become heirs of eternal life.
4. Jesus Christ the “Father” by Divine Investiture of Authority. ...in all His dealings with the human family Jesus the Son has represented and yet represents Elohim His Father in power and authority.<sup>12</sup>

While the above four statements define Jesus in ways as a Father, they stop short from completely saying what Joseph Smith says in his final sermons regarding the successive nature of Father Gods from world to world. Smith’s position would make Jesus the Father of this earth as part of his election and inclusion within a dynasty of Father Gods. However, the proclamation might also be seen representing an effort to make clear a verse in the Book of Mormon, wherein Jesus sees himself as both the Father and the Son (Ether 3:16). The proclamation does not reference the concept of a plurality of Gods, including Smith’s *man-like nature* for God with *like associates* identified by

Smith, counseling in a “council of the Gods.” Nor, does it mention Jesus as the appointed Father/King over this earth in the afterlife of the world. Cautiousness and a change of perspective seems to pervade this proclamation.

Other church writers also appear cautious, indifferent, or even, possibly, against the “King Follett Discourse.” Charles Penrose did not treat the teaching at all in his doctrinal text, *Mormon Doctrine*. Nor did James E. Talmage mention the plural Gods teaching in his *Jesus the Christ and Articles of Faith*. However, in 1903, B. H. Roberts, a prominent writer of theology in the church, published his study on the Mormon concept of God, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity*. In this work, Roberts discusses the plurality of Gods in detail and appears more to the side of Franklin D. Richards. Like all other writers, from then till now, Roberts references mainly the “King Follett Discourse.” The later sermon, the “Sermon in the Grove” has indeed seemed neglected.

In 1959, a prolific and frequently quoted author, Bruce R. McConkie wrote a theological compendium, *Mormon Doctrine*, that has been considered by many as the definitive source for basic information on church doctrine. In multiple ways, one might view this work as an expansion of Franklin Richards’ *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel*. McConkie gives dozens of references to explain the Mormon nature of God in comprehensive ways beyond prior Mormon efforts.

Notably McConkie quotes from both of Joseph Smith’s two final sermons. He has a section entitled “Plurality of Gods,” in which he affirms the obvious plurality of the three Gods, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but he states, “...in addition there is an inde-

finite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus Gods.” He further quotes Joseph Smith indicating man’s eternal position, that “...every man who reigns in celestial glory is a God to his dominions...”<sup>13</sup> In a section called “God of Gods,” McConkie interprets that “...the Father, who shall continue to all eternity as the God of exalted beings, is a God of Gods.” Again quoting Joseph Smith, he reconfirms for modern Mormon doctrine, repeating Joseph Smith’s concept, there is ““a God above the Father of our lord Jesus Christ.... If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that *God the Father of Jesus Christ* had a *Father* you may suppose that he had a Father also. Where was there ever a son with out a father? ...Hence if Jesus had a Father can we not believe that *he* had a Father also?””<sup>14</sup> In this way, for Smith and McConkie, both the Father and the Son are the most exalted beings. Jesus is now, or in due course will also become, God of gods.

While McConkie affirms the general doctrine of Mormon plural Gods, a concept he adds prevents a fully rational theology. He accepts the idea of the Father progressing, quoting Joseph Smith, ““God...was once a man like us...who dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.”” However, McConkie passes over the progressive natures of becoming a God, “a Son becoming a Father,” as taught by Joseph Smith. McConkie made of Jesus’ “infinite atonement” one that goes beyond this world, stating, “the atonement of Christ, being literally and truly infinite, applies to an infinite number of earths.”<sup>15</sup> The sense behind this position would be that Jesus continues to be the atoning Son and does not take his position with the lineage of Father Gods envisioned by Joseph Smith, who

were also Messiahs in other worlds. Thus, McConkie would appear to make Jesus the “only Son” of all the universe and deny him the natural progression to Fatherhood of preceding Fathers.

The core revelation of Mormonism is of a living *man-God*, who dwells in a world of paradox and must use his intelligence, acquiring magnanimity and long-suffering to be the God of gods. In Mormonism, God does not create evil; he controls evil by the power of his intelligence. In opposition to the teachings of Christianity, Joseph Smith taught of a God who is a natural man perfected and exalted. Smith did not state in public his whole vision until two months before his death when he indicated that even the Father has a family, including a Father, from whom he is descend-ed. In noting some uncompleted teachings, and as part of the heuristic value of this thesis, it would be timely to suggest that Mormon theology has not yet fully addressed the theo-logical vision of its founder.

As will be indicated in the following chapters, in a strong departure from the Christian concept of a Trinity, Joseph Smith not only makes God a comprehensible man, he indicates a family status for the Father, that the “Father of the Father was a Messiah on another world.” This suggests that Jesus’ Father was a Messiah since *his Father* was a Messiah presumably *on yet another world*. Following the necessary conceptual conclusions to Joseph Smith’s final theologies, Jesus, as well as all people of this world, would have originated in the world on which Jesus’ Father had been a Messiah. Ever since Jesus identified himself having a Father in his famous prayer, this Father’s world has been referred to by the inhabitants of this earth as heaven. Additionally, those who were

associated with the Messiah, as the righteous of the last world, would be living now with him. Those who had been given power to produce spirit children in this last world would have sired the children of this world who have come down to earth and put on mortal bodies.

In Joseph Smith's theology, heaven is a world like this one. In following the logic of Smith's theology, if Jesus is to have associates, faithful people who have lived in mortality with him, it is reasonable to presume each world has their resurrected dead, who also live with their past Messiah/Savior/Father. In the same way as the "just" of this world are promised spirit children in the afterlife, these exalted co-workers with Jesus would be the parents to the spirits of the men and women born into the mortality of this world having physical parents that have sired their mortal bodies.

Joseph Smith would indicate that Jesus' prayer is literal, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done *on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10)." From the natural Bible possibilities, Smith develops a concept of the earth as a new world that is a replication of the former world that is known as heaven. As the Father's *will* be done on this world, this new earth will bear *the rule* of a *new Father*. The resurrected people will live on continuing to do the Father's will. This thesis argues that the sense of an extended Godly Fatherhood, a Head-God and his obedient fellow-workers, acting in kindness over many peoples, has all the while been the meaning of Joseph Smith's final enigmatic sermons.

After President Joseph F. Smith died, his son, Joseph Fielding Smith, acted positively, during the administration of President Heber J. Grant, towards Smith's King

Follett Discourse. In 1938, while in office as historian of the church, Joseph Fielding Smith published a text, still in print, *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, in which he included both the “King Follett Discourse” and the “Sermon in the Grove.” Before 1950 and after the death of President George Albert Smith, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith went to the acting president, David O. McKay, and asked that the missing pages of the “King Follett Discourse” be returned to *The History of the Church*. McKay allowed them to be restored and are now found in current editions of the history.

Despite misgivings towards the final sermons of Joseph Smith, generally, adult members, leaders, missionaries, and educators are favorable to the teaching of a plurality of Gods. Most do not question the teaching; they feel it is part of Mormonism, but it falls into the category of mysterious doctrines that will only have its clarification “sometime in the future.”

While Wilford Woodruff lived on the underground for his polygamous marriages, Franklin Richards acted as if he were in the office of president of the Church until the 1890 Manifesto called a truce with America’s Congress. Richards’ doctrinal text, *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel*, would have had a similar position in the eyes of nineteenth-century Mormons as Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* has had over the last fifty years for present-day Latter-day Saints. The annotated plural Gods scriptures from Richards work would have been seen as an authoritative study of reliable scriptures compiled by a ranking and beloved member of the highest quorum of the church. <sup>16</sup>

There has to be a special dynamic for the doctrine of a plurality of Gods to have

been deleted, as was “The King Follett Discourse,” from the LDS church’s list of doctrines and then be partially restored, finding its place again in the *History of the Church* during the administration of David O. McKay. Like polygamy, the doctrine is presently on hold and is not promoted in speeches, writings, and manuals of the church. Official or public discussion appears imprudent by leaders and would result in censorship if any leader stepped forward with it in inappropriate circumstances. It is not repudiated as Young’s Adam-God teaching, that is, it is not disbelieved, for it occasionally appears positively in members’ conversations and even in Seminary, Institute, and Sunday School discussions. It remains in the minds of Latter-day Saints, but is not promulgated by the leadership.

In the prior chapter, a justification of Joseph Smith and his unique ability to read the Bible was developed. As stated, it could be that a major reason for the Latter-day Saints not to have fully adopted the distinctive plural Gods doctrine lies also in a certain unawareness of the Biblical sense of the matter within Smith’s thoughts and the Biblical justification he felt for his inspiration in developing the teaching. Smith’s use of the Hebrew name, *elohim*, “the Gods,” that is used as Elohim in other contexts as a name for the Father, is likely confusing to the general Mormon reader and gives reason for uncertainty as to the actual ability of Joseph Smith to be a master of Hebrew meanings.

Mormons have a great love for the Book of Mormon. It is their favorite book of scripture. The reading of the Bible has lessened among Latter-day Saints throughout the twentieth century. Members have accepted the Bible more and more as a “flawed book”

not as important to their lives as is the Book of Mormon. Moreover, they find it difficult to read as it is more remote from their spiritual lives than the Book of Mormon. It may be even more difficult for living Mormons to understand the primacy of the Bible in religious life as Smith's closest associates could have.

This thesis argues for a potential completeness to Mormon thought. The argument would persuade people of the full coherency of Mormon discourse by the acceptance of Joseph Smith's final sermons. The primary vision of two Gods has stopped short of the logic that God the Father has a family of his own and there are grandparent Gods with associate world populations stretching back forever. The extension of this family gives a unique explanation for the existence of the universe with a Father God for every sun and its earth in the universe.

#### Notes

1. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1992), 84.
2. Steven Epperson, *Jews and Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 21.
3. Rudolf Bultmann, *Mythology and Jesus Christ* (New York: Scribners, 1958).
4. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian, 1957).
5. Lisa Randall, *Warped Passage, Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe's Modern Dimensions* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2005).
6. Harold Bloom, "Perspectivism and Joseph Smith," (Salt Lake City: Sunstone)

March, 2007, 18-19.

7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 418.

8. Ibid 417.

9. Ibid 419.

10. Ibid 418.

11. George Albert Smith Family Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 30 January 1912, as quoted by Donald Q. Cannon, "The King Follett Discourse: Joseph Smith's Greatest Discourse in Historical Perspective," (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies), 78, vol.18, no 2., 191-192.

12. Gordon Allred, "The Father and the Son," *God the Father*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 148-160.

13. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 577.

14. Ibid 322.

15. Ibid 65.

16. Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little, *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1882), 184-186. The entire chapter reads as follows:

#### Plurality of Gods

The passages are numerous in the inspired writings which indicate a plurality of Gods. In the account of creation, in the book of Abraham, the plural Gods is exclusively used; P. of G. P. page 33.

The Psalmist, speaking of God says: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with oil of gladness

above thy fellows;” Psalm 45:7 It is not possible that any other than the true God is here referred to, for the God that was anointed above his fellows had loved righteousness and hated iniquity. “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the Gods; 82:1. In this passage the number of Gods among whom God judgeth is indefinite, and the words, “congregation of the mighty,” indicate that they might be quite numerous.

John, the Evangelist, opens his history of our Savior thus; “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” 1:1. In this passage we have an account of two Gods, one of which dwelt with the other in the beginning.

That the “Word” spoken of, is Jesus Christ is evident from verse 14: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

“Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, Lord of Lords; 1 Tim. 6:15 From the context of this passage we learn that the kinds and lords here referred to were holy men. Of like significance is the following: “And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;” Rev. 1:6. That is to God and the Father of God.

“A Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads:” 14:1. From the third verse we learn that these were redeemed from the earth. Whether this name of the Father of Jesus Christ was God, or some other title indicating his power and attributes, is not revealed to us, but, whatever it was, it evidently identified those who received it as Gods.

#### Bible:

Gen. 1:26 and God said, let us make man in our image.

Exo. 15:11 who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods.

Deut. 10:17 Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords.

Josh. 22:22 the Lord God of gods. Israel he shall know.

1 Chron. 16:25 great is the Lord: to be feared above all gods.

2 Chron. 2:5 for great is our God, above all gods.

Psalm 86:8 among the gods, there is none like unto thee, O Lord.

Psalm 136:2,3: O give thanks to the God of gods.

Psalm 138:1 before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.

Dan. 2:11 none can shew it before the king, except the gods.

Dan 2:47 your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings.

Dan 4:8 in whom is the Spirit of the holy Gods.

Dan 11:36 and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods.

Matt. 5:48 be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.

John 5:19 the Son doeth nothing except what he seeth the Father do.

1 Cor. 8:5 for though there be that are called gods.

Phil 3:21 that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.

1 Tim. 6:15 who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

1 John 3:2 when he shall appear we shall be like him.  
 Rev. 3:21 to him that overcometh, will I grant to sit on my throne.  
 Rev. 14:1 with 144,000, having his Father's name in their foreheads.  
 Rev. 17:14 for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.  
 Rev. 20:4 I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them.  
 Rev. 21:7 he that overcometh shall inherit all things.

Book of Mormon:

Alma 12:31 becoming as Gods, knowing good and evil.  
 3 Nephi 27:27 what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.  
 3 Nephi 28:10 ye shall be as I am, and I, even as the Father.

Doctrine and Covenants:

Section 32:2 one in me, even as I am one in the Father.  
 Section 39:4 as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons.  
 Section 76:24 worlds were created, and the inhabitants begotten sons and daughters of God.  
 Section 76:55-59 have receive of his fullness and glory; they are Gods  
 Section 76:94-95 know as they are known; and he makes them equal in power and dominion.  
 Section 84:35-39 receiveth me, receiveth my Father and his kingdom,  
 Section 93:20 be glorified in me, as I am in the Father.  
 Section 121:28 whether there be one God or many Gods, they shall be manifest.  
 Section 121:32 in the midst of the council of the eternal God of all other Gods.  
 Section 128:23 proclaiming in our ears eternal life, kingdoms, principalities, and powers.  
 Section 132:17 and from henceforth are not Gods, but angels of God, forever.  
 Section 132:19 shall pass by the angels and the Gods which are set there.  
 Section 132:37 entered into their exaltation; sit upon thrones, and are not angels but Gods.

### CHAPTER III

#### PART ONE OF THE PLURALITY OF GODS DOCTRINE:

##### THE APRIL 7, 1844, "KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE"

After several thousands of years of belief in a single, Spirit God, Joseph Smith's explanation of God as a man, two physically separate beings, Father and Son, was a major doctrinal change. His followers claim that the teaching of God as a man is the correct teaching of the Bible. For Smith to oppose all of Judaism and Christianity in the concept of the nature of God expresses a distinctive independence for his religion. His life's writings and speeches are based in doctrines he said he found in the Bible. An impressive evidence of Joseph Smith's ability to reread the Bible would be to show that the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is a teaching of the Bible.

On Conference Sunday, April 7, 1844, Joseph Smith gave the "King Follett Discourse"; Smith died eleven weeks later. He spoke to a large assembly of saints in Nauvoo, Illinois, which city's population, from its founding in 1839, had constantly increased in numbers with a steady flow of incoming English and American converts. Troubles had followed the fourteen-year-old church from the beginning, well before the founding of Nauvoo. Mormonism had endured the disaffection of important early leaders, including, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, the original witnesses to the Book of Mormon and early apostles, William E. McClellan and Thomas B. Marsh, as well as others.

During an easier time of the Mormon prophet's life, he had time for

contemplation and study. The hectic, busiest of years of the Nauvoo period, were preceded with periods of calm, when he and his fellow elders considered together the revelations that had come from the tongue and pen of the young prophet. In the winter of 1836, various church leaders were invited by Joseph to study with him in “Hebrew school.” A Jewish scholar, Joshua Seixas, the son of a rabbi of New York City, was employed to teach Joseph Smith and his closest followers Hebrew. “By engaging Joshua Seixas, the saints obtained...the best Hebraist...[they] could have hoped to attract in the 1830’s.”<sup>1</sup> It was those faithful friends, as fellow students studying the language with him, who could have been conversant with the Hebrew words that Smith used in the “King Follett Discourse.” It was this study of Hebrew that seems to have led him to the doctrine of a plurality of Gods that would become the substance of this most notorious speech.

