

Jehovah, the God of ancient Israel, LeGrand Baker

There is an important idea here. I've tried to say it once or twice, but I've never tried to write it before. So please understand, first of all this is an opinion which is very apt to be flawed in its presentation. Before I can say what I would like to say, I need to give a little contextual background.

In the pantheons of the ancient Near East, the collections of gods had different names but the same sort of functions. There was a king or father of the gods and several high ranking gods, then others of a lesser rank which included gods over wine, travel, over this city, or that mountain. The chief god was also usually the judge among the gods. Other important gods had the functions of the creator god, the god of storm, the war god, the god of the underworld, and goddess of fertility.

The foremost function of a king is to be a judge. That was also true of the king of the gods. In Mesopotamian religion there was no last judgement, but the king of the gods was also the judge of the other gods. In Egypt it was somewhat different. There was a last judgement, and when an Egyptian died, his heart was weighed to discover its purity.

Both the Canaanite Baal and the Babylonian Marduk were creator gods. They were responsible for the creation of the earth and placing people on it.

Baal and Marduk were each also the local gods of storms. That is a very important power. Storms produce rain and rain produce crops, so these gods were seen as powerful benefactors to the cities where they were worshiped.

When a city went to war with another city, the war was also seen as a struggle between the gods of those cities. So whichever god was being championed by an army might be thought of as a god of war. In Rome, Mars had that specific assignment, however.

Fertility (both human and other) and love were usually assigned to a goddess: Isis in Egypt, Ishtar in Babylon. Both were also kind goddesses to whom one could appeal for intercession with other gods.

Another important god was the one who ruled the underworld. The world of the dead is not a happy place however, for the atonement was not a doctrine of any of those ancient Near Eastern religions. As is typical of apostasy, however much truth may be preserved in doctrine, ordinances, or liturgy, the first and surest things to go is an understanding of the Saviour's atonement.

In each of these religions there is also a long list of lesser gods who belonged to a heavenly council and whose responsibilities fall under the purview of one of the major gods.

The Israelite pantheon was both like that and very, very different. It is similar in that there are

many minor gods with specific assignments. We use the phrases "council in heaven" and "foreordination" to describe the pantheon and the assignments.

When Jehovah announced to Moses, that he was the ONE GOD, he was not denying the existence of his Father, or of the members of the Council. What he was saying is that all of the characteristics and powers divided among the major gods of the apostate pantheons, are centered in himself.

Jehovah is Judge and King

Jehovah is Creator

Jehovah is God of Storms, as he graphically demonstrated when Elijah challenged the priests of Baal by announcing there will be neither rain nor dew until Jehovah said there should be. That announcement was followed by three years without rain.

Jehovah is God of Armies, as is demonstrated by his name/title, Lord of Hosts

Jehovah is God of the underworld as is shown in Isaiah 61 and the last third of Psalms 22. In both we find Jehovah going to the dead, teaching them, and giving them ordinances.

Jehovah is God of fertility as is shown in the stories of Samuel' mother, and of Sampson's parents.

Jehovah is the very personification of love.

Thus, there is no conflict of ideas when one says the ancient Israelites worshipped ONE GOD, and when one says there was an ancient Israelite pantheon which consisted of Elohim the Father, Jehovah the Son, and a full Council of gods.

The ancient world which Nephi and Jacob lived in defined their gods by their functions. The Israelites often used somewhat the same language, only rather than speaking of different gods, they spoke of the ONENESS of Jehovah by emphasizing and naming his power or characteristic which was most immediately relevant to their present subject or situation.

And that is what we find Jacob doing here. The thing which fascinates me is that the godly characteristic which Jacob associates with the atonement is not love, or judgement, fertility (as one might expect in the promise of eternal increase), or even of the underworld. What Jacob says is that the atonement was performed by the God of Creation. He wrote:

Nephi, chapter 9:5-7

v. 5 Yea, I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, from whence we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.

v. 6 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.

v. 7 Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement--save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

To me that suggests that the powers of performing the atonement are an integral part of the powers of Creation. and/or that the powers by which the Saviour created all things are the powers by which he atoned for all things.

Walt Hill could say this better than I can, and I hope he will correct me, but I'll try to muddle through any way.

