

MOSES 1

THE BOOK OF MOSES AS THE DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION FOR TEMPLE PREPARATION

Overview

The visions described in Moses 1 took place sometime after Jehovah called Moses out of the burning bush but before he returned to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel (see Moses 1:17, 25–26). The chapter describes a heavenly ascent in which Moses comes into the presence of God and speaks with Him face-to-face. Enoch, Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others described similar experiences. Remarkably, the heavenly ascent chapters of the first-century Jewish *Apocalypse of Abraham* closely resemble Moses 1 from start to finish.¹ Like Moses 1, *Apocalypse of Abraham* ends with a vision of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, and the Fall.

In some ways Moses’s heavenly ascent resembles the journey of ritual ascent that Latter-day Saints experience in temple worship. The chapter opens with a vision of the spirit world, where we all lived before we came to earth (Moses 1:3–8). Moses then “falls” to the telestial world, where we now live. There Satan tries to tempt him (Moses 1:9–23). Finally, Moses climbs upward in a step-by-step return to the celestial world in a journey that corresponds to our personal ascent back to God through covenant keeping (Moses 1:24–32). In contrast to the figurative journeys represented in earthly temples, Moses 1 ends in an actual encounter with God by passing through the heavenly “veil” and entering His celestial “temple.”

Moses 1 provides a fitting prologue to Genesis, emphasizing, among other things, that God’s *purpose* in Creation is “to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39)—which He accomplishes

1. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, “Moses 1 and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David R. Seely, John W. Welch, and Scott Gordon (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central; Reading, CA: FAIR; Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2021), 789–922.

by allowing us to be tested on earth to see whether we will ultimately follow Satan or stay true to our Heavenly Father and make and keep sacred covenants that will bring us back into His presence.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen called the book of Moses “an ancient temple text as well as the ideal scriptural context for a modern temple preparation course.”² Of course, endowed Latter-day Saints are aware that the story of the Creation and the downward road of the Fall in Moses 2–4 parallels the first part of the modern temple endowment. However, less widely appreciated is the fact that chapters 5–8 are directly relevant to later stages of the endowment. For example, the last half of the book of Moses contains stories that illustrate a specific sequence of covenants that, through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, allow faithful Saints to return on the upward road to the presence of God. These illustrations begin with the stories of Adam and Eve’s obedience and sacrifices and continue to the account of Enoch and his people living the law of consecration. Thus, as the Catholic scholar Gary A. Anderson insightfully observed, “The story of Adam and Eve is not an account of sin alone but a drama about becoming a being who fully reflects God’s very own image. . . . The work that God has begun in creation, he will bring to completion.”³

In short, the book of Moses, along with other scripture and teachings received through the Prophet Joseph Smith by 1836, provides solid evidence that the full Nauvoo temple endowment given to the Saints in 1842 was the result of early revelations, not late inventions. And, as we will see, the descent and ascent of Moses briefly related in chapter 1 parallel in astonishing clarity the trials and triumph of Adam and Eve and their faithful posterity in chapters 2–8.

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1

Moses 1:1–2. Prologue to the Visions of Moses

Verses 1 and 2 are a prologue to Moses 1. They summarize the circumstances in which the “words of God” were received and announce the most important event of the chapter: Moses seeing God face to face.

2. Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, “Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the Temple: The Story of Receiving Christ’s Atonement,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads*, 6.

3. Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 8.

Once Moses has been tried and proven, the “glory of God” will be upon him, so he will be able to enter through the heavenly veil and endure God’s presence.

Although Moses 1:6 makes it seem that God the Father is speaking directly to Moses, some have understood the voice as belonging to Jehovah, the premortal Jesus Christ. This view is consistent with the teachings of Church leaders that have said that Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost may be authorized to speak and act as if they were the Father—a concept called “divine investiture.”⁴ Another idea was offered by Elder Alvin R. Dyer, who held the view that both the Father and the Son were present during Moses’s vision. He thought that Moses’s experience may have been “similar to that which was experienced by Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove, wherein God the Father appeared and announced His Son.”⁵

1:1. “an exceedingly high mountain.” We are told that the visions occurred on “an exceedingly high mountain” (compare Ether 3:1). In ancient times, mountains sometimes served as outdoor temples. Facsimile 2 of the book of Abraham states that knowledge was “revealed from God to Abraham, as he offered sacrifice upon an altar, which he had built unto the Lord.”⁶ Though scripture does not mention Moses offering sacrifice before he received his visions, it is certainly possible that he did.

1:2. “the glory of God.” The Hebrew word for *glory* is *kabod*, which conveys the magnificence of God’s presence. The sense in which this may also signal a real bodily appearance is captured in the English phrase “He was there in all his glory.” “Glory” is repeated twelve times in Moses 1, making the contrast clear between God’s bright splendor and Satan’s shriveled darkness.

