

Mormonism from a Biblical Perspective

Examining LDS doctrine and beliefs by searching the Bible

© Copyright 2008, LifeAfterJoseph.org, All Rights Reserved.

All verses quoted from the New King James Bible, unless otherwise noted. Where the full Bible text is not represented, omissions are represented by ellipses (...). Summaries of sections of scripture as well as author additions to the text will be enclosed in brackets [].

Genesis, Chapter 1

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

It is necessary here at the very beginning of all things to understand the name used here for God. The word translated here as *God* is the Hebrew word *Elohim*. Latter-day saints will immediately recognize this as the literal name of God the Father as taught by many LDS church leaders, including Bruce R. McConkie who, in an article titled “Come, Know the Lord Jesus” in the May 1977 edition of the Ensign magazine, put it most plainly: *The Father’s name is Elohim; Jehovah is his Son.*

By breaking this name down into its parts, more can be understood, though. The first part of the name, *El*, means God. It is found in many Hebrew personal names and city names. For example, Bethel means house of God (Beth = house, El = God) and Daniel means judged by God (Dan = Judge, El = God). *El* is actually quite a generic term. It is used throughout the Old Testament to refer to gods of any sort, whether the true God, pagan gods, idols, and even people in positions of authority, but there is much more to the name of God with the addition of the suffix *im*.

When a Hebrew word ends with *im* it is plural, much like the English addition of an *s*. For example, a cherub is an angel. More than one cherub is not cherubs, but cherubim.

With the *im* ending on the word *El*, we actually have the word *gods*, rather than *god*. So *Elohim*, which Mormon doctrine claims to be the actual name of God the Father, literally means *gods*. Thus, God the Father’s actual name would have to be *Gods*.

It is also telling that singular verbs are usually used with *Elohim* (gods), which is the first of many implications of the Godhead being of a single substance yet with three distinct persons within it. It is hard to understand the subtlety in this first verse because the past tense English verb *created* works for both singular and plural subjects. We must bring the action into the present tense to give us the understanding of the difference. You might compare it to saying “Gods is creating heaven and earth” rather than “Gods are creating heaven and earth.” What appears to be bad grammar is actually our first clue of a plural God in one substance. It is this strange grammar that results in most Bible translators generally using *God* rather than *Gods* as the word translated from *Elohim*. Granted, this is not evidence enough to build a doctrine of the trinity on, and fortunately the Bible speaks at much greater depth about it throughout its pages.

Where it is doctrinally or grammatically important, I will insert an *s* in brackets following the use of the word *God* where the Hebrew word is *Elohim* throughout the remainder of this study, as seen in many of the upcoming verses.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the

Spirit of God[s] moved upon the face of the waters

3-15 And God[s] said, Let there be light: and there was light... Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters... Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place... Let the earth bring forth grass... Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night...

16-19 And God[s] made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also....

Latter-day Saints will no doubt see the beginning of symbolism for the three degrees of heaven that is such an integral part of the LDS plan of salvation in this verse mentioning the sun, moon and stars. There is no reason to think that this verse is any less literal or any more symbolic than other verses that mention such things as the different forms of plant and animal life that will be found on the earth. Moses is quite literally telling us that, just as God made whales, birds, and cattle, he also made sun, moon and stars.

20 And God[s] said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

21 And God[s] created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God[s] saw that *it was good*... Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind...

26 And God[s] said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...

27 So God[s] created man in his *own* image, in the image of God[s] created he him; male and female created he them.

LDS doctrine takes the meaning of the phrase *in his own image* to mean something akin to *exactly like* or *nearly exactly like*. If we, being flesh and bone, are created in His image, He must therefore be flesh and bone. And the reason appears sound. But consider the meaning of the word *image*. If I were to tell you I made an image of a landscape, you would suspect that I either took a photograph or painted a picture. If I were to tell you I made an image of my head, you might expect that I had sculpted a bust of myself. An image is not the thing itself. It is something that has qualities that are somehow similar to the thing itself, but it is not the thing itself. This is why the word *begotten* is used of Jesus Christ, and the word *created* used of us and the rest of creation. When a woman *begets* a child, she has given birth to something very much like herself. A woman *begets* flesh and blood. Whatever a man creates is, by definition, something less than or different than that man. A table is not greater nor the same as its creator. A car is not greater nor the same as its creator. Thus, Jesus was *begotten* – made of the same substance – of the Father while we are *created* by God in His image. God *begets* God, but God *creates* man. We are a work of God's creation that can teach us something about who He is, just as the rest of His creation does. Again, the Bible speaks volumes related to this topic, so this serves as just an introduction to the concept.

28-31 And God[s] blessed them, and God[s] said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it... And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

[End]