

ABRAHAM

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: The Book of Abraham | VOLUME: Pearl of Great Price | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

The Book of Abraham, published by Joseph Smith in 1842 and later canonized in the Pearl of Great Price (1851), presents a first-person narrative of the patriarch Abraham. It expands significantly on the Genesis account, describing Abraham's deliverance from idolatrous Chaldean priests who attempted to sacrifice him. The text serves as a primary theological vehicle for distinct Latter-day Saint doctrines, specifically the concept of the 'pre-existence' of human souls (intelligences), the organization of the cosmos around a central star named Kolob, and a creation narrative performed by 'the Gods' rather than a singular deity. It establishes a theological link between priesthood authority and lineage, explicitly denying priesthood to the lineage of Pharaoh (and by extension, Ham). The text shifts the theological framework from traditional monotheism to a form of henotheism or polytheism, where a council of divine beings organizes eternal matter into worlds to 'prove' the obedience of pre-mortal spirits.

KEY FIGURES

Abraham, Jehovah, The Gods, Pharaoh, Adam, Ham, Egyptus, Kolob

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PLURALITY OF GODS

Assertion: The creation was not the act of a singular God, but a council of 'Gods' who 'organized' the earth.

"And they went down at the beginning, and they organized and formed (that is, the Gods) the heavens and the earth."

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelical Christianity adheres to Trinitarian monotheism—one God in three persons (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 44:6)—the Book of Abraham explicitly introduces a plurality of divine beings ('the Gods') acting in concert. This moves beyond the 'Let us make man' of Genesis (interpreted by Christians as intra-Trinitarian communication) to a system of distinct deities organizing matter. This establishes a henotheistic or polytheistic cosmology fundamental to Mormon theology but heretical to the Evangelical baseline.

2. PRE-MORTAL EXISTENCE OF SPIRITS

Assertion: Human souls exist as eternal 'intelligences' before birth and are chosen for specific roles based on pre-mortal merit.

"Now the Lord had shewn unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was... thou wast chosen before thou wast born."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology teaches that God creates the human soul at conception (Psalm 139:13-16, Zechariah 12:1). The Book of Abraham teaches that humans are co-eternal with God in some form ('intelligences') and lived as spirits before physical birth. This alters the Creator-creature distinction, suggesting that the core of man is uncreated and that earthly station is determined by pre-mortal performance ('noble and great ones').

3. PRIESTHOOD LINEAGE AND RESTRICTION

Assertion: Priesthood authority is hereditary and was historically denied to the lineage of Ham/Pharaoh.

"Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood... thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land."

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts a 'patriarchal' order where priesthood is a birthright transmitted through specific fathers (Adam to Abraham). It explicitly excludes the lineage of Ham/Pharaoh from this right. In contrast, Evangelicalism teaches the Priesthood of All Believers (1 Peter 2:9) and that in Christ there is no distinction of race or lineage (Galatians 3:28). The text ties spiritual authority to bloodline rather than faith in Christ.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap is foundational. The Book of Abraham introduces a worldview where God is one of many 'Gods,' matter is eternal (denying creation ex nihilo), and humans are uncreated intelligences on a path to divine glory. This violates the Creator-creature distinction central to Evangelical theology. Furthermore, the redefinition of the Abrahamic Covenant to focus on Priesthood lineage rather than the coming Messiah (Galatians 3:16) fundamentally alters the trajectory of redemptive history.

Shared Values:

Opposition to idolatry; Importance of obeying God; Creation narrative structure (days/periods); Abraham as a father of the faithful

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Monotheism) – Teaches a plurality of Gods involved in creation.
- 2. [Critical] Anthropology (Nature of Man) – Teaches man is co-eternal with God (uncreated intelligence).
- 3. [Major] Universal Priesthood / Sola Gratia – Restricts spiritual authority based on lineage and works ('proving' oneself).

