

15 - Abraham 4 – Our Endowment of Power

Preview of Abraham 4

This completes our coverage of Abraham Chapter 3. We'll briefly go over a few things prior to Abraham 4. Chapter 4 gets into the creation. We discussed these things when we went through the Moses material. Both Moses and Abraham have accounts of the creation, and anytime there is a text about the creation, you need to think in terms of relationships between God, man, and the environment in which man is placed to work out his salvation. These creation accounts are written to establish relationships. They are not meant explain the science of creation, nor are they written to explain or even imply how long it took to create the world. They were given to mankind as part of an ordinance and an initiation, and always show up in this context. The Moses creation account is his endowment; the Abraham creation account is his endowment. The Temple creation account is your endowment. You and they received knowledge or an endowment of power that establishes a relationship between you and God and the environment in which you live.

In the 1828 Dictionary, the one that would have been current in Joseph Smith's time, we see the word "endowment" defined as:

That which is given or bestowed on the person or mind by the creator, gift or nature; any quality or faculty bestowed by the creator ... Natural vigor of intellect is an endowment of the mind.

An Endowment of Power lies not in an ordinance but in knowledge. When we say we're going to get our endowment in the Temple we usually think of the ordinances, but an endowment of power does not lie in the ordinances but in KNOWLEDGE.

An Endowment of Power lies in Knowledge; there are not that many ordinances that we enter into in the Temple. The knowledge we obtain is what gives us an endowment of power.

Joseph Smith said, "A man can be saved no faster than he gets knowledge," and, "he that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and *knoweth all things.*" (TPJS p 217; D&C 93:28)

President Kimball said:

Change comes by substituting good habits for less desirable ones. You mold your character and future by good thoughts and acts.

*Without a change in our character, there is no **power** in the ordinances of salvation and exaltation.* In other words, if you don't change your character, the ordinances you participate in have no power to save you or exalt you. The power lies in you and your agency, not in the officiator who administers the ordinances. Look at **Alma 13:16**:

Now these ordinances were given after this manner, *that thereby the people **might look forward** on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that*

they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

Alma 13:16 states very clearly that all ordinances are given so that the people *might look forward* to Jesus Christ for a remission of their sins. In other words, the ordinances we participate in provide a hope of a *future reality*. The ordinance does not guarantee the reality of the ordinance itself. The reality of the ordinance is ratified by the character change of the person who receives it. The real power behind every ordinance is your agency and your character change. If you are not striving to change your character, it means nothing – even if you have gone through the Temple a thousand times. Our hope lies in Christ. We look to Him for a remission of our sins, whereby we can become clean and be found worthy to enter God’s presence.

Neither Satan nor God can control our agency. King Benjamin taught his people that:

...the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, **unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint** through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, **submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things** which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mos 3:19)

“Yielding to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” is the process of changing our character by putting off the natural man and becoming a saint, becoming “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things.” This is the character change that makes those ordinances a reality.

The Repentance Process

The Repentance process is the process of changing character. Repentance is evidently a terrible thing that no one wants to talk about. When was the last time you heard a good talk on repentance? It's hardly talked about because it makes us all uncomfortable. Nevertheless, we should all be striving to change our character, and that is what repentance is all about.



The more one knows and understands about life, the more perfect will be their decisions, actions, and nature.

This is why the endowment of power lies in KNOWLEDGE! The more we know and understand, the better our decisions will be. We are looking for truth. We want to know what eternal truth is. **D&C 93:24** talks about it.

And [*eternal*] truth is knowledge of things as they **are**, and as they **were**, and as they **are to come**;

Are = **Present**
Were = **Past**
Are to Come = **Future**

Three Creation Accounts

In the Church, we have three creation accounts available to us: The Temple Drama, Moses, and Abraham. Each provides a different point of view.

Temple	– Present	(We are the Man Adam or the Woman Eve)
Moses	– Past	(Moses provided a historical point of view)
Abraham	– Future	(Abraham sees what will come to pass)

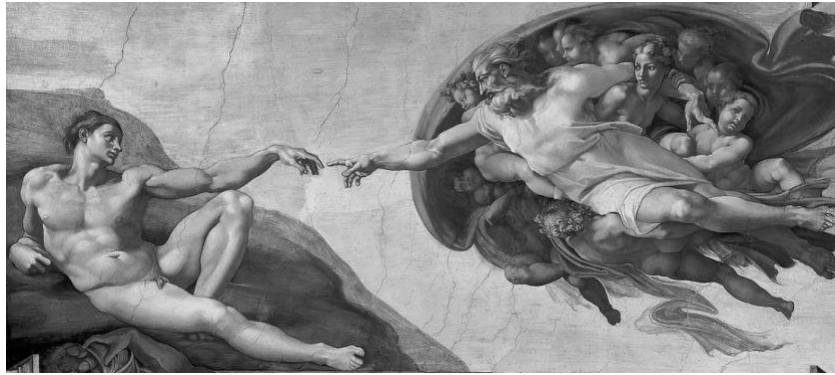
Our three creation accounts, because of their different points of view, offer us an expanded understanding of the creation. Of the three accounts, the one most neglected also happens to be the best—and that is Abraham. The insights Abraham provides, with his pre-existent point of view of the Council in Heaven discussion, are tremendous when compared to the other creation accounts.

