

Lesson 2:

“Thou Wast Chosen Before Thou Wast Born”

Purpose: To help understand the doctrine of foreordination and their own responsibility to help build up the kingdom of God and bring souls to Christ.

My lessons take a different path than the Gospel Doctrine lesson manual. The lesson outline looks closer at the doctrinal topics that the lesson purpose and scripture block review. They are designed to challenge mature, active Latter-Day Saints who have a solid Gospel foundation and are looking for insights into the scriptures that will broaden their faith and understanding.

If you are interested in the Powerpoint file to use or copy from, you can contact me at stevemplan@gmail.com. Your suggestions or comments about the lesson plan is always appreciated and can be emailed to the above address.

Translation and History of the Book of Abraham

The book of Abraham was first published in 1842 and was canonized as part of the Pearl of Great Price in 1880. The book originated with Egyptian papyri that Joseph Smith translated beginning in 1835. Many people saw the papyri, but no eyewitness account of the translation survives, making it impossible to reconstruct the process. Only small fragments of the long papyrus scrolls once in Joseph Smith's possession exist today. The relationship between those fragments and the text we have today is largely a matter of conjecture.

<https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

Differences Between the Teachings in Genesis and the Book of Abraham

Genesis	Abraham
God covenants with Abraham to “make of thee a great nation.”	Abraham provides context for that covenant by showing that Abraham was a seeker of “great knowledge” and a “follower of righteousness” who chose the right path in spite of great hardship. He rejected the wickedness of his father’s household and spurned the idols of the surrounding culture, despite the threat of death. In Genesis, God’s covenant with Abraham appears to begin during Abraham’s life.
God’s covenant with Abraham appears to begin during Abraham’s life.	In Abraham, the covenant began before the foundation of the earth and was passed down through Adam, Noah, and other prophets. Abraham thus takes his place in a long line of prophets and patriarchs whose mission is to preserve and extend God’s covenant on earth. The heart of this covenant is the priesthood, through which “the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” are conveyed.

<https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

Differences Between the Teachings in Genesis and the Book of Abraham

The book of Abraham clarifies several teachings that are obscure in the Bible.

- Life did not begin at birth, as is commonly believed. Prior to coming to earth, individuals existed as spirits. In a vision, Abraham saw that one of the spirits was “like unto God.”
- This divine being, Jesus Christ, led other spirits in organizing the earth out of “materials” or preexisting matter, not out of nothing, as many Christians later came to believe.
- Abraham further learned that mortal life was crucial to the plan of happiness God would provide for His children:
 - “We will prove them herewith,” God stated, “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them,” adding a promise to add glory forever upon the faithful.
- Nowhere in the Bible is the purpose and potential of earth life stated so clearly as in the book of Abraham.

