

Is God An Exalted, Glorified Man?

by Marvin W. Cowan

Joseph Smith was Mormonism's founder and is still the most important prophet that Mormons have ever had. On April 7, 1844 Smith delivered a funeral sermon known as the *King Follett Discourse* in which he taught that God was once a man and that men could become gods. In that sermon he said,

God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens... If you were to see Him today, you would see Him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man... I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil so that you may see... He was once a man like us; yea, that God Himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did; and I will show it from the Bible... 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 (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 345-346; compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, 10th LDS Prophet, and published by Deseret Book Co., the official LDS publishers).

If any Mormon says this teaching of Joseph Smith is false, he is also saying that Smith taught *false doctrine* and is therefore a *false prophet*. But, LDS leaders often claim that their prophet *cannot* lead them astray. So, most Mormons believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet and that this doctrine is true. That is why we often hear them talk about becoming gods when they are resurrected.

Smith's *King Follett Discourse* is the basis of current Mormon theology about God. This Discourse is so important to Mormons that it is *currently* published in booklet form. The full Discourse is also published in volume six of the *History of the Church*, by Joseph Smith. Whole sections of that Discourse are also quoted several times in *Mormon Doctrine*, by LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie. Deseret Book (the official LDS publishers) *recently* reprinted all three of the above volumes and they can be purchased from Deseret Book Company or any LDS book store.

Other official LDS Church publications which currently teach that God is a resurrected, glorified man include: *Achieving A Celestial Marriage* and *Doctrines of the Gospel*, which are student manuals for the LDS Church Educational System and published by the LDS Church with a *copyright by the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (who is Gordon B. Hinckley); *Gospel Principles* has been published by the LDS Church at least nine times and the current edition still teaches this LDS doctrine; *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church—Brigham Young* is another manual which was published for the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Relief Society to study in 1998 and it is still available today; *The Articles of Faith*

by LDS Apostle James Talmage which explains the 13 LDS Articles of Faith also teaches this doctrine and it has been reprinted numerous times. These manuals and books provide doctrinal instruction for all Mormons except the very youngest and all of these manuals are *currently* available through the LDS Distribution Center in Salt Lake City, UT. There are also many other LDS books and manuals which teach this important LDS doctrine.

Recently the president of an evangelical seminary wrote,

Evangelicals have said that Mormonism teaches that *God was once a human being like us and we can become gods just like God now is*. Mormon leaders have specifically stated that such a teaching, while stated by past leaders, is *something they don't understand and has no functioning place in present day Mormon doctrine...* this is *not an official Mormon teaching*, even though it can be found in *non-canonical* Mormon writings.

Some Mormon may have told that seminary president such things, but he should have investigated further before writing what he did. I don't know what that seminary president had in mind when he spoke of "non-canonical" LDS writings. But, Mormons not only have four books of "canonical" scripture, but they have a living prophet whose word is just as valid as their written scripture according to their ninth Article of Faith, which is also scripture.

Only *one man* on earth at a time has the authority to speak for the LDS Church and today that is their Prophet and President, Gordon B. Hinckley. Once Hinckley was interviewed concerning the LDS belief that God was once a man and that men could become gods and *Time Magazine* reported,

At first Hinckley seemed to qualify the idea that men could become gods, suggesting that, "it's of course an ideal. It's a hope for a wishful thing", but later affirmed that "yes, of course they can."

The article in *Time* went on to say,

On whether his church still holds that God the Father was once a man, he sounded uncertain, "I don't know that we emphasize it...I understand the philosophical background behind it, but I don't know a lot about it, and I don't think others know a lot about it" (*Time*, August 4, 1997, p. 56).

So many Mormons questioned him about his answers in that interview that just two months later at their General Conference he assured them that he *did* understand the LDS view of God. Obviously Hinckley does understand that doctrine since *he holds the copyright* to at least two of the manuals previously mentioned for the LDS Educational System and they teach that God was once a man who became a God just like devout Mormons can become Gods. And obviously the Mormon Church still teaches that doctrine because it is found in their official publications!

For those who want to read more on the LDS view of God we suggest *Mormonism and the Nature of God* by Kurt Widmer, published by McFarland & Co. in Jefferson, NC in 2000. Next time we will consider the Mormon view of God in contrast to biblical teachings.