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Cedars and Stars: Enduring Symbols of Cosmic Kingship in Abraham's Encounter with Pharaoh

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Chapter 3

Cedars and Stars

Enduring Symbols of Cosmic Kingship in Abraham's Encounter with Pharaoh[1]

E. Douglas Clark

The Cosmic Abraham Meets Pharaoh

Just over three and a half millennia ago, on the upper border of Egypt, a group of travelers arrived from the north and made camp for the evening. We don't know how large the party was, but it could easily have been the size of one of our Latter-day Saint wards or even stakes. The arrival of yet another caravan on this highly trafficked border was hardly unusual, but from that time hence God's people have looked back with great interest on the remarkable events of that night. For the leader of that party was none other than Abraham, father of the faithful, in whose steps the saints are ever commanded to walk.

1. Abraham's encounter with Pharaoh, including the theme of competing claims of kingship, has been treated by Hugh Nibley in *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 219–318, 382–465; and in "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," a series of articles in the *Improvement Era* beginning in January 1968; see especially "Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document," *Improvement Era*, December 1968, 28–33; "The Unknown Abraham," *Improvement Era*, April 1969, 66–72; "The Unknown Abraham," *Improvement Era*, May 1969, 87–91; "Facsimile No. 1, by the Figures," *Improvement Era*, August 1969, 75–87; "Setting the Stage—The World of Abraham," *Improvement Era*, October 1969, 89–95; and "The Sacrifice of Sarah," *Improvement Era*, April 1970, 79–95. ("Setting the Stage" and "The Sacrifice of Sarah" are both reprinted in *Abraham in Egypt*.) For extrabiblical accounts that support the Book of Abraham, including Abraham's encounter with Pharaoh, see John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, comps. and eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), hereafter referred to as *Traditions*.

   This paper builds on Nibley's work by examining Abraham's momentous encounter with Pharaoh from a different approach: first through recognizing Abraham as a cosmic figure as portrayed in Genesis and rabbinic literature, and then by focusing on the interplay of our two oldest nonbiblical sources—the Book of Abraham and the *Genesis Apocryphon*— and their use of the symbols of cedars and stars. These symbols turn out to have not only remarkable implications about cosmic kingship but also enduring relevance for Abraham's righteous posterity.

Ironically, Abraham's steps were now leading him away from the land that God had promised. What a trial of faith it must have been to finally arrive at the land of promise only to find a grievous famine. Had it been only Abraham, it is easy to imagine him staying put and toughing it out there in the promised land, for one of the constants of his exemplary life was obedience at all costs. But he also had to consider the welfare of his wife and the saints whom he led. And so, he says in his autobiography in the Book of Abraham, "I . . . concluded to go down into Egypt" (Abraham 2:21). "Concluded," he says, implying that this was a deliberate decision he alone had arrived at, and probably not without some difficulty. For despite the many prior revelations he had received, no divine direction was now forthcoming. Abraham seemed forced to take matters into his own hand and head for Egypt, where crops depended not on rainfall but on the annual flooding of the Nile. Only when Abraham arrived at the border of Egypt did the Lord finally speak.

To appreciate what happened, though, we must go back to Abraham's earlier appearance in the pages of Genesis where, as scholars point out, his pivotal role in God's plan for the human race is already perceptible at the very point of the patriarch's entrance onto the stage of history. The previous eleven Genesis chapters, often referred to as "primeval history," had spoken broadly "of the world and of humanity"[2] in a "universal setting" with "the whole world as its stage."[3] But the unfolding drama had been an increasingly tragic one in which "an avalanche of sin . . . gradually engulfs mankind"[4] to create a "continually widening chasm between man and God."[5] Even so, each new punishment meted out upon the errant human race had been followed by a divine manifestation of mercy—until the Tower of Babel.[6] Again there is divine judgment as God scatters mankind abroad, but this time there is no word of divine mercy. In the words of Gerhard von Rad:

> The whole primeval history, therefore, seems to break off in shrill dissonance, and the question . . . arises . . . urgently: Is God's relationship to the nations now finally broken; is God's gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever?[7]

The answer is found in "the strangely new thing"[8] that occurs "without any prior warning"[9] as the narrative shifts abruptly from the universal to the particular, from primeval history to patriarchal history, from mankind in general to one man in particular. As von Rad explains:

> All at once and precipitously the universal field of vision narrows; world and humanity . . . are submerged, and all interest is concentrated upon a single man. . . .
>
> From the multitude of nations God chooses a man, looses him from tribal ties, and makes him the beginner of a new nation and the recipient of great promises of salvation. What is promised to Abraham . . . has universal meaning for all generations on earth.[10]

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2. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 23.
3. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (1964; reprint, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 1:liii.
4. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 1:li.
5. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 152.
6. Ibid., 153.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis,* 1:liii.
10. Von Rad, *Genesis,* 154.

Having thus zoomed in from worldwide history to the personal story of this one man, the lens of the biblical camera will from that point on remain focused exclusively on him and his chosen line, for the story of God's blessing the world has become the story of Abraham, whom one scholar has called "the most pivotal and strategic man in the course of world history."[11] Indeed, all nations are to be blessed through him and his posterity, who are promised to be not only as the sands of the seashore but as the very stars of heaven. In short, Abraham is divinely invested with nothing less than cosmic significance for the future of the human race—a point likewise expressed in rabbinic tradition recognizing Abraham as "a cosmic type because of his linking 'earth' up to 'heaven' through the making of proselytes"[12] and insisting that through the Abrahamic covenant "the order of the world was established."[13]

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find Abraham soon crossing paths with the most powerful monarch of his time and place, Pharaoh. What has surprised and even perplexed many a modern reader is the apparent pettiness of the episode as recounted in the traditional Genesis account.

