

## The Preexistence

**T**he LDS doctrine of the preexistence is one of the most distinctive teachings in Mormonism and pertains to our spiritual existence prior to being born into mortality. According to sixth Church President Joseph F. Smith, “All men and women are . . . literally the sons and daughters of Deity. . . . 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 [physical] body.”<sup>1</sup> The LDS Church publication *Gospel Principles* explains that we were not all equal there, but “we possessed different talents and abilities,”<sup>2</sup> which we developed to varying levels. Because there were limits on how far we could progress as spirits, the Father provided a plan whereby we could become like him by obtaining physical bodies and passing tests of obedience.

Knowing that we would all sin in mortality if given our agency, a savior was chosen who would redeem us if we would repent and obey the gospel. Satan presented a counterproposal saying, “I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). Satan’s plan would have destroyed human agency by forcing everyone to be obedient.<sup>3</sup> Because God chose Jesus to be the Savior, Satan rebelled and a war ensued in which he and a third of Heavenly Father’s children who followed him were cast out of heaven and denied the opportunity of further progress.<sup>4</sup>

### Nature of the Soul

Before examining biblical and modern teachings on the preexistence of the soul, it is helpful to have some idea of just what this soul was believed to be. Judeo-Christian teachings concerning the nature of the soul have developed gradually over several millennia. The earli-

est writings of the Old Testament seem to give no indication at all of a soul or spirit separate from the body. Everett Ferguson, professor of early church history at Abilene Christian University, indicates that "the familiar dichotomy in Western thought between body and soul is a product of the Platonic tradition," and that "from the biblical perspective . . . [they] never should have been separated."<sup>5</sup> This position starkly contrasts with the LDS perception of the soul, which not only has an existence independent of the body, but is also a material being of sorts.

### *Old Testament*

Ancient Hebrews evidently didn't think of themselves as dual beings composed of both body and spirit, but merely as bodies animated by the breath of life. The Old Testament concept of life was simple: living things breathe; dead things don't. The Genesis creation story clearly depicts the animating power of breath. God, after having fashioned Adam from the dust, breathes into him the breath of life so that he can become "a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1–14), the dead bones return to life when breath enters them. Regarding this Old Testament understanding, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, "Since God is the life-giver, life breath comes from Him and man lives as long as God's breath remains in him (Job 27:3; Isa. 42:5; Zech. 12:1)."<sup>7</sup> Thus, there was no spirit as a distinct entity coexisting with the body, but simply the breath of life. For ancient Hebrews, breath *was* life.

During the late Old Testament period and into the New Testament era, the idea of spirits or ghosts is believed to have become more commonplace in Jewish thought, and a distinction began to be made between the soul and the body. This changing perception of the soul is thought to have been influenced by the Persians and Greeks, who believed in the independence and immortality of the soul.<sup>8</sup> According to Kaufmann Kohler, Isaac Broyde, and Ludwig Blau, writing in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*: "Only through the contact of the Jews with Persian and Greek thought did the idea of a disembodied soul, having its own individuality, take root in Judaism and find its expression in the later Biblical books, as, for instance, in the following passages: 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord' (Prov. 20:27); 'There is a spirit in man' (Job 32:8); 'The spirit shall return unto God who gave it' (Eccl. 12:7)."<sup>9</sup> Even in these isolated verses it isn't entirely clear what a spirit consists of and whether it has meaningful existence independent of the body.

### *New Testament*

The New Testament continues to speak of the soul in this later Jewish sense with no clear anthropological explanation of its essence or mode of existence. Dutch theologian G. C. Berkouwer notes that there is “a fairly general consensus of opinion . . . among theologians” that “no part of man is emphasized [in the Bible] as independent of other parts; not because the various parts are not important, but because the Word of God is concerned precisely with the whole man in his relation to God.”<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, there is no clear and concise delineation of the basic components of human existence in the New Testament, which seems to use terms such as *heart*, *mind*, *soul*, and *spirit* often indiscriminately with little or no precision in meaning. One can only wonder, for example what is meant to divide one’s “soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12) or to have one’s “spirit and soul and body preserved” (1 Thess. 5:23). The distinction made between the soul and spirit in these verses strains modern Christian (including LDS) categories.

### *Early Nineteenth-Century Christianity*

At the time of Joseph Smith, Christians generally regarded the soul as being capable of existing independent of the body. With respect to the physical composition of the soul, however, there were essentially two schools of thought. One was the classical Christian view that espoused the immateriality of the soul. Buck’s *Theological Dictionary*, published in 1832, defined spirit as “that vital, immaterial, active substance, or principle, in man, whereby he perceives, remembers, reasons and wills. It is rather to be described to its operations, than to be defined as to its essence.”<sup>11</sup> Rationalists of the Enlightenment repudiated the classical Christian notion that spirits are immaterial calling it unscientific and irrational. In his influential *Leviathan* (1651), philosopher Thomas Hobbes argued that any speech referring to “immaterial substances . . . [is] without meaning” and that “to say an angel or spirit is . . . an incorporeal substance is to say, in effect, there is no angel nor spirit at all.”<sup>12</sup>

Many Christians accommodated the postulates of rationalist thinking by conceding that spirit is indeed material, but of a refined nature. As Puritan writer Richard Baxter observed in 1650: “The soul is a substance; for that which is nothing can do nothing. . . . It is not bones and flesh that understand, but a purer substance, as all acknowledge.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, almost thirty years before the birth of Joseph Smith, the noted British eighteenth-century scientist and Unitarian theologian Joseph Priestley wrote, “The original, and still

prevailing idea concerning a soul or spirit, is that of a kind of attenuated aerial substance, of a more subtle nature than gross bodies."<sup>14</sup>

### *Mormonism*

The classical Christian view of spirits as immaterial is the only view expressed in early LDS literature.<sup>15</sup> A revelation received in May 1833 draws a distinction between "spirit," which is defined as "intelligence or the light of truth," and "element," which comprises the physical tabernacle of the spirit (D&C 93:29, 33). Two years later, in March 1835, LDS correspondent Warren Cowdery affirmed that "if there be intelligence there must be spirit or mind for matter is inert and abstract from mind has neither intelligence or mind."<sup>16</sup> At this time in Mormon thought, spirit was seen as being essentially the antithesis of matter.

In April 1842, the Prophet first publicly voiced the more Enlightenment view of spirit, proclaiming that "the spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body."<sup>17</sup> In May 1843, he corrected a Methodist minister stating, "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes" (D&C 131:7). Thus, where earlier LDS literature differentiated between spirit and element, spirit was now seen as a refined form of element.

### **Preexistence of Souls**

The Bible provides little insight into the origin of the human spirit besides its creation by God. Most Bible scholars maintain that there is no unambiguous teaching of the preexistence of souls in the Bible. J. I. Marais, writing for the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, goes so far as to say, "[Nowhere] does Scripture teach the pre-existence of the soul."<sup>18</sup> Congregational theologian Edward Beecher (1803–95), who was an avowed believer of preexistence himself, acknowledged that "even those serious theologians who assert the doctrine of preexistence do not claim any express scriptural evidence for it, only that it nowhere expressly refutes it."<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that, in the Bible, God has no *foreknowledge* of individuals before they were created, for he knows "the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isa. 46:10). The existence of individuals in God's mind before they had actual existence is referred to by theologians as "ideal" preexistence. While there is ample biblical evidence of *ideal* preexistence, scholars see little convincing biblical support for the belief in *actual* preexistence. Not until Joseph Smith began his translation of the Bible in 1830 would actual preexistence become explicit in LDS scripture.

