

Biblical Statements on Pre-Mortal Existence

Genesis 2:4, 7

KJV

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth . . . And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul.”

We interpret this verse as joining the immortal and eternal with the mortal body. Metaphorical or not, the principle is clear from the perspective of the Restoration.

BSB

“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created . . . Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being”

Numbers 27:16

KJV

“The God of the spirits of all flesh”

YLT

“Jehovah—God of the spirits of all flesh

Isaiah 14:12-13

KJV

“How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God”

We interpret this verse as explaining a premortal state of Lucifer who existed in heaven as one of the great ones, before he rebelled against God and lost his glorious pre-existent state and became Satan or the Devil.

ESV

“How you have fallen from heaven,
O morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the ground,
O destroyer of nations.
You said in your heart: “I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God

Jeremiah 1:5

KJV

“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

NIV

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the ear

Psalms 139:15-16

NKJV

“My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret, *and*
skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When *as yet there were* none of them”

CSB

“My bones were not hidden from you
when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw me when I was formless;
all my days were written in your book and planned
before a single one of them began”

John 1:1-2

KJV

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God”

ISV

“In the beginning, the Word existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God”

John 9:2

KJV

“His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

YLT

“His disciples asked him, saying, 'Rabbi, who did sin, this one or his parents, that he should be born blind?’

John 17:5

KJV

“O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”

NIV

“Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”

Ephesians 3:9-10

KJV

“To make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God

NIV

“To make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”

4 Apocryphal Tests

Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20 (~1st C. BC)

KJV

“For I was a witty child, and had a good spirit. Yea rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.”

NRSV

“As a child I was naturally gifted, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body”

2 Maccabees 7:28 (~120 -150 BC)

“I pray you son, look to heaven and earth and seeing everything in them, know that God made them from non-being”

This has been argued by Blake T. Ostler who agrees with other cautious scholars’ observations: “the non-existent is not absolute nothing but . . . the metaphysical substance . . . in an uncrystallized state . . . The text implies no more than the conception that the world came into existence through the sovereign creative act of God, and that it previously was not there” (*BookofMormonCentral.org*; FARMS Review 17/2 [2005]:274).

He concludes:

This ontological gulf between creator and created that makes it impossible for creedalists to accept the early Christian doctrine that we, mere humans, can nevertheless “be partakers of the divine nature,” as 2 Peter 1:4 KJV affirms. It is the central conundrum that . . . shows why the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is pivotal to theological and philosophical issues dividing Latter-day Saints from conservative Protestants . . . The apologists of the late second century adopted creatio ex nihilo primarily because it was required by the Middle Platonic view of God, which they had also adopted. They were quite correct to point out that God, as conceived by the Middle Platonists, had to be completely independent of the world and stand over against it. But this is not a Christian view of God that they are defending. Rather, it is the adoption of the God of Greek philosophy that required them to modify the biblical doctrine of creation so radically (*ibid.*, 315).

If you want to learn more of this philosopher from a Saint, read Blake Ostler’s entire 70-page article.

2 Enoch 24:2, 4; 25:1 (~1 AD)

“. . . all things that are standing finished I tell to you even before the very beginning, all that I created from non-being, and visible things from invisible . . . For before all things were visible, I alone used to go about in the invisible things . . . that visible things should come down from invisible”

The translator F. I. Andersen explains: “The impression remains that God was not the only existent being or thing from the very first. . . . God made the existent out of the non-existent, the visible out of the non-visible. So the invisible things coexisted with God before he began to make anything. . . . Vs. 4 is quite explicit on this point: Before any of the visible things had come into existence, God was moving around among the invisible things” (*BookofMormonCentral.org*; FARMS Review 17/2 [2005]: 261). For more examples on other texts from Enoch see <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12339-preexistence>.

Ancient Judaic Theology

According to Jewish thought now, human life begins at birth, but anciently, some anciently we find statements like:

- “Before God created the world He held a consultation with the souls of the righteous” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*).
- “He designed me and prepared me before the foundation of the world that I should be the mediator of the Covenant” (Assumption of Moses)

- "Before the mountains were brought forth, or even thou hadst formed the earth and the world," Thou saidst, "Return [to God] ye children of men" (Ps 90:2-3, translation from *jewishencyclopedia.com*).

Sadducees 167 BC-AD 70

As one of the two most predominant schools of thought amongst Judaism in the Late Second Temple era, Sadducees did not believe in a pre- or post-life (Mark 12:18; Acts 23:8; etc.). They justified their denial because it was not mentioned in the Torah, or Law (five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy). Well into the first century AD, they claimed that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does it mention the immortality of the soul or its life before or after the death.