> And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, 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. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.[14]

The episode stands out as "a mélange of the credible and the unexplained"[15] with "some extraordinary gaps which have not been covered over."[16] It is further puzzling not only for its bizarre incongruity with the widespread ancient tradition attesting to Abraham's exemplary righteousness,[17] but also for its utter failure to reveal why the ancients considered Abraham's encounter

11. J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible: A Survey of Archaeological Evidences in Their Bearing on the Integrity of the Historical Narratives of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1946), 187.
12. C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 38 n. 1, commenting on *Rabbah Genesis* XII.9.
13. Ibid., 245, quoting the introduction to *Rabbah Lamentations.*
14. Genesis 12:10–20.
15. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 182.
16. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 129.
17. See, for example, Isaiah 41:8; 51:1–2 (=2 Nephi 8:1–2); 1 Nephi 15:18–19; 17:35–40; 2 Nephi 29:14; Jacob 4:5; Alma 5:24; 7:25; 13:15; Helaman 3:30; 8:16–17; 3 Nephi 20:25–27; Mormon 5:20; Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] 44:19–20; Luke 16:19–31; John 8:39; *TB Nedarim* (Bablyonian Talmud) 32a; *Zohar Genesis* 76b, in

with Pharaoh to be "a crucial event in the history of mankind."[18] No wonder some scholars surmise that the original story in Genesis contained additional information that has long since dropped out of the text.[19]

Two Towering Cedars

One ancient source purporting to tell more of the original story is now known as the *Genesis Apocryphon* but perhaps more aptly named, as one translator chose to call it, *Memoirs of the Patriarchs*.[20] Long lost to the world until its 1947 discovery in a cave near the Dead Sea, the *Genesis Apocryphon* claims to contain autobiographical accounts by the ancient patriarchs Lamech, his son Noah, and in turn his descendant Abraham (Abram), whose account is by far the largest in the scroll. Unfortunately, the column that apparently formed the initial portion of the Abrahamic account was part of the deteriorated portion of the scroll (it had apparently been lying on the floor of the cave) and may well have recounted Abraham's early life in Ur and Haran.[21] The narrative picks up with Abraham traveling south through the promised land and settling for a time in Hebron until a famine strikes. Hearing that there was grain in Egypt, Abraham undertakes to travel there. But on the night of his entry into Egypt, he has a troubling dream.

> And I, Abram, had a dream in the night of my entering into the land of Egypt and I saw in my dream [that there wa]s a cedar, and a date-palm (which was) [very beautif]ul; and some men came intending to cut down and uproot the cedar, but leave the date-palm by itself. Now the date-palm remonstrated and said, "Do not cut down the cedar, for we are both from one family" [*another translation: "for the two of us grow fr[om] but a [sin]gle root"*[22]]. So the cedar was spared with the help of the date-palm, and [it was] not [cut down]. (That) night I awoke from my sleep and said to Sarai my wife, "I have had a dream, [and I] am frightened by this dream." She said to me, "Tell me your dream that I may know (it too)." So I began to tell her this dream; [and I made known] to [her the meaning of this] dream, [and] s[aid], "[ ] who will seek to *kill me and to spare you.* [N]ow this is all the favor [that you must do for me]; whe[rev]er [we shall be, *say*] about me, 'He is my brother.' Then I shall live with your help *and my life will be saved because of you.* [ ] they will seek to [ta]ke you away from me and

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Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, trans., *The Zohar,* 2nd ed. (London: Soncino, 1984), 1:260; *Damascus Document* III, 4, in Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 129; Philo, *On Abraham* XLVI, in Philo VI (1935; reprint, London: William Heinemann, 1966), 135; Qur'an 4:125; 16:120; and see my treatment of these sources in the foreword to Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt.*

18. Ben Zion Wacholder, "How Long Did Abraham Stay in Egypt?" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 35 (1964): 43.
19. John J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers, and Preachers* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992), 6:112–13, citing H. Gunkel and K. Koch.
20. Theodor H. Gaster, trans., *The Dead Sea Scriptures,* 3rd ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1976), 350–72.
21. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I: A Commentary,* 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971), 105, noting that Avigad and Yadin thought that the lost portion must have dealt with Abraham's experience in Ur and Haran.
22. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 79.

> to kill me." And Sarai wept at my words that night. [ ]. and Pharaoh Zo[an . . . so that] Sarai [no longer wished] to go toward Zoan [with me, for she feared very m]uch within her, lest any[one] should see her [ ].[23]

The most striking difference between this account and the Genesis story concerns the origin of the idea that Sarah hold herself out as Abraham's sister, for although the dream is never expressly said to come from God, yet "this is certainly the implication."[24] But the imagery of the dream also suggests something important about Abraham, who is not the first in the *Genesis Apocryphon* to be compared to a cedar. In a previous column that only recently has become available, Noah hears God interpret a dream that Noah has just had: "You are the great cedar," God explains, from which eventually "will spring a righteous plant" that "will stand for ever."[25] On the principle that plants produce their own kind, Noah's comparison to a cedar that will produce a "plant of righteousness" seems to imply that Noah himself was righteous—a fact emphasized not only in the Old Testament, which calls him "righteous" and "blameless,"[26] but also in numerous other ancient texts characterizing him as "the exemplary righteous man" imbued with "special holiness."[27]

For the *Genesis Apocryphon* later to relate another divinely given dream, this time to Abraham, comparing him to the same kind of tree to which Noah was divinely compared, points to Abraham as the plant of righteousness foretold in Noah's dream. Similarly, in another ancient patriarchal text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, *1 Enoch,* the patriarch Enoch foretells—in a passage whose context unquestionably refers to Abraham[28]—that one of his descendants "shall be chosen as a plant of righteous judgement; and his posterity shall come forth as a plant of eternal righteousness."[29]

Abraham's righteousness is in fact widely attested in numerous ancient sources,[30] while one of the Psalms declares that "the righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in

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23. 1QapGen XIX, 14–23, in Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 60–61; see also *Traditions,* 26–27.
24. Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 110; see Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (1987; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2:190.
25. 1QapGen XIV, 9, 14, in Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English,* 452.
26. Genesis 6:9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (and so also most modern translations), translating the Hebrew words *zadik* and *tammim,* rendered here in the King James as "just" and "perfect."
27. Jack P. Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 21 and 46, and see 22, 101–2, and 159, citing numerous pseudepigraphical and early Jewish and Christian sources. See also Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 5:178–79; and Menahem M. Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation: A Millennial Anthology* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1955), 2:1–6.
28. As the scholars state: "Abraham and his seed are to be chosen as the race through which God would bring 'truth and righteousness' into the world." BEIE 290, translation on 86. "The sentence . . . describes the election of Abra(ha)m, the ancestor of the chosen people." James C. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 68. "Abraham and his seed chosen as the race in and through which God would reveal His righteous judgments—'the plant of righteous judgment.'" R. H. Charles, ed., *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1893), 272 n. 5. See also James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1:74 n. 93j (noting that Ethiopian commentators also insisted that it referred to Abraham).
29. *1 Enoch* 93:5, in BEIE 86.
30. See note 17 above.

