

Adam-God Theory

Critics of the Church have accused us of believing the “doctrine” that Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was God the Father. This is based on what is reported to have been said by Brigham Young in 1852.

Brigham Young’s statement. On April 9, 1852, Brigham Young made some remarks about the relationship between Adam and God. It is reported that he said:

Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken—HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do. Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, and will know it sooner or later. . . . When Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, their bodies became mortal from its effects, and therefore their offspring were mortal. When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by his Father in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve; from the fruits of the earth, the first earthly tabernacles were originated by the Father, and so on in succession (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 volumes [London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854-1886], 1: 51).

The phrases causing confusion. A careful analysis of President Young’s statement reveals that there are two specific phrases that are the source of the controversy:

1. The first is said of Adam: “HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do.”

2. The second is referring to the father of the mortal Jesus Christ: “And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family.” It is notable that the very next phrase following this one refers to Adam and says, “When he [Christ] took a tabernacle [a body], it was begotten by his Father in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve; from the fruits of the earth, the first earthly tabernacles were originated by the Father, and so on in succession.”

Latter-day Saints have never been able to completely understand Brigham Young's statement as it has been reported. The reported statement conflicts with LDS teachings before and after Brigham Young, as well as with statements of President Young himself during the same period of time.

The comments of LDS leaders and scholars. A few LDS leaders and scholars have commented on President Young's statement.

Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872-1952) addressed the issue of the so-called Adam-God theory ("What Are the Facts Concerning the So-Called Adam-God Theory?" in *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 68-71). Elder Widtsoe wrote that even though Brigham referred to Adam as "our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do," he did not mean to imply that Adam was God the Father. Elder Widtsoe felt that Brigham wished only to emphasize the nobility of the man Adam:

He [Brigham Young] spoke of Adam as the great patriarch of the human race, a personage who had been privileged and able to assist in the creation of the earth, who would continue his efforts in behalf of the human family, and through whom many of our needs would be met. All this was in contradiction to the common doctrine the world over that Adam was a great sinner, and not to be held in affectionate remembrance. Nowhere is it suggested that Adam is God, the Father whose child Adam himself was.

On this idea, Elder Widtsoe further wrote:

In the discourse, upon which hangs the Adam-God myth, President Brigham Young discussed the earthly origin of Jesus Christ. He denied that the Holy Ghost was the father of Jesus Christ; and affirmed that the Savior was begotten by God the Father. He explained that "Our Father in Heaven begat all the spirits that ever were or ever will be upon this earth; and they were born spirits in the eternal world. Then the Lord by His power and wisdom organized the mortal tabernacle of man." That is, every human being is in direct descent from God the Father. . . .

In the course of his remarks President Young was led to discuss the high place of Adam among the generations of men, for Adam "helped to make and organize this world," and as first man, the father of us all, Adam stands at the head of the human race, and will ever be the representative of his children before our Father in heaven, the Father of our spirits. It was in connection with this thought that the oft-quoted statement was made about Adam, that "he is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do."

Elder Widtsoe then pointed out that in another paragraph in that very same sermon, President Young makes a clear distinction between Adam and God the Father in the following words:

The earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael”—the last previously defined as Adam. There can be no confusion in this passage of the separate personalities of these three great beings.

Elder Widtsoe felt Brother Brigham intended to point out that the father of the earthly body of Jesus was not the Holy Ghost or Adam. Rather, it was another individual who was in Eden with Adam:

The sermon of April 9, 1852, also makes the statement that, “Jesus, our Elder Brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven.” The dishonest inference has been drawn and advertised widely that President Young meant that Adam was the earthly father of Jesus Christ. This deduction cannot be made fairly, in view of the context or of his other published utterances on the subject. Adam and Eve were not the only persons in the Garden of Eden, for “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). President Young undoubtedly had this personage in mind, for he did not say Adam, but “our Father in heaven.”

In many discourses, President Young refers to Jesus as the Only Begotten of the Father, which would not have been true had Adam been the earthly father of Jesus. At one time he declared (*JD*, 1:238), “I believe the Father came down from heaven, as the Apostles said he did, and begat the Savior of the World; for He is the Only Begotten of the Father which could not have been if the Father did not actually beget him in person.” On another occasion (*JD*, 2:42) he said, “And what shall we say of our Heavenly Father? He is also a man in perfection, and the Father of the man Jesus Christ, and the Father of our spirits.” It seems unnecessary to offer more evidence that Brigham Young held the accepted doctrine of the Church, that God, the Father, and not Adam is the earthly Father of Jesus.

