



2013

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Stephen O. Smoot

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Smoot, Stephen O. (2013) "Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 22 : No. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol22/iss2/4>

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Title Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham

Author(s) Stephen O. Smoot

Reference *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 28-39.

ISSN 1948-7487 (print), 2167-7565 (online)

Abstract The Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price depicts the creation, including the motifs of the divine council, primeval chaos, and creation from preexisting matter. This depiction fits nicely in an ancient Near Eastern cultural background and has strong affinities with the depiction of the cosmos found in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts (especially Egyptian and Mesopotamian).

COUNCIL, CHAOS, & CREATION IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

STEPHEN O. SMOOT



Nun, the god of the primeval waters (though the waters are not represented in this colorful depiction), lifts a ship bearing the scarab beetle, who is pushing the rising sun, symbolic of birth and transition. Book of the Dead of Anhai (ca. 1050 BC).

Joseph the Seer saw these Record[s] and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records . . . which when all translated will be a pleasing history and of great value to the saints.¹

“1, Abraham”: Introduction

The Book of Abraham has an intriguing history and serves as a repository for many of the more unique doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.² For instance, although the doctrine of the premortal existence of mankind is spoken of elsewhere in Mormon scripture (Alma 13:3; Doctrine and Covenants 138:53-55; Moses 3:5; 4:1-3; 6:51), it is in the Book of Abraham that this teaching is more fully elucidated (Abraham 3:18-28). Furthermore, important teachings about the relationship between the priesthood and the Abrahamic covenant (Abraham 2:6-11), man’s relationship to God (Abraham 3:22-28), and the creation (Abraham 4-5) are vividly detailed within the pages of this book.

Hugh Nibley has articulated a very fruitful methodology in studying the Book of Abraham. Nibley has argued that while studying the Joseph Smith Papyri and the method of the translation of the Book of Abraham is indeed important, of equal if not greater importance is to judge the Book of Abraham’s contents against ancient Near Eastern traditions about the life of Abraham and thus discern whether we can find confirmatory evidence for its antiquity.³ Although Latter-day Saint commentators on the Book of Abraham have focused primarily on the doctrinal richness found therein,⁴ a few have also paid attention to the details of the text that bespeak its ancient origin. Following Nibley’s lead, several scholars have offered analyses of the narrative of the Book of Abraham that demonstrate many convergences between the text and the ancient Near East.⁵ In addition, scholars have also drawn attention to the many parallels between the Book of

Abraham and other Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and even pagan traditions about the life of Abraham.⁶

The chapters in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 3-5) focusing on the premortal council and the creation offer especially intriguing details that link the Book of Abraham with the ancient world. A few scholars have dissected these chapters, usually in discussing the depiction of the cosmos in Abraham 3.⁷ Given the many details that confirm the Book of Abraham’s ancient cosmology, an additional look at these chapters is warranted. Specifically, upon close inspection, the Book of Abraham reveals a grand cosmological vision involving a council of gods, primordial chaos, and creation out of preexisting matter.

“The Gods Took Counsel among Themselves”: The Divine Council

Although this important motif is often missed by modern readers whose theological lenses frequently predispose them to see only strict monotheism in the Bible, the scriptural depiction of God dwelling in the midst of an assembly of other divine beings is essential to recognize in order to have a proper, nuanced, and complete understanding of the nature of deity. When read with the proper hermeneutical tools, it becomes clear that this teaching not only appears in multiple places in the Hebrew Bible, but also in other Latter-day Saint scriptural works, including the Book of Abraham.

The biblical depiction of the divine council, as summarized succinctly by Stephen A. Geller, portrays God “seated among the assembly of divine beings, who are sometimes . . . called *bene ’el(im)* (‘the sons of gods’) [and] *kedoshim* (‘holy ones’), among other terms.”⁸ The Prophet Joseph Smith definitively taught this concept in 1844.

The head God called together the Gods and sat in grand council to bring forth the world. The grand

FROM THE EDITOR:

Traditionally, though not uniformly, Christianity and Judaism have relegated all references to gods other than the One God to pagan idolatry. Stephen Smoot, using more recent scholarship on the scriptural anomalies that do seem to assume other divine beings, compares this vast body of material to the statements in the Book of Abraham accounts of the creation. Thereby, he places the Abrahamic creation story squarely within its ancient (read: theologically nontraditional) Near Eastern context.



