

# “I AM A SON OF GOD”: MOSES’ PROPHETIC CALL AND ASCENT INTO THE DIVINE COUNCIL<sup>1</sup>

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In a landmark 2007 article, the evangelical biblical scholar Michael S. Heiser, writing in a Latter-day Saint academic journal, emphasized that “the divine council is central to a correct understanding of biblical theology, though few have recognized that fact. . . . The interaction on Israel’s divine council needs to continue.”<sup>2</sup> It is significant that a depiction of God’s divine council, or the council in heaven, appears in each book of scripture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:<sup>3</sup> the Bible,<sup>4</sup> the Book of Mormon,<sup>5</sup> the Doctrine and Covenants,<sup>6</sup> and the Pearl of Great Price.<sup>7</sup> Shortly before his death, the Prophet Joseph Smith touched on the subject of the divine council in his famous King Follett Discourse delivered on April 7, 1844. “The head God brought forth the Gods in the grand council,” the Prophet taught on that occasion. “The grand counsellors sat in yonder heavens, and contemplated the creation of the worlds that were created at that time.”<sup>8</sup>

A careful reading of the opening chapter of the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price yields additional evidence of the presence of the divine council in scriptural narrative. This dramatic opening to Joseph Smith’s inspired translation or revision of the book of Genesis furnishes a striking depiction of how Moses became divinized as a member of the divine council in what is a widely recognized ancient biblical motif. Besides heightening readers’ appreciation for the text, this feature of the narrative of Moses 1 is also subtle evidence for the authenticity of the Prophet’s revelation on this incident from the life of Moses.<sup>9</sup> This, however, should come

as little surprise, as Stephen D. Ricks aptly reminds us how “Joseph Smith . . . was nothing if not also a restorer of ancient doctrines.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Divine Council: An Overview**

Before we explore Moses’ ascension into the divine council in Moses 1, it is only appropriate to provide a quick overview of the concept of the divine council in ancient Israelite religion. I have already provided an outline of the divine council in the Hebrew Bible elsewhere, so I will keep this section brief.<sup>11</sup> A succinct and helpful explanation of the divine council for the purposes of this paper has been provided by Taylor Halverson:

Ancient Israelites believed that God resided in heaven, surrounded by his heavenly council. Just as a royal court consists of different members with different roles and purposes (e.g., counselor, messenger, jester, warrior, or bodyguard), so too God’s heavenly court was composed of a variety of heavenly beings. According to the Old Testament, God’s heavenly council consisted of beings such as the sons of God (see Psalms 89:7; Job 38:7), gods (see Psalm 58:1; 82:1; 97:7; 138:1), the stars (see Job 38:7), members of the council of God (see Job 15:8), members of the assembly of holy ones (see Psalm 89:5–6; Job 5:1), ministers (see Psalm 103:21), prophets (see Amos 3:7), and angels.<sup>12</sup>

In brief, the biblical divine council is nothing less than “a pantheon [of divine beings] under the leadership of a supreme God.”<sup>13</sup> E. Theodore Mullen Jr., in his classic study on this subject, explains how the biblical formulation of the divine council drew in part from earlier Canaanite religious concepts:

El . . . was the king, father, and progenitor of the gods in Canaanite mythology. As such, he stood at the head of the pantheon, unaffected by the various conflicts among the younger, cosmogonic deities. When consulted, he delivered his decree. El must thus be pictured as the aged judge who . . . sat at the head of the assembly, surrounded by the other gods. Likewise, the pictures of Yahweh in his council present him as the head of the assembly, the god whose decree determined the decision and actions of his messengers and holy ones.<sup>14</sup>

Besides these divine personages being identified variously as "gods," "sons of God(s)," "holy ones," and "angels,"<sup>15</sup> the divine council in ancient Israel could also admit mortal prophets to whom were vouchsafed heavenly secrets (cf. Amos 3:7), and who were otherwise commissioned to carry out the will of the council, as multiple biblical examples attest.<sup>16</sup> As aptly summarized by Terence E. Fretheim,

