Moses 2-3; Abraham 4-5
Creation of Earth and Man

Notes and Teachings

All non-scriptural quotes are highlighted in blue.

Introduction

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915-1985) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated, “The Lord expects us to believe and understand the true doctrine of the Creation—the creation of this earth, of man, and of all forms of life. Indeed, as we shall see, an understanding of the doctrine of creation is essential to salvation. Unless and until we gain a true view of the creation of all things we cannot hope to gain that fulness of eternal reward which otherwise would be ours” (“Christ and the Creation,” Ensign, June 1982, p. 9).

The focus of this lesson is upon the creation of the earth and man. The creation of the earth is part of God’s divine plan “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). “The plan,” Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “required the Creation, and that in turn required both the Fall and the Atonement. These are the three fundamental components of the plan. The creation of a paradisiacal planet came from God. Mortality and death came into the world through the Fall of Adam. Immortality and the possibility of eternal life were provided by the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement were planned long before the actual work of the Creation began.” (“The Creation,” Ensign, May 2000, p. 84).

Four Accounts of the Creation

In an article published in the Ensign, Keith Meservy, Professor of Religion at Brigham Young University, wrote:

All authentic accounts of the earth’s origins have a single source—the Creator of all things, whose explanations come to us through prophets. For centuries only one account has been available to the world—the record now preserved in the Bible. But with the Restoration have come three others. Each of these four accounts offers valuable insight into the process and purposes of the Creation.

1. The Genesis Account (Gen. 1–2). This is the common account shared by all Bible readers. Latter-day Saints regard it as the remnant of an account originally given to Moses.

2. The Book of Moses Account (Moses 1–3; JST Gen. 1–2). After Joseph Smith had translated the Book of Mormon and learned that many plain and precious truths had been taken from the Bible, the Lord commanded him to “translate” the Bible. In doing so, he used neither Hebrew nor Greek documents but drew upon revelation and inspiration as the source of the text.

Moses had been shown a vision depicting something of the breadth and depth of the Lord’s creations. When Moses asked for more information about the origin of this earth, the Lord responded: “Moses ... I will speak unto thee concerning this earth; ... write the things which I shall speak.” (Moses 1:40; italics added.) Moses then wrote his account, which is the basis for the account appearing in the Joseph Smith Translation (JST, sometimes called the Inspired Version).

3. The Book of Abraham Account (Abr. 3–5). This account was recorded by Abraham. A form of it was discovered in an Egyptian tomb and later sold to the Latter-day Saints. By revelation, the Prophet Joseph Smith produced the text of the Book of Abraham and published it in the Times and Seasons. In 1851 it was reprinted in the first edition of the Pearl of Great Price.

4. The Temple Account. Using the power of drama and group participation, this account teaches, so far as possible within the limits of dramatic structure, the various steps involved in the Creation, the sequence of events, and the roles of those involved. (“Four Accounts of the Creation,” Ensign, Jan. 1986, p. 50)

Moses 2-3. Context of Moses’ creation account

When considering the account of the creation of the earth as recorded by Moses in Moses 2-3 (the JST version of Gen. 1-2), its original context should always be kept in mind. In Moses 1, Moses was shown a panoramic vision of the earth “and the ends thereof” (1:8, 27-29). The visions caused Moses to marvel and wonder (1:8). So he “called upon God, saying: Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?” (1:30). Initially, the Lord responded to Moses’ questions explaining that He through His Son, Jesus Christ, created the world as part of his plan “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (1:31-39).

Having given these preliminary answers, the Lord proceeded to give Moses more detailed answers to his questions. The Lord said, “Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak” (1:40). Then followed the account of the creation as recorded in Moses 2-3.

These two chapters, then, continue to answer Moses’ two-fold inquiry, “why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?”

Moses 2-3. An account of the physical creation

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972) taught that the creation account in Moses was of the earth’s physical creation:

While it is true that all things were created spiritually, or as spirits, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth, this creation, we are informed, was in heaven. This applies to animals of all descriptions and also to plant life, before there was flesh upon the earth, or in the water, or in the air. The account of the creation of the earth as given in Genesis, and the Book of Moses, and as given in the temple, is the creation of the physical
earth, and of physical animals and plants.

There is no account of the creation of man or other forms of life when they were created as spirits. There is just the simple statement that they were so created before the physical creation. The statements in Moses 3:5 and Genesis 2:5 are interpolations thrown into the account of the physical creation, explaining that all things were first created in the spirit existence in heaven before they were placed upon this earth. (Doctrines of Salvation, 3 Vols. Ed. Bruce R. McConkie [1954-56], 1:76)

Moses 2-3. The physical creation was a spiritual creation

The creation of man in our present state happened in three stages. Robert J. Matthews, Professor of Religion at Brigham Young University, states:

More specifically, the world as we know it is really the three stages. The tree of life was located both in the garden and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained all things first created in the spirit existence in heaven before he was placed upon this earth. (Doctrines of Salvation, 3 Vols. Ed. Bruce R. McConkie [1954-56], 1:76)

Moses 2:27. “male and female created I them”

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102). Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that gender “in large measure defines who we are, why we are here upon the earth, and what we are to do and become. For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary.” Further, he said, “The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness” (“Marriage Is Essential to His Eternal Plan,” Ensign, June 2006, p. 83).

