

Dear Ashley,

The essay on the atonement is something I thought I would probably never write down. It is my testimony. As I wrote it, I was careful to avoid saying things that are very sacred to me. So you will read, “I believe” rather than “I know.” And it is full of scriptural code words. One of the great advantages of being able to read the temple sub-text in the scriptures is that when one knows the language, one can also write in that code. I have tried to do that, knowing that you, and some of my other friends will be able to read what I am writing.

Much love
LeGrand

The Atonement - LeGrand Baker, 2 Nov. 2004

This discussion of the atonement is not anything like an exhaustive treatment of the subject. The events of the atoning sacrifice by the Saviour during his mortal life, coupled with his resurrection, taken together, constitute the single most important event in the history of our universe. That superlative is easy to justify, because the universe could never have come into existence without the absolute certainty of the atonement the Saviour accomplished while on this earth. My purpose here is not to examine those events, but to accept them, without question, as the premise upon which to build everything I write here. This discussion will be limited to only two facets of the significance of the atonement: its eternal and infinite nature, and its overarching influence on us during our pre-mortal existence. My purpose is to suggest why only the Saviour had the necessary relationship with all created things, so that he could atone for all created things.

If I had to choose only three scriptures to describe the Saviour’s atoning sacrifice, they would be:

1) the explanation of why the atonement was necessary:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.(John 3:16.)

2) The Saviour’s own description of his experience:

18 Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

19 Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (D&C 19:18-19)

3) The prayer of the atonement:

3 Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him -

4 Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom

thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;
 5 Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may
 come unto me and have everlasting life. (D&C 45:3-6)

One of the most explicit, and therefore one of the most important statements about the eternal, overreaching power of the atonement was written by the Prophet Joseph in the winter of 1843. In the poem called "A Vision" the Prophet summarized what he had learned about the eternal nature of mankind. A precursory reading shows the poem to be simply another version of Section 76. However on closer examination, one discovers it is much more expansive than that. The first difference one notices is that Section 76 is written in first person plural. "We saw..." Philo Dibble, who was present when the latter part of the vision was received, describes why that is so. Dibble had gone to Hiram, Ohio, where Joseph and some friends were gathered at the Johnson farm. When Dibble arrived at the farm, the revelation was already in process. He recalls,

Joseph would, at intervals, say: "What do I see?" as one might say while looking out the window and beholding what all in the room could not see. Then he would relate what he had seen or what he was looking at. Then Sidney replied, "I see the same."
 Presently Sidney would say, "What do I see?" and would repeat what he had seen or was seeing, and Joseph would reply, "I see the same."

This manner of conversation was repeated for short intervals to the end of the vision. And during the whole time not a word was spoken by any other person not a sound or motion made by anyone but Sidney, and it seemed to me that they never moved a joint or limb during the time I was there, which I think was over an hour, and to the end of the vision.

Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time, in the midst of a magnificent glory, but Sidney sat limp and pale, apparently as limp as a rag. Observing such at the close of the vision, Joseph remarked smilingly "Sidney is not used to it as I am." (*Instructor*, vol. 27, p. 303)

and in another place Dibble added more detail,

Joseph wore black clothes, but at this time seemed to be dressed in an element of glorious white, and his face shone as if it were transparent, but I did not see the same glory attending Sidney. Joseph appeared as strong as a lion, but Sidney seemed as weak as water, and Joseph, noticing his condition smiled and said, "Brother Sidney is not as used to it as I am." (recollection of Philo Dibble in *Early Scenes in Church History: Faith-Promoting Series*, no. 8 [Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881], p. 81)

What Joseph dictated at that time became Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is an immediately contemporary account of a single vision seen by both Joseph and Sidney. In contrast, the poem, written ten years later, is in first person singular. "I saw...." It contains so much more detail that I read it as Joseph's composite description of multiple revelations. It was published in the *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1843, and republished in the *Millennial Star* in August of that same year. The lines I wish to call attention to are these:

Hosanna, for ever! They open'd anon,

And the glory of God shone around where I was;
 And there was the Son at the Father's right hand,
 In a fulness of glory and holy applause.
 I beheld round the throne holy angels and hosts,
 And sanctified beings from worlds that have been,
 In holiness worshiping God and the Lamb,
 For ever and ever. Amen and amen.
 And now after all of the proofs made of him,
 By witnesses truly, by whom he was known,
 This is mine, last of all, that he lives; yea, he lives!
 And sits at the right hand of God on his throne.
 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 career 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.