Semantic Warnings:

<p>"God"</p> <p>In Text: One of many divine rulers; often referred to in the plural 'Gods' who organize matter.</p> <p>Evangelical: The sole, uncreated, eternal Creator of all things (Isaiah 43:10).</p> <p>Example: <i>In Abraham 4:1, 'the Gods' organized the earth; in Genesis 1:1, 'God' created the heavens and earth.</i></p>
<p>"Creation"</p> <p>In Text: Organization of pre-existing eternal matter and intelligences.</p> <p>Evangelical: Bringing the universe into existence out of nothing (ex nihilo) by the power of the Word.</p> <p>Example: <i>Abraham 3:24 speaks of taking 'these materials' to make an earth.</i></p>
<p>"Soul"</p> <p>In Text: The combination of the eternal spirit (intelligence) and the body; the spirit existed before creation.</p> <p>Evangelical: The immaterial aspect of man created by God, usually synonymous with spirit, originating at conception/birth.</p> <p>Example: <i>Abraham 3:22 refers to 'intelligences' as souls organized before the world was.</i></p>

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Progression: Keeping the first estate (pre-mortal) and second estate (mortal) to have glory 'added upon' heads forever.

How Attained: Through obedience to commands ('we will prove them') and Priesthood ordinances.

Basis of Assurance: Performance in 'proving' oneself obedient to all commands.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly frames mortal life as a test of works ('see if they will do all things... command them'), contrasting with the biblical assurance of salvation by faith apart from works (Romans 3:28).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Seek the 'blessings of the fathers' (Priesthood lineage)
- 2. Declare the astronomical and spiritual truths revealed (Abraham 3:15)
- 3. Prove oneself by doing 'all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command'

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Accept the cosmological hierarchy (Kolob) as spiritual truth

2. Strive for 'glory added upon' through obedience
3. Recognize the hierarchical nature of intelligences

Ritual Requirements:

1. Priesthood ordination (implied as necessary for administration)
2. Temple ordinances (alluded to in Facsimile 2, Fig. 8: 'to be had in the Holy Temple of God')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In the creation account here, it mentions 'the Gods' organizing the earth. How do you reconcile that with passages like Isaiah 44:24 where the Lord says He stretched out the heavens 'alone'?
2. The text says we are here to be 'proved' to see if we will do all things commanded. How does that impact your sense of peace regarding your standing with God?
3. If our spirits are co-eternal with God ('intelligences'), in what sense is He truly our Creator rather than just our Organizer?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for a Better Country/City – Abraham's search for a 'city with foundations' (Hebrews 11:10) represents the human longing for God's Kingdom, which is found not in geography but in Christ. [Hebrews 11:10, Hebrews 11:16]
2. Deliverance from the Altar – Just as God intervened to save Abraham from death, Christ intervened to save us from the penalty of sin. However, Christ became the sacrifice so we could go free. [Romans 5:8, Genesis 22:13-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Probation [Severe] – The text frames life as a test ('we will prove them'). This creates a burden of constant performance, where eternal glory is contingent on flawless obedience rather than Christ's finished righteousness.
2. Cosmic Hierarchy/Comparison [Moderate] – The doctrine of 'noble and great ones' and varying degrees of intelligence creates a spiritual caste system, leading to potential pride for some and despair for others who feel less 'noble' or 'chosen.'

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct visual revelation (Urim and Thummim), angelic visitation, and physical possession of ancient records.

Verification Method: Reliance on the prophetic authority of the translator (Joseph Smith) and the internal promise of knowledge given to the faithful.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical revelation of Christ recorded in the finished canon (Hebrews 1:1-2), verified by the Spirit's witness to the Word, not secret ancient records or new cosmologies.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published 1842; claimed ancient origin c. 2000 BC.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Translator) / Claimed Abraham.

Textual Issues: The source papyri were rediscovered in 1967. Egyptologists confirm they are the 'Book of Breathings' (a funerary text) and do not mention Abraham. The 'Facsimiles' are standard Egyptian vignettes (e.g., Anubis embalming Osiris) misidentified by Smith as Abrahamic scenes.