

In the Image of God: An Addendum to the BYU Evolution Packet by Dr. Robert Wright

See

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Introductory note from Nate Richardson: This packet is designed to function as a printed packet to give to BYU students so they get a more balanced picture of the teachings of the restoration on evolution – something they aren't going to hear in the evolution-saturated environment of BYU. The Latter-day Saints have the doctrinal foundation to stand with other Biblical Christians in defending doctrines of the restoration. This addendum by Dr. Wright, a faithful latter-day saint, is a most helpful installment to enlighten our young (and old) with truth. I wish I had this when I was at BYU taking my biology classes!

Here is a little list of key points Dr. Wright makes:

“When we look at the complete historical record, *the pattern is overwhelming and unmistakable*:

- **Never** has a prophet, seer, or revelator proclaimed that Darwin's theory of evolution is true.
- **Many times** leaders have proclaimed evolution to be false, in public and official venues.
- The few ambiguous or neutral statements are greatly outnumbered by those denouncing evolution.
- The official statements of the Church consistently reject evolutionary theory.
- This pattern has remained consistent from Joseph Smith's day to the present.”

Now the full article [coloring added]:

“...to think that man evolved from one species to another is, to me, incomprehensible.”

Russel M. Nelson

In response to questions within its student body, and others concerned about the direction taken by Brigham Young University with regard to teaching evolution, an Evolution Packet was approved by the Board of Trustees in June 1992. It **claimed to include** “**all statements** issued by the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the subject of evolution and the origin of man.”

In addition to the First Presidency statements, those who prepared this packet also chose to include an excerpt from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Only here, is **the false statement made** that, “[t]he scriptures tell why man was created, but they do not tell how.”^[1] This sentiment is not expressed in any of the official statements of the Church. This entry was provided by William Evenson, who at the time was the Dean of the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, and helped create the Evolution Packet. He said of the packet, “The goal is not to achieve some kind of ‘balance’ among the views that have been expressed...”^[2] **Balance was not the goal, and balance was not achieved.**

The statement “the scriptures tell why man was created, but they do not tell how,” included in the Encyclopedia entry is incorrect. The **scriptures contain significant details related to “how” man was created:**

He was created from the dust of the ground. Genesis 2:7, Moses 3:7, Abraham 5:7; "Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:7)

He made Eve from the side of Adam. Genesis 2:23, Moses 3:23; “Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (Gen. 2:23)

There are other scriptures that refer to “how” the earth, and the living creatures were made. (See: 2 Peter 3:5, Genesis 2:19, Psalm 33:6, Jeremiah 10:12, Hebrews 3:4, Job 33:4, Psalm 33:9)

This claim that religion is relegated to understanding why God created all that is, denies the fact that He told us how he made it. Without God, science can never explain how man or any of God’s creations were accomplished.

The **Evolution Packet fails** to consider that the preface of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states very clearly:

“Lest the role of the Encyclopedia be given more weight than it deserves, the editors make it clear that those who have written and edited have only tried to explain their understanding of Church history, doctrines, and procedures; their statement and opinions remain their own.”^[3]

Any implied endorsement, authority or approval should not be extended to the Encyclopedia, the Evolution Packet, BYU Life Sciences publications, or any other publications.

This addendum is provided to serve as a substantive review of statements made by the prophets, leaders and authorities within the Church, on the subject of evolution and the origin of man. It will also serve to clarify misinterpreted or misrepresented statements made by those leaders who have been portrayed as supporting Darwinian evolution. The expansive nature of their statements, and the consistent restatements of basic doctrine over the full history of the Church, paint a very different picture than that portrayed by those who support evolution.

The consistent arguments used to support a belief in evolution fall into two categories:

1. “[T]he Church has no official position on the theory of evolution.”^[4] This statement is echoed consistently by those determined to expound this idea. Without arguing the merits of this statement, it remains unclear how this justifies its place in Church-supported institutions. To state clearly: “if it is your suggestion that the Church has not taken a position, why have you, in an organization that receives the support of that Church, taken a position?” They are certainly entitled to form their own individual opinion, or belief. But they are not entitled to portray it as Church-supported, or Church-endorsed, or use Church resources to promote it.

2. A conflation of microevolution (adaptation) with macroevolution (descent with modification). As has been discussed elsewhere in our publications, adaptation is the operation of God-authored information contained within DNA. It operates with information already present. This is observable. Descent with modification requires the introduction of new information into the genome, complex information that all evidence suggests requires an author. It is not observable.

By conflating both concepts into one term, evolution, they seek to portray that it is accepted by leaders of the Church. As you will see, no prophet has ever endorsed the concept of descent with modification, or human evolution.

