

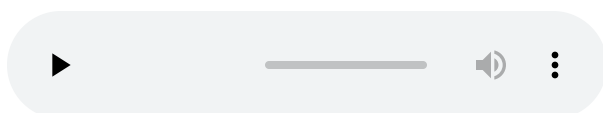
# Book of Moses Essays #37: Moses 1 in Its Ancient Context: Moses Ascends to Heaven (Moses 1:24)

**I** [interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-moses-essays-037/](http://interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-moses-essays-037/)

Book of Mormon Central Staff with Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock

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Figure 1. Ascent of Abraham and Yaho'el

In this *Essay*, we compare the symbolism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (*ApAb*) description of the ascent of Abraham to the Book of Moses and other accounts in Latter-day Saint scripture. Though, in contrast to Moses 1, *ApAb* rejects the idea that God can be seen by man, it accepts the idea that God’s can reveal Himself from behind the veil by means of His voice. God’s voice was depicted for centuries in the art of Jewish synagogues and Christian churches as a divine hand, often shown as emerging from behind a cloud or veil.

## Moses and Abraham Ascend to Heaven

In the figure above, we see Abraham and Yaho’el ascending to heaven on the wings of the two birds that were provided by God but not divided at the time of the sacrifice.<sup>[1]</sup> The imagery of heavenly ascent on the wings of birds is a convention that goes back at least two thousand years.<sup>[2]</sup> As in other *ApAb* illustrations, Yaho’el holds Abraham firmly by the wrist, using the right hand.<sup>[3]</sup>

	Book of Moses	Apocalypse of Abraham
<b>Ascent to heaven</b>	Moses lifted up his eyes unto heaven (1:24). upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away (2 Nephi 4:25)	the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of the turtledove... and carried me up (15:2-3)

*Figure 2. Resemblances in ApAb for Moses’ and Nephi’s Ascents to Heaven  
(Moses 1:24)*

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Nephi was similarly “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which [he] never had before seen.”<sup>[4]</sup> Nephi later said that “upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains,”<sup>[5]</sup> imagery that is arguably similar to the *ApAb* description of Abraham being raised up to heaven on the wings of a bird.<sup>[6]</sup>

In the Book of Moses, a context of priesthood ordinances seems implied in the account. For example, having banished Satan by calling upon the name of the Only Begotten<sup>[7]</sup> (a motif that precedes baptism in some ancient Christian sources<sup>[8]</sup>), Moses was immediately afterward “filled with the Holy Ghost.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Further support for this idea is found in the fact that the description of Moses being “caught up”<sup>[10]</sup> (as Nephi was “caught away”) is phrased in what is sometimes termed the “divine passive.”<sup>[11]</sup> This syntactic form implies that his ascent was accomplished by God’s power and not his own.<sup>[12]</sup> The scriptural use of the divine passive may also indicate a context of priesthood ordinances. For example, we are told elsewhere that Adam was “*caught away* by

the Spirit of the Lord” into the water and baptized.<sup>[13]</sup> Note that the Apostle Paul, in a description similar to that of the experiences of Moses and Abraham, was “caught up” to the third heaven.<sup>[14]</sup> Going further, Hugh Nibley explained:<sup>[15]</sup>

In the Old World accounts the hero is taken up to heaven by a dove; in the Joseph Smith revelations, it is by the Holy Ghost. The two are strikingly brought together in Abraham’s cosmic chart ([Book of Abraham,] facsimile 2), which has as its central theme the theophany, a design which does not depict but “*represents* God sitting upon His throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood; as, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham in the form of a dove” (explanation of Facsimile 2, figure 7). So there you have the whole situation—the dove that takes one to heaven is the Holy Ghost, who also instructs and teaches “through the heavens,” “revealing ... the grand Key-words ... as, also, the sign” by which alone supernal knowledge can be conveyed. It is exactly the same scenario in the Abraham apocrypha as in the Joseph Smith Book of Abraham.

