

Christ and the Creation

By Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Of the Quorum of the Twelve

(*Ensign*, Jun 1982, p9)

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.

God himself, the Father of us all, ordained and established a plan of salvation whereby his spirit children might advance and progress and become like him. It is the gospel of God, the plan of Eternal Elohim, the system that saves and exalts, and it consists of three things. These three are the very pillars of eternity itself. They are the most important events that ever have or will occur in all eternity. They are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement.

Before we can even begin to understand the temporal creation of all things, we must know how and in what manner these three eternal verities—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are inseparably woven together to form one plan of salvation. No one of them stands alone; each of them ties into the other two; and without a knowledge of all of them, it is not possible to know the truth about any one of them.

Be it known, then, that salvation is in Christ and comes because of his atoning sacrifice. The Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is the heart and core and center of revealed religion. It ransoms men from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the Fall of Adam. All men will be resurrected because our blessed Lord himself died and rose again, becoming thus the firstfruits of them that slept.

And further: Christ died to save sinners. He took upon himself the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. Eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God, is available because of what Christ did in Gethsemane and at Golgotha. He is both the resurrection and the life. Immortality and eternal life are the children of the Atonement. There is no language or power of expression given to man which can set forth the glory and wonder and infinite import of the ransoming power of the great Redeemer.

But, be it remembered, the Atonement came because of the Fall. Christ paid the ransom for Adam's transgression. If there had been no Fall, there would be no Atonement with its consequent immortality and

eternal life. Thus, just as surely as salvation comes because of the Atonement, so also salvation comes because of the Fall.

Mortality and procreation and death all had their beginnings with the Fall. The tests and trials of a mortal probation began when our first parents were cast out of their Edenic home. "Because that Adam fell, we are," Enoch said, "and by his fall came death; and we are made partakers of misery and woe." (Moses 6:48.) One of the most profound doctrinal declarations ever made fell from the lips of mother Eve. She said: "Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient." (Moses 5:11.)

And be it also remembered that the Fall was made possible because an infinite Creator, in the primeval day, made the earth and man and all forms of life in such a state that they could fall. This fall involved a change of status. All things were so created that they could fall or change, and thus was introduced the type and kind of existence needed to put into operation all of the terms and conditions of the Father's eternal plan of salvation.

This first temporal creation of all things, as we shall see, was paradisiacal in nature. In the primeval and Edenic day all forms of life lived in a higher and different state than now prevails. The coming fall would take them downward and forward and onward. Death and procreation had yet to enter the world. That death would be Adam's gift to man, and, then, the gift of God would be eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus, existence came from God; death came by Adam; and immortality and eternal life come through Christ. And thus, in Lehi's precise and eloquent language, all men are in "a state of probation" because of the Fall. And "if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden." He was then in a state of physical immortality; meaning he would have lived forever because there was as yet no death. "And they [our first parents] would have had no children"; they would have been denied the experiences of a mortal probation and a mortal death; and it is out of these two things—out of death and the tests of mortality—that eternal life comes. But—thanks be to God—"Adam fell that men

might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall.” (2 Ne. 2:21–26.)

Knowing all these things about the plan of salvation, we are in a position to consider the creation of this earth, of man, and of all forms of life. Knowing that the Creation is the father of the Fall, and that the Fall made possible the Atonement, and that salvation itself comes because of the Atonement, we are in a position to put the revealed knowledge about the Creation in a proper perspective.

Our analysis properly begins with the frank recital that our knowledge about the Creation is limited. We do not know the how and why and when of all things. Our finite limitations are such that we could not comprehend them if they were revealed to us in all their glory, fulness, and perfection. What has been revealed is that portion of the Lord’s eternal word which we must believe and understand if we are to envision the truth about the Fall and the Atonement and thus become heirs of salvation. This is all we are obligated to know in our day.

In a future day the Lord will expect more of his Saints in this regard than he does of us. “When the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things,” our latter-day revelations tell us—“Things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof.” (D&C 101:32–33.) Pending that Millennial day it is our responsibility to believe and accept that portion of the truth about the Creation that has been dispensed to us in our dispensation.

