



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 18 | Number 2

Article 8

2006

Approaching Understandings in the Book of Abraham

Kerry Muhlestein

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Muhlestein, Kerry (2006) "Approaching Understandings in the Book of Abraham," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 18 : No. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol18/iss2/8>

This Scriptural Studies is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Approaching Understandings in the Book of Abraham

Author(s) Kerry Muhlestein

Reference *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 229-46.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Review of *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant* (2005), edited by John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid.

APPROACHING UNDERSTANDINGS IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Kerry Muhlestein

The Book of Abraham is replete with important and rich doctrines for Latter-day Saints.¹ The existence of papyri connected with the Book of Abraham furthers interest in this volume of scripture. While much research has been conducted into the doctrines and also the origins of the Book of Abraham, clearly much more remains to be done. As the third title in the Studies in the Book of Abraham series, this volume provides the reader with an abundance of research in the three crucial themes from which its name derives: astronomy, papyrus, and covenant. It has been dedicated to the memory of David Elliot, a graduate student in Egyptology at the University of Pennsylvania whose paper was intended for the volume but was not completed before his untimely death. All but three of the articles were presented in a conference at Brigham Young University.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the book is the juxtaposition of articles whose conclusions or methodologies do not agree with one another. The editors have done this intentionally (p. viii), which

1. See John Gee, "The Role of the Book of Abraham in the Restoration" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997).

Review of John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid, eds. *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005. x + 209 pp., with citation and subject indexes. \$49.95.

demonstrates that well-thought-out but divergent arguments and conclusions can be advanced by scholars within the same framework of faith. In addition, it offers the reader an opportunity to observe and evaluate the differences between varying assumptions and methodologies. This exercise is valuable for scholar and layman alike.

The volume starts out with just such a juxtaposition. In the first chapter John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson outline their view that Abraham's conception of astronomy was geocentric. They note that Joseph Smith described the Abraham papyri as including "the principles of astronomy *as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients*" (p. 2). The authors then demonstrate that the ancients from Abraham's time viewed the universe geocentrically. As Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson have pointed out, adopting their position does dismiss some criticisms of the Book of Abraham (p. 2).² Many of their arguments are convincing. However, some of the evidences they produce, such as the scriptural text citing that God *descends* to the earth (p. 8), fit in nicely with their stance but do not dictate a geocentric perspective.

Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson's article is followed by a discussion of creation by Michael D. Rhodes and J. Ward Moody, wherein they use their training in physics and astronomy, as well as in Egyptology, to argue for an Abrahamic orientation that fits better with a modern astronomical understanding.³ They are explicit about their faith-based assumptions (pp. 17–18) and discuss such issues as the amount of time involved in the creation (p. 25), the age of the earth (pp. 25–26), and the possibility of death before the fall (pp. 26–28). They also compare scriptural creation accounts to a modern astronomical view of creation. While admitting to geocentric elements in the account (p. 22), Rhodes and Moody set out an argument that at least some of

2. See Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Joseph Smith's Scriptural Cosmology," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 218–19 n. 78; and as cited by the authors.

3. Portions of this article also appear in modified form in a recent commentary. See 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).

the scriptural text indicates a Kolob-centric viewpoint (as opposed to geocentric).

What neither of these articles discusses is the possibility that God was not showing Abraham a post-Einsteinian concept of the cosmos, or a helio- or geocentric view. Instead, he could have been explaining astronomy from an altogether different paradigm that we do not yet understand. Perhaps even more likely, the Lord may have been describing astronomy allegorically, not as an attempt to show the heavens from any particular standpoint, but in a manner that allowed him to teach doctrinal principles. After all, the Lord told Abraham that he was being shown these things so he could teach them in Egypt (Abraham 3:15). Not only does it seem that the Lord would be more concerned with teaching the Egyptians doctrine than astronomy, but the astronomical discussions are continually couched in descriptions of how they symbolize the things of God (see Abraham 3:14, 16–22).

