Reading Assignment: The Doctrine of Heavenly Father and Mother

**Great Gospels**

From each, extract and write down the imperative information given that we must know about our Heavenly Father, the object of our worship. Remember, what you are writing down in your write-ups from all the readings you are required to do will be information that you will include in the Course Review Paper under this topic. In other words, this is your “research” to you will include in your “research” paper!

**SPEND A MINIMUM OF TWO HOURS STUDYING THESE TEACHINGS.**

1. Heavenly Father is the Object of Our Worship

*Read: D&C 20:17-19, 29. John 14:1-9. According to these verses, whom are we to worship?* *Read: 2 Nephi 25:16 and 29. How do you reconcile these verses to the above verses? That is, we are told that God the Father is the only being we are to worship, yet Nephi also says we are to worship Jesus Christ. How do you reconcile these verses? 

2. Apostle Paul’s Sermon on Heavenly Father

*Read Acts 17:22-31*

3. The King Follett Sermon

*This is an edited version of Joseph Smith’s (1805-44) most published sermons. It was delivered in the April 1844 General Conference of the Church in Nauvoo. The sermon lasted over two hours and discussed in excess of 25 doctrinal subjects. The most important aspect of this sermon was important information about the nature of Heavenly Father.*

Beloved Saints, I will call the attention of this congregation while I address you on the subject of the dead. The decease of our beloved brother, Elder King Follett, who was crushed in a well by the falling of a tub of rock, has more immediately led me to that subject. I have been requested to speak by his friends and relatives, but inasmuch as there are a great many in this congregation who live in this city as well as elsewhere, who have lost friends, I feel disposed to speak on the subject in general, and offer you my ideas, so far as I have ability, and so far as I shall be inspired by the Holy Spirit to dwell on this subject. ...

**The Character of God**

In the first place, I wish to go back to the beginning -- to the morn of creation. There is the starting point for us to look to, in order to understand and be fully acquainted with the mind, purposes and decrees of the Great Elohim, who sits in yonder heavens as he did at the creation of this world. It is necessary for us to have an understanding of God himself in the beginning. If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it be a hard matter to get right.

There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as it respects their relationship to God. They do not know, neither do they understand the nature of that relationship; and consequently they know but little above the brute beast, or more than to eat, drink and sleep. This is all man knows about God or his existence, unless it is given by the inspiration of the Almighty. ...

**What Kind of Being Is God?**

I want to ask this congregation, every man, woman and child, to answer the question in their own heart, what kind of a being God is? . . .The Scriptures inform us that “This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” ...

**God an Exalted Man**

I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? ... and why He interferes with the affairs of man.

*God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret... If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible, -- I say, 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; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.*

In order to understand the subject of the dead, for consolation of those who mourn for the loss of their friends, it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how he came to be so; for 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.*

*It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that 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. ... 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.* ...

**The Righteous to Dwell in Everlasting Burnings**

These are the first principles of consolation. How consoling to the mourners when they are called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child, or dear relative, to
know that, although the earthly tabernacle is laid down and dissolved, they shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die any more; but they shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. [see Romans 8:14-17] What is it? To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a God, and ascend the throne of eternal power, the same as those who have gone before. What did Jesus do? Why; I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds come rolling into existence. My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself. So that Jesus treads in the tracks of his Father, and inherits what God did before; and God is thus glorified and exalted in the salvation and exaltation of all his children. It is plain beyond disputaion, and you thus learn some of the first principles of the Gospel, about which so much hath been said.

When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel -- you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not at all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave. I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible. If I do, I think there are so many otherwise men here, that they would cry “treason” and put me to death. So I will go to the old Bible and turn commentator today.

... A Council of the Gods
In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it. When we begin to learn this way, we begin to learn the only true God, and what kind of a being we have got to worship. Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach him, and how to ask as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and how to come to him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us.

Now, I ask all who hear me, why the learned men who are preaching salvation, say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing? The reason is, that they are unlearned in the things of God, and have not the gift of the Holy Ghost; they account it blasphemy in any one to contradict their idea. If you tell them that God made the world out of something, they will call you a fool. But I am learned, and know more than all the world put together. The Holy Ghost does, anyhow, and He is within me, and comprehends more than all the world: and I will associate myself with Him.

Meaning of the Word Create
You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing; and they will answer, “Doesn’t the Bible say He created the world?” And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been made out of nothing. Now, the word create came from the baurau which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos -- chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end.

The Immortal Spirit
I have another subject to dwell upon, which is calculated to exalt man; but it is impossible for me to say much on this subject. ... I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is it logical to say that the intelligence of spirits is immortal, and yet that it had a beginning? The intelligence of spirits had not beginning, neither will it have an end. ... I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man -- the immortal part, because it has no beginning. Suppose you cut it in two; then it has a beginning and an end; but join it again, and it continues one eternal round. So with the spirit of man. As the Lord liveth, if it had a beginning, it will have an end. All the fools and learned and wise men from the beginning of creation, who say that the spirit of man had a beginning, prove that it must have an end; and if that doctrine is true, then the doctrine of annihilation would be true. But if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house-tops that God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself.

Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it. All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.

The Power to Advance in Knowledge
The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another; and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits.

