GOD, ATTRIBUTES OF
See: God; God the Father; Godhood; Lectures on Faith

GOD THE FATHER
[This entry is composed of four articles:

Overview
Names and Titles
Glory of God
Work and Glory of God

The first article is an introduction to doctrines about God the Father and the sources where they may be found. The second article lists the main names and titles by which God is known in LDS scripture. The third article offers a brief discussion of the Glory of God. The concluding article in this entry elaborates on the concept of the purposes of God in relation to mankind.]

OVERVIEW
Latter-day Saints commonly refer to God the Eternal Father as Elohim, a Hebrew plural (elohim) meaning God or gods, and to his Son Jesus Christ as Jehovah (see ELOHIM, JEHovah, JESUS CHRIST). Distinguishing between the persons of the Father and the Son is not possible with more ambiguous terms like “God”; therefore, referring to the Father as “Elohim” is a useful convention as long as one remembers that in some passages of the Hebrew Bible the title “elohim” does not refer exclusively to the person of God the Father. A less ambiguous term for God the Father in LDS parlance might be “Ahman” (cf. D&C 78:15, 20), which, according to Elder Orson Pratt, is a name of the Father (JD 2:342).

In Church theology, the doctrine of the nature of God is established more clearly by the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith than by anything else. Here, Joseph Smith saw for himself that the Father and the Son were two separate and distinct beings, each possessing a body in whose image and likeness mortals are created. For Latter-day Saints, no theological or philosophical propositions about God can override the primary experience of the Prophet (see FIRST VISION).

In one sense, it creates a slight distortion to focus on one member of the Godhead and discuss his characteristics in isolation from those of the other two, for Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one in mind, one in purpose, and one in character (John 10:30; 17:11, 21–23). Most of what can be said of the Father is also true of the Son and vice versa. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the Son does nothing for which the Father is not the exemplar (TPJS, p. 312; cf. John 5:19–20).

Yet God the Father is not one in substance with the Son or the Holy Spirit, but is a separate being. The Father existed prior to the Son and the Holy Ghost and is the source of their divinity. In classical terms, LDS theology is subordinationist; that is, it views the Son and the Holy Ghost as subordinate to and dependent upon God the Eternal Father. They are his offspring. Thus Joseph Smith referred to the Father as “God the first” to emphasize his priority in the Godhead (TPJS, p. 190). The Son and the Holy Spirit were “in the beginning, with God,” but the Father alone existed before the beginning of the universe as it is known. He is ultimately the source of all things and the Father of all things, for in the beginning he begot the Son, and through the instrumentality of his agent, the Son, the Father accomplished the creation of all things.

Latter-day Saints perceive the Father as an exalted Man in the most literal, anthropomorphic terms. They do not view the language of Genesis as allegorical; human beings are created in the form and image of a God who has a physical form and image (Gen. 1:26). The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit” (D&C 130:22). Thus, “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24) in the sense that the Holy Ghost, the member of the Godhead who deals most often and most directly with humans, is a God and a spirit, but God the Father and God the Son are spirits with physical, resurrected bodies. Latter-day Saints deny the abstract nature of God the Father and affirm that he is a concrete being, that he possesses a physical body, and that he is in space and time. They further reject any idea that God the Father is “totally other,” unknowable, or incomprehensible. In LDS doctrine, knowing the Father and the Son is a prerequisite to eternal life (John 17:3; D&C 88:49). In the opinion of many Latter-day Saints, the concept of an abstract, incomprehensible deity constitutes an intrusion of Greek philosophical categories upon the biblical record.
The Father, Elohim, is called the Father because he is the literal father of the spirits of mortals (Heb. 12:9). This paternity is not allegorical. All individual human spirits were begotten (not created from nothing or made) by the Father in a pre-mortal state, where they lived and were nurtured by Heavenly Parents. These spirit children of the Father come to earth to receive mortal bodies; there is a literal family relationship among human-kind. Joseph Smith taught, “If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves” (TPJS, p. 343). Gods and humans represent a single divine lineage, the same species of being, although they and he are at different stages of progress. This doctrine is stated concisely in a well-known couplet by President Lorenzo Snow: “As man now is, God once was: as God now is, man may be” (see GODHOOD). This principle is clearly demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ, a God who became mortal, and yet a God like whom mortals may become (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). But the maxim is true of the Father as well. As the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret” (TPJS, p. 345). Thus, the Father became the Father at some time before “the beginning” as humans know it, by experiencing a mortality similar to that experienced on earth. There has been speculation among some Latter-day Saints on the implications of this doctrine, but nothing has been revealed to the Church about conditions before the “beginning” as mortals know it. The important points of the doctrine for Latter-day Saints are that Gods and humans are the same species of being, but at different stages of development in a divine continuum, and that the heavenly Father and Mother are the heavenly pattern, model, and example of what mortals can become through obedience to the gospel (see MOTHER IN HEAVEN). Knowing that they are the literal offspring of Heavenly Parents and that they can become like those parents through the gospel of Jesus Christ is a wellspring of religious motivation. With God as the literal Father and with humans having the capacity to become like him, the basic religious questions “Where did I come from?,” “Why am I here?,” and “What is my destiny?” are fundamentally answered.

