

[Return to About Mormons home](#)

Adam-God's Last Stand

by *W. John Walsh*

[NOTE: THIS PAPER IS STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION. I invite both Latter-day Saints and anti-Mormons to assist me in the creation of this paper. Since this document is intended to eventually address all aspects of this issue, I would appreciate any insights into the issues involved from either side via [EMAIL](#).]

Preface

One of the most common misrepresentations made against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that the Church sponsors the worship of the man Adam instead of our Heavenly Father. The purpose of this paper is to refute this criticism. As I have written this document, I have made a basic assumption of which the reader should be aware. I have assumed that the historical documents that I have quoted in the paper are substantially accurate transcriptions. Unfortunately, this may not be the case. However, for purposes of discussion, I have decided to take this approach. (See [Are Brigham Young's Sermons Scripture?](#); [The Seer and Journal of Discourses](#))

One of the most common misrepresentations made against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that the Church sponsors the worship of the man Adam instead of our Heavenly Father. These slanderous attacks are usually made in a manner similar to the following:

"Mormons believe that God the Father is the physical human being 'Adam' and had sexual relations with Mary to conceive Jesus." (See [Was Mary a virgin?](#))

"God is an exalted man. He has a physical body and is the same person as Adam" (For a discussion on the anthropomorphic nature of God, see [The Doctrinal Exclusion: Trinity and the Nature of God](#) by Dr. Stephen E. Robinson)

In the best of anti-Semitic tradition, notice that each example is combined with other misleading statements to provide maximum shock value. (See [Critique of the Godmakers Terminology](#))

First, let's ensure that we have a sound understanding of LDS belief and doctrine on this issue. Latter-day Saints worship God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus Christ. We do not worship the man Adam, though we respect and revere him. (See [Adam: LDS Sources](#))

Latter-day Saint beliefs regarding the [Godhead](#), especially [Jesus Christ](#) and our [Heavenly Father](#), are extremely well-defined. Full and detailed explanations of all important teachings on these points are readily available. Therefore, anyone who claims that Latter-day Saints worship the man Adam is either lying or severely misinformed.

So how did this issue originate? During the mortal ministry of Christ, his enemies spent their time "Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him." (Luke 11:54)

Likewise, enemies of Christ today have spent considerable time searching through old documents looking for anything with which to accuse the Church. These modern day Pharisees have discovered a few statements

attributed to President Brigham Young in the 1800's that could be interpreted to mean that he taught that the man Adam is our god.

The most often quoted statements attributed to President Young are the following:

When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken--HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.1, p.50 - p.51, Brigham Young, April 9, 1852)

Whether Adam is the personage that we should consider our heavenly Father, or not, is considerable of a mystery to a good many. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.4, p.218, Brigham Young, February 8, 1857)

Some have grumbled because I believe our God to be so near to us as Father Adam. There are many who know that doctrine to be true. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.5, p.331 - p.332, Brigham Young, October 7, 1857)

Upon initial examination, it might appear that President Young believed that the man Adam and God are the same personage. However, the use of selective quotation can distort a speaker's true meaning. Let's examine some other references from President Young:

"So I [Brigham Young] disagree with you, Mr. B., in the first point we have noticed, for you believe that God is without body and parts, while the Bible declares He has a corporeal body; that in His likeness, precisely, **He created Adam.**" (Journal of Discourses, Vol.1, p.238, Brigham Young, July 24, 1853, emphasis added)

"**What resemblance did our father Adam bear to his God**, when he placed him in the Garden of Eden?" Before he had time to reply, I asked him what resemblance Jesus bore to man in his incarnation? and "Do you believe Moses, who said the Lord made Adam in his own image and after his own likeness? This may appear to you a curiosity; but do you not see, bona fide, that **the Lord made Adam like himself**; and the Saviour we read of was made to look so like him, that he was the express image of his person?" (Journal of Discourses, Vol.6, p.317 - p.318, Brigham Young, April 7, 1852, emphasis added)

"Suppose you were rolling in wealth, and perfectly at your ease, with an abundance around you; you might have remained in that condition until Doomsday, and never could have advanced in the school of intelligence, any more than **Adam could have known about the works of God**, in the great design of the creation, without first being made acquainted with the opposite?" (Journal of Discourses, Vol.2, p.7, Brigham Young, October 23, 1853, emphasis added)

