The Pre-existent First Estate


In that great body of intelligences [quoting from Abraham 3:19-26] there were those whom the Lord has described as “noble and great ones”; obviously others were not noble and great...

Then the scripture tells us that there were two who stood up. Each one wanted to create this new world that they had talked about. This is the Grand Council that we talk about, where all of us presumably were. Some were “noble and great ones,” and some of us were not. We were not equal in that Grand Council, have no mistake about that...

We understand that we kept our first estate, we who belong to this Church, that we have received the Gospel, and if we live as we should, we will be "added upon." "... and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate..." (Abr 3:26.)

The Lord has told us that we have three kingdoms, celestial, terrestrial, and telestial; he has told us who will be, in great broad classifications, in each of these kingdoms, possess each of these glories...

I am not undertaking to declare doctrine or Gospel, but as I read that, and as I understand it, it means that after we, so to speak, have been taken out, those who have kept their first estates, and we are not the only ones, there remains the great over-plus. They do not have the same heritage, the same kingdom, the same glory, that we shall have, and they have and can fall into the terrestrial, the telestial, and then the Doctrine and Covenants tells us there is a kingdom without any glory. (D&C 88:24.)

... We had our agency over there, and the Lord has so told us that and it was because of the exercise of that agency that a third of the hosts of heaven rebelled. They did not keep their first estate and apparently the punishment to be inflicted upon them for their rebellion was that they should not have bodies....

Then the Lord goes on and tells us about the two beings who came and offered to build this earth and implement its creation. Satan, we learn from the other scriptures, declared that he would save everybody, apparently either take away their free agency or else cause that nothing they did would be a crime. The other one said he would do the will of the Father...

Now, this matter of body which, I take it, will come to those who keep their first estate; and those who do not keep their first estate, but who do not belong to the rebellious group, they all get bodies too. We have our bodies. We are not all born in the same circumstances, with the same advantages, and all the rest of it. But evidently the possession of a body was a great consideration, and I refer you, in that connection, to the incident of the Gadarene demons.

... I can imagine that those who did not keep their first estate but who still may come to earth and get a body, are anxious to come and get a body no matter what the conditions are ...

Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, Answers to Gospel Questions 2:186.

In the Book of Moses, Chapter 4, and in the Book of Abraham, Chapter 3, we are taught that there was a council held in heaven and our Eternal Father presented a plan by which we could come down on the earth and receive tabernacles (bodies) of flesh and bones for our spirits which are begotten sons and daughters unto God. We learn also that one third of those spirits rebelled against the plan and followed Satan. For this they were denied bodies of flesh and bones and have to remain spirits.... Well, there were other spirits there who were not faithful in keeping of this first estate (Abr 3:23-28). Yet they have not sinned away their right to receive bodies and come to earth and receive the resurrection. They were restricted in the privileges that were given to those who keep their first estate and who were promised to have “glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (Abr 3:26).


The implication here [Abr 3:22-26] is very clear that all were capable of keeping their first estate, but that there would be many who would not do so. Therefore they were to receive rewards according to merit. The promise of reward therefore was open to all based on their faithfulness and obedience.


We have been placed upon this earth because of our faithfulness in having kept our first estate. The labors that we performed in the sphere that we left before we came here have had a certain effect upon our lives here, and to a certain extent they govern and control the lives that we lead here, just the same as the labors that we do here will control and govern our lives when we pass from this stage of existence. It has been revealed to us, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, that whatever degree of intelligence we shall attain to in this life, the same will rise with us in the life to come. It is because of this knowledge that we will have an advantage over those that are negligent, in the life to come. It is now explained to my mind how some come into this world without any particular degree of energy or desire to labor for their fellows and for the spread of righteousness; it is because of their failure to have kept their first estate with diligence and with fidelity.

Elray L. Christiansen, BYU Speeches, March 24, 1964, 5. [Bracketed text in original.]

And they who keep their first estate [in the pre-existence; and we did] shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; [This might give us some answer to the differences that we see among human beings.] and they who keep their second estate [in which we now find ourselves] shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. (Abraham 3:22–26.)