Vision of St. John the Evangelist by an unknown German artist (ca. 1450, Cologne), in which the council of twenty-four elders encircles the throne of God.

councilors sat at the head in yonder heavens and contemplated the creation of the worlds which were created at the time. . . . In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted [prepared] a plan to create the world and people it.⁹

Many passages from the Hebrew Bible demonstrate the presence of a divine plurality. The textbook example from the Hebrew Bible is Psalm 82, which Michael S. Heiser uses as his primary text to assert that “it is not difficult to demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible assumes and affirms the existence of other gods.”¹⁰ This psalm vividly depicts God (*ēlōhîm*) in his place “in the divine council [*ba- ādat ēl*]; in the midst of the gods [*bē-qereb ēlōhîm*] he holds judgment” (Psalm 82:1 NRSV).¹¹ After reprimanding these gods for neglecting their duty to protect the vulnerable of humanity, God affirms the divine nature of the members of the council while simultaneously issuing a dire threat should they persist in their malfesance. “I say, ‘You are gods [*ēlōhîm*], children of the most high [*bēnê elyôn*], all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince” (Psalm 82:6-7 NRSV).

Most important for our present investigation is the depiction of the divine council in Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV), where, shortly before completing the creation, God declares to an unspecified audience, “Let us make [*na āšēh*] humankind in our image [*bē almēnū*], according to our likeness [*kidmūtēnū*].” The Hebrew uses the first person common plural prefix on *āsh*, as well as the first person common

plural suffix on both *lm* and *dmût*, which are the equivalent of the English first person plural pronoun *us* and the first person plural possessive determiner *our*, respectively.

The use of the plural in these verses may leave some modern readers perplexed. After all, such seems to indicate a pluralistic depiction of God contrary to modern Judeo-Christian theological sensitivities. Christians therefore routinely read the Trinity into these verses, or, along with Jewish readers, suggest a “plurality of majesty” to account for the presence of the plural.¹²

Contrary to these common readings of the plurals in Genesis 1:26-27, scholars have recognized the presence of the divine council in this text. According to David M. Carr, the plural in these verses “probably refers to the divine beings who compose God’s heavenly court.”¹³ Everett Fox mentions in passing that “some take [Genesis 1:26] to refer to the heavenly court.”¹⁴ Jon D. Levenson, providing commentary in an authoritative study Bible, writes, “The plural construction (*Let us . . .*) most likely reflects a setting in the divine council. . . . God the King announces the proposed course of action to His cabinet of subordinate deities.”¹⁵ Robert Hendel similarly notes, “The plural seems to refer to the lesser deities of the divine assembly described in other biblical texts.”¹⁶ Marc Zvi Brettler informs us, “[Genesis 1:26-27] is implicitly portraying God in terms of a human king: God is talking to his royal counselors or cabinet. . . . The creation of people is so significant that this creative act alone demands God consult his cabinet, [composed] of angels or other divine figures.”¹⁷ Finally, Gerald Cooke acknowledges “at least a strong possibility that [Genesis 1:26-27] represent[s] a conception of a plurality of divine beings.”¹⁸

Examples of God’s heavenly court in the Hebrew Bible could be multiplied (e.g., Genesis 3:22; Deuteronomy 32:8-9, 43;¹⁹ 1 Kings 22:19-23; Isaiah 6:1-4; 40:1-5; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). The divine council is likewise present, with some conceptual differences, in the religious systems of Israel’s neighboring cultures, including Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is a thoroughly ancient Near Eastern concept that is usually only reluctantly or begrudgingly admitted by traditional Jewish and Christian exegetes as also being biblical.

On the other hand, the presence of the divine council in the Book of Abraham could not be more

explicit. Abraham, according to Abraham 3, was granted a vision that included viewing the assembled spirits that composed the premortal council.

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good. (Abraham 3:22-23)²⁰

As David E. Bokovoy has explained, the detail that God “stood” in the midst of the council may seem trivial at first glance, but in fact contains important ramifications for the depiction of God as the head of the council.²¹ What’s more, the Book of Abraham’s identification of these preexistent intelligences of the council with the stars of heaven appears to be using language that is part of the cultural and religious environment of the ancient Near East (compare Abraham 3:16-18).²²

Notwithstanding the somewhat unfortunately misplaced chapter division, the premortal council scene of Abraham 3 actually extends into Abraham 4-5. Instead of being a break in the narrative, the account of the creation in Abraham 4-5 should be read as an extension and continuation of the narrative in Abraham 3. That is to say, the divine council is introduced in Abraham 3 because it is the divine council that will carry out the creation in Abraham 4-5. The narrative informs us, “And then [i.e., immediately after the conflict in Abraham 3:27-28 is resolved and a course of action is selected] the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (Abraham 4:1).

The text proceeds to use the plural *Gods* as the subject carrying out the creation. There can be no doubt that these Gods include those from Abraham 3 whom the Lord in verse 1 instructed to accompany him and “go down” to carry forth the creation, in terminology perfectly suited for divine council imagery (compare Abraham 4:26-27; 5:4).²³ But perhaps the most glaring detail in Abraham 4-5 that indicates the presence of the divine council is that the Gods are said to have taken “counsel among themselves” as they carried forth their creative acts (Abraham 4:26; compare 5:1-5), a detail not explicitly described

in other scriptural creation accounts. This description of the Gods taking “counsel” among themselves during their creative deliberations is crucial in identifying the presence of the divine council in Abraham 4-5.