"The first **revelation given to Adam** was of a temporal nature. Most of the revelations he received pertained to his life here." (Journal of Discourses, Vol.6, p.170, Brigham Young, January 17, 1858, emphasis added)

"The Lord sent forth His Gospel to the people; He said, I will give it to **my son Adam**, from whom Methuselah received it; and Noah received it from Methuselah; and **Melchizedek** administered to **Abraham**." (Journal of Discourses, Vol.3, p.94, Brigham Young, August 8, 1852, emphasis added)

"The world may in vain ask the question, "Who are we?" But the Gospel tells us that we are the sons and daughters of that God whom we serve. Some say, "we are the children of Adam and

Eve." So we are, and **they are the children of our Heavenly Father**. We are all the children of Adam and Eve, and they and we are the offspring of Him who dwells in the heavens, the highest Intelligence that dwells anywhere that we have any knowledge of. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.13, p.312, Brigham Young, April 17, 1870, emphasis added)

From these quotations, we can learn several important things about President Young's views of Adam. First, God created Adam. Second, since Adam did not understand the works of God and received revelation from him, then God has superior knowledge to him. Finally, Adam is the son of God. Therefore, it should be obvious that President Young believed Adam and the Lord are not only separate and distinct personages, but that Adam has a lower station than his Father in Heaven.

What about those statements suggesting that Adam is our Heavenly Father? Did President Young vacillate in his beliefs about the place of Adam? Did he contradict himself? How do we resolve this issue?

This confusion arises from a lack of understanding regarding name-titles. What is a name-title? A name-title is a way of designating a person based upon his or her function. For example, terms like Father, Mother, Son, Daughter are name-titles that refer to a specific individual within a certain context, but can also refer to a separate and distinct individual in another context. My Mother is 'Mother' to me, but 'Daughter' to her 'Mother'. For more discussion on the use of name-titles, see [Fatherhood and Sonship of Jesus Christ](#).

In LDS theology, the term 'Adam' is a name-title that means "first man and father of all". So who is 'Adam'? Many different personages can claim this name-title depending upon the context. For example, the Bible teaches:

And so it is written, The **first man Adam** was made a living soul; the **last Adam** [was made] a quickening spirit. Howbeit that [was] not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man [is] of the earth, earthy: the second man [is] the Lord from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:45-7)

The first man Adam is the personage to whom we usually refer when we use the name-title 'Adam', the mortal father of [Abel](#) and [Cain](#). The second Adam is the Lord from Heaven, even Jesus Christ. Obviously, the Apostle Paul is not teaching that the man Adam and Jesus Christ are the same personage. He is teaching that both personages can claim the name-title 'Adam', or "first man and father of all". The entire human family is descended from the man Adam (See [Mankind](#)). Yet Christ was the first to be [resurrected](#) and the father of all who accept the [gospel](#). Therefore, both the man Adam and Jesus Christ can be called by the name-title 'Adam'.

Likewise, our Heavenly Father can be called 'Adam' since he is also the "first man and father of all". In fact, [Man of Holiness](#) is one of his sacred name-titles. In addition, our Heavenly Father is the literal Father of the spirits of the entire human family. In April 1997, I watched the *Mysteries of the Bible* television program on the Arts and Entertainment cable channel. This particular episode was on the Garden of Eden story. During the program, one of the scholars said that an ancient manuscript claimed that 'Adam' was the name of God, who also gave his name 'Adam' to his son, the man Adam. While Latter-day Saints do not depend upon this type of material for doctrine, it is interesting to note that President Young was not the first to say that our Heavenly Father can be called by the name-title 'Adam'.

Each member of the human family can trace his or her lineage back to Adam and Eve (See [Mankind](#)). Therefore, all of us collectively are called by the name-title Adam. In other words, we can be called by the family name. For example, President Young taught:

"The faithful children of God will be faithful in preaching the Gospel, in building up the cause of their God, and in carrying salvation to thousands and millions of the fallen **race of Adam**, which

we have done." (Journal of Discourses, Vol.2, p.127, Brigham Young, April 17, 1853)