When Smith rose to address the audience that day, there was question among many about his status as a prophet. During the discourse, rain clouds filled the sky with a darkness that was like the spirit of some of Smith’s closest former associates, John C. Bennett and William Law. They had been chosen by Smith successively to be his second counselor in the First Presidency. Both had turned against him. Both former counselors had been accused of sexual sins; both had counter-accused Smith of polygamy. Bennett, remembered as a “saintly scoundrel,” had left Nauvoo in 1842, for the East, where he wrote and published an expose on Smith and his Saints. These rebellions had to have formed part of the spirit that had gone against Smith in his 1844 bid for presidency of the

United States and a basis for a certain ill-repute for the Mormons themselves throughout the rest of the century. Bennett was a calculating person, "...Bennett had really been writing his expose months before he left Nauvoo." <sup>2</sup>

Immediate trouble began with William Law when Smith presented him with the necessity of taking a plural wife in the summer of 1843. Law brooded about this through the fall. By the end of the year, relations had become so foul between the two men that Law found himself, first, relieved of his office in the church, and then, in January, 1844, excommunicated. Law did not leave Nauvoo as did Bennett; he began his own church and was reported by March to have had a Sunday gathering at his home that numbered three hundred. Law put together a printing press and published a newspaper unfriendly to the Mormons in June called the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Smith had never admitted publically his doctrine of polygamy. Through this newspaper, Law wanted to force an admission of the practice. <sup>3</sup> Smith was mayor of Nauvoo. When the first issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor* appeared, Smith and his city counsel branded it a nuisance and had the press destroyed. This act was possibly the most important event leading to Smith's death.

Joseph Smith had enjoyed little opulence during his life. While his entire career was short, the time he had to have pleasure in any of this world's goods came down to the last few years of his life. Among life's comforts, in Nauvoo, he finally had a modest home built for himself and the glowing admiration of his followers. John C. Bennett's greatest contribution to the Mormons had been the establishment of the Nauvoo Charter, the purpose for which was to insulate them from the animosities experienced a few years

before in Missouri. Bennett also helped form the Nauvoo Legion, a military unit, complete with uniforms and armaments furnished by the state of Illinois. In the last weeks of Smith's life, he did a vigil, dressed in army regalia, riding with his troops along the banks of the Mississippi to warn unfriendly mobs that were forming outside Nauvoo.

However, Joseph Smith was not a man of violence. He espoused law and order as is evidenced by his willingness to submit and expose himself to the imprisonment that would cause his death. But he was willing to defend his reputation. When William Law left Joseph Smith's side, he influenced others to call Joseph a "fallen prophet." Smith came to believe that Law had joined others in seeking his life,

popular support for their cause, the conspirators desired to confront the Prophet during the conference. Joseph, realizing that nothing could be gained by confronting his accusers directly, chose not to address himself to them during that conference, though he did make occasional references to their charges.<sup>4</sup>

The satisfying quality of his religious explanations helped to quell the storms of dissent around him. Many went home from the Prophet's discourse filled with new confidence in him. Joseph Fielding wrote in his diary of that day that "they said at his oration, it is the voice of a god not of a man."<sup>5</sup> Thousands attended the conference, straining to hear the Prophet; it was equally hard for him to talk in the elements as he did for hours. The Nauvoo discourse represents a religious moment when the city's population was ready to re-covenant with their prophet. Smith was confident in himself, "At no other time did he sense his prophetic calling so keenly."<sup>6</sup>

To cause his people to maintain confidence in him, Smith had prepared himself to explain to them doctrines that the great majority had never before heard and had no real

way of fully understanding. They were teachings about God unfamiliar to their cultural past and personal knowledge of the nature of God. However, likely, most accepted the concept of a plurality of Gods in the same context of belief they had received all things that Joseph Smith had taught them. Smith spoke, based in his distinctive way of *receiving revelation*, which, as this study argues, was to bring about an “extending [of] the text and filling [of] its silences.”<sup>7</sup> He unveiled things not obvious to Bible readers, but which he found in the text. He explained that God, Father in heaven, had not always been a Father God, but grew in knowledge till he was perfect in all things and became the most High God. He, later, in his last sermon, the “Sermon in the Grove,” was to explain there were other Father Gods. It is evident in the urgency of the tenor of his last discourses that Smith was serious about the plurality of Gods doctrine. He wanted to be believed and to have what he was saying accepted as truth.

Joseph Smith spoke twice on the doctrine of a plurality of Gods, once to the large conference audience and a second time, nearby, close to the temple in Nauvoo. In this second speech, the “Sermon in the Grove, East of the Temple.” In this last discourse, days before his death, he indicated the continuing presence of disaffected members,

Now, you know that of late some malicious and corrupt men have sprung up and apostatized from the Church..., and they declare the Prophet believes in a plurality of Gods..., they cry - “The Prophet says there are many Gods, and this proves that he has fallen.”<sup>8</sup>

In response to dissenters, he turned to the Bible to justify himself and represented those who opposed him as “unwilling to understand the word of God.” To him, the Bible testified of a plurality of Gods, “...of things that those apostates would gravely pronounce

blasphemy.”<sup>9</sup> The dissatisfied in Nauvoo caused Joseph to even fear that “...some of them had joined in a conspiracy to take his life.”<sup>10</sup> On the third of April, days before Smith was to deliver the King Follett Discourse, an opposing newspaper in a nearby town, the *Warsaw Signal*, indicated that problems existed among some of his “...most conspicuous followers, in relation to the doctrine of spiritual wives.”<sup>11</sup>

At first, the latter-day Seer was concerned for his life and tried to hide himself. However, to avoid being called a “fallen prophet” he chose to justify his life’s work. He apparently decided to show the Saints in Nauvoo his *higher knowledge* of the nature of God, his ability to read new information into and extend the text of the Bible. He seemed to feel the ideas of his sermons would help justify him as a prophet in their eyes. From today’s viewpoint, the plurality of Gods has only increased his mysterious and ambiguous standing. The strange and new doctrine of *many Gods* makes Mormonism a little more curious in all the world. However, for those believers present at the sermon, Smith brought off a *tour de force*.

Joseph Smith wanted the members to comprehend the nature of God the way he and his closest intimates did. Over years, he and his associates had discussed an evolving understanding of God. Steve Epperson indicates that Smith’s incarceration in Missouri during 1838-39 allowed him time to compose his more challenging teachings, “It was in Liberty jail that Smith sketched the contours of much of what was distinctive in his theology in the final years.”<sup>12</sup> The following indicates the progression of his thoughts on the nature of God,

Evidence strongly suggests Joseph's concepts of God were not fully developed in the spring of 1820, but rather grew, "precept upon precept," and possibly had not reached their full stature even at his death in 1844. These four concepts appear to have developed in the following order, and approximately on the following timetable:

1. 1832 - Joseph received a revelation, detailed in "The Vision," that man can become equal with God.
2. 1835-1839 - He began to teach that there were many gods, a council of whom directed the creation of this earth, ideas which may have come from his translation of the Book of Abraham and his study of Hebrew.
3. 1835 - 1839 - He conceived, perhaps from revelation through work with the Egyptian papyri that gods "exist one above another, so that there is no end to them."
4. 1838-1841 - With the foregoing ideas established, Joseph taught that God had not always been a God, having once existed as a man.<sup>13</sup>

These teachings of Joseph Smith figure in the concepts of modern Mormonism.

However, no one has put all of them together into one text. The church does not promote the development of the plural Gods concept. However, Smith appeared determined to present *the whole truth*. He largely ignored those focusing on controversy and who may have attended his discourse to participate in what Smith called a "petty argument." In self-justification, he felt he was able to deny any guilt for serious wrongs, "I feel in closer communion and better standing with God than ever I felt before in my life, and I am glad of this opportunity to appear in your midst."<sup>14</sup> He further said,

It has been my intention for a long time to take up this subject and lay it clearly before the people, and show what my faith is in relation to this interesting matter. ...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. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years.<sup>15</sup>

Aware of the importance of the occasion, three scribes had been chosen to record Smith's talk, Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, and Willard Richards. Wilfred Woodruff

also wrote a summary, now connected with the other three official transcriptions as a fourth volunteer scribe. Usually only one scribe was used in recording Smith's speeches. Enhancing the uniqueness of the event, the Prophet, "seldom had time to prepare for his speaking engagements,...on this occasion he had made some preparation."<sup>16</sup>

While the "King Follett Discourse" is well known for the topic of a *plurality of Gods* as well as other associated teachings, Smith's final sermon concerns the separate positions of Son and Father. In his last discourse, the "Sermon in the Grove," Smith dealt more specifically with Father Gods. He distinguishes the Father's role from the Son's, who, meaning Jesus, according to Smith's Bible interpretation, is the God of this earth. While people are to pray to the Father, according to Smith, it is the Son that more particularly could appear belonging to and is eventually *assigned* to the earth as its future king. The "Sermon in the Grove," contains the completion of the concepts of the first sermon.

While Smith said the plurality of Gods had ever been taught, others feel that the "King Follett Discourse" was the first time that he had, in public, synthesized concepts of what may have ever before only fully existed in his own mind,

For the first time he proclaimed in a unified discourse the themes he had been inculcating in fragments and frequently in secret to his most favored saints: the glory of knowledge, the multiplicity of gods, the eternal progression of the human soul.<sup>17</sup>

The setting of the day appointed for Joseph's discourse and its impact on those faithful to him and the church versus those who would harm him is summarized in the following,

With his clerks to record his words and thousands of Saints, sinners, gentiles, and dissenters to hear, discuss, and react to his comments, Joseph took the stand at 3:15 P.M., Sunday, 7 April 1844, and delivered the most controversial sermon of his life, unparalleled in Mormonism in historic and doctrinal significance. Mormonism could never be the same thereafter. The dispersing congregation would alter Joseph's life and significantly change the course of the Church. Joseph spoke with such power on that occasion that Wilford Woodruff, at a temple dedication in 1893, after forty-nine years of rich experience, 'Testified that on only one previous occasion had he felt the spirit of God more powerfully manifest than during the dedication of this Temple [Salt Lake] - that was when the Prophet Joseph delivered his last address. The Prophet in that instance stood on his feet three hours, and the spirit of God was present like a flame of fire.'<sup>18</sup>

To commence his memorable discourse, he felt he was offering ideas that were "inspired by the Holy Ghost." He further said, "I intend to edify you with the simple truths from heaven."<sup>19</sup> Three times he mentioned "going back to the beginning" or "the starting point," which could seem to show how Smith's mind not only was based in the early Bible, but being "at the beginning," one would be at the authentic source of truth. He wanted to make his listeners become,

...fully acquainted with the mind, purposes and decrees of the Great Elohim, who sits in yonder heavens. ...very few beings in the world...understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as it respects their relationship to God. They do not know, neither do they understand the nature of that relationship, and consequently they know but little above the brute beast, or more than to eat, drink, and sleep.<sup>20</sup>

To go to the beginning and try to understand Smith's concept of passing from a Son to a Father God, the Hebrew name for the "Anointed One", is "Messiah." It is written "Christ" in Greek. Translated, Messiah or Christ mean, "the One anointed with oil." In ancient Israel, kings and high priests were anointed. The anointing was a mark of

office. Thus, in the Hebrew tradition Messiah or Christ connotes king or high priest. Christ is not Jesus' name, but his title, meaning in English, Jesus *the Anointed One*. Therefore, according to Smith, as Jesus is elevated from a Son to a Father God, he will also be established as a king having a world-wide kingdom on earth "that will have no end" (Revelation 11:12). The two leading Gods, Son and Father, are *Head Gods*, most high Gods, or Gods Almighty, standing higher in comparison to all other gods, but they would not be the only Head Gods in the universe.

Smith's "perfected men," that is, men becoming *like God*, allow them to enter into Gods' presence. A challenge to all erring humans, the holiness of being like God is seemingly daunting. But, according to Smith, to rise in the first resurrection, it is requisite for one to be just or righteous, meaning obedient to the Christ. To be in God's presence, one must become holy like Jesus. Holiness is the way of the eternal world, which righteousness is partly resistance to evil, partly kindness, but Smith's vision of being with God and his host, seeing them, will require valiance in this life towards Jesus and bringing about his kingdom. Endless peoples in past worlds have submitted their wills to the common good, to their Messiah/Savior, submitting to the benevolence of a Zion world community. As part of an ideal world, perfected men will some day live without needing corrections from others, "that man should not counsel his fellow man (D&C 1:19)."

Smith insisted that his sacred calling offered him a unique perspective, superior to school-learned men. He saw himself assisted by the Holy Ghost, "...the learned men... are unlearned in the things of God and have not the gift of the Holy Ghost. ...The Holy

Ghost...is within me, and comprehends more than all the world: and I will associate myself with Him.”<sup>21</sup> Throughout the sermons, he affirmed his close proximity to God’s favor, comparing himself to Christ, “for I speak as one having authority.”<sup>22</sup> He explained that all men can come to the Lord’s mysteries and receive answers for themselves, but they need to “...understand the character of God, and how to come to him...” then God can begin “...to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it.”<sup>23</sup> Though Smith was devoted to the Bible and gave it as his direct resource, he indicated that God was his real inspiration. Thus, he credited both the Bible and God,

I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible. If I do, I think there are so many over-wise men here, that they would cry “treason” and put me to death. So I will go to the old Bible and turn commentator today.<sup>24</sup>

Smith’s “investigation” would have been a more “spiritual” evidence of the plural Gods teaching. He quoted consistently from the Bible, respecting its authority with the people of his times. Again and again, he said he would support himself in his teaching of the plurality of Gods from the Bible, “...for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible,” and again, “...and I will show it from the Bible.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, he referred to his discourse as a revelation, explaining,

...the things were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.... All things...are revealed to us in the abstract, and independent of...this mortal tabernacle, but are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all; and those revelations which will save our spirits will save our bodies.<sup>26</sup>

Smith affirmed his authority to reveal correct information, saying, “I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. ...I want you to know him, and to be

familiar with him....” For Joseph Smith, if men do not understand the nature of God, “...they do not comprehend themselves.” He intended that his audience lift their “...minds into a more lofty sphere... than what the human mind generally aspires to.” He asked what kind of being God was, and affirmed that eternal life depended on a knowledge of “...the only true God...” (John. 17:3) Ever conscious of critical voices skeptical towards his teachings, and expressing awareness of threats on his life, Smith stated that if he were able to convey an understanding of God to his audience, then,

Let every man and woman henceforth sit in silence, put their hands on their mouths, and never lift their hands or voices, or say anything against the man of God ...again. But if I fail to do it, it comes my duty to renounce all further pretension to revelations and inspirations, or to be a prophet, and I should be like the rest of the world - a false teacher, be hailed as a friend, and no man would seek my life. <sup>27</sup>

In expressing sarcasm, Smith was responding to years of skepticism directed towards him. At the same time, he was confident he had something to say that would prove his calling as a prophet. To justify himself, he intended to undo man’s ideas about God and “...prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. I am going to inquire after God; for I want you all to know him, and to be familiar with him.”

Smith said he was going to go back “before the world was, to show what kind of being God is.” He asked, “What sort of a being was God in the beginning?” Then, he answered his own question by indicating how God was made a man and Adam was made in his image,

...I am going to prove it to you from the Bible, and tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race, and why He interferences 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...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 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.<sup>28</sup>

At this point, Smith reminded the conference attendees his subject was directed to those who suffer from the loss of their loved ones. One of the consoling thoughts he felt he was giving to mourners was the chance for them to know for themselves "...how God came to be God." He recognized that what he had to say went against the wisdom of the world, but as he had emphasized it, he claimed to be getting his knowledge from the Holy Ghost and the Bible. It is in the "other-worldliness" of such knowledge of God that makes Smith's concepts so innovative in the world of ideas.

As further consolation for those who mourn, Smith interpreted the Gospel of John to let his audience understand that to read of the Son's life and experiences is to learn what suffering the Father himself experienced in another world. He would be suggesting that it is helpful for people who suffer to know that the Head Gods themselves, Father and Son, have suffered. *Both* died ignominiously on the cross in separate worlds.

The nature of Godhood not only lies in being able to sacrifice and suffer, but also to choose good instead of evil, "We have imagined ...that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see." Contrary to the traditional concept of an "unchanging God," Smith introduced the concept of an "evolving God." Moreover, he emphasized the concept of a Father God who had dwelt on a world like his Son, Jesus, did on this earth, "...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.”<sup>29</sup>

Smith then indicated from the Bible an exact verse where Jesus told of the Father undergoing a sacrificial death to bring about salvation for a people of another world and raising up others in resurrection. Moreover, Jesus himself, as the Son, would undergo the same kind of death that the Father had experienced. Smith affirmed a pattern of Messianic sacrifice in three worlds. First, there are the gospel accounts of Jesus’ death and resurrection in this world. Second, Smith quoted from the Gospel of John referring to the Father being the exemplar of Jesus’ life, which would include his death and resurrection,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, sheweth him all things that himself doeth” (John. 5:19-20)

If the Son “doeth...what he seeth the Father do,” makes one realize that Jesus’ death on the cross was also what he saw his Father do. They both died and were resurrected. So, from the Bible comes a vision of sacrifices in two worlds. In a reverse order, in looking at what Jesus did, one can see what the Father had done. As Smith developed this concept, he indicated that Jesus repeated a ritual, a sacred sacrifice that would apparently be reserved for all Head Gods. Smith was showing to his audience a major example from the Bible of how more than one God exists like the God of this earth, the God of the Bible. The example of the life of the Son God of this world indicates what the Father God had already done before. Thus, Smith appears to have penetrated the monologue of Jesus and reasoned anew, in a more satisfying way, the riddle of the Father and

Son relationship, corroborating his claim that “he could show it from the Bible.”

