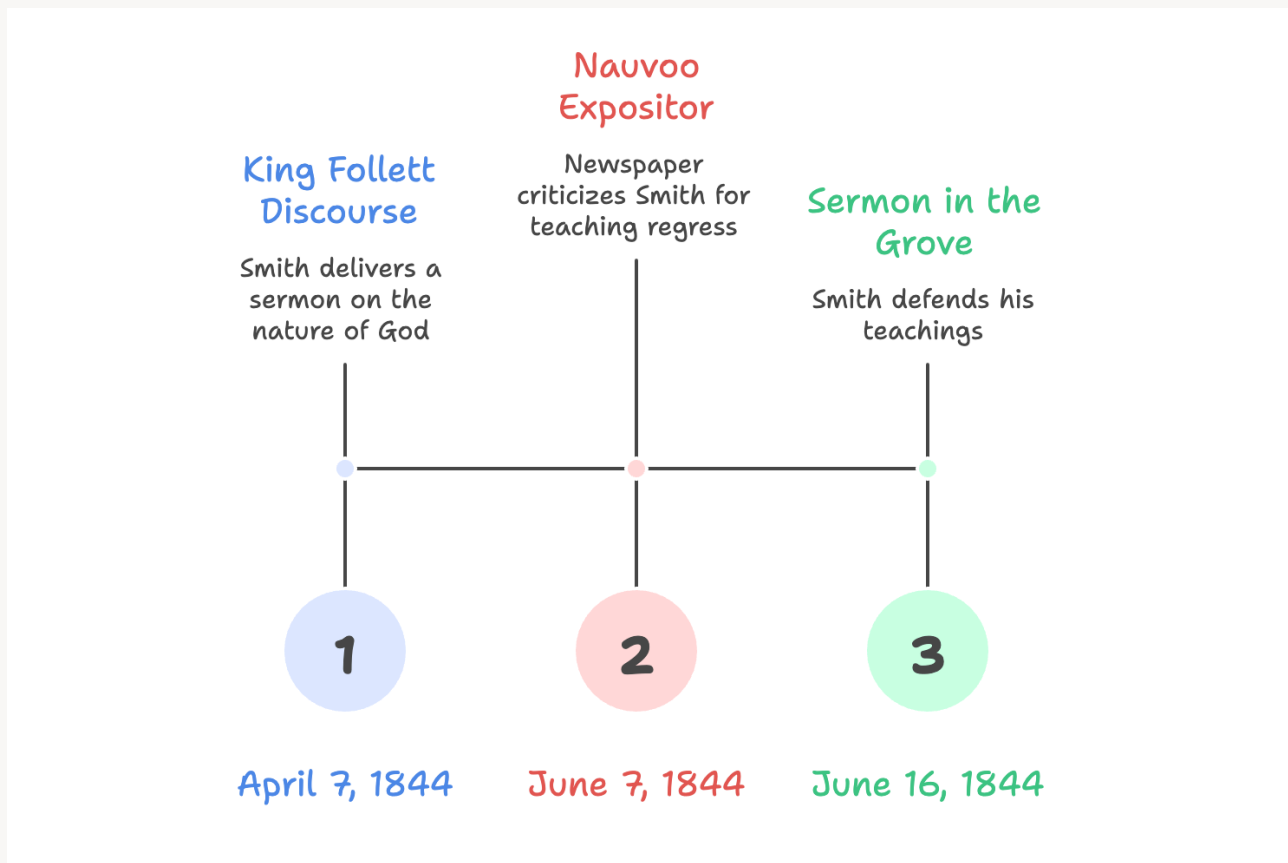


**DOCUMENTS AND SPEECHES**

# Q&A: Joseph Smith’s “Sermon in the Grove”

JANUARY 30, 2026 — AARON SHAFVALOFF



*Updated January 31, 2026*

## What was the context?

Joseph Smith’s final public doctrinal address is known as the “Sermon in the Grove.” It was delivered on June 16, 1844, in the grove just east of the Nauvoo

Temple, eleven days before his assassination. The sermon functioned as a rebuttal to dissidents associated with the *Nauvoo Expositor*, published on June 7, 1844.

## What are the sources?

The sermon survives through the notes of four contemporaneous recorders: Thomas Bullock, William McIntire, George Laub, and Alexander Neibaur.

- [Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by George Laub](#)
- [Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock](#)
- [Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by William McIntire](#)

It was later printed in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 6, pp. 473–479, and in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook.

## What is the sermon text?

*The following is based on the version in History of the Church. It has been reformatted and given [subheadings] for readability.*

### [Opening]

President Joseph Smith read the 3rd chapter of Revelation, and took for his text the 1st chapter, 6th verse:

“And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

It is altogether correct in the translation.