The council of the Lord is usually understood to be a gathering of divine beings, over whom God presides and with whom God consults regarding earthly affairs (see Gen 1:26; 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Job 1–2; 15:8; Ps 82; Isa 6:1–8). . . . The prophet was understood to be a participant in these consultations, bringing the word "back" to Israel regarding the word to be announced. . . . [T]he council demonstrates that God is not in heaven alone, but that a complex sociality is basic to the divine life. In other words, relationship is integral to the identity of God, independent of God's relationship to the world. In some sense the prophet was invited to participate in this relationship. The boundary between human and divine communities is not seen to be fixed or impenetrable. The human is caught up into the divine life and together they become involved in the becoming of the world. In so doing the prophet retains his individuality, and his humanness is not compromised. Yet, the prophet, in leaving the council table with a word to speak, becomes the embodiment of the word of God in the world. The prophet is the vehicle for divine immanence.<sup>17</sup>

Prophets such as Micaiah (1 Kings 22),<sup>18</sup> Isaiah (Isaiah 6),<sup>19</sup> Zechariah (Zechariah 1, 3),<sup>20</sup> and Daniel (Daniel 7–8)<sup>21</sup> all experienced theophanies that introduced them into the divine council. Indeed, "throughout the classical prophetic corpus there exists an underlying presupposition that a prophet has authenticity on account of his direct access to the divine presence," and as made explicit in Jeremiah 23:16–22 this included "belief in the existence of a divine council . . . into which true prophets can be admitted."<sup>22</sup> "By participating in the council," observes one commentator, "prophets become *mal'ākim* or 'angels.' Literally a *mal'āk* was one who was sent—that is, a messenger. . . . Therefore, in becoming members of God's council who *see* and *hear* as they *stand* in the assembly, Old Testament prophets were sent as messengers and

mediators for the council.”<sup>23</sup> This has direct relevance for how we understand the ascension of Moses in the opening chapter of the Book of Moses, as we will see below.

### Moses 1 as a Temple-Ascension Text

In his informative commentary on the Book of Moses, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw provides a convincing reading that grounds the text in ancient temple imagery and makes it resonate with the ascension motif.<sup>24</sup> As Bradshaw discerns concerning the opening chapter of the Book of Moses,

The details of Moses’ experience in chapter 1 place it squarely in the tradition of ancient “heavenly ascent” literature and its relationship to temple theology, rites, and ordinances. Although the stories of such ascents are similar in many respects to temple initiation rites, they make the claim of being something more. While ancient temple rituals dramatically depict a figurative journey into the presence of God, the ascent literature portrays prophets who experience actual encounters with Deity within the *heavenly* temple.<sup>25</sup>

The most obvious evidence for this is detected in the opening words of the book, which speaks of Moses being “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” (Moses 1:1). Immediately, we encounter a description that characterizes this as a temple-ascension text, since the tops of mountains were symbolically linked with the temple in the ancient Near East.<sup>26</sup> “In ancient civilizations from Egypt to India and beyond, the mountain can be a center of fertility, the primeval hillock of creation, the meeting place of the gods, the dwelling place of the high god, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the monument effectively upholding the order of creation, the place where god meets man, a place of theophany.”<sup>27</sup> This holds true for the narrative context of Moses 1, which associates the prophet’s ascent into the high mountain with theophany (vv. 2, 25), Creation (vv. 4–5, 8, 37–38), and fertility (vv. 34–35), among other appropriate themes.

As we might expect, the divine assembly of God as depicted in ancient Canaanite texts and in the Hebrew Bible indeed found lodging on the top of a mountain.<sup>28</sup> Take, for instance, Isaiah

14:12–14, where the “Shining One, son of Dawn” is thrown down to Sheol (the underworld) for pompously assuming that he would “sit in the mount of assembly, On the summit of Zaphon” (Jewish Publication Society Tanakh). Commentary on this passage by Benjamin D. Sommer in the authoritative *Jewish Study Bible* informs us that “Isaiah refers ironically to the king as *Shining One, son of Dawn*, applying to him the name of a character from ancient Canaanite myth. . . . This character seems to have attempted to join the head of the pantheon, whether this was El (who was known in Canaanite texts as Most High) or Baal (whose palace was located on the *summit of Mount Zaphon*).”<sup>29</sup>