Christ is the Creator and Redeemer of worlds so numerous that they cannot be numbered by man. As to his infinite and eternal creative and redemptive enterprises the divine word attests: “And worlds without number have I created,” saith the Father, “and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten. . . . But only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I unto you.” As to all of the other worlds of the Lord’s creating we know only that it is his work and his glory “to bring to pass”—through the Redeemer—“the immortality and eternal life” of all their inhabitants. (Moses 1:33, 35, 39.)

In what is probably the most glorious vision given to mortals in this dispensation, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon saw “the Son, on the right hand of the Father,” and “heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters

unto God.” (D&C 76:20, 23–24.) Christ is thus the Creator and the Redeemer. By him the worlds were made, and through his infinite atonement the inhabitants of those worlds are adopted into the divine family as heirs with himself. It was of this vision and of this provision whereby the Saints become the sons of God by faith that the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote:

And I heard a great voice bearing record from heav’n, He’s the Saviour and Only Begotten of God; By him, of him, and through him, the worlds were all made, Even all that careen in the heavens so broad.

Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last, Are sav’d by the very same Saviour of ours; And, of course, are begotten God’s daughters and sons By the very same truths and the very same powers. (Millennial Star, vol. 4, pp. 49–55; cited in Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, p. 66.)

That the infinite and eternal nature of creation and redemption are beyond mortal comprehension we are frank to admit. We are grateful that the Lord has given us this glimpse of everlasting truth relative to his unending labors; it is a brief view from his eternal perspective. But this earth and all that thereon is are our concern. It is the truths about “our creation,” as it were, that will chart the course for us in our enduring efforts to gain eternal life.

Let us then, with Abraham, gaze upon the great host of “noble and great ones” in premortal existence. “Among them” stands one “like unto God.” He is the great Jehovah, the Firstborn of the Father. We hear him say “unto those who were with him,” unto Michael and a great host of valiant souls: “We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell.” (Abr. 3:22, 24.)

And as we gaze and hear and ponder, our minds are enlightened and our understanding reaches to heaven. 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. And the earth is created from matter that already exists. Truly the elements are eternal, and to create is to organize.

As the work goes forward we see the fulfillment of that which God spake to Moses in the Ten Commandments: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.” (Ex. 20:11.) It is of the creative events that took place on each of these “days” that we shall now speak.

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. Our three accounts of the Creation are the Mosaic, the Abrahamic, and the one presented in the temples. Each of these stems back to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Mosaic and Abrahamic accounts place the creative events on the same successive days. We shall follow these scriptural recitations in our analysis. The temple account, for reasons that are apparent to those familiar with its teachings, has a different division of events. It seems clear that the “six days” are one continuing period and that there is no one place where the dividing lines between the successive events must of necessity be placed.

The Mosaic and the temple accounts set forth the temporal or physical creation, the actual organization of element or matter into tangible form. They are not accounts of the spirit creation. 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.

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 evolvment 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 they him, male and female to form they 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.)

Having come this far in our analysis of the Creation, we are led to ask: Why did the Lord give us these revealed accounts of the Creation? What purposes do they serve? How does the knowledge in them help us to work out our salvation or to center our affection in Him whose we are and by whom all things were made?

It is self-evident that we have received no useless and unneeded revelations. All that the Lord does has a purpose and serves a need. He expects us to treasure up his word, to ponder in our hearts its deep and hidden meanings, and to understand its full import. Those who

have done so know that the revealed accounts of the Creation are designed to accomplish two great purposes. Their *general purpose* is to enable us to understand the nature of our mortal probation, a probation in which all men are being tried and tested “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.” (Abr. 3:25.) Their *specific purpose* is to enable us to understand the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, which infinite and eternal Atonement is the very foundation upon which revealed religion rests.

