

Comments on Abraham 3

The text of this chapter is complicated. Verses 1-10 plainly form a single continuous block as the subject remains the same through the conversation. Verses 11-28 do not follow this pattern. While v. 11-28 may be all part of a single revelation, it is more likely they are two separate revelations with v. 15 providing a segue. Verses 11-14 form a compact unit in both imagery and subject. And, v. 16-28, excepting the parenthetical insert by Abraham (v. 22-26), is a highly structured quotation of God, whereas the parenthesis and v. 11-14 are not. That by no means necessarily requires them to be separate revelations, but it is a convenient and reasonable way to divide up the text into manageable units.

v. 1-10 Single continuous revelation via the Urim & Thummim regarding order of physical worlds.

v. 11-28 Two Revelations via face to face conversations with God.

v. 11-14 First revelation introducing the Abrahamic Covenant

v. 15 Why these things were revealed

v. 16-28 Second revelation drawing parallel between order in physical creation and order in spiritual creation

v. 22-26 Parenthetical insert detailing a previous revelation dealing with foreordination

1 AND I, Abraham, had the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given unto me, in Ur of the Chaldees; 2 And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it; 3 And the Lord said unto me: These are the governing ones; and the name of the great one is Kolob, because it is near unto me, for I am the Lord thy God: I have set this one to govern all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.

4 And the Lord said unto me, by the Urim and Thummim, that Kolob was after the manner of the Lord, according to its times and seasons in the revolutions thereof; that one revolution was a day unto the Lord, after his manner of reckoning, it being one thousand years according to the time appointed unto that whereon thou standest. This is the reckoning of the Lord's time, according to the reckoning of Kolob.

5 And the Lord said unto me: The planet which is the lesser light, lesser than that which is to rule the day, even the night, is above or greater than that upon which thou standest in point of reckoning, for it moveth in order more slow; this is in order because it standeth above the earth upon which thou standest, therefore the reckoning of its time is not so many as to its

number of days, and of months, and of years.

6 And the Lord said unto me: Now, Abraham, these two facts exist, behold thine eyes see it; it is given unto thee to know the times of reckoning, and the set time, yea, the set time of the earth upon which thou standest, and the set time of the greater light which is set to rule the day, and the set time of the lesser light which is set to rule the night. 7 Now the set time of the lesser light is a longer time as to its reckoning than the reckoning of the time of the earth upon which thou standest. 8 And where these two facts exist, there shall be another fact above them, that is, there shall be another planet whose reckoning of time shall be longer still; 9 And thus there shall be the reckoning of the time of one planet above another, until thou come nigh unto Kolob, which Kolob is after the reckoning of the Lord's time; which Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest. 10 And it is given unto thee to know the set time of all the stars that are set to give light, until thou come near unto the throne of God.

v1-10 This text discusses the physical order of the universe with regard to the relationship between size and time. The "greater", or larger in size, the star or planet the slower it is in time. This follows the same line of thinking as the famous Theory of Relativity, which says the more mass and energy a body has the more gravity it experiences and the slower time will elapse for it. The largest body presented in this passage is the star Kolob, with a rotational period equivalent to approximately 1000 of earth's solar years.

Another interesting point worth noting is the present text contradicts the philosophical notion of infinite regression. There are limits to the extent of the physical universe, it doesn't keep getting smaller and smaller or larger and larger. There are finite limits to the order of the physical universe. Kolob is the largest or highest in this order, there simply isn't anything larger or higher.

Note these comparisons are for "all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest" (v. 3, 9). Cross reference with D&C 77:3 and D&C 130:3 indicates there are two orders: one being the temporal order of fallen creation which we inhabit, the other being that eternal order of spiritual creation which God and angels inhabit. We are taken out of the spiritual order by physical birth and reintroduced to it at resurrection.

As the comparisons in these verses are for those things which are after the temporal physical order, we may not be able to apply them to things of the spiritual order. Nothing is directly stated in these verses about the spiritual order with regard to this subject.

v5-7 An arbitrary planet, dubbed the "lesser light", is used as an example as falling in between the star Kolob and the planet earth with regard to its greatness. And this arbitrary planet's time would be faster than Kolob, but slower than earth's.

v8-9 These verses conclude the line of thought by saying time is relative to the size of the star and planet, cp. D&C 130:4. However, this relativity stops with the upper limit of Kolob, being the greatest in this order of creation. Imposing this kind of limit stops the seemingly infinite expansion that one could conclude from the "if there are two things, there will be one greater" line of reasoning. By doing so, God indicates there is a limit to the "one greater" rule, and the philosophical and mathematical concepts of an infinite numbers of planets is shown to not be a reality.