In any case, the varying viewpoints discussed in these chapters indicate that the complexity of the vision of the heavens recorded in the Book of Abraham is not only deserving of the able and excellent treatment these two essays provide, but also of much more study. Clearly, several layers of interpretation can be gleaned from Abraham's text.

I would also like to compare the article by E. Douglas Clark to those by Jared W. Ludlow and by Brian M. Hauglid (whose essay appears later in the book). Clark draws upon the images of stars and cedars, averring that they are royal symbols and that Abraham fits the symbols better than Pharaoh because Abraham possesses the royal priesthood while Pharaoh's royalty is wholly man-made. Clark is correct in this conclusion about Abraham's real royalty; he ably highlights Abraham's pivotal role in God's covenant process with his children (pp. 38–39). This should lead the reader to reflect on Abraham as a person and his position in the covenant. These are all very valuable contributions.

However, there are also some problems with this article. While Clark musters a convincing picture of royal imagery being associated with the stars, not all of the star imagery drawn upon (see p. 53) is valid for all of Egyptian history (we have little evidence from the

time period of Abraham). He is less successful with the cedar imagery, which is not as strongly tied to Egyptian kingship as the article suggests (see pp. 38–39 and 52), or at least we do not presently have the evidence for it. The problem of evidence segues into the most persistent flaw in this thought-provoking article: the consistent use of extracanonical material without providing any apparent methodology of how that material was selected. Why were some nonscriptural texts chosen as representing authentic events without any discussion of the possibility that these texts may not accurately portray events in Abraham's life?⁴ We do not know the degree to which events described in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, *Jubilees*, the *Legends of the Jews*, or other texts that Clark cites, reflect reality. Undoubtedly many of the events they mention did not occur. While it is one thing to cite these ancient sources as examples of ancient traditions that parallel accounts Joseph Smith gave us, it is quite another to treat the stories they share as factual events with no discussion about their authenticity (see pp. 45, 47, 49, 52, and 54 for examples). Unfortunately, Clark's discussion is also marred by a nonchronological use of Egyptian sources.

However, both Ludlow and Hauglid explicitly tackle the issue of using extrascriptural sources. Ludlow examines Abraham's vision of the heavens and compares it to other ancient sources, seeking both to identify valid parallel traditions and to establish a methodology in comparing them. He specifies that such comparisons must be evaluated with at least three things in mind: (1) the similarity of context and time period of the traditions; (2) the possible dependency of each text upon the other; and (3) the purpose for the author's use of the tradition (p. 58). Stringently using these criteria and explicitly addressing the issues of extracanonical accounts, Ludlow demonstrates that traditions of Abraham seeing the heavens that are similar to the account found in the Book of Abraham are abundant in ancient sources.

Ludlow also asks the right question: are these sources fabrications that happen to support a Latter-day Saint point of view, or are they corrupted echoes of an original truth (pp. 69–70)? This is a question that

4. For a discussion on this topic, see C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986).

LDS scholars must ask because of a strong temptation to recognize support for our views regardless of proper methodology. We are on much better footing with few but strong supports rather than having our work linked to additional weak parallels. Ludlow's methodology and manner of questioning should be employed by other LDS scholars. He addresses the narrow textual context of the sources he employs, as well as the broader context, by looking at time, provenance, genre, and language. Ludlow concludes that it is neither likely that all the ancient sources he draws upon were dependent on each other nor probable that they came from a single source; instead, these traditions stemmed from a broad understanding in the ancient world that Abraham had seen the heavens and that he understood and taught astronomy (p. 71). Of this type of evidence, Ludlow concludes that while testimony must come from spiritual conversion, parallels "can be a nudging confirmation as we walk down the path of faith" (p. 73).