In addition, personages who have been exalted into godhood are also known by the name-titles of 'Adam' (for men) and 'Eve' (for women). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that those who are true and faithful to the teachings of the Savior will become "gods, even the sons of God. Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (D&C 76:58-9) (See [Biblical Support for Deification](#); [Godhood](#); [Exaltation](#)). While we believe that the faithful will enjoy a life similar to our Heavenly Father, we also believe we will still be subject to and worship the God of Heaven, which is represented as the [Father](#), [the Son](#), and [the Holy Ghost](#). We will never be at the same level as them or stop worshipping them, but we will be like them and enjoy a quality of life similar to theirs. President Young taught:

Let me here say a word to console the feelings and hearts of all who belong to this Church. Many of the sisters grieve because they are not blessed with offspring. You will see the time when you will have millions of children around you. If you are faithful to your covenants, you will be mothers of nations. **You will become Eves** to earths like this; and when you have assisted in peopling one earth, there are millions of earths still in the course of creation. And when they have endured a thousand million times longer than this earth, it is only as it were the beginning of your creations. Be faithful, and if you are not blest with children in this time, you will be hereafter. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.8, p.208)

In summary, the name-title 'Adam', which means "first man and father of all", can be applied to any number of personages including:

- The man Adam, the first mortal man from whom the human family is descended.
- Jesus Christ, the spiritual father of those who accept his gospel.
- Our Heavenly Father, the father of the spirits of the entire human family, including the man Adam.
- The race of men as a whole
- The faithful followers of Christ who will become 'Adams' and 'Eves' to create worlds without number under the supervision of the God of Heaven, which is represented as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

It should be obvious by now that President Young never intended to mean that Latter-day Saints should worship the man Adam. Throughout his life, he consistently taught that we should worship our Heavenly Father, who can be called by the name-title of 'Adam'. Therefore, the critics' representation of our theology is not accurate.

Now let's answer a few miscellaneous questions regarding this topic.

1. Why does President Young refer to Heavenly Father doing some of the things typically associated with the man Adam like partaking of the fruit?

In LDS theology, the Garden of Eden story is considered an allegory that teaches the plan of salvation using symbolic expression. Most parts of the story are not to be taken literally. For example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught,

"As to the fall, the scriptures set forth that there were in the Garden of Eden two trees. One was the tree of life, which figuratively refers to eternal life; the other was the tree of knowledge of

good and evil, which **figuratively refers to how and why and in what manner mortality and all that appertains to it came into being.** (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, p.86, emphasis added)

To say that Heavenly Father performed the role of Adam and partook of the fruit is simply another way of saying that that our Father in Heaven gained his exaltation by living a mortal experience. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.345)

Latter-day Saints are taught that the story of Adam and Eve is a pattern which all must follow if they are to receive the fullness of salvation and become like God.

2. Why would President Young use a term (Adam) which was pretty well understood by everyone in the Church to refer to a specific person in such an obscure way with no explanation?

Since President Young is not here to answer the question himself, we cannot know why he used this approach for sure. In fact, no first-hand accounts of his referring to Heavenly Father by the name-title *Adam* are available. All of the references on this subject are second- or third-hand summaries. As stated in the preface to this article, I am assuming that the reports by other people are true and accurate. However, second- and third-hand information always has a greater chance for conveying the speaker's words inaccurately or out of context. If Brigham Young were available to explain his views, then there would probably be no confusion. It is important to keep in mind that no discourse devoted exclusively to this subject exists. All of the references are snippets of just a few sentences.

However, as referenced above, when we examine the same historical documents that are used by the critics, we can clearly see (assuming that they are accurate) that he used the name-title *Adam* to refer to various individuals. Perhaps it is to avoid confusion that President Young actually used the term 'Adam' in this way only a handful of times. Most of the time the documents show that he used 'Adam' in the standardized way.

3. Is Adam-God the only example of non-standard usage of name-titles?

There is certainly precedence that the Church has used the same name-title to refer to different individuals in other instances. There is also evidence that such dual usage can cause confusion. A perfect example of this is found in the original edition of the Book of Mormon. In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, the following passage is found:

the Lamb of God is the **Eternal Father**, and the Savior of the world ...(1 Nephi 11:32, emphasis added).

