

What is the Mormon Church really?

Interpreting the Bible literally and the Mormon view of God

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Check out the website:

www.livelifebymthebook.com



Beyond facts and data

- Class goal: to help you learn to think, read, and study your Bible correctly
- Challenge: “What does it mean to read the Bible literally?”
- Example used: *How the Mormons view God*
- Also perhaps to answer in part:
 - Why do Mormons interpret things the way they do?
 - How to respond when Bible verses are quoted by Mormons or others.

Mormon View of God

- We believe in a God who is Himself progressive, whose majesty is intelligence; whose perfection consists in eternal advancement — a Being who has attained His exalted state by a path which now His children are permitted to follow, whose glory it is their heritage to share. In spite of the opposition of the sects, in the face of direct charges of blasphemy, the Church proclaims the eternal truth: ‘As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be’ *Articles of Faith*, Ch. 24, p. 430-431
- “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also...” *Doctrine and Covenants*, 130:22
- Three separate personages — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exists. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*

Where did they get these ideas?

- Joseph Smith’s revelations, continued commentary
- Also, this belief is based on several biblical passages - such as those in which Moses speaks to God “face to face” or Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
- The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Ex. 33:11
- “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” Acts 7:56

Isn’t that what the Bible says?

- **Yes, but.....**
 - for Bible Basics, the “Main and Plain” John 3:16
- **But for building a theological framework, life application, change, wisdom, Bible study is WORK**
- My son, if you **accept** my words and **store up** my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and **applying** your heart to understanding—indeed, if you **call out** for insight and **cry aloud** for understanding, and if you **look for it as for silver** and **search for it** as for hidden treasure, **then** you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Prov. 2:1-11

We start with a literal interpretation of the Bible

- **Literal** - means that we take the words for what they mean in their normal, or plain sense.
- The Bible is not a hidden code book, only understandable by a few
- Also a reaction to excessive allegorizing and “higher critical” analysis
- BUT we can’t stop at “wooden literalism”
- Sometimes the literal meaning of words is used in a symbolic or metaphorical manner
- For the LORD God is a sun and shield. Ps. 84:11
- 1 Peter 5:8 says “Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Correctives to wooden, incorrect literalism

- Common sense, literary analysis, metaphor etc.
- Genre analysis****KEY***
 - Poem, apocalyptic, history, metaphor,
- Scripture interprets Scripture
 - Context, read entire passage, book
 - Where is it in the Bible,
 - OT, NT, understand progressive revelation
 - What else Bible says, concordance
- Historical analysis—what did it mean at the time to the original audience?
- Wise commentaries
- SEE www.youtube.com/livelifeythebook.com

Apply to Mormon Verses

- Mormon literal conclusion from these passages: that God has a physical body, and that there are two separate persons involved
 - The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Ex. 33:11
 - "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Acts 7:56
- Apply: literary analysis, genre analysis, other scriptures
- Conclusion: passages do not show that God is like a man, with a human body, but in part pictures of
- Ex: This is what his interaction with God was like...How the eternal God can have an intimate relationship with his creation and cared enough to give detailed instructions on life and worship
- Acts: that the Jesus they crucified was now resurrected and in a position of power equal to the God they worshiped.

Scripture, other verses that show the true character of God

- God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? Numbers 23:19 NIV
- To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?...for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me. Isa. 46:5 & 9
- Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. Jer. 23:23-24
- God is spirit. John 4:24

Why is symbolic or metaphorical language used?

- Sometimes a picture enables us to "see" or understand something more completely than our rational mind is able to.
- Example: the "I am's" of Jesus and their context
- "I am the bread of life" ([John 6:35,48,51](#)).
- "I am the light of the world" ([John 8:12](#)).
- "I am the door of the sheep" ([John 10:7,9](#)).
- "I am the good shepherd" ([John 10:11,14](#)).
- "I am the resurrection, and the life" ([John 11:25](#)).
- "I am the way, the truth, and the life" ([John 14:6](#)).
- "I am the true vine" ([John 15:1,5](#)).