Joseph Smith, therefore, held up in the “King Follett Discourse,” the example of two separate Gods sacrificing themselves as Messiahs on two distinct worlds, earth and heaven. But, later, using reasoning, in the “Sermon in the Grove,” he extended his argument to that of yet another Father God, the Father of the Father, on yet another world. He said that the “Father of the Father was also a Messiah,” for, “wherever was there a father who was not once a son, or a son that did not become a father.” Such thinking would extend the plurality of Gods pattern into an infinity of Messianic Head Gods.

When Jesus came resigned to die in Jerusalem, he was in the process of following his Father’s own sacrificial atonement and resurrection completed on another world. Jesus was anxious and sorrowful for good reason. His impatience with his disciples, who could sleep in Gethsemane while he anguished over his death, points to a very human God. Jesus indicates by his emotional concern knowledge of his immediate future to which he alone was painfully privy; the disciples had not had the kind of instruction Jesus himself had received and were not aware of Jesus’ knowledge of his imminent death.

The Mormon prophet, envisioning the Son’s destiny to be *what the Son saw the Father do*, was saying he recognized a pattern of *laying down* of all Head Gods’ bodies. From the repetition of things in earth and heaven, one is left to presume this repetitive order is for all worlds. All Head Gods would be killed by crucifixion and *taken up, the others* in previous worlds and the Son, Jesus, in this world. Thus, from the Bible, Smith revealed how Fathers were Messiahs like their Sons. This unique Biblical recognition

helps to reinforce Smith's unusually keen readership of the Bible. No previous reader had seen the enigma of this scripture to undo it in the manner that Smith did. Smith made clear the natural relationship and progressive evolution of Son and Father Gods. .

Moreover, for Smith, as the Son becomes the Father of this world, he will rule as a king. As Smith stated in his Tenth Article of Faith, "...Christ will reign personally upon the earth." Being the king of the earth, he becomes its chief Father, which makes clearer an enigmatic verse in the Book of Mormon, "I am the Father and the Son" (Ether 3:14). Jesus described himself as the "Father and the Son" millennia before coming into mortality on earth. As confirmation of the concept of the Son who is/becomes also the Father, the Mormon sense of a pre-world plan for Jesus as the Messiah supports Christ's comment to Pilate, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born" (John 18:37).

As stated, two months later, in the Sermon in Grove, Smith added to the number of Father messiahs by indicating that the "Father of the Father was a messiah in another world." Joseph Smith can be seen regularly adding concepts to the Hebrew tradition. After he had pronounced his Bible translation complete in 1833, he was not able to put a close to Bible translations, his semantic extensions. Up to the very end of his adult life, at age 39, he was making additions. He explained his expansions by saying that the spirit walked through his body day by day, giving him a new line upon a new line of gospel information.

Latter-day Saints are afloat in an expansion of the Bible story that is so massive that they hardly recognize the size of it. For them, one part of Smith's Bible constructions

are as valid as another or as the original Bible text itself. Smith has done his work so well for Mormons that the various parts appear as authentic as the information of the Bible. . However, considering the breadth of Smith's additions and the depth of its assertions, it is no wonder that ministers and priests, trained within the strict limits of the Bible, have an instinctive distrust of Mormonism and its "extending of the text and filling in of its silences."

There is a sequential logic to Smith's argument about the man-like nature of the God of Israel. Through Smith's lifetime teaching ministry, he indicated Jesus' life's to be in stages, Creator, God of Israel, Savior and Redeemer, and finally Father God and King. Jesus' destiny would appear to be to give himself wholly to this earth. Those who have been worthy of Jesus will inherit a position alongside him and will be, "...heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16). He will be the future king of this world having gathered all Israel, all the righteous of the earth into a Zion world, symbolized in Jewish and Christian literature by the holy cities of Jerusalem and Zion. His role of Gatherer was indicated by Caiaphas, the high priest, who said,

Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. (John 11:50-52)

Jesus, being the great Gatherer, clarifies the anticipated empowerment of the Son by the Father. He will have been prepared to take on the responsibility of this world forever. Jesus has ultimate power: to create, organize, and extend life for others, as Smith

stated, "...Jesus said, As the Father hath power in Himself, even so hath the Son power to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious...to lay down His body and take it up again." <sup>30</sup>

The Father and Son relationships from Smith's King Follett Discourse perspective indicates that Jesus' sacrifice was a fulfillment of an example already set up for him by his Father. The Son's willingness caused him to follow in the way of his Father. He did "...nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do." Smith states that the Father was a Messiah and Savior in a prior realm where he atoned for the sins of another world, his own world's population of men and women. These earlier peoples from the prior world called heaven, have gone on to perfecting themselves, even perfected men-gods. They are otherwise called the host of heaven.

To Smith, the Father is a physical person, as was the Jesus a person, the same kind of human being. In a mortal life on his world, the Father was also a Messiah/Savior. The Son mirrored what his Father did. He showed by the events of his own life the pattern for Sons in all worlds. The training of the Son is what was meant when John the Beloved reported Jesus doing *all he sees the Father do*. This would include dying on a cross and being resurrected from the dead.

Using the Bible, Joseph Smith explained the completion of the preparation of a "true God" (John 17:3), as a Father God, for his work in the eternities. In this understanding is demonstrated the regular passage of a Son to the status of a Father. The full meaning of Godhood includes the eventual engendering of spirit children and their

development into immortal beings capable of joy and willing to perform services for themselves and others, so that one world after another might take place as the result of a unified effort of intelligences having learned in all diligence and holiness to defer to each other to make all things harmoniously come about.

In this redemptive promise to man, all those, who make a covenant with Jesus and express sufficient devotion to the Son can join the Son and become co-heirs with Him. This will constitute the ultimate way of learning of "...the only true God and Jesus Christ..." According to Smith's perspective, there is more than the Atonement and power to resurrect others inherent in the choice of a Head God. He is to develop relationships and have with him trusted friends and helpers who must be also encouraged to find their own power within themselves to become co-heirs with all others. This self-generated inner power is visible as the manifestation of the energy of faith and must be present in a person to be pleasing to God, to become, "joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together (Romans 8: 16-17).

Thus, to understand the developing status of a Messiah, who eventually becomes a Father in heaven, also clarifies the position of those who join him and who become themselves members of the host of heaven. Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse continues Paul's explanation of the role of the children of men, who are joint heirs with God,

Here, then, is eternal life - to know the only wise and true God, and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and *to be kings and priests to God*, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another and from a small capacity to a great one, from grace to grace, from

exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power....God...is not trifling with you or me.<sup>31</sup>

Some Mormons take the above to mean that they themselves would become like God, that is, a God Most High, and rule a separate world of their own. To read the “King Follett Discourse” to mean that some privileged men will become Head Gods, of the same stature as the Father and the Son, disregards the scriptural expectation that men will be helpers to God the Most High; they will be “*priests and kings* to God” (Revelation 1:5). Joseph Smith indicated that Jesus represents the highest level of Godhood. Moreover, he was chosen while still a spirit. All men working on their salvation already have their bodies and are beyond the election of the pre-existence.

The “King Follett Discourse” teaches the concept of God being a man and men being gods. In the Discourse, Joseph Smith, in speaking for Jesus, says that “My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling and I must do the same.” If one could say that the Son are from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, “so did the Father gain his knowledge in this natural way.” Smith teaches the Father clearly has human qualities, emotional concern, is capable of fear, and also suggests he was a progressing God. The Father learns what he knows, a kind of progression on the part of the Father. The Mormon God has progressed and learned what he knows. All men can expect to do the same to elevate themselves to be kings and priests unto God.

Philosophers and theologians have upheld God as uncreated, incomprehensible, perfect and fully omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Before Joseph Smith’s

theological concepts, God was certainly not conceived of as a man. Below are quoted sections of the King Follett Discourse wherein Smith discusses what he considers the correct revelation of God's true nature as a man. By his use of the word exalted, some people have wished to interpret that Joseph meant that God was distinctly different than men. However, if one wishes to enter into the sense of Joseph Smith's vision of the next world, one must attempt to envision his use of exalted more in the way of adequate, perfected, or advanced rather than *incomprehensible*.

*God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits 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. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and 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.<sup>32</sup>*

The essence of Smith's concepts makes God a man. Many feel that God is somehow different, somehow incomprehensible, and cannot be exactly a man. For many, God cannot be just a man. He must somehow be different than man in some mysterious sense. However, the conclusion of Joseph Smith was that he is exalted in the way Jesus has been elected to a calling higher than anyone else's and has proven by his life and actions he deserves the respect of all the world, but his high election does not exclude his human essence.

Moreover, it would be more exact to use exalted as if God is higher than man through his excellence and intelligence. Men and God have the same common appearances. As Jesus was a man in his mortal life, he will be as other men in the after life. The highest skill of man is that of God's, namely, intelligence, "the glory of god is intelligence" (D&C 93:36). Smith's emphasis for God was on one who is privileged and almighty through intelligence; both men and God are privileged through intelligence. For Smith, God is a man, a *wiser man* than all other men. As is written in Smith's scriptures, God explains, "I am more intelligent than they all" (Abraham 3:19).

Joseph Smith's concept that God is a man means there will be little difference between God and his human creation when as "exalted beings" they will be together. As envisioned in the culmination of the Hebrew Tradition's ideal concept of a universal resurrection, they will be like each other. The Father and the Son are the same as the exalted men and women of their creation: they are all men and gods by virtue of having made obedient choices. Jesus was chosen from among other spirits and is coequal with everyone, except for his election: he is the Messiah, the Anointed One. By virtue of his anointing, he becomes exalted, but he is still a man. So is his Father even a man. While still a spirit, he too was chosen as the Messiah. None of the children of men from this world can be chosen as was he to be a Messiah. The Anointed One works out his own salvation beginning as a spirit entity like other men. Mortal men already have their bodies and cannot become an "Anointed One" or a Son. Although, many aspire to be a Father of a separate world, according to Joseph Smith's last sermon explanations of a Father God

for each world. He is the only one chosen as “the Son.” He was crucified and resurrected and will become “the most high Father God for this earth.”

Joseph Smith’s teaching of a plurality of Gods also indicates that men are gods. Jesus said himself that men are gods. He was challenged by Jews who wanted to stone him for claiming he was the Son of God. According to Smith, all men are sons of God, all men are gods. To distinguish the higher calling of Jesus from ordinary men, in that he is designated “the God of this world,” God and Son referring to him are written in capital letters; god and son referring to men are written small letters. Thus, by his unusual life and final suffering, he justified his Son-ship, that is, this higher calling, and is thereafter distinguished from the son-ship of all men. Jesus affirmed to these taunting Jews that his Father had a filial relationship with humanity by pointing to an Old Testament scripture that indicated the children of men were gods. Jesus referred to the Psalmist, who said, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High" (Psalms 82:6). In indicating men’s nature as children of God, Jesus said, "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God" (John. 35-36).

To support Joseph Smith in extending his plural Gods doctrine as a Bible teaching, one may see three biblical ways that men themselves can be reckoned as gods. First, they are gods in the sense of being “children of God.” They were “created in his image” (Genesis 1:26). Men are gods as part of their genetic makeup, descending as they

do from a God. Second, when Satan urged on Adam and Eve the eating of the fruit of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he said, ye "...shall be as the gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). To have knowledge and use it is to be able to distinguish between good and evil is an expression of intelligence, another mark of a god. Third, men become gods, that is, children of God on earth, when, as Jesus said in the above verse from John, "the word of God comes to them" (Psalms 82:6). All of the above have to do with man's agency, based in his good choices, to be able to rule as a king and a priest.

Other New Testament verses confirm Smith's concept of the role of the Son and his associate gods, "...the Son,...appointed heir of all things....sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Heb. 1:2-4). Jesus is further celebrated, "...God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Heb. 1:9). In the next chapter of Hebrews, Jesus is represented as *one of the children of God*, for all men are his brethren, "For both he that sanctified and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11). Thus, to understand the nature of the universe as Joseph Smith taught it from the Bible, preconceptions must change to think of God as a man, and his associate men, especially holy and perfected men, also as gods.

One may want to ask Joseph Smith, "Well, what does this all mean...what do we get out of knowing this?" When the wife of King Follett asked Joseph to remember her dead husband in this conference sermon, he turned to his audience and said that he was

going to speak "for all those who mourn." In offering the sermon he did, he felt he was consoling people, who grieved for their loved ones, by indicating the further reality of the afterlife that was peopled by those taught to sacrifice and take responsibility for themselves. To learn to sacrifice and take responsibility begins to be a sufficient reason for enduring the trials of life and thus justifies Smith in bringing this message to his people as support in mourning their dead.

As Smith represents him, a King of heaven, or a Father in heaven, holds this highest office as a *world leader*. It means there will be a kingdom on earth where those who have trained themselves in sacrifice and unselfishness will be given the reins of the government under the holy and new Father, the most high God of the new world, who in Mormon doctrine is Jesus the Anointed One. In further extrapolation from Joseph's concept of a world of a man-God and men who are gods, those who will be the "greatest of all will be the servants of all." They will serve their less capable brethren, who have made mistakes in their lives, who will learn from the obedient obedience to this world's Messianic, appointed leader or the new Father.

Smith was devising the material that is still essentially used to teach people in the temples during the Nauvoo period. Some primary information of the temple is structured in the concepts of his last two sermons. Most notably, LDS temples are places where men and women swear an eternal covenant of loyalty to Jesus that peace may reign forever in this world as it does in all the other worlds of the universe. This would accomplish the Lord's prayer, that God's "...will be done in earth as it is in heaven." The present purpose

of temples around the world is to offer those willing an early chance to swear allegiance to Jesus. Those who can “believe without seeing and touching” and are willing to covenant with God now and will keep the promises of that covenant will be given right to be raised in the first resurrection. Among those allowed to rise in the first resurrection, some will have bodies celestial and others bodies terrestrial (D&C 76:50-80). Those most righteous, those of the celestial order, will live in glory with him,

...they shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory... heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ...[until arriving] at the station of a [perfected- God, ...the same as those who have gone before.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Joseph Smith, setting up a variation of expectations, not only identifies God within the uncertainty of the universe, but also offers an identity and a life full of responsibility to men. In other words, God does not sprinkle magic dust on men when they are resurrected and assure them happiness and a gratuitous life. It can be interpreted from Smith that he saw a need for God and man to unite before the uncertainties of eternal life. Man will thereby be exalted both through the grace of God and the works or efforts of each person’s own generative abilities as an individual. According to the dialogue with Satan and Eve, the constitution of knowledge is a result of experience with good and evil.

Those human intelligences having highest moral intelligence most satisfactorily separate good out from evil. God knows best of all how to extract good from evil. Like God, man must learn how to meet the challenges of every moment whether it be to bring peace to a situation, avoid offending others, or provide the knowledge and application to

perform duties and meet needs for oneself and others. Joseph Smith is suggesting that a constant need will exist for God and man to unite before the uncertainties of life. Man will thus be exalted both through his works and the grace of God who makes the holiest his personal companions.

Therefore, much as in this life, within the scope of one's developed capabilities and responsibilities in the eternal world, each man and woman will be fully responsible for his or her own success. This means that it is of importance for each person to continue to be schooled and converted over to good works and a productive life. To each person's capacity, he or she will be brought to submission to God's law and will be most useful to the extent of his or her degree of obedience. In the light of this kind of vision of the afterlife, especially, for the most obedient and capable, one can see how life must be regarded as more than a trial. For the most holy of God's children, it represents a rehearsal of duty for the next life and the constituting of a resolve, learn-ed in life, to have a better future through a more unflinching attitude towards life's challenges. The projected life in the sharing of a Zion world, a Zion universe, represents the real meaning of Smith's concept of men and women practicing holiness to be as gods, a reverence for all things, including a zeal and urgency to do right things for altruistic purposes of themselves.

While this focus is on the nature of God, by attending to Joseph Smith's teachings, it can also be seen as constituting a parallel discovery of the nature of and destiny of man as the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. The Mormon Prophet

presents a picture of capable men-gods in vast numbers. Moreover, Smith indicates that Jesus is fully knowledgeable about his Father's power over death. For his part, Jesus will be prepared to govern a world. Evidence for the kind of Fatherhood, projected by Joseph Smith for Jesus, lies in the proclamation by Joseph F. Smith's First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in 1914 that represents a restatement of Smith's lifetime teachings. It describes Jesus as the "Father and the Son" confirming the sense of him being a Father to all men and women.<sup>34</sup>

Both Father and Son are titles; they are not names. In the LDS church, this circumstance is parallel to when a bishop later becomes a stake president. It would be proper to call this per-son, who is a stake president also bishop; he is still a bishop. In the growing Mormon discourse adding to the Hebrew tradition, supplemented within Smith's logic for Jesus, Jesus knew of his calling prior to his interaction with Moses. To call himself both "Father and Son" is a consistent vision of himself that is reflective of the other Biblically based matters that have undergone a gradual unfolding, recalling the evolution of inter-generational Hebrew *midrash*.