Orson F. Whitney, speaking at the General Conference of the Church in April 1915, said,

“We have no right to take the theories of men, however scholarly, however learned, and set them up as a standard, and try to make the Gospel bow down to them; making of them an iron bedstead upon which God’s truth, if not long enough, must be stretched out, or if too long, must be chopped off – anything to make it fit into the system of men’s thoughts and theories! On the contrary, we should hold up the Gospel as the standard of truth, and measure thereby the theories and opinions of men.”

A review of the teachings of the prophets—specifically those from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve—reveals a consistent stance on the topic of evolution. At no point have the prophets endorsed the idea that evolution, which suggests that humans evolved from lower animals, is true. Instead, they have consistently rejected evolution as false and dangerous to believers.

Historical Context and Doctrinal Foundation

The question of human origins became particularly prominent in Church discourse following the widespread acceptance of Darwinian evolution in academic and scientific circles during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As evolutionary theory gained traction in educational institutions and popular culture, Church leaders felt compelled to address this challenge to revealed truth with clarity and authority.

The doctrinal foundation for the Church's position rests firmly upon revealed scripture, including the accounts in Genesis, Moses, and Abraham, which describe the direct creation of Adam and Eve by God. This scriptural foundation has been consistently upheld and defended by successive generations of Church leadership, who have viewed evolutionary theory not merely as a

scientific hypothesis, but as a fundamental challenge to the nature of God, the purpose of mortality, and the divine origin of humanity.

While Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* wasn't published until 1859, well after the Prophet Joseph Smith's death in 1844, Joseph Smith taught principles that directly contradict the fundamental premises of evolutionary theory. This is significant because it shows that the Church's position on these matters wasn't simply a reaction to Darwin but was established through revelation from the very beginning.

The Prophet Joseph taught something that strikes at the heart of evolutionary theory: that life forms cannot transcend the general "kinds" that God created at the beginning. In a powerful statement that has profound implications for how we understand the origin of life, he declared:

"God has made certain decrees which are fixed and immovable; for instance, God set the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens, and gave them their laws, conditions and bounds, which they cannot pass, except by His commandments; they all move in perfect harmony in their sphere and order, and are as lights, wonders and signs unto us. The sea also has its bounds which it cannot pass. God has set many signs on the earth, as well as in the heavens; for instance, the oak of the forest, the fruit of the tree, the herb of the field, all bear a sign that seed hath been planted there; for it is a decree of the Lord that every tree, plant, and herb bearing seed should bring forth of its kind."[\[5\]](#)

This teaching directly contradicts Darwin's central thesis that all life forms evolved from a single-celled organism and gradually branched out into various types of creatures over time. According to Joseph Smith, there are divine laws that prevent one kind of life from becoming another kind.

But Joseph Smith went even further. He also taught against the concept of spontaneous generation—the idea that life can arise from non-living matter. This strikes at another fundamental assumption of evolutionary theory. The Prophet taught: "[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.](#)" [\[6\]](#)

Think about the implications of this statement. If Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of God, then his teachings carry divine authority. And his teachings clearly establish that after God's initial creation, life must descend from this creation, and that it cannot transcend the general "kind" of life to which it belongs. Both of these principles directly undermine Darwin's theory of evolution.

The Early Brethren Respond to Darwin

When Darwin's book exploded onto the world stage in 1859, the leaders of the Church didn't hesitate to respond. This raises an important question: if Darwin's theory was the incredible ray

of light and truth that evolutionists claim it was, why did God's authorized servants so uniformly reject it from the very beginning?

Presidents of the Church Speak Out

President Brigham Young was particularly vocal in his opposition to evolutionary theory. He was deeply concerned that these false ideas were being taught even in Zion. In a letter that reveals his strong feelings on the matter, he wrote:

"We have enough and to spare, at present in these mountains, of schools where young infidels are made because the teachers are so tender-footed that they dare not mention the principles of the gospel to their pupils but have no hesitancy in introducing into the classroom the theories of Huxley, of Darwin.... This course I am resolutely and uncompromisingly opposed to, and *I hope to see the day when the doctrines of the gospel will be taught in all our schools, when the revelations of the Lord will be our texts....*" [7]

President Young also taught publicly about evolution, making a distinction that's crucial for us to understand today. He acknowledged what we now call microevolution—the observable variations within kinds of animals—while flatly denying macroevolution—the theoretical changes from one basic kind of animal to a different kind. He explained:

"The whole Scriptures plainly teach us that we are the children of that God who framed the world. Let us look round and see whether we can find a father and son in this congregation. Do we see one an elephant, and the other a hen? No. Does a father that looks like a human being have a son like an ape, going on all fours? No; the son looks like his father. There is an endless variety of distinction in the few features that compose the human face, yet children have in their countenances and general expression of figure and temperament a greater or less likeness of their parents. You do not see brutes spring from human beings. Every species is true to its kind. The children of men are featured alike and walk erect." [8]

This is an inspired statement. President Young knew that while there are variations within kinds of animals (what we see in the great variety of dogs, for example), we don't see one kind of animal producing offspring that are fundamentally different kinds of animals.

