A recent study points out that the charge that Abraham’s story in the Bible must be fictitious because no one could know the highly intimate things reported there—nobody, Hamming admits, unless it were Abraham himself. The earliest Abraham books are supposed to be autobiographies, and the story told from his point of view makes perfectly good sense.... It is a lesson in relativity.

This principle is recognized today as “the anthropic cosmological principle.” I refer you to the April 1980 Scientific American. It specifies that what an observer is able to see of the universe actually makes a difference in the real nature of that universe: “Man’s experience is a constraint on the kinds of universe he could observe. Many features of the universe that are remarkable to ponder are inevitable prerequisites of the existence of observers.” Though the authors say it is a mystery why this should be so, still “the principle overcomes the traditional barrier between the observer and the observed. It makes the observer an indispensable part of the macrophysical world.”

Nowhere is the principle of this relativity more clearly proclaimed than in the cosmologies of the book of Moses and the book of Abraham. Both epics begin in realms above, far from the earth (which has not yet come into existence). At each step it is made perfectly clear who is speaking and from what vantage point. “I dwell in the midst of them all; . . . I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen.” (Abraham 3:21; italics added.)

First, second, and third persons appear in a large cast of characters leaving one place for another. “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.” (Abraham 3:24; italics added.) What a world of inference opens up as we are launched into the mighty drama! Yet we immediately begin to feel ourselves into the situation. Those to whom the speaker refers (and there is no doubt who he is!) are known to Abraham from afero-time—they are “all the intelligences thine eyes have seen from the beginning.” (Abraham 3:21; italics added.)

Before being introduced to his home planet, Abraham is given a view of the cosmos, in the which he is reminded again and again that all distances, directions, and motions are to be measured with respect to his own position only. From another position, the picture might well look very different.

Kolob, as we noted, is not the center of the universe but governs only one class of stars: “I have set this one to govern all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.” (Abraham 3:3; italics added.) In the apocryphal Abraham literature, which has very recently and very suddenly taken on extreme importance in the eyes of the learned world, this point of vantage is a place in the heavens to which Abraham has been taken. There he is at first terrified because he finds no place on which to stand, until the angel who is with him gives him a correct orientation by drawing a round diagram of things. This is reflected in Facsimile No. 2 of the Book of Abraham, but we cannot discuss that here.

Time also is not reckoned in absolutes but is limited to Abraham’s system; “the reckoning of the Lord’s time” is not reckoned absolutely but “according to the reckoning of Kolob”—an in-between element to gear Abraham’s time to a larger but not necessarily the largest system. There is also reckoning by sun and moon, relative to “the earth upon which thou standest.” (Abraham 3:4-5.)

In verse 6 the expression “set time” is used four times, reminding us that there is more than one frame of time reference. One must in the “times of reckoning” take into account that “two facts” can exist, the one not excluding the other. This is one of the mysteries of cosmology today. The Doctrine and Covenants explains it by the necessity of limiting all “existence” to closed systems, for “otherwise there is no existence.” (D&C 93:30.)

Kolob’s influence and time governs “all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest”—the expression here used for the seventh time. (Abraham 3:9; italics added.)

After being apprised, like Moses, of the endless nature of God’s works—“I could not see the end thereof”—Abraham is reminded of the glory elsewhere “before the world was.” (Abraham 3:22.) Then, at the beginning of chapter 4, we see a delegation going “down” to organize this earth and its heaven. To begin with, we see bare rock, “empty and desolate,” as the other planets and satellites of the system seem to be today, “because they had not formed anything but the earth.” (Abraham 4:2.) Then the whole thing is water-covered beneath a dense envelope of cloud—“darkness reigned upon the face of the deep.” But things were already being prepared for what was to follow, for “the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters.” Dictionaries define brooding as “to sit or incubate (eggs) for the purpose of hatching.” As Milton puts it—“dovelike sat’st brooding on the vast Abyss and mad’st it pregnant.” Also, “to dwell continuously on a subject.” Brooding is just the right word—a quite long quiet period of preparation in which apparently nothing was happening. Something was to come out of the water, incubating, waiting—a long, long time.

Next, in verse 3, “there was light.” Where? It is an exercise in point of view again. All this time the Gods had been dwelling in light and glory, but the earth was dark. It was to where “darkness reigned,” according to our text, that the light came. (Abraham 4:2.) This was not the first creation of light. Wherever light comes into darkness, “there is light.”