Returning to the text of Moses 1, we read that while on the top of the mountain, Moses beheld the face of God while the glory of God fell upon him, so as to ensure that he could “endure [God’s] presence” (Moses 1:2).<sup>30</sup> After introducing himself and showing Moses his majestic creations in a panoramic vision, God then informs Moses that He has “a work for [him]” to do (Moses 1:6). Moses is subsequently commissioned to lead the children of Israel out of bondage (vv. 25–26) as well as to record God’s revelation and disseminate it to those who believe (vv. 41–42). As with the call narratives of other Old Testament prophets,<sup>31</sup> Moses is depicted as being commissioned to carry forth the will of the head of the council through a direct communication and theophany.

### Moses as a Son of God

Most important to our present study are the several instances in the text where God claims Moses as his son “in the similitude” of the Only Begotten (cf. 1:6–7, 13, 16, 40), meaning the prophet was in the “likeness” and “resemblance” of the premortal Jesus Christ in “nature, qualities or appearance” and, indeed, even “substance.”<sup>32</sup> This designation is highly significant as it directly involves Moses with the divine council. As noted previously, one of the titles provided to members of the divine council included “son(s) of God.”<sup>33</sup> This taxonomy (“son of X”) can, depending on context, refer to either literal progeny or can act as a generic classifier for someone belonging to a particular caste, guild, tribe, group, or class.<sup>34</sup> This explains references in the Hebrew Bible to, among other things, the “sons of Israel,” “sons of Zion,” “sons of the east,”

“sons of Aaron,” “sons of the perfumers,” and “sons of prophets,” in each instance the term serves to designate members of the specific group or class.<sup>35</sup> With regard to the phrase “son(s) of God,” Browning observes that besides divine beings, the appellation was provided on occasion to the Israelite king as well as to the faithful (cf. Psalm 2:7).<sup>36</sup> Since the Israelites were commanded to be holy even as God was holy (see Leviticus 11:44), it is understandable that, ideally, righteous Israelites could identify with God and his divine host with the same quality of holiness and thus take upon themselves the same divine title of “son(s) of God.”

Daniel Belnap, in his thoughtful exploration of Moses 1, explains how God’s declaration of Moses as his son “emphasizes the familial relationship between Moses and God” and “speaks not only of [Moses’] divine heritage but also of his potential to be like God through exaltation.” This declaration, naturally, “highlights [Moses’] covenantal relationship with God.”<sup>37</sup> This relationship falls directly in line with an ancient Near Eastern conception of sonship. As Belnap further clarifies, “The terms [*father* and *son*] are used throughout the ancient Near East to refer to political and social relationships. In ancient Israel they are used to describe the covenantal relationship between God and Israel.”<sup>38</sup>

Importantly for our reading of Moses 1, scholars have catalogued ancient Jewish and later Christian depictions of Moses’ deification into God’s presence, and thereby his assumption of a divine nature, usually in association with his ascent on Mount Sinai.<sup>39</sup> Jarl Fossum, for instance, has observed that “in Samaritanism, Moses is ‘the Son of the house of God,’ a title which characterizes him as belonging to the angelic dynasty. Being the ‘Elohim from humankind’ . . . Moses is actually the highest among the angelic sons of God.” Furthermore, “R. Jose ben Halafta (2d century) says that since God calls Moses ‘faithful in all His house’ (cf. Num 12:7), ‘he ranks higher than the ministering angels.’”<sup>40</sup> John Lierman has similarly noticed “the deification of Moses at Sinai” in Second Temple and Rabbinic texts,<sup>41</sup> while Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis has amassed a plethora of ancient witnesses, including Qumranic sources,<sup>42</sup> Philo,<sup>43</sup> Josephus,<sup>44</sup> and others,<sup>45</sup> all ascribing a divine status to Moses.<sup>46</sup> After a careful review of the available evidence, Fletcher-Louis, pointing to passages such as Exodus 7:1 (cf. Deuteronomy

33:1), concludes that this "fundamentally Jewish tradition which had conceived of Moses in angelomorphic terms" is "rooted in the biblical text."<sup>47</sup>