	<b>Book of Moses</b>	<b>Apocalypse of Abraham</b>
<b>Seeing God</b>	calling upon the name of God, he beheld his glory (1:25; cf. v. 31)	the Eternal One ... you will <i>not</i> see (16:3)

Figure 3. Resemblances for Moses Seeing God (Moses 1:25)

## Seeing God

Moses 1:25 tells us that Moses “beheld [God’s] glory.” However, in an important divergence from the Book of Moses, *ApAb* has Yaho’el declare to Abraham: “the Eternal One ... you will *not* see.”<sup>[16]</sup> Thus, the redactor of *ApAb* explicitly *rejects* any visualization of God and “insists on expressing the divine Presence in the form of the Deity’s Voice”<sup>[17]</sup> alone.

Importantly, however, the divine whisper or echo (Hebrew *bat kōl* בַּת קוֹל —literally, “daughter of the voice”) through which, in Jewish tradition, divine revelation continued aurally even after the open visions of the prophets had ceased,<sup>[18]</sup> was depicted for centuries in the art of Jewish synagogues and Christian churches as a divine hand. In portrayals of ritual or heavenly ascent, this hand was often shown as emerging from behind a cloud or veil, representing the obscuring boundary that separates earth from heaven.<sup>[19]</sup>

A relevant example is shown in this illustration from a decoration on the Torah shrine of the synagogue at Dura Europos. It is the “earliest known depiction of the hand of God in either Jewish or Christian art.”<sup>[20]</sup> Isaac, depicted behind the scene of his near sacrifice and clad in white clothing marked with red clavi,<sup>[21]</sup> is shown entering behind the veil of a tent sanctuary at the top of Mount Moriah.<sup>22</sup> This reading is supported by Jewish and early Christian texts suggesting that, in the *Akedah*, Isaac literally died, ascended to heaven, and was resurrected.<sup>[23]</sup> The disembodied hand, a visualization of God’s body in “*pars pro toto*”<sup>[24]</sup> (i.e., the part

shown representing all the rest) and of His heavenly utterance from behind the veil (i.e., the *bat kōl*<sup>[25]</sup>), is shown above the scene of the arrested sacrifice and to the immediate left of the tent sanctuary.<sup>[26]</sup>

Moses 1:25–31 describes the revelation of God as a progressive phenomenon, beginning with “a voice” and ending with a “face to face” encounter. Notably, the same sequence of divine disclosure is present in the story of the brother of Jared’s intimate encounter with the Lord “at the veil.”<sup>[27]</sup> In that account, the prayer of the brother of Jared is answered first with a divine voice,<sup>[28]</sup> then with seeing the finger of the hand of the Lord,<sup>[29]</sup> and finally with a view of the “body of [His] spirit.”<sup>[30]</sup>

When the accounts of Moses’ and Abraham’s subsequent passage through the veil in the Book of Moses and *ApAb* are combined, the details revealed are illuminating. These surprising details will be the focus of the next *Essay*.<sup>[31]</sup>

This article is adapted from Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., 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.



Figure 4. Detail from the Torah shrine of the Dura Europos synagogue

## Further Reading

### Further Reading

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## Notes on Figures

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*Figure 1.* Photographs of the originals of the illustrations are from *Otkrovenie Avraama* (*Apocalypse of Abraham* or *ApAb*), which comprises pages 328–375 of the *Codex Sylvester*. The *Codex Sylvester*, “the oldest and the only independent manuscript containing the full text of *ApAb*” (A. Kulik, *Retroverting*, p. 3), is known to scholars as manuscript “S.” It is the only illustrated manuscript of *ApAb*. Photographs of the illustrations from the original manuscript are published in this article for the first time with the kind permission of the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (RGADA — Russian State Archive of Early Acts, formerly TsGADA SSSR = Central State Archive of Early Acts) in Moscow. We express our sincere gratitude to Evgeniy Rychalovskiy, Head of the Publication Department and Vladislav Rzhetsky of the German Historical Institute in Moscow, for their assistance on 4 and 6 December 2019. Within the RGADA collection, the *Codex Sylvester* is catalogued as folder 381, Printer’s Library, no. 53, folios 164v-186. The six illustrations can be found in these folios: 182v, 174, 172v, 170v, 168b v, and 168a.

