

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

AT

Mount Pleasant, forenoon, November 12th, 1879.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

THROUGH the kind providence of our heavenly Father we are permitted, on this pleasant day, to assemble here in this comfortable house, for the purpose of worshipping God, and hearing instruction as the Lord may see proper, in his kindness and wisdom, to pour out his spirit, and make manifest the truth to us. It is a pleasing thing for the human mind, to contemplate that it has some object to worship: that there is a being, far exalted above us, who dwells in the heavens, who is worthy of all adoration and praise; and that we are his children, in possession of a portion of his attributes.

The world which we inhabit is a fallen creation, a fallen world, shut out from the presence of our Father, the being whom we worship, so that we cannot behold his face, nor the glory of his presence. It is for a wise purpose, that we are placed here, in this fallen condition. It seems to be so, as far as we have been made acquainted with the purposes of the Great Jehovah. It seems to be the ordeal, through which all intelligent beings must pass, in order to gain that fulness of exaltation, in the presence of God, which is promised in his word.

We were not always in the condition we are now in. We are only placed here for a few years, and are adapted to our present condition. A long time before you and I came here upon this stage of action, we had an intelligent existence; we dwelt in a better world than this, and a world that had been redeemed, a world that had been sanctified and glorified; in other words, a world that had been made celestial, just as we are in hopes that our present world will, at some future period, be exalted to the celestial glory, and become the habitation of celestial beings. That world we occupied, before we came here, was celestial; our Father had his dwelling place here, or, at least, one of his dwelling places; and we were surrounded by our Father's glory, we were familiar with his countenance, familiar with the beautiful mansions that were there,—familiar with all the glory that existed there, so far as we were capable of comprehending. There was no veil drawn between us and our Father, no veil drawn between us and the associates of our Father, who were also celestial beings, many of them having been redeemed from a world more ancient than ours. We had a long experience, I suppose, in that world; at least, we know from that which our Father has revealed to us, that we were born there; that this intelligent being that has power to discern, power to reflect, power to reason,—that this intelligent being was born in that previous estate.

These were some of the first revelations given in this last dispensation. The Lord did not wait several years, before he revealed unto us, in some measure, concerning our condition before we came here. Hence, it was away back in the year 1830, that this doctrine of the pre-existence of man was revealed, in greater fulness, than it was given in the Book of Mormon. There are two or three places in the Book of Mormon that reveal the pre-existence of man; but not in such great plainness, as was given soon after the publication of that book, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, before the Saints began to gather, informing us that we were in reality the children of our Father and God; that we had a pre-existence in which we had learned many very important principles, connected with spiritual existence, before taking bodies of flesh and bones, which was also necessary to afford us a still greater experience. Now, in this plan that God has devised for the advancement of these intelligent beings—by passing them through various stages of existence, under different circumstances, and in different conditions,—he gives them experience that they never could have gained, had they remained in the presence of the Father, in that world which was celestial; in other words, we were his offspring in that world, our spiritual bodies not having flesh and bones, but being in the image of the