But, if there is a finite limit to things physical, then how can they also be "endless" or "eternal"? Answer: Moses 1:4, 38.

11 Thus I, Abraham, talked with the Lord, face to face, as one man talketh with another; and he told me of the works which his hands had made; 12 And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof. 13 And he said unto me: This is Shinehah, which is the sun. And he said unto me: Kokob, which is star. And he said unto me: Olea, which is the moon. And he said unto me: Kokaubeam, which signifies stars, or all the great lights, which were in the firmament of heaven. 14 And it was in the night time when the Lord spake these words unto me: I will multiply thee, and thy seed after thee, like unto these; and if thou canst count the number of sands, so shall be the number of thy seeds.

v11-14 Where v. 1-10 are revelation apparently received by the Urim & Thummim, as v. suggests, this revelation is a result of a personal appearance of the Lord (it appears to be God the Father speaking per v. 27). The text of these verses is a substantial expansion on the subject of Gen. 15:5.

v12 The Lord calls Abraham His son and places His hand on his eyes and he then sees a vision. This is similar to statements in the writings of Ezekiel where the Lord (in that case probably God the Son) frequently calls him "son of man" and when he has revelations he says "the hand of the Lord was upon me" (cf. Ezek. 3:14, 3:22, 8:1, 33:22, 37:1, 40:1, see also 2 Kings 3:15, 1 Chr. 28:19, Ezra 7:28). While some of those references are certainly figurative Semitisms, the very literal reading in the present text suggests the figurative has its root in the literal.

"I could not see the end thereof", cp. Moses 1:4-5.

v13-14 Verse 13 starts out with the familiar triplet of sun, moon, and star. It then continues into the stars being representative of all Abraham's lineage in v. 14. The initial reference to the sun, moon and star is probably referring to the typical celestial, terrestrial, telestial symbolism applied in 1 Cor. 15:41 and Phil. 2:10. That the Jews interpreted this triplet as such before Paul (i.e., Paul was repeating something known, and not presenting something novel) is plainly manifest by this finding among the Qumran texts, which is commenting upon Gen. 1:16.:

Surely [all] His [pr]ecepts are truth! May He establish you as holy among His people, as the "greater [light" (Gen. 1:16) to illumine] the world with knowledge, and to shine upon the faces of many [with wisdom leading to life. May He establish you] as consecrated to the Holy of Holies! [You shall] indeed [be san]ctified to Him, glorifying His name and His Holy Ones! [excerpt from a "A blessing for the priests, the Sons of Zadock" appearing on page 149, _The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation_, Wise, Abegg & Cook, Harper Collins.]

This differing of glories interpretation is additionally supported by the context of the chapter, as v. 15-21 is a long discussion on differing degrees of intelligence.

After the opening of v. 13, the rest of the text is referring to the Abrahamic covenant, cf. 2:9, Gen. 13:16.

15 And the Lord said unto me: Abraham, I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words.

v15 Apparently a segue between two separate revelations with related subjects.

16 If two things exist, and there be one above the other, there shall be greater things above them; therefore Kolob is the greatest of all the Kokaubeam that thou hast seen, because it is nearest unto me. 17 Now, if there be two things, one above the other, and the moon be above the earth, then it may be that a planet or a star may exist above it; and there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it.

18 Howbeit that he made the greater star; as, also, if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits, notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolam, or eternal. 19 And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent

than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all. 20 The Lord thy God sent his angel to deliver thee from the hands of the priest of Elkenah. 21 I dwell in the midst of them all; I now, therefore, have come down unto thee to declare unto thee the works which my hands have made, wherein my wisdom excelleth them all, for I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, in all wisdom and prudence, over all the intelligences thine eyes have seen from the beginning; I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen....27 And the Lord said: whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. 28 And the second was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him.

v16-28 The text is a lengthy discussion on the varying degrees of intelligence (i.e., light and truth, per D&C 93:36) among intelligences (i.e., spirits).

The "if there are two, then there is one more greater" formula developed in v. 1-10 is again used. Only here it is applied to spirits and not physical creation. Thus, the Lord is using physical principles that Abraham understands to teach him spiritual principles which may be likened to them.

v16-21 These verses are presented as a quotation of the Lord. It is well organized, and highly structured. The structure serves to explain some rather complex concepts. The text is arranged below with explanatory summaries.

v16-19 These verses present a parallelism where the greatest star, Kolob, is compared with the greatest intelligence, God, among the varying degrees of stars and intelligence.

