

Gospel Classics:

The Origin of Man

By the First Presidency of the Church

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“God created man in his own image” ([Gen. 1:27](#)).



In the early 1900s, questions concerning the Creation of the earth and the theories of evolution became the subject of much public discussion. In the midst of these controversies, the First Presidency issued the following in 1909, which expresses the Church’s doctrinal position on these matters. A reprinting of this important First Presidency statement will be helpful as members of the Church study the Old Testament this year.

Inquiries arise from time to time respecting the attitude of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints upon questions which, though not vital from a doctrinal standpoint, are closely connected with the fundamental principles of salvation. The latest inquiry of this kind that has reached us is in relation to the origin of man. It is believed that a statement of the position held by the Church upon this subject will be timely and productive of good.

In presenting the statement that follows we are not conscious of putting forth anything essentially new; neither is it our desire so to do. Truth is what we wish to present, and truth—eternal truth—is fundamentally old. A restatement of the original attitude of the Church relative to this matter is all that will be attempted here. To tell the truth as God has revealed it, and commend it to the acceptance of those who need to conform their opinions thereto, is the sole purpose of this presentation.

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” In these plain and pointed words the inspired author of the book of Genesis made known to the world the truth concerning the origin of the human family. Moses, the prophet-historian—“learned,” as we are told, “in all the wisdom of the Egyptians”—when making this important announcement was not voicing a mere opinion, a theory derived from his researches into the occult lore of that ancient people. He was speaking as the mouthpiece of God, and his solemn declaration was for all time and for all people. No subsequent revelator of the truth has contradicted the great leader and lawgiver of Israel. All who have since spoken by divine authority upon this theme have confirmed his simple and sublime proclamation. Nor could it be otherwise. Truth has but one source, and all revelations from heaven are harmonious with each other. The omnipotent Creator, the maker of heaven and earth, had shown unto Moses everything pertaining to this planet, including the facts relating to man’s origin, and the authoritative pronouncement of that mighty prophet and seer to the house of Israel, and through Israel to the whole world, is couched in the simple clause: “God created man in his own image” ([Gen. 1:27](#); see [Moses 1:27–41](#)).

The creation was twofold—first spiritual, secondly temporal. This truth, also, Moses plainly taught—much more plainly than it has come down to us in the imperfect translations of the Bible that are now in use. Therein the fact of a spiritual creation, antedating the temporal creation, is strongly implied, but the proof of it is not so clear and conclusive as in other records held by the Latter-day Saints to be of equal authority with the Jewish scriptures. The partial obscurity of the latter upon the point in question is owing, no doubt, to the loss of those “plain and precious” parts of sacred writ, which, as the Book of Mormon informs us, have been taken away from the Bible during its passage down the centuries (see [1 Ne. 13:24–29](#)). Some of these missing parts the Prophet Joseph Smith undertook to restore when he revised those scriptures by the spirit of revelation, the result being that more complete account of the Creation which is found in the book of Moses, previously cited. Note the following passages:

“And now, behold, I say unto you, that these are the generations of the heaven and of the earth, when they were created, in the day that I, the Lord God, made the heaven and the earth,

“And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew. For I, the Lord God, created all things of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth. For I, the Lord God, had not caused it to rain upon the face of the earth. And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them, and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air;

“But, I, the Lord God, spake, and there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

“And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also; nevertheless, all things were before created; but spiritually were they created and made according to my word” ([Moses 3:4–7](#); see also [Moses 1](#) and [Moses 2](#), and compare with [Gen. 1](#) and [Gen. 2](#)).

These two points being established, namely, the creation of man in the image of God, and the twofold character of the Creation, let us now inquire: What was the form of man, in the spirit and in the body, as originally created? In a general way the answer is given in the words chosen as the text of this treatise. “God created man in his own image.” It is more explicitly rendered in the Book of Mormon thus: “All men were created in the beginning after mine own image” ([Ether 3:15](#)). ... If, therefore, we can ascertain the form of the “Father of spirits,” “The God of the spirits of all flesh,” we shall be able to discover the form of the original man.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is “the express image” of His Father’s person ([Heb. 1:3](#)). He walked the earth as a human being, as a perfect man, and said, in answer to a question put to Him: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” ([John 14:9](#)). This alone ought to solve the problem to the satisfaction of every thoughtful, reverent mind. The conclusion is irresistible, that if the Son of God be the express image (that is, likeness) of His Father’s person, then His Father is in the form of a man; for that was the form of the Son of God, not only during His mortal life, but before His mortal birth, and after His Resurrection. It was in this form that the Father and the Son, as two personages, appeared to Joseph Smith, when, as a boy of 14 years, he received his first vision. Then if God made man—the first man—in His own image and likeness, He must have made him like unto Christ, and consequently like unto men of Christ’s time and of the present day. That man was made in the image of Christ is positively stated in the book of Moses: “And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so. ...