From the New Testament account, when Jesus departed from the earth, he went straight into the sky, two men in white apparel appeared and said, "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)" Smith did not refer to what Jesus may be doing presently wherever it was that he went. But angels dressed in white had come announcing his return from the sky. Jesus is to come down as he went up. It is reasonable to assume that

he went to heaven to join his Father, where, alongside his Father, he will be continued to be called and viewed as the Son.

From Joseph Smith's revelation of multiple worlds with Messiahs, one gains an insight into the nature of "other worlds." The presumed patterns set for these Sons of these other worlds, who become Fathers, indicate that one can assume that Jesus has spent the time since his departure at the side of the Father, at his Father's side, learning about the rulership of a world in the context of the entire universe. He has been learning how to govern an eternal world, a world that has gone beyond its initial mortality stage and has become a Zion world, but a world that will still surely have problems. With what he has learned from his Father, Jesus will have gone on increasing in stature and glory. He will have learned to cope within spheres of responsibility, to bring with him, when he returns to this earth, all the wisdom and experience of other worlds.

An important contribution Smith has made to Bible understandings is not just an extending of the text and a filling in of silences, but a renewed enabling of others to complete the text and ellipses of the Hebrew tradition. Joseph Smith does speak of Godly attainments that need be seen to parallel man's "line upon line" progressions that move a step at a time,

...the same as all Gods have done before, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings....<sup>35</sup>

As a careful student of the Bible, Smith led his listeners to discover Bible paths never trod by other interpreters. He indicates Jesus was instructed in the mode of his own

death by the example of His Father. To underline his use of the Bible to come to greater plausibility of the plurality of Gods, in presenting the discourse, Joseph had directed his audience's attention to a Gospel scripture that underlines Jesus' capability of raising both himself and all men from the dead as did His Father in another world. Smith surprises the reader with this palpable verse that indicates his ability to "show it from the Bible," when he brings clearly from the Bible the verse, "The son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do" (John 5:19). Joseph goes on to ask, "What did Jesus do?" And Smith answers for the Son,

Why, I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself. So that Jesus treads in the tracks of his father and inherits what God did before, and God is thus glorified and exalted in the salvation and exaltation of all his children.<sup>36</sup>

At this point, in the "King Follett Discourse," Smith suggests a gradual placement of Jesus to be like his Father; he can be seen destined to become himself also a Father, for, he "treads in the tracks of his father and inherits what God [his Father] did before..." Smith said, not for Jesus alone, but as a principle for everyone concerned with exaltation, "...you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top and so it is with the principles of the Gospel - you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation." Joseph Smith emphasized the universal difficulties in learning to be an eternal person, a god, or a king and a priest, a being fit for all seasons,

*But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world, it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.*<sup>37</sup>

In Joseph's ladder of exaltation, he indicates how spiritual life requires a step at a time and one must anticipate gradual growth. The fact that this "learning and comprehension" is a "great work" points to the purpose not only of a first resurrection and a millennial period, but also to the reason for a delaying of telestial peoples, those of the second resurrection, into a special time period, being in the second millennial resurrection, when *prepared others* will be best able to help the weaker ones towards a more perfect life.

According to the Bible interpretation of Smith and other teachings, particularly Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the first resurrection will offer those who come out early of their graves an opportunity to perfect themselves as an obedient and holy people. Based on Smith's ideas, as Latter-day Saints are now taught the simple skills from cradle to grave, of social interaction, responsibility of office, and the amiable arts of compatible relationships, so will the participants of the later life learn eternal, human-friendly skills.

In the Mormon perspective of going forward, all knowledge is seen as a means to help men and women progress. With Smith's emphasis on knowledge increase, one of the great benefits of the afterlife will be increases in knowledge for all its participants. He taught that knowledge of all kinds, spiritual and secular, help people be stronger and will have been best cultivated in those judged worthy to be in the first resurrection.

The world of those first resurrected will be in part one of preparation to be of greatest help to those who will follow, who have not been as able to cope with mortality and have led lives not in compliance with Jesus' commands and the requirements of life. The universal salvation of men will be through knowledge and obedience to higher levels of moral behavior. There will be a physical change and a new fixed order to the nature of the earth.

In the cosmic additions of Smith's reading of the Bible, much will have to change in the order of the world. Most importantly, accommodation will have to be made for the seemingly numberless peoples, likely more than 100,000,000,000, who will be dwelling on the earth. In the rebuilding of the structure of the earth after the renovating physical changes, the terrestrial just will govern the telestial unjust; the Celestial just will govern the terrestrial just. In addition, the celestial will have the additional capacity to be with the Father where he dwells, that is, in the heavens.

The mobility of celestial beings is confirmed by information that Smith did not include in either of his discourses, but can become obvious to readers of the Bible, and would be needed to round out his theology of a God of plural Gods. In the New Testament, on the day of Jesus' resurrection, he met Mary Magdalene outside the tomb, and said, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father... I ascend to my Father, and your Father" (John 20:17). Later that day, Jesus met two believers on the way to Emmaus and did not warn them against touching him, but, "drew himself near..." (Luke 24:15). The evening of the day of resurrection, the apostles and disciples were met

together and Jesus appeared to them and charged them to touch him, “handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). This would indicate that within the course of the earlier part of the day, Jesus did “ascend to his Father,” that is, ascend to heaven...and return.

Communication between worlds and among Gods would have to be on a different plane than men currently understand. While the speed of airplanes and rocket ships is accepted, instantaneous space travel is still a supernatural phenomenon, beyond the ken of human knowledge. Yet, all the understanding of the Jewish/Christian/Mormon tradition is based in intellectual suppositions of a supernatural nature. Joseph Smith’s final speeches need be seen as an effort to “extend the text and fill in the silences,” like the finding of pieces to a gigantic puzzle. The Father and Son relationships presented by Joseph Smith in these discourses offer reasonable, progressive answers to questions raised by the Hebrew tradition as well as set the reader off with more questions.

At a point in the “King Follett Discourse,” Joseph Smith explains how from a simple transformation of a Hebrew word, all the above evidence indicating a plurality of Gods can be even more convincingly justified from the Bible. It is likely Smith received inspiration for his polytheistic teaching from learning of the plural nature of the word God in Hebrew, *elohim*. He explained that from the first word of the Bible, *beroshit*, comes a concept of a *Head God*. Within *beroshit* is another, shorter Hebrew word, *rosh*, that means head. Joseph assured his listeners that “...an old Jew without any authority...” had changed the beginning of the Bible. Smith saw his role as prophet as an entitlement

to special information and he was endowed with translation powers beyond others. Thus, he saw a relationship between the root, *rosh* (head), of the first word and the second word *elohim* (Gods). Effectively, he was right, in Hebrew, to extract *rosh* out of *beroshit*, and put it with *elohim*, the third word in the Bible, would make the two words say, “the head of the Gods.”<sup>38</sup>

From the understanding of a God who is “the head” of other Gods, who meet together in councils, Joseph explained that Gods meet to plan the creation of worlds. An example of the “council-government” exists and functions in the LDS church today, a system that uses the opinions and agencies of others. Councils echo and resonate down the church today from the Councils of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles, the Seventies, the Stake Presidency and the high councilmen, the Bishopric’s ward councils, to the various Priesthood and Relief Society councils. It is natural for Mormons to envision a God who meets with others and places trust in their ability to perform in order to promote the progress of other beings like themselves. Joseph paraphrased the sense of the beginning of the Bible in this way,

In the beginning, the head of the gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it. When we begin to learn this way, we begin to learn the only true God, and what kind of being we have got to worship. Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach him, and how to ask so as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and how to come to him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us.<sup>39</sup>

Mormons would say that due to his prophetic calling, Joseph Smith was unlike any other reader of the Bible, coming to new recognitions of the nature of God within the

concept of *rosh elohim*, *head of Gods*. These Gods, or *elohim*, associate with the head God and they counsel together. The most important thing they would have to counsel over would be the further extension of the life of man in the universe through the creation of new worlds, “For behold, this is my work and my glory - to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man...” (Moses 1:39).

Joseph Smith constituted a curious mixture of humble spirituality and pride-filled confidence in the office he believed he held. While he railed against his antagonists, he still gave all due for his insights concerning the nature of God to the Holy Ghost. He credits the Holy Ghost for his being able to understand the concept of *rosh* standing for the “Head God.” In reference to the Bible and the Holy Ghost, he said,

I have got the oldest book in the world; but I [also] have the oldest book in my heart, even the gift of the Holy Ghost. I have all the four Testaments. Come here, ye learned men, and read, if you can. I should not have introduced this testimony, were it not to back up the word *rosh* - the head, the Father of the Gods. I should not have brought it up, only to show that I am right. <sup>40</sup>

Joseph then considered the Hebrew verb of the first sentences in the Bible, *barah*. Instead of the traditional translation of the word that make it mean “create,” Joseph saw in it an alternate meaning of “organizing.” Again, with his claim to privileged information due to his office and calling, he paralleled science in discrediting the doctrine of *ex nihilo*, belief in the creating of matter out of nothing. He indicated that “...God had materials to organize the world out of chaos - out of chaotic matter...” He continued, these elements “...may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning and can have no end.” <sup>41</sup>

Joseph brought his best known discourse to a close with three interrelated concepts, the immortality of the spirit or the everlasting quality of the mind of man, the power of knowledge, and universal forgiveness of sin. All three aspects have a combined bearing on the eventual resurrection of man. First, Joseph Smith's teaching on the immortality of the spirit of man concerns origins in the pre-existence. He taught that "The intelligence of spirits had no beginning, neither will it have an end. ...There never was a time when there were not spirits, for they are co-equal [co-eternal] with our Father in heaven." <sup>42</sup>

The Prophet saw his learning relationship with God an example for all people's increase in knowledge. Part of man's preparation for immortality comes in the acquisition of knowledge. God has "...power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another and that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of the spirits." <sup>43</sup> In a distinctive vision for man's advancement, God is represented as concerned with the weaker intelligences and knowledge is a means to their salvation. One is led to believe that a continuing effort in the after-life will consist in a sustained learning program to help elevate men and women in knowledge to better prepare them for an adequate, joyful eternal life.

Joseph Smith explained that "...God has wrought out a salvation for all men..." He further indicated that "If a man has knowledge he can be saved." But, salvation that is brought about through knowledge must be tempered with willingness to obey the Gospel,

at which time, "...he is saved." There will be a universal forgiveness as weaker intelligences will have opportunity to develop into more perfected beings.<sup>44</sup> Smith notes the requirement that a man be obedient, which means that above all they learn to obey the Anointed One of this world, and "All will suffer until they obey Christ himself."<sup>45</sup> Man earns forgiveness through knowledge, that is, experience with good and evil, that brings him to obedience.

Salvation and glory will come to most individuals based on anticipated improved worthiness that all men and women have capacity to achieve with a positive development of their will and knowledge. When a person has gained in sufficient knowledge and accepts Christ, "All sins shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost, for Jesus will save all except the sons of perdition...."<sup>46</sup> Joseph identifies some who will be sons of perdition as those, who are full of "...the spirit of the devil - the same spirit that they had who crucified the Lord of Life... You cannot save such a person, you cannot bring them to repentance; they make open war like the devil, and awful is the consequence."<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Joseph Smith confirms that the immortal spirits of men are given opportunity by a kindly Father to advance through knowledge to a higher level of life. They will find a salvation of happiness in a universal forgiveness extended to all who accept the Christ. Thus, Joseph adds a reasonable kindness to the obscure complexity of the *otherworldly* nature of the resurrection and the afterlife. He indicates that a higher value comes from "The best men [who] bring forth the best works,"<sup>48</sup> and a certain

abundance flows naturally to good men and women. Herein lies the consolation to the relatives of King Follett in what was a second funeral sermon for Follett, as well as consolation to others who had “walked worthily” and in the words of Smith had been “seen [to] sink asleep in the arms of Jesus.” For Smith, they were “...now in the celestial kingdom of God.”<sup>49</sup>

Ten days before his death, on June 16, Joseph Smith revisited his concerns about the plurality of Gods in a second discourse, “The Sermon in the Grove, East of the Temple,” the subject of the next chapter. He finished his first discourse on a plurality of Gods affirming his own goodness and intentions as ever having wanted to choose the right,

I cannot lie down until all my work is finished. I never think any evil, nor do anything to the harm of my fellowman. When I am called by the trump of the archangel and weighed in the balance, you will all know me then. I add no more. God bless you all. Amen.<sup>50</sup>

#### A COMMENT ON THE RECENT RECEPTION OF THE KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE

As a final, general note on the reception of the “King Follett Discourse,” it can be noted that a number of writers have briefly considered the sermon, but to date a major work has not appeared. One issue of *BYU Studies*, largely dedicated to the “King Follett Discourse,” contains the most information about the speech that has yet been published.<sup>51</sup> Joseph Smith’s speech, “The King Follett Discourse,” is celebrated in the studies in this journal as a high point in Smith’s ministry. The teachings have been revered and pondered by admirers of Joseph Smith, but for a hundred years, church leadership has

left the plural Gods information contained in the discourses lie dormant. As pointed out in chapter two, some writers, Franklin D. Richards, B. H. Roberts, Bruce R. McConkie, and Joseph Fielding Smith have notably mentioned or quoted from the discourse in their writings. Charles Penrose and James E. Talmage have notably disregarded the sermon. When the managing editor, Jay Todd, of the church's magazine, *The Ensign*, was asked if an article on the plural Gods doctrine could be published in the magazine, the author of this thesis was told, "...this is the Brethren's magazine and I know that the Brethren would not want an article on the plurality of Gods published in their magazine." In contacting an apostle of the church, the author of this thesis was told by this General Authority that he would not read the thesis; he insisted that the thesis not be published. The president of the church likewise did not want to deal with the author regarding concepts contained in the study. The thesis writer was at first told "to stop writing." But upon insistence, to know why writing had to cease, the author was told to speak with what turned out to be two stake presidents, as is the current way members are dealt with regarding doctrine. The two stake presidents did at great length deal with the issue. They read and appeared to agree to the doctrinal conclusions reached in this thesis, but would not allow the study to be sent to those higher in authority. One of the stake presidents was offended by what seemed to be disrespect for certain General Authorities, who seemed to appear in an earlier version of the study improperly portrayed in the wrong for opposing the plural Gods doctrine. LDS leadership's conclusion for this doctrine at this time, as portrayed in this thesis, is that its exploration and expansion comes from a writer who

lacks the authority to speak for the church. The teaching should be handled by the highest of authorities, if not solely by the president of the church. In their opinion, the thesis's speculative conclusions should not be published and will thus not be published.

## Notes

1. Steve Epperson, *Mormons and Jews* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 82. Epperson discusses the relationship of Joseph Smith with his Hebrew tutor, Joshua Seixas, author of *Manual of Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners*. Seixas was in his early thirties as was Smith; they enjoyed each other's company. They started classes in January of 1836 with forty adult students. Classes met for one hour, twice a day for five days a week. After the first week thirty more pupils joined Seixas and he found himself teaching four separate classes. A class for advanced students included Smith, Cowdery, Rigdon, Orson Hyde, and Orson Pratt plus some others. Smith was especially devoted and received a certificate of graduation from Seixas stating, "Mr Joseph Smith Junior...has been indefatigable in acquiring the principles of the sacred language of the Old Testament Scriptures." Epperson indicated that Smith was a busy person, "For Smith this was a season of great activity and happiness. He was simultaneously supervising the completion of work on the temple for its 27 March dedication, instructing priesthood quorums in their duties, receiving visitors, "attending to family concerns," speaking to numerous congregations, officiating at marriages, daily laboring on "my studies as usual," and attending school." Epperson further quoted Smith, "my soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original, and I am determined to pursue the study of the languages, until I shall be master of them."

2. Andrew F. Smith, *John C. Bennett, Sainly Scoundrel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 122. The title of Bennett's book changed a little, but finally the title page appeared as *The History of the Saints; or an expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism*.
3. Lyndon W. Cook, *The Life of William Law* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1992). Cook explores the angry relationship that Joseph Smith and William Law experienced together. Law went from a deeply believing person in Joseph Smith to holding the bitterest of feelings against him. He justified his earlier faith in Smith by calling him a "fallen prophet," mainly due to Smith's practice of polygamy.
4. Donald Q. Cannon, "The King Follett Discourse: Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon in Historical Perspective," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2, (1978); 181.
5. Ibid 186.
6. The quotation, "extending the text and filling the silences," comes from a speech given by Philip Barlow on the complexities of Joseph Smith at Yale University in May of 2003. The speech is unpublished and is used by Barlow's permission.
7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 417.
8. Ibid 418.
9. Donald Q. Cannon, 181.
10. Van Hale, "The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse" *BYU Studies*, 18, no. 2, (1978); 210.