A1 - 16 If two things exist, and there be one above the other, there shall be greater things above them;

B1- therefore Kolob is the greatest of all the Kokaubeam that thou hast seen, because it is nearest unto me.

A2 - 17 Now, if there be two things, one above the other, and the moon be above the earth, then it may be that a planet or a star may exist above it; and there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it.

B2 - 18 Howbeit that he made the greater star;

A1 - as, also, if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other,

B1 - yet these two spirits, notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum, or eternal.

A2 - 19 And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they;

B2 - I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.

The physical and spiritual pairs of A's and B's compliment each other as follows:

Physical:

- A1 - If two things exist, a third greater will exist.
 - B1 - But Kolob is greatest (i.e., no infinite expansion)
- A2 - Greater things exist above each other.
 - B2 - Nevertheless, Kolob is the greatest.

Spiritual:

- A1 - If two spirits exist, a third greater will exist.
 - B1 - But they are eternal (i.e., no infinite regression)
- A2 - More intelligent spirits exist above each other.
 - B2 - The Lord thy God is the most intelligent

The physical and spiritual are likened and shown to be both orderly.

Significant in these verses are the limits imposed upon infinite expansion and infinite regression, see comments on v. 8. These terms are philosophical ones that describe problems associated with trying to determine the origin and extent of things.

When simplified, the logic goes something like this (using the examples from this chapter): if there are two things, then there will be a third thing greater. And then if you include the greater thing in with one of the previous two, then you have two things, and there will be one greater still. And this goes on and on for infinity because there will always be one thing greater. Thus, infinite expansion.

Infinite regression is just the opposite. Reverse it and say if one thing exists, then what pre-existed it to give it rise? If it is the parents, then who gave the parents their rise? And so on with perpetual regressing because there will always have to be one more set of parents.

However, these philosophical nightmares are handily disposed

of by saying Kolob is the greatest star and there is none greater. God is the greatest intelligence, there is none greater. There is no infinite expansion. While Philosophers can think of things that result in a conundrum, the reality is these things they think of have no practical application.

Now, the matter of infinite regression is not so easily disposed of given some of the comments in the text. The text suggests spirits have no beginning or end (cf. v. 18), so they are eternal and the issue of infinite regression is therefore irrelevant. The problem is we know plainly that spirits are created and have not always been around. This is seemingly contradictory. However, let us consider resurrected bodies. We currently do not have a resurrected body. But at some point in the future we will have a resurrected body. These resurrected bodies will be eternal bodies, not temporal ones. In other words, they will not be subject to birth, death, or change in the temporal sense. Thus, we have an eternal body that is created. This eternal resurrected body has no "beginning/birth" or "end/death" in the temporal sense, but it is created. The conclusion would then be that when v. 18 is referring to "no beginning...no end" it is referring to the temporal time frame. Thus, the issue of infinite regression is disposed of by saying spirits are not subject to temporality so this temporal notion of beginning and end simply doesn't apply.

v18 This verse seems to be suggesting spirits are uncreated. However, we know plainly the spirits are created. A close look at the text reveals what is being discussed:

notwithstanding one [spirit] is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are eternal, or eternal.

The statements "they have no beginning...they shall have no end" are qualified by "they existed before...they shall exist after". They existed before what, and will exist after what? The physical Creation, that order of creation discussed by way of comparison in v. 16-17. So, rather than this being a comment on the uncreatedness of spirits, what it is really saying is while spirit creation overlaps with physical creation it is not transient or ephemeral like physical creation is. Spirit bodies are unlike physical bodies in that they are eternal and not temporal.

"Howbeit that he made the greater star", an awkward phrase in contemporary English. If translated literally into contemporary English it would read "How else would it be that he made the greater star?" and would be appended to the end of the preceding verse 17 rather than in its current location. This

reading has some appeal as it would then be a rhetorical question following on the heels of the final statement concerning God's doing His will.

Another less literal reading would be "Nevertheless, He made the greater star [i.e., Kolob]." Which would mean that despite the "one greater" rule God imposed an upper bound manifested by Kolob. This latter reading is the better of the two given the broader context and complimentary nature of the textual structure.

v20 Taken out of context this is a curious verse. It comments on a past event that has no clear connection to the surrounding text. The text must therefore be read in light of surrounding text, which is that of an intelligence comparison. Note verse 20 is a decrescendo, as follows:

20 The Lord thy God sent his
angel to deliver
thee from the hands of the
priest of Elkenah.

The example shows different degrees of intelligence, given in descending order.