“And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them” ([Moses 2:26–27](#)).

The Father of Jesus is our Father also. Jesus Himself taught this truth when He instructed His disciples how to pray: “Our Father which art in heaven,” etc. Jesus, however, is the firstborn among all the sons of God—the first begotten in the spirit, and the only begotten in the flesh. He is our elder brother, and we, like Him, are in the image of God. All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.

“God created man in His own image.” This is just as true of the spirit as it is of the body, which is only the clothing of the spirit, its complement—the two together constituting the soul. The spirit of man is in the form of man, and the spirits of all creatures are in the likeness of their bodies. This was plainly taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith (see [D&C 77:2](#)).

Here is further evidence of the fact. More than 700 years before Moses was shown the things pertaining to this earth, another great prophet, known to us as the brother of Jared, was similarly favored by the Lord. He was even permitted to behold the spirit-body of the foreordained Savior, prior to His incarnation; and so like the body of a man was gazing upon a being of flesh and blood. He first saw the finger and then the entire body of the Lord—all in the spirit. The Book of Mormon says of this wonderful manifestation:

“And it came to pass that when the brother of Jared had said these words, behold, the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as

the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood; and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear.

“And the Lord saw that the brother of Jared had fallen to the earth; and the Lord said to him: Arise, why hast thou fallen?”

“And he saith unto the Lord: I saw the finger of the Lord, and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood.

“And the Lord said unto him: Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood; and never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as thou hast; for were it not so ye could not have seen my finger. Sawest thou more than this?”

“And he answered: Nay; Lord, show thyself unto me.

“And the Lord said unto him: Believest thou the words which I shall speak?”

“And he answered, Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth, and canst not lie.

“And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

“Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters.

“And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

“Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh” ([Ether 3:6–16](#)).

What more is needed to convince us that man, both in spirit and in body, is the image and likeness of God and that God Himself is in the form of a man?

When the divine Being whose spirit-body the brother of Jared beheld took upon Him flesh and blood, He appeared as a man, having “body, parts and passions,” like other men, though vastly superior to all others, because He was God, even the Son of God, the Word made flesh: in Him “dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” And why should He not appear as a man? That was the form of His spirit, and it must needs have an appropriate covering, a suitable tabernacle. He came into the world as He had promised to come (see [3 Ne. 1:13](#)), taking an infant tabernacle

and developing it gradually to the fulness of His spirit stature. He came as man had been coming for ages and as man has continued to come ever since. Jesus, however, as shown, was the Only Begotten of God in the flesh.

Adam, our first progenitor, “the first man,” was, like Christ, a preexistent spirit, and like Christ he took upon him an appropriate body, the body of a man, and so became a “living soul.” The doctrine of the preexistence—revealed so plainly, particularly in latter days—pours a wonderful flood of light upon the otherwise mysterious problem of man’s origin. It shows that man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body to undergo an experience in mortality. It teaches that all men existed in the spirit before any man existed in the flesh and that all who have inhabited the earth since Adam have taken bodies and become souls in like manner.

It is held by some that Adam was not the first man upon this earth and that the original human being was a development from lower orders of the animal creation. These, however, are the theories of men. The word of the Lord declared that Adam was “the first man of all men” ([Moses 1:34](#)), and we are therefore in duty bound to regard him as the primal parent of our race. It was shown to the brother of Jared that all men were created in the *beginning* after the image of God; whether we take this to mean the spirit or the body, or both, it commits us to the same conclusion: Man began life as a human being, in the likeness of our Heavenly Father.

True it is that the body of man enters upon its career as a tiny germ embryo, which becomes an infant, quickened at a certain stage by the spirit whose tabernacle it is, and the child, after being born, develops into a man. There is nothing in this, however, to indicate that the original man, the first of our race, began life as anything less than a man, or less than the human germ or embryo that becomes a man.

Man, by searching, cannot find out God. Never, unaided, will he discover the truth about the beginning of human life. The Lord must reveal Himself or remain unrevealed; and the same is true of the facts relating to the origin of Adam’s race—God alone can reveal them. Some of these facts, however, are already known, and what has been made known it is our duty to receive and retain.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaims man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity. God Himself is an exalted man, perfected, enthroned, and supreme. By His almighty power He organized the earth and all that it contains, from spirit and element, which exist coeternally with Himself. He formed every plant that grows and every animal that breathes, each after its own kind, spiritually and temporally—“that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal, and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual.” He made the tadpole and the ape, the lion and the elephant, but He did not make them in His own image, nor endow them with godlike reason and intelligence. Nevertheless, the whole animal creation will be perfected and perpetuated in the Hereafter, each class in its “distinct order or sphere,” and will enjoy “eternal felicity.” That fact has been made plain in this dispensation (see [D&C 77:3](#)).

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God.

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