*Old Testament*

An Old Testament passage commonly cited by Latter-day Saints today as evidence for the preexistence of souls is Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I [God] formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” Latter-day Saints adduce that, since God “knew” and “ordained” Jeremiah before he was born, he therefore must have existed before his birth. However, most biblical scholars interpret this passage as having reference to only *ideal* existence.<sup>20</sup> Even LDS scholar Lowell L. Bennion concedes that Jeremiah 1:5, as well as other biblical passages which Mormons interpret as referring to man’s preexistence, “may be interpreted also as meaning God’s foreknowledge rather than man’s preexistence.” He further observes that “a pre-earth life for man . . . cannot be clearly and indubitably established by the Bible.”<sup>21</sup>

Latter-day Saints frequently cite Job 38:7 to show that, “when the plan for our salvation was presented to us in the premortal spirit world, we were so happy that we shouted for joy.”<sup>22</sup> In Job 38:4–7, the Lord asks Job: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” Joseph Smith used this passage as “evidence that Job was in existence somewhere at that time.”<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, he reasoned, why would God ask where Job was? Most biblical scholars, however, see God’s question as rhetorical and intended to highlight the fact that Job was nowhere around during the creation. The whole tenor of the Lord’s query, when read in context with the entire chapter, is to emphasize the insignificance and fleeting nature of human existence. The Lord does tell Job, however, that the “sons of God” were there and “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7), but there is no indication that Job was numbered among them. In the book of Job, according to scholarly commentaries, the “sons of God” refer to angelic counselors in God’s court; not to preexistent human spirits. Old Testament scholar Brendan Byrne explains that the designation “sons of God” in Job 38:7 “does not imply actual progeny of God . . . but reflects the common Semitic use of ‘son’ (Heb *ben*) to denote membership of a class or group. ‘Sons of the gods,’ then, designates beings belonging to the heavenly or divine sphere . . . forming his [God’s] heavenly court or council.”<sup>24</sup> Note that it is these same “sons of God” who “present themselves before the Lord” to consider Job’s current mortal situation in Job 1:6.

It is interesting that the Prophet referred to this passage as proof of preexistence because of Job’s presumed existence at the foundation of the world but gave no indication that the “sons of God” were pre-existent spirits. This is likely because he didn’t view them as spirit chil-

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dren of God. Parley P. Pratt interpreted "sons of God" in this passage in 1838 as referring to resurrected beings from bygone worlds, and not to preexistent spirits.<sup>25</sup> The idea of spirit offspring had not yet been introduced in LDS teachings, so "sons of God" was understood in a traditional Christian sense of saved beings (John 1:12). There is no evidence of an understanding during the Prophet's lifetime that "sons of God" in this passage referred to preexistent spirits.

While the Old Testament itself provides little evidence of a belief in preexistence, apocryphal writings dating from the end of the Jewish exile to the time of Christ indicate a late Jewish belief in the doctrine. The Slavonic Book of Enoch 23:5 states, "All souls are prepared before the foundation of the world." No mention is made of what souls did in this preexistent state, only that they were held in reserve for mortality. The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 30:2–3 refers to "the storehouses in which the foreordained number of souls is kept." Biblical scholars suggest that this late Jewish belief in preexistence was acquired through extensive association with Persian and Greek cultures during the exile. Pythagoreans and Platonists had been advocating the preexistence of the human soul since at least the fourth century B.C. Calling it an "importation into Jewish theology through Plato and Philo," Marais explains that "this doctrine was well known to Jewish writers, and was taught in Talmud and Kabbalah."<sup>26</sup>

*New Testament*

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament seems to depict human existence as beginning in this life with no explicit mention of a pre-earth life. Nowhere are callings, activities, or outcomes in this life attributed by New Testament writers to a preexistent state. This, however, doesn't mean that belief in the preexistence of souls was non-existent in the early Church. As noted above, it was adopted by certain of the Jews who comprised the first Christians.

A New Testament passage often cited by Latter-day Saints in support of preexistence describes Jesus passing by "a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). A common LDS interpretation is that the very fact that the disciples asked the question presupposes a belief in the preexistence of spirits. This, however, is not the only reasonable interpretation of this passage. According to New Testament scholar Raymond Brown, this reference to sinning before birth may have been an allusion to contemporary rabbinic teachings regarding infants who sin while still in the womb.<sup>27</sup> Nineteenth-century Christian scholar Thomas Thayer notes that it could also reflect the popular Hellenistic belief in the transmi-

gration of souls (i.e., reincarnation), which included the belief in “retribution beyond death,” thereby impacting how one comes back in the next life cycle.<sup>28</sup> He further notes that transmigration appears in Jewish apocryphal writings and that Josephus claims that the Pharisees believed it.<sup>29</sup> Even the New Testament suggests the presence of a cultural belief in transmigration, stating that some perceived Jesus to be “John the Baptist: some, Elias [i.e., Elijah]; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14). In sum, there were several beliefs regarding ways an individual might commit sin prior to birth making it difficult to state with certainty what the underlying supposition was of Jesus’s inquirers. Even if Jesus’s inquirers did have in mind sins committed in the preexistence, there is no evidence that Jesus himself sanctioned the belief. The only explanation he gave for the man’s blindness was so “the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3).

The only explicit teachings of preexistence in the New Testament are in relation to Christ. Paul explains that after a heavenly existence “in the form of God,” Jesus took on himself “the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6–8). John identifies preexistence as one of the principal differences between Christ and the rest of humankind. In testifying of Christ’s preexistence, John the Baptist, who was six months older than Christ (Luke 1:24–26), declared, “He existed before I was born!” (Phillips Version John 1:30). John alludes twice to Christ’s uniqueness in coming down from heaven in contrast to man who originated on earth (John 3:13, 31).<sup>30</sup>

Belief in a preexistence of the human soul doesn’t explicitly appear in Christianity until the post-apostolic church; however, it was never universally held and eventually lost favor. Marais notes that “the doctrine with some modifications passed into the Christian church, was accepted by Justin Martyr, Theodoretus, Origen and others of the church Fathers, but became obsolete by the latter part of the 4th century. . . . It was formally condemned by a synod held at Constantinople in the 6th century.”<sup>31</sup> Origen of Alexandria (185–254) taught that spirits preexisted and had agency; but unlike Mormonism, he believed that being sent to earth was a punishment for disobedient spirits.<sup>32</sup> Latter-day Saints often consider these isolated expressions of belief in preexistence to be vestiges of an earlier, purer theology.<sup>33</sup> Non-LDS Bible scholars, as noted, see them as essentially Greek and Hellenized Jewish ideas that were absorbed into the early Christian church.

*Early Nineteenth-Century Christianity*

The predominant Christian view regarding the origin of spirits at the time of Joseph Smith was that each human spirit was created *ex nihilo* (i.e., out of nothing) through a fiat act of God (i.e., God simply spoke and spirits came into being) either at the time of conception or at birth. Characterizing this prevalent creationist view, Orson Pratt explained in 1852,

It is believed, by the religious world that man, both body and spirit, begins to live about the time that he is born into this world, or a little before; that then is the beginning of life. . . . How was the spirit formed? Why says one, we suppose it was made by a direct act of creation, by the Almighty Himself; that He moulded the spirit of man, formed and finished it in a proper likeness to inhabit the tabernacle He had made out of the dust.<sup>34</sup>

A variation of creationism is *traducianism*. This is the belief, held by some, that every human spirit was seminally created in Adam and then individually and naturally propagated through mortal parentage.<sup>35</sup> Neither of these entail the preexistence of conscious souls.