God <- angel <- Abraham <- Idolatrous Priest
<-----increasing intelligence-----

God is the most intelligent of them and he imparts His intelligence to angels, who do His will, to deliver His servants, from those who are hostile to Him.

v21 This verse completes the intelligence comparison by placing the Creator in perspective with His Creation. The verse presents a condescending God who visits His Creation because He rules over it. He is not aloof and distant, but rather dwells amidst the spirits.

Verse 21 uses the principle of intelligence to draw the connection between God and His creations. While He is greater than them all and is above it all, He is connected to it because He created it:

A - 21 I dwell in the midst of them all;

B - I now, therefore, have come down unto thee to
declare unto thee the

C - works which my hands have made,

D - wherein my wisdom excelleth them all,

E - for I rule in the heavens above,

E - and in the earth beneath,

D - in all wisdom and prudence,

C - over all the intelligences thine eyes have
seen from the beginning;

B - I came down in the beginning

A - in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen.

This inverted parallelism addresses God's condescension and transcendence. A-B addresses His condescension, C addresses His creation both physical (works) and spiritual (intelligences), D-E addresses His transcendence and exalted nature.

Note the C's , the subject of His creation, fall between His condescension and His exaltation suggesting that this is what connects the two. He rules over it (exaltation) because He created it, but He has the responsibility to work with it (condescension) because He made it.

"I dwell in the midst of them all", the "them" is referring to the spirits of v. 19.

"intelligences", Smith was not the originator of the term "intelligences" in reference to spirits. For example, the term is used in John Milton's Paradise Lost, written in 1667:

To whom thus Adam cleerd of doubt, repli'd.
How fully hast thou satisfi'd mee, pure
Intelligence of Heav'n, Angel serene,
And freed from intricacies, taught to live,
The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts
To interrupt the sweet of Life, from which
God hath bid dwell farr off all anxious cares,
And not molest us, unless we our selves
Seek them with wandring thoughts, and notions vaine.
[chapter 8, lines 179-187]

22 Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; 23 And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. 24 And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these

materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; 25 And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; 26 And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.

v22-26 These verses are a parenthetical recounting of a previous revelation which is referred to in v. 21 where the Lord says "all the intelligence thine eyes have seen from the beginning". This may be part of the same revelation referred to in v. 11-14, or a separate one altogether.

Among the LDS Canon, this passage is most noted for its blatant forwarding of the doctrine of pre-existent spirits. In the Bible, there are some passages that equivocally forward the issue, but only John 9:1-2 unequivocally forwards the position that Jesus' disciples adhered to the doctrine of pre-existent spirits. And even this passage is disregarded by many because Jesus does not directly comment on the issue of pre-existence of spirits.

v22-23 This text reveals something about the pre-mortal spirit world, and indicates that not all spirits are the same. Individual identities were had per-mortally, and based up them certain promises were made.

v24-26 God the Son as forwards God the Father's plan, namely mortality with free agency and rewards according to the actions. Verse 26 then predicts the War in Heaven, which becomes inevitable.

v24 "we will take of these materials", this phrase is patently anti-ex nihilo, or hostile to the notion that Creation sprang from nothing. Among various religious groups there is the discussion as to whether matter pre-existed the Creation or if Gen. 1:1-2 is referring to the very creation of matter itself. This passage obviously favors the former over the latter.

v27-28 Here, the quotation from the Lord picks up again from v. 21. The subject is the War in Heaven, which was alluded to in v. 26.

The only thing differentiating between the two who said "Here am I, send me" is that the first one "answered like unto the Son of Man". But what does this mean? A "son of man" is a mortal, cf. Ezek. 2:8, 2 Ne. 8:12. Jesus frequently refers to himself as the son of man in the Gospels. And in Rev. 1:13 and

14:14 the Lord appears as a "son of man" although He is transcendent and exalted (cp. the statement in v. 24 where it identifies him as "like unto God"). Thus, the phrase is probably referring to the Son's willingness to condescend to mortality as the primary agent of the Atonement. Assuming this is the case, the second one who said "Here am I, send me" was not willing to condescend. Thus, the Father chose the first, and the second one became angry, lost his first estate, and dragged some down with him (v. 28).

v27 This text can be arranged as a nested parallelism where the Father's open question and closing statement bracket a pair of nearly identical sentences. Note what differentiates the two pairs: "like unto the Son of Man". In other words, the second one was not "like unto the Son of Man".

A - 27 And the Lord said: Whom shall I send?

B - And one answered like unto the Son of Man:

C - Here am I, send me.

B - And another answered and said:

C - Here am I, send me.

A - And the Lord said: I will send the first.

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