### [The Charge Against the Prophet]

Now, you know that of late some malicious and corrupt men have sprung up and apostatized from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and they declare that the Prophet believes in a plurality of Gods; and, lo and behold, we

have discovered a very great secret, they cry: "The Prophet says there are many Gods, and this proves that he has fallen."

It has been my intention for a long time to take up this subject and lay it clearly before the people, and show what my faith is in relation to this interesting matter. I have contemplated the saying of Jesus (Luke 17th chapter, 26th verse):

"And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man."

And if it does rain, I'll preach this doctrine, for the truth shall be preached.

### **[Plurality of Gods]**

I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have selected this text for that express purpose. I wish to declare I have always, and in all congregations, when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. It has been preached by the Elders 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. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold, we have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural; and who can contradict it?

Our text says, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." The Apostles have discovered that there were Gods above, for John says God was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. My object was to preach the scriptures, and preach the doctrine they contain, there being a God above, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am bold to declare I have taught all the strongest doctrines publicly, and always teach stronger doctrines in public than in private.

John was one of the men, and the Apostles declare they were made kings and priests unto God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It reads just so in the Revelation. Hence the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is as prominent in the Bible

as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy. A wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many. I want to set it forth in a plain and simple manner; but to us there is but one God—that is pertaining to us; and He is in all and through all. But if Joseph Smith says there are Gods many and Lords many, they cry, “Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!”

### **[Scripture and Accusations of Blasphemy]**

Mankind verily say that the Scriptures are with them. Search the Scriptures, for they testify of things that these apostates would gravely pronounce blasphemy. Paul, if Joseph Smith is a blasphemer, you are.

I say there are Gods many and Lords many, but to us only one, and we are to be in subjection to that one. No man can limit the bounds or the eternal existence of eternal time. Hath he beheld the eternal world, and is he authorized to say that there is only one God? He makes himself a fool if he thinks or says so, and there is an end of his career or progress in knowledge. He cannot obtain all knowledge, for he has sealed up the gate to it.

### **[Scriptural Interpretation]**

Some say I do not interpret the Scripture the same as they do. They say it means the heathen’s gods. Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many; and that makes a plurality of Gods, in spite of the whims of all men.

Without a revelation, I am not going to give them the knowledge of the God of heaven. You know, and I testify, that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods. I have it from God, and get over it if you can. I have a witness of the Holy Ghost, and a testimony that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods in the text.

I will show from the Hebrew Bible that I am correct, and the first word shows a plurality of Gods; and I want the apostates and learned men to come here and prove to the contrary, if they can. An unlearned boy must give you a little Hebrew.

“Berosheit baurau Eloheim ait aushamayeen vehau aurait,” rendered by King James’ translators, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

I want to analyze the word *Berosheit*. Rosh, the head; *Sheit*, a grammatical termination; the Baith was not originally put there when the inspired man wrote it, but it has since been added by an old Jew. *Baurau* signifies to bring forth; *Eloheim* is from the word *Eloi*, God, in the singular number; and by adding the word *heim*, it renders it Gods.

It read first, “In the beginning the head of the Gods brought forth the Gods,” or, as others have translated it, “The head of the Gods called the Gods together.” I want to show a little learning as well as other fools.

### **[The Head of the Gods]**

The head God organized the heavens and the earth. I defy all the world to refute me. In the beginning the heads of the Gods organized the heavens and the earth. Now the learned priests and the people rage, and the heathen imagine a vain thing.

If we pursue the Hebrew text further, it reads, “The head one of the Gods said, Let us make a man in our own image.” I once asked a learned Jew, “If the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in *heim* in the plural, why not render the first *Eloheim* plural?” He replied, “That is the rule with few exceptions; but in this case it would ruin the Bible.” He acknowledged I was right.

I came here to investigate these things precisely as I believe them. Hear and judge for yourselves; and if you go away satisfied, well and good.

In the very beginning the Bible shows there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of refutation. It is a great subject I am dwelling on. The word *Eloheim* ought to be in the plural all the way through—Gods. The heads of the Gods appointed one God for us; and when you take that view of the subject, it sets one free to see all the beauty, holiness, and perfection of the Gods. All I want is to get the simple, naked truth, and the whole truth.

### **[One God or Three?]**

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.

“Father, I pray not for the world, but I pray for them which Thou hast given me.”

“Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.”

All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—He would be a giant or a monster.

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, and not for those alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be agreed, as Thou, Father, art with me, and I with Thee, that they also may be agreed with us,” and all come to dwell in unity, and in all the glory and everlasting burnings of the Gods; and then we shall see as we are seen, and be as our God and He as His Father.

I want to reason a little on this subject. I learned it by translating the papyrus which is now in my house.