Lebanon."[31] Rabbinic sources commenting on the biblical narrative of Abraham in Egypt contain statements strikingly reminiscent of Abraham's dream and explain how the righteous are like cedar trees and palm trees: even as there is no crookedness in the growth of these trees, so the righteous have no crookedness of character; even as the shadow of these tall trees is cast afar, so the reward of the righteous seems far away; and even as the very core of these magnificent trees points upward, so are the hearts of righteous pointed upward to the Holy One.[32] (One of the rabbinic commentaries on the biblical narrative of Abraham in Egypt even mentions dreams that God gives to the righteous: "Happy are the righteous to whom God reveals His secrets in dreams, so that they may be on their guard against sin."[33])

And who are those righteous who are like the great cedars? An ancient teaching found in various sources insists that the righteous are the true seed of Abraham;[34] hence, according to Jewish tradition, the cedar is symbolic of Israel.[35]

But what do we make of the fact that the cedar of Abraham's dream was in danger of being cut down? Could the image of Abraham as a cedar imply something even more than his exemplary righteousness? The cedar of Lebanon *(Cedrus libani)* was highly prized in the ancient Near East. Adorned with bluish-green needles and upright oval-shaped cones, the branches grow straight out as the tree develops into its distinctive and majestic pyramidal shape.[36] Attaining dazzling heights upwards of a hundred feet, the tree is extremely long-lived, up to three thousand years. The fragrant, reddish-colored wood is, among other things, an excellent fuel, burning virtually without smoke and leaving few ashes. Its resin and oil were used as perfume, as an embalming agent, and as a preservative for cloth and parchment. The finely grained wood is also strong, straight, extremely durable, resistant to rot and insects, and takes a fine finish, making it anciently the coveted wood of choice for such diverse items as musical instruments, chests, coffins, household furnishings, and tombs, and on a larger scale for ship timbers and masts, as well as for the structural parts and even decorative paneling of large and important buildings. With good reason does the modern flag of Lebanon bear the image of its famous tree, which from earliest times constituted an important trade item and figured prominently in the rise of the Middle East. The original great cedar forests

31. Psalm 92:12 NRSV.
32. See, e.g., *Rabbah Genesis* 41:1, in H. Freedman, ed., *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Soncino, 1983), 1:332–33; *Zohar Genesis* 82*a*, in Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar,* 1:273–74. See also the (more recent) translation of this passage in Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 2:87. See also *Traditions*, 95.
33. *Zohar Genesis* 83*a*, in Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar,* 1:277. See also *Traditions*, 159. Commentators on the *Genesis Apocryphon* routinely assert that the account of Abraham's dream appears to have "drawn from" the Psalms passage (see, e.g., Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 111; and Knibb, *The Qumran Community,* 2:190). Might it not, however, have been the other way around?
34. See, e.g., Abraham 2:10; and Beẓah 32b: "He who has no pity upon his fellow-creatures is assuredly not of the seed of Abraham our father." Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology,* 421. See also Joseph Smith, in Joseph Fielding Smith and Richard C. Galbraith, eds., *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 171: "The effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham."
35. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 4:444.
36. Older trees gradually lose their pyramidal shape as the branches become widespread.

covering mountainous Lebanon and surrounding regions were extensively exploited by the successive dominant powers to float their imperial navies and erect their great edifices, everything from Solomon's temple to Pharaoh's palace.[37]

To get that choice wood to Pharaoh's palace necessarily required that the cedar be imported, for while "Egypt was almost completely self-sufficient in natural resources," "timber from Lebanon and Syria was the major exception."[38] One of the earliest Egyptian annals reports that in the reign of the Pharaoh Snefru of the Fourth Dynasty (in the third millennium B.C.), an expedition of forty ships sailed to Phoenicia and returned "filled (with) cedar logs" which were used for, among other things, the doors of the royal palace.[39] In Abraham's dream, then, the attempt by Egyptians to cut down the great cedar reflects Egypt's high demand for the precious wood.

But the symbolism goes further, for these are not just any Egyptians who come to cut down the tree but are apparently sent by Pharaoh, who himself would be later compared by the Lord (speaking through Ezekiel) to "a cedar of Lebanon . . . of great height" and "beautiful in its greatness."[40] Commenting on the Ezekiel passage, one scholar contends that "the imagery [of Pharaoh as a cedar] seems strangely incongruous [since] nothing could be less suggestive of Egypt than the trees and scenery of Lebanon."[41] On the other hand, one need only catch a glimpse of the cedar's pyramidal shape[42] to recognize its unique aptness as a symbol for Egypt and its most famous monuments. Even so, the cedar described by Ezekiel is a most unusual tree, whose roots penetrated down to the "abundant water" of "the deep"[43] and whose top "towered high above all the trees of the field"[44] and ascended even "among the clouds,"[45] and "in [whose] shade all great nations lived."[46] According to one scholar, "while at first it seems to be a tree from Lebanon that is being depicted, the description soon broadens out beyond earthly proportions and sketches the picture of the great world tree," that mythological cosmic tree offering shelter and protection for all life on earth.[47]

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37. See generally Irene Jacob and Walter Jacob, "Cedar of Lebanon," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:805; J. C. Trevor, "Cedar," in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1962; reprint, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 1:545–46; *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* vol. 5, rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Keter, n.d.), col. 268; "Cedar," in Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 159; "Cedar," in Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 197; *Encyclopædica Britannica,* 15th ed., 3:5, 20:453, 28:904, 907; Jaromír Málek, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids: Egypt during the Old Kingdom* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 37; Evan Eisenberg, *The Ecology of Eden* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 116.
38. Málek, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids,* 84.
39. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* (1955; reprint, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 227.
40. Ezekiel 31:3, 7 NRSV.
41. G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1985), 339.
42. As noted in Jacob and Jacob, "Cedar of Lebanon," 2:805; Achtemeier, "Cedar," 159.
43. Ezekiel 31:4–5, 7 NRSV.
44. Ezekiel 31:5 NRSV.
45. Ezekiel 31:3, 10 NRSV.
46. Ezekiel 31:6 NRSV.
47. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48,* trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 147.