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:1–2

Moses 1:3–8. Moses in the Spirit World

1:3. “Almighty.” As He does in other ancient accounts of divine appearances, God begins by describing His majesty: “The Lord God Almighty, Endless.” In Jewish tradition, the title “Almighty” is most often associated with the demonstration of God’s power over the waters in the first act of Creation and in the

4. James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, vol. 5 of 6 (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1971), 31–32.

5. Alvin R. Dyer, *The Meaning of Truth*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1970), 2.

6. Book of Abraham, facsimile 2, figure 2. See also Genesis 15:9–21.

destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Thus, it is not surprising that later in his experience, Moses is told that he will “be made stronger than many waters . . . as if thou wert God” (1:25).

1:3. “Endless.” The term “Endless” is related to the characterization of God as being “without beginning of days or end of years.” It corresponds to *Ein Sof*, a way of referring to eternity in medieval Jewish mysticism that is depicted visually as a set of concentric circles with their “end embedded in their beginning, and their beginning in their end.”⁷ Such imagery recalls the description in Latter-day Saint scripture of God’s course as “one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:19).

1:6. “all things are present with me.” God tells Moses that “all things are present with me” (Moses 1:6). Similarly, Alma wrote, “All is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men” (Alma 40:8). Doctrine and Covenants 130:7 states that “all things for [the angels’] glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord. From these scriptures, Elder Neal A. Maxwell concluded, “God does not live in the dimension of time as do we. . . . He sees rather than foresees the future, because all things are at once present before Him.”⁸

1:8. “the world upon which he was created.” Having found God’s favor, Moses receives confirmation of his foreordained calling and status as a son of God “in the similitude of [the] Only Begotten” (Moses 1:4, 6). He is then shown the “world upon which he was created”—the premortal spirit world—and “all the children of men which are, and which were created” (verse 8). A similar vision of the premortal world was also seen by Enoch (see Moses 6:36), Abraham (see Abraham 3:22–26), and other individuals in ancient Near East traditions.

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:3–8

Moses 1:9–11. Moses Falls to the Earth

1:9. “he fell unto the earth.” Having left the presence of God and no longer being clothed with His glory, Moses fell to the earth—literally collapsing in weakness and figuratively descending again to the relative

7. Sefer Yetsirah 1:7, as quoted in Daniel C. Matt, trans., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), xlvii.

8. Neal A. Maxwell, *Things as They Really Are* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1978), 29.

darkness of the telestial world. In this way, his experience resembled the journey of Adam and Eve when they left the Garden of Eden. Moses was then left to himself. Hugh Nibley described what happened next:

As [Moses] begins to receive his natural strength, he pulls himself together and he says to himself this great truth, “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed” (Moses 1:10). . . . He has seen what is up there, and he has seen what is down here. . . .

That’s the end of that act. A new scene is when a new character enters. Now, the play begins because you have to have an antagonist and a protagonist in a play. Now Satan enters the scene. Notice, when the hero is at his lowest, when he is the most helpless, that is the time that Satan strikes. . . . Satan does not play fair.⁹

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:9–11

Moses 1:12–23. Moses Defeats Satan

1:12. “son of man.” In a fashion that recalls Satan’s encounter with Christ in the wilderness (in Matthew 4:8–9), Satan tempted Moses—now in a physically weakened state—to worship him. The title Deity conferred on Moses, son of *God*, is explicitly challenged by Satan, who calls him a “son of *man*.”¹⁰

1:13. “Where is thy glory?” Moses, having received a taste of the celestial heights, had already learned to distinguish God’s glory from Satan’s pale imitation. He challenged the adversary, saying, “Where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God” (Moses 1:15).

1:21. “In the name of the Only Begotten, depart hence, Satan.” Moses tried twice unsuccessfully to banish Satan. However, when Moses tried again for the third time, he invoked divine authority, forcing his adversary to depart through the power of the priesthood after the order of the Son of God (Moses 1:20–21). The dramatic turning point of this episode hinges on Satan’s desperate, false claim to be the Only Begotten, countered by Moses’s triumphant invocation of the name of the true Only Begotten.

9. Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], Brigham Young University, 2004), 215–216.

10. Moses 1:4, 12; emphasis added.

1:23. “Moses lifted up his eyes unto heaven.” After Satan’s defeat, Moses ascends step by step to the presence of God. The text hints that the steps of his climb have been accomplished through priesthood ordinances. Similarly, drawing on Joseph Smith’s teachings about Jacob’s vision of a ladder to heaven in Genesis 28, Elder Marion G. Romney taught, “Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord.”¹¹ As one example of hints to ordinances in Moses 1, we read that after Moses banished Satan by calling upon the name of the Only Begotten (a motif that precedes baptism in some ancient Christian traditions¹²), he was immediately “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Moses 1:24).

