

THE GODS ORGANIZE THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

(GENESIS 1:1-2:3; MOSES 2:1-3:3)

4 And then the Lord said, “Let us go down.” And they went down at the beginning, and they (that is, the Gods) organized and formed

the heavens and the earth.² And the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth. And darkness reigned upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters.

4 The book of Abraham’s account of the Creation significantly impacts how Latter-day Saints understand this important theological subject. The more noteworthy elements introduced by the book of Abraham include creation by organizing preexisting matter, multiple Gods (the divine council) participating in the process, and the seeming fact that the periods (“days”) of Creation were less temporally definite. The Creation account here directly follows the divine council scene of Abraham 3:24–28 and should indeed be read as the narrative continuation of that scene. The modern chapter divisions for the text were introduced in 1902 by James E. Talmage. As it appeared in the *T&S* under the editorship of Joseph Smith and as it appeared in the 1851 first edition of the Pearl of Great Price, there was no chapter division between 3:28 and 4:1. Read as one continuous narrative, the divine council decides on a course of action in 3:24–28 and then executes that decision beginning here. (See further the commentary for Moses 2.) **4:1** *Let us go down*. The cohortative language here clearly parallels Genesis 1:26; 11:7. As so used both here and in Genesis, it signals the execution of group action. In the biblical Creation narrative of Genesis 1, God does not enlist the effort of the divine council until the creation of humankind. Here, however, and in the book of Moses (2:1), the divine council participates in Creation from the earliest steps. *The Gods*. As with the glosses earlier in the text (at, for example, Abraham 1:7, 9, 12, 14, 20, 23; 2:11), it is not clear if these explanatory comments were original to Abraham or introduced by Joseph Smith or his scribes. In either case, the text departs from the Genesis account by explicitly introducing multiple divinities as being involved in the creative process. *Organized and formed*. The text explicitly rejects notions of creation *ex nihilo* by employing the verbs “organize” and “form” throughout. Although departing from traditional Jewish and Christian ideas of Creation, this absence of creation *ex nihilo* grounds the book of Abraham more comfortably in the milieu of the ancient Near East during Abraham’s day. It also more closely aligns the text with the underlying Hebrew of Genesis 1. This may likely be, in part, the result of Joseph Smith’s study of Hebrew under the tutelage of Joshua Seixas in Kirtland, Ohio, in the early months of 1836. As with the Hebrew terminology that appears in the text (see, for example, Abraham 3:13, 16, 18) and the explanations to the facsimiles (see, for example, Facsimile 1, fig. 12; Facsimile 2, figs. 4–5), it appears that the Prophet’s rendering of this Creation account was influenced by his knowledge of Hebrew. It remains uncertain to what extent his secular learning helped shape the articulation of this revelation—or, conversely, to what extent the revelation itself, as tailored by a divine influence, was adapted for or integrated with Joseph Smith’s growing knowledge of ancient languages. **4:2** *The formation of the earth*. Even after being formed, the earth remains empty and desolate (compare Genesis 1:2; Moses 2:2; and commentary), until it would be populated with life and given purpose. This suggests that Creation entails more than just the act of physical generation but also functional assignment. *The deep*. As with Genesis 1:2 and Moses 2:2, here the text describes a primordial dark abyss, with darkness “reigning” (a verb absent from the biblical text and from the book of Moses) over the early stages of the earth’s formation. All this aligns the text with tropes from creation myths from Abraham’s day and signals that Creation is still in its primeval stages. **4:3–5** In Abraham’s account the Gods do not “create”

THE FIRST TIME: THE GODS PRONOUNCE DAY AND NIGHT

³ And they (the Gods) said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. ⁴ And they (the Gods) comprehended the light, for it was bright. And they divided the light, or caused it to be divided, from the darkness. ⁵ And the Gods called the light Day, and the darkness they called Night. And it came to pass that from the evening until morning they called night; and from the morning until the evening they called day. And this was the first, or the beginning, of that which they called day and night.

THE SECOND TIME: THE GODS ORDER THE EXPANSE

⁶ And the Gods also said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and it shall divide the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And the Gods ordered the expanse, so that it divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so, even as they ordered. ⁸ And the Gods called the expanse, Heaven. And it

came to pass that it was from evening until morning that they called night. And it came to pass that it was from morning until evening that they called day. And this was the second time that they called night and day.

