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## The Role of the Book of Abraham in the Restoration

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Transcript  
Pearl of Great Price, Abraham

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# The Role of the Book of Abraham in the Restoration<sup>1</sup>

John Gee

The book of Abraham has been a favorite target for critics of the church since its publication in 1842. The Saints have generally paid it attention commensurate with its size, that is to say, little. The Saints have always known what is most important about the book of Abraham, and that is neither what the critics have claimed it to be nor what they have attacked it for. Other than responding to attacks from critics who did then and do now misrepresent it through ignorance or deliberate invention, the Saints generally ignored the book of Abraham until its canonization in 1880.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the book of Abraham had no impact, but its impact was indirect. This impact shall occupy us for the next few minutes.

## The Translation of the Book of Abraham

The existence of the book of Abraham was unsuspected until 1835. Before that time, the Saints had, of course, been aware that there existed lost books of scripture not found in the Bible. Not only does the Bible mention lost books of scripture, but the Book of Mormon, published in 1830, predicted their coming forth. Indeed, the Book of Mormon predicted that there was more of the history of Joseph of Egypt, and an extract of that record is found among the quotations of Lehi to his son Joseph (see 2 Nephi 3). But nowhere was the existence of the writings of Abraham specifically predicted. That more of his story existed was made known to Joseph Smith during the course of his translation of the Bible, but these sections were never published during the Prophet's lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

The early Saints often referred to Abraham, but they almost always did so from a biblical perspective.<sup>4</sup> The most popular reference to Abraham in early LDS publications was Galatians

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<sup>1</sup> While most of this paper was the result of the standard reading of books, I conducted a few computer searches thanks to Laurence Gee, Glen Cooper, and Jerry Benson. I have also plundered extensively from another paper I wrote, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri," as it is still in press and the results presented there are presently unavailable to the general public. The reappearance of arguments, sentences, phrases, and footnotes from the other paper is intentional and done with the full knowledge and consent of the author.

<sup>2</sup> See Kenneth W. Baldrige, "Pearl of Great Price: Contents and Publication," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1071; James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 8, 189, 205; H. Donl Peterson, *The Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1985), 52-53.

<sup>4</sup> Referring to Genesis, see *Evening and Morning Star* 2/21 (June 1834); *Evening and Morning Star* 2/21 (June 1834); *Evening and Morning Star* 2/24 (September 1834); *Messenger and Advocate* 1/5 (February 1835); *Messenger and Advocate* 1/10 (July 1835); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/5 (February 1836); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/6 (March 1836); Joseph Smith Jr., in *Messenger and Advocate* 2/7 (April 1836); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/8 (May 1836); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/9 (June 1836); John Whitmer,

3:8: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." This scripture was used to show that the gospel was known to Abraham:<sup>5</sup> "We have evidence, I think," W. W. Phelps wrote, "extant in the script[ures] . . . that Abraham had a perfect knowledge of the gospel."<sup>6</sup>

When Michael Chandler brought his traveling curiosity show to Kirtland in late June 1835, it was something of an oddity. It consisted of mummies and several papyri that he had bought at the customs house from agents of Antonio Lebolo's family. Lebolo had acquired them from illicit excavations from at least two different sites, and, by the time Joseph Smith acquired them, there were at least three rolls and several miscellaneous scraps of papyrus that had once belonged to five different individuals. In early July, Joseph Smith, Joseph Coe, and others bought the papyri and the mummies from Chandler for \$2,400.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Smith commenced translating the papyri in July, but in August he ceased translating and left town for a missionary tour of Michigan. In September he returned and recommenced his journal. On 1 October 1835 the Prophet recorded, "This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr. O. Cowdery and W. W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded."<sup>8</sup> We know from other