These three accounts are different because they are given to different audiences for different purposes, even though the fundamental purpose is the same in all of them. Moses is trying to teach hardhearted, stiff-necked Israel the things of God from a historical point of view (things as they were). He received these things in order to teach the Children of Israel about the relationship between God and man and the environment of the Promised Land in which they were going to live. They needed to see it and understand it that way.

In the Temple, you are seeing and participating in things as they are in the present. You are the man Adam or the woman Eve. The creation is going on in real time. You are receiving this in real time so that you can work out your salvation in the environment in which you are now living.

Abraham is looking at the creation from the point of view of the Gods. He is one of those spirits who were “noble and great” in that Council and was chosen and foreordained to be a leader, a prophet, a Patriarch. Thus Abraham sees things from a pre-existent point of view, from the vantage point of *what will be*—that which is going to happen in the future.

A few days ago, I was at the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Michelangelo has depicted the creation on the ceiling of the chapel, and to me the most important scene is this one:



In this scene we see God trying his best to reach out to Adam, but the cherubs (angels) are holding him back. Adam seems to be making only a half-hearted effort to reach God. This painting seems to underscore the idea that the creation is about relationships, not about scientific fact.

D&C 49:15-17 says:

15... for marriage is ordained of God unto man.

16Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the **earth might answer the end of its creation;**

17 And that **it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation** before the world was made.”

These verses are telling us that marriage between a husband and a wife is connected to the very purpose of the creation of the earth. Marriage is connected to the creation of the earth because there are a lot of spirits that need to come to the earth, and they need to come to a family. The spirits that were in that pre-earth council need to come to earth through those husbands and wives. As Isaiah tells us, the earth was created to be inhabited by mankind:

Isaiah 45:18

18 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.

1 Ne 17:36

36 Behold, the Lord hath created the earth *that it should be inhabited*; and he hath created his children that they should possess it.

The creation accounts are explained in history, ritual, ordinance, and scripture to establish relationships between God, Man, and the Environment in which man must live to work out his salvation. Man is that being that has the potential to become like God. King Benjamin referenced the creation in his masterful discourse.

Mosiah 2:25

25 And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were **created** of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who **created** you.

We begin to establish our relationship with God as we begin to love and serve our fellow man. He taught (v 20, 22):

20 I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another –

22 And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; ...

A non-LDS scholar, Barbara Sproul, has published a book containing all the ancient creation accounts from around the world. In the introduction to her book she writes:

“The most profound questions give rise to creation myths.”

The word ‘myth’ originally meant “the true story of one’s beginnings or origins.” Today the word is commonly used as a synonym for ‘fable’, a false or fictitious story. But here it means the true story of something *real*, especially in regards to the creation epoch. Sproul continues:

Who are we?

Why are we here?

What is the purpose of our lives and our deaths?

How should we understand our place in the world in time and in space?

These are central questions of value and meaning, and, while they are influenced by issues of fact, they are not, in themselves, factual questions; Rather they involve attitudes towards facts and reality. As such, the issues that they raise are addressed most directly by myths. (*Primal Myths*, Introduction, p 1)

She is talking about these creation epics. These epics, she says, answers those questions concerning who we are, why are we here, and the purpose for our lives and our deaths, as well as how we understand ourselves in time and space. As she collected these accounts from all over the world from every ancient culture, this is what she has come up with.

I want you to understand what she is saying. Who are we? Why are we here? And what is the purpose of our lives and our deaths and how we understand ourselves in time and space? If you understood the truth about these statements, how would that affect the choices you make in this world?

Our Endowment of Power

In our search for light and truth, which includes participating in the Temple Drama, we begin to learn that our *real* Endowment of Power is **knowing**—

That God lives;
That God created the world for mankind;
That our separation from God can be reversed;
That we have an eternal nature and spirit;
That there is plan of progression towards God;
That there is purpose to this life that endures past death;
That our potential is as limitless as God's;
That the trials of mortality are purposeful and are necessary;
That we know where evil comes from and how to control it;
That death is not an end but a beginning;
That a Son of God provides an atonement and resurrection that makes all of this possible.

