

PRE-EXISTENCE
Jeremiah 1:5
By Raymond White

Do we humans exist before we are born? Mormons say yes, all other Christians say no. What does the Bible say, if anything, on the pre-mortal existence of humans?

[1] GOD'S RHETORICAL QUESTION

Job 38:4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? :7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

This is a fair question that God asks Job. Where were you when I created the world? God follows the question with what may be or may not be the answer: "...and the sons of God shouted for joy?"

But God's answer (or non-answer) invites another question which is this: Who are *the sons of God* who shouted for joy? There are two possible answers: (1) they are pre-existent humans, or (2) they are not. If not, then they are instead some kind of angels.

Let's assume (1) is true. Then humans have a pre-existence and the Mormons are right. Don't like that? Okay, then let's assume (2) is true. In that case, angels have gender. I may not know what the "sons of God" are but I sure know that "sons" are male. And if angles have gender, then Mormons are quite comfortable with that interpretation as well, that heaven is populated with sexual beings. So, you decide. Either way, the Mormons win.

But I'll give you a good reason for believing that the Sons of God are pre-existent humans —

Luke 3:38 Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.

If Adam was a son of God, then so are the rest of us, except girls who are daughters of God.

[2] OUR SPIRITS

Psalms 104:30 Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created...

When the man is created, his spirit is *sent* into him, not created within him. It is this prior existence of man's spirit that Mormons point to and call the "pre-existence."

[3] WISDOM

Proverbs 8:27 When he prepared the heavens, I was there...

Caution: This is *not* a pre-existence verse. Many Mormons think it is, but that is a mistake which get us into trouble. The pronoun “I” is not a person, it is “wisdom” (:12) who is speaking in the first person and was with God when he prepared the heavens.

However this text does give Mormons a real pre-existence verse, which is —

Proverbs 8:31 ...and my delights were with the sons of men.

This verse *may* be a pre-existence verse. Wisdom seems to be delighting with the sons of men before the world was made. Does that mean that men existed before the world or that wisdom is delighting in men who will be? The second seems a stretch because the text is not saying that wisdom is rejoicing *about* the sons of men, but *with* the sons of men. You can't rejoice *with* someone if that someone doesn't exist.

[4] RETURN

Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Certainly you cannot return to where you've never been. So if the spirit returns to God, then it must have come from God in the first place. That couples well with —

Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

So if you consider that the man's breath of life came from somewhere outside of man's created body and not a result of the physical creation of that body, then pre-existence seems an unavoidable conclusion.

To be honest, there is a contrary verse —

Zechariah 12:1 ...and formeth the spirit of man within him.

The Bible does seem to be at odds with itself. It can't hardly be both ways: our spirits made in us and yet our spirits came to us from somewhere else. If you require the bible to be inerrant, okay, but then you have to flip a coin.

[5] BEFORE CONCEPTION

Jeremiah 1:5 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.

Forget about Jeremiah's ordination during gestation. Of course Jeremiah was a human being during gestation, but that is not an argument for pre-existence but an argument against abortion which is not my subject right now (although it's never far from my mind.)

Focus instead on “before I formed thee.” That means *before* gestation. Before there was an impregnation, God knew Jeremiah.

One could argue the meaning of “I knew thee” and try to convince us that God knew the future Jeremiah who didn’t exist yet. That seems unlikely because the Hebrew word means to know in the ordinary sense; in other words, a fact — not a future fact but a current fact: I know this truth, I know that person.

Consider God’s knowledge of Abraham —

Genesis 18:19 *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD...*

God said two things of Abraham: I know him *now* (present) and because I know him now, I know what he *will do* (future). And God said of Jeremiah: I know him *now*, before conception, and so I will ordain him to be a prophet before he is born God knew each person personally before conception, and that we call pre-existence.

[6] PREDESTINATION

Ephesians 1:4 *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. :5* *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.*

This verse is troubling for two reasons: First, that God chose some for salvation and others for damnation before the world was, which leaves little room for free will. And second, we didn’t even exist yet so what is the basis for God’s decision? He knew us “in his mind” is the standard answer which is a shallow argument.

Pre-existence answers both problems. If we existed with God before the world was, he already knew us literally and not merely “in his mind.” And therefore, having an acquaintance with us, had real reason to make such predestined decisions.

[7] ATONEMENT

Romans 5:10 *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. :11* *And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.*

The Greek work *katallage* occurs here three times, twice translated to reconciled and once translated to atonement. It occurs twice more in the New Testament and is both times translated reconciled which is its correct meaning.

Reconcile means to restore a friendship. Two friends became enemies then became friends again by their reconciliation. But if we are born enemies of God, when were we ever friends so that we could be reconciled? The only answer is in the pre-existence. Without a pre-existence, we were never friends of God and therefore reconciliation is impossible and the New Testament notion of atonement is impossible.