

People on Other Worlds

by [Kent Nielsen](#)

Since Neal Armstrong stepped from the ladder of Intrepid II and placed his foot on the moon's powdery surface, the human mind has turned with increasing interest and fascination to thoughts of outer space. Science fiction writers have suddenly become respectable.

Age-old questions again come to the surface: Is our earth the only world in all of space that has intelligent inhabitants? Or is there life on other worlds—perhaps intelligent beings like ourselves or maybe even more intelligent than ourselves? Might they visit us?

Understandably enough, discussions concerning these questions are highly absorbing and are popular among students of all ages, from junior high through graduate school.

One of the most exciting things for many Latter-day Saint students to learn is that the Church, through revelation from God (who—have you ever thought of it in this light?—is our contact from outer space), teaches some of the answers to these questions. And we've had the answers for quite some time.

Before we look at them, however, let's take a quick look at what modern science tells us about space and man's present ability to investigate it and travel in it.

We all know that the moon is only a few days away from us at present speeds of travel. (The speed is about 25,000 miles per hour when the astronauts leave the vicinity of the earth. Their rocket continually slows down, however; otherwise, at 25,000 mph, we could reach the moon in ten hours.)

Four hundred times as far away as the moon is our sun, the nearest star. If we could maintain the 25,000 mph speed, it would still take almost six months to reach the sun.

Between the earth and sun lie the paths of Mercury and Venus. In the other direction lies that of Mars. Life, as we understand it in mortality, is apparently impossible on any of these nearby planets except for a slim chance of very simple organisms on Mars. Mars does have an atmosphere, but it is one hundred times thinner than that of the earth, and it contains little water vapor or oxygen. Temperatures on its equator vary from a maximum of 80 degrees in daytime to a frigid 100 degrees below zero at night. On Venus and Mercury, temperature and atmospheric conditions are too extreme for any organisms whatever; Venus sits under a dense and suffocating atmosphere at a temperature 100 degrees hotter than melted lead, while Mercury, with no

atmosphere to speak of, alternately brakes and freezes between temperatures as hot as those of Venus and as cold as 200 degrees below zero.

Traveling out beyond Mars to our sun's outer planets, we would find conditions no more hospitable. The outer planets of our system are so far away from the sun that at 25,000 mph it would take us two and a half years to reach the closest one, massive Jupiter, and twenty years to reach outermost Pluto. At such distances from the sun, the warmest temperature we would find would be 200 degrees below zero on "nearby" Jupiter. It would be progressively colder on Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.¹ On distant Pluto the sun would appear only as an extra-bright star, giving off enough heat to keep Pluto at about 400 degrees below zero, a dark, cold, inhospitable place indeed!

So much for our own solar system. But what about other suns and other planets? On the vast scale of distances in space, even Pluto is practically on top of us. While it would take twenty years to reach Pluto, even at our speed of 25,000 mph it would take us 100,000 years to reach the nearest star outside of our solar system.

And there are one hundred billion such stars organized into the great system that we call our galaxy, all revolving around a common center like a giant pinwheel. Individual stars in the galaxy are so distant from each other that light itself takes several years to get from one star to the next. (Light takes only eight minutes to get to us from our sun.) To travel clear across the galaxy, light would require more than 100,000 years. Our own sun, with its attendant planets, is about halfway out from the galactic center, traveling around it in a great circle every 200 million years. To complete the trip even in that much time, it must travel at a speed between 150 and 200 miles per second (about 25 times 25,000 mph).

As vast as our own galaxy is, there are still billions of others! Galaxies continue endlessly into space as far as the largest telescopes can penetrate.

People often ask about the possibility of space travel to other planets surrounding distant stars. When we consider the staggering distances and the length of time it would take to reach even the closest star (hundreds of thousands of years), it is rather apparent that our traveling there by spaceship is an impossibility. To the very nearest stars, radio communication might be possible. However, even radio signals, traveling at the speed of light, would take several years to arrive there and several more years for an answer to come back, assuming there is someone there to send an answer!

Is there? Could there be? Planets that are inhabited by intelligent beings *can* exist—we live on one. And as we think of all the galaxies, it is utterly unthinkable that among the uncountable billions upon billions of stars and galaxies throughout space, intelligent beings exist on only one world in this whole vast universe. If only one star in a million should have inhabitable planets, that would still leave over 100,000 such systems in our own galaxy alone! And galaxies like ours exist by the billions!