Photographs of the illustrations from a rare printed copy of the first facsimile edition (1891) were taken on 26 April 2009 and are © Stephen T. Whitlock and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. We express our special thanks to Carole Menzies and Jennifer Griffiths who facilitated our access to the facsimiles for filming purposes in the Taylor Bodleian Slavonic and Modern Greek

Library, Oxford University, Oxford, England. The facsimile edition was originally published as N. Novickij (Novitskii, P. P., *Otkrovenie Avraama* and later as a reprint. Whitlock's Image IDs are as follows: ApAb-OX10, ApAb-OX19, ApAb-OX20, ApAb-OX26, ApAb-OX30, ApAb-OX33, ApAb-OX50. For this article, the photos have been enhanced digitally for readability and size consistency, and a colored mask has been added to the backgrounds of all photos except ApAb-OX10.

*Figures 2-3.* Copyright Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.

*Figure 4.* C. H. Kraeling, *et al.*, *Synagogue*, plate 51.

## Endnotes

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[1] They had been told not to divide these birds, evidently so that the birds could provide the means of their ascent (A. Kulik, *Retroverting*, 12:8, p. 19, cf. 15:2, p. 22). Translation of caption: "And the angel took two birds and the angel took me by the right hand and set me on the wing of a pigeon, on the right, and himself set on the wing of a turtledove. And we ascended into the regions of fiery flame and went up into the heights." Cf. *Ibid.*, 15:2–3, p. 22. Note that Abraham is shown on the left wing, though *ApAb* reads that he was set on the right wing. Though both Abraham and Yaho'el are both described in the text and shown in the illustration mounting to heaven on the wings of birds, Brian Hauglid mistakenly concluded that only one of them is ascending. He wrote: "It is not Abraham who ascends to heaven on the 'wings of the birds' (which is the main force of the parallel) but the angel to whom Abraham is talking" (B. M. Hauglid, *New Resource*, p. 59).

[2] Lourié notes "a medieval legend of the ascension of Alexander the Great, which goes back to the Hellenistic era. In the legend Alexander reaches the heaven (or even heavenly Jerusalem) transported by four griffins. This motif suggests that the griffins as the psychopomps transporting visionaries to heaven were not an invention of the authors of the *hekhalot* literature but were a part of the early Jewish environment" (B. Lourié, *Review*, p. 233).

[3] A. Kulik, *Retroverting*, 12:10, p. 19; 15:2, p. 22; R. Rubinkiewicz, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 12:10, p. 695; 15:2, p. 696. Cf. H. W. Nibley, *Abraham 2000*, p. 18; Genesis 15:9ff.

[4] 1 Nephi 11:1. Cf. Exodus 19:3, Ezekiel 40:2; JST Matthew 4:8; Revelations 21:10; Moses 7:2.

[5] 2 Nephi 4:25. Cf. "wings of his *Shekinah*" (J. Goldin, *Fathers*, p. 68). Joseph Smith explained that: "The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the Devil cannot come in the sign of a dove" (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 29 January 1843, p. 276; cf. B. R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 1:404; J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 21 March 1841, p. 66).

[6] Brian Hauglid argues that "equating the 'Spirit' with 'birds'" in this case "is a stretch" (B. M. Hauglid, *New Resource*, p. 59). However, in G. H. Box's comment on the ascent of

Abraham and Yaho'el (G. H. Box, *Apocalypse*, XIII, note 8), he had no qualms about this association, reminding readers of the “symbolism of the dove” as it “applied to the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 3:16). R. Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, p. 151 n. 1, citing the symbolism of the angel mounting on the left wing of the turtledove, noted that the turtledove is “identified [in Jewish tradition] with the Holy Spirit, the source of prophecy” (see C. Perrot *et al.*, *Pseudo-Philon*, p. 147, cited in F. J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo*, p. 111 n. 23, referencing in turn *Targum Canticles* 2:12). Moreover, because the turtledove is said explicitly elsewhere to be a symbol of the prophets (Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*, 23:7, p. 142), he conjectured that the scene in *ApAb* is a way to describe the prophetic investiture of Abraham.