Though creationism and traducianism were widely held at the time of Joseph Smith, a variation of creationism was also entertained which taught that God created the spirits of all humans *before* they were born. These "preexistencists," as they were called, believed that "at the beginning of the world, God created the souls of all men, which, however, are not united to the body till the individuals for whom they are destined are begotten or born into the world."<sup>36</sup> Refuting the traditional view that spirits are created at the time of birth, Lorenzo Dow, a Methodist preacher, wrote in 1804, "I deny it, for the bible says, Gen. [2:1–3], that God finished the heavens (that is the starry heavens) and earth and all the HOST of them, and then God rested from the works of creation on the seventh day—he hath not been at work in creating new souls ever since."<sup>37</sup> Echoing ancient apocryphal teachings, Dow believed that spirits "were laid up in a store house in Heaven" in a state of happiness until their mortal bodies were prepared.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of the timing—at the time of birth or at the beginning of the world—most Christians saw the human spirit as a product of special creation. This didn't preclude many evangelicals, however, from viewing God as our Father more than in the sense of being just our creator. Indeed, many nineteenth-century Christians came to view God as our Father in the sense of his endowing each human spirit with a portion of his divinity. In 1824, for example, the *Christian Magazine*, a publication of the Congregationalist Church,

declared that man's soul possesses "a spark of his [i.e., God's] intelligence, and continues to be in a high and peculiar sense 'his offspring.' Hence the nature of the soul, and its relation and resemblance to the divinity, proclaim its worth."<sup>39</sup> Even the Heavenly Mother and Father concept of later Mormonism was to be found in the esoteric teachings of the Kabbalah, which intrigued Christian mystics at the time of Joseph Smith. According to this tradition, the soul is "born into this world in which we live, through the union of the King and Queen who are, as regards the generation of the soul, like the human species in the generation of the body."<sup>40</sup> While Latter-day Saints initially acknowledged, along with other Christians, God's figurative Fatherhood, they soon began regarding it more literally (see Chapter 7).

### *Early Mormonism*

The first intimation of preexistence in modern revelation is generally believed to be found in the Book of Mormon. It is doubtful, however, that many of the first converts would have initially perceived the idea of preexistence in this book of scripture. In reflecting back on his own initiation to the doctrine of preexistence, Orson Pratt, who was one of the most theologically astute of the early Saints, observed that, had it not been for revelations subsequent to the Book of Mormon, "I do not think that I should have ever discerned it in that book."<sup>41</sup> Modern Saints commonly point to Alma 13 as evidence of preexistence in the Book of Mormon. Alma 13:3 states that anciently, priests were "called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceeding great faith, are called with a holy calling." This verse is generally interpreted to mean that these priests existed as spirits before they were born and exercised "faith and good works" in their preexistent state.<sup>42</sup>

When read without the filter of current LDS theology, this passage seems to imply only that their *calling* was before the foundation of the world and that it was predicated on God's foreknowledge of their *future* faith and good works. Early Latter-day Saints would have been no more disposed to read preexistence into this passage than they would in similar New Testament passages that describe how the elect are "afore prepared" (Rom. 9:23) and "chosen . . . before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4) "according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Pet. 1:2). Traditionally, Christians have seen no evidence of actual preexistence in these passages, only ideal preexistence (i.e., existence in God's prescient mind). The language of Alma 13 evokes the early nineteenth-century Free Will Baptist idea that individual election is

"from all eternity" according to "the foreknowledge of God . . . [of] the future faith and good works of the elect."<sup>43</sup>

The earliest explicit teachings on preexistence come from the book of Moses and early sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. These revelations present a simple concept of preexistence that resembled the contemporary notion of preexistencism in that the spirits of all human beings are depicted as having been created before the world was made. The first seven chapters of the revised account of the creation (recorded in June 1830) and now published as the book of Moses make repeated reference to man's spiritual creation as well as the creation of all other things spiritually before they existed naturally upon the earth (Moses 3:1–7; 5:24; 6:36, 51, 63). Several revelations during the next two years appear to reinforce this premortal spiritual creation of "all things" (D&C 29:30–32, 49:17, 77:2). Mysteriously, after this initial flurry of references to a spiritual creation, Joseph makes no further mention of it in any later revelations or teachings.

### *Kirtland Period*

In May 1833, a shift occurred in the Prophet's teachings regarding the origin of spirits when he received a revelation indicating that every spirit of man was in the beginning with God as intelligence (not to be confused with *an* intelligence, a doctrine later taught in Nauvoo), and that this "intelligence or the light of truth was not created or made, neither indeed can be" (D&C 93:29). This intelligence is also equated with the "Spirit of truth" (v. 23) which is the same principle identified as the light or glory of God (v. 36). Elaborating on this spirit or intelligence, Parley P. Pratt wrote in 1842, "*The Spirit of Truth*, proceeding from the Father and the Son . . . is the light, life, and *spirit of all things*."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the spirit of human beings was seen as a portion of the divine Spirit.

This concept of spirits being created from eternal, divine intelligence is similar to the ancient Gnostic doctrine of emanation and is not unlike that taught in Hosea Ballou's popular book *A Treatise on Atonement* (1805). Ballou, a Universalist, "blurred the distinction between the human and the divine by contending that human beings embodied a divine principle, having been created from the 'fulness' of God rather than from nothing."<sup>45</sup>

It isn't clear whether section 93 was understood as teaching that intelligence became individual spirits prior to the time of mortal birth or whether a portion of it becomes a spirit each time a human fetus is created. Verse 38 explains that "every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning," suggesting a premortal individuation. On the other hand, Thomas Ward, editor of the LDS *Millennial Star*, remarked in

1843 that “what the church of Jesus Christ understood by salvation . . . was this, that intelligence [not *an* intelligence], or the light of truth being connected with elementary matter [i.e., the physical body], which constituted our existence, had become, through the fall as Gods, knowing good and evil.”<sup>46</sup> In either case a portion of this divine intelligence becomes “independent in the sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself” (D&C 93:30).