It was apparently that very grandioseness, or Pharaoh's aspiration thereto, that had angered the Lord. "Therefore thus says the LORD GOD," continues the Ezekiel passage, "Because it towered high and set its top among the clouds, and its heart was proud of its height, I gave it into the hand of the prince of the nations; he has dealt with it as its wickedness deserves. I have cast it out. Foreigners from the most terrible of the nations have cut it down and left it."[48] Accordingly, even as Pharaoh, as a great cosmic cedar, had aspired to ascend into the very clouds, so he "went down to Sheol," being "brought down . . . to the world below."[49] In short, the Ezekiel passage is directed to "the proud self-exaltation of the mighty one who does not accept that his rise comes from the hand of one mightier still,"[50] making "the entire chapter [of Ezekiel 31] a biting satire on the divine claims of the pharaoh."[51]

The association of the cedar tree with kingship recurred throughout the ancient Near East. Because of the quality of its wood, the cedar anciently symbolized strength and stamina; because of its size, it symbolized also the lofty and the sublime.[52] Assyrian kings often compared their rule to the qualities of a cedar, expressing the hope that their reign would be as tolerant as the majestic tree.[53] Such royal symbolism was rooted in early tradition, as for example in Mesopotamian lore that places the garden of the gods at Dilmun, or land of sacred cedars "guarded like the tree of life in Eden." It was to Dilmun's cedar mountain, "the mountain of life," that Gilgamesh journeyed in order to obtain immortality.[54] The cedar tree was the very symbol of the Mesopotamian deity Tammuz,[55] who was revered at both Babylon and Assyria and who is thought to be the same deity appearing under different names elsewhere, most notably Adonis in Greece and Osiris in Egypt.[56] Similarly, the oldest Egyptian emblem of Osiris[57] (and earlier of the creator god Ptah, himself designated as the "Noble *Djed*")[58] was the *djed* column, which had the appearance of a conifer with its branches lopped off[59] and was apparently originally a cedar. As "one of the most frequently used hieroglyphic signs," the *djed* "had particular associations with Egyptian concepts of royalty"[60] and "was comparable to the Tree of Life."[61] In Syria the cedar was also the "most venerated and venerable sacred tree."[62] There, as

48. Ezekiel 31:10–12 NRSV.
49. Ezekiel 31:15, 18 NRSV. See also Isaiah 14:12–15.
50. Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 426.
51. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 323.
52. "Cedar Tree," in Udo Becker, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols* (New York: Continuum, 1992), 55.
53. Maurice H. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (New York: Ktav, 1970), 33.
54. E. O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 11:71.
55. Ibid., 166.
56. Lowell K. Handy, "Tammuz," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 6:318.
57. James, *Tree of Life,* 38, 40.
58. Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 165.
59. James, *Tree of Life,* 38.
60. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art,* 165.
61. James, *Tree of Life,* 40.
62. Ibid., 38.

in ancient Palestine, when the reigning deity sat enthroned in his temple to preside over gods and men, he was said to be holding a scepter of cedar, "a derivative of the Tree of Life [and] indicative of his royal status in heaven and on earth."[63]

Similarly, Jewish tradition remembers that when the usurper Nimrod built a throne for himself "in imitation of the seat of God," it was of cedar wood,[64] even as later when Nimrod, after his unsuccessful attempt to sacrifice Abraham, had a cedar throne made for him.[65] Likewise years later, according to tradition, when Abraham was honored for his remarkable victory over the allied eastern kings, the multitudes who wished him to be their king "felled cedars" to erect a large royal dais for him.[66]

But it is Abraham as a cedar that carries not only royal but also cosmic significance, like the great world tree that the proud Pharaoh aspired to be. Commenting on Abraham's experience in Egypt, the *Zohar* expressly compares Abraham to a cedar that "is pre-eminent and all sit under him. The world is supported upon one righteous one, as it is written, 'the righteous is the foundation of the world' (Prov. X, 25)."[67] Such a view of Abraham would correspond with his divinely ordained cosmic role as the conduit through whom all nations would be blessed.

Accordingly, what Abraham's dream appears to portend is nothing less than a confrontation between two competing claimants to cosmic kingship.

Competing Claimants to Cosmic Kingship

More than a century before the discovery of the *Genesis Apocryphon,* the Prophet Joseph Smith published what he stated was an authentic autobiography of Abraham. Called the Book of Abraham, it has remarkable parallels with the Abrahamic account in the *Genesis Apocryphon,* beginning with God's instructions to Abraham as he was about to enter Egypt:

> 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; 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; Let her say unto the Egyptians, she is thy sister, and thy soul shall live. 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.[68]

Unlike the *Genesis Apocryphon,* however, the Book of Abraham contains intact the account of young Abraham in Ur, where he had ardently sought the patriarchal priesthood of his ancient forefathers.[69] What made the search difficult was that his immediate forefathers had "turned from their

63. Ibid., 101.
64. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 1:178, citing *Midrash ha Gadol.*
65. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt,* 312, citing Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrasch* (1967). See *Traditions*, 179.
66. *Rabbah Genesis* 42:5 in Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah,* 1:347. See *Traditions*, 97.
67. *Zohar Genesis* 82a, in Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar,* 1:274. See *Traditions*, 159.
68. Abraham 2:22–25.
69. Abraham 1:1–4.

righteousness, and from the holy commandments which the Lord their God had given unto them, unto the worshiping of the gods of the heathen," and had set "their hearts . . . to do evil."[70] Facing a corrupt and murderous society, young Abraham courageously spoke out for truth, creating such a stir that those in power determined to do away with him by making him a victim in the kind of human sacrifice against that which he was preaching. Strapped upon the altar as the intended offering in an important religious ritual involving both local and Egyptian pagan gods, Abraham saw Pharaoh's priest raise the knife. Abraham raised his voice in prayer and was dramatically delivered and promised divine protection and blessing.[71]

It is only then in the narrative that we begin to discover the larger significance of the confrontation that has just passed: Pharaoh falsely claimed the exclusive patriarchal priesthood authority to which Abraham was the legitimate heir![72] At issue was nothing less than the right of Adam's priesthood rulership over all of his posterity, the entire human race. Abraham refers to it as "the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam,"[73] or as "that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah."[74] The same unique priesthood order, as described in a latter-day revelation, "was confirmed to be handed down from father to son,"[75] meaning apparently the firstborn son, who when he became the senior patriarch would exercise his right to "rule," or righteously preside over all of Adam's righteous posterity.[76] Josephus likewise speaks of the "rulership" and "reins of power" that were handed down through the line of the antediluvian patriarchs,[77] while an early Ethiopic text provides detailed descriptions of how each of those patriarchs in turn presided over and taught all of the righteous.[78] Hence Jewish tradition remembered that God granted to Abraham "to rule as king over the whole world."[79]

