

ABRAHAM 1-5

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

OVERVIEW

The Book of Abraham, canonized within the Pearl of Great Price, presents a first-person narrative attributed to the biblical patriarch. It begins with Abraham seeking the blessings of the 'fathers' (priesthood lineage) in Chaldea, where he narrowly escapes ritual sacrifice at the hands of a priest of Elkenah. Jehovah intervenes, destroying the altar and leading Abraham toward Canaan and Egypt. The narrative transitions into a complex cosmological vision received via the Urim and Thummim, where Abraham learns of the governing star 'Kolob' nearest to God's throne. The text introduces the doctrine of eternal 'intelligences'—uncreated spirits existing before the world was formed. It culminates in a retelling of the Genesis creation narrative, significantly altered to depict 'the Gods' (plural) organizing existing matter rather than a singular God creating ex nihilo. The text establishes the theological foundation for the Latter-day Saint concepts of pre-mortal existence, the plurality of gods, and the probationary nature of mortal life.

KEY FIGURES

Abraham, Jehovah, The Gods, Pharaoh, Priest of Elkenah, Adam, One like unto the Son of Man

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PLURALITY OF GODS

Assertion: The creation of the world was conducted by a council of 'Gods' rather than a singular deity.

"And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light. (Abraham 4:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelical Christianity adheres to Trinitarian Monotheism—one God in three persons, creating ex nihilo—the Book of Abraham explicitly introduces a plurality of divine beings ('the Gods') who 'organize' the earth. This moves the theology from monotheism toward henotheism or polytheism, suggesting a council of deities rather than a singular, sovereign Creator (Isaiah 44:6, Deuteronomy 6:4).

2. PRE-MORTAL EXISTENCE OF SPIRITS

Assertion: Human spirits (intelligences) are eternal, uncreated, and existed before the physical world.

"they are gnolaum, or eternal... I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen. (Abraham 3:18, 21)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds that human souls are created by God (Zechariah 12:1), marking a distinct Creator/creature distinction. The Book of Abraham asserts that human intelligences are co-eternal with God ('gnolaum'), having no beginning. This elevates the nature of man to a status of uncreated existence, fundamentally altering the relationship between God and humanity from Maker/Made to Leader/Follower.

3. CREATION AS ORGANIZATION

Assertion: The earth was formed from pre-existing materials, not created out of nothing.

"we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell (Abraham 3:24)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible presents God calling the universe into existence by His word where nothing previously existed (Hebrews 11:3). The Book of Abraham depicts the Gods taking existing 'materials' to build the earth. This implies that matter is eternal and co-existent with God, limiting God's sovereignty as the sole source of all reality.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The Book of Abraham introduces a cosmology that is radically different from the biblical worldview. By establishing that 'intelligences' are co-eternal with God, it removes God's status as the absolute Creator of all things. By depicting 'the Gods' organizing matter, it denies God's omnipotence in creating ex nihilo. Furthermore, the text establishes a meritocratic system of salvation where spirits are 'proved' to see

if they will obey, contrasting sharply with the biblical doctrine of human depravity and the necessity of monergistic grace. The God of Abraham 3-5 is a ruler among equals (other intelligences), whereas the God of the Bible is the Wholly Other, I AM.

Shared Values:

Belief in a personal God (Jehovah); Importance of obedience; Rejection of idolatry; Narrative of Abraham's call and migration

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Monotheism) – Teaches a plurality of Gods involved in creation.
2. [Critical] Anthropology (Nature of Man) – Teaches humans are uncreated, eternal intelligences, denying the Creator/creature distinction.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Claims to correct and expand Genesis with new, contradictory information based on a 'lost' record.

Semantic Warnings:

"God"

In Text: An exalted being (one of many) who organizes matter; often referred to in the plural 'Gods'.

Evangelical: The sole, uncreated, eternal Spirit who created all things ex nihilo (Isaiah 43:10).

Example: *Abraham 4:1 'The Gods organized and formed the heavens.'*

"Soul/Spirit"

In Text: An uncreated, eternal intelligence ('gnolaum') that existed before the world.

Evangelical: A created aspect of humanity, formed by God (Genesis 2:7).

Example: *Abraham 3:18 'They are gnolaum, or eternal.'*

"Creation"

In Text: Organization of pre-existing eternal matter.

Evangelical: Bringing the universe into existence from nothing.

Example: *Abraham 3:24 'We will take of these materials.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Progression through estates: keeping the first estate (pre-mortal), keeping the second estate (mortal), and having glory added forever (exaltation).

How Attained: Through obedience to commands and passing the 'test' of the second estate.

Basis of Assurance: Performance and obedience ('we will prove them herewith').

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly frames life as a test of obedience ('to see if they will do all things... command them'), which is the antithesis of Sola Fide, where righteousness is a gift received, not a status earned through testing.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Get thee out of thy country (Abraham 2:3)
2. Declare all these words (Abraham 3:15)
3. Say unto them, I pray thee, thou art my sister (Abraham 2:25)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Seek for the 'blessings of the fathers' (Priesthood lineage)
2. Keep the 'first estate' (pre-mortal obedience) and 'second estate' (mortal obedience)
3. Desire great knowledge and to be a 'greater follower of righteousness'

Ritual Requirements:

1. Priesthood ordination (implied by Abraham's seeking of the 'right')
2. Sacrifice/Altar building (Abraham 2:17)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Abraham 4, it speaks of '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 obey. How does that make you feel about your standing with God when you have a bad day or fail?
3. If our spirits are eternal and uncreated like God (Abraham 3:18), what makes God 'God' other than just being more advanced than us?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Deliverance from the Altar – Just as Abraham was bound and helpless, facing death, and was delivered solely by the intervention of Jehovah, so we are bound by sin and death, unable to save ourselves, and are rescued only by Christ. [Romans 5:6 'For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.']}
2. Desire for a Better Country – Abraham's search for a true home and rest reflects the human longing for the Kingdom of God, which is found not in a geographic location but in Christ. [Hebrews 11:10, 16 'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Probationary Anxiety [Severe] – The teaching that life is a test ('we will prove them') creates a constant, low-level anxiety that one's eternal destiny hangs on their daily performance and obedience, rather than on the finished work of Christ.
2. Ontological Pressure [Moderate] – Believing one is an eternal intelligence destined for godhood places an infinite burden of potential on the believer. Failure isn't just sin; it's a failure to achieve one's cosmic potential.
3. Cognitive Dissonance [Severe] – Adherents must maintain belief in the text despite the visual evidence of the Facsimiles and Papyri being standard Egyptian funerary documents, creating an intellectual burden to suppress critical thinking.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation via Urim and Thummim, face-to-face conversation with Jehovah, and ancient records.

Verification Method: Personal spiritual confirmation of the prophet's translation and the text's claims.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical revelation of Christ recorded in the closed canon of Scripture (Jude 1:3). The Book of Abraham relies on a subjective, esoteric translation process of an artifact that modern Egyptology does not support as being about Abraham.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published in 1842; Papyri date to approx. 200 BC - 100 AD.

Authorship: Attributed to Abraham; Translated by Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The source papyri (rediscovered in 1967) are the 'Book of Breathings' (an Egyptian funerary text for a priest named Hor). They do not mention Abraham or the religion of the Hebrews. The translation does not match the characters.