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CREATION, CREATION ACCOUNTS

Latter-day Saints have, in addition to the biblical Genesis, two modern restorations of ancient scriptural accounts of the Creation in the BOOK OF MOSES and the BOOK OF ABRAHAM. Related authoritative information also appears in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the LDS temple ceremony. Drawing on this wealth of creation literature, Latter-day Saints understand that Jesus Christ, acting under the direction of God the Father, created this and other worlds to make possible the immortality and eternal life of human beings who already existed as spirit children of the Father. This understanding differs from both scientific and traditional Christian accounts in that it affirms God's purpose and role, while recognizing creation as organization of pre-existing materials and not as an ex nihilo event (creation from nothing). Furthermore, these accounts describe an active role for God's spirit children in the Creation and include a more detailed version of the origins of evil.

The frequent occurrence of creation accounts in LDS scriptures and sacred ceremonies reflects a pattern of the ancient world generally, and ancient Israel in particular, where the Creation was regularly recited or reenacted. The Creation—including its ritual recitation and reenactment—was viewed by the Israelites and other peoples of the ancient Near East as possessing a dynamic, not a static, quality. According to Raffaele Pettazzoni, a noted historian of religions, "What happened in the beginning has an exemplary and defining value for what is happening today and what will happen in the future" (p. 26).

Creation plays a central theological role in the Book of Mormon. The events surrounding creation are linked with the fall of that angel who became the devil (2 Ne. 2:17; 9:8). His fall, in turn, led to the fall of Adam; opposition as a feature of mortal existence; and, ultimately, the need for a divine redemption of mankind (2 Ne. 2:18–27). Book of Mormon prophets invoked the Creation as a symbol of God's goodness and a touchstone of human stewardship: "The Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it" (1 Ne. 17:36). Those who reject God's goodness, as symbolized by the Creation (and the Atonement), will inevitably be judged and punished (cf. 2 Ne. 1:10).

The creation account in the book of Moses (revealed in 1830 as the beginning of the JOSEPH SMITH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE) provides several insights in addition to those found in Genesis.

First, the book of Moses establishes Mosaic authorship of its creation account indicating explicitly that it resulted from a revelation given to Moses sometime between the time of the burning bush and the exodus (Moses 1:17, 25).

Second, it clarifies the role of Jesus Christ in the Creation: "By the word of my power have I created [these lands and their inhabitants], which is mine Only Begotten Son" (Moses 1:32–33); "I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: Let us make man in our image" (Moses 2:26–27); "And I, the Lord God, said unto mine Only Begotten: Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil" (Moses 4:28). This is consistent with the teachings of John and Paul in the New Testament (John 1:3, 10; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:13–16; Heb. 1:2, 10).

Third, the Creation is placed in a much larger context of ongoing creations of innumerable inhabited earths with their respective heavens (in all of which Christ played a central role): "And worlds without number have I created... for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is
mine Only Begotten. . . . And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works” (Moses 1:33, 38; see also worlds). Moses is given details of the creation of “this heaven, and this earth” only (Moses 2:1; cf. 1:35).

Fourth, the origin of evil is traced back to the rebellion of Satan, who sought (1) to replace God’s Beloved Son, who had been “chosen from the beginning,” and (2) to receive and use God’s own power to redeem all humans by destroying their agency (Moses 4:1–4). The importance of human agency is reaffirmed in the command to Adam and Eve concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil: “Thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:17).

Fifth, the account in Moses makes clear that there was a spirit creation of all living things in heaven before they were created physically upon the earth: “I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth. . . . And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them; and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air” (Moses 3:5).

Certain LDS commentators have explored the possibility that the Moses account could resolve the apparent conflict in the order of God’s creative acts between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 by treating the first as a spirit creation (O. Pratt, pp. 21–22; Roberts, pp. 264–68; cf. DS 1:74–76, which explains a different view). Later revelations make it clear that mankind’s spirit creation had taken place long before the events described in any of the accounts of the earth’s creation. God, our Heavenly Father, is literally the “Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9). “Man as a spirit was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body” (see First Presidency, “The Origin of Man,” Nov. 1909 [Appendix]; see also SPIRIT BODY).