Similarly, Hauglid's article is devoted to understanding how and why Muslim apocryphal traditions developed, thus enabling us to better use and evaluate these sources. Hauglid is appropriately respectful of the Muslim point of view; he notes that "Muslims do not consider that the Qur'an is in any way a part of the apocryphal tradition but as the word of God incarnate revealed directly to Muhammad through Gabriel" (p. 133). Not only does Hauglid describe the development of Muslim extracanonical traditions, but he also addresses the important issue of how much would have been available in Joseph Smith's day.

One section of this article is somewhat puzzling, though. Hauglid states that Muslim tradition was created to bolster the message of Muhammad and Islam, thus making any similarities to the Book of Abraham purely unintentional. "Thus, when supportive evidence is encountered in Muslim tradition, it gives that much more force to the uniquely ancient character of the Book of Abraham" (p. 137). I fail to see how this is so. When Muslim traditions that agree with the Book of Abraham draw from sources more ancient than themselves, this does lend support to the Abrahamic account coming from an ancient tradition. But anything that was created whole cloth in an effort to support Muhammad would be late enough that it would reveal nothing at

all about the ancient character of the Book of Abraham. These would be the kinds of fabrications Ludlow asked about, as opposed to the ancient traditions to which he compared them. It is in drawing on ancient tradition that we find evidence, not from the creation of new traditions. However, Hauglid does demonstrate how these new traditions can be valuable.

Hauglid notes that ancient Jewish sources held that Abraham had fought against idolatry while living with his father and that this led to his life being endangered (p. 142). He also outlines a Muslim tradition to this same effect, with some slight variations. While we do not know if the latter text is dependent on the former, the two together lend credence to the idea that there was an ancient tradition similar to the text found in the Book of Abraham. He firms this up by creating a table that shows how much of the material in Abraham 2 is supported by Muslim tradition, whether or not it is mentioned in the biblical account (pp. 144–46). Together Ludlow and Hauglid explain how to use ancient sources and demonstrate this correct use with examples. This makes their contributions to the volume valuable on a number of levels.

In a very short article Richard D. Draper addresses an issue that many teachers encounter as they engage their students in the study of various creation accounts. Draper ably outlines the nuances of the literality and symbolism interlaced in creation accounts. He points out that men such as Parley P. Pratt and Brigham Young spoke of the symbolic nature of the description of the creation of humankind, and he investigates the question of whether or not they got this idea from Joseph Smith. Draper suggests that they did not and cites many of Joseph's teachings about the creation, noting that he does not mention anything about the biblical explanation being symbolic.

Draper's arguments are largely convincing. Some questions, however, remain. Draper notes that, in two sermons in which Joseph discussed the creation, he specifically employed the language of Genesis. While this might indicate that Joseph took these accounts literally, it is also possible that he was just using scriptural language, as he was prone to do, and saying nothing at all about the literality of the account.

Draper discusses yet another sermon, the King Follett discourse, averring that when Joseph used scriptural language in that discourse it supports his literal interpretation of that language. However, Joseph's point in this section of the Follett discourse was the eternal nature of spirit, not how Adam's physical body was created. We are probably safer in saying of the King Follett discourse, and of his other sermons, that Joseph did not say anything that indicated he did not accept a literal interpretation of the biblical account of man's creation. He did not address the subject specifically, and we do not know everything he said to other church leaders; thus, as far as we know, Draper's position that Brigham Young and Parley P. Pratt did not get their ideas about the creation of mankind from Joseph seems to be true. However, we can neither prove nor disprove it.

In a further effort to ascertain the degree of literality within the account of the creation of mankind, Draper appeals to the Abrahamic account. This is appropriate. Since the Abrahamic narrative predates that of the Genesis and Moses accounts and, furthermore, because this text presents a unique viewpoint of creation, the Abrahamic creation pericope is more likely to vary from the Genesis and Moses accounts than they are from each other. Draper demonstrates that the Abrahamic account squares with the biblical account, lending further credence to his argument for the literality of the text. He concludes that the scriptural language as it stands is the creation account God wants us to have. Regardless of whether it is symbolic or literal, it is the story of creation as God has given it to us.