43. It is not likely that the final decision of the contending armies took place immediately. Many, no doubt, were unsettled in their views, unstable in their minds, and undecided as to which force to join; there may have been, for aught we know, many deserters from both armies: and there may have been a long period before the division line was so strictly drawn as to become unalterable. Laws, without doubt, were enacted, and penalties affixed, according to the nature of the offences or crimes; those who altogether turned from the Lord, and were determined to maintain the cause of Satan, and who proceeded to the utmost extremities of wickedness, placed themselves without the reach of redemption; therefore, such were prohibited from entering into a second probationary state, and had no privilege of receiving bodies of flesh and bones.

44. Among the two-thirds who remained, it is highly probable, that there were many who were not valiant in the war, but whose
sins were of such a nature that they could be forgiven through faith in the future sufferings of the Only Begotten of the Father, and through their sincere repentance and reformation. We see no impropriety in Jesus offering Himself as an acceptable offering and sacrifice before the Father to atone for the sins of His brethren, committed, not only in the second, but also in the first estate. Certain it was, that the work which Jesus was to accomplish, was known in the Grand Council where the rebellion broke out; it was known that man would sin in his second estate; for it was upon the subject of his redemption that the assembly became divided, and which resulted in war....

46. If all the two-thirds who kept their first estate were equally valiant in the war, and equally faithful, why should some of them be called and chosen in the spiritual state to hold responsible stations and offices in this world, while others were not? If there were none of those spirits who sinned, why were the Apostles, when they existed in their previous state, chosen to be blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”? All these passages seem to convey an idea, that there were callings, choosings, ordinances, promises, predestinations, elections, and appointments, made before the world began.


I will now leave these ideas, and turn my attention on to the remarks made by brother Lorenzo Snow in the forenoon. The principles and doctrine couched in those remarks are of great interest to the human family. I will take the liberty to treat upon the same principles, but shall carry the ideas still further, though in my own language and style of delivery. I will use a few words of Scripture concerning the evil that now exists and has existed upon the earth, referring to certain characters who have always been upon the earth and are still upon it, who are actually, to a great extent, “lording over God’s heritage.” I would plant my remarks here; and then for the context, I will use another saying—“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” I have but little time to expound and explain minutely, but will start at the beginning. God has created man in his own image, upright. Man in his creation is but a very little lower than the angels. In what degree and capacity is he lower than the angels? Angels are those beings who have been on an earth like this, and have passed through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. They have kept their first estate far enough to preserve themselves in the Priesthood. They did not so violate the law of the Priesthood and condemn themselves to the sin against the Holy Ghost as to be finally lost. They are not crowned with the celestial ones. They are persons who have lived upon an earth, but did not magnify the Priesthood in that high degree that many others have done who have become Gods, even the sons of God. Human beings that pertain to this world, who do not magnify or are not capable of magnifying their high calling in the Priesthood and receive crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives, will also, when they again receive their bodies, become angels and will receive a glory. They are single, without families or kingdoms to reign over. All the difference between men and angels is, men are passing through the day of trial that angels have already passed through. They belong to the same family that we do; but they have proven themselves worthy only of an exaltation to the state of angels, whereas we have the privilege of obtaining not only the same exaltation they enjoy, but of going further until we become Gods, even the sons of God.


I have called attention to these passages to prove that there were some spirits who dwelt with God, so wicked and rebellious that they had to be cast out of heaven, and became the devil and his angels; as well as some who had developed such nobility of character, that God had set them apart or ordained them to be his rulers. Between these two extremes of good and bad, obedient and rebellious were, I doubt not, all degrees of faithfulness and nobility of conduct; and I hazard the opinion that the amount and kind of development in that pre-existent state influences the character in this life, and brings within reach of men privileges and blessings commensurate with their faithfulness in the spirit world. Yet, I would not be understood as holding the opinion that those born to wealth and ease, whose lives appear to be an unbroken round of pleasure and happiness, must therefore have been spirits in their first estate that were very highly developed in refinement, and very valiant for God and his Christ.