This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to my by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given my be inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more. (“King Follett Sermon,” Ensign, Apr. 1971, pp. 13-17; continued in May, 1971, pp. 13-17; emphasis added)

4. Related Quotes to Joseph Smith’s Teachings Regarding the Nature of God

Brigham Young (1891-77) President
- The great architect, manager and superintendent, controller and dictator who guides this work is out of sight to our natural eyes. He lives on another world; he is in another state of existence; he has passed the ordeals we are now passing through; he has received an experience, has suffered and enjoyed, and knows all that we know regarding the toils, sufferings, life and death of this mortality, for he has passed through the whole of it, and has
received his crown and exaltation and holds the keys and the power of this Kingdom; he sways his scepter, and does his will among the children of men, among Saints and among sinners, and brings forth results to suit his purpose among kingdoms and nations and empires, that all may redound to his glory and to the perfection of his work. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young [1997], p. 30; emphasis added)

• Now to the facts in the case; all the different between Jesus Christ and any other man that ever lived on the earth, from the days of Adam until now, is simply this, the Father, after He had once been in the flesh, and lived as we live, obtained His exaltation, attained to thrones, gained the ascendancy over principalities and powers, and had the knowledge and power to create—to bring forth and organize the elements [i.e., the earth] upon natural principles. This He did after His ascension, or His glory, or His eternity, and was actually classed with the Gods, with the beings who create, with those who have kept the celestial law while in the flesh, and again obtained their bodies. Then He was prepared to commence the work of creation, as the Scriptures teach. It is all here in the Bible; I am not telling you a word but what is contained in that book. (Journal of Discourses, 26 vols., 4:218; emphasis added)

• How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when 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. (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1998], p.22-23; emphasis added)

Lorenzo Snow (1814-1901) President

• [In Nauvoo while talking upon a principle of the gospel, the Spirit of God rested powerfully upon me and showed me more clearly than I can now see your faces a certain principle and its glory, and it came to me summarized in this brief sentence: “As man is now, God once was; as God is now man may be.” The Spirit of God was on me in a marvelous manner all that day, and I stored that great truth away in my mind. I felt that I had learnt something that I ought not to communicate to others. The (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow [2012], p. 83)

• Man can possess the same glory as God. Through a continual course of progression, our Heavenly Father has received exaltation and glory, and He points us out the same path; and inasmuch as He is clothed with power, authority, and glory, He says, “Walk ye up and come in possession of the same glory and happiness that I possess.” (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow [2012], p. 85)

5. Mother in Heaven

From Gospel Topics found in LDS.org

The Church acknowledges the contribution of scholars to the historical content presented in this article; their work is used with permission.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that all human beings, male and female, are beloved spirit children of heavenly parents, a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother. This understanding is rooted in scriptural and prophetic teachings about the nature of God, our relationship to Deity, and the godly potential of men and women.[1] The doctrine of a Heavenly Mother is a cherished and distinctive belief among Latter-day Saints. [2]

While there is no record of a formal revelation to Joseph Smith on this doctrine, some early Latter-day Saint women recalled that he personally taught them about a Mother in Heaven.[3] The earliest published references to the doctrine appeared shortly after Joseph Smith’s death in 1844, in documents written by his close associates.[4] The most notable expression of the idea is found in a poem by Eliza R. Snow, entitled “My Father in Heaven” and now known as the hymn “O My Father.” This text declares: “In the heav’ns are parents single? / No, the thought makes reason stare; / Truth is reason—truth eternal / Tells me I’ve a mother there.” [5]

Subsequent Church leaders have affirmed the existence of a Mother in Heaven. In 1909, the First Presidency taught that “all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.”[6] Susa Young Gates, a prominent leader in the Church, wrote in 1920 that Joseph Smith’s visions and teachings revealed the truth that “the divine Mother, [is] side by side with the divine Father.”[7] And in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” issued in 1995, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared, “Each [person] is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”[8]

Prophets have taught that our heavenly parents work together for the salvation of the human family. “We are part of a divine plan designed by Heavenly Parents who love us,” taught Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.[9] President Harold B. Lee stated, “We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our earthly father and mother, and that influences from beyond are constantly working to try to help us when we do all we can.”[10]

Latter-day Saints direct their worship to Heavenly Father, in the name of Christ, and do not pray to Heavenly Mother. In this, they follow the pattern set by Jesus Christ, who taught His disciples to “always pray unto the Father in my name.”[11] Latter-day Saints are taught to pray to Heavenly Father, but as President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “The fact that we do not pray to our Mother in Heaven in no way belittles or denigrates her.”[12] Indeed, as Elder Rudger Clawson wrote, “We honor woman when we acknowledge Godhood in her eternal Prototype.”[13]

As with many other truths of the gospel, our present knowledge about a Mother in Heaven is limited. Nevertheless, we have been given sufficient knowledge to appreciate the sacredness of this doctrine and to comprehend the divine pattern established for us as children of heavenly parents. Latter-day Saints believe that this pattern is reflected in Paul’s statement that “neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”[14] Men and women cannot be exalted without each other. Just as we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “Our theology
begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them."[15]

Notes


[3] Zina Diantha Huntington Young recalled that when her mother died in 1839, Joseph Smith consoled her by telling her that in heaven she would see her own mother again and become acquainted with her eternal Mother. (Susa Young Gates, History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911], 15–16.)


[7] "The Vision Beautiful," Improvement Era 23, no. 6 (Apr. 1920): 542. At this time, Gates was the recording secretary of the Relief Society general presidency.


[13] "Our Mother in Heaven," Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star 72, no. 39 (Sept. 29, 1910): 620. Rudger Clawson was the editor of the periodical and likely author of this editorial.