Father and the Son,—his own sons and daughters. He had a great desire that we should be educated and taught. He could teach us a great many things in that world as we teach our children; he could impart to us a great many truths—for there were as many truths in existence in that day as are in existence now; but truths were taught to us, as we were capable of understanding them. The Lord felt anxious that we might come up and eventually be made like him, as it is written in the New Testament, "who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." I have no doubt before we came into this world, we had a great anxiety, that we might be brought up in the same way he was instructed and taught, and led along, passing through different conditions of existence, that we finally might be counted worthy to be exalted at his right hand, and receive the fulness of his celestial glory the same that he is in possession of, and that we might have all his attributes, dwelling within us, as separate individuals and personages, that he might exalt us like unto himself. Now, there is a great deal to be comprehended, when we are told that we are children who will become like our Father; that we were like him in our first stage and condition of existence. We were there, as it were, children without a fulness of knowledge; many experiences had not yet been given to us; but we were like him in our general outline—the outline of our persons; our general form was like him, "after his image" &c. It is thus written in the Book of Mormon, in that great vision given to the brother of Jared, in which the Lord condescended to take the veil off his eyes. The brother of Jared had gone up into the mountain, and had moulted out of a rock sixteen small stones, which he carried up into the top of the mount. He went there with an object in view; the object was to get the Lord to touch the stones that they might shine forth in darkness in the eight vessels, (which had been built to convey him and his brother across the great waters) one to be placed at each end of each of the vessels. It would naturally increase the faith of the brother of Jared, to believe it possible that he might see the finger of the Lord. He was going to pray that God would touch the stones, the same as we pray for the Lord to put forth his finger and touch the particles of oil, when we dedicate it, for sacred purposes. If we pray in faith, we must suppose that the finger of the Lord touches that oil. And Jared prayed in faith. He did not know but what it might be his privilege to see his finger. He did see it; it appeared to him like the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood. But his faith was too great for his nervous system; for when he saw the finger of the Lord, he fell to the earth, through fear. And the Lord looked upon him and asked him why he had fallen. He answered and said, "I saw the finger of the Lord and I feared lest he should smite me; for I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood." He did not know but what his imperfections were so great, that the Lord would smite him; but he was commanded to arise. The Lord then asked him "Sawest thou more than this?" And he answered, "Yea, Lord, shew thyself unto me." Here was a prayer that extended a little further. The Lord wanted to see what amount of faith he had, and he put another question to him. "Believest thou the words which I shall speak?" And he answered, "Yea, Lord, I know that thou speakest the truth, for thou art a God of truth and canst not lie." And when the brother of Jared had manifested his faith, the Lord condescended to shew his whole personage to him, and said, "Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image. Behold, this body, which ye now behold is the body of my spirit, and man have I created after the body of my spirit."

Here the pre-existence of man was taught in the Book of Mormon. "All men in the beginning were created after the image of this body" which he was then shewing. All the human family that then existed, and that would exist in future time upon the earth, were created in the beginning, after the image of that body; that is, that body which he shewed was not a body of flesh and bones, but a pure spiritual body, organized out of pure spiritual substance, filled with light and truth. He improved this great man of God, that he was prepared, from before the foundation of the world, to redeem his people. "Behold," says he, "I am Jesus Christ, I am the Father and the Son. In me shall

all mankind have light; and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name."

Here, then, was a great deal of information given to us, concerning the formation of the human spirit, the formation of men,—the formation of their persons, and their individualities, before the foundation of this world.

It was after this was given, and the Book of Mormon was published, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arose. But the Lord, thinking that we had not sufficient understanding of this pre-existence, began to tell us (in the month of June 1830, only a few months after the organization of the Church) more about these things. He told us about the spiritual creation, something we did not comprehend before. We used to read the first and second chapters of Genesis which give an account of the works of the Almighty, but did not distinguish between the spiritual work and the temporal work of Christ. Although there are some things in King James' translation that give us a little distinction between the two creations, yet we did not comprehend it. The light shone, in some measure, in darkness, but so dark were our minds, through tradition, that we did not comprehend the light—or the few feeble glimmerings of light, contained in these first and second chapters of the uninspired translation. But our heavenly Father inspired his servant Joseph Smith, to translate several chapters more in the Book of Genesis, in December 1830, which gave a more full account, down to the days of the flood. He told us a great many important principles, principles that he did not give, so far as the historical matter was concerned, in the Book of Mormon. They were an addition in some respects, and therefore, they were new to us, who lived in the early rise of the Church, and calculated to give us great joy.

In these two creations that took place in the beginning, represented as the beginning of this creation—not absolutely the beginning of all the creations of God; for his works are without beginning and without end, they never cease, nor does his word cease; he speaks to us, so far as this creation is concerned, according to our natural ideas and understanding. He says "all things I have created by the word of my power, which is the power of my spirit—I created them firstly spiritual and secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again firstly temporal and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work, speaking unto you that you may naturally understand; but unto myself my works have no end neither beginning."