With these examples in mind, we can reasonably infer that Moses' classification as a son of God is meant, on one level, to ratify his membership in the divine council. This understanding also helps clarify Satan's motive in calling Moses a "son of man" as the narrative drama unfolds. The text informs us that after the closing of his first vision on the mountain (vv. 2–9), "behold, Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man, worship me" (v. 12). Moses rebuffs Satan by demanding to know, "Who art thou?" and insisting that he himself is "a son of God, in the similitude of [God's] Only Begotten" (v. 13). When viewed within the context of the ascension motif and the divine council, the subsequent dialogue between Satan and Moses takes up new meaning. Satan meant to debase Moses to a level of mere humanity by denoting him a "son of man." Sure enough, Moses was a "son of man" in the sense that he was a mortal. The term (*ben 'ādām*), after all, simply denotes "mortal" or "human being."<sup>48</sup> Although the King James translators tended to follow a literal reading of the Hebrew, many contemporary English translations of the Bible routinely translate *ben 'ādām* as "mortal." However, since Moses was designated a "son of God" by God himself, he was much more than merely a "son of man." His ascent into the divine council put him far above such. By calling him a "son of man," Satan wished nothing less than to strip Moses of his prophetic legitimacy by denying his association in the divine council as a son of God. As Rodney Turner explains, Moses' divine calling as a spokesman for God was "challenged when Moses was accosted by Satan himself: 'Moses, son of man, worship me.' (Moses 1:12). This is the ruse the devil has employed since time immemorial. He has ever sought to strip the Lord's people of their peculiar standing with him and drag them down to the level of unregenerate humanity. . . . Moses would not be robbed!"<sup>49</sup>

At the close of this discussion about Moses participating in the divine council, I will conclude with a brief mention of where in the text we see the council in action. During the second occasion of Moses' encounter with God in the opening chapter of the text (vv. 24–41)—after the interruption where Satan intervenes (vv.

12–23)—“the glory of the Lord [falls] upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and talked with him face to face” (v. 31). As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that there is continuity between the first chapter and the subsequent chapters of the text, meaning that the rest of the Creation story and Eden narrative is intended to be read as given to Moses when he was still standing in God’s presence. Indeed, this is made explicit at the close of the chapter, which indicates that Moses’ experience on the mount acts as a sort of framing device for the ensuing narrative: “And now, Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak” (v. 40). This means that Moses 4:1–4, in which it is quite obvious that God is interacting with His divine council (cf. Abraham 3:24–28), takes place while Moses is still in God’s presence, or at the very least while he is witnessing a revelation. Thus, after entering into the divine council and God’s presence in the first chapter, Moses then actually sees the council in action in the opening of the fourth chapter. The same holds true for the overt divine council language of Moses 2:26, which depicts God in council with his Son ordering the creation of humankind by fiat.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusion

The preceding has afforded us an illuminating context by which we can draw out profound significance from the opening chapter of the Book of Moses. Moses’ gripping experience narrated in this text is best understood as an ascension narrative wherein a prophet: (1) ascends into the presence of God and his divine assembly residing in the heavenly temple on the cosmic mountain; (2) receives a divine, angelic rank as a member of the council; and (3) receives a call or commission and becomes a messenger for the council. Moses 1 gives us several narrative indicators (including the setting on the top of a mountain, Moses being brought into the presence of God, and Moses being identified as a son of God) that Moses was indeed introduced into the divine council and was given the responsibility of being a true messenger of God.



## Discussion

### **Jo Ann H. Seely:**

Thank you so much Stephen for that really interesting and enlightening discourse.

### **Stephen O. Smoot:**

Thank you.

### **Jo Ann:**

You mentioned that the divine council is referred to in all of the standard works. So I'm wondering if you could give us a few examples of where the divine council plays a role in prophetic commissions in Latter-day Saint scripture?