Sadducees denied the later exilic like Daniel (~600 BC) who refer to it.

Philo ~30 BC – 50 AD

Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish philosopher from the time of the New Testament. Philo's thoughts stretched beyond Alexandria and demonstrate the wide-reaching nature of Judaic thought across the Roman Empire. His writings include convoluted accounts that often contradicted each other. This is often seen in Judaic arguments where rhetorical debate has been used for centuries. Terry Givens' study of Philo's views on a pre-mortal existence are interesting:

Philo believed God created the world entirely outside of time, meaning the world, though created, was eternally so. . . . Philo undeniably asserts the preexistence of matter.

Philo recognized that scripture has four different categories of sense—literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. . . . Philo gives deference to the Genesis narrative that implies a kind of temporal sequence to creation, as well as to the classical metaphysical "necessity" of God's eternally constant creative activity. (Book Review, *BYU Studies* 2011; vol. 50, no. 4, 139)

Philo seems to recognize the apparent contradiction and regards his view as imperfect: the human mind, so removed from such a transcendent divine nature and activity, cannot understand or put into language such creative phenomena (Book Review, *BYU Studies* 2011; vol. 50, no. 4, 139).

Greek-Plato

Greek influence seeped into both Judaism (after 325 BC) and into Christianity (from its first century). Plato believed in a life prior to earth where the soul existed. All previous knowledge that we used to have had to be relearned. Rather than thinking of a human learning something new, he knowledge was actually remembering what one previously knew. "In Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*, belief in the soul's preexistence is useful in order to motivate human beings to live by the assumption that philosophical knowledge is attainable and that the philosophical life is the best of all possible lives" (ibid, 138).

Christian Thought

In early Christian writings from the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Origen wrote of the eternal nature of each human soul as it was created by God. A samples of two of his writings show how he intertwined a premortal existence with predestination:

1. Let us inquire whether God, the creator and founder of all things, created certain of them holy and happy, so that they could admit no element at all of an opposite kind, and certain others so that they were made capable both of virtue and vice; or whether we are to suppose that He created some so as to be altogether incapable of virtue, and others again altogether incapable of wickedness, but with the power of abiding only in a state of happiness, and others again such as to be capable of either condition. . . .
How could his soul and its images be formed along with his body, who, before he was created in the womb, is said to be known to God, and was sanctified by Him before his birth? (Origen, *De Principiis*, I.V.3; I. VII. 4).
2. If, then, when they were not yet born, and had not done any-thing either good or evil, in order that God's purpose according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, if at such a period this was said, how if we do not go back to the works done before this life, can it be said that there is no unrighteousness with God when the elder serves the younger and is hated (by God) before he has done anything worthy of slavery or of hatred? (Origen, *Commentary on John*, Book II, section 25).

However, by AD 553 a pre-mortal existence was denounced as heresy at a General Church Council. The ideas of creationism, support by Jerome (AD 347-420) and others, answered the question of how the soul or spirit came to be. Simply stated, God created a soul for each body at the time of its birth.

One of the most prolific writers of fifth century Christian Theology was the Saint Augustine (354-430). In his early writings, Saint Augustine expounded on the idea of preexistence. In his younger days he was a Greek Platonist, and believed that one's soul preexisted its incarnation in an individuated person. After he was made Bishop though, he did

not speak as freely of this radical idea among Christians. . . . Augustine defines the highest of all wisdom as the aspiration to know God and one's own soul; knowing one's own self is on a par, almost, with knowing God.

Augustine thought, with good reason, that premortality was nonbiblical and contradicted the doctrine of original sin, which doctrine was interpreted by the church in Augustine's day to have been taught by Paul. He also felt that an eternally existent soul impinged upon God's divine omnipotence and absolute sovereignty, because such a soul could by moral effort, theoretically, secure its own salvation and thus not be indebted to Christ's saving work; thus premortality diminishes, theologically, the scope of Christ's Atonement (*BYU Studies* 2011; vol. 50, no. 4. 139-140).

Catholic

"In 1950 Pope [Pius XII](#) released an encyclical confirming that there is no intrinsic conflict between the theory of evolution and the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, provided that Catholics still believe that humans are endowed with a soul created by God" (Encyclopedia Britannica, "Creationism").

