

Book of Moses Essay #1: Enoch's Prophetic Commission (Moses 6:26–36) — Introduction

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Elijah and Enoch, 17th century. Museum of History, Sanok, Poland^[1] The two Old Testament prophets who did not suffer death—Enoch at left and Elijah at right, accompanied by the symbols of the cave and the raven. The Cyrillic characters on

the page of the book read “I have been very jealous for the Lord God” (1 Kings 19:10, 14), followed by what is evidently an excerpt from Psalm 3:5: “I lay down.”

As with many prophets elsewhere in scripture, the account of Enoch’s mission found in the Pearl of Great Price begins with the details of how he was called as a prophet. Such a story is often called a “prophetic commission.” Bible scholar Walther Zimmerli^[2] distinguished between two types of prophetic commissions: (1) the *narrative call pattern*, whereby the prophet is called as part of a conversation with the Lord or His representative and objections to his fitness for the mission are raised and resolved;^[3] and (2) the *throne theophany call pattern*, whereby the prophet ascends to the presence of God to receive his divine commission. Though no account of a prophetic calling rigidly fits the criteria for either of these categories, the calls of Moses, Jeremiah, and Enoch^[4] might be seen as typifying the first pattern, whereas the calls of Isaiah and Ezekiel are generally good exemplars of the second.

Among the objections that skeptics have raised about the Book of Moses is whether, on the one hand, it has simply borrowed its stories and language wholesale from the Bible and, on the other hand, paradoxically, whether it is not biblical enough. In addition to introducing significant aspects of Enoch’s call that will be treated in more depth in subsequent articles, this article will give examples of how both kinds of objections can be met with a little research and careful reading.

With respect to the concern about wholesale borrowing from the Bible, our response will treat this question: Does Moses 6:26–27 simply borrow from the Gospel of John? With respect to the concern about whether the Book of Moses is sufficiently biblical, we will address a second question: Does Enoch’s call fit the biblical pattern?

Does Moses 6:26–27 Simply Borrow from the Gospel of John?

The account of Enoch’s prophetic commission in Moses 6 begins as follows:^[5]

26 And it came to pass that Enoch journeyed in the land, among the people; and as he journeyed, the Spirit of God descended out of heaven, and abode upon him.

27 And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people ...

Curiously, the closest biblical parallel to the wording of these opening verses is not to be found in the call of any Old Testament prophet, but rather in the description of events following Jesus’ baptism found in the New Testament. As demonstrated in the following chart, these parallels include the Spirit of God descending from heaven, the Spirit abiding upon an individual, and a voice from heaven declaring that individual’s sonship.

Topic	Book of Moses	New Testament
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The Spirit Descends from Heaven and Abides upon Him	Moses 6:26 – And it came to pass that Enoch journeyed in the land, among the people; and as he journeyed, the Spirit of God descended out of heaven, and abode upon him.	John 1:32 – And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.
A Voice from Heaven Declares His Sonship	Moses 6:27 – And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people,	Matthew 3:17– And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ^[6]

The connection between Enoch’s divine encounter and the baptism of Jesus becomes intelligible when one regards the latter event, as do Margaret Barker and Gaetano Lettieri, as an “ascent experience”^[7] consistent with the idea of baptism as prefiguring death and resurrection.^[8] From this perspective, we can see Enoch’s prophetic commission as having been given in the context of a heavenly ascent.^[9]

Though one might try to explain the parallels between Moses 6:26–27 and the baptism of Jesus as an obvious case of Joseph Smith simply borrowing from the New Testament, an article by the non-Latter-day Saint scholar Samuel Zinner^[10] argues that the relevant New Testament motifs may actually have their origins in the Enoch literature. Zinner compares the Father’s declaration of sonship found in Hebrews 1:5–6 to accounts of Jesus’s baptism found in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. He also notes that the motifs of “rest” and “reigning” co-occur in these three texts as well as in the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*.^[11] Finally, Zinner sees “striking” similarities between *1 Enoch* and the baptismal allusion in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* in regard to a promise made by Enoch to the righteous: “and a bright light will shine upon you, and the voice of rest you will hear from heaven.”^[12]