Although the first Pharaoh did not possess that unique patriarchal authority, he was a righteous man who governed "wisely and justly" after the pattern of the true patriarchal order. By Abraham's day, however, the Pharaohs were falsely claiming the authority of patriarchal priesthood rule over all mankind. According to R. T. Rundle Clark in his celebrated study of ancient Egyptian symbolism, "It is basic for all [Egyptian] royal symbols of antiquity that kingship is universal; it means rule over the whole earth and all that is beneath the vault of the sky."[80]

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70. Abraham 1:5–6.
71. Abraham 1:5–20.
72. Abraham 1:21–27.
73. Abraham 1:3.
74. Abraham 1:26.
75. D&C 107:40.
76. D&C 107:40–57.
77. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.3.3-4, in *Josephus IV* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 37–41.
78. "Combat of Adam and Eve with Satan," bk. II chap. VIII–bk. III chap. VI, in S. C. Malan, ed., *The Book of Adam and Eve, Also Called the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 114–50.
79. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 1:178.
80. R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (1959; reprint, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 237.

As the Book of Abraham account continues, Abraham finally receives the priesthood that he sought, along with pivotal promises containing more than disclosed in Genesis: all nations and families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham as his posterity would carry the gospel to all the world, and those accepting would actually be accounted his seed and would rise up and bless him as their father.[81]

This, then, is the remarkable man who finds it necessary to travel to Egypt, ostensibly forced there by famine but actually led by the hand of the Lord; according to the Zohar, "If Abram had not gone down into Egypt and been tested there, his portion would not have been in the Lord."[82] What was the test? Was it not to obey the Lord's instruction regarding Sarah? After all, Abraham proved repeatedly throughout his life that he would gladly risk that life in the cause of truth and to protect his fellow beings, for whom he bore such love that he was remembered in Jewish tradition as the very personification of compassion and loving-kindness.[83] Now, however, to obey God, Abraham was forced to stand by silently and without protest as Egyptian emissaries took his beloved wife to Pharaoh's harem. The *Genesis Apocryphon* describes what ensued when Pharaoh had Sarah brought to the palace.

> I wept bitterly—I, Abram, and Lot, my nephew, with me—on the night when Sarai was taken away from me by force. That night I prayed, I entreated, and I asked for mercy; in (my) sorrow I said, as my tears ran down (my cheeks), "Blessed (are) you, O God Most High, my Lord, for all ages! For you are Lord and Master over all, and have power to mete out justice to all the kings of the earth. Now I lodge my complaint with you, my Lord, against the Pharaoh Zoan, the king of Egypt, because my wife has been taken away from me by force. Mete out justice to him for me and show forth your great hand against him and against all his house. May he not be able to defile my wife tonight—that it may be known about you, my Lord, that you are the Lord of all the kings of the earth." And I wept and talked to no one. (But) that night God Most High sent him a pestilential spirit *to afflict him* and all the men of *his household,* an evil spirit, that kept afflicting him and all the men of his household. He was not able to approach her, nor did he have intercourse with her, though he was with her (?) for two years.[84]

The power of this moving petition lies not only in its depth of emotion and supplication, but also, of course, in the identity of the petitioner: this is not just any injured party praying for justice, but Abraham, true heir to the royal patriarchal priesthood of God, praying to that same God to mete out justice to a pretender to that authority. The confrontation may be less ostentatious than that between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel,[85] but the point is the same: Will the true and living God now show forth his power so that, in Abraham's words, "it may be known about you, my Lord, that you are the Lord of all the kings of the earth"? And for God to do so would also necessarily reveal the true identity of the parties. Indeed, Abraham's prayer directly challenges

81. Abraham 2:9–12.

82. *Zohar Genesis* 83*a*, in Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar,* 1:276.

83. See, e.g., Charles B. Chavel, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts* (New York: Shilo, 1980), 42–46; Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, eds., *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987), 299–302.

84. 1QapGen XX, 10–16, in Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 63, 65. See also *Traditions*, 28.

85. 1 Kings 18.

royal Egyptian ideology in which the divine Pharaoh himself "constituted a final court of appeal."[86] And in that same ideology "justice was defined as 'what Pharaoh loves,' [and] wrongdoing as 'what Pharaoh hates.'"[87] Abraham's plea that God "mete out justice" upon Pharaoh is surely the ultimate affront to Pharaoh's usurped authority.

Meanwhile, all that Pharaoh knew was that he was suddenly and sorely afflicted to such an astonishing degree that he could not even approach this dazzling foreign beauty he had, according to the *Genesis Apocryphon,* just officially taken as wife. Nor did the plagues pass. For two long years was Pharaoh, and with him all his household, afflicted, nor was there any abating, nor could the magicians or physicians, so famed for their curative powers, heal the ailing king, for when they tried, they themselves became afflicted. The situation was bizarre and baffling, for normally "an Egyptian who fell ill could always rely on some cure being available, whatever the problem."[88] But on the need for this particular cure rested the welfare of the entire realm, for Egyptians deemed their king "a divine presence on whom the life of the nation depended."[89] By means of royal ritual "the kingship was clearly very closely connected with agriculture and fertility, and the safety and health of the king entailed the safety of Egypt and the health and well-being of its inhabitants,"[90] so that "the destiny of the Egyptian people was linked to that of their Pharaoh and his welfare was also theirs."[91] Indeed, "the state was unthinkable without kingship," which "as the central institution of Egyptian society . . . form[ed] the point of connection among human society, the gods, and the wider cosmos."[92] Hence Egyptian kingship was perceived as "not merely part, but the kernel of the static order of the world,"[93] and even beyond:

> Around this sacred monarchy and its priesthood a theocratic government [had] developed in which every aspect of life was a function of the State centred in the divine throne as the pivot of society in a permanent changeless cosmic order of elemental vastness whose powers were unlimited.[94]

There was an important corollary to this cosmic power:

> It was the duty of the king as the son of Re, who had put order *(maat)* in the place of chaos when he called all things into being, to maintain "justice" *(maat)* in relation to the needs of the nation, ruling it with "truth."[95]

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86. J. E. Manchip White, *Ancient Egypt: Its Culture and History* (New York: Dover, 1970), 17.
87. Ibid., 16.
88. Eugen Strouhal, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 251.
89. H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (1972; reprint, New York: Hacker Art Books, 1978), 44.
90. H. W. Fairman, "The Kingship Rituals of Egypt," in S. H. Hooke, ed., *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 85.
91. James Putnam, *Egyptology: An Introduction to the History, Art and Culture of Ancient Egypt* (1990; reprint, London: Grange Books, 1998), 44.
92. John Baines, "Origins of Egyptian Kingship," in David O'Connor and David P. Silverman, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 95.
93. Ibid.
94. E. O. James, "The Sacred Kingship and the Priesthood," in *The Sacral Kingship: Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955)* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 65.
95. E. O. James, *The Nature and Function of Priesthood: A Comparative and Anthropological Study* (1955; reprint, London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), 116.

