

## ABRAHAM TRAVELS ON TO EGYPT

(GENESIS 12:9-10)

<sup>21</sup> And I, Abraham, journeyed, going on still towards the south. And there was a continuation of a famine in the land. And I, Abraham, concluded to go down into Egypt, to sojourn there, for the famine became very grievous.

## THE LORD INSTRUCTS ABRAHAM BEFORE ENTERING EGYPT

(GENESIS 12:11-13)

<sup>22</sup> And it came to pass when I was come near to enter into Egypt, the Lord said unto me, “Behold, Sarai, thy wife, is a very fair woman to look upon. <sup>23</sup> Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see her, they will say, ‘She is his wife,’

and they will kill you, but they will save her alive. Therefore, see that ye do on this wise: <sup>24</sup> let her say unto the Egyptians, she is thy sister, and thy soul shall live.” <sup>25</sup> And it came to pass that I, Abraham, told Sarai, my wife, all that the Lord had said unto me, “Therefore say unto them, ‘I pray thee, thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee.’”

## ABRAHAM RECEIVES A REVELATION BY THE URIM AND THUMMIM

**3** And I, Abraham, had the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given unto me, in Ur of the Chaldees. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the

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of Joshua as a city captured by the Israelites (Joshua 7-8). **2:21** The motivation for the journey to Egypt is, as with the motivation to leave Haran, to escape a famine. In the extant text of the book of Abraham, however, the patriarch never actually sets foot in Egypt. **2:22-25** Unlike in the parallel account in Genesis 12:11-13, here the Lord instructs Abraham to call Sarai his sister instead of his wife. The concern behind this subterfuge is clear from the text. Given that ancient Egyptian texts depict pharaohs as taking any women they wanted, and given the capacity for callousness in ancient royalty, this fear was not unrealistic. The text is taking advantage of an ambiguity in ancient Egyptian language and culture. In ancient Egyptian, the word for *wife* (*hmt*) meant “wife,” but the word for *sister* (*snt*) could mean either “sister” or “wife.” In any case, Genesis 20:12 identifies Sarai as Abraham’s half-sister. The Lord was thus not instructing Abraham to lie but rather to be evasive or purposefully ambiguous. Interestingly, a text recovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls depicts Abraham as being warned of this impending danger in a dream.

**3** This chapter features some of the more distinctive (and important) elements of Latter-day Saint cosmology. The depiction of Kolob, a great star (or planet) nearest to the throne of God, and some of the most explicit details in Restoration scripture about the premortal council in heaven are derived from this chapter. **3:1-2** *Urim and Thummim*. Abraham is said to have had the Urim and Thummim, by which he communicated with God. Note that Abraham does not necessarily see his cosmic vision through the Urim and Thummim but rather seems to use it to, at a minimum, speak with God (Abraham 3:4). That Abraham’s Urim and Thummim was the same as the one possessed by the brother of Jared (Ether 3:21-28) is unlikely. Rather, it seems more probable that Abraham possessed a separate seeric or oracular instrument that was rendered as “Urim and Thummim” by Joseph Smith in his translation. (No physical de-

throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it.

### KOLOB, THE GOVERNING ONE

<sup>3</sup> And the Lord said unto me, “These are the governing ones, and the name of the great one is Kolob, because it is near unto me, for I am the Lord thy God. I have set this one to govern all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.” <sup>4</sup> And the Lord said unto me, by the Urim and Thummim, that Kolob was after the manner of the Lord, ac-

ording to its times and seasons in the revolutions thereof; that one revolution was a day unto the Lord, after his manner of reckoning, it being one thousand years according to the time appointed unto that whereon thou standest. This is the reckoning of the Lord’s time, according to the reckoning of Kolob. <sup>5</sup> And the Lord said unto me, “The planet which is the lesser light, lesser than that which is to rule the day, even the night, is above or greater than that upon which thou standest in point of reckoning, for