Elder Widtsoe concluded his helpful chapter:

The perspective of years brings out the remarkable fact, that, though the enemies of the Latter-day Saints have had access, in printed form, to the hundreds of discourses of Brigham Young, only half a dozen statements have been useful to the calumniators of the founder of Utah. Of these, the sermon of April 9, 1852, which has been quoted most frequently, presents no errors of fact or doctrine, if read understandingly and honestly.

Elder Mark E. Peterson suspected that *JD*, 1:51 did not accurately report what Brigham Young actually said on that occasion. He wrote:

Elder Charles C. Rich was not present on the day when President Young gave an address that was wrongly reported as saying Adam was our Father in heaven (see *JD*, 1:51). The sermon was delivered April 9, 1852, and Elder Rich returned April 21. In a personal copy of the *Journal of Discourses*, Elder Ben E. Rich, son of Elder Charles C. Rich, referred to the misquotation as it appears in the *Journal of Discourses*, and in his own hand corrected the statement to read as follows: “Jesus our Elder Brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character who talked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in heaven.” In this same statement Ben E. Rich wrote: “As corrected above is what President Young said, as testified to me by my father, C. C. Rich.” (This signed statement is in the hands of the Church Historical Department.) On the face of it the mistake is obvious. We find in Genesis 2:15-16 and 3:8-9 that God walked and talked with Adam in the Garden of Eden” (*Adam: Who Is He?* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976], 16-17).

President Joseph Fielding Smith explained Brigham Young’s statement in *JD*, 1:51 (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 90-108). It is interesting that President Smith both suggests that *JD*, 1:51 may be a mis-quote, but then he proceeds to explain the two confusing phrases in case they were reported accurately:

Source of Adam-God theory. President Brigham Young is quoted—in all probability the sermon was erroneously transcribed!—as having said: “[*JD*, 1:51 quoted].”

Relationship of Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael. If the enemies of the Church who quote this wished to be honest, they could not help seeing that President Brigham Young definitely declares that Adam is Michael, the Archangel, the Ancient of Days, which indicates definitely that Adam is not Elohim, or the God whom we worship, who is the Father of Jesus Christ.

Further, they could see that President Young declared that Adam helped to make the earth. If he *helped* then he was subordinate to someone who was superior. In another paragraph in that same discourse, President Young said: “It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael.” Here he places Adam, or Michael, third in the list, and hence the least important of the three mentioned, and this President Young understood perfectly. We believe that Adam, known as Michael, had authority in the heavens before the world was framed. He dwelt in the presence of the Father and the Son and was subject to their direction as the scriptures plainly indicate.

All exalted men become gods. To believe that Adam is a god should not be strange to any person who accepts the Bible. When Jesus

was accused of blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God, he answered the Jews: "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; 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 10:34-36).

Paul said, writing to the members of the Church in Rome: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). And to the Galatians he said: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

Joseph Smith taught a plurality of gods, and that man by obeying the commandments of God and keeping the whole law will eventually reach the power and exaltation by which he also will become a god (D&C 132:17, 19-25, 29-32, 37, 49).

How Adam is our God. The expression that Adam is the only God with whom we have to do, has caused great discussion and the question naturally arises, do we not have to do with Jesus Christ and his Father? Certainly we do, and we are taught to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son, and all that we do is to be done in the name of the Son. To make clear what President Young had in mind, I will give this illustration: The army is composed of a great number of privates and officers of various ranks. The private in the army is, of course, under the captain, and the captain is under the colonel who receives instructions from his superior officers. In other words the only person with whom the private has to do is his captain. This illustration may seem rather crude, but I think it will convey the thought.

President Brigham Young was thoroughly acquainted with the doctrine of the Church. He studied the Doctrine and Covenants and many times quoted from it the particular passages concerning the relationship of Adam to Jesus Christ. He knew perfectly that Adam was subordinate and obedient to Jesus Christ. He knew perfectly that Adam had been placed at the head of the human family by commandment of the Father, and this doctrine he taught during the many years of his ministry. When he said Adam was the only god with whom we have to do, he evidently had in mind this passage given by revelation through Joseph Smith: "That you may come up unto the crown prepared for you, and be made rulers over many kingdoms, saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Zion [i.e. Jesus Christ], who hath established the foundations of Adam-ondi-Ahman; Who hath appointed Michael [Adam] your prince, and established his feet, and

set him upon high, and given him the keys of salvation under the counsel and direction of the Holy One, who is without beginning of days and end of life” (D&C 78:15-16).

Adam holds keys of salvation under Christ. This doctrine was also taught by Joseph Smith, who said: “The Priesthood was first given to Adam. . . . He obtained it in the creation, before the world was formed. . . . He had dominion given him over every living creature. He is Michael the Archangel, spoken of in the scriptures. . . . The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years. The keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the gospel is sent. When they are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam’s authority. . . . Christ is the Great High Priest, Adam next” (*TPJS*, 157-58).