11. Van Hale, quoting the *Warsaw Signal*, 3 April 1844, “The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse,” *BYU Studies* 18, 2, (1978), 210.
12. Cannon, 186.
13. Epperson, 91.
14. Van Hale, “The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse, 213.
15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings*, 417.
16. Ibid 417.
17. Van Hale, 210.
18. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 366.
19. Van Hale, 213.
20. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings*, 387.
21. Ibid 387.
22. Ibid 386.
23. Ibid 395.
24. Ibid 389.
25. Ibid 394-395.
26. Ibid 393.
27. Ibid 390.
28. Ibid 398.
29. Ibid 388.
30. Ibid 390.

32. Ibid 390.

33. Ibid 391.

34. Ibid 391.

35. Ibid 390.

36. Ibid 392.

37. Ibid 391.

38. “Father and Son Proclamation,” *The Improvement Era*, August, 1914. This proclamation appeared, signed by the members of Joseph F. Smith’s First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles, confirming the Fatherhood status of the Son. Joseph Fielding Smith, 391.

39. Ibid 392.

40. Ibid 393.

41. One may well wonder how much Hebrew Joseph Smith could have learned in the weeks he studied it. In spite of the short time he spent studying Hebrew, he came to a major conclusion from the Hebrew of the Hebrew Bible. He insisted in the “Sermon in the Grove” that *elohim*, “the Gods,” was a plural noun and should “always be read in the plural throughout the Bible.” Furthermore, by extracting *rosh*, meaning “head” from *beroshit*, Smith was able to emphasize the Hebrew idea of a “most high God” and give it an all new turn: he gave a social setting to God and a “council of associate Gods” that has raised a willing believer-ship among Mormons. This “association of Gods” was developed from *rosh*, out of the

context of the first words of Genesis. It is in noting how Smith combined *rosh* with *elohim* that one begins to wonder at his precocity in Hebrew. The placing of the two nouns together creates the “construct state” in Hebrew. Smith did it right. He put two nouns together that states in correct Hebrew, the *head of the Gods*. Mormons are willing believers in Smith’s proposal of a social hierarchy, partly because the idea of a “most high God and his associates” so resembles their own hierarchy of “a Prophet and his associate apostles,” who also often meet as a council. Priesthood connects on heaven and on earth.

42. Ibid 394-395.

43. Ibid 394.

44. Ibid 395.

45. Ibid 397.

46. Ibid 401.

47. Ibid 402.

48. Ibid 403.

49. Ibid, 403.

50. Ibid 407.

51. *Brigham Young University Studies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press) Winter 1978, 18, no. 2. Useful for this thesis were the articles, “The King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith’s Greatest Sermon in Historical Perspective,” by Donald Q. Cannon, “The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text,”

by Stan Larson, and “The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse,” by Van Hale.

## CHAPTER IV

## PART TWO OF THE PLURAL GODS DOCTRINE:

## THE JUNE 16, 1844, "SERMON IN THE GROVE"

While Mormons have stopped discussing in public the plural Gods doctrine, they have never ceased to raise aspects of the concept in an unquestioning fashion among themselves. For example, couples share the concept of a joint future, "together with all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Such an affinity to the deep Hebrew past and its promised posterity of thousands of millions implies all the abundance and individual advancement suggested by the Mormon teaching of plural Gods. Nevertheless, in spite of Smith's urgency, conviction, and the notoriety of the "King Follett Discourse," it has not been used as a means to finish the LDS concept of God. Most have faith that "all will be explained in the end." Therefore, at this time, this thesis indicates that a textual clarity has not emerged that authoritatively completes Mormon doctrine.

The "Sermon in the Grove" is a parallel sermon to the "King Follett Discourse." It completes the doctrine of plural Gods as far as Joseph Smith was able to bring it before his untimely death. The concept of a Father God for each world is forwarded and expanded in the "Sermon in the Grove." A Book of Mormon scripture indicates Jesus' destiny: he is a "Son-God" who will become or is already a "Father-God" and calls his followers "sons and daughters,"

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have light, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters

(Ether 3:16).

The “Sermon in the Grove” represents a confirmation of Smith’s final ideas on the plural nature of deity. The primary addition of the last sermon is the concept of endless Father Gods, who have passed through the experiences of the Son of this world as detailed in the Gospels of the New Testament. One of the most compelling arguments for Smith’s doctrine of plural Gods is the logic of his last sermon on the rationality of a son becoming a father, reasoning that all fathers were once sons and sons become fathers.

From this rationale, it would be appropriate to ask in Smith’s support of this filial formulation, “what is the sense of Jesus having a Father and he being a Son, and being referred to as such, unless they were indeed Son and Father?” Many mistrust Smith’s idea of a plurality of Gods. Yet, one might rightly question the traditional Christian doctrine about the non-biblical, one God, Triune doctrine. Why have Christians trusted the Roman Emperor Constantine, who presided over the bishops thatS mandated the concept of the “mysterious Spirit God?” It seems to be an irrational dogma, especially since Jesus is promised to return “down to earth,” *with his body*, the same as he “went up” (Acts 1:11).

To accept Smith’s concepts would mean that even the Father of this world was once a Son. The Father too would have had a Father, who also would have had his Father, and endlessly so, in the timelessness of eternity. The riddle of Jesus being both Father and Son is answered in the realization that he has been a Son, but was anointed “with the oil of gladness” that foreordains him to become a Father. Hence, the election of Jesus in the pre-world as the Messiah for this earth was an appointment to the office of Father and his

high calling is ever implied in his mighty deeds, “And, thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth” (Hebrews 1:9-10).

In the following, the various aspects of the “Sermon in the Grove” will be discussed and then aligned with the concepts of the “King Follett Discourse” to constitute a summary of the plural Gods doctrine. It would be reasonable to assume that some of the Bible-absorbed people converted to Mormonism in Nauvoo would have challenged Joseph Smith on the plural Gods teaching. Indeed, when Smith gave his second sermon about a plurality of Gods, he answered questions apparently raised against the new doctrine by associates and fellow-members. While the first discourse was a presentation of the new doctrine, the final sermon of Smith’s life was a defense of the new teaching based in the Bible.

In the beginning of the “Sermon in the Grove,” Smith made an allusion to the weather as if the rain were part of the challenge he faced from critics to his newly revealed doctrine of plural Gods. His firmness indicates his determination to cause people to believe in the new teaching, “And if it does rain, I’ll preach this doctrine, for the truth shall be preached. I will preach on the plurality of Gods.”<sup>1</sup> Smith thus made it clear that neither rain nor subject would stop him.

As noted, in footnote seven of Chapter One of this thesis are found the potential Biblical scriptures that Franklin D. Richards compiled regarding the plural Gods teaching. In his last discourse, Joseph Smith used two scriptures to prove the plural Gods doctrine based on the authority of two New Testament apostles, Paul and John. Smith

referred to Paul, whom he paraphrased from in I Corinthians 8:5-6, "...there are Gods many and Lords many, and that makes a plurality of Gods.... I testify to you that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods. I have it from God...a testimony of the Holy Ghost." 2

Smith was well aware of the comparison of his doctrine with the ancient classical pantheon of Gods. Admittedly ambiguous, he justified the scripture by virtue as his own personal calling as prophet. However, while Smith testified of the existence of many Gods, he said there was only one God that pertained to man, "I say there are Gods many and Lords many, but to us only one, and we are to be in subjection to that one...." In his mind, this was strong evidence of his teaching, and he further affirmed, "...the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible." 3

Smith also quoted from the Revelation of John that discusses election as part of the plural Gods belief showing the progression of Son to his Father's throne, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21), as well as this verse, "And [Jesus] hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father" (Revelation 1:6). In this latter verse Smith indicates the presence of three Gods are present, Jesus, God the Father, and the Father of Father. The complete verse states,

And from *Jesus Christ* who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and of the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto *God* and his *Father*; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:5-6, emphasis Added)

In this verse, it is Jesus who has made men “kings and priests unto God.” However Smith sees in this verse God the Father having a Father in the words, “unto God and his Father.” It is possible to read the two names, “God and His Father,” as if the God mentioned is the Father of Jesus...and this Father also has a Father who is his God. Smith is, thus, indicating from the Bible that Jesus has a Father, who has a Father, who would be a grandfather God in dynastic lineage to Jesus. To strengthen his argument, Smith referred to the explanation of the Book of Abraham of intelligences, that of one intelligence being above the other indicating a hierarchy of intelligence and authority, always one personage higher than another, as the rule of the universe, in an endless pattern of more superior beings (Abraham 3:8, 16-17, 19).

Smith then said that he felt he had always taught the plurality of Gods teaching, “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. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years.” For his audience, Smith noted distinct, separate identities, one as God the Father, the other as Jesus Christ, and a final one as the Holy Ghost that confirmed for him his argument, “...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?” 4

Smith continued to show from the Bible that he was right, “I will show from the Hebrew Bible that I am correct, and the first word shows a plurality of Gods.” 5 Smith reviewed the Hebrew Bible’s usage of God in the plural, *elohim*, the Gods. He rehearsed

information he had explained in the “King Follett Discourse” concerning *rosh*, head, and *barah*, “brought forth, created or organized.” He indicated that *elohim*, plural in English for “the Gods,” comes from *eloi [eloh]*, singular in English for a single God. The following are Smith’s alternate translations to or postulations about the first line in the Bible brought together for this thesis in a numbered order, expressing potential meanings of the concept of creation or “bringing forths” undertaken by plural Gods,

1. In the beginning the head of the Gods brought forth the Gods,
2. The head of the Gods called the Gods together.
3. The head God organized the heavens and the earth.
4. In the beginning the heads of the Gods organized the heavens and the earth. 6

Smith reasoned that there was a plurality of intelligent beings involved in the creation and the bringing forth of men of this earth, but always with a head-God over them. These men-Gods achieved the enormous events of creation of the earth and of man by first speaking or counseling together, “The head one of the Gods said, Let us make a man in our own image” (compare Genesis 1:26).

As part of his continuing justification of his reading of Genesis, Smith told of an answer he received from a Jewish scholar about the plural name for God in Hebrew,

I once asked a learned Jew, ‘If the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in *heim* in the plural, why not render the first *Eloheim* plural?’ He replied, ‘That is the rule with few exceptions, but in this case it would ruin the Bible.’ He acknowledged I was right. 7

Smith further justified using God in the plural by saying the

...word *Eloheim* ought to be in the plural all the way through [the Bible] - Gods. The head of the Gods appointed one God for us, and when you take [that] view of the subject, it sets one free to see all the beauty, holiness and perfection of the Gods.” 8

While the “learned Jew” had said translating *elohim* in the plural as Gods “...would ruin the Bible,” Smith came to think the rendering of *elohim* into the plural would not ruin the Bible, but enhance it. By taking literally the plurality of *elohim*, the second most common name for deity in the Hebrew Bible, the concept of *elohim* does indeed alter and extend the identity of God. Based on Smith’s concept of councils of Gods, who deliberate together, Smith’s plurality of Gods teaching indicates a cooperative control of the cosmos by order-creating intelligent beings, always presided over and directed by what he called “the Head God.” The origin of the concept of “head” can be seen going back to Smith’s extraction of *rosh*, “head,” from *beroshit*, “in the beginning,” out of the first line of the Hebrew Bible.

In spite of his support for plural Gods in the *universe*, Smith’s explanation that the *world* itself is still under the direction of one God does two things. First, it restores to the Bible the oneness or monotheism that has ever been cherished in the Jewish and Christian faiths, as Smith said, “...but to us, there is but one God - that is *pertaining to us*; and he is in all and through all.”<sup>9</sup> Second, it allows one to see Jesus as the Messiah/King, pre-existent to the appearance of the world (John 1:2-3). But, it also helps to confirm the consistent progression of the person who performed the role of Jehovah for Israel, and seeing that same person come to mortal life and become the Savior of all mankind, the Son of the Father for this world. Additionally, the gospel logic of messianic progression would anticipate Jesus also to become the Father of this earth.

In a further unique assertion, Joseph Smith indicated, “The word Eloheim ought

to be in the plural all the way through Gods....” 10 This means that the word God should be written in the plural throughout the Bible as *elohim* or the usual, singular English translation, God, *could be* translated everywhere in scripture in the plural as *the Gods*. For Mormons, “all the way through” could mean both the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Chapters four and five of the Book of Abraham, in the Pearl of Great Price, refer to God each time as *the Gods*, as in this sample, “And the Gods organized the earth to bring forth grass from its own seed.... and the Gods saw that they were obeyed” (Abraham 4:12).

Smith said that it would be correct to see God plural all the way through the Bible as *the Gods*. The Hebrew plural noun for deity is equivalent in the New Testament to Father. Through-out Hebrew scripture, *elohim*, God, and Father would parallel each other. God can be used for either Jesus and the Father. However, general New Testament usage of God equates it nearly always to the Father. The translated name for Yahweh in the Old Testament is Jehovah or Lord; the same transfer from Old to New Testament can be made for Yahweh/Jehovah to Lord or Son in the New Testament or anywhere else in Mormon scripture. The division of two names for God in the Old Testament, Elohim and Yahweh, thus becomes God and Lord, or in the New Testament, Father and Son. To pattern these names in the following way represents a certain consistency all its own that at the same time indicates a logic in Godly relationships that may be seen as the Mormon perspective to the names and personages of the Godhead,

<b>Hebrew Bible Name for God</b>	<b>English Name for God</b>	<b>New Testament God</b>
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Elohim (*elohim*)  
Jehovah

God  
Lord

Father  
Son

Continuing his sermon, Smith clarified Godly relationships, having pointed to connections between the names for God. Smith referenced in the “Sermon in the Grove,” the papyri from which he translated the Book of Abraham. He said, “suppose we have two facts: that supposes another fact may exist - two men on the earth, one wiser than the other, would logically show that another who is wiser than the wisest may exist.” 11 Smith used the reasoning in the Book of Abraham of beings having lived in a pre-existence and called intelligences existing “... one above another, so that there is no end to them.” He felt he could also use the same reasoning to distinguish between head Gods’ familial positions,

If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way. Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly, Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also? I despise the idea of being scared to death at such a doctrine, for the Bible is full of it. 12

This reasoning has to form the basis of Joseph Smith’s idea of plural Gods. In all creation, like begets like: men are children of God, hence, they are gods. A Father has a Son; this Son progresses and becomes a Father. This Father has a Son, who in turn becomes a Father. Such an idea, of a life with endless Gods, matches what is known of an endless cosmos. At this point, re-calling an argument from the King Follett Discourse, Smith again referred to the Bible to express a key element in his doctrine,

Jesus said that the Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before Him. As the Father had done before? He laid down his life, and took it up the same as His Father had done before. He did as He was sent, to lay down His life and take it up again; and then was committed unto Him the keys. 13

To attribute a Father, even a grandfather God role, with a prior position in time to the Father of the men and women of this earth is possibly the most audacious of all the concepts in Smith's revelations. In the above, Smith implies that the universe is fashioned under the direction of myriads of Father Gods heading the worlds. He does not say that there are billions of Father Gods to match the billions of stars and their planets in the universe. However, with his previous explanation of fathers ever having been sons and sons always becoming fathers, he drives a logic that would seem to make it inescapably his truth that for every world there is a Son who becomes a Father. Without making speculations that would take this study astray, the above quotation could suggest that every *creation of a world* is a refinement of what spun into space as a result of what scientists call the Big Bang.

Additionally, Smith explains Jesus' sacrifice is what is done on each world. Smith says that Jesus' Father and this Father's Father had also been Messiahs. The sacrificial giving of life for others would be part of a pattern for all worlds, part of a ritual preparation for Father Gods. The Father had also laid down his life and took it up as did Jesus.

If you look at the life of Jesus, you see what the Father himself had done on another world. With this mirroring of the Messianic role, Son and Father... Son who becomes a Father, the Father is again substantially identified as a progressing being.

Looking at the life of Jesus and backwards to Smith's proposed "Messianic life" of the Father, one can better understand how the New Testament and Smith himself portray the Son as a learning and progressing being made aware of himself by his Father and reflecting the nature of Sons who become Fathers in the pattern of his life in the words given him of his Father in the gospels.