As you ponder these truths, can you begin to see the power it can give to your life as you come to understand them? Can you see that knowing these things can give you power over the trials, tribulations, and other issues of mortality that surround you every day? It is *this* knowledge that gives us an endowment of power, not the ordinances. The ordinances point us to Christ and the future reality that those ordinances promise.

The question now becomes: What if we did not know these things? Where would we be? What would we be doing?

Man is the only creature that can act in futurity. That means he can act or make decisions here that result in a blessing or a condemnation after death. No other creature is capable of that. Unless we understand the information that we receive in the endowment of power, there is no reason to act in futurity. Otherwise we might as well...

Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, ... there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Ne 28:8)

Abraham 4 deals with the creation epics. Remember, the creation accounts establish our relationship with God and answer WHY the world was created, not HOW.

Without a knowledge of these things we have no power over this life, but become as the beasts—to live and die, obsessed with, and consumed in, the worldly satisfaction of pride and the flesh.

This is why we have the creation epics in our scriptures, and it is why we rehearse the creation epic every time we participate in our Temples. They help us understand our relationship with our

fellowman, with our God, and with the environment in which we are to work out our own salvation (See Mormon 9:27). All ancient cultures around the world have creation epics that explain the true story of their origin or beginning. These epics help us understand our place in this rotten world.

Historical Background

Anciently the Threshing Floor was a considered a central and sacred place that became important for the sustaining of both the physical life as well as the spiritual well-being of mankind. The most simple and practical purpose of the Threshing Floor was a place where the harvested grain would be broken down by animals that would tread on the collected grain, separating the inedible chaff from the grain. The animals would not only tread on the grain but drag wooden sleds impregnated with pieces of flint to cut and break away the undesirable and useless stems and chaff. Once broken apart, the chaff and grain would be thrown into the air together. The lighter chaff would be blown away in the winds while the heavier and more important grain would fall to the bedrock or stone floor for gathering. This process of separating of the grain from the chaff on the threshing floor is often used today to symbolize a separation of the good from the bad.

Because of its location on a high, prominent spot, the “threshing floor” became a central place for sacrifice, and a sacred site where the creation of the world by the gods was acted out, the purpose of which was to explain the cultural beliefs and myths of the people and the community. The threshing floor became a place of education and understanding rather than a simple place of separation of good and bad. It was a place to understand the plan of God for the life and salvation of mankind, assisting all to faithfully endure mortality to the end.

Creating a perfect stage, the first theaters of Greece and Rome were fashioned around, and evolved from, the ancient threshing floors. The sacred nature of the threshing floor was so prevalent that altars were erected at the threshing sites and temples were often constructed near or over the threshing floors themselves. Multiple rows of seating were erected up and around the center floor so that large numbers of people could view the dramas being acted out upon the stone floor below. The amphitheater was born (See B. H. Stricker, “The Origin of the Greek Theatre” in the “The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology”).

Temple Texts

Our scriptures contain many of the great and instructive texts that convey temple truths. Genesis, Moses, and Abraham provide much of the script contained in the Temple narrative. 2 Nephi 2 is another great text that bestows an endowment of power – it conveys the knowledge Lehi wanted his son Jacob to understand as he lived out the remainder of his life. In this chapter the Creation is addressed. Adam and Eve are discussed, as well as the Fall, and our redemption from the Fall. Opposition in all things is explained, as well as agency – our freedom to choose liberty or death. In other words, Lehi teaches his son the very concepts that we are to glean from participation in our own Temples.

Remember – knowing these things is what separates us from the beasts, allowing us to act in futurity. We cannot act in futurity if we do not understand what lies in futurity! We can’t make decisions pertaining to our own exaltation if we are not aware that death is an event we live through.

We also need to understand that within the knowledge of these things we listed, there resides a power of damnation as well. Beginning in **2 Ne 9:25**, we read:

25 Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

This is why the children of Adam and Eve could not sin until *after* they were taught the Gospel. We cannot be accountable to the Law unless we are under the Law. If we are not under the Law or don't know the Law or do not understand the Law, mercy steps in to satisfy the demands of justice, satisfying a Law we did not even know about. But...here's the stipulation:

27 But **wo unto him that has the law given**, yea, that has all of the commandments of God like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that **wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state**.

What this verse is saying: if the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught by the Church, is true, only Mormons can sin. Everyone else does not have all of the law. Others cannot be held accountable for what we, as Latter-day Saints, know to be true because they have not made the same agreements or covenants. Others do have light and truth and the Spirit of Christ to a certain extent, but they cannot be held accountable to the Word of Wisdom; they cannot be held accountable for what has been revealed in the D&C, or our other revealed scripture, or to the moral codes we have been given. All will be judged according to the light and knowledge they have. He who has more light and knowledge is more accountable.