### *Nauvoo Period*

After the brief mention of uncreated intelligence in Doctrine and Covenants 93, the Prophet remained silent on the subject of the origin of spirits for the next six years. Then, in 1839, he revived the topic with another shift to a doctrine of eternally existing intelligences (now plural). His public teachings in this regard correspond to teachings he was concurrently bringing to light in the book of Abraham. Abraham 3 describes eternally existing intelligences, stating that “spirits” or “intelligences have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum, or eternal” (Abr. 3:18). Notably, the idea of spirits being uncreated appears in all of the Prophet’s pronouncements on the origin of spirits after 1833:

*ca. August 1839:* The Spirit of Man is not a created being; it existed from Eternity and will exist to eternity.<sup>47</sup>

*February 1840:* I believe that the *soul* is eternal; and had no beginning.<sup>48</sup>

*January 1841:* If the soul of man had a beginning it will surely have an end. . . . Spirits are eternal.<sup>49</sup>

*March 1841:* The spirit or the intelligence of men are [sic] self Existant principles.<sup>50</sup>

*April 1842:* The spirits of men are eternal.<sup>51</sup>

*April 1844:* “I wish to speak of . . . the soul—the immortal spirit—the mind of man. Where did it come from? All doctors of divinity say that God created it in the beginning; but it is not so . . . Is it logical to say that a spirit is immortal and yet have a beginning? Because if a spirit of man had a beginning it will have an end. . . . God never had power to create the spirit of man at all! . . . Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it. All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.”<sup>52</sup>

The book of Abraham further states that these intelligences “were organized before the world was” (Abr. 3:22), which later LDS commentators have assumed to be referring to their spirit birth. It



would seem, however, that from an examination of all the Prophet's related teachings during the same period, the organization spoken of in Abraham 3 refers to a social organization of eternally existing intelligences and not a material organization of intelligence into intelligent entities through some process such as spirit birth.<sup>53</sup> The following quotations represent the extent of the Prophet's recorded usage of the term *organization* when referring to spirits:

*ca. August 1839:* The Father called all spirits before him at the creation of man, and *organized* them.<sup>54</sup>

*January 1841:* At the first *organization* in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed, and the plan of salvation made and we sanctioned it.<sup>55</sup>

*April 1842:* The spirits of men are eternal. . . . They are *organized* according to that Priesthood which is everlasting.<sup>56</sup>

*May 1843:* He who rules in the heavens when he has a certain work to do calls the Spirits before him to *organize* them.<sup>57</sup>

*October 1843:* The *organization* of . . . spiritual and heavenly beings, was agreeably to the most perfect order and harmony—that their limits and bounds were fixed irrevocably, and voluntarily subscribed to by themselves.<sup>58</sup>

The only organization of intelligences envisioned by the Prophet in these statements is a social organization and not an organization of intelligence into spirits.

Joseph taught that "God Himself found Himself in the midst of spirits and glory. Because He was greater He saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest, who were less in intelligence, could have a privilege to advance like Himself. . . . So He took in hand to save the world of spirits."<sup>59</sup> According to this, it seems that God's plan for saving spirits resulted from the happenstance of a benevolent, superior intelligence finding himself in the midst of unorganized, inferior intelligences. As the Prophet declared in March 1841, "God is good and all his acts is for the benefit of inferior intelligences—God saw that those intelligences had Not power to Defend themselves against those that had a tabernacle therefore the Lord Calls them together in Counsel [organizes them?] and agrees to form them tabernacles."<sup>60</sup>

It wasn't until after the Prophet's death that the idea of a spirit birth began to appear in LDS sermons and writings (see Chapter 7). From 1839 to his martyrdom, Joseph used "intelligences," "minds," "spirits," and "souls" interchangeably to refer to the eternal, uncreated, and unmodified human spirit. His recorded teachings, therefore, seem incompatible with the doctrine of spirit birth. LDS scholar Van Hale observes, "Either the Mormon spirit birth doctrine was the result



of Smith's early followers misunderstanding the prophet's doctrinal statements, or they taught unrecorded doctrine taught by Smith privately in Nauvoo, however much in conflict with Smith's earlier teachings."<sup>61</sup> Yale University professor Harold Bloom similarly notes: "Smith's passionate belief (wholly Gnostic) that our spirit or intelligence is as old as God and the gods, and so need never have been begotten, is rather clearly at variance with the doctrine of spirits being engendered for the unborn. We have the anomaly of a doctrine of Spirit Birth that not only has no sanction in the scriptures that Smith composed, but that also seems to violate one of his most basic principles."<sup>62</sup>

### *Contemporary Mormonism*

Modern expositors of LDS doctrine are left with the task of reconciling the many disparate teachings of the Prophet and his successors on preexistence. Were spirits created? Were they begotten? Have they always existed? The position taken relative to each of these questions requires that conflicting scriptures be reinterpreted if scriptural unity is to be maintained. For example, the current position, as taught in the Church publication *Gospel Principles*, is that spirits "are literally the sons and daughters of God."<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie both maintained that the account of the spiritual creation spoken of in early LDS revelations doesn't refer to the spirit creation or the creation of the human spirit, but rather to the creation of Adam's spiritual-physical (i.e., paradisiacal) body in the Garden of Eden (see Chapter 12.)

Today, the predominant LDS view of the human spirit includes the belief that we existed prior to our spirit birth as some form of intelligence. There is a difference of opinion, however, as to whether we always existed as individual intelligences or were part of a pool of intelligence that became individuated through spirit birth.<sup>64</sup> There are also differences of opinion as to whether our eternal intelligence existed independently of spirit matter, was a property of spirit matter, or was synonymous with spirit matter. Joseph Fielding Smith taught that intelligence exists independently of spirit element and that "intelligence combined with the spirit constitutes a spiritual identity or individual."<sup>65</sup> Orson Pratt earlier taught that intelligence was an attribute of spirit matter and that, prior to spirit birth, "each particle [of spirit matter] was an intelligent, living being of itself."<sup>66</sup> Parley P. Pratt also taught that spirit "is a substance endowed with the attributes of intelligence."<sup>67</sup> For Bruce R. McConkie, "intelligence or light and truth, is . . . a synonym for spirit element," making intelligence and spirit element one and the same.<sup>68</sup>

A distinctive LDS teaching today regarding preexistence is that all living things—humans, animals, plant life, and even the earth itself—had a preexistence as spirits.<sup>69</sup> The idea that the trillions upon trillions of insects and noxious weeds have spirits that existed for aeons prior to their fleeting and seemingly insignificant existence on earth is a curious thought. Even more astounding is the notion that they will be resurrected to immortal glory at some unspecified time in the future. (See Chapter 20.)

### Foreordination

Associated with the doctrine of preexistence is the LDS belief that certain spirits were foreordained in pre-earth life to receive special blessings and callings in this life. According to current LDS thought, God's foreordination of individuals in the preexistence is based largely on how valiant they were in that first estate.

#### *Biblical Teachings*

Latter-day Saints cite several biblical passages to support the idea of an *actual* foreordination of spirits in the preexistence. However, close scrutiny shows that actual foreordination proves difficult to establish as a biblical doctrine. For one thing, foreordination in and of itself does not necessarily imply or require the prior existence of the one foreordained. We have already noted that Jeremiah's "foreordination" (Jer. 1:5) is generally seen by Old Testament scholars as an ideal foreordination (i.e., in God's prescient mind).

An Old Testament passage frequently used in Mormon discourse as evidence of the foreordination of faithful spirits in the preexistence to be born into the house of Israel is Deuteronomy 32:7–8:

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.

When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.<sup>70</sup>

The scholarly understanding of this passage (see also Chap. 6) is that God is here depicted assigning different deities to different nations with Yahweh being designated as Israel's God. The text describes the separation of the "sons of Adam" (implying a post-Fall separation), and not the separation of the spirit children of God. There is no implication here of a preexistent foreordination of individuals.

In the New Testament, Acts records Paul stating that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Some LDS authors and leaders interpret this passage to mean that premortal worthiness determines where and when one comes to earth.<sup>71</sup> Once again, however, there is no requirement of human preexistence for God to determine the times and places into which individuals are born. Incidentally, the “appointment” spoken of in Acts 17:26 pertains to the bounds and habitations of “nations,” not individuals.

