Book of Moses Essays #74: The Family of Adam and Eve (Moses 6:1–12)

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Figure 1. Piero della Francesca, ca. 1420-1492: Adam and His Children, ca. 1447-1466.

Pictured on his deathbed, Adam is supported by Eve and surrounded by a daughter and two sons. In the background, Seth converses with an angel. The scene of the Death of Adam is part of a cycle of frescoes in the church of San Francesco in Arezzo, Italy illustrating the
Legend of the True Cross. In this cycle, the classical forms of the *quattrocento* appear against a “sparse, often surrealist landscape—the pictorial equivalent of silence. To the modern eye, Piero’s paintings show a subdued emotion, where rational theory appears to have overwhelmed naturalism.”

From the story of Lamech in Moses 5, Umberto Cassuto draws the lesson:

that material progress did not go hand in hand with moral advancement. Not only did violence prevail in the world, but it was precisely in deeds of violence that these generations gloried. The very qualities that are ethically reprehensible, and are hateful in the sight of the Lord, were esteemed in the eyes of men. In such circumstances, the Judge of the whole earth could not but execute judgment. All the achievements of material civilization are not worth anything without moral virtues, and cannot protect man from retribution. We have here a kind of prelude to the decree of the Flood.

Mercifully postponing judgment, however, God first launched successive waves of what Hugh Nibley called a “crash program” to gather any that would hearken to the call of repentance—first to Adam-ondi-Ahman, and later to Enoch’s city. The absolute failure of the final pre-diluvian ministry of the long-suffering Noah definitively confirmed that there were none but his immediate family who would listen and demonstrated the inevitability of the sweeping destruction of the Flood.

The first part of Moses 6 and Genesis 5 describes the final events in the life of Adam as a patriarch to the righteous branch of his posterity (compare Abraham 1:26). The focus of the account is on the birth of the righteous Seth and the beginning of the patriarchal line that will culminate, in the seventh generation from Adam, with the call of Enoch.

The Patriarchal Priesthood and the Line of Seth

Moses 6:2 announces the first theme of the chapter: despite the death of Abel, a righteous posterity to Adam will be raised up through Seth, ensuring the continuity of a covenant people. Joseph Fielding McConkie writes:

Seth means “the appointed” or “substitute,” he being effectually the second Abel. As such he becomes a natural type for Christ, who like Abel was first a martyr, and then like the second Abel, Seth, ruled in glory with his father.

In the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve*, as Tromp notes, Seth not only “continues humanity” but is also the one who “hands on the primeval mysteries.” Similarly, Doctrine and Covenants 107 records that the “evangelical [or patriarchal] order of the priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made.” The revelation goes on to say that Seth was “ordained by Adam at the age of sixty-nine years, and was blessed by him three years previous to his (Adam’s) death, and received the promise of God by his father, that his
posterity should be the chosen of the Lord, and that they should be preserved unto the end of the earth.”[9] Regarding the description of Seth’s role in Gnostic texts, S. Kent Brown writes:

While Adam was the founder of the covenant race, it was Seth and his successors who perpetuated the covenant people and who came to be known as “the seed of the great Seth” or “the great, incorruptible, immovable race of the great, mighty men of the great Seth”[10]… In his earthly function, … Seth came to reveal secrets about the heavens and the future which he had learned both from his father and from revelation…[11] In fact, he authored a book which was hidden in order to come forth in the latter days, a work reportedly containing the secrets of the universe which Seth and the covenant people had known and revered from the beginning.[12]

Just as the Book of Mormon, as a history of those who were Nephites by lineage or “adoption,” does not record the story of the Lamanites and their associates,[13] so the Book of Moses story tells us very little about the history of the Cainites or of the children of Adam that were born before Cain and Abel[14] who “followed Satan by choice and were disqualified as sons of God.”[15] The account instead focuses on the inauguration of temple ordinances among the righteous,[16] which began, as Nibley indicates, “when God set them apart, gave them a blessing, gave them a new name, [and] registered them in the new Book of the Generations of Adam.”[17]

The Great Council at Adam-ondi-Ahman

Joseph Smith revealed the name of the location where Adam gave his final blessing to be Adam-ondi-Ahman, which Nibley takes as meaning “Adam (or “man”) in the presence of God.”[18] In this place, Adam gathered his posterity three years prior to his death, and “predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation.”[19]