One of the remarkable ideas expressed there has to do with the all-encompassing effects of the atonement:

I beheld round the throne holy angels and hosts,
 And sanctified beings from worlds that have been,

The implication is that our earth was not the first of the physical worlds created, and that the beings who lived on other worlds before ours were sanctified by the "future" atoning sacrifice that was performed by the Saviour on this earth. That would work because in sacred time there is neither past, present, nor future.

The most telling phrases in the poem are:

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.

President John Taylor wrote of that principle. In the editorial he wrote in 1857 while living in New York, he addresses an unnamed lady, and asked,

Knowest thou not that eternities ago, thy spirit, pure and holy, dwelt in thy Heavenly Father's bosom, and in his presence, and with thy mother, one of the Queens of heaven, surrounded by thy brother and sister spirits in the spirit world, among the Gods. That as thy spirit beheld the scenes transpiring there, and thou growing in intelligence, thou sawest worlds upon worlds organized and peopled with thy kindred spirits, took upon them tabernacles, died, were resurrected, and received their exaltation on the redeemed

worlds they once dwelt upon. Thou being willing and anxious to imitate them, waiting and desirous to obtain a body, a resurrection and exaltation also....] (John Taylor, editor, *The Mormon*, New York City, August 29, 1857)

From these two statements it is apparent to me that the power of the atonement accomplished by the Saviour on this earth was retroactive to the full reaches of our universe in both time and space. The people who lived on physical worlds created before our own earth "were resurrected, and received their exaltation on the redeemed worlds they once dwelt upon," John the Beloved taught the same thing:

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 The same was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
- 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
- 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.(John 1:1-2)

It seems to me that John's statement cannot be understood if one limits its meaning to conditions on our physical earth.

The Saviour introduced himself that same way when he came to America.

15 Behold, I am Jesus Christ the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; and in me hath the Father glorified his name.

....

18 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. (3 Nephi 9: 15 - 18)

Section 93 is even more explicit.

- 7 And he [John] bore record, saying: I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning, before the world was;
- 8 Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation——
- 9 The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men.
- 10 The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him.

The testimony is that all things, and all people - everything and everyone in the full expanse of the universe - "all things were made by him, and through him, and of him."

That the worlds were made "by him," is easy enough to understand; that they were made "through him," seems to be a reference to his authority - at least the authority under which the members of the Council operated during the creation process - but also the authority by which he sustains our rights to exercise agency and be one's Self. But that the were made "of him" seems to require some explanation, even though it means exactly what it says.

It is an axiom of today's scientific thinking that matter is organized energy. The present theory is

that the fundamental building blocks from which all things are made are little "strings" of pulsating energy. No one is sure what that energy is, just as no one is sure what light is, but energy and light seem to be so closely related that they are simply different expressions of the same thing. If that is so, then one can say that today's best science testifies that all things are made of light - just as the scriptures say they are - and the light is the Light of Christ. My understanding is that the light of which all things are made is part of the huge aura that surrounds the Saviour and is an extension of his person. All living things have such an aura - but his is simply bigger than all the others put together. (Abraham 3: 19-20) The scriptures give considerable detail about that. The most explicit is in Section 88.

- 6 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;
 7 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.
 8 As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made;
 9 As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made;
 10 And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand.
 11 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;
 12 Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space
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- 13 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: 6-13)

There is an intriguing account in the "Book of the Secrets of Enoch," that describes how that was so "before the beginning" and, by implication, how that remains so now.

- 22: 1 On the tenth Heaven, Aravoth, I saw the appearance of the Lord's face, like iron made to glow in fire, and brought out, emitting sparks, and it burns. Thus I saw the Lord's face, but the Lord's face is ineffable, marvelous and very awful, and very, very terrible.
 2 And who am I to tell of the Lord's unspeakable being, and of his very wonderful face? and I cannot tell the quantity of his many instructions, and various voices, the Lord's throne very great and not made with hands, nor the quantity of those standing round him, troops of cherubim and
 3 seraphim, nor their incessant singing, of his immutable beauty, and who shall tell of the ineffable greatness of his glory?
 4 And I fell prone and bowed down to the Lord,
 5 and the Lord with his lips said to me: 'Have courage, Enoch, do not fear, arise and stand before my face into eternity.'
 6 And the archistratege Michael lifted me up, and led me to before the Lord's face.
 7 And the Lord said to his servants tempting them: 'Let Enoch stand before my face into eternity,' and the glorious ones bowed down to the Lord, and said: 'Let Enoch go according to Thy word.'
 8 And the Lord said to Michael: 'Go and take Enoch from out his earthly garments, and anoint him with my sweet ointment, [Charles' footnote reads: "oil"] and put him into the garments of My glory.'