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in *Messenger and Advocate* 2/10 (July 1836); Sidney Rigdon, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/2 (November 1836); Sidney Rigdon, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/3 (December 1836); William Smith, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/4 (January 1837); Wilford Woodruff, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/5 (February 1837); Warren Parrish, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/7 (April 1837); Warren Parrish, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/8 (May 1837); Joel Johnson, in *Times and Seasons* 1/5 (March 1840); Joseph Smith Jr. et al., in *Times and Seasons* 1/9 (July 1840); Elias Higbee, in *Times and Seasons* 2/7 (1 February 1841); W. W. Phelps, in *Times and Seasons* 2/7 (1 February 1841); *Times and Seasons* 3/16 (15 June 1842). Referring to Exodus: *Messenger and Advocate* 2/4 (January 1836). Referring to John, see *Times and Seasons* 3/9 (1 March 1842). Referring to Romans 8:28; 9; or 11:26, see *Evening and Morning Star* 1/6 (November 1832); *Evening and Morning Star* 1/12 (May 1833); *Evening and Morning Star* 2/19 (April 1834); *Times and Seasons* 2/15 (1 June 1841); Brigham Young, in *Times and Seasons* 2/21 (1 September 1841). Referring to Ephesians, see *Messenger and Advocate* 1/2 (November 1834). Referring to the Book of Mormon, see *Times and Seasons* 1/5 (March 1840). Referring to the book of Jasher, see *Times and Seasons* 1/8 (June 1840), reprinted from the *New York Star*.

<sup>5</sup> See *Evening and Morning Star* 1/11 (April 1833); *Evening and Morning Star* 2/18 (March 1834); *Evening and Morning Star* 2/24 (September 1834); *Messenger and Advocate* 1/6 (March 1835); *Messenger and Advocate* 1/9 (June 1835); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/2 (November 1835); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/6 (March 1836); *Messenger and Advocate* 2/9 (June 1836); John Taylor, in *Messenger and Advocate* 3/9 (June 1837); Edward Partridge, in *Times and Seasons* 1/3 (January 1840); *Times and Seasons* 2/1 (March 1840); *Times and Seasons* 2/1 (1 November 1840); *Times and Seasons* 2/4 (15 December 1840); *Times and Seasons* 2/9 (1 March 1841); Erastus Snow, in *Times and Seasons* 2/19 (2 August 1841); *Times and Seasons* 3/21 (1 September 1842).

<sup>6</sup> W. W. Phelps, in *Messenger and Advocate* 1/9 (June 1835).

<sup>7</sup> See H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1995), 6.

<sup>8</sup> *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. and comp. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 60; compare *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:45.

references by both Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith that the astronomical papyrus was the hypocephalus reprinted as Facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham. Since the book of Abraham gives an outline of its prospective contents, we can tell where this portion of the text should be placed in the book of Abraham: "A knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers, have I kept even unto this day, and I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record, for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me" (Abraham 1:31).

As it currently stands, the book of Abraham stops in the middle of a revelation on the creation (Abraham 4:1–5:21) that was given to Abraham preparatory to his entry into Egypt. The "knowledge . . . of the planets, of the stars" (Abraham 1:31), to which Facsimile 2 serves as an illustration, follows the creation section in the text of the book of Abraham. Thus by October 1835 Joseph Smith had already translated more than is in the current book of Abraham. Only a few other sessions of translating are recorded in the Kirtland period, the last occurring in November 1835. After November the study of Hebrew and the completion of the Kirtland temple filled the Prophet's time. On 12 May 1838 provision was made for Joseph to spend more time translating the papyri,<sup>9</sup> but surveying Missouri took most of the next two months,<sup>10</sup> and by July the Saints were being attacked again.<sup>11</sup>

Anson Call recorded that in the summer of 1838 it took "altogether about two hours"<sup>12</sup> to read the translation of the book of Abraham, about four times as long as it takes to read the present printed text.<sup>13</sup> On 16 August 1841, after the Saints settled in Nauvoo, Joseph said that he needed more time "that he might attend to the business of translating."<sup>14</sup> The next record of translation is from early 1842, when the Prophet revised his translation before printing the excerpts that now constitute the book of Abraham. More extracts were promised, but Joseph seems not to have had any spare time to complete the translation. By August 1842 Joseph was in hiding.<sup>15</sup>

Of the translation manuscripts of the book of Abraham, we have only four fragmentary manuscripts, none of which include the translation eventually published or the extent of the

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<sup>9</sup> See *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:242; *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, ed. Scott H. Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 183.