Moses 3:7; Abraham 5:7. Adam created from the dust of the earth

The creation of Adam from the dust of the earth is a figurative expression. Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872-1952) of the Quorum of the Twelve taught: “The statement that man was made from the dust of the earth is merely figurative. It may mean that he was made of universal materials, as is the earth. Likewise, the statement that God breathed into man the breath of life is figurative and refers to the existence of the spirit within the body. The exact process whereby man was placed upon earth is not known with certainty, nor is it vital to a satisfactory understanding of the plan of salvation.” (A Rational Theology [1937], p. 51)

The exact process of Adam’s creation is not succinctly stated in the scriptures. However, in 1909 the First Presidency declared: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaims man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity.” (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund, Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [1833-1951], 6 vols., Ed. James R. Clark [1965-1975], 4:206 (emphasis added)).

Moses 3:7. “the first flesh upon the earth”

The meaning of this is that Adam was the first mortal upon the earth. President Marion G. Romney (1897-1988) of the First Presidency said: “The Lord said that Adam was the first man (see Moses 1:34, Moses 3:7; D&C 84:16). The Lord also said that Adam was the first flesh (see Moses 3:7), which, as I understand it, means the first mortal on the earth” (“Records of Great Worth,” Ensign, Sept. 1980, p. 5). Likewise, President Joseph Fielding Smith declared: “The Pearl of Great Price does not say that man was the first living thing on the earth, but that he was the first flesh and the first man also. He became the first mortal flesh when he fell. By flesh is meant mortality, and Adam was the first mortal on the earth.” (Doctrines of Salvation, 3 Vols. Ed. by Bruce R. McConkie [1954-56], 1:77)

Moses 3:8-14. Garden, trees, and water

Donald W. Parry, Professor of Ancient Languages at Brigham Young University, suggests several similarities between ancient Israelite temples and the Garden of Eden:

(1) The tree of life was located both in the garden and in the temple.
Both the garden and the temple were associated with sacred waters.

Eastward orientations played a role in the garden story and in subsequent Israelite temples.

The cosmic mountain was symbolically affiliated with the garden and temple.

The account of the earth’s creation is closely connected with the Garden of Eden pericope and the temple.

Cherubim, or heavenly beings, function as guardians of the garden and the temple.

Revelation was an essential part of the garden and the temple.

Sacrifice existed in the garden and in subsequent temple systems.

Similar religious language existed in both the garden and the temple.

Sacred vestments were associated with Adam and Eve in the garden and with the priesthood in the Jerusalem temple.

Abundance was associated with the garden and the temple. (“Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism. Ed by Donald W. Parry, [1994], 126-147)

The phrase “help meet for him” translates the Hebrew word ezer kinigdo, which literally means, “as opposite him” or “as against him.” In this sense, ezer kinigdo means “his counterpart.” Adam was like one wing of an airplane. But without his ezer kinigdo, the other wing (which is opposite but equal to him), Adam could not “fulfill the measure of his creation.” The Lord then created a woman, Eve, to be “an help meet for him.”

That Eve was to be an equal partner to Adam, and not one whom he would have dominion over, is portrayed in the Mosaic account of Eve’s creation. Note the order in which the following events occur. First, we are told of Adam’s creation (Moses 3:7). Second, the garden of Eden was created with the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Moses 3:8-9). Then came to Adam the command “to dress it, and to keep” the garden and the prohibition from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Moses 3:16-17). Following this command the Lord God said “that it was not good that the man should be alone; wherefore, I will make an help meet for him” (Moses 3:18). Then the Lord brought all the animals that He had created before Adam “to see what he would call them.” “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field.” The account then states: “but as for Adam, there was not found an help meet for him” (Moses 3:19-20). His ezer kinigdo was not found among the animals which Adam had been previously given dominion over (see Moses 2:28).

The account then records the figurative creation of Eve from one Adam’s ribs (Moses 3:22), symbolizing that she was not only created from the same “dust of the earth” as Adam but that she belongs at Adam’s side as an equal partner in bringing forth children and devoting herself to the raising of a righteous posterity. Understanding this, Adam said, “This I know now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ... Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Moses 4:23-24).