The resemblance between *ApAb* and 2 Nephi was first proposed in H. W. Nibley, *To Open*, p. 11, who has written extensively on the symbolism on related imagery in H. W. Nibley, *Approach to Abraham*.

[7] Moses 1:21.

[8] See, e.g., J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified*, pp. 144–146.

[9] Moses 1:24.

[10] Moses 1:1.

[11] K. L. Barney, June 21 2006.

[12] Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Moses 7:27.

[13] Moses 6:64.

[14] 2 Corinthians 12:2.

[15] H. W. Nibley, *Abraham* 2000, pp. 56–57.

[16] A. Kulik, *Retroverting*, 16:3, p. 22, emphasis added. This Jewish belief is found in Exodus 33:20 and rabbinic commentaries (R. Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, p. 155 n. 3).

[17] A. A. Orlov, *Gods of My Father*, p. 53; see also A. A. Orlov, *Praxis*, p. 160. Andrei Orlov has argued that there may be some connection between the anti-anthropomorphism in the heavenly ascent of Abraham and its prelude in the destruction of Terah's idols (A. A. Orlov, *Divine Manifestations*, pp. 217–235). He has also shown that this attitude has Deuteronomic precedents (*ibid.*, pp. 8–12). Importantly, Robin M. Jensen depicts similar ambivalence to divine anthropomorphism in early Christianity (R. M. Jensen, *Invisible Christian God*).

[18] “A. When the latter prophets died, that is, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, then the Holy Spirit came to an end in Israel. B. But even so, they made them hear [Heavenly messages] through an echo [*bat kōl*]” (J. Neusner, *Tosefta*, *Sotah* 13:3, 1:885).

[19] Citing E. R. Goodenough, Hugh Nibley explained (H. W. Nibley, *Atonement*, pp. 561–562):

In a stock presentation found in early Jewish synagogues [see, e.g., J. M. Bradshaw, *Ezekiel Mural*, pp. 11–12, 22–23] as well as on very early Christian murals [see, e.g., J. M. Bradshaw, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*, pp. 64–65, 96], “the hand of God is represented, but could not be called that explicitly, and instead of the heavenly utterance, the *bat kōl* [echo, distant voice, whisper] is given (E. R. Goodenough, *Archeological Evidence*, 1:246). From the hand “radiate beams of light” ( *ibid.*, 1:246). “To show the hand and light thus emerging from central darkness,” writes Goodenough, “is as near as one could come in conservative Judaism to depicting God himself” ( *ibid.*, 1:248). In early Christian representations the hand of God reaching through the veil is grasped by the initiate [i.e., in ritual ascent] or human spirit [i.e., in heavenly ascent] who is being caught up into the presence of the Lord.

Goodenough is specifically describing a hand that appears next to an illustration of the *Akedah* in the Beth Alpha synagogue (E. R. Goodenough, *Illustrations*, figure 638), where the message of the *bat kōl* is represented in Hebrew words written below the hand explicitly tell Abraham “do not raise [your hand against the boy]” (*al tishlah [yadkha el ha-na ‘ar]*) in order to stop the sacrifice (Genesis 22:12). The same symbolism is in play in the Dura synagogue Torah shrine (E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:71; cf. C. H. Kraeling *et al.*, *Synagogue*, p. 57). However, extending the meaning of the hand in Beth Alpha, the hand at Dura may have been intended to signify *two* events at the same time: God’s speech at the altar as well as at the entrance to the sanctuary-tent. Significantly, Rachel Hachlili notes that the hand of God in this scene “differs from all the others [in the Dura synagogue] by the addition of two lined borders” (R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art*, p. 144). She interprets this border tentatively as “a cloud?” but the two-lines more plausibly resemble layered fabrics of a veil, as in the illustration of the veils surrounding the throne of God from the *Codex Sylvester* shown below.