<sup>10</sup> See *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:243–48.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, 2:255–56.

<sup>12</sup> Anson Call, as cited in Matthews, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible*, 98.

<sup>13</sup> It takes me approximately half an hour to read through the published text of the book of Abraham at a slow and steady pace.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Smith, in *Times and Seasons* 2 (1 September 1841): 522. See *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 75.

<sup>15</sup> See *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:402–88.

translation that had been done by 1 October 1835. Most of the documents we have were written by scribes who were not employed until after that date.

The publication of the book of Abraham in March 1842 made more of a stir among the gentiles than it did among the Saints.<sup>16</sup> The original publication of the book of Abraham had a somewhat limited circulation until its republication in the Pearl of Great Price.<sup>17</sup> In 1851, when the book of Abraham was republished in the Pearl of Great Price, Elder Franklin D. Richards stated, “Most of the Revelations composing this work were published at early periods of the Church, when the circulation of its journals was so limited as to render them comparatively unknown at present [11 July 1851].”<sup>18</sup> In 1842 the Saints showed little interest in obtaining more of the book of Abraham, and, just as had occurred in Kirtland, temple concerns took over for Joseph, in part due to the endowment’s being introduced.<sup>19</sup> When, at the suggestion of Elder Franklin D. Richards, then the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve and the newly called president of the British mission, the book of Abraham was republished, it was as an English tract and not as an American one.<sup>20</sup> As a result of the economic crisis in Britain in the 1840s (during which time church membership increased twelvefold),<sup>21</sup> “most British Saints in 1850 did not own a copy of the Book of Mormon or of the Doctrine and Covenants or possess the popular church pamphlets.”<sup>22</sup> Elder Richards proposed publishing the Pearl of Great Price as “a collection of revelations, prophecies &c., in a tract form of a character not designed to pioneer our doctrines to the world, so much as for the use of the Elders and Saints.”<sup>23</sup> This quality still characterizes the book today.

Although the book of Abraham makes several important contributions to the restoration, we will concentrate on those that have had the most influence, in order of ascending importance.

### **Abraham 1:2**

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<sup>16</sup> See *Times and Seasons* (2 May 1842); *Times and Seasons* (16 May 1842); *Times and Seasons* (1 June 1842); *Times and Seasons* (15 August 1842); *Times and Seasons* (1 September 1842); *Times and Seasons* (15 September 1842); *Times and Seasons* (1 March 1843).

<sup>17</sup> See Franklin D. Richards preface to the *Pearl of Great Price*, reproduced in Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 195.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> The endowment was introduced on 4 May 1842. See *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:xliiii.

<sup>20</sup> See Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 9–13.

<sup>21</sup> See Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Franklin D. Richards, letter to Levi Richards, 1 February 1851, cited in Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 11. Compare Richards, preface to the *Pearl of Great Price*, which notes that the Pearl of Great Price was “not adapted, nor designed, as a pioneer of the faith among unbelievers” (195).

One evidence of the early impact of the book of Abraham is a quotation taken from Abraham 1:2 in the first patriarchal blessing book.<sup>24</sup> Though the blessings in this book date to 1833, the book was actually copied in September 1835—during or after the translation of the book of Abraham—thus vitiating contentions that “some of the text of the book of Abraham was revealed and recorded before the ‘Abraham’ papyri came into possession of Joseph Smith.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Kolob**

One of the clearest contributions of the restoration is its cutting through Christian controversies by spurning the Neoplatonic encrustations on the doctrine of God. The Neoplatonic god was shaped by the philosopher’s pen, but the book of Abraham restored to the airy nothing of Neoplatonism a local habitation with the name Kolob, which is “set nigh unto the throne of God” (Abraham 3:9). It may thus be the most notable name to have come from the book of Abraham. I do not here address the identity of Kolob as an astronomical body, but we should note that Wilford Woodruff mentions Kolob in his journal on 3 January 1836, before there is any attestation to it in the manuscripts of the book of Abraham.