If the keys of salvation have been committed to the hands of Adam, under the direction of Jesus Christ, then is there anything out of place for President Brigham Young to declare that it is Adam with whom we have to do? And yet here is the acknowledgment of the superiority of Jesus Christ. This being true, then the human family is immediately subject to Adam and he to the Redeemer of the world.

Again, to illustrate this point: In the Church we have a presiding officer whom we call the bishop. He has full charge in the ward over which he presides. This bishop is subject to the direction of the stake president, and he in turn to the Presidency of the Church. The only one, in the same sense, with whom the members have to do is bishop, but he is not the superior officer by any means.

Status of Adam revealed to Joseph Smith. In another revelation which President Young taught many times, we find the following: “Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created” (D&C 29:34).

The doctrine taught by the Church in relation to Adam is clearly defined in the following revelation: “Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing. “And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the prince, the archangel. And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations

shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever. And Adam stood up in the midst of the congregation; and, notwithstanding he was bowed down with age, being full of the Holy Ghost, predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation” (D&C 107:53-56).

Status of Adam known by Brigham Young. From these passages President Brigham Young could very properly say that we are subject to Adam: that he rules over his posterity, and he gives us commandments, even as he receives commandments from Jesus Christ, who directs him in his ministry and will do so to the latest day of time. And this does not detract anything from the power, greatness, and glory of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Men who harp upon this saying in the discourse of President Brigham Young should know just as well as they know anything—for it has come to their attention hundreds of times—that Brigham Young did not confuse Adam with Jesus Christ or the Father whom he worshiped.

There is a volume published containing the sayings of President Brigham Young in which his doctrine concerning the Father and the Son, and Adam’s relationship to them is clearly declared in many pages. But when men desire to malign and misrepresent, such things count for nothing.

This is from one of the discourses of Brigham Young: “We are all the children of Adam and Eve, and they are the offspring of Him who dwells in the heavens, the Highest Intelligence that dwells anywhere that we have any knowledge of.” Now, if he believed what some people like to interpret him as saying, then he could not say such a thing as that! . . .

President Young teaches paternity of Christ. Another ambiguous statement from President Brigham Young—also, quite likely, not recorded exactly as he said it—is torn from its context and used by enemies of the truth to make it appear that he believed something entirely different from the whole burden of all his other teachings. It is: “When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he [Christ] took a tabernacle, it was begotten by his Father in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. . . . Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven. . . . Now, remember from this time forth, and forever, that Jesus Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost” (*JD*, 1:50-51).

The statement by President Brigham Young that the Father is the first of the human family is easily explained. But the expression that he was the same character that was in the Garden of Eden has led to misunderstanding because of the implication which our enemies place upon it that it had reference to Adam. Unfortunately President Brigham Young is not here to make his meaning in this regard perfectly clear. Under the circumstances we must refer to other expressions by President Brigham Young in order to ascertain exactly what his views really were in relation to God, Adam, and Jesus Christ.

God: first of the human family. Let me comment first upon the expression that God is the “first of the human family.” This same doctrine was taught by Joseph Smith. It is a fundamental doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to the teachings of Joseph Smith, he beheld the Father and the Son in his glorious vision, and he taught that each had a body of flesh and bones. He has expressed it in these words: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130:22).

He also taught that, literally, God is our Father; that men are of the same race—the race called humans; and that God, the Progenitor, or Creator, is the Father of the human race. “In the image of his own body, male and female, created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created and became living souls in the land upon the footstool of God” (Moses 6:9).

It is a doctrine common to the Latter-day Saints, that God, the Great Elohim, is the First, or Creator, of the human family.

The Father was with Adam in Eden. In discussing the statement by President Brigham Young that the Father of Jesus Christ is the same character who was in the Garden of Eden, it should be perfectly clear that President Young was not referring to Adam, but to God the Father, who created Adam, for he was in the Garden of Eden; and according to Mormon doctrine Adam was in his presence constantly, walked with him, talked with him, and the Father taught Adam his language. It was not until the fall, that the Father departed from Adam and no longer visited him in the Garden of Eden.

Surely we must give President Brigham Young credit for at least ordinary intelligence, and in stating this I place it mildly. If he meant to convey the thought that the character who was in the Garden of Eden, “and who is our Father in Heaven,” was Adam, then it would mean that

this expression was in conflict with all else that he taught concerning God the Father, and I am bold to say that President Brigham Young was not inconsistent in his teaching of this doctrine. The very expression in question, “the same character that was in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven,” contradicts the thought that he meant Adam.