### **[Abraham’s Reasoning]**

I learned a testimony concerning Abraham, and he reasoned concerning the God of heaven:

“In order to do that,” said he, “suppose we have two facts: that supposes another fact may exist. Two men on the earth, one wiser than the other, would logically show that another who is wiser than the wisest may exist. Intelligences exist one above another, so that there is no end to them.”

If Abraham reasoned thus—if Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father—you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way.

Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly. Hence, if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also? I despise the idea of being scared to death at such a doctrine, for the Bible is full of it.

### **[Christ and the Father]**

I want you to pay particular attention to what I am saying. Jesus said that the Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before Him. As the Father had done before? He laid down His life and took it up the same as His Father had done before.

He did as He was sent, to lay down His life and take it up again; and then was committed unto Him the keys. I know it is good reasoning.

### **[The Church Being Purged]**

I have reason to think that the Church is being purged. I saw Satan fall from heaven, and the way they ran was a caution. All these are wonders and marvels in our eyes in these last days. So long as men are under the law of God, they have no fears—they do not scare themselves.

I want to stick to my text, to show that when men open their lips against these truths they do not injure me, but injure themselves. To the law and to the testimony, for these principles are poured out all over the Scriptures.

When things that are of the greatest importance are passed over by weak-minded men without even a thought, I want to see truth in all its bearings and hug it to my bosom. I believe all that God ever revealed, and I never hear of a man being damned for believing too much; but they are damned for unbelief.

## **["Ye Are Gods"]**

They found fault with Jesus Christ because He said He was the Son of God, and made Himself equal with God. They say of me, like they did of the Apostles of old, that I must be put down.

What did Jesus say?

“Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are Gods? If He called them Gods unto whom the word of God came, and the Scriptures cannot be broken, say ye of Him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said I am the Son of God?”

It was through Him that they drank of the spiritual rock. Of course He would take the honor to Himself. Jesus, if they were called Gods unto whom the word of God came, why should it be thought blasphemy that I should say I am the Son of God?

## **[Eternal Glories]**

Go and read the vision in the Book of Covenants. There is clearly illustrated glory upon glory—one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and a glory of the stars; and as one star differeth from another star in glory, even so do they of the telestial world differ in glory.

Every man who reigns in celestial glory is a God to his dominions. By the apostates admitting the testimony of the Doctrine and Covenants, they damn themselves.

Paul, what do you say? They impeached Paul and all went and left him. Paul had seven churches, and they drove him off from among them; and yet they cannot do it by me. I rejoice in that. My testimony is good.

Paul says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."

They who obtain a glorious resurrection from the dead are exalted far above principalities, powers, thrones, dominions, and angels, and are expressly declared to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, all having eternal power.

## **[Moses and the Sons of God]**

These Scriptures are a mixture of very strange doctrines to the Christian world, who are blindly led by the blind. I will refer to another Scripture.

Now, says God, when He visited Moses in the bush (Moses was a stammering sort of a boy like me), God said, "Thou shalt be a God unto the children of Israel." God said, "Thou shalt be a God unto Aaron, and he shall be thy spokesman."

I believe those Gods that God reveals as Gods to be sons of God, and all can cry, "Abba, Father!" Sons of God who exalt themselves to be Gods, even from before the foundation of the world, and are the only Gods I have a reverence for.

## **[Apostasy and Authority]**

John said he was a king:

"And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen."

Oh, Thou God who art King of kings and Lord of lords, the sectarian world, by their actions, declare, "We cannot believe Thee."

The old Catholic church traditions are worth more than all you have said. Here is a principle of logic that most men have no more sense than to adopt. I will illustrate it by an old apple tree. Here jumps off a branch and says, "I am

the true tree, and you are corrupt." If the whole tree is corrupt, are not its branches corrupt?

If the Catholic religion is a false religion, how can any true religion come out of it? If the Catholic church is bad, how can any good thing come out of it? The character of the old churches have always been slandered by all apostates since the world began.

### **[God Will Never Acknowledge Traitors]**

I testify again, as the Lord lives, God never will acknowledge any traitors or apostates. Any man who will betray the Catholics will betray you; and if he will betray me, he will betray you.

All men are liars who say they are of the true Church without the revelations of Jesus Christ and the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which is after the order of the Son of God.

It is in the order of heavenly things that God should always send a new dispensation into the world when men have apostatized from the truth and lost the priesthood; but when men come out and build upon other men's foundations, they do it on their own responsibility, without authority from God; and when the floods come and the winds blow, their foundations will be found to be sand, and their whole fabric will crumble to dust.

Did I build on any other man's foundation? I have got all the truth which the Christian world possessed, and an independent revelation in the bargain, and God will bear me off triumphant.