The Abrahamic account is distinctive among creation accounts. It describes a structured cosmos, with many stars, one above another, with their different periods and orders of government (Abr. 3:1–10). Within this context Abraham also learns about eternally existing SPIRITS, one above the other in intelligence, all the way up to “the Lord thy God,” who is “more intelligent than they all” (Abr. 3:19; see speeches cited in bibliography). He is shown a group of organized intelligences (or spirits, or souls—the words are here used interchangeably), over whom God rules and among whom he dwells, and is taught that “in the beginning” God came down in the midst of them, and said of some who were “noble and great”: “These I will make my rulers. . . . And he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born” (Abr. 3:18–23). A purpose of this premortal assembly in heaven is explained by “one among them that was like unto God,” who says to those who are with him, “We will go down. . . . and we will make an earth wherein these may dwell, and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:24–25). This is followed by a pronouncement of the glory to come upon those who prove worthy, the choosing of one “like unto the Son of Man” (who is to be sent to bring this about), and the rejection of Satan—all done by “the Lord,” who is identified elsewhere as Jehovah (Abr. 3:25–28; cf. Abr. 1:15–16; 2:7–8). Thereafter, “the Lord said: Let us go down,” whereupon the Gods “organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (Abr. 4:1). A significant feature of this revealed account is that both the space and the materials for the earth explicitly existed before its creation.

Within this context of the divine assembly, or COUNCIL IN HEAVEN, Abraham’s account of the Creation proceeds, generally following the structural outline of Genesis. By the time Joseph Smith published this “translation” in 1842, he had gained a much deeper understanding both through additional revelation and some through study of Hebrew. In light of the doctrine of the council in heaven, Joseph Smith had pointed out that the Hebrew term Elohim, a plural form, should be rendered the “Gods” in the creation account, not as the traditional “God” (WJS, p. 379). It is so rendered throughout Abraham’s account. In light of the doctrine of the eternal nature of matter, the word traditionally translated as “created” becomes “organized.” The phrase “without form and void” (Hebrew tohu wa-bohu) is rendered, quite properly, “empty and desolate” and describes the condition of the earth after it was organized, not before (Abr. 4:2).

The term “day” (Hebrew yom) for the seven
“days” of creation is given as “time,” a permissible alternative in both Hebrew and English; and it is explicitly pointed out that the “time” in which Adam should die if he partook of the forbidden fruit “was after the Lord’s time, which was after the time of Kolob [a great star that Abraham had seen nearest to the throne of God, whose revolution, one thousand years by our reckoning, is a day unto the Lord]; for as yet the Gods had not appointed unto Adam his reckoning” (Abr. 3:13; 3:2–4).

On the basis of the above passage, which clearly excludes the possibility of earthly twenty-four-hour days being the “days” or “times” of creation, some Latter-day Saint commentators have argued for one-thousand-year periods as the “times” of creation as well as the “time” of Adam’s earthly life after the fall; others have argued for indefinite periods of time, as long as it would take to accomplish the work involved. Abraham’s account does contain the interesting passage, in connection with the “organizing” of the lights in the “expanse” of heaven, “The Gods watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed” (Abr. 4:14–18). Abraham’s account actually includes twelve different “labors” of the Gods, divided up among the “days” in the manner of Genesis. The later temple account of creation gives an abbreviated version of those labors, divided up differently among the seven days while retaining the same order, suggesting that it may not be significant which labor is assigned to which day.

Abraham connects the seemingly differing accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 within the context of the council in heaven. Abraham’s seven-day account proceeds through the work of the first five creative times and part of the sixth as the physical creation of the earth and its preparation to support life before life was actually placed upon it. Thus, during the third time, “the Gods organized the earth to bring forth grass . . . and the earth to bring forth the tree from its own seed” (Abr. 4:12; emphasis added). And during the fifth time, the Gods “prepared the waters that they might bring forth great whales, and every living creature, . . . and every winged fowl after their kind” (Abr. 4:21). Similarly, on the sixth time “the Gods prepared the earth to bring forth the living creature after his kind. . . . And the Gods saw they would obey” (Abr. 4:24–25). Then upon the sixth time, the Gods again took counsel among themselves and determined to form man, and to give them dominion over the plants and animals that should come upon the earth (Abr. 4:26–29). “And the Gods said among themselves: On the seventh time we will end our work, which we have counseled; and we will rest . . . And thus were their decisions at the time that they counseled among themselves” (Abr. 5:2–3). The account paralleling Genesis 2 then follows smoothly as an account of the actual placing of life upon the earth; “And the Gods came down and formed these the generations of the heavens and of the earth, when they were formed in the day that the Gods formed the earth and the heavens, according to all that which they had said concerning every plant of the field before it was in the earth” (Abr. 5:4–5).