### *Early Nineteenth-Century Christianity*

In Protestantism, two rival doctrines had developed with respect to the receipt of callings and blessings in this life. Calvinists or predestinationists held that callings and appointments in this life are the result of God’s sovereign will from eternity, not of any individual acts of worthiness. By 1800 many Protestants were abandoning belief in traditional predestination in favor of the doctrine of foreordination based on God’s foreknowledge of how one will choose to act in this life. Those who believed that free will played a role in callings and appointments were known as Arminians, after the early free-will advocate Jacob Arminius (1560–1609).<sup>72</sup>

The difference between Calvinists and Arminians stems largely from differences in interpretation of New Testament passages that speak of God’s foreordination and foreknowledge of Christ, of Israel, and of believers in general. The New Testament states that Christ “was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20) and was slain according to “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). As pertaining to Israel, Paul states that God “foreknew” them (Rom. 11:2), and preserved a remnant “according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). Regarding believers who obtain eternal life, Paul said, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29) and to be “justified” and “glorified” (v. 30). Peter called these the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:2). The common factor in all of these divine appointments is God’s foreknowledge, a concept that was understood differently by Calvinists and Arminians.

Calvinists, who represented more traditional Protestant Christian thought, maintained that God’s foreknowledge is a *result* of his foreordination of people and events. In other words, God foreknows because he determines in advance whom he chooses to bless. Calvinists argued that nowhere in the Bible is God’s foreknowledge of human beings’ voluntary works designated as the basis of God’s fore-



ordination, instead pointing to scriptures which state that election comes "according to his [God's] purpose" (Rom. 8:38; see also Eph. 1:11), "according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5), and "according . . . to grace" (Rom. 11:5). Paul taught that God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9; see also Rom. 9:11). Calvinists perceived there to be ample scriptural support, at least in Paul's writings, for the belief that it is God's sovereign will, rather than his foreknowledge of the exercise of human free will, that determines callings.

Arminians, on the other hand, felt justified in reading voluntary human righteousness into these same passages since free will is implied elsewhere in the New Testament. They contended that God foreordained individuals to blessings and callings in this life as a result of his absolute foreknowledge of the choices people would make in this life. Arminian Methodist John Wesley, for example, taught that God "fore-appoint[ed] obedient believers to salvation, not without, but 'according to his foreknowledge' of all their works from the foundation of the world."<sup>73</sup> This appointment, as noted earlier, is not dependent on their preexistence. Wesley states, "[God] calleth men 'elected from the foundation of the world,' though not elected till they were men in the flesh. Yet it is all so before God, who, knowing all things from eternity, 'calleth things that are not as though they were.'"<sup>74</sup> Arminians, therefore, held that God foresaw who would be obedient through their own free will and foreordained them to salvation accordingly.

### *Early Mormonism*

It was the spreading Arminian belief in foreordination based on "the foreknowledge of God . . . from all eternity . . . [of] the future faith and good works of the elect"<sup>75</sup> that resonates in early Mormon teachings. Alma 13, for example, speaks of ancient priests being "called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works" (Alma 13:3–4). In 1841, approximately one year prior to the publication of the book of Abraham in which foreordination based on premortal works was introduced, Brigham Young and Willard Richards, cite Alma 13 and state, "God chose, elected, or ordained Jesus Christ, His Son, to be the creator, governor, savior, and judge of the world; and Abraham to be the father of the faithful, on account of His foreknowledge of their obedience to His will and commandments."<sup>76</sup> They make no mention of faithfulness in the preexistence, only foreknowledge of faithfulness in mortality.



Just as Mormons joined with Arminians in attributing individual election and foreordination to God's foreknowledge of one's future voluntary works in mortality, they also used the same rationale as Arminians to explain seeming biblical references to predestination. According to Arminians, it was the *terms* of salvation that were predestined or ordained from the foundation of the world, not individual salvation itself. Thus, predestination for Arminians meant that "God has predestined that a specific group of people will be saved—namely, those who believe in Jesus Christ. By believing, individuals fulfilled the predestined condition of salvation."<sup>77</sup> Joseph Smith likewise repudiated the Calvinist concept of predestination, stating in a sermon on May 16, 1841, that "unconditional election of individuals to eternal life was not taught by the apostles."<sup>78</sup> Echoing the Arminian predestination of the terms of salvation, he declared that "God did elect or predestinate, that all those who would be saved, should be saved in Christ Jesus, and through obedience to the gospel."<sup>79</sup>

### *Nauvoo Period*

In the book of Abraham, the basis of foreordination shifts from God's foreknowledge of a person's future righteousness in mortality to a knowledge of that person's premortal righteousness. Here, Abraham sees a gathering of preexistent spirits: "And among all these were many of the noble and great ones." He then records God saying, "These I will make my rulers . . . Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born" (Abr. 3:22–23). Thus, foreordination is explained as being based on premortal nobility, without a mention of God's foreknowledge of one's future righteousness—although such foreknowledge is certainly not precluded.

### *Contemporary Mormonism*

Today, Mormons generally follow Joseph Smith's later teaching that the foreordination of prophets and other individuals called to fill special missions is based on premortal worthiness.<sup>80</sup> Latter-day Saints who acknowledge the role of God's foreknowledge in the foreordination and election of individuals don't all agree as to whether God's foreknowledge is absolute, as Arminians would claim, or whether it is just an incredibly accurate prediction based on his past intimate acquaintance with individuals, a concept that emerged from the LDS doctrine of a finite or limited God. Reflecting this latter view, Apostle James E. Talmage taught that God "has a full knowledge of the nature and disposition of each of His children, a knowledge gained by long observation and experience in the past eternity of our primeval

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childhood" and that elections are made "by reason of that surpassing knowledge."<sup>81</sup> Thus, according to Talmage, foreordination isn't based on absolute foreknowledge, but on predictive foreknowledge using inductive logic, similar to a weather forecast. Expressing a contrary, absolutist view, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell wrote, "God's omniscience is not solely a function of prolonged and discerning familiarity with us—but of the stunning reality that the past and present and future are part of an 'eternal now' with God!"<sup>82</sup>

The book of Abraham's doctrine of foreordination based on pre-mortal righteousness colors the way earlier passages are currently understood. Alma's teaching that the foreordination of priests is based on God's foreknowledge of their works in this life, for example, is sometimes viewed as foreordination based on premortal worthiness, thus making it consistent with teachings in Abraham 3:22–23. The Church publication *Gospel Principles* cites Alma 13:1–3 as teaching that "the prophets prepared themselves to become leaders on earth while they were still spirits in Heaven." Consequently, "God foreordained (chose) them to be his leaders on earth."<sup>83</sup> Alma 13, however, was not initially understood as entailing human preexistence much less varying levels of personal preparation in the preexistence.

Even scriptures with no apparent reference to foreordination are read as though foreordination is implied in one way (pre-mortal righteousness) or the other (divine foreknowledge). An example of this is Jesus's statement, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27). According to Bruce R. McConkie, people are "chosen" to become Christ's sheep in the preexistence "because of their pre-existent training, election, and foreordination."<sup>84</sup> Apostle Neal A. Maxwell, whose theology tends to draw upon earlier LDS teachings that were more in harmony with Arminian thinking, taught that those whom Christ calls his sheep are so designated from preexistence because of God's "divine foreknowledge concerning all mortals and their response to the gospel."<sup>85</sup> However, when read in context, Christ seems to be simply saying that those who hear his voice in this life thereby qualify to become his sheep. There is no implication of any foreordination (John 7:17, 8:32–33, 18:37). This also seems to be the sense of similar expressions found in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 26:21, 3 Ne. 18:31).