### **[Closing]**

I will drop this subject. I wish I could speak for three or four hours, but it is not expedient on account of the rain. I would still go on, and show you proof upon proofs. All the Bible is equal in support of this doctrine, one part as another.

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## **Does it teach a regress of deities?**

Yes. Consider the following reasons:

- **Context:** The sermon was responding to the Nauvoo Expositor's charge that Smith had taught of "innumerable Gods as much above the God that presides over this universe, as he is above us."<sup>1</sup>
- **God above the Father of Jesus Christ:** Smith explicitly teaches that "the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father," grounding this claim in the KJV wording of Revelation 1:6. In doing so, he even sets aside his earlier rendering of the passage in the Joseph Smith Translation.
- **All fathers were first sons:** Smith presses the logic of filial succession with the question, "Where was there ever a father without first being a son?" For Smith, fatherhood necessarily presupposes prior sonship.
- **Eternal progenitorship:** Smith reinforces this principle by appealing to the universal pattern: "Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor?" Even fathers arise from antecedents.
- **Unending series of greater intelligences:** Smith generalizes this logic into an infinite hierarchy, declaring that "intelligences exist one above another, so that there is no end to them." He explicitly attributes this teaching to Abraham and states that he learned it through translating the Egyptian papyri in his possession, linking the doctrine directly to what would later be canonized as Abraham 3.
- **The Father was assigned for us:** Smith teaches that "the heads of the Gods appointed one God for us," indicating that the God we worship was selected or designated by a higher council of gods to preside over this world.
- **Gods are over particular dominions:** He further clarifies that divine authority is domain-specific: "But to us there is but one God—that is pertaining to us... Every man who reigns in celestial glory is a God to his dominions." Smith explicitly bases this claim on his reading of 1 Corinthians 8:5–6.
- **Gods before the Father and Son:** Finally, Laub's notes report Smith as teaching that the Savior took a body "as god did or the gods before them took bodies." The plural "them" most naturally refers to the Father and the

Son, implying divine beings who were prior to both, rather than merely the lineage beneath the Father.

## Does Smith appeal to scripture to make his case?

Yes. The sermon's anchor text is the KJV of Revelation 1:6. Smith reads this as John teaching that God the Father has a Father. Among other texts, Smith also appeals to Genesis 1:1, Genesis 1:26, Exodus 4:16, Psalms 82:6, John 5:19, John 10:34-36, 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, Revelation 1:6, and Abraham 3:16-19.

## Why didn't Smith use his previous translation of Revelation 1:6?

In the Joseph Smith Translation he rendered the key phrase in Revelation 1:6 as, "unto God, his Father." This JST revision (early-to-mid 1832) reflects a more monotheistic reading consistent with his earlier 1830s theology. In the Sermon in the Grove, Joseph reverts back to the King James Version, declaring, "It is altogether correct in the translation."

## Have LDS manuals taught that the sermon is true and inspired?

Yes. In *Teaching Seminary Preservice Readings* (2004):

"By way of having all things in perspective, we should be aware that there are approved and inspired writings that are not in the standard works. These writings also are true and should be used along with the scriptures themselves in learning and teaching the gospel. Next to the standard works five of the greatest documents in our literature are...

"The 'King Follett Sermon' and the 'Sermon in the Grove.' (See History of the Church, 6:302–17; 6:473–79.) These two sermons, one in thought and content, set forth the doctrine of the plurality of Gods and of

becoming joint heirs with Christ. They show that man may become as his Maker and reign in celestial exaltation forever.”<sup>2</sup>

LDS apologist Jacob Hansen (@ThoughtfulSaint) gives the false impression that the King Follett Discourse was the last sermon of Joseph Smith with relevance to the regress of deities.

[pic.twitter.com/k26YHr1Q57](https://pic.twitter.com/k26YHr1Q57)

— Mormonism Research Ministry (@mrmdotorg) [January 27, 2026](#)

## See also

- [Traditional Christian and Mormon Views of God and Their Compatibility With the Moral Theistic Argument: An Exercise in Ramified Natural Theology](#) (PDF), by Loren Pankratz – covers Blake Ostler’s interpretation of the King Follett Discourse and Sermon in the Grove

## References

1. “The King Follett Discourse: Pinnacle or Peripheral?”, p. 5. [Link](#). ↩
2. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Bible, a Sealed Book,” in *Teaching Seminary Preservice Readings*, Religion 370, 471, and 475 (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2004), 125–26, quoting *Supplement, A Symposium on the New Testament* (1984), 1–7. <https://media.ldscdn.org/pdf/manuals/teaching-seminary-preservice-readings-religion-370-471-and-475/36923-teaching-seminary-preservice-eng.pdf> ↩

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