<https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

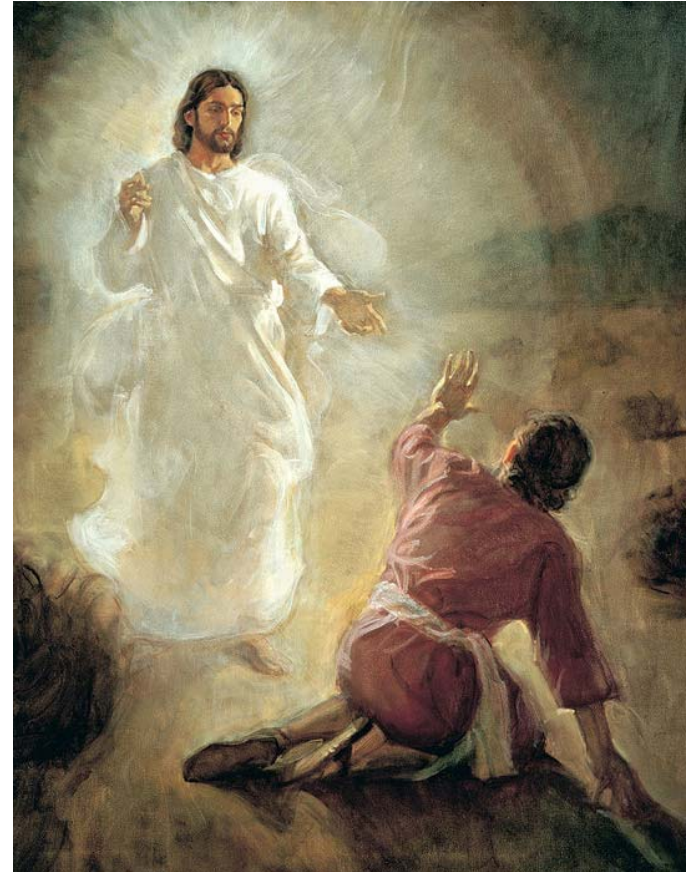
Premortal or Preexistence

- Can something “preexist”? Can there be a “preexistence”?
- Premortal is a more exact phrase that describes our spirit lives prior to mortality.
- Church publications tend to use the phrase “Premortal.”
- Church talks (General Conference, BYU Devotionals, etc.) tend to use the phrase “Preexistence.”
- Generally, when the Church is speaking officially, it uses “Premortal.”

Abraham 3:11-12

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;

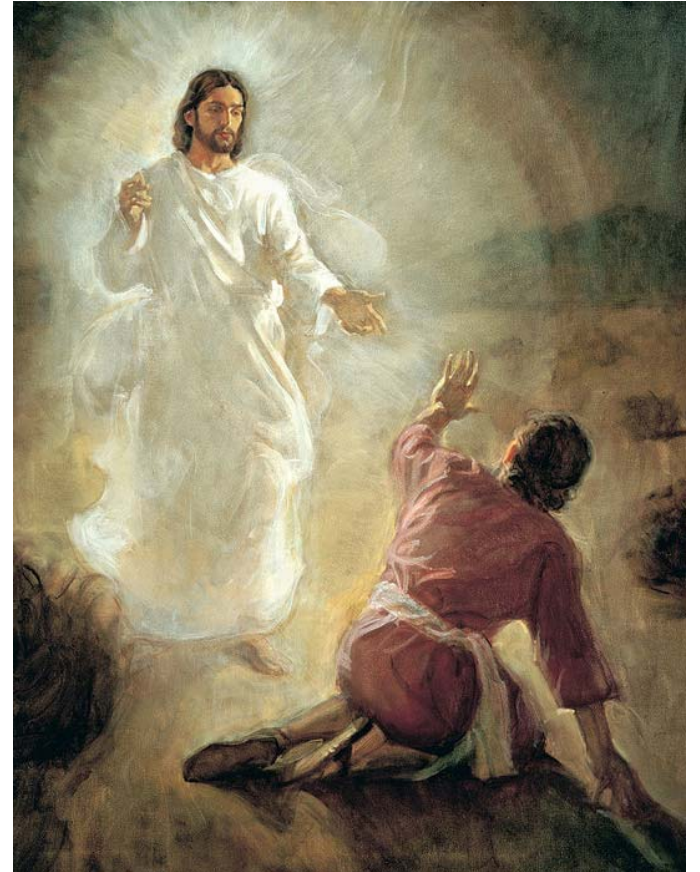
12 And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof.



What is the “state” or “nature” of Jesus Christ’s body as he talks with Abraham?

“As the premortal Jehovah, He had created the earth and governed the events of the Old Testament with the same priesthood power He would hold during His mortal ministry.”