That Pharaoh would now find himself in such a precarious plight implies that he has breached his duty to rule with *maat,* vividly calling to mind the Book of Abraham's description of the Pharaohs of his day as having departed from the righteous ways of the first Pharaoh.[96] The violation of *maat* by the Pharaoh who had taken Sarah and been willing to kill Abraham threatened not only Pharaoh personally but also his royal realm and beyond; the crisis was, in a word, cosmic.

What next befalls Pharaoh in the *Genesis Apocryphon* is noteworthy in light of the fact that Egyptians suffering from illness sometimes turned to the gods for help. Some magical cures apparently took place in temples, where the afflicted would pray, meditate, and rest, while truths would be revealed to them in dreams.[97] According to the *Genesis Apocryphon,* Pharaoh had a dream in which he saw Abraham laying his hand on Pharaoh's head and healing him.[98] Egypt's finest physicians and wizards had utterly failed to cure the languishing king, upon whose health and well-being theoretically rested the welfare of the entire realm and continuation of the cosmic order. All was imperiled, and, according to Pharaoh's dream, everything now depended on the power of one man, this foreigner Abraham. In one of the great turnabouts and ironies of history, the life of Pharaoh and all that theoretically depended on him were literally in Abraham's hands. No wonder the ancients understood this incident to be a "crucial event in the history of mankind."[99]

The *Genesis Apocryphon* proceeds to tell that when Pharaoh's messenger implored Abraham to come heal the king, Lot divulged that Sarah was really Abraham's wife and would have to be restored to him before he could heal Pharaoh. With this startling news, the irony of the situation may well have become apparent. Numerous statues of the ancient Pharaohs depict the king's head sheltered under the outstretched wings of a falcon, symbolizing the perpetual protection of Pharaoh by the great god Horus.[100] "The central tenet binding together ancient Egyptian civilisation [was] the notion that the king fulfils a role on earth under the protective wings of the celestial falcon in heaven."[101] Now, however, it was Abraham who seemed to enjoy divine protection, even at Pharaoh's expense.

Summoning Abraham to his side, the ailing monarch first chided and then implored: "*What have you done to me . . . ? . . . Here is your wife;* take her away; *go,* depart from all the provinces of Egypt. But now pray for me and for my household that this evil spirit may be commanded (to depart) from us."[102] Pharaoh's complaint, followed immediately by his plea to the patriarch for help, demonstrates that not only has the Lord stretched out his mighty hand to answer Abraham's prayer, but that the Lord's hand was in the whole event in the first place, for as Hugh Nibley has observed, "If Abraham was rudely thrust aside by his royal [rival] . . . in Egypt . . . , it was only to show who the real king was—[Pharaoh], as it turned out, [was] for all [his] pride and power the [pretender]," which "in the end, is made perfectly clear in the almost comical [complaint] of [Pharaoh that he], who had contemptuously thrust the helpless

96. Abraham 1:26.
97. Strouhal, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians,* 251.
98. 1QapGen XX.22, in Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 57. See also *Traditions*, 28.
99. Wacholder, "How Long Did Abraham Stay in Egypt?" 43.
100. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art,* 82–83.
101. Stephen Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: British Museum, 1992), 21–22.
102. 1QapGen XX.26–28, in Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 65, 67. See also *Traditions*, 29.

Abraham aside, [was] actually the [victim] of his power. . . . The roles of victim and victor are almost ludicrously reversed."[103]

Even so, it was not in Abraham's nature to take pleasure at the pain of another, even an enemy; and, as the *Genesis Apocryphon* recounts, he promptly complied with the request of the hapless king: "So I prayed for that [ ] . . . and I laid my hands upon his [he]ad. The plague was removed from him and the evil [spirit] was commanded (to depart) [from him], and he was cured. And the king rose."[104]

This remarkable account, unknown to the modern world in Joseph Smith's day, constitutes the missing piece of the puzzle that makes sense of the scene depicted in the Book of Abraham's Facsimile 3 showing Abraham sitting on Pharaoh's throne "by the politeness of the king" and wearing a crown "representing the priesthood." Abraham's remarkable rise from the Egyptian altar of death in Ur to Pharaoh's very throne in Egypt reflects, says Hugh Nibley, the broad outlines of the royal ritual enacted throughout the ancient Near East at the New Year's drama, an "indispensable element" of which was "the temporary humiliation of the true king while a rival and substitute displaces him on the throne."[105] And as in the New Year's drama where "the true king is always vindicated in the end," so it is with Abraham when Pharaoh "acknowledg[es] th[e] superior power and priesthood of his rival"[106] by "the bestowal of royal honors."[107] Here again the image of the cedar becomes visible, for despite Pharaoh's pretensions to be the cedar world-tree, it took Abraham to restore health and life to the ailing Pharaoh, reminiscent of the fact that in the ancient Near East the cedar was "employed in magic rites and incantations . . . for the purpose of restoring life and health."[108] And with a twist of irony, it is finally only by Abraham's word that Pharaoh himself is not felled, while Abraham towers tall and strong as the true cosmic royal cedar.

As the Stars of Heaven

The Book of Abraham facsimile depicting Abraham on the Egyptian throne explains that he is "reasoning upon the principles of astronomy, in the king's court." And as this unique opportunity had arisen directly from God's unusual command to Abraham as he was about to enter Egypt, so God had also prepared Abraham—apparently on the very night he received that command—with the knowledge necessary to enlighten the Egyptians on the subject for which they were already so famed. According to the Book of Abraham, it was immediately after Abraham received the strange command regarding Sarah that he gazed into the Urim and Thummim, which served that night as a kind of supertelescope through which the patriarch peered at the stars—only to then find himself face to face with their Creator, who personally conducted the astronomy lesson.