The Prophet said that the purpose of Adam’s blessing was to “bring [his posterity] into the presence of God.”[20] Hyrum Andrus explained that “Adam … realized his desire to a degree, for ‘the Lord appeared unto them.’[21] But even this blessing was short of the ultimate purpose of the Gospel, which was to bring all those of Adam’s descendants who would obey its divine truths back into the presence of God and to endow them with celestial glory.”[22]

A description of a gathering like the one described in Doctrine and Covenants 107 is given in the Life of Adam and Eve. Descriptions of the number present vary widely: while most versions of the tradition mention thirty sons and thirty daughters, the Latin recension uniquely pictures a surprisingly large assembly of “15,000 men, not counting women and children.”[23] The Georgian version recounts the story as follows:
For all the years of Adam were 930 years. And [those who were descended] from him multiplied over the earth and settled it. And when the 930 years were completed, Adam fell ill and cried out in a loud voice and said, “Gather to me all my descendants and I will see them before my death.”

And all his progeny gathered to him who had settled, and he divided the three parts of the earth among his descendants. And all Adam’s descendants assembled by him, for they had taken a position before his doors, in the place which Adam had made, and into which he would enter and address his prayers to God.[24]

Another extrabiblical source purporting to give an account of this event is the Apocalypse of Adam, which Stephen Robinson describes as:

an account of Adam’s final instructions to his son Seth. Since the 700th year[25] should be understood as the 700th year of Seth’s life, it is also, according to the Septuagint chronology, the last year of Adam’s life. This would indicate that the document is not an apocalypse, but rather a testament in the pattern of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,[26] where the fathers also call their sons together just before their deaths for a last word of instruction and exhortation.[27]

The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan recounts that “Adam let his blessing descend upon Seth, and upon his children, and upon all his children’s children.”[28] Nibley argues that this “great assembly” was “the original model” for the widespread tradition of annual year-rites thereafter performed throughout the world.[29]

Beyond their obvious value as part of the scriptural record, revelations about the council at Adam-ondi-Ahman seem to have provided the Prophet with a prototype for church governance,[30] a model whose importance persists to the present time.[31] His revelation appears to have been based on a vision, since he speaks of seeing the event.[32] Connections between this vision, the translation of the early chapters of the Book of Moses, and the organization of church councils are seen by Robert Matthews to be “reasonable and possible—even probable.”[33] Moreover, Dahl cites close affinities with Doctrine and Covenants “68, 85, 88, 102, 107, which speak of priesthood matters in terms of ancient councils, priesthood genealogies, keys and powers.”[34]

The Prophet Joseph Smith was concerned about maintaining a proper spirit in the meetings of the early Church. He had seen by revelation the manner in which ancient assemblies were conducted, and was pained by the offensive behavior that he had sometimes witnessed in his time:

How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations—too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God.[35]
Having spoken for the first time about the correct order of councils in the Church at a conference in Hiram, Ohio, on October 11, 1831, the Prophet reported: “The Elders were instructed in the ancient manner of conducting meetings, of which knowledge most of them were ignorant.”[36] Beginning on that day, the Prophet called and set apart six brethren to visit the several branches of the Church and teach them “the ancient manner of conducting meetings as they were led by the Holy Ghost.”[37] The minutes do not give additional detail about the specifics that they were to teach,[38] however one week after the final selection of brethren for this assignment had been completed, Orson Hyde, one of the six called to teach the branches, requested a revelation from the Prophet. The Lord’s response reads in part:[39]

1 My servant, Orson Hyde, was called by his ordination to proclaim the everlasting gospel, by the Spirit of the living God, from people to people, and from land to land, in the congregations of the wicked, in their synagogues, reasoning with and expounding all scriptures unto them.

2 And, behold, and lo, this is an ensample unto all those who were ordained unto this priesthood, whose mission is appointed unto them to go forth—

3 And this is the ensample unto them, that they shall speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost.

4 And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.

5 Behold, this is the promise of the Lord unto you, O ye my servants.

Although the passage certainly can be applied more generally, Elder Hyde no doubt saw its relevance to his recent assignment to teach the branches to conduct meetings “as they were led by the Holy Ghost.”[40] While it was the duty of the presiding authority to provide adequate opportunity for discussion of all matters laid before a council, all present at the meeting had an equally binding responsibility to refrain from speaking impetuously.[41] On the contrary, each council member was charged to “speak [only] as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost,”[42] thus following the example of Adam’s posterity, who “rose up and blessed Adam,”[43] and of the patriarch himself, who prophesied being full of the Holy Ghost.”[44] Joseph Smith explained: “Each should speak in his turn and in his place, and in his time and season, that there may be perfect order in all things; and that every man, before he makes an objection to any item that is brought before a council for consideration, should be sure that he can throw light upon the subject rather than spread darkness, and that his objection be founded in righteousness.”[45]

