

# Book of Moses Essays #56: Moses Sees the Garden of Eden (Moses 3) The Naming of Animals, Angels, Adam, and Eve (Moses 3:19–20, 23; 4:26)

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Figure 1. Jan Breughel, the Elder, ca. 1568-1625: *The Garden of Eden*, 1612

In the depiction of the Garden of Eden above, Jan Brueghel the Elder masterfully fills the foreground of the scene with the abundance, happiness, and beauty of newly created life. From there, however, he skillfully draws our eyes toward the two tiny figures in the background ominously reaching for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

However, it should not be forgotten that prior to that event wherein Eve and Adam received crucial knowledge as a consequence of their transgression, an important test for knowledge was administered to Adam when he was required to go through a test of naming.

Though the story of the naming of the animals is couched in the Bible as a proof of Adam's dominion and as a motivating prelude to the creation of Eve, there are hints in competing versions of the event that the account may not be as straightforward as it seems. Building on the foundation of [Essay #39](#) that discussed a series of sacred names given to Moses representing important junctures in his mortal journey and heavenly ascent, this Essay describes an alternative Islamic interpretation of the event that understands Adam to be engaged, not in naming the *animals*, but rather in demonstrating his knowledge of secret names to the *angels*.

## Animals or Angels?

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Moses 3:19 recounts the well-known story of how Adam gave names to all the animals:

And out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and commanded that they should come unto Adam, to see what he would call them; and they were also living souls; for I, God, breathed into them the breath of life, and commanded that whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that should be the name thereof.



*Figure 2. Adam Enthroned, the Angels Prostrating Themselves before Him, 1576*

Intriguingly, the story in Jewish writings of what happened afterward differs significantly from other ancient sources. Whereas some strands of Jewish tradition, consistent with the thrust of the biblical account, record that the *animals* subsequently bowed to Adam, other Jewish, Christian, and Islamic accounts insist that it was the *angels* who paid homage to him.<sup>[1]</sup>

While it is impossible to reconstruct how and why these two versions of the story differ, it has been argued that some scriptural passages relating to angels were controversial and subject to tampering by Jewish scribes during the second temple period.<sup>[2]</sup> We also know from the

book of Revelation about the close association between beasts and angels, who worship together at God's throne in heaven.<sup>[3]</sup> It does not seem impossible that in some contexts "beasts" were interpreted as "angels" by readers familiar with such imagery.

With these considerations in mind, we will consider a parallel tradition from Islamic sources that appears in place of the episode of the naming of animals.<sup>[4]</sup> In a manner similar to temple initiates in other cultures, Adam — before the Fall and after having been given instruction by God — is said in these sources to have been directed to recite a series of secret names to the angels in order prove that he was worthy of the elevated status of priest and king that had been conferred upon him.<sup>[5]</sup>

## What Was the Nature of the Test?

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It is seen specifically as a test of knowledge. Ida Zilio-Grandi comments that:

While in the Bible God lets Adam choose the names of things, in the *Qur'an* it is God who teaches — who reveals therefore—the names to Adam. ... Extremely high value is attributed to knowledge. ... Indeed, it is not by obedience that the ability to represent God in the governance of the world is measured, but by knowledge.<sup>[6]</sup>

## What Was the Nature of the Names Involved?

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There are several different opinions about the nature of the names involved. With respect to Adam's purported premortal accomplishment, *Qur'an* commentators themselves "dispute which particular names were involved; various theories [taking the position that] they were the names of all things animate and inanimate, the names of the angels, the names of his own descendants, or the names of God."<sup>[7]</sup>

Mahmoud Ayoub writes similarly of the diversity of opinions on the matter:

Much disagreement has arisen among commentators regarding the words that Adam received from his Lord. ... Ibn 'Arabi says that these were 'lights and states or stations of the realm of dominion and power and the realm of the subtle spirits. ... It may also be that Adam received from God *gnoses* [hidden knowledge], sciences, and truths.'<sup>[8]</sup>

Regardless of the specifics, *Al-Mizan* asserts that this was not a simple dictionary recital showing off the power of Adam's memory, but rather "something totally different from what we understand from the knowledge of names."<sup>[9]</sup> Alusi concludes that Adam's saying of these names is "in the end, like saying the names of God, for power concerns God Himself in His ruling of the world."<sup>[10]</sup>

## The Names As Helps in Repentance and Reconciliation

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Additional passages from Islamic sources connect the knowledge said to have been given to Adam in a general way to temple-related practices to effect repentance and reconciliation elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Though Islamic sources studiously avoid any reference to atonement rituals connected with the Jewish temple, a penitential *function* is accorded to a knowledge of certain words given to Adam. Describing a separate incident that was said to have occurred *after* the Fall, Islamic writings recount that “Adam received (some) words from his Lord”<sup>[11]</sup> that enabled him to repent and return to good standing with God, so he could eventually go back to the Garden of Eden.<sup>[12]</sup>

While *Al-Mizan* declines speculation about what specific words were revealed, it likewise elaborates on their function:

It was this learning of the words that paved the way for the repentance of Adam. ... Probably, the words received at the time of repentance were related to the names taught to him in the beginning. ... There must have been something in those names to wipe out every injustice, to erase every sin and to cure every spiritual and moral disease; ... those names were sublime creations hidden from the heavens and the earth; they were intermediaries to convey the grace and bounties of Allāh to His creation; and no creature would be able to attain to its perfection without their assistance.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **The Names As Required Knowledge for Heavenly or Ritual Ascent**

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In the *Qur'an*, the specific means by which these “words” were meant to assist in the attainment of Adam’s perfection is left unspecified. However, an exchange of sacred words is implied in the accounts of conversations between Muhammad and heavenly guardians during his “night journey” (*isra*), when he ascended on a golden ladder (*mi'raj*) to the highest heaven.<sup>[14]</sup> Moreover, the literature of mystical Judaism and Christian Gnosticism abounds with accounts of righteous prophets and sages who were taught how to advance past a series of celestial gatekeepers toward the presence of God by the memorization and use of sacred names and phrases.<sup>[15]</sup>

Is it possible that Adam himself received his name as part of the episode reported in Moses 3:19?<sup>[16]</sup> It is difficult to say because the Hebrew word for Adam is used as a generic term for “the man” in the early chapters of Genesis. However, it seems significant that the final instance of naming in the story of the Garden and the Fall — Adam’s bestowal of a permanent proper name on Eve — occurs in immediate proximity to the account of God’s making coats of skin for the couple.<sup>[17]</sup> In this connection, it may be significant that Islamic traditions associate a test of naming with the marriage of Adam and Eve.<sup>[18]</sup>

Just as the episode reported in 3:19 was considered by Islamic commentators to be a test of Adam’s knowledge of certain names as a measure of worthiness for his exalted role, so also was the story of the naming of Eve seen in precisely the same way. Thus, the test of Adam’s

knowledge of certain names culminated in an examination to determine whether Adam could identify Eve and recite *her* name. Notice the words al-Tha'labi uses to describe the incident: [19]

When Adam awoke from his sleep he saw [Eve] sitting at his head. The angels said to Adam, testing his knowledge: "What is this, Adam?" He answered: "A woman." They asked: "And what is her name?" he replied: "Eve (*hawwa*)."

Al-Tha'labi precises that when Adam and Eve were rejoined after the Fall "they recognized each other by questioning on a day of questioning. So, the place was named *Arafat* (= questions) and the day, '*Irfah* (= knowledge or recognition)."[20]

## Conclusions

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Whether or not traditions that revise the story of Adam's naming of the animals and of Eve to refer to something like ancient temple naming practices are authentic, Latter-day Saints certainly have no quarrel with the idea that Adam and Eve received the fullness of the saving ordinances. Indeed, Joseph Smith taught explicitly that the origins of modern temple ordinances go back beyond the foundation of the world. For example, in 1835, as the Saints prepared to receive the ordinances that would be available to them in the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet stated:[21]

The order of the house of God has been, and ever will be, the same, even after Christ comes; and after the termination of the thousand years, it will be the same; and we shall finally enter into the celestial kingdom of God, and enjoy it forever.

Adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*. 2014 Updated ed. In *God's Image and Likeness* 1. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>, pp. 177–180, 183–184.

## Further Reading

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Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve*. 2014 Updated ed. In *God's Image and Likeness* 1. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014. <https://archive.org/details/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>, pp. 177–180, 183–184.

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## Notes on Figures

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*Figure 1.* Picture Library, The Royal Collection, with the assistance of Karen Lawson. Copyright 2007 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

*Figure 2.* With the kind permission of Rachel Milstein. From R. Milstein, *et al.*, *Stories*. Original in Topkapi Saray Museum Library, H. 1227: Ms. T-7, Istanbul, Turkey. For more detailed explanation of this figure, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Figure 4-7, p. 225.

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## Endnotes

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[1] See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 225–226, 582–583 for a discussion of these traditions.

[2] M. Barker, *Beyond*, pp. 195-196; M. Barker, *Great High Priest: Temple Roots*, p. 157.

[3] Revelation 4:6-9, 19:4; D&C 77:2-4.

[4] J.-L. Monneret, *Grands*, p. 481 n. 12; cf. M. i. A. A. al-Kisa'i, *Tales*, p. 28; al-Tabari, *Creation*, 1:94-97, pp. 266-269; G. Weil, *Legends*, p. 22.

[5] *Qur'an* 2:30-33; cf. the idea of the naming as a test for Adam (vs. Satan) in al-Tabari, *Creation*, 1:97, p. 269; M. J. B. bin Gorion *et al.*, *Mimekor*, 3, 1:6-7; L. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:62-64, 5:84-86 n. 35; E. G. Mathews, Jr., *Armenian*, p. 148 and n. 35; J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah* 1, 17:4:2, p. 183; M.-A. Ouaknin *et al.*, *Rabbi Éliézer*, 13, pp. 87-88.