Latter-day Saints also attribute omnipotence and omniscience to the Father. He knows all things relative to the universe in which mortals live and is himself the source and possessor of all true power manifest in it. This is part of what it means to be exalted, and this is why human beings may safely put their faith and trust in God the Father, an exalted being. Nevertheless, in most things dealing with this world, the Father works through a mediator, his Son, Jesus Christ. With few exceptions, scriptural references to God, or even to the Father, have Jesus Christ as the actual subject, for the Father is represented by his Son. On those few recorded occasions when the Father has plainly manifested himself, he has apparently limited his personal involvement to bearing witness of the Son, as at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17), at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), in his witness to the Nephites and Lamanites (3 Ne. 11:7), and in Joseph Smith’s First Vision (JS—H 1:17). Christ is the agent of the Father, and since he alone, by his atonement, has made access to the Father possible, Latter-day Saints worship and pray to the Father and offer all other sacred performances to him in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ (Moses 5:8).

Another important personal attribute of the Father is his perfect love (1 Jn. 4:8). Because of this love, it is the nature of the Father to improve everything and everyone to the extent that they will allow. Out of preexisting chaos, matter unorganized, the Father created an orderly universe. Out of preexisting intelligence, he begat spirit children. Even those of his children who will not cooperate and obey, and who cannot therefore become like him, he still saves, if they will allow him, and places them in lesser kingdoms of glory (D&C 76:42–43; see SALVATION). “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The love of the Father is not limited to those who worship and obey him, although their rewards will be greatest, but it is extended to all of his children. The Father’s work, and his glory, is to love and to lift all of his children as far as they will allow him. Latter-day Saints believe it is the intention of the Father to make all human beings as happy as they possibly can be. To that end, the Father authored the PLAN OF SALVATION. The Father desires that all human beings be exalted like himself, receive the powers and the joys that he possesses, and experience a fulness of joy in eternity. The limiting factor is the degree to which humans, by exercising their faith and obedience and by making wise choices, will permit the Father to bless them in
achieving this goal. Sometimes having faith in God
means having faith that the Father’s plan will do
what it is designed to do—to bring maximum hap-
piness to human beings. Nevertheless, Latter-day
Saints believe, in contrast to some other views,
that the Father will never violate individual agency
by forcing his children to exaltation and happiness.
Coercion in any degree, even in the form of pre-
destination to the celestial kingdom, is abhorrent
to the nature of the Father. All relationships to him
or associations with him are voluntary.

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NAMES AND TITLES
Known names and titles of God the Eternal Father
are limited in number, especially when compared
to the names applied to Jesus Christ (see JESUS
CHRIST, NAMES AND TITLES OF). Latter-day Saints
understand the Godhead to consist of three sep-
ate individuals: the Father; Jesus Christ, his Son;
and the Holy Ghost (D&C 130:22). Therefore,
when the need exists to distinguish God the Father
from the other two members of the Godhead,
Church members select from the names found in
scripture.

GOD. Among Latter-day Saints, the title “GOD”
generally identifies God the Father. Occasionally,
God may refer to the unified Godhead of the
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (cf. 2 Ne. 31:21; D&C
20:28) and at times to each member individually
(AF, pp. 159–63). This characteristic makes the
attempt to distinguish the Father from Jesus Christ
in scripture very difficult at times. Significantly,
Jesus’ declarations that he and the Father are
“one,” and to know one is to know the other,
indicate that the unity or “oneness” of the God-
head—in purpose and mind and testifying of one
another—is of primary worth and seems to dimin-
ish the importance of making distinctions among its
members. The scriptures teach that a person
will come to know the Father by first knowing
Christ (John 14:6–23; D&C 84:35–38; 93:1–22;
132:12). Jesus’ instructions that his believers are to
be “one” with him as he is “one” with the Father
are basic to his doctrine (cf. John 17:1–26; 3 Ne.