The explicit use of *counsel* to describe the actions of the Gods in Abraham 4 links it with the Hebrew noun *sôd*, which can be defined as both “council” as well as “counsel.” It conveys the sense of friends holding a private conversation in an intimate assembly or circle, as well as secrets that God imparts to his prophets (Amos 3:7),²⁴ and is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer both to the divine council itself (cf. Psalm 89:6-7) as well as to the “counseling” that the gods do among themselves in the council.²⁵

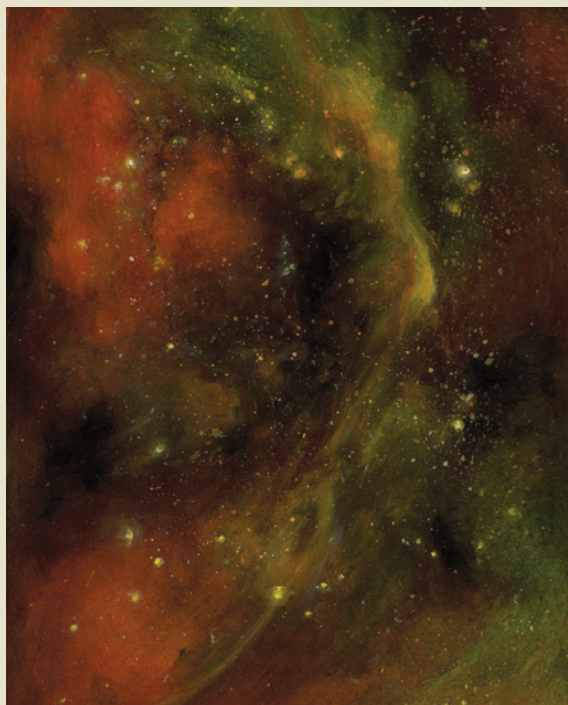
I hasten to clarify what I am not claiming. I am not claiming that the Book of Abraham employs the word *sôd* in describing the premortal council. Because we presently possess only an English rendering of the text, there remains, of course, the question of whether the Book of Abraham was originally written in Hebrew, Egyptian, or another ancient Near Eastern language.²⁶ What I am claiming, however,

One important aspect of a number of Egyptian creation myths is the motif of primordial water from which the earth, or, more properly, a primeval hill or landmass, springs out of.

is that narrative details in the Book of Abraham grant us confidence to conclude that the text shares a conceptualization of God’s *sôd* similar to that of the Hebrew Bible’s. As we’ve just seen, the Book of Abraham presents a depiction of the divine council that includes assemblage of its members (Abraham 3:22-23), deliberation or conflict (Abraham 3:27-28), a decree from the chief (Abraham 3:27), and an ultimate enactment of the decree (Abraham 4:1). This is the same pattern we see in divine council narratives in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere.²⁷

“Empty and Desolate”: The Primordial Chaos

Genesis 1:2 informs us that at the creation “the earth was a formless void” and that “darkness covered the face of the deep,” while the Book of Abraham indicates that “the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate” and that “darkness reigned upon the



The artist's representation of nebulae (Nos. 1, 4, 2)—swirling clouds of gases and dust particles—thought by many to be star-forming regions. Sherrie Nielsen – Nielsen Designs Inc.

face of the deep” (Abraham 4:2). The Hebrew of Genesis 1:2 uses highly technical vocabulary to describe this “formless void.” The earth at the time of creation, according to the Hebrew text, was *tōhū wā-bōhū*. The New Revised Standard Version quoted above offers a perfectly acceptable translation, while E. A. Speiser translates the phrase as “a formless waste.”²⁸ Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine argue that “a formless void” is an appropriate translation of this idiom,²⁹ and commentary provided by the *New Interpreter’s Bible* speaks of *tōhū wā-bōhū* as “something desolate and unproductive.”³⁰ Finally, Gordon J. Wenham suggests that “unproductive and uninhabited” is the underlying meaning of *tōhū wā-bōhū*.³¹ Regardless of the precise translation, *tōhū wā-bōhū* thus seems to be a description of chaos.

But what are we to understand in Genesis 1:1-3 and Abraham 4:1-2 by “the deep” (*tēhôm*) upon which “darkness” (*ōšek*) covered? Bendt Alster identifies *tēhôm* as “the primeval sea” that “denotes the cosmic sea on which the world rests.”³² Allen P. Ross concurs, noting that *tēhôm* “refers to the salty deep, the ocean, and thereby figuratively to the abyss . . . the primeval ocean.”³³ Fox simply designates *tēhôm* as “the primeval waters, a common (and usually divine) image in ancient Near Eastern mythology.”³⁴ This identification of *tēhôm* as primeval water is supported later in the verse, where we read that the spirit, or wind, of God (*rûa ʾēlōhîm*) swept over “the waters [*ha-māim*]” at the beginning of God’s creation.