For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation. (D&C 82:3)

If we do not live up to the covenants we make and act according to the knowledge we acquire, that endowed power can become a power of condemnation.

The Will of God

Christ has said, "For I came down from heaven, **not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me**" (John 6:38). In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless **not my will, but thine, be done**" (Luke 22:42). In the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he used the phrase, "**Thy will be done** in earth, *as it is in heaven*" (Matt 6:10).

In pondering these verses and others, I have come to wonder: just *what* is God's will? I don't think He cares what I eat or which direction I drive my car to get home. We tend to link sinning with not doing the will of God. The question then arises: can we be condemned for exercising the very agency God made sure we could have in that Grand Council in Heaven?—The same agency that Lucifer was kicked out for wanting to destroy? You will recall that when the woman was taken in adultery and was brought to Jesus, he did not get mad at her, nor condemn her, but said, "[if you truly want to be happy], go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

The scriptures make plain that Christ was most upset by people who spent their time trying to get other people to commit sin, or who kept others from coming unto Him and His Gospel. Most of His condemnation was directed at the Pharisees, who created rules that most others could not keep, and who made people feel guilty and hopeless about their chances for salvation. If Christ did not condemn the woman taken in adultery for using the very agency He ensured would be ours in the pre-existence, can we be condemned for using our agency here on earth? NO! It was preserved for us. Joseph Smith taught that God would not, and Satan cannot, control our agency (TPJS, p 187).

The Three Pillars of the Gospel

In the Book of Mormon, Aaron and Ammon teach King Lamoni and his father the Gospel. They both start with **the Creation, the Fall** and **the Atonement**. These are the three pillars of the Gospel.

Ammon: Alma 18: 36, 39	Aaron: Alma 22: 12-14
<p>36 Now when Ammon had said these words, he began at <u>the creation of the world</u>, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning <u>the fall of man</u>, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people ...</p> <p>39 But this is not all; for <u>he expounded unto them the plan of redemption</u>, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and <u>he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ</u>, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.</p>	<p>12 And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, <u>he began from the creation of Adam</u>, reading the scriptures unto the king</p> <p>13 And Aaron <u>did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam</u>, laying <u>the fall of man before him</u>, and their carnal state <u>and also the plan of redemption</u>, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.</p> <p>14 And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but <u>the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins</u>, through faith and repentance, and so forth;</p>

King Benjamin also taught his people about Christ and His atonement (Mos 3:11, 15-16, 19). This is also taught in 2 Nephi 2 (See v 10). Alma 40-42 is another great discourse on the fall, the resurrection, and the atonement.

We need to understand the creation so that we can understand the relationship between God, mankind, and the environment in which we have to work out our own salvation. We need to understand the Fall in order to understand why we need the atonement.

King Benjamin was extremely successful in teaching these things to his people. His teachings generated a profound spiritual awakening in the hearts and minds of his people. I have pondered his discourse for a long time, trying to distill what it was he taught that so successfully changed their hearts. I have asked myself, what can we do to teach our families to also return and come unto Christ as did Benjamin? What do I need to teach my family that will produce the same result in the hearts and minds of my children and grandchildren? The conclusion I've come to is that he taught a very powerful concept: He taught them to retain in remembrance the greatness of God and their own nothingness before Him (See Mos 4:5, 11). I believe he got his people to understand just how much they needed God, Christ, and the Atonement in their lives.

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true. (Mos 4:11-12)

We cannot, cannot, CANNOT—it is impossible—be saved without a reliance upon Christ, His atonement and the resurrection!

I've read and studied Benjamin's address many, many times, and I have concluded that what my children and grandchildren need to know and understand is how much they need Christ and that atonement. I believe that knowledge and understanding is what caused the massive conversion at the time of King Benjamin.

Benjamin wanted to know if his people believed what he had to say. The report he received was *by acclamation*:

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And **they all cried aloud with one voice**, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for **we believe** in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. (Mosiah 4:2)

And **they all cried with one voice**, saying: Yea, **we believe** all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. (Mosiah 5:2) [*Notice their new character traits*]

The Gospel is new to every generation. It is new to our children and our grandchildren. Everyone has to come unto Christ. We sometimes get so involved in the culture, traditions, and organizations of the Church that we forget to come unto Christ. Our sacrament meeting ought to be the most important of our meetings, according to Brigham Young. He considered the ordinance of the sacrament even more important than the endowment we receive. The sacrament prayer is for you. The Bread and the Water are “blessed to the souls who partake of it or drink of it.” It is blessed to be sanctified (become holy) to all those who partake or drink of it. Each week we are given the opportunity to renew our covenant of obedience. It is part of the process of repentance and the changing of our characters. If we are exercising our faith unto repentance, we will want to come before God each week and declare our desire to improve and become better. This is why partaking of the sacrament is so vital to our lives.