President John Taylor, who succeeded Brigham Young as Prophet and President of the Church, was even more explicit in his denunciation of evolution. In his famous treatise *Mediation and Atonement*, he wrote what may be **one of the most comprehensive rejections** of evolutionary theory ever penned **by a Church president**:

"The animal and vegetable creations are governed by certain laws and are composed of certain elements peculiar to themselves. This applies to man, to the beasts, fowls, fish and creeping things, to the insects and to all animated nature; each one possessing its own distinctive features, each requiring a specific sustenance, each having an organism and faculties governed by prescribed laws to perpetuate its own kind. So accurate is the formation of the various living creatures that an intelligent student of nature can tell by any particular bone of the skeleton of an

animal to what class or order it belongs. These principles do not change, as represented by evolutionists of the Darwinian school, but the primitive organisms of all living beings exist in the same form as when they first received their impress from their Maker.... and if we take man, he is said to have been made in the image of God, for the simple reason that he is a son of God; and being His son, he is, of course, His offspring, an emanation from God, in whose likeness, we are told, he is made. He did not originate from a chaotic mass of matter, moving or inert, but came forth possessing, in an embryotic state, all the faculties and powers of a God. And when he shall be perfected, and have progressed to maturity, he will be like his Father—a God; being indeed His offspring. As the horse, the ox, the sheep, and every living creature, including man, propagates its own species and perpetuates its own kind, so does God perpetuate His." [9]

This statement is remarkable for several reasons. First, President Taylor directly links Darwin's name to his denunciation. Second, he puts this teaching into print in his great work, making it part of the permanent record. Third, he clearly states that macroevolution simply doesn't happen—each kind perpetuates its own kind, including man, who is the offspring of God.

Elder John W. Taylor, the son of President John Taylor and an apostle himself, likewise spoke out against evolution in the October General Conference of 1903. In discussing false doctrines that have crept into the Church among a limited number, he said:

“We have still a great work to perform, and we should not waste our time on hypnotism, or Christian Science, or evolution, and such things. We have believers in evolution in our midst, and there is a little ‘blight upon the top of the trees’ in this regard. As a servant of God I tell you mankind can not be redeemed, worlds without end; can not evolve, or crystalize, or get into the condition entitling them to become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and to partake of the fulness of His glory; can not go on to perfection, and sit down in the councils of heaven with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and those bright intelligences who created this world and others, only through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. All the evolution in the world will not save a single soul; neither will all the Christian Science, neither will spiritualism, nor hypnotism, nor any other ism that is not of God.” [10]

The Witness of Early Apostles

The apostles of this era were equally clear in their opposition to evolutionary theory. Elder Erastus Snow, called to be an apostle in 1849, saw through to the fundamental flaw of evolution theory: that its story of single cell to man is beyond the power of observation and therefore must be taken on faith. He taught:

"Mr. Darwin, and a kindred school of modern philosophers, would fain try to impress upon us their theory of evolutions, and would have us believe we are descendants from, and only a little in advance of our ancestor, the monkey; and that other inferior grades of animals are aspiring to become monkeys; they fail to demonstrate their theories, simply because they are not demonstrateable." [11]

This is a crucial point that many people miss today. Evolution from single-celled organisms to humans cannot be demonstrated or observed. It must be accepted as a matter of belief—ironically, as a matter of faith.

Elder Orson Pratt, one of the great scriptorians of the nineteenth century, contrasted the revealed truth about man's origin with the theories of evolution:

"By revelations given in ancient days, and renewed through this young Prophet of God, we learn that we, ourselves, did not begin to exist when we were born into this state of existence; we learn that we are of higher origin than that assigned by poor, unbelieving man. Contrast the ideas of the last few centuries with the ideas that God has revealed from heaven. They would make man look for his origin down to the very reptile and the worm that crawls upon the earth, and to the fish of the sea—as the first father, the first origin, the first oyster. Such is the reason of the learned of the last few centuries—the evolution theory; in other words, that which you learn from books, the creation of man's folly and foolishness. But when we learn through the revelations of God that instead of man's coming up from the poor worm of the dirt, he descended from the being who controls the universe by his power; that he descended from that being who is the fullness of all knowledge, and who sways his sceptre over more planetary systems than there are sands upon the sea shore. We are his offspring, we are his sons and his daughters, we are his children, he has begotten us, and we existed before the foundation of the world." [\[12\]](#)

What a contrast! Instead of ascending from the lowest forms of life, we descended from the highest—from God Himself.