That the Saints will have ample opportunity in the future to experience firsthand “the ancient manner of conducting meetings” is attested by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, who wrote:[46]
Not many years hence there shall be another gathering of high priests and righteous souls in this same valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman. At this gathering Adam, the Ancient of Days, will again be present. At this time the vision which Daniel saw will be enacted.\cite{47} The Ancient of Days will sit. There will stand before him those who have held the keys of all dispensations, who shall render up their stewardships to the first Patriarch of the race, who holds the keys of salvation. \cite{48} This council in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman is to be of the greatest importance to the world. At that time there will be a transfer of authority from the usurper and imposter, Lucifer, to the rightful King, Jesus Christ. \cite{49} Our Lord will then assume the reins of government; directions will be given to the Priesthood; and He, whose right it is to rule, will be installed officially by the voice of the Priesthood there assembled. This grand council of Priesthood will be composed, not only of those who are faithful who now dwell on this earth, but also of the prophets and apostles of old, who have had directing authority. Others may also be there, but if so they will be there by appointment, for this is to be an official council called to attend to the most momentous matters concerning the destiny of the earth.

When this gathering is held, the world will not know of it; the members of the Church at large will not know of it, yet it shall be preparatory to the coming in the clouds of glory of our Savior Jesus Christ as the Prophet Joseph Smith has said.
Exactly where will this gathering take place?

Although “neither biblical records nor secular history and archaeological research” are likely to ever “identify the dimensions or the location of the Garden [of Eden] in terms of the present-day surface of the earth,” statements attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith might be read as implying indications of Adam and Eve’s step-by-step migration after the Fall, paralleling the general direction of the movement of the Saints in Missouri after their expulsion from Jackson County. North of Independence, in Caldwell County, is an area that the Saints named Far West. It was near that place, according to the Prophet, that Cain killed Abel. Continuing about twelve miles further in that same general direction is a location where the Prophet proposed building a stake and city that was to be named Seth, in
memory of the son who consoled Adam and Eve after their loss of Abel.[52] About 13 miles north of Seth and 70 miles north of Independence is Adam-ondi-Ahman, where Adam gave a final blessing to his posterity,[53] and where, presumably, the anticipated gathering of the council described by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith will take place.

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**Notes on Figures**

*Figure 1.* Art Resource, Inc., with the assistance of Tricia Smith. Original in the Church of San Francesco, Arezzo, Italy.

*Figure 2.* Adapted from D. H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:923, with the permission of the Brigham Young University Copyright Licensing Office and with the assistance of Nick Coakley and Carl Johnson.

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**References**


**Endnotes**

[4] Unless one posits that any of Noah’s converts were among the “many” caught up to Zion, Enoch’s city (Moses 7:27). Thanks to Steve Whitlock for this suggestion.
[15] H. W. Nibley, Before Adam, p. 78 and Moses 7:33, 37. See also D. J. Meldrum et al., Children JBMS; D. J. Meldrum et al., Children 2007, pp. 7-13; T. D. Stephens, Tree of Life; J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Commentary 6:8-c, p. 481.
[16] In this way it resembles the small plates of Nephi, focused on important dealings between God and man rather than secular history. Thanks for Steve Whitlock for this suggestion.
[23], Synopsis, 30:3, p. 34E. See J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Endnote 6-6, p. 493.
[29] H. W. Nibley et al., One Eternal Round, p. 383. See J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Commentary 1:25-e, p. 60; 5:47-a, p. 395; Excursus 35: Lamech’s “Sword Song”, p. 612; the overview of Moses 4, pp. 221; Endnote 4-21, p. 304.
[34] L. E. Dahl, Joseph Smith Translation, p. 126. See J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Endnote 6-10, p. 493.
[38] See J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Endnote 6-13, p. 494.
[41] See J. M. Bradshaw, God’s Image 1, Endnote 6-14, p. 494.
[51] See statements and discussion in L. C. Berrett et al., Missouri, pp. 322-323. See also Moses 5:32.
[53] Doctrine and Covenants 107:53-56