It is only fair to say that a mere recitation of what took place during the “six days” and of the Lord’s resting on the “seventh day” do not of themselves set forth with clarity the purposes of the creation accounts. And so the Lord, as recorded in chapter 3 of the Mosaic account, proceeds to explain the purpose and nature of the Creation. He comments about the Creation. He reveals some facts and principles without which we cannot envision what the true doctrine of the Creation is. His statements are interpolative; they are inserted in the historical account to give us its true depth and meaning and import. They are not chronological recitations, but are commentary about what he had already set forth in its sequential order.

The Lord introduces his commentary about the Creation by saying that the events of the “six days,” which he has just recited, “are the generations of the heaven and of the earth, when they were created, in the day that I, the Lord God, made the heaven and the earth.” (Moses 3:4.) Thus, all things have been created; the work is finished; the account is revealed; but it can only be understood if some added truths are set forth. These deal with the premortal existence of all things and with the paradisiacal nature of the earth and of all created things when they first came from their Creator’s hand. Both of these concepts are interwoven in the same sentences, and in some instances the words used have a dual meaning and apply to both the premortal life and the paradisiacal creation.

And so the Lord says that he created “every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew. ... And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them.” (Moses 3:5.) Clearly he is speaking of the premortal existence of all things. This earth, all men, animals, fish, fowls, plants, all things—all lived first as spirit entities. Their home was heaven, and the earth was created to be the place where they could take upon themselves mortality.

“For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth.” Apply these words to the spirit creation, if you will, and they will be true in such

a context. But they have a much more pointed and important meaning. They are followed by the statement: "For I, the Lord God, had not caused it to rain upon the face of the earth; ... and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air; But I, the Lord God, spake, and there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." (Moses 3:5-6.) The Lord is here telling us about the events of which he has spoken, about the events of the "six days," about the account of the physical or tangible or temporal creation set forth in chapter 2 of Moses. He says the things so made were "spiritually" created and were not "naturally upon the face of the earth," for the reasons quoted.

At this point we must insert a statement from our tenth article of faith: "We believe ... that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." [A of F 1:10] That is to say, when the earth was first created it was in a paradisiacal state, an Edenic state, a state in which there was no death. And when the Lord comes again, and the Millennial era is ushered in, the earth will return to its paradisiacal state and be renewed. It will be made new again; it will become a new heaven and a new earth whereon dwelleth righteousness. In that day, "there shall be no sorrow because there is no death" as we know it. (D&C 101:29.)

Thus we learn that the initial creation was paradisiacal; death and mortality had not yet entered the world. There was no mortal flesh upon the earth for any form of life. The Creation was past, but mortality as we know it lay ahead. All things had been created in a state of paradisiacal immortality. It was of this day that Lehi said: "And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end." (2 Ne. 2:22.) If there is no death, all things of necessity must continue to live everlastingly and without end.

Continuing the divine commentary about the Creation, we read: "And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also; nevertheless, all things were before created; but spiritually were they created and made according to my word." (Moses 3:7.) How filled with meaning are these words! The physical body of Adam is made from the dust of this earth, the very earth to which the Gods came down to form him. His "spirit" enters his body, as Abraham expresses it. (See Abr. 5:7.) Man becomes a living, immortal soul; body and spirit are joined together. He has been created "spiritually," as all things were because there is as yet no mortality. Then comes the Fall; Adam falls; mortality and procreation and death commence. Fallen

man is mortal; he has mortal flesh; he is "the first flesh upon the earth." And the effects of his fall pass upon all created things. They fall in that they too become mortal. Death enters the world; mortality reigns; procreation commences; and the Lord's great and eternal purposes roll onward.

Thus, "all things" were created as spirit entities in heaven; then "all things" were created in a paradisiacal state upon the earth; that is, "spiritually were they created," for there was as yet no death. They had *spiritual bodies* made of the elements of the earth as distinguished from the *mortal bodies* they would receive after the Fall when death would enter the scheme of things. Natural bodies are subject to the natural death; spiritual bodies, being paradisiacal in nature, are not subject to death. Hence the need for a fall and the mortality and death that grows out of it.