But whether planets with conditions satisfactory for human life are a dime a dozen or extremely rare, science cannot tell us. Other stars are too far away, and our means of learning about them

too meager. Even if the nearest star had such planets, we could not hope to see them with the best conceivable instruments, much less tell if they were inhabited—unless the inhabitants should just happen to be sending extremely powerful radio messages our way. The U.S. government has actually turned its radio telescopes upon a couple of nearby stars that appear to be likely prospects to see if such messages were forthcoming. They weren't.

How, then, can we ever hope to know about people on other worlds? Considering the place and the conditions of the world upon which the Lord has placed us, and the limitations upon our scientific abilities, it seems that there is only one answer. We have no other source of knowledge than that which the Lord himself feels it is important to give to us in our earthly condition.

Walter Sullivan, science editor of the *New York Times*, wrote a prize-winning best seller about the possibility of contacting intelligent life on other worlds. In his book *We Are Not Alone*, he discusses what a tremendous impact such contact would have upon mankind should it occur, and he remarks that one group of people who would be at least partly prepared for such an event would be the Latter-day Saints.

Of course, Mr. Sullivan is correct. Not only do we know about the existence of people on other worlds; Latter-day Saints know also that people from other worlds visit the earth! Earth has been receiving visitors from outer space for years, and these visitors have been leaving highly intelligent messages for our benefit. When we put this all in perspective, it becomes very exciting: intelligent beings from a higher culture have visited earth frequently. In fact, isn't that a large part of the gospel message? Let's review some of the things that we as Latter-day Saints know about outer space.

People on Other Worlds

In June 1830 the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith by revelation some of the earlier writings of Moses, the man who took Israel out of Egypt fifteen hundred years before Christ, thousands of years before even Jules Verne wrote stories about outer space. Here is what Joseph Smith learned about Moses' experiences:

“And calling upon the name of God, he [Moses] beheld his glory again, for it was upon him; and he heard a voice, saying: Blessed art thou, Moses, for I, the Almighty, have chosen thee, and thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God.

“And it came to pass, as the voice was still speaking, Moses cast his eyes and beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; ...

“And he beheld also the inhabitants thereof, ...

“And he beheld many lands; and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof.

“And it came to pass that Moses called upon God, saying: Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?”

“And behold, the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and talked with him face to face. And the Lord God said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me.

“And by the word of my power, have I created them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth.

“And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose. ...

“But only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I unto you. For behold, there are many worlds that have passed away by the word of my power. And there are many that now stand, and innumerable are they unto man; but all things are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them.

“And the Lord God spake unto Moses, saying: 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.

“And now, Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak.

“And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shall write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; and they shall be had again among the children of men—among as many as believe.”²

The message of these few verses is stunning! People on many worlds! Right now! Living, working, playing, creating, doing things—right now!

Of special interest are the last two verses, wherein the Lord tells Moses about Joseph Smith’s role in giving these truths to the world again. Notice, however, that only those who believe were to know these things. That’s why the world at large doesn’t understand anything about Moses’ revelation. The world as yet hasn’t placed the Pearl of Great Price on its nightstand for its evening reading.

Of course, Moses and Joseph Smith weren’t the only ones to learn of other worlds. Enoch, a thousand years before Moses, said, “And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still. ...”³

The apostle Paul knew of these things also. He spoke of God’s Son, “whom he hath appointed heir of all things,” being the one “by whom also he made the worlds.”⁴

Brigham Young has said, "... there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. That course has been from all eternity, and it is and will be to all eternity."⁵

How Long Has This Been Going On?

This insight of the gospel into the subject of outer space is what makes the whole subject meaningful. When you look up into the heavens at night and see the countless numbers of stars, it is easy to imagine other people "out there" being tested and tried and experiencing struggles and joys somewhat similar to those we are going through. But the most exciting thing about this whole basic and fundamental concept is that it is true. Totally and completely true. People growing, developing, and finding fulfillment—out there!

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. ... he was once a man like us ... God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth. ..."⁶

"If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and ... God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. ... And where was there ever a father without first being a son? ... If Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that *He* had a Father also? ...

"He [Jesus] laid down His life, and took it up, the same as His Father had done before."⁷

Long before our God began his creations, he dwelt on a mortal world like ours, one of the creations that his Father had created for him and his brethren. He, with many of his brethren, was obedient to the principles of the eternal gospel. One among these, it is presumed, was a savior for them, and through him they obtained a resurrection and an exaltation on an eternal, celestial world.⁸ Then they gained the power and godhood of their Father and were made heirs of all that he had, continuing his works and creating worlds of their own for their own posterity—the same as their Father had done before, and his Father, and his Father, and on and on. With these things in mind, W. W. Phelps, in a hymn, asks the question:

"If you could hie to Kolob

In the twinkling of an eye,

And then continue onward

With that same speed to fly,

D'ye think that you could ever,

Through all eternity,

Find out the generation

*Where Gods began to be?"*⁹

Nothing is more basic in the restored gospel than these truths that, because of recent events of space travel, are so timely. The great hope of the gospel for us is that we may come to a oneness with our Lord and our Father and partake of this same work and glory and godhood. Being joint-heirs of all that the Father has, we may then look forward to using those powers to organize still other worlds from the unorganized matter that exists throughout boundless space. Creating other worlds, peopling them with our own eternal posterity, providing a savior for them, and making known to them the saving principles of the eternal gospel, that they may have the same experiences we are now having and be exalted with us in their turn—this is eternal life.¹⁰ No wonder this possibility continues to fascinate and inspire Saints of all ages. This hope is what inspires members of the Church to seek eternal marriage and to seek in all things to be one with our Lord Jesus Christ, because we want to be with him and participate in all the marvelous things of which Paul the apostle said: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”¹¹

Differences in Other Worlds

Another basic truth is that all of the worlds out there are *not* the same. Some are celestial. Some are terrestrial. Some are telestial. Some, such as ours, are in a phase of temporal existence. And there are other phases, probably some we don’t even know of.

The Lord has said that “there is no space in which there is no kingdom ... either a greater or a lesser kingdom.” He has also said, “All kingdoms have a law given.” All kingdoms are *not* given the same laws, but “unto every law there are certain bounds. ...”¹²

Our earth and its inhabitants are under the laws of temporal existence.¹³ We know a little about the bounds of the laws of this earth’s temporal existence. We know that our world is to undergo a major change to prepare for the Millennium. Many fascinating things are going to happen. Few other events in all scripture have been so clearly and definitively outlined as that which will happen to our world in preparation for and during a one-thousand-year period called the Millennium. But that is a subject for another article. It’s enough to point out here that our earth is now subject to one set of laws, and in the future it will be subject to another set of laws. In other words, our world already has gone through and will yet go through certain planned phases. The same thing happens to other worlds in outer space.

A vital point to remember here is that our science—our core of understanding concerning the operations of our world—is based on experience. And human experience apart from God’s revelations has been limited to a world under a temporal set of laws. We can hope to determine with some accuracy the scientific laws and principles that pertain to this order of the world. But if we assume a uniformity in space and time so complete that we picture the whole universe—past, present, and future—as being subject to the same order that God has given our temporal world, we fail to understand the potentially rich variety of other types of laws that God has given to other worlds. Many of these worlds have passed to a higher state of existence than our own.

Interestingly, the revelations from the Lord do assure us that worlds and heavens do continue one above the other.¹⁴ As our earth’s atmosphere (“firmament” or “expanse”) in which the birds fly is sometimes referred to as a “heaven,”¹⁵ so also our solar system of planets is referred to as the

earth's heavens.¹⁶ Seemingly, this order of heavens is what is referred to when the Lord promised that "the heavens and the earth shall pass away" and there shall be "new heavens and a new earth."¹⁷

But there are heavens beyond the "heavens" for our earth. "... the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," wrote Solomon.¹⁸ And Joseph Smith commented: "the heaven of heavens could not contain him [Christ]; for he took the liberty to go into other heavens."¹⁹

We do not know how extensive is the order of heavens that pertain to our Lord Jesus Christ and that were created by him. It may consist of the local group of stars to which our sun belongs, or of our whole galaxy, or of our cluster of galaxies, or of all of the galaxies we have so far discovered.

Abraham was shown that in our Lord's system of heavens, one planet exists above another "until thou come nigh unto Kolob, which ... is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order" as our earth.²⁰

As a side note, unbelievers have always found it difficult to picture the work and power of the Lord on such a vast scale. In the days of St. Augustine, 400 years after Christ, Christian scholars vigorously debated the possibility of people living on the *other side of our world!* Men debated whether such a land, virtually another world, actually existed, and if it did, whether it was inhabited by men of some form or other. Their speculations and questions about another "world" at the antipodes almost exactly parallel those of our own science about other worlds in space. Augustine himself came to the conclusion that if there were such a place, it could not be inhabited by men.

A similar problem to Augustine's arose once again in the time of Copernicus and Galileo. At that time the apostate Christian church had accepted the science of Aristotle, which taught that there was but one earth, located at the very center or lowest place in the universe. When Copernicus proposed his new theory of the order of the universe, he placed the sun at the center and the earth in the heavens. It opened the door once again to the question of other worlds.