[20] S. Lander, *Revealing and Concealing*, p. 205.

[21] A. Grabar, *Le Thème*, p. 145: “*clavi rouges*.” In this image, the clavi can be seen as reddish purple stripes descending diagonally from left to right on what is usually taken to be a white chiton (tunic or outer robe). More generally Goodenough comments ((E. R. Goodenough, *Garments*, pp. 228–229):

The feeling of a special meaning in the Jewish-Christian version of the pallium tradition [large rectangular cloak associated with Greek philosophers and still used, e.g., as an emblem of the pope in the Roman Catholic Church] is intensified by the common use of the marks in the corners of the himation [outer garment associated with the ancient Greeks worn over the left shoulder and under the right] as well as of the stripes on the chiton. ... I find it hard to believe that even the stripes were “purely ornamental,” though I cannot trace their origin or explain their meaning. ... [The mark] came in Christianity [in the shape of a half-square] to be called a *gam* or gamma or gammadia. Whatever it originally represented, obviously it had some sort of religious potency, perhaps explained or re-explained as it went from religion to religion, or perhaps just persisting as a symbol in its own right without explanations.

In a speech by Tertullian, *On the Mantle [De Pallium]*, he describes how the pallium was used in Greek mysteries, but “now that Christians have adopted it, ... it surpasses all the clothing of the gods or priests” (Tertullian, *On the Mantle*, 4:10 as paraphrased in E. R. Goodenough, *Garments*, p. 228).

Some scholars have dismissed the depictions of distinctive clothing of this sort as merely the product of slavish copying by the mural makers from standard design books. Others assert that different marks may serve merely to distinguish between male and female garments (M. Avi-Yonah, *Critique*, pp. 120–121). However, Erwin Goodenough notes that distinctive marks are found not only in the Dura murals, but also in a cache of white textile fragments also discovered at Dura that “may well have been the contents of a box where sacred vestments were kept, or they may have been fetishistic marks, originally on sacred robes, that were preserved after the garments had been outworn” (E. R. Goodenough, *Garments*, p. 225; cf. E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:127–129; see also discussion of “cultic refuse pits” in A. Wrathall, *Cult Objects*). Such marks on Christian robes, as well as on clothing in Hellenistic Egypt, Palmyra, and on Roman figures of Victory are thought to be “a symbol of immortality” (E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:163). For further discussion of Goodenough’s conclusions and a report of similar patterns found at Masada and elsewhere, see J. W. Welch *et al.*, *Gammadia*. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *God’s Image* 1, pp. 571–573, 654–657; H. W. Nibley, *Vestments*.

[22] A. Grabar, *Le Thème*, pp. 145–146 (translation by Bradshaw):

[The Targum] explains every detail of this particular image, including its setting. The hut with the child at its door is “The House of God” at the summit of the mountain. Before it stands the youth Isaac that his father has brought there as an offering[, clad in a tunic adorned with red *clavi*]. The crimson color of the interior of the modest hut raises its status to that of a sanctuary (according to the *Pirke de R. Eliezer*, chapter 31, this summit had already served as the site of the sacrifices of Adam, Abel and Noah [M.-A. Ouaknin *et al.*, *Rabbi Éliézer*, 31, p. 186]). Each of the figures are seen from the back because, having been placed between the observer and the mountain, they are turned toward its summit and the sanctuary that crowns it. Abraham and Isaac, according to what is written in the Targum, thus foreshadow the “future generations” of Israel reunited behind them who stand before the Torah of the synagogue. Thus, the setting of the scene is completely explained, as well as the connection, within the same panel, between the *sacra* of the Temple and this *Sacrifice of Isaac* that includes an image of the first sanctuary of Yahweh.