In light of these (and additional passages relating these themes to the personage of the “Son of Man”), Zinner argues that the ideas behind all these passages “arose in an Enochic matrix” ^[13] (i.e. literary traditions concerning the prophet Enoch). Thus, it is certainly possible that the New Testament authors who recorded Christ’s baptism were alluding to ideas from Enoch literature rather than vice versa.^[14]

Of course, evidence that the authors of the New Testament gospels may have drawn on older *ideas* when they composed their accounts does not change the fact that the Book of Moses frequently shares *vocabulary* and *phrasing* with them. If Joseph Smith had translated the Book of Moses using the method that ordinary translators used in rendering

a document from another language into English, one would hardly expect his English translation of the ancient ideas (presumably not Greek) to match the King James translation of the Greek Gospels so perfectly.

This observation holds for every one of Joseph Smith's translations. Indeed, the most obvious thing one can say about the vocabulary of the Book of Moses is that, like most of Joseph Smith's other translations and revelations, it draws extensively from the Bible.^[15] How can this be explained?

We should not forget that biblical language was often used to express religious ideas in Joseph Smith's day. That being the case, the biblical language found in Joseph Smith's revelations might reasonably be seen as a deliberate part of what Ben McGuire calls "the rhetorical strategy of the text in translation."^[16] This refers, among other things, to the idea that the use of scripture phrasing familiar to Joseph Smith's Bible-reading contemporaries, might have increased their acceptance of Joseph Smith's revelations as authentic scripture on a par with the Old and New Testaments.

Moreover, when the Prophet used familiar (but sometimes more difficult-to-understand) King James language in modern scripture, it provided direct signals to perceptive readers about interconnections with the Bible that otherwise might have been difficult to detect. These intertextual connections can be seen as fulfilling the Book of Mormon prophecy that old and new revelations would "grow together" as one.^[17]

In summary, we can generalize the lessons above as follows: (1) the Bible itself did not appear in a vacuum, and the ideas expressed in the Bible may have had their origins long before the biblical era; and (2) the presence of biblical language in modern scripture seems to have been part of a divine strategy that was designed to bless its readers.

Does Enoch's Prophetic Commission Fit the Biblical Pattern?

The account of Enoch's prophetic commission occupies only eleven verses in the Book of Moses. It is easy to rush past them in our reading, pausing only to appreciate some of the more memorable features such as the characterization of Enoch as a "lad," and then moving on quickly to the assumption that we already know the gist of the passage as a whole. We can be grateful to Stephen Ricks for the deep knowledge of ancient scripture he has acquired and the detailed attention he has given to the text of the Book of Moses, allowing uncovering him to see things that we might have missed otherwise otherwise have gone unnoticed—including the fact that Enoch's prophetic calling proves to be a good fit to the biblical pattern.

Following Norman Habel, Professor Ricks has identified six characteristic features of the narrative call pattern found in the Bible. Remarkably, each of these is not only present in the Book of Moses account of Enoch's prophetic commission, but is also presented, with

one exception, in the typical sequence: ^[18]

- the divine confrontation (Moses 6:26)
- the introductory word (Moses 6:28)
- the commission (Moses 6:27)
- the objection (Moses 6:31)
- the reassurance (Moses 6:32–34)
- the sign (Moses 6:35–36).

Future articles will examine each of these features in the prophetic commission of Enoch in greater detail. Such findings demonstrate not only that the Book of Moses holds up well under close examination, but also that, like a fractal whose self-similar patterns become more wondrous upon ever closer inspection, the brilliance of its inspiration shines most impressively under bright light and high magnification: there is glory in the details.

This article was adapted and expanded from Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., and David J. Larsen. *Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel. In God's Image and Likeness 2*. Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014, pp. 34–41.

Further Reading

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Endnotes

[1] Figure 1. Museum of History, Sanok, Poland.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MHS_Eliasz_i_Enoch_XVII_w_p.jpg (accessed September 13, 2013). We discuss some of the rich symbolism of this image below.