Smith's teaching, that indicates that men who will see God will be like him, requires that a pattern for men is for them to have also replicated in their lives somehow, for sure, to a lesser extent, the suffering of Christ. As Christ is holy, men must also become holy like him through suffering of their own. This would mean that when men meet their God, both God and men will have been humbled by their adversities; they will be gentle men. This would further suggest that all Gods and men of past redeemed worlds will contain kindly populations of people made meek by the experiences of their mortal lives.

Joseph Smith built up radical understandings from the Bible that he claimed came to him from heaven. He interpreted the Bible differently than other interpreters and can be seen adding to the Bible and making Mormonism his own, continuing Bible culture, even creating reasonings that could give more relevance to a universal modern-day *Bible* culture. Smith's concern was to show the plurality of Gods doctrine from the Bible. In the following verses he confirms his chief Bible source for the teaching of a plurality of Gods. The verses indicate the Father had a similar experience on a prior world as that of the Son on this world. Quoted in the last chapter, these enigmatic verses come from well-

known Bible gospel materials that bear repetition as they are the cornerstone of Smith's *evidence from the Bible* and have not generally been interpreted before as he did,

The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will (John 5:19).

Before his final sacrifice, Jesus indicated he would receive power from the Father to resurrect himself. There is strong suggestion in the scripture that it was an obligation on Jesus' part to perform this sacrifice to please his Father in order to have all power from the Father. Readers of the gospels, knowing of Jesus' ordeal in Gethsemane, are well aware of the ridicule and pain awaiting him. Nevertheless, while he showed emotional anxiety, he went willingly to his crucifixion. By complying in all ways, as a worthy example of righteous life, he so pleased his Father that a voice was heard to say, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1: 11). The Father's love for the Son is justified in the Son's obedience, and is stated in the following,

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:17-18).

As part of the very last instructions given to the eleven apostles in the last chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus indicated that he had received power from his Father, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus had a private relationship with his Father, one of mutual trust and obligation. Jesus is to receive power to resurrect others as had done the Father. Without knowing that the Father had resurrected the people on his own world, that had not been noted before as Joseph Smith did, one could not know, to which people John was referring. It is clear that the text states that the Father had resurrected others (John 5:21). The Father is said in John to have “raised up the dead” causing readers to ask, “where and when, did the Father ‘raise the dead...and quickeneth them’ any time in the history of this world?”

To confirm what Jesus said, Smith makes clear that the Father’s doings did not take place in this world. As Jesus said, the Father’s sphere of activity was not on this world, “And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape” (John 5:37). Contrary to many Bible readers’ assumption that the Father has been *the acting God* of this world, with Smith’s clarifications, Jesus Christ is seen as the God of this world and all things done in it have been done by him.

With unusual Bible insight, Joseph Smith unravels difficult verses with simple explanations. God the Father raised the dead on his world, the world mankind came from - *not this world*. One is left to conclude in the last two verses that in consequence of Smith’s interpretation of Jesus’ stated obedience to his Father’s will, and in completing the requirements of the office of Messiahship, all power is granted to him. Jesus was empowered not only to raise the dead, but also to take authority over the rule of this

world as his Father took charge of his own world's kingdom.

Thus, Smith explains away much of the supernatural mystery of the religious universe when he identifies superior men forming a dynasty of Gods, Fathers to Sons, and their associate co-workers, "the host of heaven." The Sons become Everlasting Fathers when they have completed their sacrificial ordeal and are given "all power." As part of this granted power, the new Son assumes the role of an Everlasting Father. He also can raise himself from the dead as well as give life to all others in his assigned world and grant them immortal life. To give further breadth to Smith's Bible extensions, this vision granted Exekiel points to how the Hebrew Tradition has had a foreshadowing of this raising of the dead,

...the Lord...set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.  
 ...they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?  
 And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. And again he said unto me Pro-  
 phesy.... as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking and the bones  
 came together, bone to his bone. ...the sinews and the flesh came up upon them,  
 ...and the breath came upon them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet,  
 an exceeding great army. ...Son of man these bones are the whole house of Israel.  
 O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your  
 graves, and bring you into the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:1-4, 7-8, 10-12).

Thus, the Hebrew tradition has anticipated a revivification of Israel. It would be first a revival of *all the righteous people* as in a general resurrection and a bringing forth from their graves of *all the world's* dead. In his use of the Bible and his interpretive additions, Smith insists in both sermons that he can "show his concept of plural Gods from the Bible." His analysis of the progressive naturalness of the Father and Son relationship indicates how he could structure an understanding from the Bible of a basic

plurality of two head Gods, one for this world and one for the prior world that is now called heaven. But Smith's reading of the Bible goes further than these two head Gods. He was suggesting that much more is indicated in the way of *plural gods* by the making of all men and women into gods. A major scripture for his overall argument comes from Paul,

The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 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 (Romans 8:16-17).

Christ is an heir to his Father's glory and men who suffer with him will have glory with him. The binding of men and women together in a common godliness can best be understood to have purpose in their agency to choose between good and evil for a self-elective life, but also in the promise of their own immortality. With endless life, each man and woman can come into full possession of his life and agency. The sense of the Hebrew tradition's anticipation of Abraham's progeny being endless like the stars of the heavens is made more complete in the vision of a life with the high Gods and the lessor gods in a society of godliness enjoying life together.

As if Smith knew he needed to build slowly his concept of endless Fathers, he begins with reasoning about a single Son and Father. He indicates that these are at least two Gods, which he says are "plural anyhow." The first page of the Bible indicates that when God "created the heavens and the earth, he "divided the waters" from the firmament and "called the firmament heaven" (Genesis 1: 1, 7-8). To speak in Bible terms about the "created heavens," one is only speaking about the "firmament" of this

solar system and this earth. Most have assumed that the Father and the Son of the Bible they have been dealing with were the creators of the entire and endless cosmos. Not having telescopes like that of even Galileo, the writers of the Bible in the beginning were looking at this single solar system all while referring to the previous world as heaven.

The all-inclusive term for God, *elohim*, allows for extended life beyond this world to end-less rulers over the universe. In the sense of a greater cosmos, there may be many universes or heavens, with endless Father Gods, one head One for each world. Smith would suggest that the Gods have the intent of bringing eternal life to those who will inhabit each world, confronting for them new challenges together. In Smith's ideology, he gives purpose to man and the Gods, world after world. He says, "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). The Gods' "work and...glory [is] to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). The Gods have the goal of increasing the knowledge of men and women and strengthening them that they might have joy-filled lives.

For Smith, all things are planned out in the Gods' councils beforehand. Presumably in vision, the Father let the Son see how he, the Father, laid down his life and took it up again. The Father further shows the Son how to raise the dead and has empowered him to give immortality to the dead of his world, as the Father did when he raised the dead on his world in a prior cosmic epoch. Thus, with the completion of the expiatory sacrifice of crucifixion on each world, all power is transferred to each Son by each Father allowing them to become in due course an Everlasting Father capable of

taking care of his own world. After going through crucifixion and death, Jesus explained, “All power is given me in heaven and earth” (Matthew 28:18).

Thus, it is evident from the Bible account that there is a power transfer to the Son from the Father, for Jesus to say he had been given all power, but one that remains tied to “heaven and earth.” For outsiders, Smith approached the phenomenon of plural Gods from what he could read into the Bible record, even from additional Bible information, that he would have claimed was also revealed to him by the Father God and is now canonized in modern Mormon scripture. He draws his listener’s attention to the plural Gods concept with information concerning intelligence,

And the Lord said unto me. These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all (Abraham 3:19).

In a summary of Smith’s idea of plural Gods, one may confirm he taught of two Gods concerned with this world, Son and Father. Yet, Smith spoke of a Father of the Father. All Father Gods must suffer as Messiahs on their own appointed worlds, as part of the pattern of a Father God for each world, world after world. The process of developing new Son Gods into Father Gods as well as bringing multitudes of others to their salvations continues indefinitely world after world. Given the possible count of worlds in an endless and growing universe would by themselves make the number of everlasting Fathers in the universe potentially very large and the exalted human populations of these worlds of an incomprehensible infinite number.

Given the LDS concept of “saved” men and women giving birth to spirit children

make the ongoing creation of new spirit children on each world of the universes a numerically unfathomable phenomenon. But, it also causes the realization that the men and women of this world are not the spirit sons and daughters of a single “Father in heaven,” but the children of many men and women, who have lived on the previous world that is commonly called heaven. The process of spirit children generation would go backwards and forwards infinitely. The name *elohim* becomes all the more appropriate as a recognition and designation of the real nature of Godliness in a plurality of being who work together “to bring to pass the eternal life of man.” Thus, the singular name, Elohim, God, Father, as described by the plural name *elohim*, is a “single pluralism” apparently inherent within the Hebrew scriptural message.

An example of another kind of “single pluralism,” as indicated in the following scripture, is the pattern of always using a Son wherein the Gods of the eternities speak together in the singular in a common divine investiture shows the pattern of how worlds are created, “And worlds without number have I created: and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33). The concept of divine investiture formalizes the nature of world building, meaning, worlds are always created by a Son. Son is a title. Jesus is not mentioned in the above verse, but the office of Son is.

A worthy Son is to be a Head God for each world and is separated out from among all the lesser sons destined for the new world; he is elevated above his brethren to the office of a Son. He is anointed and set apart to organize, foster, promote, and

eventually govern all his brothers and sisters. He is responsible for the salvation of all those foreordained to be together in the new world. He plans and works hard not to lose a single lamb from the flock. A divine investiture of authority is a universe-wide spreading of Godly power and responsibility to the endless corners of time and space.

More awareness of a Father God, who is concerned with the outer cosmos, is brought to the forefront by Smith's teaching of a plurality of Gods. It offers different possibilities of scripture than those that concern a single earth. Certain universal scriptures deal with the nature of the outer universe. It should be stated that scripture is religious knowledge that has application to both the seen and unseen worlds. The above scripture that indicates that God has created worlds without number, (Moses 1:33) can be called part of an "eternal scripture record," as it concerns a universality of worlds. To be an "eternal scripture record" means they are part of scriptures used or knowledge that is useful in world after world since they form the way things are or need to be. Smith has compared the likeness of one world to another. This could allow all of knowledge that has been given on this earth to parallel to some degree knowledge of previous and future worlds. Information that can be perceived as an "eternal scripture record" is scripture knowledge that pertains more exactly to how each world comes into place, is governed, or even functions.

There could likely be no deviation in "eternal scriptural records," nor in procedures. In the above scripture pertaining to the nature of the title of Son, it means that each and every world is created by a Son God. There are no deviations; all eternal matters

pertain to world after world. Worlds are created “by the Son... which is mine only Begotten.” This Son will be world after world “an only begotten of the Father.” Therefore, indeed, these kinds of scripture are called by Joseph Smith “eternal scriptural records.” Such scriptures indicate the highest of spiritual considerations, even cosmic information. This means that many scriptural anecdotes, stories, as well as large sections of scriptures may be expected to be recreated and used in world after world. Smith pointed readers to a specific 1832 revelation that was of this special other worldly nature. Smith referred to the 76<sup>th</sup> Section of the Doctrine and Covenants as the “Vision.” For him, it was a memorable experience to have received it and the information even for him distinctly significant from most other revelations. He described in the *History of the Church* the revelation as “light which burst upon the world,”

...the foregoing vision...show[s] the perfection of the theory [of different degrees of glory in the future life] and witnesses the fact that that document is *a transcript from the records of the eternal world*. The sublimity of the ideas; the purity of the language; the scope for action; the continued duration for completion, in order that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee; the rewards for faithfulness, and the punishments for sins, are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men, that every honest man is constrained to exclaim, “It came from God.” 14 (emphasis added)

Smith referred to the special spiritual information as a “transcript from the records of the eternal world.” These “eternal scriptural records” offer knowledge according to Smith’s revelations about Gods that describes their nature in fundamental ways. Smith could thus present the information of the “King Follett Discourse” containing this “higher information” of the “eternal scriptural records concerning the universe of Gods.” It is the information about other worlds, of an ever-expanding universe, that is, of endless Father

Gods, who ceaselessly increase within the relationships of a Father to Son mentorship that allows Smith to provide significant Bible expansions. But, it is also these cosmic matters of other worlds, beyond this one, that make Joseph Smith's last sermons difficult to comprehend and accept from the sparsity of past paradigms.

LDS readers are accustomed to think in terms of this world; they focus on one Father and one Son; the Father and Son seem to be for all the universe too. As most people reason things out, if the Father and Son are the Gods of this earth, they must *also* be the Gods of other worlds. For them, being ignorant of potential "single pluralisms," certain scriptures seem to state a necessary limitation, "God,....Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2). However, in recreating the scholastic perception that would place more responsibility and power on the Father and Son of this world and its heaven than can be understood or is naturally feasible, makes the Mormon concept like the incomprehensible God of the Christian scholastics, St. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas.

To ease the incomprehensibility for such Godly paradigms, Joseph Smith's doctrine from the Hebrew Bible, of a plurality of Gods, allows *elohim* be translated as written, *the Gods*. Joseph Smith advises that *elohim* be written throughout all scripture as *the Gods*. In opposition to the traditional concept of a single God for all the universe, the idea of other Gods in the universe, sharing the burden and taking care of other worlds, allows the simplicity of Smith's doctrine to have a place in the mind as comprehensible and reasonable.

Additionally, it is helpful to recognize that the designation of Father and Son are in reality titles. Mormons have given the name Elohim to the Father, because they don't know his personal name. However, everyone knows the Son's name. It was given to him by the angel Gabriel, whom Smith tells us was Noah in mortality. He told Mary, "...thou shalt call him Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

The Son's personal name is Jesus, the same name given to Joshua, the ancient warrior/ prophet of Israel, except Joshua is the Hebrew form of Jesus as used in English. The most strictly correct anglicized Hebrew makes the name for Jesus, Joshua, or *Yhoshuah*. The name, Jesus, is actually Greek. To separate personal names from titles helps explain why *Christ or the Son* are titles, and that they can be used to designate other Messiahs or chosen Sons for other worlds. The Anointed ones can be called *Sons* while becoming Fathers. Smith's idea of a Father God that is elected for each world, who always is a "son that becomes a father," makes a uniquely patterned order for the universe.

Thus, while clarifying explanations for the cosmos, Smith's last sermons have left enigmatic hypotheses. His untimely death has likely caused the loss of other unfulfilled insights to his theological supposition he might have had of Godly life in the universe for his followers. One can nevertheless see from the above postulations how there could be knowledge of the plurality of Gods that others might be able to develop from the "eternal scriptural records" now that Smith has prepared concepts to see in the ways he understood a plurality of Gods in earth and in the heavens.

For example, in chapter one of Moses, the difficulty to comprehend these “eternal scriptural records” can be seen to lie in its monotheistic presentation. Similar records report what happened to Moses in the early epoch of the teachings of a single God to men. In Smith’s first chapter of Moses, the words sound as if God the Father were speaking, but to be consistent with Smith’s other teachings, it has to be the Son. It was Jehovah, who met Moses on the Mount, and who is himself reciting from “eternal scriptural records” on Godhood and the process of creating worlds, or as it is presented, “The words of God, [the Gods] which he spake [were delivered] unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain. (Moses 1:1)”

One must read in that the God of the verse, who is delivering the message, is Jehovah. Confirmation of this is that according to the Gospel of John, the Father had not been seen by anyone up to Christ’s day (John 5:37). The only God to converse with Moses on a high mountain had to be Jehovah, not the Father. Thus, to understand the first chapter of Moses, one must read it as if Jehovah had been reading a script given him of the Father Gods to present to Moses. One must interpolate that the entire chapter sounds as if a Father God is speaking. However, the Father God reading has to be the future Father God of this earth, Jesus, as the Messiah, the Anointed One sent of the Father, who was given a section to recite to Moses from the eternal scriptural records.

Thus, the above scriptural analysis would indicate that information can be generated from the text that supports the plurality of Gods teaching even from Mormon scripture. There was a time when Joseph Smith was still learning the doctrine. Smith

suggested that to discover if there were plural Gods or not would be, “A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest” (D&C 121:28). For the Mormon prophet, the information about a plurality of Gods was an ultimate, but progressive revelation discussing how worlds have been, are, and will be.