The Twentieth Century: Official Church Statements

As we moved into the twentieth century, the Church felt the need to make more formal, official statements about evolution. This wasn't because the doctrine had changed, but because the theory of evolution was gaining more widespread acceptance in secular academia and the Church needed to clarify its position.

"The Origin of Man" - The Definitive Statement

In 1909, fifty years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the First Presidency issued what remains the Church's most comprehensive and definitive statement on evolution. This document, titled "The Origin of Man," was issued during the presidency of Joseph F. Smith and represents the official position of the Church.

The statement begins by clarifying that they weren't presenting anything new: "[In presenting the statement \[on evolution\] that follows we are not conscious of putting forth anything essentially new; neither is it our desire so to do. Truth is what we wish to present, and truth—eternal truth—is fundamentally old. A restatement of the original attitude of the Church relative to this matter is all that will be attempted here.](#)" [\[13\]](#)

The **heart of the statement directly contradicts evolutionary theory:**

"It is held by some that Adam was not the first man upon this earth and that the original human being was a development from lower orders of the animal creation. These, however, are the theories of men. The word of the Lord declared that Adam was 'the first man of all men' (Moses 1:34), and we are therefore in duty bound to regard him as the primal parent of our race. It was shown to the brother of Jared that all men were created in the beginning after the image of God; whether we take this to mean the spirit or the body, or both, it commits us to the same conclusion: Man began life as a human being, in the likeness of our Heavenly Father." [\[14\]](#)

The statement concludes with this **powerful declaration**: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaims man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity."

This statement is still considered the Church's official position. As recently as February 2002, when it was reprinted in the *Ensign*, the Church declared that it "[expresses the Church's doctrinal position on these matters \[of questions concerning the Creation and evolution theory\]](#)." [\[15\]](#)

Real Science vs. Vain Philosophy

In 1910, the First Presidency issued another statement that, while not specifically mentioning evolution, had clear implications for the theory. They declared:

"Our religion is not hostile to real science. That which is demonstrated, we accept with joy; but vain philosophy, human theory and mere speculations of men, we do not accept nor do we adopt anything contrary to divine revelation or to good common sense. But everything that tends to right conduct, that harmonizes with sound morality and increases faith in Deity, finds favor with us no matter where it may be found." [\[16\]](#)

Notice the careful distinction between "real science" and "vain philosophy, human theory and mere speculations of men." Since evolution from a single-celled organism to a human being cannot be observed or demonstrated, it falls into the latter category rather than the former.

The Misunderstood Views of Talmage and Widtsoe

Many people today try to claim that apostles James E. Talmage and John A. Widtsoe supported evolution. This is a significant misunderstanding of their actual positions. While both believed in an old earth and death before the Fall of Adam, neither came close to accepting evolution as modern evolutionists do.

Elder Talmage made a clear distinction between observable facts and unproven theories:

"Attempts have been made to show that the present state of man is the culmination of a long course of development, higher forms having been evolved from inferior progenitors. Undoubtedly much that is classed under the current title, Evolution, is true. That part which

comprises facts is true; and with equal assurance be it said that much of the theory of evolutionists is error." [17]

The "facts" he referred to were the observable variations within kinds of animals (microevolution). The "theory" that is "error" was the story of man evolving from apes and other macroevolutionary claims.

In his famous address "*The Earth and Man*," Elder Talmage was careful to stress: "We believe that Adam was a real personage, who stands at the head of his race chronologically. To my mind Adam is a historic personage, not a prehistoric being, unidentified and uncertain." He also declared, "**I do not regard Adam as related to -- certainly not as descended from -- the Neanderthal, the Cro-Magnon, the Peking or the Piltdown man.** Adam came as divinely directed, created and empowered, and stands as the patriarchal head of his posterity...." [18]

Elder Widtsoe was equally careful to distinguish between facts and theories. He consistently warned against accepting theories as facts:

"Had the proponents as well as the opponents of evolution, as a whole or in part, kept in mind that they were discussing a theory, subject to frequent and fundamental change, the civilized world would have been spared much unseemly behavior. Again the warning: Distinguish clearly between facts and the inferences from facts. Certainly, it is a mistake to accept theories in building faith in anything, from religion to our everyday life pursuits." [19]

Regarding the theory of common descent—the idea that all life evolved from a common ancestor—Elder Widtsoe wrote: "Yet, at the best the doctrine of the common origin of all life is only an inference of science. After these many years of searching, its truth has not been demonstrated." [20]

In his *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Elder Widstoe was equally blunt:

"Any theory that leaves out God as a personal, purposeful Being, and accepts chance as a first cause, cannot be accepted by Latter-day Saints... That man and the whole of creation came by chance is unthinkable. It is equally unthinkable that if man came into being by the will and power of God, the divine creative power is limited to one process dimly sensed by mortal man." [21]

Both of these apostles, far from supporting evolution, were actually **quite critical of it** when properly understood.