Joseph Smith said there is no such thing as immaterial matter, and that physical matter and spirit matter are the same except one is more refined than the other. So I presume the following fundamental ideas are as true of spirit matter as they are true of physical matter.

Matter is an expression of the way energy is organized. Matter and energy are fundamentally the same thing. In an atomic explosion, when matter is changed back into energy, that energy is expressed in an explosion of force, visible light, and heat.

The elementary particles of visible light are called photons. Sometimes they act like a wave, other times they act like a particle, so no one is quite sure whether they are either or both. The elementary particles of matter of which our bodies, this earth, and the universe, are made is akin to or the same sort of thing as photons, just as energy is akin to or the same sort of thing as light. I presume, then, it would be correct, if over-simplistic, to say that our bodies are made of light -- but not necessarily of visible light. I also presume it would be equally correct, but somehow more easily recognizable to say that our spirit bodies are made of light also.

The essence of our being and personality is called in the scriptures, "intelligence." Of that we learn,

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. (D&C 93:29-30)

The phrase "light of truth" seems to be a literal, rather than a figurative description, for in section 88 we learn that truth shines.

This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom; Which glory is that of the church of the Firstborn, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ his Son-- He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth; Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of

the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made; As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made; And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space-- The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things. (D&C 88: 4-13)

Truth seems to be something like the "elementary particles" of which light is made, or light is an expression of organized truth.

Truth is a knowledge of reality -- of things as they really are. Christ is the personification of that knowlege, for he has all truth.

And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning. The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth; (D&C 93:24- 26)

Having all truth does not constitute a monopoly. For the next two verses say,

And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93: 27-28)

What I am about to wright may not be correct, but it is as close as I can come with the information I have.

Truth shines, so light is either a product of truth, or an expression of organized truth (lie matter is an expression of organized energy?). Intelligence is the light of truth.

Christ has all truth and therefore is the source of light. I presume he is the source of the light which constitutes intelligence, and in its "less refined" form, the source of light which constitutes both spirit and temporal matter. (I don't have any idea what the relationship is between intelligence and matter. Intelligence, which is the light of truth, cannot be created or made. Mater, which I understand to be an expression of light, is "organized.")

The begining of the gospel of John is necessary to pull all this together. It equates the light which is "in him" with the life of man. It reads:

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. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)

Thus it appears that man is an expression of the life which is the light which emanates from the fulness of truth of which Christ is the personification. In short, we and all things in this "age" are made of the light which emanates from Christ.

Now let us return to Jacob's comment that it is the Creator God who is also the God of the Atonement.

The next phrase in John's gospel, v. 5, seems to define the whole power of the atonement. "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended [encircled, overcame] it not." The power of the atonement is the power to withstand, then defeat and overcome chaos.

In the full eternal scope of the creation process (creation of spirit element, creation of temporal element, creation of eternal-resurrected element) As far as I can tell, Christ gives free reign to the individual units of personality which are called "intelligences." The result is partial chaos. The cause is that all "facts" are not truth. and one can "know" that which is not consistent with reality. Again section 93,

And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; and whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of the wicked one who was a liar from the beginning. (v. 24-25)

Chaos must be defeated in four spheres. First at the Council on Kolob, when Satan is kicked out in Abraham 3. Second, I suppose is, on the defeat of Satan in spirit world which was created by the Council and peopled by spirits (either, or both of those may be called the war in heaven). Third is the defeat of physical chaos in the creation of element, and the creation of our bodies. Fourth is the defeat of death when the Saviour introduced the gospel and ordinances into the world of the dead. Fifth is the cleansing of this beautiful earth from the evil which has been on it, and the introduction of the thousand years of peace. Sixth is the resurrection of all things, the universe, the earth, and its inhabitants. (I'm sure that is a very inadequate list) Each of those defeats of chaos were achieved by the acts of the atonement which occurred during the Saviour's experience in the garden and on the cross. The idea the atonement is infinite and eternal is a VERY BIG idea.

I think what Jacob is saying is that Christ was the only one who could have performed the atonement because all things are made by him, of him, through him. He IS all things, therefore he and only he has the power to cleanse and justify all things.