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scription of the Urim and Thummim or how it was used as an oracular device is provided in the text.) Intriguingly, medieval Jewish sources posit that Abraham had a glowing precious stone or some other instrument (something like an astrolabe) for studying the stars. *Abraham as astronomer*. Ancient and medieval sources report that Abraham was knowledgeable in the astronomical sciences. Some of these sources even depict Abraham as bringing a knowledge of mathematics and astronomy to Egypt. **3:3 Kolob**. Here Kolob is mentioned for the first time. In the text it is said to be a star or planet; a “great [star/planet]” and a “governing one”; “nigh unto the throne of God”; used to tell relative time (Abraham 3:4); and a signifier of “first creation” (Facsimile 2, fig. 1). The name arguably derives from the reconstructed Afroasiatic root \**klb/krb*, meaning “interior, inside, middle.” Descendent cognates that likely relate to Kolob are attested in Egyptian (*k3b*; “interior, midst”), Akkadian (*qerbum*; “inside”), and Hebrew (*qereb*; “inside, middle”). Alternatively, the name Kolob might derive from the Semitic root *klb*, meaning “dog” (as in the Akkadian *kalbu* or Hebrew *keleb*), and might thereby be identifiable with the dog-star Sirius, which held especially significant calendrical and religious significance for the ancient Egyptians. The converging characteristics between Kolob and Sirius are compelling (for example, Sirius was recognized as a great star by the ancients, served an important calendrical and timekeeping purpose, was depicted as being a ruling star, and so on) but this identification remains unconfirmed. *Near unto God*. An important theme in this chapter is the relative proximity of graded stars to God’s celestial residence. Kolob is repeatedly said to be nearest to the throne of God (here and at 3:9–10, 16), thus making it the greatest of the governing astronomical bodies. If Kolob does indeed derive from the root \**klb/krb*, then this emphasis on its nearness and proximity to God would work well as a pun on the name. **3:5–10 Geocentric cosmology**. The “order[s]” and “set time[s]” of celestial objects (the moon, the sun, other planets, and Kolob) are enumerated from Abraham’s vantage point on earth (“upon which thou standest”). This has led some scholars to view the cosmology of the book of Abraham as geocentric, meaning Abraham is observing celestial phenomena from the “reckoning” of the earth. *Times of reckoning and set time(s)*. The text does not clarify what it meant by these terms at 3:6, but the terms could refer to, respectively, the reckoned times of the movement of celestial objects from a geocentric perspective or possibly the true times of motion for these bodies set by God detached from a geocentric view. *Kolob as governing planet*. Abraham 3:9 appears to identify Kolob as a planet, whereas elsewhere this chapter calls Kolob a star (3:16). While confusing for modern readers, this is to be expected from a text

it moveth in order more slow. This is in order because it standeth above the earth upon which thou standest, therefore the reckoning of its time is not so many as to its number of days, and of months, and of years.”

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said unto me, “Now, Abraham, these two facts exist, behold thine eyes see it. It is given unto thee to know the times of reckoning, and the set time, yea, the set time of the earth upon which thou standest, and the set time of the greater light which is set to rule the day, and the set time of the lesser light which is set to rule the night. <sup>7</sup> Now the set time of the lesser light is a longer time as to its reckoning than the reckoning of the time of the earth upon which thou standest. <sup>8</sup> And where these two facts exist, there shall be another fact above them, that is, there shall be another planet whose reckoning of time shall be longer still. <sup>9</sup> And thus there shall be the reckoning of the time of one planet above another, until thou come nigh unto Kolob, which Kolob

is after the reckoning of the Lord’s time, which Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.

<sup>10</sup> And it is given unto thee to know the set time of all the stars that are set to give light, until thou come near unto the throne of God.”

### THE LORD SHOWS ABRAHAM OTHER CELESTIAL BODIES

<sup>11</sup> Thus I, Abraham, talked with the Lord, face to face, as one man talketh with another, and he told me of the works which his hands had made.

<sup>12</sup> And he said unto me, “My son, my son” —and his hand was stretched out—“behold I will show you all these.” And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many. And they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof. <sup>13</sup> And he said unto me, “This is Shinehah” (which is the sun). And he said unto me, “Kokob,”

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from Abraham’s day since anciently planets, stars, and even constellations and other celestial objects were not uniformly distinguished as they are with modern scientific nomenclature. In any case, Kolob is said to govern the planets (celestial bodies) below it. Kolob can thus rightly be seen as a type of Christ, the Master of the cosmos in close concert with His Father (see Doctrine and Covenants 45:1; 76:23–24; Moses 1:33; 2:1). **3:11–12** *Abraham’s theophany*. As Enoch (Moses 7:4; Doctrine and Covenants 107:49) before him and Jacob (Genesis 32:30) and Moses (Exodus 33:11; Moses 1:2, 31) after, Abraham receives a dramatic theophany (compare 2:6). The parallel language with Moses’s theophany on the mount is especially striking. *Abraham the seer*. A *Leitmotif* running through this chapter is a depiction of Abraham as a seer: Abraham *sees* or is otherwise *shown* celestial bodies, spirits (or intelligences), God Himself, and the premortal council (Abraham 3:2, 6, 11–12, 15–16, 21–22). Furthermore, the Lord instructs the heavenly council to will wait and *see* if the premortal intelligences will do all things they are commanded on earth (3:25). This echoes a *Leitmotif* in Genesis where Abraham sees the Lord and the land of his inheritance (see Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:15). **3:13** *Names of celestial objects*. Here the Lord shows Abraham various celestial bodies and gives them names. Shinehah is plausibly attested as a name for the sun’s ecliptic in Egyptian texts from Abraham’s day

(which is star). And he said unto me, “Olea” (which is the moon). And he said unto me, “Kokaubeam,” (which signifies stars, or all the great lights, which were in the firmament of heaven.)<sup>14</sup> And it was in the nighttime when the Lord spake these words unto me, “I will multiply thee, and thy seed after thee, like unto these. And if thou canst count the number of sands, so shall be the number of thy seeds.”