As shown in our [sacrament prayers](#), Latter-day Saints typically use the name-title Eternal Father to refer to our Heavenly Father. But, this passage makes it appear that the Father and the Son are the same personage. Yet the [First Vision](#) of Joseph Smith clearly shows that our Eternal Father and Jesus Christ are separate and distinct individuals. Therefore, this passage is very confusing (but not incorrect, see references below). Therefore, to clarify the identities of the personages involved, in the 1837 edition, this passage was changed

to:

the Lamb of God is the the **Son of the Eternal Father**, and the Savior of the world ...(1 Nephi 11:32, emphasis added).

Of course, the critics jump on this change and charge that we have changed our theology. Yet, as proven elsewhere, no theological change has taken place (See [Are there Doctrinal Differences Between Various Editions to the Book of Mormon?](#)). Jesus Christ *is* both the Father and the Son, but Jesus Christ is *not* Heavenly Father. (See [Fatherhood and Sonship of Jesus Christ](#)). However, the Prophet Joseph Smith decided to make this clarification in the text to avoid any confusion for the reader. Likewise, the Church today has standardized the usage of name-titles to help alleviate confusion.

4. Since the Church now seems to use a standardized usage for Elohim, Jehovah, Michael, and Adam, why would anyone use a nonstandard usage? I thought that Elohim was God's first name, so why is Brigham Young calling him Adam or anything else?

In a theological context, Latter-day Saints typically refer to Heavenly Father by the exalted name-title of *Elohim*, Jesus Christ as *Jehovah*, and the man Adam as *Michael*. (See [Elohim](#); [Jehovah](#)) This standardized LDS usage has been attacked by critics of the Church because the Bible does not use the name titles *Elohim*, *Jehovah*, or *Michael (Adam)* in this way.

Elohim is the plural of the Caananite *El* or the Hebrew *Eloah*; consequently, its literal meaning is *Gods*. In the Bible, *Elohim* is applied (1) to the one true God; (2) to false gods and idols; (3) to representatives of God, such as angels, judges, kings; (4) to the devil, at least in this phrase: the god of this world. The critics like to point out this Biblical usage in an attempt to persuade us that our theology is wrong.

Of course, LDS scholars fully realize how the Hebrew terms are used in Biblical manuscripts. Unfortunately, some Latter-day Saints mistakenly believe that *Elohim*, *Jehovah*, and *Michael* are the proper names of the individuals involved and cannot be used in other contexts. Therefore, some people become confused when presented with these and other alternate contexts. However, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie has pointed out, we simply do not know the personal name of God. (I don't have a reference at the moment. If anyone can email me one, I would be grateful).

For convenience and to avoid confusion, the Church has chosen to standardize name-titles by applying them to only one individual when teaching basic principles. For example, even though it is a plural word and has multiple usage, Latter-day Saints normally use the term *Elohim* to identify the Father because its usage connotes his supremacy and omnipotence, he being God above all Gods.

However, from time to time, Church leaders do not use this standardization of name-titles in order to help Latter-day Saints grasp some of the higher doctrines. For example, when Latter-day Saints use the name-title *God*, they typically mean Our Heavenly Father. They usually refer to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and their Savior and Redeemer (See [Names and Titles of Jesus Christ](#)). However, Jesus Christ is also appropriately called by the name-title *God*. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

Christ-Messiah is God!

Such is the plain and pure pronouncement of all the prophets of all the ages. In our desire to avoid the false and absurd conclusions contained in the creeds of Christendom, we are wont to shy away from this pure and unadorned verity; we go to great lengths to use language that shows there is both a Father and a Son, that they are separate Persons and are not somehow mystically intertwined as an essence or spirit that is everywhere present. Such an approach is perhaps essential in reasoning with the Gentiles of sectarianism; it helps to overthrow the fallacies

formulated in their creeds.

But having so done, if we are to envision our Lord's true status and glory, we must come back to the pronouncement of pronouncements, the doctrine of doctrines, the message of messages, which is that Christ is God. And if it were not so, he could not save us. Let all men, both in heaven and on earth, hear the proclamation and rejoice in its eternal verity: "The Lord is God, and beside him there is no Savior." (D&C 76:1.) (The Promised Messiah, p.98)

As we can see, Elder McConkie explains that we can use a name-title in a limited, exclusive fashion to explain one principle. However, such usage may not comprise it's full meaning. Therefore, at times Church leaders will expound upon a doctrine that may go against the standardized LDS usage.