FATHER, FATHER IN HEAVEN. The name-title
“Father in Heaven” refers to the director of crea-
tion and Father of the spirits of all mankind (MFP
5:26–27). Jesus used the terms “my Father,” “our
Father,” and “the Father” when teaching about
and praying to his Father. The Aramaic word ha’abba
(father) has carried over into English translations of
the New Testament (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal.
4:6). In the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Jesus
continually used the title “Father” when referring
to the Father in Heaven (e.g., 3 Ne. 11:11; 19:20–
23). In some instances, however, Father may refer
to the Son (see JESUS CHRIST: FATHERHOOD AND
SONSHIP). According to both the New Testament
and Book of Mormon, faithful souls who are con-
verted to Jesus Christ and who make personal cov-
ernants with him are spiritually reborn, becoming
“his sons and his daughters” (e.g., Mosiah 5:7; cf. 1
Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 6:18, MFP 5:27–31).

GOD THE FATHER. The combination of the title
“God” and the appellative “Father” specifies the
Father of Jesus Christ and of all spirits. Latter-day
Saints worship God the Father and Jesus Christ
and pray to the Father in the name of Christ as
directed by the Lord (D&C 88:64).

ELOHIM. The commonly used term for “God” or
“gods” in the Hebrew Bible is ha’elohim, a plural
form whose singular is ha’eloh or ha’el and has the
meaning of “lofty one” or “exalted one.” Early
Church leaders adopted the policy of designating
God the Father by the exalted name-title “Elohim”
(cf. MFP 5:26; see Elohim; Name of
GOD). This terminology has continued down to the
present.

JEHOVAH, LORD, LORD GOD. The term “LORD,”
printed with capital letters in many English ver-
sions of the Old Testament, is a substitute for the
name Jehovah (yhwh in the Hebrew Bible). Even
though Latter-day Saints identify Jesus Christ as
Jehovah (3 Ne. 15:3–5; cf. D&C 110:1–4; see
Jehovah, Jesus Christ), they utilize the title
“Lord” for both the Father and the Son, as is com-
mon throughout scripture. The title “Lord God” in
the Hebrew Bible is a compound of ha’elohim
preceded by either yhwh (Jehovah) or adonai (lord
or master). This combined name-title refers mainly to
Jehovah in the Old Testament. In the New Testa-
ment, the Book of Mormon, and in other latter-day scriptures, “Lord God” can mean either the Father (e.g., Moses 4:1–4) or the Son (Mosiah 3:21).

Ahman. In two revelations to Joseph Smith (D&C 78:20; 95:17), Jesus Christ referred to himself as “the Son Ahman,” allowing the possibility that “Ahman” may be a word meaning God, and one of the names of the Father (see Ahman). The name also appears in a compound name, Adam-ondi-ahman (D&C 116:1; 117:8, 11).

Man of Holiness. Adam learned by revelation that one of the names of God the Father is “Man of Holiness” (Moses 6:57). Enoch also recorded God’s words: “Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name” (Moses 7:35; see ENDLESS AND ETERNAL).

In the Bible and latter-day scripture, other titles for God carry valuable meaning: “Father of Spirits,” “God of all other Gods,” “Endless,” “The Living God,” and “Lord of Sabaoth [Hebrew for Hosts],” which is by interpretation, the creator of the first day, the beginning and the end” (D&C 95:7).

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Glory of God
Glory is an intrinsic attribute and emanation of God, which LDS SCRIPTURES associate with divine law and with the power and Spirit that “proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space” (D&C 88:7–13). Prominent terms for this “spirit of glory” (1 Pet. 4:14) are the Spirit of God, the holy spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, the light of truth, the Light of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ. This all-pervading Spirit is so pure and refined that it is not perceptible to mortals under ordinary circumstances (D&C 131:7–8; TPJS, pp. 207, 301–332). Yet on occasion, the prophets testify, the innate glory has been visibly manifest as flaming spiritual fire (Ex. 24:17; Acts 2:3; Hel. 5:43–45; 3 Ne. 17:24; 19:13–14; HC 1:30–32). Moses and Jesus were transfigured by the same glorifying power (Ex. 34:29–35; Matt. 17:2).

Because glory radiates from God, he is described as “a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24; cf. Isa. 33:14). God may withhold or conceal his glory (TPJS, pp. 162, 181, 325). But he may also radiate such transcendent light and heat that no mortal flesh can endure his presence (Mal. 4:1; D&C 133:41, 49; HC 1:17, 37). Only when clothed by the Spirit can anyone endure the glorious presence of God (Moses 1:2, 11; D&C 67:11).

The spirit of glory permeates God’s creations (D&C 63:59; 88:41). Therefore, they are kingdoms of glory, and to behold any or the least of his creations is to behold a portion of his glory (Moses 1:5; Ps. 19:1; D&C 88:45–47; TPJS, p. 351). Since God’s works are endless, his glory is ever-increasing (Abr. 3:12; Moses 1:38; 7:30). His “work and glory” are to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of his children (Moses 1:39). As Jesus’ submission to the will of his Father glorified both himself and his Father, so does the obedience of his children glorify both themselves and God (John 13:31; 17:1). Oneness with God is achieved through this relationship of glory (John 17:21–23; D&C 88:60).