More than an apologetic exercise

- Interpretation ➡ Theology ➡ Life application
- **Mormon conclusion: If God is like man, then man can become like God**
- "Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power." from **Joseph Smith's King Follet Sermon** http://www.utm.org/onlineresources/sermons_talks_interviews/kingfolletsermon.htm

Additional Mormon application

- The Lord created you and me for the purpose of becoming Gods like Himself; when we have been proved in our present capacity, and been faithful with all things He puts into our possession. We are created, we are born for the express purpose of growing up from the low estate of manhood, to become Gods like unto our Father in heaven. That is the truth about it, just as it is. The Lord has organized mankind for the express purpose of increasing in that intelligence and truth, which is with God, until he is capable of creating worlds on worlds, and becoming Gods, even the sons of God.
 - Brigham Young, *Journal Of Discourses*

We may not come up with heretical doctrines, but we also may make mistakes in our understanding of the Bible

From: *Defending Scripture*. . . Literally by Carolyn Arends. CT

- “All these years later, I’m learning that understanding the literal meaning of the Bible is a more nuanced adventure than my college friends and I imagined. We’d been blithely unaware that there is more than one genre in the Bible, or that literary context profoundly matters to meaning. . . . For me, **the most negative consequence of all that well-intentioned literalism was the conviction that Yahweh, having given us his straightforward Word, was completely comprehensible.** This paradigm both diminished my perception of God and set up my faith for crisis when I discovered aspects of God that remain stubbornly shrouded in mystery. . . .

- *If you’d told me back then that the language we have for God—even (especially) much of our biblical language—must be understood **analogically**, I would have prayed for you and backed away slowly. I wouldn’t have understood that there are no words that can be applied to God exactly the same way they are applied to creaturely things, no language that can be used “**univocally**.”*

- **analogy**, from the Greek *analogia*, correspondence
 - 1. agreement or similarity, esp. in a certain limited number of features or details
 - 2. a comparison made to show such a similarity: to draw an analogy between an atom and the solar system
- **univocal** Latin *univocus*, from Latin *uni-* + *voc-*, *vox* voice
 - 1. having one meaning only
 - 2. unambiguous

She continues

When I say that I am “alive” and God is “alive,” the word “alive” is analogical, not univocal—it does not apply to me (a temporal creature) the same way it applies to God (who is eternal). The same goes for words like “good” or “powerful.” Connotations of imperfection or limitation must be deleted from any word when it is applied to God, and the notions (as best as we can conceive them) of total perfection and completion must be added.

Understanding this sooner would have helped me with biblical descriptions of God’s “wrath.” I can only get a glimmer of what God’s wrath looks like when I divest the word of the human implications of self-centered, reactionary anger, and condition it with the unchanging goodness that must clarify all of God’s attributes.

J. I. Packer likens our relationship with God to that of a two-year-old with a father who has a brain of Einsteinian proportions. To make relationship possible, the father will have to accommodate himself to the toddler he loves. The child will know her daddy, but she won’t completely comprehend him. What the father reveals to the daughter will be true, as far as it goes. But there will always be more.

We shouldn’t be surprised (or worried) that in his overtures to us God uses every kind of language available—straightforward (but culturally lensed) historical narrative, analogy, metaphor, parable, poetry, apocalyptic vision, and, hallelujah, the Word made flesh, Jesus.

Applications

- When reading Mormon or really ANY theology, don’t accept conclusions just because a Bible verse is quoted.
- Be very careful that you do not quote, teach, apply Bible passages incorrectly
 - **Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15
- Resource:
 - www.youtube.com/livelifebymthebook

Additional Applications

- Fear God. . . really
- We will never be God. We will always servants, always learning, yet always loved.
- This doesn’t mean to be unsure, to waffle when we have an opportunity to speak
- We can say, (as RW does) “Jesus said. ‘I am the way, the truth, the life.’”
- Historically we can trust His words—they are not my words or not my conclusions—you disagree with Him if you disagree.
- Put authority where it belongs: back to the literal and yet multi-faceted, eternal, Word of God and the Word made flesh—Jesus.