[6] I. Zilio-Grandi, *Paradise*, pp. 84, 87; cf. D&C 107:18-19, 130:18-19, 131:5-6. This is a theme often mentioned in the teachings of Joseph Smith.

[7] Adam and Eve, Adam and Eve. Compare J. T. Townsend, *Tanhuma*, 6:12, 3:171.

[8] M. M. Ayoub, *Qur'an* (Vol. 1), p. 85.

[9] A. a.-S. M. H. at-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, 1:163.

[10] Cited in I. Zilio-Grandi, *Paradise*, pp. 86-87.

[11] 2:37.

[12] A. I. A. I. M. I. I. al-Tha'labi, *Lives*, p. 59; cf. M. i. A. A. al-Kisa'i, *Tales*, p. 60.

[13] A. a.-S. M. H. at-Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan*, 1:188-189, 211.

[14] J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, p. 39.

[15] See, e.g., C. R. A. Morray-Jones, *Divine Names*, passim. See also J. Gee, *Keeper*, p. 235. Among other ancient documents from around the world, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* takes up a similar theme as it describes the manner in which initiates were to advance past a series of gatekeepers through his knowledge of certain names (B. T. Ostler, *Clothed*, pp. 8-10). For a detailed analysis specifically relating to the sacred names of Moses, see J. Bradshaw *et al.*, 'Made Stronger Than Many Waters' (*Ancient Threads*). Descriptions of this sort recall President Brigham Young's succinct definition of the modern endowment ordinance: "Your endowment is to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being able to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell" (B. Young, 6 April 1853 – B, p. 31).

Examples of the use of naming in similar functions abound. The Coptic *Discourse on Abbaton* explicitly associates "absolute authority" over the angels with a knowledge of their names (E. A. W. Budge, *Cave*, pp. 58-59; cf. Judges 13:17-18) and, elsewhere, Josephus records that the Essenes were under a vow to preserve the names of the angels (F. Josephus, *Wars*, 2:8:7, p. 477). Hence, the frequent theme of danger for any possessor of the name who revealed it to an unauthorized party (J. B. Pritchard, *Unknown Name*; cf. Judges 16:4-20; B. H. Porter *et al.*, *Names*, pp. 508-513). Truman G. Madsen proposes that the idea that the "proper use of the name YHWH constitutes a covenant between Israel and her God" may be the reason behind the third commandment (T. G. Madsen, *Putting*, p. 459). According to Schimmel, a scholar of Islamic mysticism: "The Hope of discovering the Greatest Name of God has inspired many a Sufi who dreamed of reaching the highest bliss in this world and the next by means of this blessed name" (A. Schimmel, *Mystical*, p. 25; cf. B. H. Porter *et al.*, *Names*, pp. 510-512). The dedicatory prayer for Solomon's temple stressed that it was not meant to be a residence for God, since He "lived in his 'dwelling place in heaven' but that the 'name of God' dwelt in the Temple" (W. J. Hamblin *et al.*, *Solomon's Temple*, p. 27, cf. p. 182. See also 1 Kings 8:27-30; Doctrine and Covenants 110:7). The shout of the people at Christ's triumphal entry becomes more understandable when translated as "Blessed is he who comes *with* the Name of the Lord" ("With" = "in" in Hebrew (M. Barker, *Hidden*, p. 44; cf. Matthew 21:9). The meaning of being "willing to take upon [us] the name of Jesus Christ" in the sacrament is clear in light of temple ordinances (D. H. Oaks, *Taking Upon Us*; D. A. Bednar, *Name*, p. 98; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77; 109:22, 26, 79).

[16] Revelation 2:17; D&C 130:11.

[17] See the discussion of the nakedness and clothing of Adam and Eve in J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 234-240.

[18] J.-L. Monneret, *Grands*, p. 481 n. 12; cf. M. i. A. A. al-Kisa'i, *Tales*, p. 28; al-Tabari, *Creation*, 1:94-97, pp. 266-269; G. Weil, *Legends*, p. 22.

[19] A. I. A. I. M. I. I. al-Tha'labi, *Lives*, p. 48. Cf. p. 54. See also al-Tabari, *Creation*, 1:120, p. 291.

[20] A. I. A. I. M. I. I. al-Tha'labi, *Lives*, p. 54. Cf. al-Tabari, *Creation*, 1:120, p. 291.

[21] J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 12 November 1835, p. 91; cf.

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-12-november-1835/4>. Of course, the Nauvoo Temple ordinances had not been given to the Saints at the time these statements were made, so it is evident that the Prophet is making a broad claim about the antiquity of saving ordinances here, including the general “order of the house of God,” and not making an assertion about the completeness and exactness in every detail of the ordinances the Saints had then received. After the Nauvoo endowment was administered on 4 May 1842, Elder Willard Richards wrote: “In this council was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days” (*ibid.*, 4 May 1842, p. 237; cf.

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1841-december-1842/25>) — asserting both the antiquity of the ordinance and the fact that this order was new to the select group to whom it had been given.