Protestant

The doctrine that God created the earth out of nothing, *creation ex nihilo*, the logical thought is that nothing existed before. If earth was without form and void, that included any prior existence. I found the following chart from the *Foundation for the Advancement of Religion Online* (<http://www.religionresourcesonline.org/>)

Pre-Mortal Existence of Man	
Adventist	There is no Pre-Mortal Existence of Man. Man begins to exist when he is born into this world.
Baptist	Do not believe in the Pre-Mortal Existence of Man. Jesus Christ (God) only had such. He lived before this life.
Catholic	Christ, as God, was from all eternity. Do not believe in the Pre-Mortal Existence of Man.
Christian Scientist	Most believe in the Pre-Mortal Existence of Man, meaning that life does not begin at birth. There are a variety of beliefs within the church concerning this subject.
Church of Jesus Christ LDS	Before life, we lived as spirits with God our Heavenly Father. When we are born, the spirit unites with a body of earthly substance. The spirit is immortal.
Disciples of Christ	No doctrine concerning the pre-existence of man. There is a wide variety of opinion and it is left to the individual to believe what they wish.
Eastern Orthodox	God, meaning the Holy Trinity, only had pre-existence. All of us were created on this earth by God (spirit).
Episcopalian	God lived before His birth at Bethlehem and is the only one to live before birth. Do not have any knowledge of the Pre-Mortal Existence of Man.
Jehovah's Witness	Christ had what is called a "pre-human" existence as a spirit person, was born a mortal man, and does not have an immortal soul. Our personal existence begins with our birth.
Lutheran	Do not believe in the Pre-Mortal Existence of Man.
Methodist	Do not believe in the Pre-Mortal Existence of Man.
Presbyterian	No doctrine as such. Only speculation.
Quaker	Do not have a majority that feels one way or other about it. This is left to the individual to interpret for his or her self. Not generally a matter of discussion in meetings.
Unitarian	There was no Pre-Mortal Existence of Man. Man began here on this earth.
United Church of Christ	Most do not believe in an existence before birth, but there may be some that do. This is a matter that is left up to the individual, and is not a matter of concern for the church.

Hinduism (2300 B.C. and 1500 B.C.)

Their holy scripture, *Bhagavad-gita 2:12*, reads: "Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be."

These religious options opens many metaphysical and moral problems that Terry L Givens addresses:

- "If the soul originates with the body . . . then why does it not perish with the body?"
- "If God creates the soul afresh in every human, how can it be imperfect, as a soul of fallen nature necessarily is?"
- If it is created pure and innocent, how and when does it come to acquire the burden of Adam's sin and guilt?
- What justice can there be in immediately consigning a purely created spirit to the incubus of guilt, sin, and fallenness?"

(Terry L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought*, New York: Oxford Univ. 2010)

Islamic ~AD 600 (Encyclopedia Britannica,

Some Muslims interpret the Quran 7:127, "thy Lord Brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves," as referring to a pre-birth existence. However, the greater tradition claim "creates ex nihilo and is in no need of a consort, nor does he have offspring." It is hard to find collaboration between those two ideas. (For more see www.britannica.com, or "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics, and Society," Pew Research Center, April 30, 2013.)

Restored Doctrine of Premortal Life: 1828-2021

The most influential scriptures that form this doctrine is the Books of Moses and Abraham. The Encyclopedia of Mormonism (pages 1123-1124) summaries the beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

Prior to mortal birth individuals existed as men and women in a spirit state and thus coexisted with both the Father and the Son. That period of life is also referred to as the first estate or pre-existence. . . . There is indeed indication that the intelligence dwelling in each person is coeternal with God. It always existed and never was created or made ([D&C 93:29](#)). In due time that intelligence was given a spirit body, becoming the spirit child of God the Eternal Father and his beloved companion, the Mother in Heaven. This spirit, inhabited by the eternal intelligence, took the form of its creators and is in their image (Ballard, p. 140).

To the Prophet Joseph Smith it was revealed that we are all literal spirit sons and daughters of heavenly parents. He received a revelation of information once made known to Moses: "I [God] made the world, and men before they were in the flesh" ([Moses 6:51](#)). This likewise reflects the implication in Numbers 16:22 that God is the Father of all, and hence he is "the God of the spirits of all flesh."

Intelligences were organized before the world was, and among these were many great and noble ones, such as Abraham and Moses. God stood in their midst, saw that they were good, and chose them for responsibilities on earth and throughout eternity ([Abr. 3:21-23](#)). Jesus, the firstborn spirit, was preeminent among them. "Jesus existed with the Father prior to birth in the flesh; and in the pre-existent state He was chosen and ordained to be the one and only Savior and Redeemer of the human race" (*JC*, p. 6).

Revelation indicates that all things, even the earth itself, had a spirit existence before the physical creation. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Not only has man a spirit, and is thereby a living soul, but likewise the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea have spirits, and hence are living souls. The fish, the fowl, the beasts of the field lived before they were placed naturally in this earth, and so did the plants that are upon the face of the earth. The spirits that possess the bodies of the animals are in the similitude of their bodies" (*DS* 1:63-64).