In some interpretations of LDS theology, the doctrine of foreordination to callings and elections in this life includes the belief that being born into a particular lineage and race is determined by one's righteousness in the preexistence. Those who were valiant in the preexistence were foreordained to be born into the chosen lineage of Israel. Bruce R. McConkie states that righteous spirits "were chosen, before they were born, to come to earth as members of the house of Israel. . . . They are foreordained to be baptized, to join the Church, to

receive the priesthood, to enter the ordinance of celestial marriage, and to be sealed up unto eternal life.”<sup>86</sup> The implication, of course, is that those who are not of the house of Israel were seen by God as being less likely to be saved. If foreordination to salvation is based on God’s absolute foreknowledge of what one will do in this life, one has to ask if it is even possible for one to be saved who isn’t thus foreordained. Of course, the whole practice since New Testament times of taking the gospel to the gentiles is predicated on their potential for embracing the gospel.

### The War in Heaven

In Mormon theology, the war in heaven refers to an ideological confrontation that occurred in the preexistence in which Satan or Lucifer and one third of the spirits that followed him were cast down to earth because of their rebelliousness. The contention was over the role played by moral free agency in the salvation of mortal human beings. The Father’s plan called for individual accountability, with his firstborn son to be offered as a sacrifice for those who would repent. Satan proposed to save all of humanity by denying them agency. The Father rejected Satan’s plan and cast him down to earth with all his followers. It is believed that this war continues to be waged on earth and can be seen in various ideologies (socialism, totalitarianism, etc.) that threaten moral free agency.<sup>87</sup>

#### *Old Testament*

Before looking at biblical passages cited by Latter-day Saints as references to the war in heaven, it is instructive to note that ancient Hebrews developed a number of creation stories that paralleled those of their Near Eastern neighbors. Many of these involved some type of combat among the gods at the time of the creation. Isaiah alludes to this combat when he says of God: “Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?” (Isa. 51:9). Rahab, the dragon, refers to a primeval sea monster, God’s opponent in mythic portrayals of the creation battle.<sup>88</sup> This seems to be the only primordial war alluded to in the Old Testament.

As discussed in Chapter 10, scholars don’t see Old Testament writers as having viewed Satan as a rebellious spirit who was cast out from the presence of God, but rather as a respectable member of God’s court who bargained with and even received challenges from God (see Job 1:6–12, 2:1–6). One of the initial tales of Satan being cast out of heaven is a late Jewish tradition in which Satan was commanded to pay homage to Adam who was made in the image of God. Satan

refused saying, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will be like the Most High!" At once God flung Satan and his host out of heaven, down to the earth, and from that moment dates the enmity between Satan and man."<sup>89</sup> Later Christian thought moved Satan's ejection to an earlier (primordial) time and a different set of circumstances.

### *New Testament*

By New Testament times, a Jewish tradition had developed which saw Satan and his angels as outcasts from heaven. Jude 1:6 states that those "angels which kept not their first estate but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." In Mormon theology, keeping one's "first estate" means being faithful in one's premortal existence (Abr. 3:26). Biblical scholars, however, generally understand it as referring to a station of authority. Thus, the NIV reads that these angels "did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home." Other modern translations give a similar rendering. The footnote in the Jerusalem Bible states that these renegade angels are those "sons of God" briefly mentioned in Genesis 6:1–2, but elaborated on in the Book of Enoch. As interpreted in 1 Enoch 6–19, these angels left heaven to mate with mortal women. Jude is familiar with the Book of Enoch and refers to it in Jude 1:14.

According to the Genesis account:

The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. . . .

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. (Gen. 6:2, 4)

Scholars explain that this account refers to angels who descended from heaven and married humans. Their offspring were called "Nephilim," or giants; and they were great antagonists in the land of Canaan (Num. 13:33; Deut. 2:10–11, 20–21, 3:11; Josh. 12:4, 17:15).<sup>90</sup> First-century Jewish historian Josephus explains, "Many angels of God, accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength, for the tradition is that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants."<sup>91</sup> According to Josephus, it was a Jewish "tradition" that fallen angels were, in some sense, the fathers of the giants of old.<sup>92</sup>

In an apparent effort to make sense out of this passage in Genesis, and since the sons of God were understood in early Mormonism as righteous mortals who embraced the gospel (D&C 11:30, 34:3, 35:2), Joseph Smith altered this passage to read that it was the daughters of these righteous sons of God (rather than the sons of God themselves) who apostatized by marrying non-believing men (see Moses 8:13–15). Interestingly, later in life he adopted Josephus's interpretation of this Genesis passage, telling the Saints in a sermon on April 13, 1843: "The history of Josephus in Speaking of angels [who] came down and took themselves wives of the daughters of men . . . These ware resurrected Bodies, [who] Violated the Celestial laws."<sup>93</sup> The LDS interpretation of this passage today is that the sons of God were mortal male members of the Church who married women outside the faith. According to Bruce R. McConkie, "Men were marrying out of the Church because they preferred a lewd and lascivious way of life rather than the one decreed in proper matrimony."<sup>94</sup> Thus, McConkie points to mortal men who were rebellious rather than women (as originally taught by Joseph Smith) or angels (as taught by Josephus and in Joseph Smith's later sermons).

Returning to the passage in Jude, it is noteworthy that the angels alluded to were not cast down to earth to tempt humans (as in Mormon theology), but were shackled with chains and confined to darkness (Jude 1:6). Jude's description thus corresponds to 2 Peter 2:4, which states that God consigned these "angels that sinned . . . to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." Both views are consistent with the revelation of John in which he saw an angel who was given "the key of the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:1). The footnote to this verse in the Jerusalem Bible specifies that this pit or abyss was believed to be the place "where fallen angels are imprisoned, to be released only to their final punishment." The pseudepigraphic book of 1 Enoch, an apocalyptic work composed in the third century B.C., contributed to this idea of wicked angels falling and being locked up till the last days. They were to be bound "hand and foot" and "cast into darkness" (1 Enoch 10:6), and "in the great day of judgment," they were to be "cast into the fire" (1 Enoch 10:9).

In Jude 1:6 these angels were not punished because of their protest against God's plan but because they "left their own habitation" (i.e., they physically went where they shouldn't have gone). Their subsequent bondage "in everlasting chains" was neither the result of any kind of war or debate, nor was their punishment to be cast down to earth.

The only biblical passage that mentions anything about an actual conflict or war in heaven is found in Revelation. Prior to this time, there doesn't appear to be any notion of such a conflict. Catholic New

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Testament scholar David Aune states, "Nowhere else in Jewish or early Christian literature is a heavenly battle depicted."<sup>95</sup> Nor does the heavenly war in Revelation seem to refer to a *premortal* war among God's spirit children.