The idea of Kolob being nearest the dwelling place of God took off immediately after the publication of the book of Abraham in March 1842. A July 1842 editorial in the *Times and Seasons* referred to Abraham’s astronomy,<sup>26</sup> and W. W. Phelps published his memorable hymn “If You Could Hie to Kolob” in 1843.<sup>27</sup> Brigham Young referred to it once in 1853<sup>28</sup> and once in 1860.<sup>29</sup> Orson Pratt referred to it three times in the early 1870s, but it was not popular among the general church membership until after the Pearl of Great Price was canonized as scripture in 1880.<sup>30</sup> After that, references to Kolob began to crop up in church talks with increasing frequency.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See James R. Harris, “The Book of Abraham Facsimiles,” in *Studies in Scripture: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall, 1985), 280.

<sup>25</sup> James R. Harris, review of Jay Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham*, in *BYU Studies* 10/1 (Autumn 1969): 126–27.

<sup>26</sup> See “Government of God,” *Times and Seasons* 3/18 (15 July 1842).

<sup>27</sup> See *Times and Seasons* 4/6 (1 February 1843).

<sup>28</sup> See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1 (10 July 1853).

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*, 8 (6 October 1860).

<sup>30</sup> See Kenneth W. Baldrige, “Pearl of Great Price: Contents and Publication” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1071; Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 8, 189, 205; Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 22–23.

<sup>31</sup> See Charles Penrose, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 (16 November 1884); Orson F. Whitney, in *Collected Discourses*, 1 (19 August 1888); Andrew Jenson, in *Collected Discourses*, 2 (16 January 1891); Orson F. Whitney, in *Collected Discourses*, 4 (12 August 1894); George Q. Cannon, in *Collected Discourses* 4 (7 April 1895); Orson F. Whitney, in *Collected Discourses*, 5 (1896); Wilford Woodruff, in *Collected Discourses*, 5 (19 October 1896) (also in *Conference Report* [April 1898]: 31; Wilford Woodruff, in *Collected Discourses*, 5 (29 August 1897); Ben Rich, April 1910.



## Premortal Existence

In the church today the book of Abraham is generally the most concise, clear, and cogent description of the premortal existence.<sup>32</sup> It is, of course, not the only description of the premortal existence, but it is significant for several reasons. Biblical references (see Job 38:7;<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah 1:5;<sup>34</sup> Romans 8:29;<sup>35</sup> Ephesians 1:4<sup>36</sup>) were explained differently depending on the dogmatic tenets of the exegete. The earliest mention of the premortal existence in LDS scriptures (the translation occurred in 1829 and was published in 1830) is found in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 13), but this is hardly the clearest explanation of the subject. The book of Moses (see Moses 4:1–4), which was revealed in 1830 and published in 1851,<sup>37</sup> also contains a clear reference to the premortal existence and the war in heaven, but it only explicitly refers to the premortal existence of Christ and Satan. The premortal existence of the devil and his angels is also mentioned in Doctrine and Covenants 29:36–39, which was revealed in September 1830 and published in 1833.<sup>38</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 38:1 (revealed in January 1831 and published in 1833)<sup>39</sup> refers only to “all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made.” Doctrine and Covenants 49:17 (revealed in March 1831 and published in 1833)<sup>40</sup> is does not clearly state whether man or the measure of man has a premortal existence. The premortal existence of man is discussed in Doctrine and Covenants 93:29–35 (revealed in May 1833 and published in 1835).<sup>41</sup> Yet Abraham 3:21–28 (revealed in 1835) puts it all in perspective by discussing man’s inclusion in the grand council before the world began and the consequences of man’s obedience or disobedience during his first and second estates.

Once man’s position in the eternities was put in perspective, Joseph began to preach it. While in Liberty Jail he wrote to the Saints, “How vane and trifling, have ben our spirits, our Conferncs our Coun[c]ils our private Meetings our pri[v]ate as well as public Conversations to low to mean to vulgar to condecending, for the dignifide Characters of the Cald and Chosen of God, according to the purposes of his word will from befo[re] the foundation of the world, to

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<sup>32</sup> See Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Explained as referring to the angels.