To help us better understand the precise nature of *tēhôm*, we diverge briefly from the Hebrew Bible to examine an important cognate of *tēhôm* in the celebrated Babylonian creation myth and temple liturgy *Enuma Elish*. As Alster explains, *tēhôm* is related to the Akkadian Tiamat,³⁵ who in the *Enuma Elish* is an evil goddess conquered by the god Marduk and whose spoiled carcass becomes the primordial cosmic ocean at the creation of the world (4.125-46).³⁶ Since its discovery and translation in the late nineteenth century, scholars have recognized the shared cosmological conceptions between Genesis 1 and the *Enuma Elish*. Although a direct dependence between the two creation mythologies cannot be maintained, and several significantly different cosmological conceptualizations exist between the two myths,³⁷ it is apparent that the Israelites and Babylonians (as well as other surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures, for that matter) shared many commonalities in their

creation mythologies, including the depiction of deity overcoming chaos by bringing it into order through either a cosmic battle or divine fiat.³⁸

Also significant for Latter-day Saints is the *Enuma Elish's* depiction of the primeval theomachy in the council of the gods, wherein Tiamat and her evil host of warrior gods battle against Marduk for reign over the divine council and, ultimately, the cosmos (3-4.129).³⁹ The motif of a primeval theomachy in the divine council likewise appears in the Book of Abraham, in this instance between the premortal Jehovah and Satan over the agency of mankind (Abraham 3:22-28; compare Moses 4:1-4). Again, this is not to say that the Book of Abraham and the *Enuma Elish* are drawing directly on each other but rather to note the common presence of this motif in ancient Near Eastern creation mythology.⁴⁰

The Egyptians shared a similar cosmological outlook with their Semitic neighbors. For example, one important aspect of a number of Egyptian creation myths is the motif of primordial water from which the earth, or, more properly, a primeval hill or land-mass, springs out of. Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, for example, write about the “creator-god and solar deity” Atum (later Atum-Ré), who, in the creation mythology of Heliopolis, came into being by “rising up from Nun, the waters of chaos,” and thus became the “primeval mound.”⁴¹ Günter Burkard identifies Nun as the “primeval ocean,” whom he describes as being “chaotic, unorganized” and “preexisting.”⁴² Similar creation myths that involve the earth being

The Singhn. Courtesy of Wulf Barsch.



Amor Vincit Omnia. Courtesy of Wulf Barsch.

formed out of chaotic primeval water are also found at Memphis and Hermopolis, both associated with their respective deities.⁴³

But besides just conceptualizing creation from primordial matter, it is apparent that the Egyptians likewise conceived of creation as consisting of the establishment of order. James P. Allen writes about the importance of Maat in Egyptian cosmology as a “force of nature” that was “established at the creation.” Allen explains that Maat is “the natural order of the universe” that “on a cosmic level governed the proper functioning of the universe.” Maat should therefore be understood as “‘order,’ ‘justice’; and ‘truth.’” The opposite of Maat is *izft*, which represents chaos, disorder, or disharmony and is generated by unruly humans. These two forces are constantly at war with each other in Egyptian cosmology. It is the duty, particularly of the pharaoh, to preserve Maat in Egyptian society and thus keep chaos at bay. By doing so the pharaoh is imitating “the creator who established a balanced universe.”⁴⁴

What we therefore have in these mythologies is a conception of creation in which a deity fashions chaotic, watery mass into order. The conquering of chaos depicts the deity as the rightful, mighty king over his newly fashioned cosmos. This is true also for the biblical depiction of creation (which shouldn’t come as a surprise, given, as explained earlier, that Genesis shares cosmological conceptions

similar to those of other Near Eastern cultures).⁴⁵ Adele Berlin and Brettler, for example, have pointed out that Psalm 24:1-2, “a hymn celebrating God, creator and victor,” echoes the depiction in Genesis 1:1-3, wherein “God tamed the primeval waters and founded the earth upon them (Ps. 136.6); He is therefore to be acknowledged as the supreme sovereign of the world.”⁴⁶ Robert A. Oden Jr. indicates that the depiction of the “formless void” in Genesis 1 is that of “watery and dark undifferentiated matter” that “existed prior to the formation of a structured cosmos,”⁴⁷ and J. H. Hertz helpfully explains that Genesis 1:1-3 describes “the reduction of chaos to ordered arrangement.”⁴⁸ Along these lines, J. R. Porter comments that Genesis 1 follows the ancient Near Eastern depiction of a “deity’s victory over the forces of chaos, represented by threatening waters, as a result of which the god is established as a supreme king.”⁴⁹



The god Shu, supported by two Heh gods, separates his mother Nut, goddess of the sky, from Geb, the earth god, who reclines beneath. Book of the Dead of Anhai (ca. 1050 BC).