Peter C. Nadig's paper is crucial for those who want to understand how the writings of Abraham eventually arrived in Ptolemaic (or perhaps Roman) Egypt.⁵ The first step must be to understand the time

5. See Marc Coenen, "The Dating of the Papyri Joseph Smith I, X and XI and Min Who Massacres His Enemies," in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years, Part II. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors, and Harco Willems (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 1103–15; Robert K. Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 99; Marc Coenen, "Horus, Prophet of Min Who Massacres His Enemies," *Chronique d'Égypte* 74/148 (1999): 257–59; John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 25–27; Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 5–10; and Jan Quaegebeur, "Books of Thoth

and place in general and the role of Jews within that community in particular. Nadig's piece does precisely this. While noting the limitations in available sources, he outlines briefly some of the key historical events of Ptolemaic Egypt, especially as these events involved the status of Jews within Egypt. He outlines shifts in the status of and attitude toward Jews, noting the upturn in social status that Jews gained in the Ptolemaic realm just before the earliest assigned date of the papyri. This information is crucial in any attempt to piece together the history of the papyri.

In the introduction to his article on Facsimile 3 and Book of the Dead 125, John Gee makes an understatement when he says that little has been done in the way of scholarly treatment of Facsimile 3 (p. 95). This is also true when he says that Egyptological work remains to be done on similar scenes. It is surprising how much we still do not understand about this type of scene. Of the few things that have been written of Facsimile 3, it is astonishing how many are wrong. Gee takes the logical first step in correcting this error. His article is intentionally limited in scope, discussing what has typically been said of the facsimile from an Egyptological standpoint and how those things are wrong. Succinctly put, the article demonstrates what Facsimile 3 is not. Before we can start doing things right in regard to this representation, we must stop doing things wrong.

Gee demonstrates that the vignette of the judgment scene (something different from textual references to judgment) was first associated with Book of the Dead chapter 30B and later with chapter 125, significantly noting that vignettes could be applied to more than one text and thus to more than one concept (pp. 98–99).⁶ He also shows that while many have called Facsimile 3 a typical Egyptian judgment

Belonging to Owners of Portraits? On Dating Late Hieratic Funerary Papyri," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. Morris L. Bierbrier (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1997), 74. While Nibley and Ritner prefer the later Roman period date, the earlier date espoused by Gee, Quaegebeur, and Coenen is most likely correct.

6. On the topic of vignettes and accompanying texts containing incongruities, see Valérie Angenot, "Discordance entre texte et image: Deux exemples de l'Antique et du Nouvel Empire," *Göttinger Miszellen* 187 (2002): 11–21.

scene,⁷ it most decidedly is not a typical judgment scene. Virtually none of the elements typical of the judgment scene are present. Instead, Facsimile 3 seems to be what I prefer to call a presentation scene, wherein one is presented to a god or another important figure. While variations of this scene are often associated with the judgment scene, they also exist in contexts having nothing to do with judgment.

What remains to be done is to analyze more carefully exactly what this scene means Egyptologically, which is quite separate from what it may mean in the context of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Both John Gee and I are engaged in such analyses. Gee has already presented much of his work in a scholarly conference, the publication of which is forthcoming.⁸

Gee concludes with examples of vignettes associated with the Book of Breathing's juxtaposed with Facsimile 3, highlighting the differences between the two. He also includes a very helpful table outlining documents associated with the judgment scene, noting which are securely dated and including information as to the date of the text, its various elements, and the sequence. This table will be a valuable tool for those who aim to further this research. Gee's discussion of the elements comprising a judgment scene would be slightly enhanced if it included the prose description of judgment provided in the Demotic tale of Setne Khamwas (II), especially since this stems from the same era as the Joseph Smith Papyri.⁹ While such an inclusion would provide further evidence and an even more rounded understanding of the topic, the conclusions reached would not be altered by the consideration of this text.