On the tradition of Abraham’s vision of God’s presence on the top of Mount Moriah and the identification of this site of sacrifice with the Jerusalem Temple mount, see, e.g., M. McNamara, *Targum Neofiti*, 22:14, p. 119; H. N. Bialik *et al.*, *Legends*, p. 41; L. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:253 n. 253; W. G. Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, Psalm 76:3, 2:14–15; Rashi, *Genesis Commentary*, 22:14, 2:237; A. J. Rosenberg, *Mikraot*, *Genesis* 22:14 Vayera, 1:259; M. Zlotowitz *et al.*, *Bereishis*, *Genesis* 22:14, 1:806–807; H. Freedman *et al.*, *Midrash*, *Genesis* (Vayera) 56:10, pp. 500–501.



[23] See M. Barker, *Hidden*, p. 36. “This motif is based in part on the fact that only Abraham is mentioned as returning after the incident in Genesis 22:19” (J. L. Kugel, *Traditions*, p. 325).

H. Schwartz, *Tree*, p. 171 gives the following summary of relevant Jewish traditions about “Isaac’s Ascent”:

When the knife touched Isaac’s throat, his soul flew from him. ... Then the angel spoke “Lay not your hand upon the lad,” and at that instant Isaac’s soul returned to his body. And when Isaac found that his soul had been restored to him, he exclaimed: “Blessed is He who quickens the dead!” (cf. M.-A. Ouaknin *et al.*, Rabbi Éliézer, 31, p. 187, which adds “Then Isaac became acquainted with [*connut*] the resurrection of the dead and knew that the dead would someday live again”).

Afterward, “the angels on high took Isaac and brought him to the schoolhouse of Shem the Great” (M. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan*, 22:19, p. 81). While he was there (H. Schwartz, *Tree*, p. 171):

all the Treasuries of Heaven [were] opened to Isaac[, including] the celestial Temple, which has existed there since the time of Creation ..., for no mystery of heaven was deemed too secret for the pure soul of Isaac. There, too, Isaac found his own face on the curtain [heavenly veil] of God known as the *Pargod*. [Regarding the *tselem* (= image) of souls of individuals on the veil, see C. Mopsik, *Hénoch*, pp. 51ff., 326–327.]

Regarding ancient sources for relevant Jewish traditions of the “death” and “resurrection” of Isaac, see H. Schwartz, *Tree*, p. 172; L. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:251 n. 243; H. Freedman *et al.*, *Midrash, Genesis (Vayera)* 56:11, p. 502.

Barker refers to early Christian texts that “compared the death and resurrection of Jesus to Isaac; others contrasted the death of Jesus and the *Akedah*, because Abraham offered a ram in his place, implying that Isaac did not die” (M. Barker, *Temple Themes*, p. 31. Cf. p. 28). See also J. L. Kugel, *Bible As It Was*, pp. 177–178; J. L. Kugel, *Traditions*, pp. 306–307, 324–325; Hebrews 11:17–19; S. Kierkegaard, *Fear, Preliminary Expectoration*, pp. 47–48; J. D. Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*, especially pp. 111–114, 125–142 (an argument against the story of Abraham as an etiology for animal sacrifice). In this regard, James L. Kugel notes one particularly revealing passage (J. L. Kugel, *Traditions*, pp. 324–325):

The allusion in Romans 8:32 to the Genesis narrative came to have great significance, indirect though it may have been. The allusion itself is certainly felt in Paul’s use of the word “spare,” but it also may be carried in the expression “His own son,” Greek *tou idlou huiou*. This phrase is sometimes rendered “only son” since *idlou* here may represent a translation of Hebrew “your only [son]” ... in Genesis 12:2, 12, and 17; see also John 3:16. It was taken up by Origen (*Homilies in Genesis*, 8) and Irenaeus (*Against the Heresies*, 4:5.4). [See also Augustine (*City of God*, 16:32).]

Kugel also notes that “the same idea was sometimes represented visually, with the ram depicted as hanging from a tree (= crucified)” ((ibid., pp. 324–325. Cf. Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis* 20:3), as in the *Akedah* mosaic at Beth Alpha.