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103. Nibley, "The Sacrifice of Sarah," 84; see also *Abraham in Egypt,* 359–60.

104. 1QapGen XX.28–29, in Fitzmyer, *The "Genesis Apocryphon" of Qumran Cave I,* 67. See also *Traditions*, 29.

105. Nibley, "The Sacrifice of Sarah," 84; see also *Abraham in Egypt,* 359–60.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid., 82. Bestowed, notes Nibley, on both Abraham and Sarah; he is ushered onto the royal throne while she is presented with silver and gold and garments of the finest linen and purple. Ibid., 87.

108. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism,* 33.

> 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; And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I 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. . . . And it was in the night time 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.[109]

Furthermore, explained the Lord, the stars in their varying degrees of glory were like God's spirit children in their differing degrees of intelligence.[110] Abraham was being shown these things before going into Egypt, he was told, "that ye may declare all these words."[111]

What the Lord apparently did not tell Abraham was the remarkable circumstance in which he would be declaring these things—seated on the very throne of Pharaoh and surrounded by the greatest astronomers of the realm. Abraham "taught them much," says Eupolemus, and "explained astrology and the other sciences to them."[112] According to Josephus, Abraham conversed "with the most learned of the Egyptians, whence his virtue and reputation became still more conspicuous." And "gaining their admiration at these meetings as a man of extreme sagacity, gifted not only with high intelligence but with power to convince his hearers on any subject which he undertook to teach, he introduced them to arithmetic and transmitted to them the laws of astronomy."[113]

That Abraham would be deemed qualified to enlighten the royal Egyptian court on astronomy is perhaps as much a miracle as was his healing of Pharaoh. From the earliest times, explained Diodorus of Sicily in the first century B.C., "the positions and arrangements of the stars, as well as their motion, have always been the subject of careful observation among the Egyptians, if anywhere in the world . . . they have observed with utmost keenness the motions, orbits and stoppings of each planet."[114] Nor was this intense interest in the skies merely a disinterested search for knowledge,[115] but was part and parcel of the royal ideology and cult with its "need to establish the exact periods of time deemed indispensable for the performance of certain rites."[116] Thus, "remarkable progress was made in astronomy by observation of the sky" in order "to meet the practical requirements of telling the time for temple services to begin, matching the public calendar with celestial time and correctly orienting sacred buildings such as temples and pyramids."[117] It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that "the continuous [astronomical] observations necessitated to fulfil the requirements of the cult" were made by members of

109. Abraham 3:11–14.
110. Abraham 3:16–19.
111. Abraham 3:15.
112. Eupolemus, quoted by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17.8, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2:881. See also *Traditions*, 8.
113. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.8.2, in *Josephus IV,* 83. See also *Traditions*, 49.
114. Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 24, quoting Diodorus, *World History* 1.81.
115. See James Henry Breasted, *A History of Egypt: From the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 100: "It never occurred to the Egyptian to enter upon the search for truth for its own sake. . . . They had much practical acquaintance with astronomy."
116. Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), 8.
117. Strouhal, *Life of the Ancient Egyptians,* 239–40.

the priesthood[118]—a fact adding further significance to the detail included in Book of Abraham Facsimile 3 showing that as Abraham sat on the Egyptian throne he was wearing "a crown upon his head, representing the Priesthood." If the Egyptians expected miraculous healing to come only by means of a priest, they similarly expected astronomical instruction to come the same way. And so it did as they were taught by the great Abraham seated upon the royal throne.

And here the imagery of the cedar converges with that of the stars, for even as Abraham, symbolized by the great cedar, teaches of the sky, early Egyptian texts describe the sky itself as "a huge tree overshadowing the earth, the stars being the fruits or leaves which hang from its branches. When 'the gods perch on its boughs,' they are evidently identified with the stars."[119] One might also say that Abraham's vastly superior knowledge of the stars demonstrates that he is the true cedar, towering high above Pharaoh and enjoying a much higher vantage point from which to see and understand the cosmos.

Ironically, the center of the cosmos in Egyptian belief was represented by Pharaoh's throne, which was deemed "the divine throne as the pivot of society in a permanent changeless cosmic order of elemental vastness,"[120] in which "everything, past and future," was thought to be "written in the stars,"[121] so that Pharaoh's proximity and pivotal relationship to the starry heavens was indeed central. If Pharaoh was the earthly embodiment of the gods,[122] the High God Ptah—the "ancient one" who was associated with a cedar by virtue of being the Noble *Djed*[123]—was depicted as "the regulator of the circuit of the heavenly bodies" and is described in a Pyramid Text as "the greatest of those who are in the northern sky,"[124] meaning the greatest star around whom all the other stars rotate. Likewise the god Osiris, whose soul was at one point transformed into a star,[125] appears in Pyramid Texts "seated on his throne . . . while the stars clustered about, as celestial spirits."[126] Similarly, Pharaoh's reign is infused with cosmic significance as he is frequently depicted with upraised arms supporting the star-studded heavens.[127] The concept is reminiscent of the cosmic throne room of other ancient eastern monarchs whose thrones were each situated in a domed and sometimes even revolving room decorated with depictions of the stars and other heavenly bodies. In this auspicious setting the king reigned "as though enthroned in Heaven" while the stars, planets, and moon "revolve[d] like jewels about the throne."[128]

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118. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion,* 8.
119. W. Max Müller, *Egyptian Mythology* (London: George G. Harrap, n.d.), 35.
120. James, "The Sacred Kingship and the Priesthood," in *The Sacral Kingship,* 65.
121. Müller, *Egyptian Mythology,* 53.
122. Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity* (New York: Timken, 1990), 56.
123. See above notes 55 and 56 and accompanying text.
124. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt,* 59.
125. Ibid., 131.
126. Beatrice L. Goff, *Symbols of Ancient Egypt in the Late Period: The Twenty-first Dynasty* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 20.
127. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art,* 127.
128. H. P. L'Orange, "Expressions of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World," in *The Sacral Kingship,* 484.