### THE GRADATION OF CELESTIAL BODIES IN RELATION TO THE GRADATION OF SPIRITS

<sup>15</sup> And the Lord said unto me, “Abraham, I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words.<sup>16</sup> If two things

exist, and there be one above the other, there shall be greater things above them. Therefore, Kolob is the greatest of all the Kokaubeam that thou hast seen, because it is nearest unto me.<sup>17</sup> Now, if there be two things, one above the other, and the moon be above the earth, then it may be that a planet or a star may exist above it. And there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it.<sup>18</sup> Howbeit that he made the greater star, as, also, if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits, notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning. They existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum” (or eternal).

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(š[i]-n-ḥ<sup>3</sup> or š-nḥ<sup>3</sup>). Kokob is clearly recognizable as the Hebrew word for star, as is Kokaubeam in the plural (compare the Akkadian *kakkabu*). An etymology for Olea, identified as the moon, does not immediately present itself. Proposals include that it derives either from Hebrew (*yārēah*) or Egyptian (*i<sup>3</sup>ḥ/w*), but this is doubtful. Shinehah appears as a codename for Kirtland Township in the 1835 first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, and “Olea Shinehah” (also attested as “Olahah Shinehah”) appears in an 1838 revelation of Joseph Smith. These names are associated with the location of Adam-ondi-Ahman (compare Doctrine and Covenants 117:8), suggesting, alternatively, that they may relate to the “pure language” of Adam (compare Moses 6:5–9). **3:14** A primary purpose behind the Lord showing Abraham these celestial bodies is to provide a simile for the innumerable quantity of his descendants (compare Genesis 15:5; 22:17). Note especially the parallel language at Abraham 3:12. **3:15–21** The vision of graded stars and other celestial bodies pivots here to a vision of the premortal spirits varying in grades of intelligence (3:18). Just as Abraham encounters a hierarchy of stars and planets until he comes nigh unto the throne of God, so too he encounters a hierarchy of spirits or intelligences until he finally approaches God Himself, the supreme intelligence. The description and imagery of the stars and spirits illustrates an unmistakable conceptual link between the two in this chapter. **3:15** Abraham is explicitly told to declare to the Egyptians what he learned from his vision. (This corresponds with what is depicted in Facsimile 3 but is not described in any of the extant narrative.) This might explain why Abraham was shown what some scholars have argued is a pre-scientific geocentric view of the cosmos. In order for Abraham to successfully share truths about the plan of salvation with the Egyptians, he would need to couch his visions in a worldview that would have been comprehensible to his audience (compare 2 Nephi 31:3; Doctrine and Covenants 1:24). **3:18** *Stars and spirits*. The pivot between graded stars and graded spirits might plausibly rest on a pun in the Egyptian language. The Egyptian word for spirit (*ḥ*) is phonetically similar to the word for the light and brilliance

<sup>19</sup> And the Lord said unto me, “These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other, there shall be another more intelligent than they. I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all. <sup>20</sup> The Lord thy God sent his angel to deliver thee from the hands of the priest of Elkenah. <sup>21</sup> I dwell in the midst of them all. I now, therefore, have come down unto thee to declare unto thee the works which my hands have made, wherein my wisdom excelleth them all, for I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, in all wisdom and prudence, over all the intelligences thine eyes have seen from the beginning. I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen.”

## ABRAHAM SEES THE PREMORTAL INTELLIGENCES

<sup>22</sup> Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was. And among all these there were many of the noble and great ones. <sup>23</sup> And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said, “These I will make my rulers.” For he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good. And he said unto me, “Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.”