The next verse reminds us that light itself is relative, a part of the energy spectrum seen by some being with the capacity to be aware of it: “They. . . comprehended the light, for it was
bright” (Abraham 4:4), that is, visible. Basic chemicals react to light, but are they aware of it—do they comprehend it? In verse 5 we are introduced to the dualism of night and day, land and water, which is peculiar to the earth and conditions of all life upon it.

The creation process as described in the Pearl of Great Price is open ended and ongoing, entailing careful planning based on vast experience, long consultations, models, tests, and even trial runs for a complicated system requiring a vast scale of participation by the creatures concerned. The whole operation is dominated by the overriding principle of love. You may accept the Big Bang, with its potential for producing all that came thereafter, but by any reckoning the earth was definitely not among the instantaneous productions of the first millisecond or even of the first fifteen minutes. No matter how you figure, it came along much, much later after a great deal had happened. “Worlds without number” had already come into existence and gone their ways: “And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works, neither to my words.” (Moses 1:38.)

Consider how it was done: “And the Gods said: We will do everything that we have said, and organize them.” (Abraham 4:31.) “And the Gods saw that they would be obeyed, and that their plan was good.” (Abraham 4:21.) “We will end our work, which we have counseled [on day six] . . . And thus were their decisions at the time that they counseled among themselves to form the heavens and the earth [on day six].” (Abraham 5:2-3.) After the talk they got down to work. “The Gods came down and formed these the generations of the heavens and of the earth, . . . according to all that which they had said . . . before.” (Abraham 5:4-5.) They worked through agents: “The Gods ordered, saying: Let [such-and-such happen] . . .; and it was so, even as they ordered.” (Abraham 4:9,11.)

What they ordered was not the completed product, but the process to bring it about, providing a scheme under which life might expand: “Let us prepare the earth to bring forth grass” (Abraham 4:11; italics added), not “Let us create grass.” “Let us prepare the waters to bring forth abundantly. . . . And the Gods prepared the waters that they might bring forth great whales, and every living creature that moveth.” (Abraham 4:20.) Note the future tense: the waters are so treated that they will have the capacity. The Gods did not make whales on the spot but arranged it so that in time they might appear. They created the potential. “And the Gods saw that they would be obeyed, and that their plan was good” (Abraham 4:21), that is, it was working, not because they were doing it all themselves—there were other agents at work: they were being obeyed. By whom? Well, the land animals, we are told, which "would obey." (Abraham 4:25.) “And the Gods watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed.” (Abraham 4:18.)

“They obeyed” is the active voice, introducing a teaching that, in my opinion, is by far the most significant and distinct aspect of Mormonism. It is the principle of maximum participation, of the active cooperation of all of God’s creatures in the working out of his plans, which, in fact, are devised for their benefit: “This is my work and my glory.” (Moses 1:39.) Everybody gets into the act. Every creature, to the limit of its competence, is given the supreme compliment of being left on its own, so that the word “obey” is correctly applied. “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.” (Abraham 3:24.) Why? “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” (Abraham 3:25.) What he commands is what will best fulfill the measure of their existence, but they are not forced to do it—they are not automatons. Adam was advised not to eat the fruit but was told at the same time that he was permitted to do it. It was up to him whether he would obey or not. If he did obey, he would qualify for a higher trust.

Abraham 4:11-12 continues: “Let us prepare the earth to bring forth grass. . . . And the Gods organized the earth to bring forth grass from its own seed, . . . yielding fruit [the fruit is the seed], whose seed could only bring forth the same . . . after his kind; and the Gods saw that they were obeyed.” Here are levels of independence down to a complete programming by which the “seed could only bring forth the same.” It reminds us of DNA, but nothing is completely automatic, for the Gods watched those things which they had ordered “until they obeyed,” that is, until they could be trusted to carry on their own. This is not Deism, the prearranged harmony of Leibniz, for the Gods keep up an active interest in the operation in which indeed things often go awry: “We shall go away now,” they say, “but we shall visit you again,” which they do from time to time, keeping up an active interest. The most important provision of all is, “We will bless them,” and “cause them to be fruitful and multiply.” (Abraham 4:28.) That blessing of everything makes all the difference. The Darwinists might say, “You people are simply describing a natural process in humanized terms,” for they have always made much of the completely natural, inevitable, mindless, undirected, spontaneous, mechanical aspect of natural selection necessary for its operation as a purely and completely physical law. They ever gloated on the unfeeling cruelty of the whole thing—“nature red in tooth and claw,” as Kipling put it. The blessing is the whole difference between a play and no play.