In relation to Pharaoh's throne, those stars were considered to be the prior Egyptian kings, who, "in dying, left the sad and restricting conditions of earthly life for a carefree existence among the stars"[129] to be transformed into "the imperishable stars, that is, . . . the circumpolar stars that never set in the northern sky."[130] To join those glorious beings was the highest aspiration of the living Pharaoh, who saw "in the splendor of the nightly heavens the host of those who had preceded him" as "they now swept across the sky as eternal stars."[131] Many royal tombs, including the pyramidal burial chambers at the end of the Old Kingdom, have star-covered ceilings. The motif continued even into the New Kingdom, as seen, for example, in the astronomical ceiling in the tomb of Seti I, where "the imperishable circumpolar stars of the northern sky" appear.[132] Commemorating Pharaoh's destiny among those imperishable stars were the seemingly imperishable pyramids of the Old Kingdom, constructed with a northerly orientation for the entrance corridor, which "ascends at an angle of 26 to 27 degrees and creates a direct line from the circumpolar stars to the burial chamber. The pharaoh could thus climb to the 'indestructible' stars of the northern sky who accepted him in their number and prevented him from sinking into the depths of the Netherworld."[133] Once again there is a convergence of the imagery of cedars and stars, for as the Pyramid Texts prescribe, the deceased king—whose body had been embalmed with cedar oil and laid in a cedar tomb—was to "ferry over to Re, to the horizon . . . to his station on the east side of the sky, in its northern region among the Imperishable (Stars)."[134] His barque would, of course, necessarily be made of cedar,[135] even as was the funerary barque of Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid.[136]

Pharaoh's highest eternal aspirations were thus inextricably linked with the stars, but it was now obvious that it was none other than Abraham who held the key to understanding those stars; only he could point the way to eternal life and kingship. What remains to be explained, however, is why the Egyptian ideology of the stars—an ideology already ancient in Abraham's day—bears such resemblance to the Abrahamic ideology as seen in the Joseph Smith sources. For example, even as the Egyptian creator god Ptah was identified with the sun or the polar star, so the God who has through Joseph Smith declared himself still to be the God of Abraham[137] has emphasized his divine connection with the cosmos he has created: "He is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. . . . As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made."[138] Even as Ptah was the greatest star and the axis around which the other stars rotated, so Abraham tells (in the Book of Abraham) that the star nearest to God's throne is the greatest

129. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt,* 181.
130. Goff, *Symbols of Ancient Egypt,* 20.
131. James Henry Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 101.
132. Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings,* 78.
133. Ibid., 24; and see p. 87.
134. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt,* 102, quoting Pyramid Text § 1000.
135. Málek, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids,* 37, 58.
136. John Baines and Jaromír Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Facts on File, 1984), 20.
137. 2 Nephi 29:14; D&C 132:29–51.
138. D&C 88:7–9.

of all the stars seen by Abraham, and governs the other heavenly bodies,[139] in likeness of the one greatest premortal spirit who "was like unto God," even the "Son of Man."[140] Even as Pharaoh's throne, as the divine throne, was set in the midst of the starry orbiting heavens, so God tells Enoch (in the Book of Moses) that "I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made."[141] Even as Osiris is seen surrounded by stars as celestial spirits, so Abraham saw the host of premortal spirits surrounding the glorious one who "was like unto God,"[142] and so Joseph Smith described righteous spirits as so glorious in appearance as to resemble "flaming fire."[143] Even as the living Pharaoh identified his royal predecessors with great stars, so Abraham disclosed that his patriarchal predecessors were kings with a keen interest in and knowledge of the stars,[144] and had figured among the "many . . . noble and great ones" chosen by God to be "rulers,"[145] similar to the stars among which there were "many great ones" God had set as "the governing ones."[146] And even as Pharaoh's ultimate and highest aim was to join his ancestors among the great stars, so Abraham was promised that his seed would be multiplied as the "stars, or all the great lights . . . in the firmament of heaven,"[147] meaning that they who obeyed the gospel[148] would in eternity "have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever."[149]

What such striking resemblances seem to suggest is that the Abrahamic ideology of the stars was nothing new with him but had been well known among his patriarchal predecessors and was in turn preserved to a remarkable (and clearly recognizable degree) by the Pharaohs "seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah."[150] Indeed, when the Book of Abraham tells of the "records of the fathers" in Abraham's possession, Abraham indicates that they contained "a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers."[151] According to *Jubilees*, among those patriarchal records in Abraham's possession were the writings of Enoch,[152] calling to mind the astronomical sections of the extant work called *1 Enoch*.[153] And Eupolemus recounts that when Abraham taught the Egyptians astronomy, he attributed the discovery of these things to Enoch.[154]

139. Abraham 3:2–3, 9, 16.
140. Abraham 3:24, 27.
141. Moses 7:36.
142. Abraham 3:24.
143. Smith and Galbraith, *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* 365–66.
144. Abraham 1:26, 31.
145. Abraham 3:22–23.
146. Abraham 3:2–3.
147. Abraham 3:13.
148. Abraham 2:10.
149. Abraham 3:26.
150. Abraham 1:26.
151. Abraham 1:31.
152. *Jubilees* 21:10. See also *Traditions*, 19.
153. *1 Enoch* 72–82, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 1:50–61.
154. Eupolemus, quoted by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.17.8, in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2:881. See also *Traditions*, 9.

But that unforgettable scene of cosmic kingship with Abraham seated on Pharaoh's throne and discoursing on the stars looked not only backward in time but also forward; in Nibley's words, Abraham "is one of those key figures in whom all the events of the past are brought into focus as by a burning-glass, and whose actions are in turn projected into the future as an ever-expanding image."[155] As the posterity of Abraham, Latter-day Saints strive to "do the works of Abraham"[156] in order to "keep their second estate" and "have glory added upon their heads forever and ever"[157]—so they can join their illustrious ancestor Abraham, who already has entered into his exaltation and sits upon his throne not as an angel but as a god.[158] Then will they, in accordance with the ancient rabbinical teaching about future Israel, truly "shine like the stars"[159] as they sit gloriously enthroned among the stars, enjoying that eternal life and kingship so aptly symbolized by the towering and majestic evergreen cedars of Lebanon.

Such was the significance of the cedar and the stars seen by Father Abraham on that momentous night long ago at the border of Egypt.

155. Nibley, "Facsimile No. 1, by the Figures," 88.
156. D&C 132:32.
157. Abraham 3:26.
158. D&C 132:37.
159. Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation,* 3:161, citing *Sifre D'barim* 206 and other midrashim, and citing Daniel 12:3 that the "wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament . . . as the stars for ever and ever."