We learn, therefore, when speaking of this spiritual creation, that not only all the children of men, of all generations, and of all ages, were created spiritually in heaven, but that fish and fowls, and beast, and all animated things, having life, were first made spiritual in heaven, on the fifth and sixth days, before bodies of flesh were prepared for them on the earth; and that there was no flesh upon the earth until the morning of the seventh day. On that morning God made the first fleshly tabernacle and took man's spirit and put within it, and man became a living soul—the first flesh upon the earth—the first man also. Though it was the seventh day, no flesh but this one tabernacle was yet formed. No fish, fowl nor beast was as yet permitted to have a body of flesh. The second chapter of Genesis, (new translation,) informs us that the spirits of fowls were created in heaven, the spirits of fish and cattle, and all things that dwell upon the earth, had their pre-existence. They were created in heaven, the spiritual part of them; not their flesh and bones. We are also told in this inspired translation, that these living trees which we behold—for God has given life unto all things—had their spiritual existence in heaven before their temporal existence; every herb and every tree, before it was planted out on the earth, that is, the spiritual part of it, the life of it, that which, in other words, animates, that which gives power to the vegetable to bring forth fruit after its likeness—the spiritual part existed in heaven. It was a spiritual creation first. We are also told that the earth was organized in a spiritual form, that is, that portion that gives life to the earth. We read about the earth's dying, and that it shall be quickened again. What is it that will make the earth die? It will be the withdrawing the spiritual portion from it, th

which gives it life—that which animates it, and causes it to bring forth fruit; that which quickens the earth is the spirit of God. That spiritual creation existed before the temporal was formed. This was the beginning of the first part of his work, pertaining to this creation. On the seventh day he began the temporal portion. There was not yet a man to till the ground, "And the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground, and took his spirit—(that is the man's spirit—) and put it into him and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." This we read in the 2d chapter of Genesis, and you will find it recorded on the 6th and 35th pages of the new edition of the Pearl of Great Price.

Abraham also obtained a knowledge of the spiritual creation, as well as the temporal. In giving a history of the creation, he speaks of the formation of man out of the ground, how he took man's spirit that was created in heaven and put it within the body of man, and man became a living soul—the first flesh upon the earth, as recorded in the second of Genesis. Now, we have been in the habit of thinking that the various kinds of animals that have lived, according to geologists, were the first flesh on the earth, and we go away back millions of ages to see that these lower formations of life existed before man. But the Lord gives us different information from this. He shows us that among all the animated creatures of flesh, man was the first that was ever placed upon the earth in this temporal condition, contradicting the theories of geologists—that is, so far as placing man on the earth in this present probation, is concerned. What may have taken place millions of ages before the world was organized temporally for man to inhabit is not revealed; but so far as this present change is concerned, that took place about six thousand years ago, man was the first being that came upon the earth and inhabited a body of flesh and bones. Afterwards, on the seventh day, out of the ground the Lord God created the beasts of the field. Go back to the first chapter of Genesis, and you will find that the beasts, etc., were formed on the sixth day or period, and that on the seventh there was no flesh on the earth, and having created man as the first flesh upon the earth, he then created out of the ground the beasts of the field.

Here is the second part of the beginning of his work, firstly spiritual, the beasts created in heaven, then, secondly, temporal, their bodies formed out of the ground, their spirits being put within these bodies, and the beasts became living souls. As it was with the birds of the air, so with the fish of the sea, and so with all animated creatures pertaining to this world. This is the history of the generations of the heavens and the earth, on the day that the Lord God created them; and the Lord has seen proper to reveal this great information in the first of Genesis, and in the Book of Abraham.