“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states that “fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” Ensign, Nov. 1995, p. 102). This is best symbolized in the account of Eve’s creation. President Harold B. Lee (1899-1973) taught:

Marriage is a partnership. Someone has observed that in the Bible account of the creation woman was not formed from a part of man’s head, suggesting that she might rule over him, nor from a part of his foot that she was to be trampled under his feet. Woman was taken from man’s side as though to emphasize the fact that she was always to be by his side as a partner and companion. At the marriage altar you are pledged to each other from that day to pull the load together in double harness. (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee [2000], p. 109)

Moses 3:24. A man shall cleave unto his wife and and become one flesh

President Joseph Fielding Smith affirmed that Adam and Eve were married by Heavenly Father and that their marriage was destined to be eternal: “Marriage as established in the beginning was an eternal covenant. The first man and the first woman were not married until death should part them, for at that time death had not come into the world. The ceremony on that occasion was performed by the Eternal Father himself whose work endures forever. It is the will of the Lord that all marriages should be of like character, and in becoming ‘one flesh’ the man and the woman are to continue in the married status, according to the Lord’s plan, throughout all eternity as well as in this mortal life.” (Doctrines of Salvation, 3 Vols. Ed. by Bruce R. McConkie [1954-56], 2:71)

Abraham 4-5. Blueprint account of the creation

Of Abraham’s account of the creation, Elder Bruce R. McConkie noted:

Abraham gives a blueprint as it were of the Creation. He tells the plans of the holy beings who wrought the creative work. After reciting the events of the “six days” he says: “And thus were their decisions at the time that they counseled among themselves to form the heavens and the earth.” (Abr. 5:3.)

Then he says they performed as they had planned, which means we can, by merely changing the verb tenses and without doing violence to the sense and meaning, also consider the Abrahamic account as one of the actual creation. (“Christ and the Creation,” Ensign, June 1982, p. 11)

Abraham 4:1. “the Gods organized and formed the heavens and the earth”

Who was involved in the creation of the earth? Adam, who is Michael (D&C 27:11), is specifically identified with aiding in the creation. President Brigham Young (1801-1877) taught: “It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael” (Journal of Discourses, 26 Vols. [1855-1886],1:51). Of this statement, Elder Mark E. Petersen (1900-1984) made this interesting observation:

Journal of Discourses, 26 Vols. [1855-1886],1:51)
It is interesting that President Young would speak of Adam, as Michael, assisting in the creation of the earth. It was really most appropriate that Michael should help form the earth which he was to occupy as the first man, and which would become a home for his descendants. And since the Savior, as Jehovah, was to come to this same earth to bring about the atonement for the first sin to be committed here, it likewise was most appropriate that he also take part in this earth’s creation.

So both worked together in the creation, Jehovah and Michael, under the direction of the Eternal Father, Elohim. And both worked together in the over-all plan of salvation for mankind, Adam providing mortality without which we could not be tried and tested in the Lord’s plan, and Jesus providing the redemption, both from mortality and its ultimate end—death—and from sin, which likewise was part of our mortal experience. (Adam: Who Is He? [1976], p. 84)

It further appears from Abraham’s writings that the noble and great spirits assisted in the creation. Abraham saw one among “the noble and great ones” who “was like unto God”—that is, Jesus Christ—and he said to noble and great spirits, “We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth wherein these may dwell” (Abraham 3:22, 24). Thus Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “Truly Christ is the Creator of the future abode of the spirit children of the Father. But he does not work alone. The Creation is an organized venture; each of the other noble and great spirits plays his part” (“Christ and the Creation,” Ensign, June 1982, p. 11)

Abraham 4:10, 12, 18, 21. The Gods were obeyed

It is obvious in the creation accounts that God did not just snap his fingers and in a magical way the earth suddenly came into existence. Rather, the creation of the earth was achieved through a process that included the Gods giving laws and commands and progress did not happen until the laws and commands were obeyed.

Is this not how the Lord works with his children? Just as the earth was not instantly and magically brought into a state of paradisiacal glory, neither are his children brought into a state of godhood immediately. Rather, we like the earth, are going through a process where—in various existences (premortal, mortal, spirit world, millennium)—we will eventually become like God if we obey his line-upon-line commands.

Additional Notes and Teachings

What is the Length of a Day in the Creation Account?

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: “The physical Creation itself was staged through ordered periods of time. In Genesis and Moses, those periods are called days. But in the book of Abraham, each period is referred to as a time. Whether termed a day, a time, or an age, each phase was a period between two identifiable events—a division of eternity” (“The Creation,” Ensign, Nov. 2000, 84).

Likewise, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915-1985) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles added:

But first, what is a day? It is a specified time period; it is an age, an eon, a division of eternity; it is the time between two identifiable events. And each day, of whatever length, has the duration needed for its purposes. One measuring rod is the time required for a celestial body to turn once on its axis. For instance, Abraham says that according to “the Lord’s time” a day is “one thousand years” long. This is “one revolution ... of Kolob,” he says, and it is after the Lord’s “manner of reckoning.” (Abr. 3:4.)