David O. McKay's True Position

President David O. McKay is another leader whose position on evolution has been misrepresented. Some point to his use of the word "beautiful" to describe evolution's theory, but when we look at the full context of his statements, a different picture emerges.

In a 1968 General Conference address, President McKay made his position clear:

"There is a purposeful design permeating all nature, the crowning event of which is man. Here, on this thought, science again leads the student up to a certain point, and sometimes leaves him with his soul unanchored. For example, evolution's theory of the creation of the world offers many perplexing problems to the inquiring mind. Inevitably, a teacher who denies divine agency in creation, who insists that there is no intelligent purpose in it, undoubtedly impresses the student with the thought that all may be chance. I say that no youth should be left without a counterbalancing thought." [22]

President McKay also taught: "The stern fact of life is that animals, as other living things, can grow and produce their kind only in accordance with fixed laws of nature and the divine command, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and the beast of the earth after his kind.' (Genesis 1:24)." [23]

This statement clearly negates belief in macroevolution—the idea that one kind of animal can evolve into a fundamentally different kind.

Consistent Apostolic Opposition

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, apostles continued to speak out against evolution. Elder Marion G. Romney was particularly consistent in his opposition, speaking against it in General Conference multiple times over a twenty-year period.

In 1973, as Second Counselor in the First Presidency, President Romney gave a stirring address titled "Man – A Child of God," in which he taught:

"The theory that man is other than the offspring of God has been, and, so long as it is accepted and acted upon, will continue to be, a major factor in blocking man's spiritual growth and in corrupting his morals.... The concept that man is a beast relieves him of a sense of accountability and encourages him to adopt the fatalistic attitude of 'eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.'" [24]

The Scriptural Stalwarts

Two figures stand out as particularly strong opponents of evolution in the latter twentieth century: Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie.

President Joseph Fielding Smith, who served as an apostle for nearly sixty years before becoming President of the Church, was unequivocal in his opposition to evolution:

"This idea that everything commenced from a small beginning, from the scum upon the surface of the sea, and has gradually developed until all forms of life, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, and the plants upon the face of the earth, have all sprung from that one source, is a falsehood absolutely. There is no truth in it, for God has given us his word by

which we may know, and all who are led by the Spirit of God can understand through that Holy Spirit, the truth of these things...." [\[25\]](#)

Even more directly, President Smith declared:

"I say most emphatically, you cannot believe in this theory of the origin of man, and at the same time accept the plan of salvation as set forth by the Lord our God. You must choose the one and reject the other, for they are in direct conflict and there is a gulf separating them which is so great that it cannot be bridged, no matter how much one may try to do so." [\[26\]](#)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie was equally adamant. In his comprehensive work *Mormon Doctrine*, he concluded: "There is no harmony between the truths of revealed religion and the theories of organic evolution." [\[27\]](#)

Statements From the Presidents of the Church

Several Presidents of the Church in the latter twentieth century spoke against evolution. President Harold B. Lee shared a story that illustrates the problem:

"I was somewhat sorrowed recently to hear someone, a sister who comes from a church family, ask, 'What about the pre-Adamic people?' Here was someone who I thought was fully grounded in the faith. I asked, 'What about the pre-Adamic people?' She replied, 'Well, aren't there evidences that people preceded the Adamic period of the earth?' I said, 'Have you forgotten the scripture that says, "And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also. ..." (Moses 3:7.) I asked, 'Do you believe that?'" [\[28\]](#)

President Lee's counsel was clear: "I say that we need to teach our people to find their answers in the scriptures. If only each of us would be wise enough to say that we aren't able to answer any question unless we can find a doctrinal answer in the scriptures!" [\[29\]](#)

President Ezra Taft Benson, the thirteenth President of the Church, continued the tradition of rejecting evolutionary explanations for human origins. He declared:

"The theory of evolution is one of the most pernicious doctrines ever taught. It strikes at the very foundation of revealed religion and seeks to destroy faith in God, in Christ, and in the Bible."

President Benson connected the rejection of evolution to broader spiritual concerns:

"When we accept the theory of evolution, we reject the need for a Creator. When we reject the need for a Creator, we reject the reality of God. This is the ultimate goal of those who promote evolutionary theory—to destroy faith in the Almighty."