Note what seem to be tears streaming down Enoch's face, consistent with a theme in the Book of Moses and ancient sources (see [Essay #28](#)). While Elijah wears a prominent mantle symbolizing his calling (1 Kings 19:13; 19:19; 2 Kings 2:8, 13, 14), Enoch wears what seem to be rough animal skins. This portrayal contradicts some Muslim traditions that credit Enoch with the invention of sewing with cloth (perhaps a confusion of "the homophonic Arabic verbs khatta 'write' and khata 'sew'"), in contrast to earlier people who are said to have worn animal skins (J. C. Reeves, et al., *Enoch from Antiquity* 1, pp. 104-107). See also [Essay #6](#).

Significantly, though the two prophets are distinguished by their clothing and symbols from their stories that surround them, their faces and features are nearly identical. Both Jews and Christians associated Enoch and Elijah because neither of them suffered death. The Babylonian Talmud we read: "Nine entered the Garden of Eden when they were still alive, and they are: Enoch (Chanoch) the son of Jared, Elijah Messiah, Eliezer the bondsman of Abraham, Hirom the king of Zor, Ebed-melech the Cushi [Jeremiah 38:7], and Jabetz the son of R. Jehudah the Prince, Bothiah the daughter of Pharaoh and Serech the daughter of Ascher, and, according to others, also R. Jehoshua b. Levi." Early Christians, such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome taught similarly. This belief persisted popularly in later centuries (L. R. Muir, *Biblical Drama*, p. 139). Some of these early and medieval Christians also concluded that these two prophets would appear as the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13 (see P. S. Alexander, *From Son of Adam*, p. 115). Others, however, saw allusions to Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 1:10) and Moses (see Exodus 7-11; see R. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 84-88) in Revelation 11:6. However, in response to Joseph Smith's questions about these two witnesses the Prophet was told: They are two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days" (D&C 77:15). See also B. R. McConkie, *NT Commentary*, 3:509; B. R. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, p. 390).

The role of Enoch and Elijah as scribes is prominent in both of their accounts. Indeed Kristen Lindbeck concludes: "The scene of Elijah writing and God signing recalls Enoch's role as heavenly scribe in Second Temple literature, suggesting an influence on Elijah traditions because Elijah and Enoch both entered heaven without dying" (K. H. Lindbeck, *Elijah and the Rabbis*, p 47). Enoch would have been as much at home as Elijah with a book on his lap.

That said, L. Ouspensky, et al., *Icons*, p. 140 notes: "The character of [Elijah], portrayed in image and colors, is often emphasized ... by the word of the prophet himself written on an open scroll, "I have been very jealous for the Lord Almighty (1 Kings 19:10, 14)." But why would additional words from the Psalms have been appended to that statement?

In the King James Bible, Psalm 3:5 reads: "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me." Jack Sparks (J. N. Sparks, et al., *Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 683 n. Psalm 3) notes that the reference would have been natural in light of its role as a prophecy of the

resurrection of Christ and the association of Elijah with the resurrection of all men at the last day:

The historical account in Psalm 3 is that of King David fleeing from his son, Absalom (2 Kings 15-18). But prophetically, Psalm 3 is speaking of Jesus as the son of David according to the flesh (Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:3. [Cf., e.g., Clement, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 3:26, p. 12; J. Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 97, p. 247; Cyprian, Treatises, 12:2:24, p. 525).

Specifically pertaining to the application of this scripture to the resurrection of Christ, we read in L. R. Muir, Biblical Drama, p. 139: “In several German plays Christ is summoned to rise by an angel with the words from the introit for Sexagesima Sunday “Exurge! quare obdormis, domine?” (Rise up why are you sleeping, lord?; Psalm 44:23). He steps from the tomb, singing the antiphon for Maundy Thursday, “Ego dormive” (I laid me down and slept [and rose up again]; Psalm 3:5).”