At a point in the “Sermon in the Grove,” on the subject of plural Gods, Joseph felt he had established the nature of God sufficiently. He proceeded to the second great theme of his last sermons, the nature of man. On the one hand, he showed a contrary position to all other churches by demonstrating a developing nature for God, that he was a man who had to perfect himself. On the other hand, he demonstrated how man, again, in a contrary perception to other Churches’ doctrines, was a god. To indicate from the Bible how man was a god, he said,

What did Jesus say? “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 Scriptures cannot be broken, say ye of Him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said I am the Son of God?” 15

“The Vision” of the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 76, referred to above and revealed to Joseph Smith, clarifies the nature of men in the celestial kingdom. Smith can be seen to be supporting the logic of his discourse from this earlier of his revelations, when he called men gods, “Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God” (D&C 76:58). And “... every man who reigns in celestial glory is a God to his dominions.” 15 From the “Sermon in the Grove,” the prophet continued to explain how men are gods,

They who obtain a glorious resurrection from the dead, are exalted far above principalities, powers, thrones, dominions and angels, and are expressly declared to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, all having eternal power. These scriptures are a mixture of very strange doctrines to the Christian world, who are blindly led by the blind. I will refer to another Scripture. Now, says God, when he visited Moses in the bush, ...God said, "Thou shalt be a God unto the children of Israel." God said, "Thou shalt be a God unto Aaron, and he shall be thy spokesman." I believe those Gods that God reveals as Gods to be sons of God, and all can cry, "Abba, Father!" Sons of God who exalt themselves to be Gods, even from before the foundation of the world, and are the only Gods I have a reverence for. 16

Joseph Smith finished his second sermon affirming an "...order of heavenly things that God should always send a new dispensation into the world when men have apostatized and lost the priesthood, ..." He indicated that he was building his religious heritage anew and had not built "...on any other man's foundation." The prophet felt he had all the "...truth that the Christian world possessed, and an independent revelation in the bargain." One of the unique revelations he referred to was the plurality of Gods and he said he could "...still go on, and show you proof upon proof; all the Bible is equal in support of this doctrine, one part as another." 17

Joseph Smith died before people had an opportunity to discuss fully the concepts of his two discourses with him or hear a possible evolution of evidences that he would have used to justify his concepts. In the "Sermon in the Grove," eleven days before his death, Joseph had added more information about a plurality of Gods. In doing so, in a chiasmus of sermons, The "King Follet Discourse," and the "Sermon in the Grove," he affirmed his strongly expressed feelings on a plurality of Gods. The two discourses are complex with information and require close readings to focus on the distinctive

teachings.

While the “King Follett Discourse” has enjoyed nearly all the notoriety for the doctrine of a plurality of Gods, the sermon Joseph Smith gave on June 16, 1844, in a grove near the temple in Nauvoo, what is being called in this thesis, the “Sermon in the Grove,” contains additional, essential arguments on the plural nature of the Mormon Godhood. Joseph Smith died ten days later on June 26. Before one can properly appreciate the assist that the “Sermon in the Grove” gives to the whole plural Gods situation, one must review and understand some of the build-up to and hesitations regarding the present historical situation of the “King Follett Discourse” itself. In partial explanation, one LDS writer has indicated that in the “King Follett Discourse,” Smith presented four innovative concepts:

1. Men can become gods.
2. There exist many gods.
3. The gods exist one above another innumerable, and
4. God was once as man now is. 18

These ideas are supported and strengthened by additional considerations in Smith’s second discourse on a plurality of Gods, the “Sermon in the Grove.” Most importantly contained in the second sermon is a novel teaching of the Father of the Father having a Father. To learn of Godly figures behind the traditional Father God, much as an expanded vision of the billions of stars has changed perceptions of the universe, drives the doctrine to a higher level of completion than attained in the first sermon. The teachings of a plurality of Gods as found in the “King Follett Discourse” by themselves have remained unresolved doctrines in the Mormon consciousness because they are

disconnected from the concept of a plurality of Father Gods.

Opponents to accepting the doctrine have stressed the fact that Smith did not have time to write this information down by his own hand or to supervise personally his scribes in the writing of the thoughts of his mind. To them, the “King Follett Discourse,” not being holographic is therefore not definitive or wholly trustworthy and presumably cannot be accepted into church canon. To have a second sermon, verifying not only the same information, but containing extensions and completions, brings a degree of authentication to Smith’s mind-set in his first sermon and shows a progression to the whole concept that can still be further clarified.

The “King Follett Discourse,” standing on its own, can be seen to open the Church to controversy. As already quoted once, in 1912, George Albert Smith wrote regarding the King Follett Discourse that,

...I have thought that the report of that sermon might not be authentic and I have feared that it contained some things that might be contrary to the truth.... Some of the Brethren felt as I did and thought that greater publicity should not be given to that particular sermon. 19

One cannot help but wonder about a judgment that would condemn basing itself on a “report” of the material? Since many of the elements of the reasoning for a later withholding of the “King Follett Discourse” are present, this letter contains important things to review in the variety of its implications. George Albert Smith was the grandson of one of Joseph Smith’s uncles. He was therefore a not too distant cousin of Joseph F. Smith, who in 1912 was president of the church. Joseph F. Smith was the son of Hyrum Smith, the brother to Joseph Smith. The body of men who entered the highest ranks of the

LDS church at the turn of the nineteenth century were the first leaders who had not known Joseph Smith personally. They had not heard his voice, nor had experience with the ways of his mind. They could not be expected to have been as close to Smith's intimate thoughts regarding the plural Gods teaching as was the original convert generation. Leaders, John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, and Franklin D. Richards, had supported aspects, if not all, of Smith's plural Gods teaching. While president of the church in 1884, John Taylor recalled in part how he understood Smith had explained it,

I have heard the Prophet Joseph quote...from the Hebrew Bible in support of a plurality of Gods, showing that the suffix "mem" in the word Eloheim or God, ought to be rendered in the plural and to read if literally translated, "and the Gods said let us, etc." Certain it is that in our present translation of the word "us" or "let us" indicates that idea; for "us" is certainly in the plural and means more than one. 20

In reference to Joseph Smith's meager formal education, Taylor made a remark justifying the source of Smith's unusual knowledge that he saw puzzling "many of the wisest scientists, profoundest thinkers." He indicated that Smith was taught by God; he received information from, "...the heavens above us; [from] the Gods that exist in the eternal worlds."<sup>21</sup> When on the subject of plural Gods, Smith's final theological perspectives clearly possessed Taylor's mind and the doctrine had his confidence.

By the first years of the twentieth-century, a transition had occurred between the older and the newer generation. George Albert Smith and those "who felt as [he] did and thought that greater publicity should not be given to that particular sermon" were not in favor of what Franklin Richards and others had supported for fifty years. The people who shared an uncertain view of Joseph Smith's now most famous sermon, could have been

the same kind of worried people, who removed the pages of the “King Follett Discourse” from the *History of the Church*.

There is a possibility that the removal of the pages was done at the request of Joseph F. Smith. It is possible it was done with the agreement of all the living, leading Brethren of the church as a decision in one of their regular meetings. One of the indications for this consideration is that in the August 1914 issue of the church’s monthly magazine, *The Improvement Era*, the entire First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve was the doctrinal exposition, “The Father and the Son.”

While this document can be seen as a compromising and interim position, it is also a safe stance that would allow the LDS Church some respite from the negative publicity of the previous sixty years since the announcement of polygamy in 1854. All the leadership signed their names to this document that was provided to the world as a statement of LDS consensus as to the nature of God. In several ways, it responded to the scripture in the Book of Mormon that clarifies Jesus in his paradoxical recognition of himself, “...I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people, Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. ...they who believe on my name...shall become my sons and daughters” (Ether 3:16).<sup>22</sup> This joint statement represents for the time a guideline to the nature of the God of Mormonism and supports the circumspect and briefly indicated explanation of God that persists in the Church unchanged up until today.

When the “King Follett Discourse” was removed from the *History of the Church*,

an entire chapter from the month of April, 1844 was taken. Pages 302 to 317 cleanly disappeared constituting the complete chapter XIV. The intact Chapter XV represented a conclusion to the 1844 Spring conference that had been initiated in the prior chapter and begins with these words,

Monday, April 8, 1844, - [Conference Report Continued.] At three-quarters past 9 a. m., President Joseph Smith took his seat on the stand and requested the choir sing a hymn. He called upon Elder Brigham Young to read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, as his own lungs were injured. 23

However, the other plural Gods sermon was left intact in the *History of the Church*. The second discourse on the subject of a plurality of Gods, the “Sermon in the Grove,” given on Sun-day, June 16, 1844. As part of chapter XXIII of the *History of the Church*, the “Sermon in the Grove” took its chronological place nine chapters and 171 pages away from the chapter that contained the “King Follett Discourse” that was removed. Smith made these personal remarks regarding this sermon that were entered into the body of the *History of the Church*, in chapter XXIII,

I preached at the stand at 10:00 a. m. Before I closed by remarks it rained severely. The following synopsis was reported by Elder Thomas Bullock, whom I had transferred from the duties of clerk of the *Maid of Iowa* to my office. 24

At the end of the sermon, these words were added, “[On account of the rain it was impossible for Thomas Bullock to report any more].” 25 These comments lend ambiance and Smith’s personal care and intimate concern for this sermon. For the modern reader, the “Sermon in the Grove” is also found in the end of Joseph Fielding Smith’s single volume of edited sermons and writings of Joseph Smith, *The Teachings of the Prophet*

*Joseph Smith*, as well as in the sixth volume of the *History of the Church*. Joseph Fielding Smith was the son of Joseph F. Smith. Joseph Fielding Smith also later became president of the church. Prior to his presidential administration, he requested and it was granted that the King Follett Discourse be returned to its rightful place in the *History of the Church* during the administration of President David O. McKay.

In final summary, the content of the final sermons of Joseph Smith defies all past tradition. Joseph Smith indicates that the universe has been created by men who are Gods. Over the last one hundred and fifty years, the focus of concern has been on the first discourse, the “King Follett Discourse.” In this well-known sermon, Smith explained men needed to “comprehend the character of God...to comprehend themselves.” Giving God comprehensive power over men, Smith said that God “...interferes in the affairs of men.” He further represented God as an exalted man, stating that “God became a God. He was once a man like us. God himself dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ did.” Smith said Jesus followed after the Father in “taking up his life as did his Father.” The Father worked out his kingdom for his world with “fear and trembling.” Jesus had undergone pain as had his Father to show himself worthy of a kingdom on this earth. Envisioning many righteous men becoming Gods, Smith differentiated between Head Gods and lessor gods, but that these many meet together in “councils of Gods.”

What Smith represented in the totality of his two sermons has gone without the general, modern Mormon community’s recognition of the additional concepts of his second sermon. The major argument of this study would suggest that one cannot fully

discuss the doctrine without combining the material of the two sermons. In the second sermon, Smith added an explanation that supports monotheism for this earth. He said, there was only one God "that is, pertaining to us...and we are to be in subjection to that one." He explained that *elohim* or God as it is in the Old Testament should be in the plural throughout the Bible as "the Gods." Furthermore, men are to be like their God, Jesus; the Son; Jesus is to be like the Father. Exalted men gods and highest of Gods will be all together as the Gods, the *elohim*. Latter-day Saints are taught that the holiest of men and women will have spirit children. By implication they become heavenly fathers and mothers, but they will not become "Head Gods" and do not have leadership of a world by them-selves. By implication the men and women of this world were born of similar elevated and exalted parents of the previous world and not of a single Father God as is generally assumed.

It was in the second sermon, Smith taught possibly his most significant concept of all his concepts, that the Father of Jesus also had a Father. Smith reasoned, "Where was there ever a son without a father? and where was there ever a father without first being a son? ...Hence, if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe the Father had a Father also?" Smith said that the Father of the Father laid down his life in sacrifice as did Jesus, "...Jesus said that the "Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before him; As the Father had done before? He laid down His life, and took it up the same as His Father had done before."

Smith stated throughout his discourses that he could show his teaching of plural

Gods from the Bible. An explanation of Extended Biblicism that clarifies Smith's Biblical practice of polygamy also explains the Biblical teaching of a plurality of Gods and thereby lessens his enigma by showing the continuing sources for Smith's doctrines to be in the accepted document of western religion, the Bible. It is in his reputation's favor to find the doctrine of the plurality of Gods in the Bible. In the plural Bible usage, *elohim*, or Gods, and in the ensemble of scriptures, as compiled by Franklin D. Richards, in *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel*, one finds justification of Joseph Smith in his unusual teaching to be from the Bible.

#### CONCLUSION

Important considerations for religious conceptual thought can be made out of the findings of this thesis. First, for those interested in the Bible, Joseph Smith does indeed mount an argument of a wholly different kind of God than previously extracted from the text. Smith's view denies the traditional Trinity, that of a single, incomprehensible, spirit God manifesting different persona. He makes his God plural, a Son and a Father, separate, intelligent beings of flesh and bone like the bodies of mortals, and adds a third distinct spirit God, the Holy Ghost. There is an implication to the human nature of Joseph Smith's Gods: they are agents within a cosmos of paradox; they choose good and reject evil. They exist parallel to these dichotomies, extracting *good* out of *evil*.

It can be seen how Smith thought he could show a plurality of Gods in different ways from the Bible. For example, he is grammatically correct in asserting that the name for God, *elohim*, that is mentioned 2500 times in the Hebrew Bible, is a plural name. The

suffix, “*im*” is the plural, masculine ending for all masculine nouns in Hebrew, much as “s” is the plural for English nouns. This plural interpretation of *elohim* is not the traditional explanation, which is either a “we don’t know why it is plural” or “this is traditional usage and must be accepted.” Smith is right, the singular for *elohim* is *eloh*. He claimed that each time that *elohim* is used it should be translated literally *the Gods*. For the Mormon prophet, the One God of Israel is Jesus Christ, having guided Israel as their God even before his appearance in mortality. The Father is a second God, a higher God than Jesus, who lives in another world.

Joseph Smith further makes a claim on our attention regarding the Bible tradition by indicating that the resurrecting that the Father conducted, about which Jesus is quoted in John 5:19-22, was done on another world. Smith says that the Father of Jesus was a Messiah, under-going a painful death like Jesus, but on another world. He indicated that the Father raised another world’s population elsewhere in space. He stated that Jesus’ Father had a Father and he was also a Messiah on his world. Smith’s logic would remind readers that “sons become fathers, and fathers have ever first been sons.” Such reasoning, based in surmising the nature of Gods as fitting into the endless universe is the Mormon position and indicates a man-made (plural Gods) origin for the universe organized and sustained by Father Gods that, presumably, in LDS thought, in number are endless.

While the above concepts are largely unknown in the world at large, they are generally accepted by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, because of their potentially sensational character and uncertainties regarding

them, it appears that the leadership of the church has chosen to take a “wait and see” approach, rather than working out the ideas to accept them within the body of church doctrines. Thus, the acceptance of the concept of “the plurality of Gods” is not mentioned in public meetings, nor taught directly in the study manuals of the church. Privately, the ideas are commonly believed in.

The distinguishing of the nature of the higher “Gods,” the Father and the Son, is the emphasis for this thesis on the plurality of Gods teaching. However, the clarifying of the lesser “gods,” those men and women, who have lived in mortality, constitutes another implication of this thesis for general consideration and deserves a brief mention. Already, in Mormon doctrine, men themselves are gods. To the extent that they make themselves capable of choosing good and avoiding evil, they become “godly.” They are the spirit children of gods. However, as shown in the Joseph Smith thought of “a son becoming a father and a father being first a son,” men-gods will not be elevated to that position held by the single “Anointed One.” Men are to be kings and priests in the service of the most High God forever. Only one Son will be chosen for each new world.

This thesis shows the logic and reasonableness of Joseph Smith’s teaching of a plurality of Gods. All the parts of this thesis have not been gathered together previously as a whole for consideration with an emphasis on the succession of a Son God to a position of Fatherhood on each world. The intent has been to indicate that the plural Gods doctrine can be interpreted out of the Bible as Smith said. It has also been a concern to point out that the “King Follett Discourse,” that has borne all the weight of evidence of

the credibility of the plural Gods doctrine was not the only document left by Joseph Smith. This thesis makes clear that a second speech, the “Sermon in the Grove,” that followed Smith’s “King Follett Discourse” by two months adds information to the plural Gods teaching and should be better known in this context. The additional information contained in the second sermon, “the Sermon in the Grove,” adds substantially to the material in Smith’s better known discourse, the “King Follett Discourse.” The plural Gods doctrine is not complete with the first sermon by itself. One hundred and seventy-six pages separate the two sermons in the *History of the Church*. The substance and spirit of these two sermons, joined together, as indicated in this thesis constitute new material for comprehending the thinking patterns of Joseph Smith pertaining to his concept of a plurality of Gods teaching.

## NOTES

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 417
2. Ibid 418-419.
3. Ibid 418.
4. Ibid 417.
5. Ibid 419.
6. Donald Q. Cannon, “The King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith’s Greatest Discourse in Historical Perspective,” (Provo: *BYU Studies*) Wtr. 1978, vol. 18, no. 2, 179-192.
7. Joseph Fielding Smith, 419.
8. Ibid 419. In Smith’s speeches Elohim is written Eloheim. The Elohim spelling is standard today and in Mormon circles, it is spelled this way and capitalized. To express the idea of plural Gods, I have chosen to write Elohim with the first letter in lower case and the noun written in italics as *elohim*. The reason I do this is to differentiate between the singular God, Elohim, as he is presented in Mormon discourse as Jesus’ Father in heaven. Mormons usually think of God the Father, Elohim, as a single person. To write Elohim in lower case and italics as *elohim*, allows one to better recall the Hebrew meaning for God to be the plural *the* Gods, which could also include the lesser men-gods as, together with the Father and the

Son, constitute “the host of heaven.” Thus, Elohim will be written when it refers to create two new pages and re-enter two pages deleted by mistake. Here.