9 And Michael did thus, as the Lord told him. He anointed me, and dressed me, and the appearance of that ointment is more than the great light, and his ointment is like sweet dew, and its'

10 smell mild, shining like the sun's ray, and I looked at myself, and was like one of his glorious ones.

11 And the Lord summoned one of his archangels by name Pravuil, whose knowledge was quicker in wisdom than the other archangels, who wrote all the deeds of the Lord ; and the

12 Lord said to Pravuil: 'Bring out the books from my store-houses, and a reed of quick-writing, and give it to Enoch, and deliver to him the choice and comforting books out of thy hand.'

23: 1 And he was telling me all the works of heaven, earth and sea, and all the elements, their passages and goings, and the thunderings of the thunders, the sun and moon, the goings and changes of the stars, the seasons, years, days, and hours, the risings of the wind, the numbers of the angels,

2 and the formation of their songs, and all human things, the tongue of every human song and life, the commandments, instructions, and sweet voiced singings, and all things that it is fitting to learn. And Pravuil told me: 'All the things

[3-]4 that I have told thee, we have written. Sit and write all the souls of mankind, however many of them are born, and the places prepared for them

5 to eternity ; for all souls are prepared to eternity, before the formation of the world.'

And all

6 double thirty days and thirty nights, and I wrote out all things exactly, and wrote three hundred and sixty-six books.

24: 1 And the Lord summoned me, and said to me: Enoch, sit down on my left with Gabriel.' And I bowed down to the Lord, and the Lord spoke

2 to me: Enoch, beloved, all thou seest, all things that are standing finished I tell to thee even before the very beginning, all that I created from non-being, and visible things from invisible.

3 Hear, Enoch, and take in these my words, for not to My angels have I told my secret, and I have not told them their rise, nor my endless realm, nor have they understood my creating,

4 which I tell thee to-day. For before all things were visible, I alone used to go about in the invisible things, like the sun from east to west, and west to east. But even the sun has peace in itself, while I found no peace, because I "as creating all things, and I conceived the thought of placing foundations, and of creating visible creation.

25: 1 I commanded in the very lowest parts, that visible things should come down from invisible, and Adoil [Charles' footnote says the name "Adoil" is from a Hebrew root meaning "the hand of God."] came down very great, and I beheld

2 him, and lo! he had a belly of great light. And I said to him: 'Become undone, Adoil, and let

3 the visible come out of thee.' And he came undone, and a great light came out. And I was in the midst of the great light, and as there is born light from light, there came forth a great age, and showed all creation, which I had thought to

4 create. And I saw that it was good. And I placed for myself a throne, and took my seat on it, and said to the light: 'Go thou up higher and fix thyself high above the throne, and be

5 a foundation to the highest things.' And above the light there is nothing else, and then I bent up and looked up from my throne. ("The Book of the Secrets of Enoch," 21-25, in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. II, [Oxford,

Clarendon Press, 1976], 2:442-445.)

I have a strong personal liking for the books of Enoch. There was a time when the Jews accepted Enoch as scripture. That the early Christians did also, as is attested in the New Testament where Jude quotes it as scripture (Jude 1:14-16 is Enoch 1: 9). But one must point out that Jude was quoting First Enoch, not the Secrets of Enoch, so his quote cannot be used to show that the Secrets of Enoch was considered to be a part of the early Christian canon. That's OK in my thinking - I like it anyway. Enoch's description of Adoil sounds enough like Revelation 12: 1-9 that they probably represent visions of the same events. There are also details in Lehi's vision described in 1 Nephi 1: 8-12, that suggest Lehi also saw the same thing.

The phrase in Section 88, that the Saviour is "the light and the life of the world" obviously has a greater meaning than just the light and the life of *this* world. Rather, it clearly stretches to all ends of creation.

To the Prophet Joseph the Saviour said, "And now, remember the words of him who is the life and light of the world, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God." (D&C 10: 70) And through Moroni we find the idea expanded, so that it includes the creation from before the beginning. Moroni quotes the Saviour as saying, "For behold, I am the Father, I am the light, and the life, and the truth of the world." (Ether 4:12) The most complete explanation of that idea I know is also in D&C 88 where the Saviour said:

40 For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy and claimeth her own; justice continueth its course and claimeth its own; judgment goeth before the face of him who sitteth upon the throne and governeth and executeth all things.

41 He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever.

42 And again, verily I say unto you, he hath given a law unto all things, by which they move in their times and their seasons;

43 And their courses are fixed, even the courses of the heavens and the earth, which comprehend the earth and all the planets.

44 And they give light to each other in their times and in their seasons, in their minutes, in their hours, in their days, in their weeks, in their months, in their years—all these are one year with God, but not with man.