After the earth is set up we are shown everything from Adam’s point of view. In Genesis 2:5, we are definitely referred to a pre-temporal creation, then (2:8) we see a garden planted, and (2:15) a man put into the garden, where he is wonderfully at home. He can eat of every tree in the garden (2:16). He lives on terms of greatest intimacy with other creatures, naming and classifying them as he takes his garden (2:16). He lives on terms of greatest intimacy with other creatures, naming and classifying them as he takes his garden (2:16). He lives on terms of greatest intimacy with other creatures, naming and classifying them as he takes his garden (2:16). He lives on terms of greatest intimacy with other creatures, naming and classifying them as he takes his garden (2:16). He lives on terms of greatest intimacy with other creatures, naming and classifying them as he takes his garden (2:16).
any other creature, and he lives in a very lush period, a
garden, which is however reduced to an oasis in an encroach-
ing desert. (Abraham 5:7-10.) To this limited terrain he is
perfectly adapted. It is a paradise. **How long does he live
there? No one knows, for this was still “after the
Lord’s time,” not ours.** (Abraham 5:13.) It was only when
he was forced out of this timeless, changeless paradise that
he began to count the hours and days, moving into a hard
semi-arid world of thorns, thistles, and briars, where he had
to toil and sweat in the heat just to stay alive and lost his old
intimacy with the animals. (Genesis 3:17-19.)

The questions most commonly asked are: When did it
happen? How long did it take? Our texts make it very clear
that we are not to measure the time and periods involved by
our chronometers and calendars. **Until Adam underwent
that fatal change of habitat, body chemistry, diet, and psyche that went with the Fall, nothing is to be
measured in our years,** “for . . . the Gods had not appoint-
ated unto Adam his reckoning.” (Abraham 5:13.) Until then,
time is measured from their point of view, not ours. As far as
we are concerned it can be any time, and there would be no
point to insisting on this again and again if we were to do to
cast their time to our time was mulitply our years by
365,000. Theirs was a different time. The only numbers we
are given designated the phases of periods of creation: “and
this was the second time” (Abraham 4:8), “and it was the
third time” (4:13), and so on. The periods are numbered but
never measured. The Gods called them “days,” but the text is
at great pains to make clear that it was day and night from
their point of view, when our time had not yet been
appointed. “And the Gods called the light Day, and the
darkness they called Night. And. . . from the evening until
morning they called night; . . . and this was the first, or the
beginning, of that which they called day and night.”
(Abraham 4:5.) Doctrine and Covenants 130:4-5 explains that “the reckoning of God’s time, angel’s time, prophet’s
time, and man’s time [is] according to the planet on which
they reside.” That implies different time schemes at least. In
moving from one system to another one also changes one’s
timing. “There are no angels who minister to this earth but
those who do belong or have belonged to it.” (D&C 130:5.)

“It was from morning until evening that they called day; and
it was the fifth time.” (Abraham 4:23.) How long is such a
time? In the “fourth time,” we read, “the Gods watched those
gods which they had ordered until they obeyed.” (Abraham
4:19, 18.) That important word “until” tells us two things: (1)
that they took all the time that was necessary, no matter how
long it might have been, measuring the period in terms not
of a terminal date but in terms of the requirements of the
task; (2) “until” means up till a certain time, but not there-
after. When things were running smoothly, they were left on
their own, which implies a shift from one time-scale to
another. When, for example, “the Gods prepared the earth to
bring forth” (Abraham 4:24), after they had prepared the
waters to do the same long before, how long do you think
that took? Again, the record is deliberately vague.

The relative times are clearly shown when “the Gods
organized the lights in the expanse of the heaven.” From our
position that is just what they are—lights, nothing more.
“And caused them to divide the day from the night” . . . Such
a division had already taken place at the beginning, but this
was a new time-system for this earth . . . “And
organized them to be for signs and for seasons, and for days
and for years.” (Abraham 4:14.) A sign is a symbol, a mark,
an arbitrary indicator, a means of measuring. It is only a sign
relative to a particular observer. **These lights were not
originally created as markers of time, but they could be
used as such, they could be “organized for” such.**
The moon was not created for my convenience; but just the
same, from where I stand it can be made to serve a number
of special purposes. Aside from measuring time, those
heavenly bodies do “give light upon the earth . . . the greater
light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night;
with the lesser light they set the stars also.” (Abraham 4:15-
16.)