While President of the Quorum of the Twelve, President Benson gave his fervent warning given in General Conference, which also appeared in book form:

“As a watchman on the tower, I feel to warn you that one of the chief means of misleading our youth and destroying the family unit is our educational institutions. There is more than one reason why the Church is advising our youth to attend colleges close to their homes where institutes of religion are available. It gives the parents the opportunity to stay close to their children, and if they become alerted and informed, these parents can help expose some of the deceptions of men like ... Charles Darwin...” [30]

During his presidency in the Church, Howard W. Hunter published a book of his teachings that offers insight into the topic of evolution. He opposed the "modernists" who sought to liberalize the scriptures and undermine their accuracy or historicity. In response to their views, Howard W. Hunter denounced their perspective and posed a rhetorical question:

“The Old Testament unfolds the story of the Creation of the earth and mankind by God. Should we now disregard this account and modernize the Creation according to the theories of the modernists? Can we say there was no Garden of Eden or an Adam and Eve? Because modernists now declare the story of the Flood is unreasonable and impossible, should we disbelieve the account of Noah and the Flood as related in the Old Testament?” [31]

While he never showed much interest in discussing the issue, President Gordon B. Hinckley also disavowed belief in evolution. He said:

“I believe in evolution, *not organic evolution*, as it is called, but in the evolution of the mind, the heart, and the soul of man. I believe in improvement. I believe in growth.” [32]

In an August 1981 address to the faculty at BYU, Gordon B. Hinckley admonished the staff:

“We must never forget, my beloved associates, that Brigham Young University is the university of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There must be in the very substance of our teaching recognition of God as our Eternal Father, of Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of mankind, and of the revealed word as divine wisdom.

Our students, with those who sacrifice to send them here, have the right to expect that they will leave not only with increased knowledge but with increased faith as well. If they leave only with knowledge, they will have lost the substance while grasping for the shadow.” [33]

When speaking of those who teach at BYU he said:

“We are, of course, properly **concerned about you who teach** at this great institution. You are the bone and sinew of the university. We are **concerned that your academic credentials** be the very best and that there be a quality of excellence in all you do. We are also concerned with **your faith, your principles**. I hope you will not regard us as being unduly cautious or unnecessarily critical. We act in the spirit spoken of Alma concerning teachers in his day. Said he: ‘Trust no one to be your teacher . . . except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his

commandments.' (Mosiah 23:14)" [34]

In a First Presidency Message, he made the following statement:

"We have nothing to fear when we walk by the light of eternal truth. But we had better be discerning. Sophistry has a way of masking itself as truth. Half-truths are used to mislead under the representation that they are whole truths. Innuendo is often used by enemies of this work as representing truth. *Theories and hypotheses are often set forth as if they were confirmed truth.* Statements taken out of context of time or circumstance or the written word are often given as truth, when as a matter of fact such procedure may be the very essence of falsehood."

President Hinckley added:

"I remember when I was a college student there were great discussions on the question of organic evolution. I took classes in geology and biology and heard the whole story of Darwinism as it was then taught. I wondered about it. I thought much about it. But **I did not let it throw me,** for I read what the scriptures said about our origins and our relationship to God."

The Twenty-First Century: Continued Opposition

The pattern of prophetic opposition to evolution has continued into the twenty-first century. In 2002, the Church reprinted "The Origin of Man" statement in the *Ensign*, with a preamble declaring it to "[express] the Church's doctrinal position on these matters [of questions relating to the Creation and evolution theory]." [35]

President Boyd K. Packer has been particularly vocal in his opposition to evolution. In a 2006 address, he taught:

"No lesson is more manifest than that all living things do as the Lord commanded them in the Creation. They reproduce after their own kind (see Moses 2:12, 24-25). They follow the pattern of their parentage. Everyone knows that. Every four-year-old knows that! A bird will not become an animal nor a fish. A mammal will not beget a reptile, nor 'do men gather . . . figs of thistles' (Matthew 7:16)." [36]

In his book, *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through the Words of Mormon*, he wrote:

"If man is but an animal, then logic favors freedom without accountability or consequence. Had man evolved from animals, there could have been **no fall, no law broken, no penalty, no need for a mediator.** The ordinance of baptism would be an empty gesture since it is for the remission of sins. Many who perceive organic evolution to be **a law rather than theory** do not realize **they forsake the atonement** in the process.

And, I am sorry to say, **the so-called theistic evolution, the theory that God used an evolutionary process to prepare a physical body for the spirit of man, is equally false.** I say I am sorry because I know it is a view commonly held by good and thoughtful people who search

for an acceptable resolution to an apparent conflict between the theory of evolution and the doctrines of the gospel. An understanding of the sealing authority with its binding of the generations into eternal families cannot admit to ancestral bloodlines to beasts.” [37]

In a 2008 *Ensign* article, President Packer wrote:

"We are taught in Genesis, in Moses, in Abraham, in the Book of Mormon, and in the endowment that man's mortal body was made in the image of God in a separate creation. Had the Creation come in a different way, there could have been no Fall. If men were merely animals, then logic favors freedom without accountability. How well I know that among learned men are those who look down at animals and stones to find the origin of man. They do not look inside themselves to find the spirit there. They train themselves to measure things by time, by thousands and by millions, and say these animals called men all came by chance." [38]

In a 2007 interview with the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Elder Russel M. Nelson was asked directly about the Church's position on evolution:

"*Pew Forum*: Different denominations deal differently with questions about life's origins and development. Conservative denominations tend to have more trouble with Darwinian evolution. Does the church have an **official position** on this topic?