Centuries later, when Columbus and other explorers found that there truly was a "new world" in the midst of the ocean, and that it was inhabited by men, Christian missionaries lost no time in trying to convert them. Once men had crossed the "impossible" ocean barrier, the "new world" became one with the old world and the problem simply disappeared. The Book of Mormon throws a flood of light on the relationship of the gospel to the ancient inhabitants of America. The Lord could, and did, send angels and revelations of his truths to prophets in America as well as to prophets in Palestine. And though Augustine and the men of his time could not cross the oceans to America, the resurrected Christ certainly could—and did.

Certainly it is no harder for the Lord to visit other worlds than it was for him to visit the Nephites on this continent after his resurrection. When speaking of other worlds, the Lord told Joseph Smith that "all these are kingdoms," and he likened them to a field in which different servants labored, each of which he visited in turn; "and thus they all received the light of the countenance of their Lord. ... Therefore, unto this parable will I liken all these kingdoms, and the inhabitants

thereof—every kingdom in its hour and in its time, and in its season, even according to the decree which God hath made.”²¹

What Do People on Other Worlds Look Like?

A great many Christians today, influenced by the modern teaching of the evolutionary origin of man from lower species, have long since abandoned the doctrine that man was created in the image of God. Since before the time of Augustine, the living God of revelation and the scriptures has been replaced by the god of Greek philosophy—a being without body, parts, or passions, beyond the bounds of time and space. These Christians, as well as persons who believe in no religion whatever, expect that the chance processes of evolution on other worlds would most likely bring about intelligent beings quite different from man. All of us have been made more or less familiar with this kind of thinking on a less refined scale through the green, bug-eyed monster types of popular science fiction.

Such things make interesting reading for the unknowledgeable, but no Latter-day Saint need be left in doubt. There is nothing more fundamental in God’s revelations than the basic premise that we are of the race of Gods. We are of his species. God looks like us. We look like him. He has two arms, two legs, a head—indeed, Jesus said, “If ye have seen me, ye have seen the Father.” Obviously, God’s sons and daughters would be of his species, would resemble him. This was one of the basic truths Joseph Smith knew after his vision in 1820. Consequently, people on other worlds would be like us, because we are all his children.

The world may think of green, bug-eyed monsters, and science fiction movies may fascinate and enthrall, but they are pure fiction! People “out there” are like people here, because we are all of the race of Gods.

Visitors from Outer Space

A final note to this most brief summary of some of the things that the Lord has told us concerning outer space is concerned with the possibility of visitors from outer space. Anyone interested in intelligent beings on other worlds ponders the obvious question: Could a person from outer space ever come to earth?

Any Latter-day Saint knows the answer. Of course visitors from outer space can come to earth! They’ve been doing it for six thousand years!

God and angels visited Adam. Visitations of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ to the earth are recorded in the Old and New Testaments, as well as visitations by angels. The Book of Mormon has numerous accounts of visitations. The Father and the Son visited Joseph Smith in 1820. Space travel seems to be quite common!

In our temporal existence, we may not be able to travel to worlds beyond our solar system, but other beings in other phases of existence are not so limited. The gospel has been taught in every

dispensation by space travel. True, the visitors do not use rocket ships—they have more efficient means.

When Moroni returned to heaven after one of his visits to Joseph Smith, Joseph “saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared. ...”²²

God continues to guide his prophets and his people by the revelations of the Spirit. That is nothing else but communication with other, more intelligent beings from another world.

Communication with other worlds is not a future possibility; it is a present fact! Through such communication we have learned much from the wisdom of superior beings—information that can solve our earthly problems, if we will listen.

What is the Millennium all about if it is not simply a period when earthly civilization will be brought under the government of superior beings from another world who will visit earth frequently to direct affairs on earth! Indeed, when looked at in perspective, the gospel becomes enormously exciting and sophisticated.

“Christ and the resurrected Saints will reign over the earth during the thousand years. They will not probably dwell upon the earth, but will visit it when they please, or when it is necessary to govern it.”²³

But these beings from outer space, or another world, will not be aliens. They will be our brethren who have lived upon this earth in mortality. All of us in the Church are expending our energies in the gospel partly because of the assignment from the Lord to inform the world of this coming visitation by him and other people from outer space, or from the heavens.

It is obvious, therefore, that if we are to help prepare the world to receive these visitors we must know something ourselves about other worlds, the people on them, why we are here, and what is yet going to happen to this world. No one on earth should know more about outer space—and talk more about it—than Latter-day Saints.

It is good that the world’s attention has been turned to the moon. If the journeys into space did nothing but turn mankind’s mind once more to the age-old questions about other worlds and life on them—if it did only this—Neal Armstrong’s footprints on the moon will have served a tremendously significant mission.