The Book of Abraham’s portrait of creation from primordial water is consistent with the Near Eastern myths we have seen above. The text speaks of “the deep” upon which darkness “reign[ed]” as “the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters” (Abraham 4:2).⁵⁰ Eventually we’re informed that “the Gods ordered, saying: Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the earth come up dry” out of them (Abraham 4:9). These waters from which the earth arises out of are the primeval waters that the Gods commanded

to be divided by placing “an expanse in the midst” of them (Abraham 4:6).

That the Gods in the Book of Abraham overcame a previously ruling chaos to establish their own dominion can be seen in the text’s usage of the word *reign* to describe the position of the chaotic darkness before the Gods fashioned the cosmos (Abraham 4:2). What is more, the Book of Abraham’s creation account portrays the Gods in much more regal terms than that of Genesis. Thus, we read of the Gods forcefully “ordering” this or that aspect of the cosmos, which obligingly “obey” when commanded (Abraham 4:7, 9-12, 18, 21, 25). The language in the Book of Abraham conjures the same imagery typical of the Near Eastern creation mythology we have reviewed—namely, that of kingly dominion establishing order over a previously chaotic cosmos.

“We Will Take of These Materials”: Creation *ex materia*

In close conjunction with the concept of God fashioning an ordered cosmos out of chaotic matter is the concept that God created the earth not *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing, but rather *ex materia*, or from preexisting matter.⁵¹ It is therefore not surprising that creation *ex materia* is present in the Genesis and Abraham accounts of creation. Unfailingly throughout Abraham 4 and 5 the verbs *organize* and *form* are used to describe the creative activity of the Gods. The presence of preexistent matter that the Gods form and organize is also apparent. “We will go down,” says God in the prologue to the Book of Abraham’s creation account, “for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [speaking of the preexistent intelligences] may dwell” (Abraham 3:24). Commenting on this verse, Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes explain, “The earth and its solar system were not created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, as traditional Christianity teaches, but from existing matter. . . . The elements that are the building blocks of the Creation have always existed.”⁵² Indeed, Speiser argues that, despite “the theological and philosophical implications” of Genesis 1 speaking of “coexistent matter,” “the text should be allowed to speak for itself.”⁵³

Of crucial importance is the verb used by God in the first verse of Genesis. The verb in Hebrew is *ḥārā*; it is highly unique, occurring only about fifty times

and being used only by God in the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁴ Although it is often rendered as “create” in various translations, another meaning of the word could also be to “form” or “fashion.”⁵⁵ John H. Walton writes that the verb *bārā* in Genesis 1:1 most likely means giving the aforementioned (see above) primordial chaos “a function or a role within an ordered cosmos.”⁵⁶ Walter Brueggemann similarly clarifies that the concept of creation in Genesis is that of “an ordering out of an already existing chaos.”⁵⁷ As Walton elaborates, concerning the concept of creation in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern thought,

something is brought into existence functionally, not necessarily materially; rarely would the statement concern the issue of matter. Indeed, the text never uses *bara'* in a context in which materials are mentioned. Thus instead of suggesting manufacture of matter out of nothing (as many have inferred in the past), that materials are not mentioned suggests that manufacture is not the issue.⁵⁸

Latter-day Saint scholar Kevin L. Barney explains that “the verb [*bārā*] seems to be used in the sense of shaping or fashioning.”⁵⁹ To illustrate, Walton compares God’s act of creating in Genesis 1:1 as that of a human creating a painting. “One can create a piece of art, but that expression does not suggest manufacture of the canvas or paint.”⁶⁰ In his monumental King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith insightfully compared the process of creation in Genesis 1:1 to that of building a ship.

Now, the word create came from the word *baurau* [*bārā*] which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory.⁶¹

Joseph’s views on this point are not far removed from those of biblical scholars such as Brettler, who indicates that the creation account in Genesis “does not describe creation out of nothing. . . . Primeval stuff already exists in [Genesis 1], and the text shows no concern for how it originated. Rather, it is a myth about how God alone structured primordial matter into a highly organized world.”⁶² Fox straightforwardly comments, “Gen. 1 describes God’s bringing order out of chaos, not creation from nothingness.”⁶³



Glory to God. © 2012, Hilary Onyon.

Barney similarly concludes that “the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is . . . nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible,” and “the historical evidence strongly favors Joseph Smith’s rejection of creation *ex nihilo* in his reading of Genesis 1:1.”⁶⁴

Thus, to read the concept of creation *ex nihilo* into the text of Genesis 1:1 is to wrest this account out of its primary ideological and historical context. Although Jewish and Christian theologians have gone to great pains to try to demonstrate the presence of creation *ex nihilo* in the biblical text, it simply does not exist.⁶⁵ In this regard, as in the previous two, the Book of Abraham’s description of creation from primordial matter is right at home in the ancient Near East.