Russell M. Nelson: We believe that God is our creator and that he has **created other forms of life**. It's interesting to me, drawing on my 40 years experience as a medical doctor, how similar those species are. We developed open-heart surgery, for example, experimenting on lower animals simply because the same creator made the human being. We owe a lot to those lower species. But to think that man evolved from one species to another is, to me, incomprehensible.

Pew Forum: Why is that?

Russell M. Nelson: **Man has always been man**. Dogs have always been dogs. Monkeys have always been monkeys. It's just the way genetics works." [39]

The Question of BYU

Some people assume that because evolution is taught at Brigham Young University, the Church must approve of it. This is a misunderstanding of the Church's position. While evolution is being taught at BYU (which BYU professors say is necessary for the world's academic recognition), we are not to accept it as true.[40]

President Harold B. Lee taught:

"This institution [BYU] must turn out the best scientists. We want them to turn out the best philosophers to be found in any of the schools. But we want those scientists and philosophers

thus trained to measure the theory of their science and philosophy by the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ." [\[41\]](#)

President Ezra Taft Benson warned parents in his October 1970 Conference talk:

"If your children are taught untruths on evolution in the public schools *or even in our Church schools*, provide them with a copy of President Joseph Fielding Smith's **excellent rebuttal** in his book *Man, His Origin and Destiny*."

In 1911, three professors were fired from BYU after a report was made to the Board of Trustees by Superintendent Horace Cummings. Superintendent Cummings reported to the board that:

"The teachers were following the 'higher criticism'... treating the Bible as a collection of myths, folk-lore, dramas, literary productions, history and some inspiration."

They rejected the flood, the confusion of tongues, the miracle of the Red Sea, and the temptation of Christ as real phenomena.

The theory of evolution is treated as a demonstrated law and their applications of it to gospel truths give rise to many curious and conflicting explanations of scripture.

The professors taught that "all truths change as we change. Nothing is fixed or reliable."

They also taught that 'Visions and revelations are mental suggestions.' The objective reality of the presence of the Father and the Son, in Joseph Smith's first vision, is questioned."[\[42\]](#)

Superintendent Cummings concluded his report by saying that the professors "seem to feel that they have **a mission to protect the young from the errors of their parents**." These teachings would be very familiar to many professors at BYU today. They do not represent the fundamental principles of the gospel and are the direct result of allowing evolution and the scientism it promotes back into our institutions. The rejection of these anti-God theories resulted in the dismissal of those promoting them. It was difficult, but necessary. These ideas have crept back in to BYU under the guise of "acceptance of the world's credentials," and acceptance of the world's money (See [What Happened to Hope?](#)).

Understanding the Distinction: Micro vs. Macro Evolution

Throughout this historical survey, we've seen that Church leaders consistently make a distinction between two very different concepts that are often lumped together under the term "evolution."

Microevolution (adaptation) refers to the observable variations within kinds of animals and plants. We can see all around us—the great variety of dogs, the different types of roses, the variations in human appearance. This is observable, demonstrable science, and Church leaders have never had a problem with it.

Macroevolution (descent with modification), on the other hand, refers to the theoretical change from one basic kind of organism to a completely different kind—the idea that all life evolved from a single-celled organism, that fish evolved into amphibians, that apes evolved into humans.

This is not observable, cannot be demonstrated, and must be accepted as a matter of faith.

Professor James E. Talmage, contrasted his observations of macro and micro evolution in an 1890 lecture, “The Theory of Evolution”:

“That variations do occur among animals and plants is beyond doubt. Equally certain is it that by human agency even, selective breeding may be so directed as to bring about great changes in development. From the wild and stunted ponies have come the Peteheron, the Norman, the Cleveland, and the Clydesdale. By man’s care, the Alderhey, the Devon, the Friesian, the Holstein, the Jersey, and the Durham cattle have been bred; each breed possessing distinctive qualities. From the hard, sour crab apple have come, under man’s protection, many varieties of rich and mellow fruit, but they all are apples. From the wild dog rose have sprung hundreds of rich and rare varieties, but they all are roses. All of these are readily recognized as varieties of the same kinds. No florist has yet developed a rose from a tulip; human power is insufficient to cause a willow to bear acorns; the stock breeder cannot transform his cows into wool bearers, nor his dogs into horses. Even the amoebae, that structureless bit of jelly, produces only amoebae.