[24] S. Lander, *Revealing and Concealing*, p. 205.

[25] According to ibid., p. 208, Joseph Gutmann sees “the whole image [of the Akedah at Dura Europos as] ‘symbolic of the *bat kōl* = voice from heaven.’ This view is supported by the use of the *bat kōl* in the expansive Palestinian *Targum Neofiti* on Genesis 22:10 (M. McNamara, *Targum Neofiti*, Genesis 22:10, p. 118; see also p. 39). ... According to Jensen, late antique Christianity shares this understanding of the divine hand, yet the divine voice is identified with the first person of the Trinity. ... Jensen ponders the choice of this human body part to represent God’s voice: ‘Does God have hands?’”

[26] Other scholars have given different interpretations, but none account for all the data as well as Grabar and Du Mesnil de Buisson. Goodenough (E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:71), Kraeling (C. H. Kraeling *et al.*, *Synagogue*, p. 57), and Perkins (A. Perkins, *Art*, p. 57) are in agreement that the structure with the figure at the entrance is a tent. However, despite the fact that every woman depicted elsewhere in the synagogue is wearing a head covering and colored clothing (see W. G. Moon, *Nudity*, pp. 596–597), Goodenough differs from these and other scholars in insisting that the figure is a female (Sarah) rather than a male (E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:72–75; cf. E. R. Goodenough, *Method*, pp. 189–190). Goodenough also clearly misinterprets the figure at the door of the tent as looking outward from the tent rather than inward toward its interior (E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:73: “Sarah face[s] the hand of God” vs. A. Grabar, *Le Thème*, p. 145: “Turning his back to the observer—like the other two figures in the scene—the child [Isaac] seems to be entering the hut” [ *Tournant le dos au spectateur — tout comme les deux autres figures de la scène—l’enfant semble entrer dans la cabane*]). Though admitting that many aspects of Goodenough’s interpretations are brilliant, Michael Avi-Yonah faults him at times for “disregarding inconvenient facts” when they contradict his overarching “vision” of the meaning of the murals (M. Avi-Yonah, *Critique*, pp. 121, 120)—which, in his analysis of the Dura Europos wall painting of the binding of Isaac, required him to define a key role for Sarah.

Alternative interpretations suffer from their own problems (for a list of these interpretations see R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art*, p. 239). For example, C. H. Kraeling *et al.*, *Synagogue*, p. 58, although accepting that the small figure at the entrance of the tent is a male, implausibly concludes that he is intended to represent “one of the two ‘young men’ left behind a short distance before proceeding to the sacrifice” (similarly A. Perkins, *Art*, p. 571). However, as E. R. Goodenough, *Dura Symbolism*, 9:72 points out, this interpretation is made improbable because the young men in Genesis 22:5 are occupied with tending an ass, not keeping a tent (as shown in the related mural at the Beth Alpha synagogue—see E. R. Goodenough, *Illustrations*, figure 638). Moreover, only one male figure rather than the expected two young men is depicted.

In light of all the data, the interpretation of Grabar, Hopkins (C. Hopkins, *Discovery*, pp. 144–145), and Du Mesnil de Buisson seems the best resolution of these difficulties. From de Buisson’s perspective, “the tent has been interpreted as a temple or the Temple, and the small figure on its threshold as either Abraham (which is unlikely because of the dress) or Isaac himself” (C. H. Kraeling *et al.*, *Synagogue*, pp. 57–58, citing the findings of C. Du Mesnil de Buisson, *Les Peintures*, pp. 23–27; A. Grabar, *Le Thème*, pp. 144–146). See also M. Barker, *Temple Themes*, p. 28.

[27] For a description of this Book of Mormon account as an encounter “at the veil,” see M. C. Thomas, Brother of Jared.

[28] See Ether 2:22–25.

[29] See Ether 3:6–10.

[30] See Ether 3:13–20.

[31] See *Essay #371*.