THE THIRD TIME: THE GODS DIVIDE THE EARTH AND GREAT WATERS

⁹ And the Gods ordered, saying, “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the earth come up dry.” And it was so as they ordered. ¹⁰ And the Gods pronounced the dry land, Earth; and the gathering together of the waters, pronounced they, Great Waters. And the Gods saw that they were obeyed. ¹¹ And the Gods said, “Let us prepare the earth to bring forth grass; the herb yielding seed; the fruit tree yielding fruit, after his kind, whose seed in itself yieldeth its own likeness upon the earth.” And it was so, even as they ordered. ¹² And the Gods organized the earth to bring forth grass from its own seed, and the herb to bring forth herb from its own seed,

light but rather “comprehend” the light and “divide” it from the darkness, thereby recognizing the day-night cycle. This reinforces the point that Creation involves teleological reckoning or assigning purpose to observable phenomena. **4:6–8** The expanse that separates the waters corresponds to the firmament of Genesis 1:6 and Moses 2:6 (see commentary). Once again, Joseph Smith’s rendering here appears to derive from his knowledge of Hebrew, as it is indeed a more precise rendering of the Hebrew *raqia*’ (compare Facsimile 2, fig. 4). **4:9–13** *Waters and earth*. The Gods continue their organization of the earth by gathering the seas, dividing the land, and preparing for the generation of vegetation. The subtle detail at Abraham 4:9 (“let the earth come up dry”) that is absent in the King James Version of Genesis 1:9 (as well as in its underlying Hebrew) and Moses 2:9 evokes ancient Egyptian creation imagery of the primeval hillock springing from the primordial waters. This detail would have resonated well with Abraham’s Egyptian audience (compare Abraham 3:15). *Ordered and obeyed*. A running *Leitmotif* throughout this account is that of the gods “ordering” or “pronouncing” the stages of Creation and the elements accordingly “obeying” those commands (compare Helaman

yielding seed after his kind, and the earth to bring forth the tree from its own seed, yielding fruit, whose seed could only bring forth the same in itself, after his kind. And the Gods saw that they were obeyed. ¹³ And it came to pass that they numbered the days: from the evening until the morning they called night; and it came to pass, from the morning until the evening they called day. And it was the third time.

THE FOURTH TIME: THE GODS ORGANIZE LIGHT

¹⁴ And the Gods organized the lights in the expanse of the heaven, and caused them to divide the day from the night, and organized them to be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years, ¹⁵ and organized them to be for lights in the expanse of the heaven to give light upon the earth. And it was so. ¹⁶ And the Gods organized the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. (With the lesser light they set the stars also.)

¹⁷ And the Gods set them in the expanse of the heavens, to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to cause to divide the light from the darkness.

¹⁸ And the Gods watched those things which they had ordered until they obeyed. ¹⁹ And it came to pass that it was from evening until morning that it was night; and it came to pass that it was from morning until evening that it was day. And it was the fourth time.

THE FIFTH TIME: THE GODS PREPARE THE WATERS FOR LIFE

²⁰ And the Gods said, “Let us prepare the waters to bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that have life, and the fowl, that they may fly above the earth in the open expanse of heaven.” ²¹ And the Gods prepared the waters that they might bring forth great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters were to bring forth abundantly after their kind, and every winged fowl after their kind. And the Gods saw that

12:6–23). This departs from the language of Genesis and the book of Moses but is consistent with the text’s overall portrait of creation through divine organization and conjures imagery of kingly dominion establishing order over a previously chaotic cosmos. **4:14–19** Previously, at Abraham 4:3–5, the Gods divided the light from the darkness for the reckoning of time. Here they organize “the lights in the expanse of the heaven” (that is, the stars) for the same purpose. Kolob, the greatest star, also reckons time (3:4). Ancient Near Eastern peoples tracked the motion of stars for calendrical and timekeeping purposes. Tracking the motion of the star Sirius (see the commentary at 3:3) was especially important in ancient Egypt as its heliacal rising heralded the new year and the onset of the annual flooding of the Nile. Along with this, the gods decree that the “two great lights” (the sun and the moon) are to rule the day and night, respectively, to providing light to the earth. *Until they obeyed.* The remarkable language of 4:18, which has no corresponding verse in Genesis 1 or Moses 2, suggests that a process of gradual unfolding is involved even in the gods’ commands or decrees in organizing the earth. **4:20–23** In departing once again from Genesis 1, here the gods “prepare” the earth to bring forth aquatic and avian life. At Abraham 4:21 a plan for Creation is mentioned for the first and

they would be obeyed, and that their plan was good. ²² And the Gods said, “We will bless them, and cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas or great waters; and cause the fowl to multiply in the earth.” ²³ And it came to pass that it was from evening until morning that they called night; and it came to pass that it was from morning until evening that they called day. And it was the fifth time.