Taking the sterility of hybrids as a test, *the first case of origination of a species through natural selection, has yet to be heard of.*”

Church leaders have consistently accepted microevolution while rejecting macroevolution. This distinction is crucial for understanding their teachings.

The Overwhelming Pattern

When we look at the **complete historical record, the pattern is overwhelming and unmistakable:**

- **Never has a prophet, seer, or revelator proclaimed that Darwin's theory of evolution is true.**
- **Many times leaders have proclaimed evolution to be false, in public and official venues.**
- **The few ambiguous or neutral statements are greatly outnumbered by those denouncing evolution.**
- **The official statements of the Church consistently reject evolutionary theory.**
- **This pattern has remained consistent from Joseph Smith's day to the present.**

Why This Matters

You might wonder why this historical survey matters. After all, isn't this just an academic question? The answer is no—this question has profound implications for how we understand ourselves, our purpose, and our relationship with God.

If we are merely the products of random evolutionary processes, then we have no inherent purpose or meaning. We are accountable to only ourselves. Our moral choices are simply the result of evolutionary programming designed to help our genes survive.

But if we are the literal offspring of God, created in His image, then everything changes. We have divine potential. We are accountable to our Heavenly Father. Our choices have eternal significance. We have a glorious destiny awaiting us.

As President Marion G. Romney taught: ["The theory that man is other than the offspring of God has been, and so long as it is accepted and acted upon, will continue to be, a major factor in blocking man's spiritual growth and in corrupting his morals."](#) [\[43\]](#)

Conclusion

As we conclude this survey of prophetic teachings, it's worth remembering the counsel of President Thomas S. Monson, who has repeatedly quoted these words from Stephen L Richards:

["Should doubt knock at your doorway, just say to those skeptical, disturbing, rebellious thoughts: 'I propose to stay with my faith, with the faith of my people. I know that happiness and contentment are there, and I forbid you agnostic, doubting thoughts to destroy the house of my faith. I acknowledge that I do not understand the processes of creation, but I accept the fact of it. I grant that I cannot explain the miracles of the Bible, and I do not attempt to do so, but I accept God's word. I wasn't with Joseph, but I believe him. My faith did not come to me through science, and I will not permit so-called science to destroy it.'"](#) [\[44\]](#)

The prophets have spoken clearly and consistently on this matter. We can trust their words, knowing that they speak as servants of the Lord. As the Lord Himself declared: ["Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same"](#) (D&C 1:38).

The choice is ours: we can follow the theories of men, or we can follow the prophets of God. The historical record shows us clearly which path our leaders have consistently recommended. This addendum does not attempt to address the scientific flaws within evolution, or the theological challenges it faces. The purpose has been to demonstrate the consistency of the Prophets and authorities within the Church in addressing the fallacy and warn of the dangers associate with the theory of human evolution. While confusion may arise about microevolution and macroevolution and whatever other labels are placed upon it, the message is clear: God created man in His image, we did not descend from any other of His creations. God is not the author of this confusion, but we know who is.

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- [5] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976] p. 197-198.
- [6] Ibid., p. 373.
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- [15] Preamble to "The Origin of Man," reprinted in *Ensign*, February 2002.
- [16] Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund, "Words in Season from the First Presidency," *Deseret Evening News*, December 17, 1910.
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- [18] James E. Talmage, "The Earth and Man," Delivered August 9, 1931. This statement further negates the statement made in BYU Life Sciences publication, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ and Evolution* by Ugo A. Perego concerning Adam and Eve simply being the first creatures evolved enough to enter a covenant relationship with God (p. 247).
- [19] John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era], p. 28-30.
- [20] Ibid., p. 159-164.

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- [22] David O. McKay, *General Conference*, April 1968.
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- [26] *Ibid.*, 1:141-142. Emphasis in original.
- [27] Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd Ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979], p. 256.
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- [34] *Ibid*, p.25
- [35] Preamble to "The Origin of Man," reprinted in *Ensign*, February 2002.
- [36] Boyd K. Packer, "Children of God," *BYU Women's Conference*, May 5, 2006.
- [37] Boyd K. Packer, *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon*, p. 1-31
- [38] Boyd K. Packer, "Children of God," *BYU Women's Conference*, May 5, 2006.
- [39] See <http://www.newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/> pew-forum-interviews-church-leaders or <http://pewforum.org/events/?EventID=143>
- [40] For additional information regarding the motivation and costs associated with teaching evolution at BYU, see "[What Happened to Hope?](#)"
- [41] Boyd K. Packer, "The Pattern of Our Parentage," *General Conference*, Oct. 1984.
- [42] Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, vol. 1 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 1:423.

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