Here we get what is perhaps the most striking instance of
“anthrocentric cosmology.” An astronomer (I think at Notre
Dame) recently calculated the probability of a planet in the
solar system having a moon (just one moon, at that) that
subtended exactly the same arc in the sky as does the sun
from the surface of the same planet. **The chances are
astronomically remote, so remote, indeed, that
there seems to be something deliberate about what is
otherwise a stunning coincidence.** [Intelligent
Design.] From no other point of view in all the universe will
the sun and the moon have exactly the same size. It is also
arranged that the stars come out with the moon—though the
ancients knew perfectly well that they were there in the
daytime too; yet for us, again—from our point of view
only—they are simply not there. The North Star does not
really stand still while the other stars circle around it (move
away from the earth and all your calculations will be
spoiled). Hence the repeated insistence on specifying,
according to the time appointed as that “upon which thou
standest.” (Abraham 3:3.)

What the book of Abraham shows me is that we are in the
midst of eternity, surrounded by evidence of the fact. Every
morning on the way to work, I behold those very old rocks at
the base of Rock Canyon and think how everywhere around
us in space float masses of rock like that, that never, never
want to change and really never need to. What does a million
years mean to them? For that matter, what does ten
minutes? If they were blasted tomorrow, reduced to powder
or vapor, nothing would be lost. That is the First Law: The
stuff is there. In whatever form it may take, it is always all
there. That is the first point scored by the book of Abraham,
the first great mystery. **Don’t ask why it is there.**

**Nobody can tell you.** In 1951, the Pope officially declared
for the Big Bang theory, because it looked to some like a
creatio ex nihilo. Actually, it is just the opposite: the Big
Bang took place precisely because all that the universe
contains was already compressed within that primal
singularity so tightly that it had to explode. It was all there,
always. So we begin with an imponderable given quantity:
“See, yonder is matter unorganized,” or as the Book of
Abraham puts it, “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.” (Abraham 3:24.)

Mystery No. 2: Why should it be so organized? Its natural
state calls for progressive disorganization—the Second Law.
But organizing is the exact reversal of that law. Whose idea
was it to build this elaborate organization—which we can see
for ourselves exists, however contrary to natural law? Many scientists are puzzling over that just now. Trust the book of Abraham to anticipate such problems; this sort of thing has been going on for a long, long time. It is planned, programmed, and tested. The “anthropic cosmological principle” recognized that the state of organization depends on the observer. He reads order into the chaos. We may be looking at total chaos or at nothing, but to us it makes sense. Not just to me but to us. If it were only to me it could be an illusion, so we check with each other. Many find the whole thing absurd. Eminent scientists tell us that we are living in an absurd world. But that only means that we know that it should be different. When I say it is absurd, I am complaining that what I see is “not the way it really is.” And who are we? Abraham sees that as the ultimate question and meets it handily: intelligence—awareness— is the beginning and ending of it all. You start out with “intelligences,” beyond which nothing is to be said. You can doubt everything else, but that much you must grant—there were those intelligences, because they still are. What the book of Abraham tells me is that, if this moment of consciousness is real, then it is all real. I can bear unshakable testimony to one thing: I am here. I am under no obligation to explain it or prove it before it can be believed.

Let us consider our Adam. What kind of being is he? The same kind as ourselves—but what is that? He plays a surprising number of roles, each with a different persona, a different name, a different environment, a different office and calling: (1) he was a member of the presidency when the earth project was being discussed; (2) he was on the committee of inspection that came down from time to time to check up on the operation; (3) then he changed his name and nature to live upon the earth, but it was a very different earth from any we know; it had to be a garden place specially prepared for him. (4) When he left that paradise, he changed his nature again and for the first time began to reckon the passing of time by our measurements, becoming a short-lived creature subject to death. (5) In this condition, he began to receive instructions from heavenly mentors on how to go about changing his condition and status, entering into a covenant that completely changed his mentality and way of life. “The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit,” when “that which is natural” became spiritual. (1 Corinthians 15:45-46.) The man Adam passes from one state of being to another, and so do we: “as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Corinthians 15:49.) (6) In time he died and became a spirit being, the head of all his spirit children in the waiting-place, according to common Christian tradition as well as our own. (7) Then he became, after Christ, the firstfruits of the resurrection and returned triumphantly to his first and second estates (8) to go on to glory and eternal lives.

In these seven or eight Adams, we have another fundamental teaching that sets Mormonism off from all contemporary religion and science. The one views man’s life on earth as a one-act drama: Adam fell, Christ redeemed us, and that is the story. Before Adam, there was nothing. Science tells us that the drama is pointless, because there is really nothing after it. We, on the other hand, see an ongoing epic of many episodes, each one a play in itself—a dispensation.