Kevin L. Barney examines a crucial and oft-ignored possibility concerning the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham. He argues that the facsimiles may well have a Semitic interpretation quite separate from what the ancient Egyptians may have seen in these vignettes, and he

7. See Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992), 108.

8. John Gee, "A New Look at the *n p by* Formula," presented at the IX^e Congrès International des Études Démotiques, Paris, France, 31 August–3 September 2005.

9. Translation available in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume III: The Late Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 140.

provides parallels. Coupled with Nadig's article, Barney's piece gives us a clearer understanding of the sociohistorical context from which the papyri stem. (What remains to be done, and Nadig is very capable of doing this, is a description of the intellectual and cross-cultural sharing of the time period.)

Barney sets out the possibility that the Book of Abraham had at least one Jewish redactor, whom he dubs J-red. He outlines five key false assumptions used by critics of the church that his Jewish redaction theory would dismiss (p. 111). He finds several convincing parallel cases in which Semites clearly used Egyptian elements but gave them a uniquely Israelite/Jewish interpretation. One of his more convincing bits of evidence is based on similarities between the *Testament of Abraham* and the Egyptian psychostasy. While scholars have long assumed that there were parallels between the scene described in the *Testament of Abraham* and the typical Egyptian judgment scene, until recently no one has done a thorough investigation into these similarities to put the assumption on a sure scholarly foundation. However, Jared Ludlow presented his investigation at an academic Egyptological conference held at BYU-Hawaii in February 2006,¹⁰ concluding that the assumption is indeed correct and that the parallels are real. This study makes Barney's example all the more forceful.

It should be noted that Barney argues that J-red adapts/adopts vignettes from the Book of Breathings for a Jewish use, but Facsimile 1 is not typical of the Book of Breathings (at least no parallels have been found). This does not diminish his argument; the hypothetical J-red could have provided a Jewish adaptation to this scene whatever its original context. Undoubtedly each culture will assign its own understanding to any visual representation. Barney demonstrates that there are Semitic contexts and interpretations for Egyptian motifs that are valid in addition to their Egyptian context. This could be the case with the Book of Abraham facsimiles. Barney's Semitic adaptation theory

10. Jared Ludlow, "Reinterpretation of the Judgment Scene in the *Testament of Abraham*," presented at the Evolving Egypt: Innovation, Appropriation, and Reinterpretation Conference held at BYU-Hawaii, February 2006.

has many strengths, but we cannot know for sure if it represents what actually happened.

The various times Abraham and his descendants moved in and out of the Egyptian realm provided many opportunities for reinterpretations and adaptations of each other's cultural elements. Abraham's text, and its ensuing copies, could have moved to and from Egypt a number of times and could have been handled by numerous types of people. Besides the possibility of a Jewish reinterpretation of an Egyptian motif, we should be cognizant of the possibility of an Egyptian redrawing of Jewish documents and representations. Could there have been a J-red and an E-red? Could E-red have seen a Jewish drawing and recopied it on papyrus using artistic elements and scenes with which he was most comfortable? (Most artists draw using their own cultural artistic conventions, regardless of the original representations; hence we have Latter-day Saint depictions of Abraham's sacrifice that are very different from Facsimile 1, and Renaissance portraits of biblical figures in European styles.) While the J-red hypothesis is valuable and attractive, we must acknowledge that the possible twists in the story of how Abraham's book arrived in its present form are dizzying. Still, careful analyses such as that done by Barney will open up new avenues for further research, and we will slowly inch toward a more accurate picture.

Janet Hovorka sheds light on the overlooked part that the wives of Abraham played in the covenant. Hovorka asks important questions about Sarah and Hagar (p. 147). She examines aspects of covenants in general and the Abrahamic covenant in particular, attempting to elucidate evidence for the participation of both these women in the covenant. Her piece should lead readers to reflect on what these women went through and their contribution to scriptural history and covenant blessings, an important yet understudied topic. The evidence is sparse, and though her article is thought provoking, Hovorka often stretches the sources further than they can safely go. These flaws undermine much of the article. While Sarah and Hagar may have played larger roles than we have typically given them credit for, I do not think we do them or modern-day readers any favors by attempting to reconstruct

what we believe must have been the case from evidence that does not support the conclusions.