Bruce R. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, 33.

From these [John 10:14,27; Rom 8:17,29; 9:11; Eph 1:4] and a host of other passages, it is clear that people do not all have the same talent for recognizing truth and believing the doctrines of salvation. Some heed the warning voice and believe the gospel; others do not. (Page 34.) No two persons are born with the same talents and capacities; no two are rooted in the same soil of circumstances; each is unique. The cares of this world, gold and honor and power and renown, the lusts of the flesh, the chains of past sins, and a thousand other things—all exert their influence upon us. But in the final sense the answer stems back to premortality.... And the talent of greatest worth was that of spirituality, or it enables us to hearken to the Holy Spirit and accept that gospel which prepares us for eternal life.

Men are not born equal. They enter this life with the talents and capacities developed in preexistence.... And as it is with the prophets, so is it with all the chosen seed. “God’s elect,” as Paul calls them (Rom 8:33), are especially endowed at birth with spiritual talents. It is easier for them to believe the gospel than it is for the generality of mankind. (Page 39.) Do all of Abraham’s seed believe the truth and pursue the course he charted? Not by any means. (Page 40.) Speaking of Israel—“my kinsmen according to the flesh,” he calls them—Paul says: “They are not all Israel, which are Israel. Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are of the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” (Rom 9:3,6-8.) [Meaning the obedient are really sons of Abraham, and the disobedient, even if they are in the blood-line, are not counted as sons of Abraham.]

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 357.

The contention in heaven was—Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and the devil said he could save them all, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads for him.

Intelligence

Marion G. Romney, Ensign, Nov. 1978, 14.

Through that birth process, self-existing intelligence was organized into individual spirit beings.

Bruce R. McConkie, Promised Messiah, 46.

... as a conscious identity, he [Jesus Christ - Jehovah] had a beginning. He was born, as were all the spirit children of the Father.... For him [Christ], as for all men -- and he is the Prototype --
the eternal spirit element that has neither beginning nor end, and is self-existent, by nature, was organized into a spirit body.


Intelligence, or light and truth, is also used as a synonym for spirit element. Scriptures using both terms speak of the self-existent nature of the substance involved. (D&C 93:29; 131:7-8.) Abraham calls the pre-existent spirits “the intelligences that were organized before the world was” (Abr 3:22) because the intelligences were organized intelligence or in other words the spirit bodies were born from spirit element.


“There is no such thing as immaterial matter,” the Prophet tells us. “All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.” (D&C 131:7-8.) This spirit element has always existed; it is co-eternal (co-eval) with God. (Teachings, 352–354.) It is also called intelligence or the light of truth, which “was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” (D&C 93:29.)

Speaking of pre-existent spirits, Abraham calls them “the intelligences that were organized before the world was.” (Abr 3:22-24.) Thus, portions of the self-existent spirit element are born as spirit children, or in other words the intelligence which cannot be created or made, because it is self-existent, is organized into intelligences.


Pre-existence is the term commonly used to describe the pre-mortal existence of the spirit children of God the Father. Speaking of this prior existence in a spirit sphere, the First Presidency of the Church (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund) said: “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity”; as spirits they were the “offspring of celestial parentage.” (Man: His Origin and Destiny, 351, 355.) These spirit beings, the offspring of exalted parents, were men and women, appearing in all respects as mortal persons do, excepting only that their spirit bodies were made of a more pure and refined substance than the elements from which mortal bodies are made. (Ether 3:16; D&C 131:7-8.)

To understand the doctrine of pre-existence two great truths must be accepted: 1. That God is a personal Being in whose image man is created, an exalted, perfected, and glorified Man of Holiness (Moses 6:57), and not a spirit essence that fills the immensity of space; and 2. That matter or element is self-existent and eternal in nature, creation being merely the organization and reorganization of that substance which “was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” (D&C 93:29.) Unless God the Father was a personal Being, he could not have begotten spirits in his image, and if there had been no self-existent spirit element, there would have been no substance from which those spirit bodies could have been organized.