### **Stephen:**

In addition to the biblical examples, which are plentiful—I referenced Isaiah and Micaiah, for instance, in my paper—in the Book of Mormon, the divine counsel appears literally in the first chapter with the prophetic commission of Lehi.<sup>51</sup> When Lehi sees God sitting on His throne in 1 Nephi 1:8–15, he sees him surrounded by the numberless concourses of angels, receives the heavenly book, and is instructed to preach out of the book. And this commissions him to become a prophet. In my paper on the Interpreter website, I discuss this example, and other Latter-day Saint scholars have also discussed this and have written on it.<sup>52</sup>

So the example of Lehi immediately comes to mind. The other example in the Pearl of Great Price comes from the Book of Abraham. Abraham, of course, has his vision of the premortal council in the third chapter of the book (see Abraham 3:22–28).<sup>53</sup> So we have a number of examples of this happening.

### **Jo Ann:**

So this next question is twofold. First of all, could you characterize the divine council just a little more? Is it limited only to prophets? Just give us an idea of what you think we might know from the text,

and what significance does the divine council have for Latter-day Saint theology today?

**Stephen:**

It seems from the biblical evidence that the ancient Israelites imagined the divine council as being limited to prophets. To my knowledge, I can only think of examples where prophets are allowed entrance into the divine council. And practically always, to my knowledge, it is in the context of the prophetic call. I quote Terence E. Fretheim in my paper, who discusses how the classic example of this is in the book of Jeremiah, where the very legitimacy of a prophet is in connection to his having witnessed the divine council.<sup>54</sup> I would also call attention to the observation made by Walter Brueggemann, who notes that this is precisely the main idea underlying passages such as Jeremiah 23:16–22.<sup>55</sup>

As to the second part of your question—the relevance of all of this for Latter-day Saint theology—I think it’s remarkable that through our Restoration understanding, we have sort of democratized the divine council, if you will. And all God’s children are invited to ritually enter into God’s presence in the temple with the hopeful expectation that in the eternities to come, we will actually enter back into God’s presence.

Related to this is the Latter-day Saint notion of theosis, or exaltation, and an acknowledgement of a multiplicity of gods. To quote the biblical scholar Gerald Cooke, writing back in 1964 in a pioneering study, “Any serious investigation of conceptions of God in the Old Testament must deal with recurrent references which suggest a pluralistic conception of deity. Beings other than Yahweh are referred to variously as ‘sons’ or as an ‘assembly’, ‘council’, etc.”<sup>56</sup> I think the same goes true for our unique Restoration scripture as well. In our Restoration theology, as we attempt to situate ourselves in the metaphysics and cosmology, if you will, of the divine council as well as the implications of a divine plurality and human deification, we should grapple with questions such as how this influences our relationship with God and our understanding of human nature and destiny. That’s a whole other world of study and exploration—the theology of all of this. I hope that what I’ve

provided here at least are some initial thoughts to get us in that direction.

**Jo Ann:**

Moving onto another topic, how does reading Moses 1 as a temple-ascension text raise our appreciation for it?

**Stephen:**

In my paper, I mentioned Jeff Bradshaw's excellent work on the Book of Moses as a temple text. He has already published some good material that I reference, and I understand he has some material forthcoming to look out for. I recommend his work for a fuller treatment of this idea. For now, I can say that by reading the text through this hermeneutical lens, we can pick up on features of the text that we may have otherwise missed. Language, structure, patterns, symbols, and even doctrines may otherwise just go over our heads if we don't have the right exegetical framework in mind.

So if we were to just read Moses 1 cold—just pick it up and read it as its own thing without a meaningful hermeneutical context—we'd probably walk away with the impression, "Okay. Moses goes up a big mountain and sees God and is called God's son. Great." And then we'd just move on. But if we take a minute and think to ourselves, "In a temple context or an ascension narrative context, these images and words are coded with meaning," then suddenly Moses going up a high mountain is not just the same thing as hiking Mount Timpanogos like you do on the weekend here in Utah. Now there's something cosmically significant about Moses being on a high mountain. Same with Moses being called a son of God. It's not just a nice thing that God called Moses his son. Being called a son of God in this context is supremely important. So I would encourage readers to try these different hermeneutical lenses when they read these texts and see how it might raise their appreciation for language, themes, and concepts in the text. And it doesn't have to just be the temple-ascension context. There are other hermeneutical methods we can use to read this text that also bring up meaning and significance. But this is one that I have found especially meaningful, and I encourage others to try it in their own study.