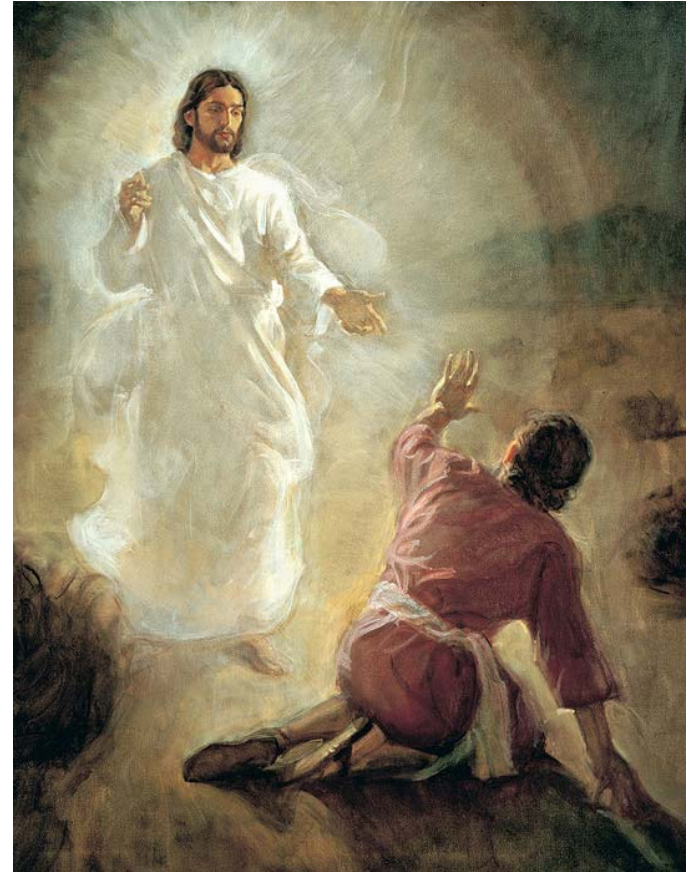
“Unit 28, Day 2: Hebrews 7–10,” New Testament Study Guide for Home-Study Seminary Students (2016)



Because Jesus Christ was indeed the firstborn of heavenly parents and is, as pertaining to our first estate, our “elder brother,” that means He also possessed a spirit body that had a definite birth or time of organization just like every other spirit child of God. Elder McConkie taught that implicit in Jesus’ birth as a spirit child is the fact that “he had a beginning; there was a day when he came into being as a conscious identity, as a spirit entity, as an organized intelligence.” And yet, as scripture and modern prophets teach, He “is himself also the Eternal One.” In other words, Jesus Christ’s spirit body had a beginning, but He is also an eternal being without beginning, who is coexistent with God, and, more importantly, was Himself God in our premortal realm.

“BYU Religious Studies Center: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior3. The Premortal Godhood of Christ: A Restoration Perspective

https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jesus-christ-son-of-god-savior/3-premortal-godhood-christ-restoration-perspective#_edn6



Predestination vs Foreordination

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rejects the belief in predestination-that God predetermines the salvation or the damnation of every individual. The gospel teaches that genuine human freedom and genuine responsibility-individual agency in both thought and action-are crucial in both the development and the outcome of a person's life. Church doctrine rejects the strict dual option providing only heaven or hell as an outcome, since people vary widely in their levels of spiritual attainment. At the same time, Latter-day Saints recognize both the indispensable need for the grace of God manifested through Jesus Christ and the effective spiritual guidance that comes through divine foreordination.

Source: The Encyclopedia of Mormonism

Foreordination is the premortal selection of individuals to come forth in mortality at specified times, under certain conditions, and to fulfill predesignated responsibilities. In LDS interpretation, "foreordained" does not mean predetermined. It is the outcome of voluntary choice, not the violation or abrogation of it.

Latter-day Saints further believe that the times, places, and circumstances of birth into mortality may be the outcome of former covenants and decisions as well as that which would be best, in divine wisdom, to provide both opportunities and challenges for the individual's growth and development. Additionally, foreordination may also be based on God's own purposes and plans to bless all of his children. The specifics of these factors remain unclear.

Foreordination does not preclude the exercise of agency. Foreordination is a conditional preappointment to or bestowal of certain blessings and responsibilities.

Abraham 3:22-23

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.

What is or are “intelligence” or “intelligences” as discussed in Abraham 3?