Though Revelation speaks of a heavenly battle, there is no indication that it was a premortal battle. In this conflict, Satan, who is portrayed as "a great red dragon" (Rev. 12:3), "drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth" (Rev. 12:4). Mormons typically understand this as a reference to a third of the hosts of heaven who followed Satan in the preexistence.<sup>96</sup> Though not equating Satan's hosts with God's premortal offspring, many Christians prior to the Restoration also understood the banishment of Satan's followers from heaven as occurring at the creation of the world. This is most dramatically depicted in Milton's seventeenth-century epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. Biblical scholars point out, however, that the text itself has this ejection from heaven taking place after mortals were already inhabiting the earth: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you" (Rev. 12:12).<sup>97</sup> John further places Satan's banishment to earth some time after the woman or the church<sup>98</sup> brings forth the man child (Rev. 12:13). Thus, this event would have coincided with the persecution of the Christian church. Remember that John saw "things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1). As an explanation for Revelation's supposed reference to a premortal war in heaven following the description of the early Christian persecution, Bruce R. McConkie suggested that it was a "parenthetical interpolation" and was not intended to be a sequential narrative.<sup>99</sup>

This reference to a war in heaven is generally understood by scholars as being a depiction of the persecution of the early Christian church and having nothing to do with a premortal conflict.<sup>100</sup> M. Eugene Boring, writing in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, states, "The conflict in heaven in which the dragon is defeated is the result of the birth and exaltation of the Messiah. This conflict is not an explanation of the origin of Satan as a 'fallen angel' who rebelled prior to the creation of the world (as in Milton's *Paradise Lost*)."<sup>101</sup> Given that the war with the dragon in heaven is presented in the context of the persecution of the early Christian church, scholars believe that the imagery was simply a way of conveying the cosmic nature of the forces of evil that had combined against the church. This was also the view shared by the third-century Christian historian Victorinus.<sup>103</sup> For John, it appears to have been an eschatological battle signaling the end time, which he believed to be imminently approaching.

### *Early Mormonism*

By the time of Joseph Smith, the New Testament view of the devil and his angels being cast out of heaven had been combined with a literal reading of Isaiah in which Lucifer falls from heaven because of his arrogance in vaunting himself above God. The Book of Mormon reflects this conflation: “An angel of God . . . had fallen from heaven . . . having sought that which was evil before God” and thus became the devil (2 Ne. 2:17). Notice that, as yet, no war or strife over agency is mentioned. Satan is simply depicted as seeking to do evil and consequently falling from heaven.

Shortly after the Book of Mormon was published, Satan’s “fall” became characterized as an ejection resulting from his contest against the principle of agency. Joseph Smith’s revision of Genesis states that Satan “rebelled” against God and “sought to destroy the agency of man.” He also sought God’s “power” and, as a result, was cast down to earth “to deceive and to blind men” (Moses 4:3–4; see also D&C 29:36). Interestingly, modern LDS scripture never uses the term “war” or any of its synonyms to describe Satan’s premortal rebellion. While Doctrine and Covenants 76:28–29 speaks of Satan being cast out of heaven and consequently “mak[ing] war with the saints of God,” this war occurs after being ejected from heaven. The only place in scripture that refers to a “war in heaven” is Revelation 12:7, however this is presented as an eschatological rather than a premortal war.

Notably, Doctrine and Covenants 88 uses many of the same characters and events referred to in Revelation 12 to describe an eschatological battle to be waged after the millennium. In this conflict, the “devil shall gather together his armies . . . and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies” (D&C 88:113; cf. 12:7). Satan and his hosts will be defeated and “cast away” (D&C 88:114; cf. Rev. 12:9). One wonders if Joseph Smith may have initially understood the war spoken of in Revelation 12 as an eschatological war.

### *Nauvoo Period*

It wasn’t until Joseph began his work on the book of Abraham that one can see a clear teaching that the contention in heaven involved premortal spirits. Until then, the participants of this heavenly rebellion were referred to in a rather classical Christian sense as “the devil and his angels” (D&C 29:37). Abraham 3, which Joseph prepared for publication in March 1842, relates that when God asked whom he should send into the world (presumably to redeem mankind), two spirits volunteered. God chose the first (presumably Christ) and therefore “the second [presumably Satan] was angry, and

kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him" (Abr. 3:28). In May 1843, Joseph taught that Satan "drew many away with him & the greatness of his punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle."<sup>103</sup> Again in May 1843, Joseph explained that those spirits that followed Satan are "like the devil" in the sense that they have "no bodies" and "kept not their first estate."<sup>104</sup> In these remarks, Joseph is now clearly referring to Satan and his followers as spirits like other premortal spirits, though they are not designated as God's spirit children.

### *Later Mormonism*

Teachings on the war in heaven since the Nauvoo period have not changed significantly; however, one interesting addition pertains to the cast of characters involved in the premortal conflict. Now they are all considered to have been spirit children begotten of God, but not necessarily all destined for *this* earth. Brigham Young asked, "Do you suppose that one third part of all the beings that existed in eternity came with him? No, but one third part of the spirits that were begotten and organized and brought forth to become tenants of fleshly bodies to dwell upon this earth."<sup>105</sup> Of course, this raises the question of whether other worlds populated by Heavenly Father's children would also have evil spirits led by a Satan.

As a final note, the scriptures never explain how Satan would "destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3). In current LDS thought, Satan's plan is generally understood as destroying human agency by coercing obedience.<sup>106</sup> During the first several decades of the Church, however, Satan was seen more as a Universalist whose plan for destroying agency was to remove human accountability. In other words, Satan would save people *in* their sins. "An agency was given to all intelligent beings," wrote Orson Pratt, "and . . . Satan sought to destroy this . . . and to redeem them all in their sins."<sup>107</sup> In a letter to William Smith dated December 25, 1844, and published in the *Times and Seasons*, W. W. Phelps wrote, "Lucifer lost his [first estate] by offering to save men in their sins."<sup>108</sup> The fact that Moses 4:1 has Satan proposing to "redeem" all mankind seems to imply that souls would sin. In a Nauvoo sermon reported by George Laub, Joseph Smith taught that Satan "boasted of himself Saying Send me I can save all Even those who Sined against the Holy Ghost."<sup>109</sup> Thus, Satan's plan would have even saved those who commit the unpardonable sin. This early LDS notion of destroying human agency by removing the consequences of sin is rarely presented in current LDS discourse.



## Notes

1. Joseph F. Smith, "The Origin of Man," 78, 80.
2. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 10.
3. *Ibid.*, 13–15.
4. *Ibid.*, 16.
5. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 334–35.
6. The Hebrew and Greek words in the King James Version that are translated as *soul* or *spirit* are words that literally mean "breath" or "wind." For example, the Hebrew word *neshamah* that is rendered as *spirit* or *soul* literally means "breath." The Greek word rendered *ghost* or *spirit* in the New Testament is *pneuma* which, again, literally means "breath." Even in English, *spirit*, generally a synonym for *soul*, comes from the Latin *spiritus* and originally meant "breath." (The English words *spiritual* and *respiratory* both derive from the same root.) One of Joseph Smith's early translations utilized a later Judeo-Christian understanding of the soul by providing a modified account of the creation which includes the merging of a spirit being with the body (Abr. 5:7).
7. L. A. Bushinski, "Spirit (in the Bible)," 13:424.
8. *Ibid.*, 13:425.
9. Kaufmann Kohler, Isaac Broyde, and Ludwig Blau, "Soul," 472.
10. G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 200.
11. Charles A. Buck, *A Theological Dictionary*, 2:438.
12. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Commonwealth: Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, 28, 249.
13. Leonard Bacon, *Baxtor's Works*, 2:28.
14. Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, 52.
15. For references to early LDS teachings espousing the immateriality of the soul, see Charles R. Harrell, "The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence: 1830–1844," 82.
16. Warren Cowdery, letter, *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 (April 1835): 97
17. *History of the Church*, 4:575.
18. J. I. Marais, "Psychology," 4:2495.
19. Edward Beecher, *The Conflict of the Ages*, 563.
20. Marais, "Psychology," 4:2495; Leo G. Perdue, "Jeremiah," 1113.
21. Lowell L. Bennion, *An Introduction to the Gospel*, 50.
22. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 13
23. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 68.
24. Brendan Byrne, "Sons of God," 6:156. See also Marvin Pope, *Job*, 9, 292–93.
25. Parker Pratt Robinson, ed., *Writings of Parley P. Pratt*, 65, 216.
26. Marais, "Psychology," 4:2495. See also Terryl Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought*, 26–29.
27. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 371.
28. Thomas B. Thayer, *The Origin and History of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, 105.