**Jo Ann:**

How about Joseph Smith? Does this happen to him? And if so, please walk us through the steps?

**Stephen:**

That's a very good question. A few potential revelatory moments from the life of Joseph Smith come to mind. I can think of Doctrine and Covenants 76:18–24, where Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon had a vision of the Celestial Kingdom. In that vision, the Prophet describes seeing the glory of the Son on the right hand of the Father along with multiple angels (Doctrine and Covenants 76:20–21). Another incident that strikes me as potentially significant to this point is the First Vision. Don Bradley, a fantastic Latter-day Saint historian, has argued that Joseph Smith's First Vision had a temple significance to it.<sup>57</sup> He goes so far as to say that the First Vision was a proto-Endowment for Joseph Smith in some sense.

There's also an article on the Pearl of Great Price Central website that explores Joseph Smith's First Vision as a divine council scene.<sup>58</sup> In the 1835 account of the First Vision, Joseph described seeing "many angels" in the vision in addition to the Father and the Son.<sup>59</sup> It's actually an interlinear insertion in the manuscript, almost a sort of parenthetical comment. Perhaps this indicates a divine council setting that Joseph was hesitant to include mention of in this account. It would be appropriate since Joseph receives his prophetic call with the First Vision. So it may work there as well.

**Jo Ann:**

Yes, I'm glad you brought that up, because in my mind I was thinking there's an account of the First Vision that describes other divine beings being present in the vision, but I couldn't remember which year.

**Stephen:**

November 1835, during Joseph's encounter with Robert Matthews.<sup>60</sup>

**Jo Ann:**

Thank you very much. Maybe just one final question.

**Stephen:**

Sure.

**Jo Ann:**

So what implications does your paper have for the restoration of the temple?

**Stephen:**

I wish I could say that my paper answers all the questions people have had about the temple, but I will never presume that much about this very modest paper. One way I can say that I think my research helps inform our understanding is that it complicates the narrative you sometimes hear that the Nauvoo temple endowment was this very late innovation that Joseph Smith thought of only at the end of his ministry. That is to say the seeds of the Nauvoo endowment ritual are present in Joseph Smith's scriptural texts dating back to 1830. Some of the important elements are there in the Book of Mormon and in the Pearl of Great Price with the Book of Moses, including the concepts of ascending into God's presence, the Creation, the Garden story, the Fall of Adam and Eve, and so forth. These are central to the endowment experience as Joseph Smith revealed it in Nauvoo. So the core elements are recognizable as early in 1830–1831. If nothing else, I think this helps us appreciate how the temple ordinances were revealed line upon line. I think it also undermines the common claim that it was only after he became a Freemason that Joseph decided to create the endowment ceremony. That narrative is sometimes thrown out there, especially by skeptical biographers of the Prophet. And I think that this research complicates that picture, if not outright refutes it, and shows that the origins of the temple are much more complex than that.

**Jo Ann:**

Definitely. And clearly reading the Book of Moses is excellent preparation for attending the temple.

**Stephen:**

Absolutely.

**Jo Ann:**

Well, thank you very much, Stephen. We really appreciated you coming and sharing your insights with us and talking about this interesting topic of the divine council.

**Stephen:**

Thank you very much. The pleasure was all mine.

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## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 2012 Religious Education Student Symposium held at Brigham Young University and was subsequently published in the proceedings of that conference. This updated and expanded version of the paper is republished here with permission.
2. Michael S. Heiser, "Israel's Divine Council, Mormonism, and Evangelicalism: Clarifying the Issues and Directions for Future Study," *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 323. See also the response to Heiser in David E. Bokovoy, "'Ye Really *Are* Gods': A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 267–313.
3. An accessible overview of this topic from a Latter-day Saint perspective can be found in Joseph F. McConkie, "Premortal Existence, Foreordinations, and Heavenly Councils," in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 174–98.
4. Daniel O. McClellan, "Psalm 82 in Contemporary Latter-day Saint Tradition," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 15 (2015): 79–96; William H. Hamblin, "The Sôd of YHWH and the Endowment," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 4 (2013): 147–54; Richard Neitzel Holzzapfel, Dana M. Pike, and David Rolph Seely, *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 262; Daniel C. Peterson, "'Ye Are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witness to the Divine Nature of Humankind," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Daniel C. Peterson (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 471–594.
5. Stephen O. Smoot, "The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 27 (2017): 155–80.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 76:58; 121:32; 132:20; cf. Brent L. Top, "Premortal Existence," in *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 510.
7. Terryl Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215–16; *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 125–28; Stephen O. Smoot, "Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 28–39.