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:12–23

Moses 1:24–29. Moses Passes through the Heavenly Veil

1:25. “calling upon the name of God.” Continuing to press forward, Moses “call[ed] upon the name of God” in sacred prayer (Moses 1:25). At first, Moses heard God’s voice but did not yet see Him face to face. His experience parallels that of Adam and Eve when they “called upon the name of the Lord” in sacred prayer (5:4).

With temple symbolism that resembles the experience of Moses, we read that Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not, for they were shut out from his presence” (5:4). To proceed further, the veil must be opened to the petitioner.

Moses’s experience of passing through the heavenly veil is described briefly but unmistakably. The description of passing through the veil begins with an opening bookend. Moses 1:25 states that after “calling upon God,” the Lord’s glory “was upon [Moses]; and he heard a voice.”

11. Marion G. Romney, “Temples—The Gates to Heaven,” in *Look to God and Live* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 239–240. See, more generally, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Faith, Hope, and Charity: The ‘Three Principal Rounds’ of the Ladder of Heavenly Ascent,” in *To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 59–112.

12. See, for example, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Matthew L. Bowen, “‘By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified’: The Symbolic, Salvific, Interrelated, Additive, Retrospective, and Anticipatory Nature of the Ordinances of Spiritual Rebirth in John 3 and Moses 6,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 24 (2017): 144–146.

A corresponding bookend closes the description in similar fashion. In verses 30–31, we are told that Moses *saw* God rather than just hearing Him: “Moses called upon God. . . . And behold, the glory of the Lord was upon Moses so that Moses stood in the presence of God, *and talked with him face to face.*”

Sandwiched between the opening and closing bookends is a phrase that seems to describe a conversation between Moses and God: “As the voice was still speaking” (1:27). From the textual evidence in Moses 1 as well as the repeated use of almost identical phrases in the *Jewish Apocalypse of Abraham* to describe traversals of the heavenly veil, we can safely conclude that the phrase “As the voice was still speaking” signals a sacred conversation that allowed Moses’s upward passage through the heavenly veil.¹³

Jewish and early Christian accounts transmitted by initiates claim that Moses received a series of three successive sacred names.¹⁴ These names were symbolic representations of important transitions in his premortal and mortal life and were analogous to names used as keywords in ancient temple settings (compare Revelation 2:17; Doctrine and Covenants 130:11).

Moses 1:25 can be seen as representing the bestowal of a final, fourth name that identified Moses with the Father Himself (compare Revelation 3:12). The symbolism of this name is implied in the divine declaration that Moses was to be “made stronger than many waters . . . as if thou wert God.”

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:24–29

Moses 1:27–39. Moses Speaks with God Face to Face

1:27. “Moses cast his eyes and beheld the earth.” The change in perspective as Moses passes upward through the heavenly veil is related in subtle beauty in the book of Moses. Previously, as Moses stood on the earth, he “lifted up his eyes unto heaven” (Moses 1:24). Now, after ascending to heaven, he “cast his eyes” down to see the earth and all its inhabitants (verses 27–28).

13. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, “Moses 1 and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David R. Seely, John W. Welch, and Scott Gordon (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central; Reading, CA: FAIR; Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2021), 823–829.

14. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Matthew L. Bowen, “Made Stronger Than Many Waters’: The Names of Moses as Keywords in the Heavenly Ascent of Moses,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads*, 943–1000.

1:28. “he beheld also the inhabitants thereof.” In his vision, Moses seems not only to have seen the inhabitants of the earth but also to have witnessed the earth’s entire history from beginning to end—like Adam, Enoch, the brother of Jared, John the Beloved, and others. Moroni taught that those with perfect faith cannot be “kept from within the veil”—that is, cannot be kept *outside* the veil (see Ether 3:27). The veil in question is the *heavenly* veil behind which God dwells in glory. The *earthly* counterpart of that veil is the temple veil that divides the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

1:39. “my work and my glory.” To Moses, God described His purposes for this earth and its inhabitants as being “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Moses was then shown the events of the Creation, the Fall, and the revelation of the plan of redemption to Adam and Eve.

1:40. “thou shalt write.” From Moses 1:40, it appears that Moses was commanded to record an account similar to, but certainly not identical to, what we have today as chapters 2–8 of the book of Moses.

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:27–39

Moses 1:40–42. Epilogue

The epilogue of Moses 1 describes how the story of Moses’s heavenly ascent would be lost but then restored in the last days through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Source

Book of Moses Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Related verses

Moses 1:40–42

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