From the time of their spirit birth, the Father’s pre-existent offspring were endowed with agency and subjected to the provisions of the laws ordained for their government. They had power to obey or disobey and to progress in one field or another. “The first principles of man are self-existent with God,” the Prophet said. “God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself.” (Teachings, 354.)

The pre-existent life was thus a period—undoubtedly an infinitely long one—of probation, progression and schooling. The spirit hosts were taught and given experiences in various administrative capacities. Some so exercised their agency and so conformed to law as to become “noble and great”; these were foreordained before their mortal births to perform great missions for the Lord in this life. (Abr 3:22-28.) Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father. (D&C 93:21-23.)

Mortal progression and testing is a continuation of what began in pre-existence. (Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed., 589–590.)


Why he [God] cannot create intelligence is simply because intelligence, like time and space, always existed, and therefore did not have to be created. However, intelligences spoken of in the Book of Abraham were created, for these are spirit children of God, begotten sons.

Spencer W. Kimball, Miracle of Forgiveness, 5.

Our spirit matter was eternal and coexistent with God, but it was organized into spirit bodies by our Heavenly Father.


… the substance of our spirits, like the substance of our bodies, had a pre-existence; that both are eternal, and that not one particle of either ever sprang from nothing; that creation signifies organization of pre-existent materials, and not the production of those materials from nothing …


The world which we inhabit is a fallen creation, a fallen world, shut out from the presence of our Father, the being whom we worship, so that we cannot behold his face, nor the glory of his presence. It is for a wise purpose, that we are placed here, in this fallen condition. It seems to be so, as far as we have been made acquainted with the purpose of the great Jehovah. It seems to be the ordeal through which all intelligent beings must pass in order to gain that fulness of exaltation, in the presence of God, which is promised in his word.

We were not always in the condition we are now in. We are only placed here for a few years, and are adapted to our present condition. A long time before you and I came here upon this stage of action, we had an intelligent existence; we dwelt in a better world than this, and a world that had been sanctified and glorified; in other words, a world that had been redeemed, a world that had been made celestial, just as we are in hopes that our present world will, at some future period, be exalted to the celestial glory, and become the habitation of celestial beings. That world we occupied, before we came here, was celestial; our Father had his dwelling place there, or, at least, one of his dwelling places; and we were surrounded by our Father’s glory, we were familiar with his countenance, familiar with the beautiful mansions that were there—familiar with all the glory that existed there, so far as we were capable of comprehending.

There was no veil drawn between us and our Father, no veil drawn between us and the associates of our Father, who were also celestial beings, many of them having been redeemed from a world more ancient than ours. We had a long experience, I suppose, in that world; at least, we know from that which our Father has revealed to us, that we were born there; that this intelligent being that has power to discern, power to reflect, power to reason—that this intelligent being was born in that previous estate …

All men in the beginning were created after the image of this
body which he was then showing [to the brother of Jared]. All the human family that then existed, and that would exist in future time upon the earth were created in the beginning, after the image of that body, that is, that body which he showed was not a body of flesh and bones, but a pure spiritual body, organized out of pure spiritual substance, filled with light and truth.

There is one thing connected with the temporal form of the earth which I did not mention; I will refer to it now. While this earth existed in its more perfect temporal form, Adam and Eve were placed upon it, and they were immortal, just like all the beasts and just like the fishes of the sea; death had not yet come upon any of them; all things were immortal so far as this creation was concerned. The first pairs, the beginning of this temporal work, were not subject to death. And another thing, they were not to be shut out from the presence of the Almighty….

James E. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 466.

God showed unto Abraham “the intelligences that were organized before the world was”; and by “intelligences we are to understand personal “spirits” (Abr 3:22, 23); nevertheless, we are expressly told that “Intelligence” that is, “the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (D&C 93:29).


John Taylor, Mediation & Atonement, Ch. 11, 95.

But having free agency, they used it; and Lucifer and a third part of the angels were cast out because they rebelled and used this agency in opposition to their Heavenly Father.