“To Possess Greater Knowledge”: Conclusion

The Book of Abraham invites its readers to drink deeply from its doctrinally rich pages. The narrative itself opens with Abraham expressing his heartfelt longing to become a greater possessor of truth and righteousness (Abraham 1:1-3; cf. 2:12-13). But besides having a doctrinal richness, the Book of Abraham also has strong ties with ancient Near Eastern, including particularly biblical, cosmology. Although questions still remain regarding the precise manner in which Joseph produced the Book of Abraham, including its relationship to the Egyptian papyri he received in 1835,⁶⁶ and although questions remain as to how precisely Joseph’s study of Hebrew influenced his translation of the Book of Abraham,⁶⁷

there can be little doubt that the cosmological concepts in the Book of Abraham of the divine council, the conquering of chaos by the Gods, and creation from primordial matter fit nicely in the ancient world. ■



Stephen O. Smoot is an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University pursuing bachelor's degrees in ancient Near Eastern studies and German studies.

NOTES

1. Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whittaker, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Vol. 2: Assigned Histories, 1831-1847* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 86.
2. On the history of the Book of Abraham, see Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969); H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995); Kerry M. Muhlestein, "Prelude to the Pearl: Sweeping Events Leading to the Discovery of the Book of Abraham," in *Prelude to the Restoration: Apostasy to the Restored Church*, ed. Steven C. Harper et al. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 149-60; Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010), esp. 1-20.
3. Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 2000), 1-4.
4. For a sampling of LDS doctrinal commentaries on the Book of Abraham, see Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1951), passim; George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 238-367; Hyrum L. Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), passim; H. Donl Peterson, *The Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 232-94; Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 177-236, 246-82. Although these commentaries also cover historical and other aspects of the Book of Abraham, the major emphasis in each of these commentaries is coverage of doctrinal themes.
5. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 163-301; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2009), 375-468; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?" in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 119-36; John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 63-98; John Gee and Kerry Muhlestein, "An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/2 (2011): 70-77; John Gee, "Abraham and Idrimi," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/1 (2013): 34-39.
6. John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001); John Gee, "An Egyptian View of Abraham," in *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner, D. Morgan Davis, and Carl Griffin (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011), 137-56; Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, passim.
7. John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, "'And I Saw the Stars': The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1-16; Michael D. Rhodes and J. Ward Moody, "Astronomy and Creation in the Book of Abraham," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, 17-36; Kerry M. Muhlestein, "Encircling Astronomy and the Egyptians: An Approach to Abraham 3," *Religious Educator* 10/1 (2009): 33-50.
8. Stephen A. Geller, "The Religion of the Bible," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2027-28. For other investigations into this subject, see generally Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 35/1 (1964): 22-47. For an important Latter-day Saint commentary on the divine council, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Ye Are Gods: Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, Donald W. Parry, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 471-594.
9. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 6:307-8. See also Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: BYU Reli-

- gious Studies Center, 1980), 341, 345, 351, 358.
10. See Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18/1 (2008): 2-4, and also 19-20. Heiser is not alone in recognizing the divine council in Psalm 82. Rebecca Lesses indicates, "The divine council also appears in Ps. 82.1, where its members are called 'gods.'" See Rebecca Lesses, "Divine Beings," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 544.
 11. It must be remembered that both *ēlohîm* or *ēl* could be used as either a noun or an abstraction. This can, at times, confound readers as to which sense (nominal or abstract) is being used in a given passage. When no grammatical clues are present, the key is usually to rely on the context of the passage to govern the translation. For reasons too complex to relate here, I concur with the NRSV that "divine council" is perhaps the most fitting translation of *ādat ēl*. Still, regardless of whether one translates *ādat ēl* as "divine council" or "council of God," the meaning of the psalm is not substantially altered.
 12. J. R. Dummelow's popular, though outdated, biblical commentary offers the "plurality of majesty" or "royal we" explanation as one possibility for explaining the plurals of Genesis 1:16-27. See *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, ed. J. R. Dummelow (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 5. Stated briefly, the idea is that monarchs have been known in some instances to speak in the plural when referring to themselves, as a sign of excellence or nobility, and that this can account for the plural in the text. This explanation has been popular for some time among Christians and Jews, as well as among Latter-day Saints. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 38.
 13. David M. Carr, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.
 14. Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 15.
 15. Jon D. Levenson, "Genesis," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 14.
 16. Ronald Hendel, "Genesis," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 6.
 17. Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42-43.
 18. Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76/1 (2009): 22-23.
 19. Although not present in the Masoretic Text, due undoubtedly to scribal mangling, the Qumran manuscripts *4QDeut¹* and *4QDeut⁹* offer variant readings of these two passages in Deuteronomy 32 that unmistakably show the presence of the divine council. See Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999), 191-93. For commentary, see Carmel McCarthy, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Deuteronomy* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 140-41, 152-53.
 20. The Book of Abraham's "noble and great ones" call to mind the Anunnaki of Mesopotamian religion, whom Jean Bottéro identifies as "the most powerful, the most eminent, and, in some ways, the upper class or 'chiefs' of the other [gods]." Jean Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 55.
 21. David E. Bokovoy, "'Ye Really Are Gods': A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 272-73.
 22. Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 17-19; E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chino, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 194-96, 203, 238, 242-43; F. Lelli, "Stars," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons of the Bible*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Peter Willem van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1530-40; Muhlestein, "Encircling Astronomy," 36.
 23. The same language is used in Genesis 11:7, where, after seeing the unfavorable conditions of humans operating with one language, Yahweh instructs his host: "Come, let us go down, and confuse their language." As Levenson, "Genesis," 29, indicates, "As in [Genesis] 1:26, the plural (*let us*) probably reflects an address to the divine council."
 24. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, eds. and comps., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, rep. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), s.v. "sôd." See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), s.v. "sôd." For commentary, see David E. Bokovoy, "Invoking the Council as Witnesses in Amos 3:13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127/1 (2008): 37-51.
 25. For an extensive discussion of *sôd*, see Heinz-Josef Fabry, "sôd," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986), 5:775-782. See also the discussion of *sôd* in Bokovoy, "'Ye Really Are Gods,'" 299-303; S. B. Parker, "Council," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons of the Bible*, 392-98.
 26. There is also the theory that Joseph is the inspired author of a pseudopigraphical Book of Abraham composed in English in the nineteenth century. See, for example, Karl C. Sanberg, "Knowing Brother Joseph Again: The Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith as Translator," *Dialogue* 22/4 (1989): 17-37. Sanberg's argument is essentially that the Book of Abraham's contents are derived from Joseph's inspired, prophetic interaction with contemporary environmental sources (e.g., his study of Hebrew with Joshua Seixas, and his exposure to the writings of Flavius Josephus). It is not within the scope of this paper to scrutinize this or other theories of the Book of Abraham's translation.
 27. Bokovoy, "'Ye Really Are Gods,'" 276-79.
 28. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 5.
 29. Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and the Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011), 200.
 30. Neil M. Alexander, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:342.
 31. Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed.