8. "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (August 15, 1844): 614. The earliest published version of this sermon, quoted here, was amalgamated from audits of the sermon made by two clerks, Thomas Bullock and William Clayton. See "Accounts of the 'King Follett Sermon,'" The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-king-follett-sermon>. For an illuminating analysis of Joseph Smith's teachings in this sermon, see Kevin L. Barney, "Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith's Understanding of Genesis 1:1," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 107–24.
9. See also Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, "Moses 1 and the Apocalypse of Abraham: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 179–290; Mark J. Johnson, "The Lost Prologue: Reading Moses Chapter One as an Ancient Text," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 36 (2020): 145–86; E. Douglas Clark, "A Prologue to Genesis: Moses 1 in Light of Jewish Traditions," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006): 129–42; Hugh Nibley, "To Open the Last Dispensation: Moses Chapter 1," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 1–22.
10. Stephen D. Ricks, "Ancient Views of Creation and the Doctrine of Creation ex Nihilo," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 319.
11. Smoot, "Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible," 161–70.
12. Taylor Halverson, "The Path of Angels: A Biblical Pattern for the Role of Angels in Physical Salvation," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. D. Kelly Ogden, Jared W. Ludlow, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 154.
13. H. Haag, "bēn," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:158.
14. E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 24 (Chico: Scholar's Press, 1980), 120.
15. Smoot, "Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible," 161–3; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 22–24.
16. Edwin C. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 3 (1964): 279–86.



17. Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary 15 (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 336.
18. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 205–6; Ellen White, *Yahweh's Council: Its Structure and Membership* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 60–65.
19. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 207–19; White, *Yahweh's Council*, 80–85; cf. Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 2 (1990): 229–47; David E. Bokovoy, "On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah's Prophetic Call," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 29–49.
20. White, *Yahweh's Council*, 86–96; Michael R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1–8*, *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies* 506 (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2009), 46–47, 88–90, 156–7; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "YHWH, the Divine Beings, and Zechariah 1–6," in *Monotheism in Late Prophetic and Early Apocalyptic Literature: Studies of the Sofja Kovalevskaja Research Group on Early Jewish Monotheism, Vol. III*, ed. Nathan MacDonald and Ken Brown (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 73–101.
21. White, *Yahweh's Council*, 97–104; Choon Leong Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 106–14, 124–6.
22. Janet E. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament supplement Series* 150 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 107; cf. Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 58–60.
23. Bokovoy, "Ye Really Are Gods," 299–300.
24. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God's Image and Likeness I: Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014); Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), esp. 23–50.
25. Bradshaw, *In God's Image and Likeness*, 37, emphasis in original, internal citations removed. Compare the intriguing suggestion in Andrew F. Ehat, "'Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?' Sesquicentennial Reflections of a Sacred Day: 4 May 1842," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 52–53.
26. John M. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East," in *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 59–66; Donald W. Parry, "Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," in *Temples of the Ancient*