There is no revealed recitation specifying that each of the “six days” involved in the Creation was of the same duration. (“Christ and the Creation,” Ensign, June 1982, 11)

Moses 2-3; Abraham 4-5. The six days of creation

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has given the following description of each day of creation. This description might be helpful in understanding what took place in each creative period.

The First Day—Elohim, Jehovah, Michael, a host of noble and great ones—all these played their parts. “The Gods” created the atmospheric heavens and the temporal earth. It was “without form, and void”; as yet it could serve no useful purpose with respect to the salvation of man. It was “empty and desolate”; life could not yet exist on its surface; it was not yet a fit abiding place for those sons of God who shouted for joy at the prospect of a mortal probation. The “waters” of the great “deep” were present, and “darkness reigned” until the divine decree: “Let there be light.” The light and the darkness were then “divided,” the one being called “Day” and the other “Night.” Clearly our planet was thus formed as a revolving orb and placed in its relationship to our sun. (See Moses 2:1–5; Abr. 4:1–5.)

The Second Day—On this day “the waters” were “divided” between the surface of the earth and the atmospheric heavens that surround it. A “firmament” or an “expanse” called “Heaven” was created to divide “the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.” Thus, as the creative events unfold, provision seems to be made for clouds and rain and storms to give life to that which will yet grow and dwell upon the earth. (See Moses 2:6–8; Abr. 4:6–8.)

The Third Day—This is the day when life began. In it “the waters under the heaven” were “gathered together unto one place,” and the “dry land” appeared. The dry land was called “Earth,” and the assembled waters became “the Sea.” This is the day in which “the Gods organized the earth to bring forth” grass and herbs and plants and trees; and it is the day in which vegetation in all its varied forms actually came forth from the seeds planted by the Creators. This is the day when the decree went forth that grass, herbs, and trees could each grow only from “its own seed,” and that each could in turn bring forth only after its own “kind.” And thus the bounds of the plant and vegetable kingdoms were set by the hands of those by whom each varied plant and tree was made. (See Moses 2:9–13; Abr. 4:9–13.)

The Fourth Day—After seeds in all their varieties had been planted on the earth; after these had sprouted and
grown; after each variety was prepared to bring forth fruit and seed after its own kind—the Creators organized all things in such a way as to make their earthly garden a productive and beautiful place. They then “organized the lights in the expanse of the heaven” so there would be “seasons” and a way of measuring “days” and “years.” We have no way of knowing what changes then took place in either the atmospheric or the sidereal heavens, but during this period the sun, moon, and stars assumed the relationship to the earth that now is theirs. At least the light of each of them began to shine through the lifting hazes that enshrouded the newly created earth so they could play their parts with reference to life in all its forms as it soon would be upon the new orb. (See Moses 2:14–19; Abr. 4:14–19.)

The Fifth Day—Next came fish and fowl and “every living creature” whose abode is “the waters.” Their Creators placed them on the newly organized earth, and they were given the command: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the sea; and let fowl multiply in the earth.” This command—as with a similar decree given to man and applicable to all animal life—they could not then keep, but they soon would be able to do so. Appended to this command to multiply was the heaven-sent restriction that the creatures in the waters could only bring forth “after their kind,” and that “every winged fowl” could only bring forth “after his kind.” There was no provision for evolution or change from one species to another. (See Moses 2:20–23; Abr. 4:20–23.)

The Sixth Day—The crowning day of creation is at hand. In its early hours, the great Creators “made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything which creepeth upon the earth after his kind.” And the same procreative restrictions applied to them that apply to all forms of life; they too are to reproduce only after their kind.

All that we have recited is now accomplished, but what of man? Is man found upon the earth? He is not. And so “the Gods,” having so counseled among themselves, said: “Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness. ... So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form them, male and female to form them.” They then did as they had counseled, and the most glorious of all the creative acts was accomplished. Man is the crowning creature to step forth according to the divine will. He is in the image and likeness of the Eternal Elohim, and to him is given “dominion” over all things. And, then, finally, that his purposes shall roll everlastingly onward. God blesses the “male and female” whom he has created and commands them: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” As the “sixth day” closes, the Creators, viewing their creative labors with satisfaction, see that “all things” which they have “made are "very good.” (See Moses 2:24–31; Abr. 4:24–31.)

Such is the revealed account of the creation of all things. Our summary has combined elements from the Mosaic, the Abrahamic, and the temple accounts. At this point in the Mosaic record the scripture says: “Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” The Lord then rests on the “seventh day.” (See Moses 3:1–3.) (“Christ and the Creation,” Ensign, June 1982, 11-13)