9. Ibid 418.

10. Ibid 420.

11. Ibid 420.

12. Ibid 421.

13. Ibid 421.

14. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1951), 1:252-253.

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, 422.

16. Ibid 423.

17. Ibid 424.

18. Stan Larsen, “The Grimshaw Amalgamation” (Provo, Utah: *BYU Studies*, 1978) 18, no. 2, 213.

19. George Albert Smith Family Papers, Special collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 30 January 1912, as quoted from Donald Q. Cannon, “The King Follett Discourse: Joseph Smith's Greatest Discourse in Historical Perspective” (Provo, Utah: *BYU Studies*) Wtr, 78, 18, no. 2, 191-192.

20. John Taylor, “Remarks delivered by Elder John Q. Cannon and Presidents Wilford Woodruff & John Taylor, In the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, June 29, 1884,” *Journal of Discourse* (London: John Henry Smith,

1884, vol. IV), 213-214.

21. Ibid 213.

22. Gordon Allred, compiler, (reprint from *The Improvement Era*, August, 1914)  
*God the Father* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 150-151, 156.

23. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt  
Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950) 6:318.

24. Ibid 473.

25. Ibid 479.

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APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## COMBINED CONCEPTS ON THE PLURALITY OF GODS DOCTRINE

## FROM THE

## “KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE” AND THE “SERMON IN THE GROVE”

1. Joseph Smith said, "If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves."
2. Smith affirmed that *he* [Smith] is the *very* man to comprehend and explain the character of God. He said that he knew him [God] and he wanted others to know him. "I want you all to know him, and to be familiar with him, for I speak as one having authority."
3. Joseph Smith affirmed that God "...interferes with the affairs of men";
4. Smith presented God as an exalted man, "...in the person, image, and very form as a man."
5. He explained that "God became a God. He was once a man like us. God himself dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ did [live on this earth]."
6. Joseph Smith indicated Jesus followed after his Father in "taking up his life as did his Father."
7. He told his audience in Nauvoo that all men must learn how to become gods themselves. They are to be kings and queens, "...the same as those who have gone

before."

8. Before this earth, there were men who were gods and lived on the world called by mortals on this earth heaven. The immortal men and women have gone, like men here will need to do, "from a small capacity to a great one, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation."

9. The Father worked out his kingdom for his world with "fear and trembling," just as Jesus had also undergone pain to show himself worthy for "his kingdom" on this earth.

10. Jesus treads in the tracks of his Father: He inherits what his Father did before him, that is, a world and immense numbers of brothers and sisters, who are in his care. He shares this glorified life and heavy responsibility with his chosen servants.

11. Joseph Smith created the concept of a "head God," and Gods meet in "councils of Gods."

12. To know the true nature of God allows men to know how to approach him in order to have "the heavens unfolded to them."

Additional concepts from the "Sermon in the Grove, East of the Temple"

13. Joseph confirmed Paul's statement that there were Gods many and Lords many, but he indicated there was only one God "that is, pertaining to us...and we are to be in subjection to that one."

14. Joseph Smith affirmed he knew of the nature of God from a witness of the Holy Ghost.

15. *elohim* or God as it is in the Old Testament should be in the plural throughout the

Bible as “the Gods.”

16. Men are to be like their God, Jesus; the Son; Jesus is to be like the Father. They will be all together as the Gods. The holiest of men and women will have spirit children. By implication they become heavenly father and mothers, but do not have leadership of a world by themselves. By implication the men and women of this world were born of parents of the previous world.

17. The Father of Jesus also had a Father. Joseph reasoned, "Where was there ever a son without a father? and where was there ever a father without first being a son? ...Hence, if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe the Father had a Father also?"

18. The Father of the Father laid down his life in sacrifice as did Jesus, "...Jesus said that the “Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before him; As the Father had done before? He laid down His life, and took it up the same as His Father had done before."

19. All men are natively gods, but particularly, righteous men, who exemplify the highest qualities of human possibilities are more truly like the Father and are recognized more precisely as gods.

## APPENDIX B

## MODERN CONSIDERATIONS OF BIBLE ERRORS

To support the thesis argument of Joseph Smith's ability with Bible materials, it is relevant to conclude with modern voices that support Smith's explanation of Bible errors. As Smith said the text of the Bible was corrupt, validation of his Bible perceptions strengthens his recognition of the plural Gods doctrine from the Bible granting him more of a comprehensive mastery over the text. From his earliest statement regarding the Bible, he indicated a distrust for the incompleteness of the text. His many additions to the Bible have gone on for 175 years with relatively little specific comment on or recognition of them as extensions or additions to original Hebrew thought.

The most famous statement in Mormonism by Joseph Smith regarding the Bible expresses a mild, but enduring distrust of the text as conveyed to all the many LDS children who memorize, "...and we believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly (Article of Faith 8)." Smith's reason to translate the Bible was to improve its sense. Substantial value in Smith's Bible translation for his followers can be seen in the distilling from the Bible text Smith's unusual doctrines, particularly nature of deity.

Over time Smith has not been found alone in thinking that the Bible was brought to his times without error. From his youth, he lived with what are seen today as

Evangelicals, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, who all honor the sanctity of the Bible, its inviolableness. Still today, many devout believers reverence the Bible as infallible inspiration, having been divinely developed and preserved. Bible believers of past ages would agree, that "...Jesus Christ, the divine Word, worked providentially to develop the Hebrew and Greek tongues into fit vehicles for the conveyance of His saving message.... The languages were perfectly adapted to the expression of his divine thoughts." Another fundamentalist writer summarizes the position of many of today's true believers regarding the purity of the Bible text, "Nothing had been lost from that text, and nothing ever would be lost."<sup>1</sup> However, Joseph Smith taught contrary to this modern Bible supporter as well as to most Bible preachers of his age.

Joseph Smith showed to people susceptible to belief in him that the losses of materials from the Bible were considerable. He could have said he not only learned of Bible variations from an angel, but that the Book of Mormon makes clear that when the Bible was first written, "it contained the plainness of the gospel of the Lord,...[and that] there [were] many plain and precious things taken away from the book (1 Nephi 13:24, 28)." At least, by the time he had written the very first of the Book of Mormon, it had become clear to Smith that the Bible had not come to his day in its original completeness. One can sense that by the time he translated the Bible, he felt impelled by personal conviction and empowered by God to restore what had been lost. Ten years after his major work of translation, in 1843, he was still saying, "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless

transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”<sup>2</sup>

In confirmation of Smith’s approach to the Bible text, what he called a translation has meant the following to the Mormon writer, Robert J. Matthews “...he was effecting a restoration of lost meaning and material, and since the Bible did not originate in English, his work to some degree would amount to an inspired, or revelatory, “translation” into English....” Smith felt that the translation was a return to what others had first written in the original tongues. Matthews saw Smith’s Bible originality stemming from this effort of translation and bringing all kinds of new understandings that constitute “...some of the most important and unique doctrinal contributions ... currently available...[and] is inseparable from the history of the Church and the building up of the kingdom in the last days.”<sup>3</sup>

Objections have been made that Joseph Smith’s translation improvements and changes have not shown up in other translations done from the traditional ancient languages. This seeming weakness in Smith’s translation has been viewed by such commentators as if it could have been expected that the *meaning losses* that Smith sought could have been caught and paralleled to his work by new, more modern translations out of the originals. This position entirely misses Smith’s perspective: Smith would still view the latest translation texts as corrupted. It was presumed by Smith and would be today by his supporters that what Jerome, Luther, or any other prior translator/scribe did was somehow necessarily continuing to support defects already in place before any surviving texts were written.

According to Smith, Bible readers and translators have been unaware that Bible texts were and would still be waiting to be improved upon. Joseph Smith's criticism of the Bible is not of recent translations of the last seven hundred years, but of changes occurring in antiquity. He referred in his last sermon, the "Sermon in the Grove," to "an old Jew" in the deep past, who "changed" meanings. What is consistent with modern Jewish commentators, in their finding value in Smith's contributions, concerns Smith's sensitivity to matters that reach into the earliest of times for the respective Old and New Testaments.

Moreover, it would appear that some observers have thought that a new translation, word by word, was what Smith did. Such a consideration misses the point of Biblical Mormonism and ignores the claims of Joseph Smith. He said he was a prophet and was given a restoration of meanings unavailable to seemingly all others. The mystery of Joseph Smith's penetration into the text goes deeper than even comparisons within translations of ancient languages will allow.

To support Smith's uniqueness, one must recognize his work as one of adding to the text; it cannot be compared to the varieties of other translations, "...in the overwhelming majority of passages there are no parallels to the work of Joseph Smith in supplying new material and information to the Bible."<sup>4</sup> To detail the position of fundamentalist Christians of an inviolable Bible would indicate the distance their attitudes have been and continue to be from those of Joseph Smith. For many of them, the Bible is flawless and unchangeable. Smith emphasized as part of his claim to divine

direction flaws *in the information* of the Bible. He therefore felt justified in modifying stretches of Bible text to render a different sense to its doctrine. For believers, the uncanniness of Smith's additions lie in the largeness of their vision and a certain finalizing irrefutableness about his emendations for those who look at the broad issue of making the text even more "...a blueprint for a holy commonwealth." <sup>5</sup>

There are critics on Smith's side, who indicate weaknesses in the Bible. Beginning in the original texts there were scribal problems, even before Tyndale had produced the first English Bible. The Jews, from their fixed position with the Hebrew version, like many Christians also today see the Bible as unchangeable. However, before the text arrived at its presently perceived inviolable state, the Hebrew Bible had undergone an evolution of text. Those who study the Hebrew Bible in the Masoretic original freely admit they are dealing with a flawed text that incorporates accepted mistakes. In training to read in the Hebrew Bible, novice Hebraists become aware of implanted errors, largely minor, that cannot be changed. <sup>6</sup>

The traditional text of the Hebrew Bible has been considered to be so holy by some that even recognized scribal errors cannot be changed. The Masoretes perfected the present text of the Hebrew Bible, "they invented a system of vowel pointings and superimposed it on the text. Vowels and accents were written under, within and above the existing text." The Masoretes came to completion of their work "toward the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century A.D. and since then [it] has replaced all other textual traditions." <sup>7</sup>

In consideration of the changes that naturally occur within a living language, the Hebrew language as a somnolent ancient language has also evolved. An Old Testament scholar, Emmanuel Tov, confirms there were errors in the text before it arrived in the hands of the Masoretes,

Corruptions as well as various forms of scribal intervention (changes, corrections, etc.) are thus evidenced in all textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible, including... the proto-Masoretic texts. ...before they [the Masoretes, and before them the *Soferim* (scribes) had put their meticulous principles into practice, the text already contained corruptions and had been tampered with during that earlier period when scribes did not yet treat the text with such reverence. Therefore, paradoxically, the Masoretes carefully preserved a text that was already corrupted.<sup>8</sup>

The text of the Pentateuch as commenced by Moses and as the various books traversed the centuries together, picking up the Israelite histories, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, etc., and books of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., could have undergone constant changes. Artifacts, that have been found in archaeological excavations, on which early Biblical Hebrew was written have indicated not only orthographic and syntactic changes, but also semantic variances in Biblical text that would have that quality of difference to resemble Joseph Smith's claimed experience of "variations" he noted in the quotations of the angel.

As there are two sides to the Joseph Smith puzzle, there are two sides to the religious ambiguity that concerns the Bible. The devout and traditional opinion of the Bible, as expressed above that would see the Bible inviolable and wholly intact after centuries of transferral through the "providential concern of God for his scriptures," is far from the opinion of historical critics. The enterprise of historical criticism, begun with Baruch Spinoza up to Rudolph Bultmann and Ernst Kasemann, with its Enlightenment

perspectives of rationalism and analysis, confront on every side that historical evidence that they see as the blind-sidedness of dogmatic belief. For them,

...historical discipline determines the standards of meaning and value that are used to interpret scripture. ...the content of the Bible is separated from what stands behind it. What the Bible reports and what it means are...two different matters.... to be determined by scholarship operating under presuppositions of modern culture. <sup>9</sup>

Thus, meaning and interpretation are ever added reasons for uncertainty over an authentic knowledge of the Bible. Often Bible Criticism is considered to be a negative commentary on scripture. However, for the purpose of establishing credibility for Joseph Smith in his position identifying errors in the Bible, the *Higher Critics* do represent allies in their recognition of historical errors and improbabilities in the text. While none of the Higher Critics would have undertaken the semantical changes in the Bible that Joseph Smith did, many of them could well have been intrigued and certainly pleasantly puzzled by the Mormon prophet's Bible additions.

The historical analysis of the Bible grew in legitimacy among German scholars until it received recognition as *Higher Criticism*. Sophisticated German and English historians can be seen preceding Smith; those outside his work have ever remained ignorant of his accomplishment. However, potential examples of early support can be noted in the foreseeing of "the foundations of the later Documentary Hypothesis," when by 1780-83, J. G. Eichhorn had "...divided Genesis into a Jehovah and an Elohim source." <sup>10</sup> Earlier, G. E. Lessing had questioned the historical accuracy of 600,000 men leaving Egypt as indicated in the account of the exodus. Lessing found the crossing of the

Red Sea itself suspect, indicating it

...was quite impossible for such numbers to have crossed the sea in the few hours implied in Exodus 14.21-9. He estimated that the total number of Israelites would have been over three million, needing six thousand carts...one hundred thousand horses, three hundred thousand oxen and six hundred thousand sheep. ...estimates of the length of such a caravan [have been] put at 180 German miles.<sup>11</sup>

Other materials discussing Bible inadequacy could be used to confirm Joseph Smith's understanding of the errant nature of the Bible. The title of Bart Ehrman's work, by itself, *The Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, indicates scribal prejudice that would have caused textual corruption.<sup>12</sup>

## NOTES TO APPENDIX B

1. Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, (Des Moines Iowa: Christian Research Press) 1973, 90.
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book) 1993, 9-10.
3. Robert J Matthews, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible*, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press) 1985, xxx to xxxi.
4. Ibid, xxxii.
5. Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 1999, 20.
6. An example of a text for rabbinical preparation that deals with the technical concerns of an imperfect Hebrew text, E. Kautzsch, edited and enlarged edition, A. E. Cowley, second English edition, *Gesenius's Hebrew Grammar* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1910, 65-104. These authors, still considered ultimate Hebrew authorities for coping with the grammar of the Hebrew Bible, explain the orthographic, syntactic and semantic problems of the Hebrew Bible text as it was found and codified by the Masoretes. In a detail that supports Smith's claim to variation in the text, on pages 65-67, they acknowledge the margin emendations known as *Qere* and *Kethibh* (Masora marginalis and finalis), which margin embellishments were found top, bottom, and to the side of the page. Some of these marginalia were preferred to what was written in the text

and were *Qere* or “*to be read*,” since according to the opinion of Jewish critics, they are to be preferred to the [*Kethibh*], i.e. what is written in the text, and are actually to be read instead of it.” (65-66) This means that translators had a choice for their texts from items written in the text and those written in the margins of the text. When Smith reported his encounter with the angel, he used explanations in his canonized history, telling of the angel’s version of the third chapter of Malachi, “...and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy, though with a little variation from the way it reads in our books (Joseph Smith History 1:36),...” Whether one believes in an angel visiting Smith or not, it is clear from a study of *Gesenius’s Hebrew Grammar* that multiple orthographic, syntactic, and semantic changes have been found and these variations are indicated as part of the flow of grammatical instruction in Gesenius’s text. This affirms most meticulously Joseph Smith’s assertion of variation in the English Bible, as it was embedded even in the oldest Hebrew text before it had been translated into English by the earliest translators. From the textual evidence of these eminent German Hebraists, Smith is justified in claiming a right to render the text into the best translation he was capable of accomplishing, much as Luther, Mofitt or Phillips did the best they could. The unusual thing Smith accomplished was his unique translation of English to English. The other translators had the use of scholarly comparisons and a knowledge of the original languages, Greek and Hebrew. Joseph Smith *translated* the Bible English to English with no scholarly help or training. Anyone can read the *Joseph Smith Translation* verse by verse and see which version he prefers. The proof of a superior translation has to at least

be in part in the style and content of the reading. Latter-day Saints express a prejudice for their prophet's translation version; others, if they were to read the readily available Smith's translation version, known as the JST, might also find his work satisfying.

7. Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1992, 436.

8. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1996, 9.

9. Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Kasemann*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1995, 2.

10. John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1985, 19.

11. Ibid, 25.

12. Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, (New York: Oxford), 1993.