Thus, as the interpolative exposition in the divine word explains, "I, the Lord God, planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there I put the man whom I had formed." (Moses 3:8.) Adam, our father, dwelt in the Garden of Eden. He was the *first man of all men* in the day of his creation, and he became the *first flesh of all flesh* through the Fall. Because of the Fall "all things" changed from their spiritual state to a natural state. And thus we read: "And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, *naturally*, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a living soul. For it was *spiritual* in the day that I created it." (Moses 3:9; italics added.)

There is no evolving from one species to another in any of this. The account is speaking of "every tree" and of "all things." Considering them as one collective unit, the account continues: "It remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it, yea, even all things which I prepared for the use of man; and man saw that it was good for food." (Moses 3:9.)

The Lord's commentary about the Creation also says: "Out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; ... and they were also living souls; for I, God, breathed into them the breath of life." (Moses 3:19.) It also says, speaking figuratively, that Eve was formed from Adam's rib. And in that primeval day, when neither death nor the probationary experiences of mortality had entered the world, "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (See Moses 3:21-25.)

As to the Fall itself we are told that the Lord planted "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" in the midst of the garden. (Moses 3:9.) To Adam and Eve the command came: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou

mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Moses 3:16–17.) Again the account is speaking figuratively. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.

Moses 4 gives the actual account of the Fall. Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit and the earth is cursed and begins to bring forth thorns and thistles; that is, the earth falls to its present natural state. Eve is identified as “the mother of all living” (Moses 4:26); and she and Adam begin to have “sons and daughters” (Moses 5:3).

Thus, man is created in such a way that he can fall. He falls and brings mortality and procreation and death into being so that he can be redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is ransomed from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the Fall of Adam so that he can have immortality and eternal life. The Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are bound together as one.

These revealed verities about the creation of all things run counter to many of the speculations and theoretical postulates of the world. They are, however, what the inspired word sets forth, and we are duty bound to accept them. We are frank to admit that our knowledge of the creation of the universe, of this earth, of man, and of all living things is meager—perhaps almost miniscule—as compared to what there is to learn. But the Lord has revealed to us as much about the mystery of creation as is necessary for us in our probationary estate.

He has revealed to us the basic verities which enable us to understand the true doctrine of creation. This doctrine is that the Lord Jesus Christ is both the Creator and the Redeemer of this earth and all that on it is, save only man. It is that the Lord God himself, the Father of us all, came down and created man, male and female, in his own image and likeness. It is that the earth and all else were created in a paradisiacal state so there could be a fall. It is that the Great Creator became the Redeemer so he could ransom men from the effects of the Fall, thereby bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. It is that the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are the three pillars of eternity. It is that all who accept him as both the Creator and the Redeemer have power to become joint-heirs with him and thereby inherit all that his Father hath.

Truly Christ is both the Creator and the Redeemer, as is portrayed by the marble reproduction of Thorvaldsen’s

Christus that stands in the rotunda of the visitors’ center on Temple Square. There we see the Creator in majestic marble standing in the midst of eternity. On the domed ceiling and the encircling walls are paintings of the sidereal heavens with their endless orbs, all moving through an organized cosmos. And as we gaze upon what the hand of mere man has made, our minds are opened to see in a limited manner the miracle of creation.

There we also see the nail marks in those blessed hands, the hands that healed and blessed, and also in the feet that trod the dusty lanes of that earth which his hands had made. We see the gash in his pierced side from whence came the blood and water as a sign that the Atonement had been wrought. And our minds are opened, again in a limited manner, to see the miracle of redemption.

And as we ponder upon the wonder of it all, our gaze and thoughts dwell upon the beatific face and we feel the beckoning power of the outstretched arms. And the marvel in marble seems to breathe the breath of life and say: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6.) “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28.) Come unto me and ye shall be saved. Come, inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world for all who accept me as the Creator and Redeemer. Come, be one with me; I am thy God.