

Gospel Principles **Scriptural Study Guide**

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*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).
I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things; yea,
in the beginning I created the heaven, and the earth upon which thou standest (Book of Moses 2:1).
And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens
and the earth (Book of Abraham 4:1).*

What the Bible Says about Creation

- *According to the Bible, how many Gods created the world?*
- *What are the basic differences between the Creator and creation?*

The first sentence of the Bible is one of its most famous: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). God alone brought absolutely everything into existence—apart from himself, of course. He is the Creator, and all things in this world are creatures, including human beings.

“An important consequence of this difference between the Creator and his creation is that while we need God, God does not need us or anything else.”

As the Creator, God has no beginning to his existence; he simply is. “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2). The universe and everything in it, on the other hand, came into existence. “All things came into being through him” (John 1:3 NASB). God is by nature eternal; we are not. Everything other than God—from the lowliest earthly things to the most powerful heavenly beings—exists because God created it (see Colossians 1:16).

An important consequence of this difference between the Creator and his creation is that while we need God, God does not need us or anything else. Since God’s existence is eternal and uncreated, he does not depend on anything outside of himself. We, on the other hand, exist only because he made us, and we are therefore absolutely dependent on God for everything. “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24-25). While God cares for his creatures and even loves us, he is not dependent on us for anything, while we are utterly dependent on him for everything, including our very existence.

The most fundamental religious error is the confusion of this Creator-creature distinction, a confusion seen most obviously in those who worship idols: “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Romans 1:25). The Creator alone is worthy of our worship: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11). That is what true worship means—the humble acknowledgment that we are entirely dependent on God for our very existence and for everything we have. No creature, no matter how glorious, is deserving of such worship, but only God (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9).

This one Creator God exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see, for

example, Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2). Each of these three persons was actively involved in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:1-3; Psalm 104:30; John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:10). Yet this is not three Gods creating the world, but only one God, whom the Old Testament calls the LORD (Jehovah). “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?” (Malachi 2:10). “I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself” (Isaiah 44:24). “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:18).

“You are the LORD, you alone.
You have made heaven,
the heaven of heavens, with all their host,
the earth and all that is on it,
the seas and all that is in them;
and you preserve all of them;
and the host of heaven worships you.”
(Nehemiah 9:6)

The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament that there is one Creator (Romans 1:25; 1 Peter 4:19; Revelation 4:11), while revealing that this Creator includes the eternal divine persons of the Son (Colossians 1:16) and the Spirit (Hebrews 9:14).

Changing Stories of Creation

- *Why do the LDS scriptures have such different explanations of creation?*

The earliest scriptures that Joseph Smith produced present the same view of creation and the Creator as we have seen in the Bible. Consider the following statements in **the Book of Mormon**, which Joseph dictated in 1828 and 1829:

“Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it” (1 Nephi 17:36).

“There is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are” (2 Nephi 2:14).

“We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things” (Mosiah 4:2).

“And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end” (2 Nephi 31:21; see also Alma 11:44; Mormon 7:7; D&C 20:28).

That the one Lord God—and specifically Jesus Christ—created the world and everything in them is the consistent teaching of the Book of Mormon (see also Jacob 4:9; Mosiah 2:20-25; 4:9, 21; 3 Nephi 9:15). The Book of Mormon never even hints at the idea that more than one God was responsible for making the universe, or that any uncreated thing might exist other than God.

Soon after Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon in 1830, however, he began modifying this traditional Christian doctrine of creation. **The Book of Moses**, which Joseph dictated in 1830 and 1831, teaches that God created this world—and many other worlds as well—by his “Only Begotten”:

“And by the word of my power, have I created them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth. And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:32-33).

“I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things; yea, in the beginning I created the heaven, and the earth upon which thou standest.

And the earth was without form, and void; and I caused darkness to come up upon the face of the deep; and my Spirit moved upon the face of the water; for I am God. And I, God, said: Let there be light; and there was light” (Moses 2:1-3).

The above passage, Moses 2:1-3, is clearly a rewriting of the opening verses of the Bible (Genesis 1:1-3), revised to sound more explicitly Christian. The most important aspect of this revision is that it distinguishes between God, as the Creator, and his “Only Begotten” (Jesus Christ) as his agent who performed the work of creation on his behalf. At this point in Joseph Smith’s life, he was already moving away from the traditional Christian belief in one God existing eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. During this period of time, Joseph generally thought of the Father and the Son as two separate divine beings, with only the Father being Almighty God.

A few years later, Joseph Smith produced another book that he claimed was an inspired translation of an ancient scripture, called **the Book of Abraham**. Smith produced this translation in 1835 but made some revisions to it later in 1842. Like the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham includes a revision of the first chapter of Genesis—but one that reads very differently.

“And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth. And the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth; and darkness reigned upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters. And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light” (Abraham 4:1-3).

At this point in Joseph Smith’s own doctrinal development, he had begun to teach that many Gods existed. He thought that the common Hebrew word for God in the Old Testament, *Elohim*, used in Genesis 1, referred to a plurality of “Gods.” That is not, however, what *Elohim* means in Genesis 1. It is true that the form of the word *Elohim* is what we would call plural, but biblical Hebrew used “plural” forms in other ways besides expressing a plural number of persons or things. As all Hebrew scholars agree, when *Elohim* as the subject noun has singular verbs attached to it (as it does throughout Genesis 1), it functions as a singular noun and should be translated “God,” not “Gods.” Joseph’s revision of Genesis 1 in the Book of Abraham reflects his misunderstanding of this fact about the Hebrew language.

Another way in which the Book of Abraham departs from the biblical view of creation has to do with the very nature of creation. Recall that both the Bible and the Book of Mormon clearly state that God created the entire universe (“the heavens and the earth”) and everything in it. The universe is not eternal, but rather, God created it, bringing it and everything in it into existence. Soon after Joseph Smith produced the Book of Moses, he rejected this traditional understanding of the nature of the universe. Instead, he began teaching that the world and everything in it was simply organized or formed into its present state, and in particular that the spirits or essences of human beings were just as eternal as God:

“Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.... For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness [*sic*] of joy” (D&C 93:29, 33, dated 1833).

To support this new doctrine, Joseph rewrote Genesis 1 in the Book of Abraham to say, not that one God created the world, but that “**the Gods organized and formed** the heavens and the earth” (Abraham 4:1). His point was that the Gods organized the world from the uncreated, eternal elements as a place for us, who are also eternal beings, to live and progress.

Gospel Principles quotes from the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham as if all of these books agree in their teaching on creation. As we have seen, though, the Book of Moses differs in some respects from the Bible and the Book of Mormon on this subject, and the Book of Abraham reflects an entirely different doctrine of creation. The Book of Abraham erases the biblical distinction between the Creator and the creation. In its place, it teaches that a plurality of Gods exists

and that these Gods organized eternal elements into a place for eternal beings to live. It is crucial that those studying Gospel Principles be aware of Joseph Smith's changing views and understand how they end up departing from the Bible's teaching about the Creator.

For further study:

Ronald V. Huggins, "[Joseph Smith's Modalism: Sabellian Sequentialism or Swedenborgian Expansionism?](#)" A theological and historical analysis of Joseph Smith's earliest understanding of God and how it evolved into the plurality of gods doctrine.

Ronald V. Huggins, "[Joseph Smith and the First Verse of the Bible,](#)" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46 (2003): 29-52. An academic article examining how Joseph rewrote and reinterpreted Genesis 1:1 in the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, and two late sermons.