For example, as the Prophet Joseph Smith pointed out, such Old Testament passages as, "In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), should more properly be translated, "In the beginning the head of the Gods brought forth the Gods," and they created the heavens and the earth. (Teachings, pp. 370-371.) Joseph Smith is broadening our understanding by his non-standard usage of the name-title *Elohim*.

In other words, we usually refer to *Elohim* as God, to teach the principle that we should only worship our Heavenly Father. But we can also use the name-title *Elohim* to describe the entire Celestial hierarchy.

Likewise, there were a few occasions where President Young reportedly went against the standardized usage of the name-title *Adam*. If we are confused, it is either because we do not have an adequate understanding of name-titles (e.g., mistakenly believing a name-title is exclusively associated with a unique individual) or some of the comments lack the contextual background that would be available if President Young were here to explain his comments in full.

5. *Why are there so many explanations of the Adam-God theory?*

Occasionally the critics demand that we always use the same approach to discuss this topic. To say that Latter-day Saints must "make up our minds" about this issue is a fallacy. Since President Young is not here to explain these reported teachings in full, we cannot know exactly what he meant in every detail. Therefore, we will certainly not gain a full understanding until we have a chance to discuss it with him after mortality.

What really matters is not the approach that we use to explain these statements, which are reported to have been made by a man who died over a century ago, but that we are successful in not letting the critics misrepresent our real beliefs. Despite what most critics claim, Latter-day Saints do not worship the man Adam instead of our Heavenly Father.

By far, the most common quote used by anti-Mormons on this issue is the following:

When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken--HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.1, p.50 - p.51, Brigham Young, April 9, 1852)

When presented with this statement, most people (including Latter-day Saints) would assume that President Young is reported to have said we should worship the man Adam instead of our Heavenly Father. Of course, the anti-Mormons use this reported statement to create this very impression. Therefore, most Latter-day Saints then proceed to explain how the man Adam could be considered our god (in a limited sense), but that we really worship our Father in Heaven. They are simply unaware of President Young's nonstandardized usage of the name-title "Adam."

Why are most Latter-day Saints unfamiliar with this usage? First, the majority of the historical references which suggest this usage are found in the Journal of Discourses, which is not a source for official Church teachings and most Latter-day Saints do not study it for doctrinal understanding. It is not considered part of the Church [curriculum](#) and is not used in Sunday School classes.

Second, in a ministry lasting over forty years, President Young only used this type of language a few times. While the Journal of Discourses contains 26 volumes and thousands of pages, I have only been able to find a few brief references on the subject. Even these sources are second-hand accounts of President Young's talks.

Third, as discussed above, in the 150 years since these statements were reportedly made, the Church has standardized the usage of some terms to facilitate teaching the gospel. Therefore, most Latter-day Saints are surprised when presented with this nonstandardized usage. Since we are left to guess about President Young's full meaning from the sparse historical material that is available, it is hardly surprising that different opinions have been formed.

6. Some other Latter-day Saints, including some Church leaders, have said that President Young did teach the "Adam-God" doctrine. Furthermore, they say it was a false doctrine when he taught it. Doesn't this prove that President Young's understanding of God was flawed?

If one Protestant says something about another Protestant, does this make the statement true simply because he is also a Protestant? If one American says something about another American, does this make the statement true simply because he is also an American? If one Black says something about another Black, does this make the statement true simply because he is also Black? Of course not! Quoting one person's opinion does not define the thoughts of another person, even if they belong to the same religion, nation, or race. The basic suppositions behind this technique are so flawed that I am continuously surprised that the critics bother to use it.

Latter-day Saints are taught to place particular emphasis on [the scriptures](#). For example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught:

"These canonized scriptures are the voice of Deity to the Church and the world. They have been formally adopted by the Church as the standard, rule, and measuring rod by which all gospel teaching shall be judged. Any doctrinal teaching that is out of harmony with the standard works is false, no matter who sponsors or promulgates it." (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.1, p.56)

Some Latter-day Saints have not understood President Young's teachings on this issue. Their understanding of what President Young taught is contrary to official Church doctrine. Therefore, they have concluded what President Young taught was false. In reality, they did not really understand his teachings. As shown above, nothing that President Young taught cannot be reconciled to official Church doctrine. It was not President Young's doctrine that was false, but their understanding of it.

(See [Response to Criticism](#) home page; [Accusatory Questions](#) home page)

All About Mormons