Brigham Young’s teachings about Adam. Now let me present one or two expressions in other discourses by President Young—of course, the critics never think of referring to these: “How has it transpired that theological truth is thus so widely disseminated? It is because God was once known on the earth among his children of mankind, as we know one another. Adam was as conversant with his Father who placed him upon this earth as we are conversant with our earthly parents. The Father frequently came to visit his son Adam, and talked and walked with him; and the children of Adam were more or less acquainted with him, and the things that pertain to God and to heaven were as familiar among mankind in the first ages of their existence on the earth, as these mountains are to our mountain boys” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 2nd ed., 159). . . .

“Our Lord Jesus Christ-the Savior, who has redeemed the world and all things pertaining to it, is the Only Begotten of the Father pertaining to the flesh. He is our Elder Brother, and the Heir of the family, and as such we worship him. He has tasted death for every man, and has paid the debt contracted by our first parents [that is Adam and Eve]” (*Ibid.*, 40).

“The Latter-day Saints believe in Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Father, who came in the meridian of time, performed his work, suffered the penalty and paid the debt of man’s original sin by offering up himself, [they believe he] was resurrected from the dead, and ascended to his Father; and as Jesus descended below all things, so he will ascend above all things” (*Ibid.*, 39).

It is very clear from these expressions that President Brigham Young did not believe and did not teach, that Jesus Christ was begotten by Adam. He taught that Adam died and that Jesus Christ redeemed him. He taught that Adam disobeyed the commandment of the Father, or God, and was driven from the Garden of Eden. He said that Adam was conversant with his Father in the Garden of Eden. This is believed by all members of the Church, and also that the Father was in the Garden of Eden until Adam was driven out for his transgression.

Adam not Father of Christ. The statement, “And when he took a tabernacle it was begotten by his Father in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and, the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, has reference to the body of Jesus Christ.

Adam died as the Father said he would through partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Moses 3:16-17; 4:9, 17; 6:10-12). Adam's spirit and body were separated, and he did not get the resurrection until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). Adam, when a spirit without the body, could not beget a body of flesh and bones, therefore, he could not be the Father of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

Again, Adam was as dependent on Jesus Christ as we are for the resurrection which came through the fact that Jesus had life in himself as his Father did (John 10:14-18). Therefore, he had to have a Father who had body of flesh and bones who was immortal, not a father who was a spirit with a body in the grave, whose body had turned to dust.

Worship Elohim: not Adam. We worship Elohim, the Father of Jesus Christ. We do not worship Adam and we do not pray to him. We are all his children through the flesh, but Elohim, the God we worship, is the Father of our spirits; and Jesus Christ, his first Begotten Son in the spirit creation and his Only Begotten Son in the flesh, is our Eldest Brother.

Professor Stephen E. Robinson at Brigham Young University wrote of JD, 1:51:

So how do Latter-day Saints deal with [this statement]? We don't; we simply set it aside. It is an anomaly. On occasion my colleagues and I at Brigham Young University have tried to figure out what Brigham Young might have actually said and what it might have meant, but the attempts have always failed. The reported statements simply do not compute—we cannot make sense out of them. This is not a matter of believing it or disbelieving it; we simply don't know what "it" is. If Brigham Young were here we could ask him what he actually said and what he meant by it, but he is not here, and even expert students of his thought are left to wonder whether he was misquoted, whether he meant to say one thing and actually said another, whether he was somehow joking with or testing the saints, or whether some vital element that would make sense out of the reports has been omitted (Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], 20-21).

Anti-Mormon critics have not only interpreted Brigham Young's remarks—referring to it as the "Adam-God theory"—they have also elevated their own interpretation to the status of "official LDS doctrine." It is a case of our theology being dictated to us by our critics. According to them Brigham Young taught that Adam, the husband of Eve and father of Cain, is identical to that Elohim who is God, the Father of spirits and the Father of Jesus Christ. But for Latter-day Saints this interpretation has

always been simply impossible. It contradicts the LDS scriptures. It contradicts the teachings of Joseph Smith. As mentioned, it contradicts other statements by Brigham Young made during the same period of time. It contradicts the teachings of all the prophets since Brigham Young. And it contradicts the sacred ordinances of the LDS temples, with which Brigham Young was intimately familiar.

The point is that while anti-Mormons can believe whatever they want, the Latter-day Saints have never believed that Brigham Young taught the “Adam-God theory” as explained in anti-Mormon literature, and that whether Brigham Young believed it or not, the concept proposed and interpreted by non-Mormons simply cannot be found in the theology of the Latter-day Saints.

I do not believe it. My friends do not believe it. And no one I know who understands LDS theology believes it. Yet there are few anti-Mormon publications that do not present this “theory” as one of the most characteristic doctrines of the Latter-day Saints. This is certainly a misrepresentation. I believe it is also dishonest. When used to justify a charge that Latter-day Saints aren’t Christians, it is a case of condemning the Latter-day Saints for things they do not believe or teach.