- James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 38.
32. Bendt Alster, "Tiamat," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons of the Bible*, 1634.
 33. Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exploration of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 107.
 34. Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 13.
 35. Alster, "Tiamat," 1634. Victor P. Hamilton simply calls *têhôm* the "Hebraized form" of Tiamat. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 110. Knight and Levine agree, observing that "the Hebrew word for 'deep' is *tehom*, a linguistic cognate to Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess of the salt seas. She represents the great abyss, the endless seas around and under the earth." See Knight and Levine, *Meaning of the Bible*, 201. See also the insightful comments by Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5-9, where he discusses both the divine council in Genesis as well as the relationship between *têhôm* and Tiamat.
 36. For a translation, see Benjamin R. Foster, "Enuma Elish," in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:398.
 37. For instance, *têhôm* is nowhere personified as being evil in Genesis 1, whereas Tiamat is consistently portrayed as such throughout the *Enuma Elish*.
 38. For some treatments on the relationship between Genesis 1 and the *Enuma Elish*, see Speiser, *Genesis*, 9-11 (where he shows that creation from preexisting matter takes place in the same order in both Genesis 1 and *Enuma Elish*); Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 109-11; J. Edward Wright, "Cosmogony, Cosmology," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006), 1:756-60; W. G. Lambert, "Enuma Elish," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:526-28; Bruce Chilton et al., eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 56-57.
 39. Foster, "Enuma Elish," 395-98.
 40. For a Latter-day Saint view on this subject, see Stephen D. Ricks, "Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 118-25; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan J. Head, "The Investiture Panel at Mari and Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 4 (2012): 11-16.
 41. Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: The British Museum, 1995), 45. The worship of Atum, "the primeval god who evolved from Chaos," is very old, as seen in three utterances in the Pyramid Texts (Utterance 527, 587, and 600) describing his virility and creative power and invoking him, along with the other members of the Ennead of Òn (Heliopolis), to protect the king and his pyramid. In Utterance 587 Atum is praised as being "high in this your name of 'Height,'" while in Utterance 600 Atum is said to have "[become] high on the height, [and risen] up as the *bnbn*-stone in the Mansion of the 'Phoenix' in Òn." See Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 198, 238, 246-47. The creation myth involving Atum is also recorded, with some variation, in the Coffin Texts. See Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts: Volume 1, Spells 1-354* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1973), esp. 80-87. On the *bnbn*-stone as the primeval hillock, see Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1952), 71, 594; Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 99, 212; Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 50-52.
 42. Günter Burkard, "Vorstellungen vom Kosmos—Die Weltgebäude," in *Ägypten: Die Welt der Pharaonen*, ed. Regine Schulz and Matthias Seidel (Germany: Könnemann, 1997), 447, translation mine. See also James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130. Burkard, "Vorstellungen vom Kosmos," 449, likewise points to the importance of the Egyptian temple as a "microcosm" recapturing this creation mythology. That Latter-day Saint temples also recapture cosmic mythology in both ritual and architecture, drawn, in large part, from the Book of Abraham, is not surprising. See Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), passim; Nibley, "The Meaning of the Temple," in *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 1-41; Nibley, "Abraham's Creation Drama," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1-42; Matthew B. Brown and Paul Thomas Smith, *Symbols in Stone: Symbolism of the Early Temples of the Restoration* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1997), 97-102; Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven: Insights on the Doctrines and Symbols of the Temple* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999), esp. 1-55.
 43. Shaw and Nicholson, *Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, 206-7, 210, 229, 283.
 44. Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, 119-21. See also Jan Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 11-12. Assmann, *Of God and Gods*, cites an Egyptian text that speaks of "the sun god and creator, Re, [who] has placed the king on earth for ever and ever, in order that he may judge mankind and satisfy the gods, establish Ma'at and annihilate Isfet."
 45. "There is no doubt that the text [of Genesis] utilizes older materials. It reflects creation stories and cosmologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia. However, the text before us transforms these older materials to serve a quite new purpose, a purpose most intimately related to Israel's covenantal experience." Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 24, emphasis in original. J. J. M. Roberts similarly observes, "The closest parallels to the Israelite cosmogonic myth come from the Baal Epic at Ugarit—though the preserved Ugaritic texts do not explicitly tie Baal's defeat of the sea dragon to creation—but there are