THE SIXTH TIME: THE GODS PREPARE THE EARTH FOR LIFE AND CREATE HUMANKIND

²⁴ And the Gods prepared the earth to bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind. And it was so, as they had said. ²⁵ And the Gods organized the earth to bring forth the beasts after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the earth after its kind. And the Gods saw they would obey. ²⁶ And the Gods took counsel among themselves and said, “Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness, and we will give them dominion over the

fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” ²⁷ So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them.

²⁸ And the Gods said, “We will bless them.” And the Gods said, “We will cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” ²⁹ And the Gods said, “Behold, we will give them every herb bearing seed that shall come upon the face of all the earth, and every tree which shall have fruit upon it. Yea, the fruit of the tree yielding seed to them we will give it, it shall be for their meat. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, behold, we will give them life, and also we will give to them every green herb for meat. And all these things shall be thus organized.” ³¹ And the Gods said, “We will do everything that we

only time, and the gods recognize it as “good.” The immediate context suggests that this plan was invoked specifically to prepare the earth for sentient animal life, which would eventually lead to human life. **4:26–27** After preparing mammalian, insect, and reptile life (4:24–25), the gods form humankind in their image and likeness. This they counsel to do, thereby explicitly evoking the presence of the divine council. The creation of humans after the image and likeness of the gods is the capstone of Creation. *Image and likeness.* See the commentary at Moses 2:26–27. This notion of humanity being in the image of the gods works especially well for Abraham’s account, as it parallels ancient Egyptian notions of the Egyptian monarch and humanity at large being the divine offspring and the image of deity who therefore enjoy special status as well as divine concern and attention. **4:31** This injunction to obedience, unique to this account, is more plausibly read as something of an apodictic charge (akin to the “thou shalt nots” of the Ten Commandments), not a descriptive statement on the nature of human-

have said, and organize them; and behold, they shall be very obedient.” And it came to pass that it was from evening until morning they called night; and it came to pass that it was from morning until evening that they called day. And they numbered the sixth time.

THE SEVENTH TIME: THE GODS CONCLUDE THE CREATION

5 “And thus we will finish the heavens and the earth, and all the hosts of them.” ² And the Gods said among themselves, “On the seventh time we will end our work, which we have counseled; and we will rest on the seventh time from all our work which we have counseled.” ³ And the Gods concluded upon the seventh time—because that on the seventh time they would rest

from all their works which they (the Gods) counseled among themselves to form—and sanctified it. And thus were their decisions at the time that they counseled among themselves to form the heavens and the earth.

THE GENERATIONS OF THE HEAVENS AND OF THE EARTH (GENESIS 2:4–25; MOSES 3:4–25)

⁴ And the Gods came down and formed these the generations of the heavens and of the earth, when they were formed in the day that the Gods formed the earth and the heavens, ⁵ according to all that which they had said concerning every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew. For the Gods had not caused it to rain upon the earth when they counseled to do them, and had not formed

ity. At Abraham 3:25 the Lord declares that one of the purposes of sending the premortal intelligences to earth is to see if they will be obedient to the commandments given to them while in a probationary state.

5 The concluding chapter of the book of Abraham ends abruptly with Adam giving names to the animals in the garden. In an unpublished editorial dated March 1, 1842, Joseph Smith signaled his intention to “contin[ue] to translate & publish [the rest of the book of Abraham] as fast as possible till the whole is completed.” Eleven months later, John Taylor, acting as editor of the *T&S*, published a notice in the paper that the Prophet “promise[d] . . . to furnish us with further extracts from the Book of Abraham.” Joseph’s death on June 27, 1844, put an end to the translation and publication of any additional material from the book of Abraham. **5:1** The chapter begins with a direct quotation from the gods without the customary quotation formula (“And the Gods said . . .”) that is found throughout the previous chapter. This oddity might be explained as either a scribal error in the transmission of the book of Abraham or a typographical error on the part of the printers of the *T&S*. There is no extant manuscript for any text beyond 3:26, however, so this hypothesis is impossible to prove. **5:2–3** Once again the verb “counsel” is used to indicate the deliberateness behind the gods’ activity. The “time that they counseled among themselves to form the heavens and the earth” appears to refer to the council scene in 3:24–26, thereby reinforcing the narrative continuity of the text and making the presence of the divine council in this text unambiguous. **5:4** As with Genesis 2:4 and Moses 3:4, this verse marks the commencement of a second Creation account. See the commentary at Moses 3:4. **5:7** Another gloss explains that the human’s spirit as well as the breath of life (compare Genesis 2:7; Moses 3:7) is what constitutes a living soul (compare