In order to properly address the topic, Hovorka first defines a covenant and identifies the aspects we should expect to find if Sarah and Hagar were active participants in the covenant, such as covenantal stipulations, covenantal blessings, and covenantal tokens or signs. She applies the typical biblical definition of the Abrahamic covenant, leaving out the important aspects of the priesthood and sharing the gospel that are a major part of the covenant passages in the restoration scriptures (pp. 150–51).¹¹ She then sets out to demonstrate that Sarah was part of the covenant, something that appeals to Latter-day Saints since we associate the Abrahamic covenant with the marriage covenant. She is correct in pointing out that Sarah has not received enough attention and amply outlines Sarah’s ability to be obedient to all that the Lord asked. She thus concludes that Sarah was part of the covenant. While I agree that Sarah was part of the covenant, I am not convinced that demonstrating her obedience necessarily proves that.

As part of the discussion of Sarah and covenantal blessings, Hovorka espouses an idea that others have had—namely, that Sarah may have been bereft of children because she may have occupied the role of a celibate priestess in Mesopotamia before becoming converted to Jehovah. While the argument is possible, it is unconvincing. After all, Sarah herself says that the Lord had restrained her from bearing children (Genesis 16:2); it seems unlikely that the Lord’s mechanism of restraint would be her pagan service as a Mesopotamian priestess.

In concluding her discussion of Sarah’s part in the covenant blessings, Hovorka notes that Abraham was told by the Lord to follow her counsel and that Peter and Paul both held her up as an example for women to follow. “Thus, Sarah received the same blessings as

11. For more on the Abrahamic covenant, see S. Michael Wilcox, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” in *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, ed. Richard D. Draper (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 271–80; Ellis T. Rasmussen, “Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:9–10; and Bruce R. McConkie, “The Promises Made to the Fathers,” in *The Old Testament: Genesis to 2 Samuel; Studies in Scripture*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 47–62.

Abraham” (p. 156). This is a non sequitur. Certainly Sarah was part of the covenant and received the blessings of posterity and so forth, but this is not necessarily a conclusion drawn from her obedience and good example.

Hovorka is correct in pointing out that Sarah’s name change (from Sarai) is a sign of covenant (p. 156). But she then attempts to demonstrate that Sarah’s laughing upon hearing the news that she would bear a child was a laugh of rejoicing. I fail to see what this has to do with covenant tokens (though it is a topic worth addressing), and the evidence does not seem to support the claim. Hovorka proposes that the word translated as “laugh” should be read as “rejoiced” but fails to investigate how the word is usually used in the Hebrew Bible. My own preliminary investigation indicates that “rejoiced” is a less common usage. Furthermore, when confronted by heavenly messengers who construed her laugh as a sign of doubt, Sarah denied that she had laughed (Genesis 18:15), something one is unlikely to do if the laugh had been one of rejoicing.

In taking on the more difficult task of establishing Hagar inside the covenant, Hovorka acknowledges the difficulty arising from lack of source material (p. 157). Hovorka is right in her assertion that Hagar and Ishmael were in a covenantal relationship with the Lord (p. 158), and the scriptural text supports this view (Genesis 16:10–13). However, whatever Hagar and Ishmael’s covenant is, it is not the full Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:21). Additionally, Hovorka avers that a promised land is part of the covenant with Ishmael and Hagar (pp. 158, 160). This concept is not to be found in the canonical text, and Hovorka’s idea that the separation of Ishmael from Isaac occurred so that each could have his own land does not mean that Ishmael was assured land. Hovorka also suggests that perhaps Hagar’s name was changed to Keturah, who is listed as one of Abraham’s later wives (p. 161). However, since the Midianites are descended of Keturah, and Jethro the Midianite held the priesthood, it seems unlikely that his ancestress was in fact Hagar, an Egyptian. Still, there is no doubt that Hagar and Ishmael participated in a covenant with the Lord. Hovorka’s article serves as a reminder of the importance of covenants in general,

of the Abrahamic covenant specifically, and of the crucial and overlooked role that Sarah and Hagar played in the establishment of the covenant. Unfortunately, much of the evidence mustered is weak.