<sup>34</sup> Explained as being post-conception.

<sup>35</sup> Explained as predestination.

<sup>36</sup> Explained as predestination.

<sup>37</sup> This was first published in the *Millennial Star* 13 (15 March 1851): 90–93. See Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> In the Book of Commandments this reference was 29:45–46. See *A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion: Phelps, 1833), 65.

<sup>39</sup> In the Book of Commandments this reference was 40:1. See *Book of Commandments*, 80.

<sup>40</sup> In the Book of Commandments this reference was 52:17. See *Book of Commandments*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> In the original Doctrine and Covenants this reference was 82:5. See Joseph Smith et al., comps., *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints carefully selected from the Revelations of God*, (Kirtland, Ohio: Williams, 1835), 211–12.

hold the keys of the mistres [mysteries] of those things that have ben kept hid from the foundation untill now."<sup>42</sup> Around August 1839 Joseph was more explicit:<sup>43</sup> "The Father called all spirits before him at the creation of Man & organized them. He (Adam) is the head, was told to multiply. The Keys were given to him, and by him to others & he will have to give an account of his Stewardship, & they to him. The Priesthood is everlasting."<sup>44</sup>

The Prophet continued to make such statements until his death. For example, in January 1841 Joseph explained that spirits are eternal. He taught that at the first organization in heaven all were present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed; we understood and sanctioned the plan of salvation. We came to this earth for a body so that we might present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness is having a body. The devil has no body, and therein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man; in fact, a body is so important to him that when he was cast out of a man by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he preferred a swine's body to no body at all.<sup>45</sup>

In February 1841 Thomas McIntire recorded, "Joseph said that before the foundation of the Earth in the Grand Counsel that the Spirits of all Men ware subject to opression & the express purpose of God in Giveing it a tabernicle was to arm it against the power of Darkness."<sup>46</sup> In March 1841 Joseph again taught, "The spirit or the inteligence of men are self-existant principles he before the foundation [of] this Earth—& quotes the Lord[']s question to Job 'where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the Earth' [as] Evidence that Job was in Existing somewhere at that time[.] he says God is Good & all his acts is for the benefit of infereir inteligences—God saw that those intelegences had Not power to Defend themselves against those that had a tabernacle therefore the Lord Calls them togather in Counsel & agrees to form them tabernacles so that he might Gender the Spirit & the tabernicle togather so as to create sympathy for their fellowman."<sup>47</sup> These statements were made a year before the publication of the book of Abraham.

A year after the publication of the book of Abraham, Joseph again preached the doctrine of the premortal existence: "The design of God before the foundation of the world was that we

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<sup>42</sup> Joseph Smith, letter to the members of the church in Quincy, Illinois, and to those scattered abroad, 20 March 1839, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Jessee, 397.

<sup>43</sup> On 15 March 1839 Joseph Smith complained from Liberty Jail, "I never have had opportunity to give them [the Saints] the plan that God has revealed to me" (Joseph Smith, letter to Presendia Huntington Buell, 15 March 1839, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Jessee, 387. This, along with the fragmentary nature of the documentation, might account for what seems to be an absence of the doctrine at previous times.

<sup>44</sup> *Words of Joseph Smith*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> See *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

should take tabernacles that through faithfulness we should overcome & thereby obtain a resrection from the dead, in this wise obtain glory honor power and dominion for this thing is needful, inasmuch as the Spirits in the Eternal world, glory in bringin other Spirits in Subjection unto them, Striving continually for the mastery, He who rules in the heavens when he has a certain work to do calls the Spirits before him to organize them. They present themselves and offer their Services. When Lucifer was hurled from Heaven the decree was the he Sould not obtain a tabernacle not those that were with him, but go abroad upon the earth exposed to the anger of the elements naked & bare."<sup>48</sup> This sermon was also recorded by Willard Richards, who quoted language taken from the book of Abraham: "Organization of Spirits in the eternal world—spirits in the eternal world are like spirits in this world, when those spirits have come into this [and] risn & received glorified bodies, they will have an ascendancy over spirits who have no bodies, or kept not their first estate like the devil. Devils punishment, should not have a habitation like other men."<sup>49</sup>