The degree to which mortal men and women acquire and live the moral and spiritual principles of light and truth inherent in divine intelligence determines the degree to which they will be filled with the glory of God when resurrected and, therefore, the sphere of glory they will inherit in eternity (D&C 88:22–32; 93:20, 28; 130:18–19; TPJS, p. 366).

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Work and Glory of God
A revelation received by Moses between his experience at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1–4:17) and his return to Egypt (Ex. 4:20; cf. Moses 1:26) describes the work and glory of God as “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). One of the most frequently quoted passages of scripture in LDS sermons, this declaration elucidates the chief object of God’s actions on behalf of his children.

Earlier in this vision, Moses had “beheld many lands; and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof” (Moses 1:29). Then the Lord told him that “as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works” (1:38). After receiving this expansive, orienting view of God’s creations, Moses asked the
Lord, "Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?" (1:30).

The Lord answered the first question by explaining that "this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Creating worlds and populating them with his children are major parts of God's "work." He creates EARTHS as dwelling places for his spirit children, where they receive physical bodies and learn to walk by faith. Whereas IMMORTALITY is never-ending life, ETERNAL LIFE means to become like God (see GODHOOD). Thus, God's "glory" consists in mankind's attainment of everlasting glory, the ultimate being eternal life.

In answer to Moses' second question (i.e., "by what thou madest them?") the Lord stated that worlds were created by the power of the "Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth" (Moses 1:32). This passage underscores the view that the creative acts of God, which include all inhabitable worlds (Moses 1:33; cf. John 1:1–2), are done through the Only Begotten as God's agent, and are done in grace and truth for the benefit of his children.

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GODHEAD

[For discussions about the three members of the Godhead and their divine attributes and manifestations in the world, see GOD; GOD THE FATHER; ELOHIM; MAN OF HOLINESS; JESUS CHRIST; HOLY GHOST; HOLY SPIRIT; GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST; DOVE, SIGN OF. See also GODHOOD; ENDLESS AND ETERNAL; NAME OF GOD; INTELLIGENCE; FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD; OMNIPOTENT GOD; OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD; OMNISCIENCE OF GOD.]

Latter-day Saints believe in God the Father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost (A of F 1). These three Gods form the Godhead, which holds the keys of power over the universe. Each member of the Godhead is an independent personage, separate and distinct from the other two, the three being in perfect unity and harmony with each other (AF, chap. 2).

This knowledge concerning the Godhead derives primarily from the Bible and the revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith (see SMITH, JOSEPH: TEACHINGS OF JOSEPH SMITH). For example, the three members of the Godhead were separately manifested at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16–17) and at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:55–56). Joseph Smith commented, "Peter and Stephen testify that they saw the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Any person that had seen the heavens opened knew that there are three personages in the heavens who hold the keys of power, and one presides over all" (TPJS, p. 312).

On June 16, 1844, in his last Sunday sermon before his martyrdom, Joseph Smith declared that "in all congregations" he had taught "the plurality of Gods" for fifteen years: "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods" (TPJS, p. 370). The two earliest surviving accounts of Joseph's FIRST VISION do not give details on the Godhead, but that he consistently taught that the Father and the Son were separate personages is clearly documentable in most periods of his life (e.g., D&C 76:23 [1832]; 137:3 [1836], his First Vision, JS–H 1:17 [recorded 1838]; D&C 130:22 [1843]). While the fifth LECTURE ON FAITH (1834) does not identify the Holy Ghost as a "personage," it affirms that "the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitute the Godhead" (cf. Millet, pp. 223–34).

Although the three members of the Godhead are distinct personages, their Godhead is "one" in that all three are united in their thoughts, actions, and purpose, with each having a fulness of knowledge, truth, and power. Each is a God. This does not imply a mystical union of substance or personality. Joseph Smith taught:

Many men say there is one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization anyhow. "Father, I pray not for the world, but I pray for those that thou hast given me... that they may be one as we are."... I want to read the text to you myself—"I am agreed with the Father and the Father is agreed with me, and we are agreed as one." The Greek shows that it should be agreed. "Father, I pray for them which thou hast given me out of the world, that they all may be agreed," and all come to dwell in unity [TPJS, p. 372; cf. John 17:9–11, 20–21; also cf. WJS, p. 380].

The unity prayed for in John 17 provides a model for the LDS understanding of the unity of the God-