## THE PREMORTAL COUNCIL (MOSES 4:1–4)

<sup>24</sup> And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him, “We

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of stars and other celestial bodies (*ibh*). In Egyptian texts from before and during Abraham’s day, the spirits of the deceased were sometimes conceptualized as a star. Indeed, in some of these texts the goal in the afterlife is for the spirit of the deceased (particularly that of the deceased king) to be exalted among the stars in the celestial, cosmic realm. The imagery of stars/spirits in Abraham’s vision plays nicely on mythological and cosmic symbolism already prevalent among the ancient Egyptians. *Gnolaum*, or *eternal*. The word is clearly recognizable as the Hebrew word for “everlasting, eternal” (*’olam*). In Genesis 21:33 Abraham plants a tamarisk tree at Beer-Sheba and dedicates it to “the everlasting God” (*’el ’olam*). The eternity of spirit or intelligence was a teaching the Prophet Joseph Smith emphasized in the final years of his ministry, including in his now-famous King Follett Sermon of April 7, 1844. **3:22–23** Abraham is shown the premortal intelligences that were “organized” into the premortal divine council. These intelligences or spirits are described as “noble and great ones” and are decreed by God to become “rulers” in mortality because they are good. Abraham is identified as one of these noble and great spirits. This evokes depictions of the divine council of God and His attending divine beings (called, variously, gods, the sons of god[s], angels, holy ones, and so on) in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts. Furthermore, it subtly plays on (and subverts) ideas in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian religion that kings were divinely foreordained by the gods to be rulers. Instead, Abraham’s vision reveals that he and other righteous spirits were foreordained by the Lord to be rulers. This delegitimizes the rule of Abraham’s rival Pharaoh, who, while still being righteous, at Abraham 1:26–27 tries to “fain claim” to priesthood to which he does not have a right. **3:24–28** Abraham is shown a vision of what transpired in the divine council just before the unfolding of Creation (compare Moses 4:1–4). This passage is supremely important for the modern Latter-day Saint doctrine of the premortal existence of humanity since it is one the most explicit on this subject in all scripture. *Cre-*

will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell.<sup>25</sup> And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.<sup>26</sup> And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon. And they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate. And they

who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.”<sup>27</sup> And the Lord said, “Whom shall I send?” And one answered like unto the Son of Man, “Here am I, send me.” And another answered and said, “Here am I, send me.” And the Lord said, “I will send the first.”<sup>28</sup> And the second was angry, and kept not his first estate. And at that day many followed after him.

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*ation from matter.* Unlike traditional Jewish and Christian teaching, the text at Abraham 3:24 affirms creation from preexisting matter, not creation *ex nihilo*, or from nothing. In creation myths from Abraham’s day, Creation was often envisioned as an act of divine fashioning of chaotic elements (typically a primordial cosmic ocean). This, indeed, is how Genesis 1:1–3 envisions Creation. *The purpose of mortality.* At Abraham 3:25 an important purpose is given for why the earth was created and populated with the premortal spirits: to see if they would obey the commands of the Lord God, the supreme intelligence. From other scripture, it is clear that this test of obedience is part of the Lord’s work to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of humankind (see Moses 1:39). *The first estate.* The language of Abraham 3:26 is appropriated from Jude 1:6, which speaks of angels who did not keep their “first estate” (more literally, their “own position [of authority]”; *eautou archē*) but instead were destined for damnation. The point made in the text here is that those intelligences who excelled in their “first estate” (premortally, disembodied state) by adhering to the Lord’s commandments would have “glory” (eternal life and exaltation) added upon them if they successfully traversed their “second estate” (probationary mortality). It is, in effect, a concise formulation of the plan of salvation. *The Son of Man.* In biblical Hebrew, the phrase “son of man” (*ben ’adam*) connotes “mortal, human.” It is used prominently in the book of Ezekiel when God addresses the prophet and also in Moses 1:12 when Satan denigrates Moses. In later apocalyptic works, most notably Daniel (especially 7:13–14), the Son of Man (Aramaic: *bar ’enash*) is an eschatological figure who assumes rulership over the earth at the end of days. Believed by His disciples to be this very eschatological figure (compare Revelation 1:13), Jesus is identified as the Son of Man in numerous instances throughout the canonical Gospels. In the book of Moses (6:57; 7:35), one of the Adamic names for God the Father is revealed to be Man of Holiness. The identity of the premortal Jesus as “one like unto the Son of Man” at Abraham 3:27 might be understood simultaneously in these contexts: He is the Firstborn of the Man of Holiness (compare Doctrine and Covenants 78:20; 93:21–22; 95:17), one who condescended to become a mortal (compare 1 Nephi 11:14–36), and the foreordained millennial King (compare Revelation 19:15–16). *The fall of Lucifer.* At 3:27–28 the fall of Lucifer is briefly narrated (compare Moses 4:1–4; 2 Nephi 2:17–18). Upset that he was not selected to be the Father’s redemptive emissary, Lucifer (here left unnamed, merely identified as “another” or “the second”) becomes angry and draws many of the premortal intelligences away with him. The language clearly portrays some sense of rebellion or open mutiny against the Father’s plan (compare Doctrine and Covenants 76:25–27). Biblical writings (see Genesis 6:1–4; Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28:1–10; 28:11–19; Job 38; Daniel 11–12; Psalm 82) later echoes of a much earlier Near Eastern mythic archetype of conflict in the divine council that results in the fall or overthrow of a rebellious deity.