RINGS AND CLIQUES IN CHURCH GOVERNMENT.—But there are those in our midst, who, although they have a name and a standing in the church, disregard the authority of the priesthood, both local and general. I hear sometimes of parties, and of cliques, and of rings in our midst. What! a party in the church and kingdom of God? What! rings associated with the principles of eternal truth—associated with the celestial law that emanates from our Heavenly Father! The devil got up a ring and was cast out of heaven for getting it up, as also a third part of the spirits who associated themselves with him. They were cast out because they devised principles that were in opposition to the word and will and law of God, and every man who follows in their footsteps, unless he speedily repents, will be placed in the same position—will also be cast out. The law of God must be put in force against the transgressor. No man who professes to be a Latter-day Saint can transgress with impunity. The priesthood of God cannot be disregarded with impunity….


From the scriptural records available to us, from the sermons of the Prophet, and from a knowledge of the revealed requisites for becoming a son of perdition, we know that Cain was a liar and a rebel in pre-existence; that, like Lucifer, he had power and influence there; that in this life he was taught the gospel, received the priesthood, and knew of the divinity of the Lord’s work; that he then came out in open rebellion against God; that he in fact loved Satan more than God, choosing to worship and serve that evil one rather than the Lord; and that he offered false sacrifices at Satan’s behest and slew Abel because the devil directed him so to do. (Gen. 4; Moses 5:16-55.)


A comparable case is Cain. That son of Adam, though a friend of Lucifer in pre-existence, did manage to gain mortal birth. He could have hearkened to his Father Adam and walked in the strait and narrow path. But instead he chose to follow a course which he had already charted, in a very real sense, in his first estate, an estate where he had been known as Perdition. Coming from this background, Cain elected to use his agency to fight the truth in this life, and in his case he became a son of perdition. (Moses 5:16-59.)

Joseph Smith, Words of Joseph Smith, 200–201. [Bold added.]

No person can have this Salvation except through a tabernacle [physical body]. Now in this world mankind are naturally selfish, ambitious & striving to excel one above another. Yet some are willing to build up others as well as themselves. So in the other world there is a variety of spirits, some who seek to excel, & this was the case with the devil when he fell. He sought for things which were unlawful. Hence, he was cast down & it is said he drew away many with him & the greatness of his punishment is that he shall not have a tabernacle. This is his punishment.

Discourses of Brigham Young, 68.

He came here, and one-third part of the spirits in heaven came with him. Do you suppose that one-third part of all 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 fleshy bodies to dwell upon this earth. They forsook Jesus Christ, the rightful heir, and joined with Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, and came to this earth; they got here first. As soon as Mother Eve made her appearance in the garden of Eden, the Devil was on hand. (JD 3:368-369.)

Discourses of Brigham Young, 54–55.

But let me tell you that it was one-third part of the spirits who were prepared to take tabernacles upon this earth, and who rebelled against the other two-thirds of the heavenly host; and they were cast down to this world. It is written that they were cast down to the earth. They were cast down to this globe – to this terra firma that you and I walk upon, and whose atmosphere we breathe. One-third part of the spirits that were prepared for this earth rebelled against Jesus Christ, and were cast down to the earth, and they have been opposed to him from that day to this, with Lucifer at their head. He is their general — Lucifer, the Son of the Morning. He was once a brilliant and influential character in heaven, and we will know more about him hereafter. (JD 5:54-55.)

Discourses of Brigham Young, 379.

If we are faithful to our religion, when we go into the spirit world, the fallen spirits -- Lucifer and the third part of the heavenly hosts that came with him, and the spirits of wicked men who have dwelt upon this earth, the whole of them combined will have no influence over our spirits. Is not that an advantage? Yes. All the rest of the children of men are more or less subject to them, and they are subject to them as they were while here in the flesh. (JD 7:240.)

Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, 241.

The devil did not make this earth. It never belonged to him, and never will; but Lucifer was cast down to the earth with the third part of the hosts of heaven, and they have dwelt here until today. They remain here yet; and they have had their effect upon the hearts and minds of the children of men for nearly six thousand years—from the time that man was cast out of the Garden of Eden into the cold and dreary world. (JD 11:243, October 22, 1865.)