In her article on Abraham and redemption, Jennifer Lane continues her important work on understanding redemption phraseology, legality, and symbolism in various scriptural texts. In this series of investigations she has unveiled new meanings for many aspects of the Old Testament,¹² New Testament,¹³ and Book of Mormon.¹⁴ Her scholarship in this area has revolutionized what we can learn from many scriptural passages.¹⁵ Lane insightfully identifies Abraham 1:2 as a description of Abraham's search for redemption. She also outlines how redemption was available through family relationships and how the covenant with Abraham created a family relationship between him and Jehovah, making redemption possible. Through Abraham's faith and his participation in the covenant, redemption is extended to Abraham. In this article Lane provides a case study that elucidates the general principles she has discussed previously.

My only suggestion would be a change in language, or emphasis. Lane consistently uses adoption terminology in describing the creation of familial relations through covenant. So do most others.¹⁶ In doing so, they follow the lead of Paul, who consistently employs adoption nomenclature (see Romans 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and Ephesians

12. Jennifer Clark Lane, "The Lord Will Redeem His People: 'Adoptive' Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament," in *Thy People Shall Be My People and Thy God My God: The 22d Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 49–60.

13. Jennifer Clark Lane, "Hebrew Concepts of Adoption and Redemption in the Writings of Paul," in *The Apostle Paul, His Life and His Testimony: The 23d Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 80–95; and Jennifer Clark Lane, "Not Bondage but Adoption: Adoptive Redemption in the Writings of Paul" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1994).

14. Jennifer Clark, "The Lord Will Redeem His People: 'Adoptive' Covenant and Redemption in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon" (University Scholars Project, Brigham Young University, 1993).

15. For example, her ideas strongly influenced my lecture "Covenant and Redemption on the Book of Ruth," presented at BYU–Hawaii Women's Conference, May 2006.

16. See, for example, Brian K. Ray, "Adoption and Atonement: Becoming Sons and Daughters of Christ," *Religious Educator* 6/3 (2005): 129–36.

1:5). However, this is not the familial term most often employed in the scriptures, and I fear that the sole use of adoption terminology hides other crucial concepts about which the scriptures are insistent. Overall, the scriptural language does not emphasize being *adopted* by Christ, but being *begotten* by Christ. This may seem a small matter, but it touches upon the concept of being born again and becoming new creatures, matters that are not unimportant.

Lane's article is actually replete with scriptural *begotten* concepts. While covenants can indeed signify adoption in the mortal world, they can be part of begetting when dealing with God. Lane references covenants and adoption in regard to King Benjamin's sermon (p. 171). However, the passage she cites reads "because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually *begotten* you. . . . And under this head ye are made free" (Mosiah 5:7–8). Lane notes that as part of the covenant Abraham receives a new name (p. 171). Yet new names generally denote becoming a new being, something that does not happen through adoption but through birth or rebirth (in the end, all of our births have been rebirths). Lane also emphasizes the reception of a new nature (p. 173); however, a new nature accompanies not an adoption but a rebirth, which would make us begotten of him who gave us the new birth. It is the atonement of Christ that changes our nature or makes of us new creatures, thus constituting a rebirth—or begetting—of which he is the father.

The phraseology hinges on the concept of being born again, and focusing on adoption threatens to turn us away from the need to be born of God and to have our natures changed until finally our natures have become such that we are redeemed. Alma the Younger reports what the Lord told him: all mankind "must be *born* again; yea, *born* of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures" (Mosiah 27:25–26). Alma finishes by saying that "I am *born* of God. My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity" (Mosiah 27:28–29). Later Alma asks, "have ye spiritually been *born* of God?" (Alma 5:14).