Several themes in other ancient creation accounts—premortal conflict in heaven, divine victory over the opposing powers of chaos, and the promulgation of law at the time of creation—are also familiar from creation accounts in LDS scripture and theology (2 Ne. 2:17; 9:8; Moses 4:3–4; Abr. 3:27–28; see also WAR IN HEAVEN; PREEXISTENCE). These ideas are alluded to in several places in the Bible (cf. Ex. 15; Job 38–41; Isa. 40–42; Ps. 18; 19; 24; 33; 68; 93; 104; Prov. 8:22–33; Hab. 3:8; Rev. 12:7–12). From the early Christian era until the end of the nineteenth century, traditional Christian interpretation has generally treated these biblical texts allegorically or has not considered them at all in discussions of the Creation. A profound transformation in the Christian interpretation of these passages took place during the latter part of the nineteenth century with the discovery and translation of creation accounts from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. While these accounts vary considerably in detail, they usually mention premortal combats, the establishment of the divine order before creation, and creation from chaos. The biblical passages mentioned above are now often understood in light of these descriptions of extrabiblical accounts.

The doctrine of ex nihilo creation has been the traditional Christian explanation. In recent discussion of the subject, many Jewish scholars agreed that the belief in an ex nihilo creation is not to be found before the Hellenistic period, while Christian scholars see no evidence of this doctrine in the Christian church until the end of the second century A.D. The rejection of ex nihilo creation in the teaching of the Latter-day Saints thus accords with the evidence of the earliest understanding of the Creation in ancient Israel and in early Christianity. Similarly, Latter-day Saints have understood such biblical passages as John 9:2 and Jeremiah 1:4–5 to
refer to individual premortal earthly existence, with implications for subsequent earthly existence. In support of this, it may be pointed out that various Christians and Christian groups in the early Christian centuries taught the same doctrine (cf. Origen, *De principiis* 1:7; 2:8; 4:1), and that it is also to be found in Jewish belief of the same period, including Philo (*De mutatione nominum* 39; *De opificio mundi* 51; *De cherubim* 32); in some apocryphal writings (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19–20; 15:3); and among the Essenes (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.8.11, as well as in the Jewish Talmud and Midrash).

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**CREEDS**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no creed, as that term is understood in traditional theology. Truth and the things of God are comprehended by study, faith, reason, science, experience, personal revelation, and revelation received through the prophets of God. Creeds, on the other hand, tend to delimit this process.

From the beginning of the Church until the present, its view has always been that such formulas are incompatible with the gospel’s inclusive commitment to truth and continual revelation. The Doctrine and Covenants states, “He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (*D&C* 50:24). In his *First Vision* in 1820, the young Prophet Joseph Smith was told that the creeds of the competing churches around him “were an abomination in [God’s] sight” (*HC* 1:19). These sweeping words were clarified in his *Wentworth Letter* (1842): “all were teaching incorrect doctrines.” During the April 1843 conference of the Church, the Prophet said: “It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine” (*HC* 5:340), and later he elaborated: “I cannot believe in any of the creeds of the different denominations, though all of them have some truth. I want to come up into the presence of God, and learn all things, but the creeds set up stakes, and say, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further,’ which I cannot subscribe to” (*HC* 6:67).

Since Joseph Smith’s day, the Christian world has moved in this direction by acknowledging that creeds are “historically conditioned,” and that confessions of faith are to be seen as “guidelines” rather than as final pronouncements.

Authoritative statements found in LDS literature are not viewed as elements in a creed. For example, although its thirteen *ARTICLES OF FAITH* are scriptural, they are open-ended. One of them says, “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (A of F 9). During fast and testimony meetings, usually on the first Sunday of each month, the conviction is often expressed by members that they know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that Joseph Smith and the living prophets are true prophets of God. These words in some respects parallel the Islamic confession of faith, or Shahadah, which is also not considered a creed.

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