Intelligence has several meanings, three of which are:

- (1) The light of truth that gives life and light to all things in the universe. It has always existed.
- (2) The word intelligences may also refer to spirit children of God.
- (3) The scriptures also may speak of intelligence as referring to the spirit element that existed before we were begotten as spirit children.

Intelligence was not created or made, D&C 93:29.

All intelligence is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, D&C 93:30.

The glory of God is intelligence, D&C 93:36–37.

The Lord rules over all the intelligences, Abr. 3:21.

The Lord showed Abraham the intelligences that were organized before the world was, Abr. 3:22.

<https://www.lds.org/scriptures/gs/intelligence-intelligences?lang=eng>

Doctrine & Covenants 93:29-31

29 Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

30 All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.

31 Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.

Taking what we read in D&C 93:29-31, is there a connection between the eternal existence of intelligences and agency?

- “But if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house tops that God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself. Intelligence exists upon a self-existent principle; it is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it.”

The Prophet Joseph Smith, the King Follett Sermon, April 7, 1844

- “The doctrine of eternal, uncreated intelligence provides the most credible and expansive explanation of human action and agency. Indeed, without the assumption that we are eternal intelligences, no adequate theory of meaningful action and agency is possible. “

Williams, Richard (1999) "Agency: Philosophical and Spiritual Foundations for Applied Psychology," Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy: Vol. 24: No. 1, Article 12.

Abraham 3:24-28

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.

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.

Abraham 3:24

24 And there stood one among them that was like unto God,....

Elder James E. Talmage noted that “the Father operated in the work of creation through the Son, who thus became the executive through whom the will, commandment, or word of the Father was put into effect. It is with incisive appropriateness therefore, that the Son, Jesus Christ, is designated by the apostle John as the Word; or as declared by the Father ‘the word of my power’ [Moses 1:32].”

The Prophet Joseph Smith bore a similar powerful witness of the Savior’s mighty acts of creation, as did the lawgiver Moses:

D&C 76:22–24

And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father- That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.

“BYU Religious Studies Center: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior³. The Premortal Godhood of Christ: A Restoration Perspective
https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jesus-christ-son-god-savior/3-premortal-godhood-christ-restoration-perspective#_edn6

Abraham 3:24-5

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.

First Estate

First estate refers to the unspecified period of time otherwise known as premortal life. All mankind were begotten as individual spirit children of God, with individual agency, prior to being born into mortality. Using this agency, a third part of these spirits followed Lucifer and rebelled against God and the Plan of Salvation that God proposed to bring about the eventual exaltation of his children through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Encyclopedia of Mormonism.

Second Estate

Second estate is mankind's mortal existence on this earth. Through the process of birth, the spirit children of God who kept their first estate (premortally), enter into their second estate by receiving a physical body with additional opportunities for experience and development. All who receive the saving principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ and seek to live righteous and useful lives, embracing the fulness of the gospel, will obtain the complete blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Abraham 3:27-28

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.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles affirmed that it is “extremely important to get straight what happened in that premortal council. It was not an unstructured meeting, nor was it a discussion between plans, nor an idea-producing session, as to how to formulate the plan for salvation and carry it out. Our Father’s plan was known, and the actual question put was whom the Father should send to carry out the plan”.

However, even though Heavenly Father asked “Whom shall I send?” it was not because He did not know whom to send to earth to be the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. He always knew whom He would send. Elder Maxwell testified that “Jesus, being sinless and being the Firstborn of the Eternal Father in the spirit world, was utterly and uniquely qualified to perform the Atonement. No one else was qualified in full conformance with the Father’s will”.

Yet if Heavenly Father always knew who would be the Savior, why did He ask, “Whom shall I send?” By asking this question, our Heavenly Father allowed His Firstborn Son to offer Himself of his own voluntary will. Through His submissive response, Jehovah established a perfect pattern for offering all future sacrifices, which were to be given with real intent and not grudgingly, just as He gave Himself.

“Lesson 21: Abraham 3,” Old Testament Seminary Teacher Manual (2014)