In one thread of Jewish Midrash, the prophecy of Psalm 3:5 is seen as being fulfilled through Elijah and the Messiah (W. G. Braude, Midrash on Psalms, Psalm 3, 1:59):

The congregation of Israel said: “I laid me down,” away from prophecy; “and I slept,” apart from the Holy Spirit; “I awake,” through Elijah, as is said “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet” (Malachi 3:23); “for the Lord sustaineth me,” through the lord Messiah.

Elsewhere in Jewish tradition, the following story has been handed down to describe why Israel is required to wait so long for their final, definitive redemption at the coming of the Messiah. Two students longing for the return of the Messiah are told by the Prophet Elijah that the Messiah (here identified as King David) is “asleep and dreaming, and he will arise [only] when we are worthy of it.” (H. Schwartz, Tree, p. 499).

Our thanks to Cynthian Nielsen for her contributions to the interpretation of this figure.

[2] W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 97–100.

[3] See, for example, G. Y. Glazov, Bridling of the Tongue, pp. 27–53.

[4] See S. D. Ricks, Narrative Call.

[5] Moses 6:26–27.

[6] Mark 1:11; cf. Mark 9:7. Compare Moses 1:4, 6. See also Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32; D&C 93:15; M. Barker, Risen, pp. 46–49.

[7] M. Barker, Risen, pp. 46–49; M. Barker, Hidden, pp. 91–94; G. Lettieri, Ambiguity, pp. 26–29.

[8] Romans 6:4–6.

[9] J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, God’s Image 2, *Endnote M6-5*, p. 93.

[10] S. Zinner, Underemphasized Parallels.

[11] H. Koester *et al.*, Thomas, 2, p. 126. See J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, God’s Image 2, *Endnote M6-6*, p. 93.

[12] G. W. E. Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch 1, 96:3, p. 461. Cf. Ibid., 91:1, p. 409, which speaks of “a voice calling me, and a spirit poured out upon me.” Relating to the theme of reigning, Zinner also draws attention to 1 Enoch 96:1, which speaks of the “authority” that the “righteous” will have over the “sinners” (1 Enoch, 96:1, p. 461).

[13] S. Zinner, Underemphasized Parallels.

[14] For example, G. W. E. Nickelsburg *et al.*, 1 Enoch 2, 71:14–16, p. 321.

[15] For an extensive discussion of Joseph Smith as a translator and interpreter, see J. M. Bradshaw, Foreword. For an example of the challenges in unpacking Joseph Smith’s dense allusions to imagery from scripture and elsewhere in his sermons, see J. M. Bradshaw, Now That We Have the Words. In Richard C. Galbraith’s introductory essay to a volume on Joseph Smith’s teachings, he writes (J. Smith, Jr., Scriptural Teachings, pp. 1–2, 3):

Ironically, of all Joseph Smith’s great accomplishments in the work of the Restoration, the one perhaps least appreciated was his immense knowledge of the scriptures. The scriptures were the brick and mortar of all his sermons, writings, and other personal communications; he quoted them, he alluded to them, he adapted them in all his speaking and writing.

The Prophet’s extensive use of the scriptures may not be obvious to the casual reader. In the book Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, for example, the Prophet appears to cite fewer than one passage of scripture every other page ... But that figure misses the mark. A more careful reading of this book reveals some twenty scriptures for every one actually cited. When I discovered that, I began to ask, not “When is the Prophet quoting scripture,” but rather “What might he be quoting that is not scripture?”

.... [A] computer-aided search of the Teachings has identified several thousand distinctive scriptural phrases or passages. These scriptural citations of the Prophet come from almost every book of the Old and New Testament and from most books and sections of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price.

Of course, the easy familiarity he exhibited with scripture in the later years of his ministry can be contrasted with his more limited knowledge at the beginning.

[16] B. L. McGuire, Book of Mormon as a Communicative Act, note 11. See also B. A. Gardner, Gift and Power, Kindle Locations 1521–1647, 1900–2481.

[17] 2 Nephi 3:12.

[18] S. D. Ricks, Narrative Call, pp. 97–98.