- World*, 133–7; cf. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, *Solomon's Temple: Myth and History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 10.
27. Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 5.
  28. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 25.
  29. Benjamin D. Sommer, Isaiah 14:12–15nn, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 794–5, italics in original. As Sommer goes on to explain, the “mount of assembly” in verse 13 is nothing less than “the assembly of the gods in council,” and mount Zaphon “the abode of the Gods.” The monarch condemned in this passage is an unnamed Babylonian king (presumably Nebuchadnezzar) per Isaiah 14:4. However, it appears likely that the material used in this “proverb” (Hebrew *māšāl*) was originally used to polemicize the Assyrian king Sargon II, who perished in battle in 705 BC (cf. vv. 19–20).
  30. Margaret Barker and Kevin Christensen have explored the connection between theophanies of deity and temple symbolism, demonstrating a profound correlation between the two. See Margaret Barker and Kevin Christensen, “Seeking the Face of the Lord: Joseph Smith and the First Temple Tradition,” in *Joseph Smith Jr: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143–72.
  31. N. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77, no. 3 (1965): 297–323; Gerard Meagher, “The Prophetic Call Narrative,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1972): 164–77; Stephen D. Ricks, “The Narrative Call Pattern in the Prophetic Commission of Enoch (Moses 6),” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 97–105.
  32. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “similitude.”
  33. See also Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (The) God(s),” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 35, no. 1 (1964): 22–47; S. B. Parker, “Sons of (The) God(s),” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1500–1510.
  34. Gene M. Tucker, “Sons of God, Children of God,” in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 1054; cf. Brendan Byrne, “Sons of God,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:156–59. Byrne, “Sons of God,” 156, notes at least three classifications attending the phrase “sons of God”: “(1) divine or angelic beings; (2) Israelites or Israel as a whole; or (3) the king.”
  35. Robin Gallaher Branch and Lee E. Klosinski, “Sons,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI:

- Eerdmans, 2000), 1240–1; cf. Haag, “*bēn*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 2:149–53.
36. W. R. F. Browning, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 349.
  37. Daniel Belnap, “‘Where Is Thy Glory?’ Moses 1, the Nature of Truth, and the Plan of Salvation,” *Religious Educator* 10, no. 2 (2009): 164.
  38. Belnap, “‘Where Is Thy Glory?’” 164. Belnap concludes, “By affirming that Moses is his son, God acknowledges Moses’ faithfulness and status as an heir, worthy to be in his presence.”
  39. For an overview, see John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 25–34.
  40. Jarl Fossum, “‘Son of God,’” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:130; internal citations removed.
  41. John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 232–38.
  42. Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition: The Deification of Moses and Early Christology,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 3, no. 3 (1996): 236–52; cf. “Some Reflections on Angelomorphic Humanity Texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7, no. 3 (2000): 292–312, esp. 298–305.
  43. Specifically, Philo, *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* (III/8–10) and Philo, *On the Life of Moses* (XXVIII/155–158); see *The Works of Philo*, rep. ed., trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 94–95, 473–4.
  44. Specifically, Josephus, *Antiquities* (3.7.7/180; 3.15.3/320); see *Josephus: The Complete Works*, rep. ed., trans. William Whiston (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 106, 119.
  45. For instance, Sirach 45:1–5; see *The Jewish Annotated Apocrypha*, ed. Jonathan Klawans and Lawrence M. Wills (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 488–9.
  46. See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology, and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 173–84.
  47. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*, 174.
  48. Donald Senior, “‘Son of Man,’” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 1242.
  49. Rodney Turner, “The Vision of Moses,” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume 2: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 53.
  50. The notion that the cohortative language of Genesis 1:26 (which parallels Moses 2:26) clearly demonstrates the presence of the divine council in the text enjoys widespread scholarly acceptance. For just one recent and especially insightful reading of Genesis 1:26–31 that recognizes the divine council in the passage, see Ellen van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture*,

*Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 192–6. In any case, Moses 2:26 makes it clear that at least two personages are participating in the scene.

51. Blake T. Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form–Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 67–96; John W. Welch, “The Calling of a Prophet,” in *First Nephi: The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 35–54; Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 (2 Nephi 16), the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 171–90; John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004), 421–48.
52. Smoot, “Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible,” 155–80, esp. 170–174.
53. Smoot, “Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham,” 28–39.
54. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 336.
55. Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, 58–60.
56. Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” 22.
57. Don Bradley, “Joseph Smith’s First Vision as Endowment and Epitome of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (or Why I Came Back to the Church),” FairMormon Conference, 2019, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2019/first-vision-as-endowment-and-epitome-of-the-gospel>.
58. “The First Vision as a Divine Council Vision: Joseph Smith–History Insight #10” Pearl of Great Price Central (March 5, 2020), <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/the-first-vision-as-a-divine-council-vision/>.
59. “Journal, 1835–1836,” 24, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/25>.
60. See “Editorial Note,” in “Journal, 1835–1836,” 22, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/23>.