29. Ibid., 106.

30. In some ways, Doctrine and Covenants 93 is an expansion on ideas found in the Gospel of John and ascribes to all individuals what was originally ascribed uniquely to Christ. In John, only Christ was "in the beginning with God" (John 1:2); in Doctrine and Covenants 93, "man was also in the beginning with God" (v. 29). In John, only Christ was uncreated and "all things were made by him" (v. 3). In Doctrine and Covenants 93, neither Christ nor man "was created or made" (v. 29).

31. Marais, "Psychology," 4:2495.

32. Origen, *De Principiis*, 262–64, 286–89, 349–82.

33. See, for example, Joseph Fielding McConkie, "Premortal Existence, Foreordinations, and Heavenly Councils," 174.

34. Orson Pratt, August 29, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:54.

35. John Newton Brown, "Pre-existiani," 964.

36. Ibid. An 1825 Presbyterian magazine stated, "If we must speculate and form a theory on this subject, the safest and most rational is, to suppose that all souls were created at the beginning of the world; that they remain in a quiescent state, till the bodies which they are to inhabit are formed." "Lectures on the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly of the Divines," 530.

37. Lorenzo Dow, *The Opinion of Dow; or, Lorenzo's Thoughts, On Different Subjects . . .*, 108.

38. Ibid., 110.

39. Theophilus, "On the Value of the Soul," 107.

40. As paraphrased by Isaac Myer, *Qabbalah*, 273.

41. Orson Pratt, December 15, 1872, *Journal of Discourses*, 15:249.

42. See, for example, Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 290.

43. H. N. "Sermon," *The Hopkinsian Magazine* 3 (Nov. 1828): 242.

44. Parley P. Pratt, "The True God and His Worship Contrasted with Idolatry," 187; emphasis his.

45. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of Puritans to the Civil War*, 229.

46. Thomas Ward, "General Conference," 33.

47. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 9.

48. Ibid., 33.

49. Ibid., 60.

50. Ibid., 68.

51. Joseph Smith Jr., "Try the Spirits," 745.

52. Stan Larsen, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," 203–4. Larsen's amalgamated version of the King Follett discourse is particularly significant here in that it preserves the wording of the original firsthand accounts, which read that "a spirit" is uncreated. Joseph Fielding Smith altered the wording to read "the intelligence of spirits" in his collection of the Prophet's teachings, which is frequently quoted as proof that the Prophet had in mind the intelligence of spirits, not spirits themselves, when he spoke of spirits as being uncreated. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 353.



53. For examples of Abr. 3:22 being interpreted as referring to spirit birth, see McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 442; James E. Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism*, 240. It is noteworthy that Joseph Fielding Smith also used “organize” to describe the social or ecclesiastical organization of preexistent spirits. From Abraham’s teaching that there were many intelligences (spirits of men), and that they were organized before the world was formed, he concludes: “Men were organized in some such way as we are organized here in the kingdom of God. Among the spirits of men there were superior intelligences chosen to act in authority.” Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, 27–28.

54. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 9; emphasis mine.

55. *Ibid.*, 60; emphasis mine.

56. Smith, “Try the Spirits,” 745; emphasis mine.

57. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 207; emphasis mine.

58. *Ibid.*, 253; emphasis mine.

59. Larsen, “The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text,” 204.

60. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 67–68 (original spelling).

61. Van Hale, “The Origin of the Human Spirit in Early Mormon Thought,” 124.

62. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, 124.

63. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 9.

64. Differing opinions on the nature of intelligence are described in Paul Nolan Hyde, “Intelligences,” 2:692–93.

65. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Progress of Man*, 11.

66. Orson Pratt, “The Pre-Existence of Man” *The Seer* 1, no. 7 (July 1853): 103.

67. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology: Designed as an Introduction to the First Principles of Spiritual Philosophy, Religion, Law and Government . . .*, 97. For a discussion of different LDS perspectives on intelligence, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, “The History of Intelligence in Latter-day Saint Thought,” 235.

68. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 387.

69. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Compiled Sermons of Joseph Fielding Smith*, 1:64.

70. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 175; Harold B. Lee, *Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, 24–25.

71. See, for example, Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 47; Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report*, October, 1973, 7.

72. Roger E. Olsen, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 454.

73. John Wesley, quoted in John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 21.

74. *Ibid.*

75. H. N. “Sermon,” 242.

76. Brigham Young and Williard Richards, “Election and Reprobation,” 218.

77. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 470.

78. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 74, 189.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 9–10.

81. James E. Talmage, *The Great Apostasy*, 20.
82. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, 8.
83. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 9.
84. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 291; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:490.
85. Neal A. Maxwell, *Things as They Really Are*, 25.
86. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 512–13.
87. C. Terry Warner, "Agency," 1:26–27.
88. John Day, "Rahab," 5:610.
89. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 1:64.
90. Joel W. Rosenberg, "Genesis," 2306.
91. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 28.
92. *Ibid.*
93. Quoted in Eugene E. England, "George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," 174 (original spelling).
94. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man*, 360.
95. David E. Aune, "Revelation," 2324.
96. Top, "War in Heaven," 4:1547.
97. Joseph Smith rearranged a few verses in Revelation 12, moving this event to an earlier time—but the result seems to confuse the flow of the narration.
98. Aune, "Revelation," 2323.
99. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:518.
100. L. Michael White, "The AntiChrist: A Historical Puzzle." M. Eugene Boring, "Revelation," 2229.
101. Boring, "Revelation," 2229.
102. Thomas W. Mackay, "Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John's Apocalypse 11:3–13," 1:268.
103. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 201.
104. *Ibid.*, 205.
105. Brigham Young, June 22, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:369.
106. *Gospel Principles* (2009), 13–15.
107. Orson Pratt, July 18, 1880, *Journal of Discourses*, 21:288.
108. Phelps, "The Answer," 758.
109. England, "George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," 171. The allusion to Satan saving even sons of perdition is particularly noteworthy in light of a sermon the Prophet delivered on April 7, 1844, in which he taught: "God has wro[ugh]t out sal[vatio]n for all men unless they have com[mitte]d a cert[ai]n sin." He then explained that in the council in heaven, "[J]esus] cont[ende]d that there wo[ul]d be cert[ai]n souls that wo[ul]d be condemned & the d[evi]l s[ai]d he co[ul]d save them all." Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 353. The implication is that Jesus wasn't proposing to save everyone in the celestial kingdom, but only from outer darkness.