

Daniel C. Peterson on Hugh Nibley and Adam-God Theory

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Bill Hamblin and I were traveling with Hugh and Phyllis Nibley. . I would guess it was sometime in the mid-nineties. And what was going on was that Hugh was giving a fireside up in Salt Lake. It strikes me that it was somewhere in the vicinity of the Jordan River temple, so it was at the south end of the valley and it was wintery. And so Phyllis asked if we would drive them up to this fireside. And so Bill and I volunteered

I had been thinking about the Adam-God theory. Years ago I was reading something about Adam-God and suddenly I got this sort of testimony of it, but my problem was to know exactly what I had a testimony of. I sensed that there was truth there, but I didn't know exactly what it was.

And I'd read a lot of the accounts, mostly by apostates, trying to explain what it means. They don't seem to be compatible with my understanding of the gospel, right? But nevertheless, I had this feeling that it wasn't just false, but if I could somehow nail down what it was, I'd feel a lot better. And, frankly, some of the interpretations I've read don't seem to need to fit even with other statements from Brigham. So, I thought, okay, there's something there, but it's eluding me. I just can't quite figure out what it is exactly. Quite often Saints today will say, wow, he was just wrong, but I can't quite say that anymore.

So anyway, that puzzled me, but I'd heard that Hugh Nibley had said that he believed in Adam-God. And so I thought maybe if he'd figured it out, he'd tell me. So, on the way back from the fireside, I raised the issue with him.

And I remember saying that I'm not asking you because I want to preach it. I just had heard that he believed it. And he said, "yes." I said, "I want to know what you believe if I can." And he said, "I made a covenant with the Lord, that I wouldn't talk about it." And I said, "Oh, I understand that, but I'm just trying to get a little guidance to help myself figure out the issue."

And then Bill came into the conversation. We had already talked about the fact that we were going to ask him. And so Bill was trying to encourage him and I brought it up two or three times in gentle ways, saying, "I've tried to work this out, but this doesn't fit with my understanding," or "I just can't quite make this part fit in."

And even Phyllis came in and said, “Oh, Hugh, tell them. Tell them what you think. Tell them how you've worked it out.” And he said, “No, I keep my covenants.” And [then at one point we were still talking about it a little bit, and he said something like, “Look, we're going under an overpass”—just to change the subject. And he absolutely would not spill the beans.

I have a book or two on the Adam God theory and I've read them. These are by people who are no longer members. And I think to myself, “No I can't go there. That doesn't work for me.” But nevertheless, it was in the course of reading one of those that I had some sort of a totally unsought experience. The sense that there's truth here, but it's not necessarily what you're reading. Anyway, that was the extent of it.

I can still see that evening going under bridge. It was icy and wet that night and dark, of course, and him just refusing to speak. He was perfectly willing, and in fact, voluble—he was talkative on anything else, but not that.