45 The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God.

46 Unto what shall I liken these kingdoms, that ye may understand?

47 Behold, all these are kingdoms, and any man who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power.

48 I say unto you, he hath seen him; nevertheless, he who came unto his own was not comprehended.

49 The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; nevertheless, the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God, being quickened in him and by him.

50 Then shall ye know that ye have seen me, that I am, and that I am the true light that is in you, and that you are in me; otherwise ye could not abound. (D&C 88:40-50)

Thus from "before the beginning" - to the most distant edges of this eternity - Christ is the origin, the light, the life and the truth of everything created in this "system."

Not only everything created physically, but everything created spiritually as well, are made of the light that is the aura that expands from his person.

Not only are our spiritual and physical bodies made of his light, but throughout all of our history we each were, are, and will ever be sustained by his light. As Paul observed,

22 [The Father] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,
23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.(Ephesians 1:22-23.)

It is because we are a part of him that he can heal us, and we can be clean.

How long have we been a part of him? For a very, very long time.

The Saviour teaches us that intelligences are "independent."

29 Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

30 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)

I wonder about that "sphere in which God has placed [them]."

While it is true that intelligences are individual, cognizant and independent persons of light, it must also be true that they do not exist in a vacuum. I believe that the environment in which they live, which sustains, nourishes, and nurtures them - and empowers them as it empowers us - is that same great aura of light which is in and through all things.

I have also wondered at the meaning of a few verses I quote above. What if the Lord's statement not only applies to all things with a spirit or physical body, but to intelligences as well:

36 All kingdoms have a law given;

37 And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or a lesser kingdom.

38 And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.

39 All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.

40 For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy and claimeth her own; justice continueth its course and claimeth its own; judgment goeth before the face of him who sitteth upon the throne and governeth and executeth all things.

41 He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever. (D&C 88: 36-41)

If vs. 40 applies also to intelligences, and for them it is also true that "intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth

unto light;" Then one may believe that intelligences are capable of friendship and love. I take it that Alma 13 means precisely what it says: that the "children" are the spirit children of our Father in Heaven - that they are the noble and great ones in Abraham 3 - and that Alma 13 tells how they came to be noble and great - "in the first place" which I believe means in the *first* place - as intelligences.

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, [God's foreknowledge was based on their faithfulness as intelligences] on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place [when they were intelligences] being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith [- faith in Christ - when they were intelligences], are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such. [received the priesthood before their first "preparatory" redemption. To be redeemed means to be brought into the presence of God (Ether 3:13; 2 Nephi 1:15, 2:1-4.) - so a preparatory redemption would be the redemption that brings them into his presence as his spirit children.]

4 And thus they [as intelligences] have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith [in Christ], while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they [intelligences who were not chosen] might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

5 Or in fine, in the first place they [the non-chosen] were on the same standing with their brethren [the chosen]; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared -

I think we find a personal - autobiographical - account of that growth in the first four verses of Abraham. If "the land of the Chaldeans" can be taken as symbolic of his *first* home, then the rest falls easily into place, for the odyssey he describes ends when he has achieved his place with Adam in the Council in Heaven.

1 In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence;

2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.

3 It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me.

4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed. (Abraham 1:1-4)

If intelligences are capable of choices, they are also capable of sin. If they sin, they are unclean. No unclean thing can enter the presence of God. Therefore no intelligence who had ever sinned could enter into the presence of God as one of his spirit children. There was only one who had

never sinned, therefore only one who could by right become a child of God. All the others required his assistance - his atonement - to become innocent of their past and free from sin.

Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning [that is: in the beginning - before the Council - when they became children of our Father]; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state [as little babies in this world], innocent before God. (D&C 93: 38)

Thus the same eternal and infinite atonement that enables a spirit person to be born into this world as an innocent baby, first enabled that same intelligent to be born into the spirit world as an innocent child of God. - and still enables each person in this world to become innocent again, and be redeemed a final time into the Celestial world of our Heavenly Father. The Prophet Joseph wrote:

50 And again we bear record—for we saw and heard, and this is the testimony of the gospel of Christ concerning them who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just—
 51 They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—
 52 That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power;
 53 And who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true.
 54 They are they who are the church of the Firstborn.
 55 They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—
 56 They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory;
 57 And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son.
 58 Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—
 59 Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's.
 60 And they shall overcome all things. (D&C 76: 50-60)

That phrase, "and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's" projects our present relationship with the Saviour through the ends of eternity. The Prophet Joseph further described that relationship this way:

When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves. And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy. (D&C 130:1-2.)

I understand "that same sociality" to be one's eternal relationship with the Saviour as well as with all of his children who are with him in the Celestial world.