Enoch records that the Lord spoke to Adam about being born of God, comparing it to our physical birth (Moses 6:59–60).

This last verse highlights that the rebirth is not merely symbolic terminology, nor is it merely adoption. Our spiritual rebirth is as real as any of our other births. We call God our “Father” because he is the Father of our spirits. We also call our mortal dads “father” because they are the fathers of our mortal bodies. We could thus create a chart:

Father of Our Spirit Life	Father of Our Mortal Life		
God the Father	Dad		

Yet we must all become new creatures, having a new spirit created in us. Thus the chart continues:

Father of Our Spirit Life	Father of Our Mortal Life	Father of Our Spiritual Life	
God the Father	Dad	Christ	

And eventually we will receive eternal life from Christ (as well as a resurrected body), who has been given the power to give us eternal life from his Father.

Father of Our Spirit Life	Father of Our Mortal Life	Father of Our Spiritual Life	Father of Our Eternal Life
God the Father	Dad	Christ	Christ

Thus we see that Christ literally becomes our father as much as any of the fathers of our previous births. We seldom forget the fourth column but often overlook the third. As we focus on becoming children of Christ, not through adoption but through being born again and receiving a new nature, we will come that much closer to redemption. While the language of adoption is not wrong per se, I would suggest that we not use it exclusively so that we may maintain a focus on the gospel idea of being born again and its part in the redemptive process. This is not to say that any of Lane’s excellent writings have been wrong but is to suggest a possible change for future writings that focus on our familial relationship with Christ. It is my understanding

that this is exactly the direction Lane's research is now taking and that this issue is one she plans to address.

The concluding chapter, by Andrew H. Hedges, makes an important contribution in examining differences between how Joseph Smith treated Abraham and how his religious contemporaries did. Hedges acknowledges the incumbent limitations in such a study and how to deal with them. As he notes, we must all remember that while Hedges is able to account for written and printed material available in Joseph's day, we cannot take into account the kinds of things that were being preached in the countryside that Joseph may have heard. Yet, since the written texts Hedges cited were likely referred to and used as a guide by most preachers, Hedges's conclusions still carry a great deal of weight.

Hedges demonstrates that attention paid to Abraham was at an all-time low when Joseph was working on the Book of Abraham (p. 179). He also describes the differences in the way Abraham the person as well as the Abrahamic narrative were employed by Joseph's contemporaries as compared with the text of the Book of Abraham. For example, this bit of restoration scripture emphasizes covenants and how they would be fulfilled in the future, something Hedges demonstrates contrasted with the way that American preachers treated Abraham in Joseph's day. He also notes Joseph's uniqueness in emphasizing a literal promised land. Moreover, no one in Joseph's day mentioned Abraham's dealings in Egypt, idolatry, or Abraham nearly being sacrificed (p. 186). Additionally, an Abrahamic creation account is completely original.

Hedges's conclusions devastate notions that Joseph Smith was borrowing Abrahamic ideas from his religious contemporaries. The material in the Book of Abraham seems unique and contrasts strongly with the way other Christians portrayed Abraham. In the face of Hedges's article, it is ludicrous to try to maintain that Joseph was modifying or borrowing existing Abrahamic doctrines.

The final merit of the book comes from its apparatuses. The citation index, which lists the ancient sources used within the various articles, will make further research much easier. The same is true of the extensive subject index and the list of foreign terms used. Though

these tools represent a small number of pages, they are the result of many hours of work that will result in exponentially more hours being saved by future researchers. The editors are to be commended for including these tools.

Overall, this volume is an indispensable piece of scholarship for anyone who wants to understand the Book of Abraham better. Although some flaws exist throughout, the combined strength of the articles is commendable. Not only does the book answer many previous questions about Abraham, but it also provides guidelines for future research.