Now, let us consider the condition of the temporal work, for it is needful for us to understand these things, that we may advance in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of truth, in this great school of experience. Let us try to understand, then, the nature of the temporal work; for it was formed in the manner specified in this revelation. Was there any death in this creation after the temporal was formed, before the fall? No. Were any birds of the air subject to death? No. Were any of the fishes of the sea? No. Were there any animals placed on the earth in their temporal condition, their bodies being formed and adapted to the spirit that came from heaven—were any subject to death? No. Were they ferocious? No. To every animal that God had granted life he had given every green herb of the field for meat, whether it was the lion, the leopard, the wolf, or whatever animal may have existed upon the face of this earth. There was no such thing as one animal destroying another—fighting and quarrelling were unknown among the beasts of the field. A little child, if there had been any, could have played, so far as any danger was concerned, with these animals, and they feasted upon the green herbs which were given to the beasts for their sustenance. By and by, a garden was made eastward in Eden, in which the Lord planted a great many beautiful trees. This was purely a temporal work, and that garden would have existed until to-day if death had not come into

the world through the fall of our first parents.

How different was the second or temporal work, that existed in the beginning of the great work of creation, from the present order of things! Now we see, and according to history we learn, that all creation are at enmity one with another in their natural state. Hence we find the lions with teeth, probably constructed since the fall, and adapted to devour their prey. I do not believe they had such teeth in the beginning. They had teeth with which they ate "straw like the ox." But everything was changed in a great measure, in this beautiful temporal creation; and the beasts began to fight, and quarrel, and devour each other; and man began to be ferocious, like the beasts, desirous to kill his fellow man. We see him at this early stage in our race, seeking the blood of his fellows, and entering into secret combinations to kill, and destroy, and rob one another of their position and property, and to be at enmity one against another. The Lord in the midst of this fallen condition of his temporal work, has permitted it to continue for about 6,000 years. But mankind have been devising a multitude of measures, by which they reform one another; but after they get pretty well reformed they rise up again and devour one another by wholesale. While they are engaged in reforming each other, they are making weapons of destruction to destroy one another. Enmity prevails, and has prevailed, for the last 6,000 years, with the exception of now and then a dispensation, being introduced, wherein this fallen nature of ours becomes, in a great measure, changed through obedience to the plan of salvation which God has revealed; and then we begin to love our fellow men, are filled with love and kindness like, in some measure, our heavenly Father, going forth and proclaiming to them the gospel of peace, and trying to do them good, and redeem them, and reclaim them; and we succeed, now and then, in bringing some to a higher state; they are born of God, and become new creatures in Christ, being filled with that superior power, that exists in that celestial world, where we formerly resided. It comes down from the Father, and from the Son, and enters into the hearts of the sons and daughters of God, and they are made new creatures; they begin to love that which is good, and hate that which is evil, and begin to perfect themselves in their various dispensations, according to the light and knowledge sent down from heaven for their perfection.

Notwithstanding so many dispensations, and the world has continued so long under the power of Satan, now is the time when the Lord our God has begun to send forth a proclamation of redemption, to lift us up out of this low fallen condition in which we have been placed, and our fathers before us, for so long a time; and it so happens that we are living very near the period when the last of his work will commence, namely, when the earth will be restored from its fallen condition to that same temporal condition in which it existed before the fall, when there was no enmity existing between mankind. I say, the day is now almost at hand when the Lord is going to begin the last of his work, which will be to make this earth again temporal—or in other words, to remove, in some measure, the curse—to restore it back to the temporal condition in which it was when he first organized it and before sin contaminated it.

In order to accomplish this work, he is working, according to his own will and pleasure, among the nations, raising up a kingdom, a nucleus, by taking them "one of a city and two of a family," gathering them out from every nation to the land of Zion and planting the truth in their hearts; they become more and more instructed and learn more and more of the ways of the Lord, preparatory to the organization of this world again in its temporal beauty and perfection as it was when it first issued forth in its temporal form from the hands of the Almighty.

There is one thing connected with the temporal form of the earth which I did not mention; I will refer to it now. While this earth existed in its more perfect temporal form, Adam and Eve were placed upon it, and they were immortal, just like all the beasts and just like the fishes of the sea: death had not yet come upon any of them; all things were immortal so far as this creation was concerned. The first pairs, the beginning of his temporal work, were not subject to death. And another thing, they were not subject to be shut out from the pres-