- also Egyptian and Hittite texts of a similar character.” J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 51.
46. Berlin and Brettler, “Psalms,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1308, also 1434. See also Psalm 24:1-2.
 47. Robert A. Oden Jr., “Cosmogony, Cosmology,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1166.
 48. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino, 1981), 2.
 49. J. R. Porter, “Creation,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 140. Incidentally, scholars have argued for this reading of the creation myth in Genesis since at least the turn of the last century. “Das irdische All ist also aus einer chaotischen Urflut hervorgegangen. Die Lehre vom chaotischen Urwasser fanden wir in sämtlichen Kosmogonien des altorientalischen Völkerkreises.” Alfred Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 36.
 50. Given what I’ve noted earlier (see n. 11), perhaps we could understand the “Spirit of the Gods” to mean “divine spirit.”
 51. It should be remembered that the term *preexist* or *preexistence* (from the Latin *ex* “out” + *sistere* “take a stand”) means “pre-placement,” not necessarily “pre-being.”
 52. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary*, 178-79, and also 280.
 53. Speiser, *Genesis*, 13.
 54. Although I take exception with the interpretation of the theological significance of *bārā*, a good discussion of this verb is found in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), s.v. “*bārā*.” See also John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 1:75-83, esp. 77-79; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 36-45, esp. 40-41.
 55. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. “*bārā*,” Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “*bārā*.”
 56. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 181.
 57. Brueggeman, *Genesis*, 29.
 58. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 183. Walton has elsewhere written: “Ancient traditions do not typically begin with nothing. Instead, they start with a condition devoid of order, function or purpose. Creation then takes place by giving things order, function, and purpose, which is synonymous with giving them existence. . . . Instead of suggesting manufacture of matter out of nothing (as many have inferred in the past) . . . *bārā* concerns bringing heaven and earth into existence by focusing on operation through organization and assignment of roles and functions. . . . Perhaps an English verb that captures this idea less ambiguously is ‘to design.’” John H. Walton, “Creation,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 156, 162.
 59. Kevin Barney, “Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith’s Understanding of Genesis 1:1,” *BYU Studies* 39/3 (2000): 108. Walter Brueggemann has investigated some of the creative verbs used in conjunction with *bārā* elsewhere. See Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1997), 146-53.
 60. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 183.
 61. *History of the Church*, 6:309. Compare Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 341, 345, 351, 359, 361.
 62. Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, 41.
 63. Fox, *Five Books of Moses*, 13.
 64. Barney, “Examining Six Key Concepts,” 110, 112.
 65. See Blake T. Ostler, “Out of Nothing: A History of Creation *ex Nihilo* in Early Christian Thought,” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 253-320; Stephen D. Ricks, “Ancient Views of Creation and the Doctrine of Creation *Ex Nihilo*,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 319-37.
 66. For some helpful sources on this subject, see generally John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, esp. 1-30, 51-62; Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2011), 217-243; Brian M. Hauglid, “Thoughts on the Book of Abraham,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper*, 245-58.
 67. I am aware of the discussion of how Joseph’s study of Hebrew influenced the production of the Book of Abraham and am currently conducting my own research on the subject. That an influence exists is beyond question. For reasons too complex to discuss here, I am, however, hesitant to attribute too much of an influence to Joseph’s study of Hebrew beyond the transliteration and translation of some select phrases and words. I am highly doubtful that Joseph’s study of Hebrew alone would have vouchsafed the complex cosmological details discussed in this paper. Of course, one’s assumptions about the translation of the Book of Abraham (i.e., whether one believes Joseph translated an actual ancient text or composed the text by revelation) will in large part determine how one assesses the evidence.