Franklin D. Richards, who later compiled the Pearl of Great Price, noted the following of the sermon: "As man is liable to enemies there as well as here it is necessary for him to be placed beyond their power in order to be saved. This is done by our taking bodies (keeping our first estate) and having the Power of the Resurrection pass upon us whereby we are enabled to gain the ascendancy over the disembodied spirits. The mortification of satan consists in his not being permitted to take a body."<sup>50</sup> The phrases *first estate* and *second estate* derive from the book of Abraham (see Abraham 3:26–28) and do not occur elsewhere in the restoration scriptures.<sup>51</sup>

The book of Abraham forms a background for the funeral discourse given for King Follett.<sup>52</sup> The Prophet noted that he learned some of the things he spoke of in the King Follett discourse "by translating the papyrus now in my house."<sup>53</sup>

In one of his last sermons before his death, Joseph again referred to the book of Abraham, stating that "every man who has a calling to minister to the Inhabitants of the world, was ordained to that very purpose in the grand Council of Heaven before this world was—I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that grand Council."<sup>54</sup> George Laub reported it this way: "Brother Joseph Smith was chosen for the last dispensation or Seventh Dispensation. The time the grand council Set in heaven to organise this world Joseph was chosen for the last &

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>51</sup> Although the term *first estate* occurs in Jude 1:6, it there refers to angels and is not assumed to refer to men except by Mormons.

<sup>52</sup> See *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–62.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 367.

greatest Prophet to lay the foundation of gods work of the Seventh Dispensation.”<sup>55</sup> Samuel W. Richards recorded, “At the general & grand Council of heaven, all those to whom a dispensation was to be committed, were set apart & ordained at that time, to that calling.”<sup>56</sup>

The Brethren completely absorbed this teaching that Joseph had received from the book of Abraham and taught in his discourses. In 1845 William Clayton recorded, “It has been a doctrine taught by this church that we were in the grand council amongst the Gods when the organization of this world was contemplated and that the laws of government were all made and sanctioned by all present and all the ordinances and ceremonies decreed upon.”<sup>57</sup> In 1857 Brigham Young said that Adam received his mission before the foundation of the earth, “in the grand council, and performed the mission assigned him there.”<sup>58</sup> Orson Hyde also discussed the premortal existence and compared it to the life of immigrants before they came to a new country.<sup>59</sup> It was not until after the Pearl of Great Price was published in the United States in 1878 and canonized two years later<sup>60</sup> that the Brethren, such as Orson F. Whitney, connected the doctrine of the grand council in the premortal existence with the book of Abraham.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusions

The doctrine of the premortal existence was revealed over time and came line upon line, but the basic concept was known early on. However, it was not until the book of Abraham was revealed that all the knowledge came together. The book of Abraham, translated in 1835, made its most significant early impact through Joseph Smith’s teachings about the premortal existence after his imprisonment in Liberty Jail, which began in 1839. The book of Abraham was published in 1842, but most church leaders gained their doctrinal understanding of the premortal existence from the Prophet’s sermons. These they took west with them, and it was not until after the book of Abraham was reprinted in the United States in 1878 and canonized in 1880 that the doctrine of the premortal existence was again tied to the book of Abraham. The secondhand impact had nevertheless been profound, and thus there were no doctrinal shifts when it was canonized. The book of Abraham had come home.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew F. Ehat, “‘It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth’: Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God,” *BYU Studies* 20 (spring 1980): 269.

<sup>58</sup> Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 5:3 51–52.

<sup>59</sup> See *Journal of Discourses*, 7:315.

<sup>60</sup> See Balderidge, “Pearl of Great Price: Contents and Publication,” 1071; Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 188, 203–5; Peterson, *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, 21–22.

<sup>61</sup> See Orson F. Whitney, in *Collected Discourses*, 1 (24 June 1888).