



2022

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Recommended Citation

Smoot, Stephen O.; Gee, John; Muhlestein, Kerry; and Thompson, John S. (2022) "The Fall of Lucifer," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 61: Iss. 4, Article 29.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol61/iss4/29>

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The Fall of Lucifer

Similar to what is depicted in other books of Latter-day Saint scripture (for example Moses 4:1–4), the Book of Abraham’s depiction of the premortal council includes a brief mention of the fall of Lucifer. As readers encounter at the end of chapter 3 of the Book of Abraham, Lucifer’s fall from the divine council was an act of rebellion because he was not selected to carry out God’s plan of salvation.

And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; and they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. And the second was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him. (Abr. 3:24–28)

While later biblical and extrabiblical writings from the first millennium BC contain reworked allusions to pervasive Near Eastern myths about the fall of rebellious deities or angels (for example, Gen. 6:1–4; Isa. 14; Job 38; Ps. 82; Ezek. 28:1–10; 28:11–19; and Dan. 11–12),¹ a fair question

1. On this topic, consult Hugh Rowland Page Jr., *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of Its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 1996); R. Mark Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges: Myth and Meaning in Isaiah 14:4b–21* (Atlanta:

to ask is whether this mythic archetype is attested in Near Eastern literature from Abraham's day. In fact, there does appear to be evidence for elements of this mythic concept in the literature of earlier Near Eastern cultures.

Biblical scholar Mark Smith has recently drawn attention to the "basic idea" underlying the myth of the "conflict between competing deities in the divine realm" being present in texts from the Middle and Late Bronze Age sites of Mari and Ugarit. "These cases of divine conflict are set in the divine council that meets in heaven; they end in the demotion or expulsion of the defeated deity."² In the Mari corpus is a letter from Šamaš-našir, the governor of the city of Terqa, to Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari from circa 1775 to 1760 BC.³ In this text, Šamaš-našir "gives account of a vision concerning a heavenly verdict" by the god Dagan, the chief deity of Mari, against other deities, including the god Tišpak of the city Ešnunna. "This is done in the presence of other gods" in the divine council and "corresponds to Zimri-Lim's hoped-for victory over King Ibalpiel II of Ešnunna, whose god [Tišpak]—and, through him, the king himself—is threatened with" destruction.⁴ As the relevant section of the text reads, "[Now, let them c]all [Tišpak before me] and I will pass judgment.' So they called on Tišpak for me, and Dagan said to Tišpak as follows: 'From Šinaḥ (?) you have ruled the land. Now your day has passed. You will confront your day like [the city] Ekallatum.'"⁵

As scholars recognize, this text clearly depicts a divine-council scene where "a denial of the right of [another deity] to rule" is issued by the edict of a superior deity.⁶ As such, it provides broad parallel with and precedent to later biblical texts that depict the fall of rebellious divinities,⁷ as well as the Book of Abraham.

Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), esp. 81–127; and Mark S. Smith, *The Genesis of Good and Evil: The Fall(out) and Original Sin in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 15–28.

2. Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 22.

3. Reproduced in "6. Šamaš-našir to Zimri-Lim," in *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Peter Machinist (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 26–27.

4. Martti Nissinen, "Prophets and the Divine Council," in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst Akel Knauf (Freiburg, Switz.: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2002), 9.

5. "6. Šamaš-našir to Zimri-Lim," 27, punctuation slightly modified and footnotes removed.

6. Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Cross-Cultural Recognition of Deities in the Biblical World*, rep. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 138.

7. Smith, *God in Translation*, 137–39.

Turning to the material from Ugarit, the Late Bronze Age text known as the Baal Cycle depicts “cases of divine conflict [which] are set in the divine council that meets in heaven; they end in the demotion or expulsion of the defeated deity.”⁸ One such scene from the Baal Cycle (*KTU* 1.2 I 19–48) narrates how the god Baal defiantly rebuked the messenger gods of his rival, the deity Yamm, after they brought the divine council a message demanding surrender. The cycle ends with Baal defeating Yamm and claiming kingship in the divine council (*KTU* 1.2 IV 30–41).⁹ That the Ugaritic Baal Cycle provides clear underlying mythic and literary precedent for later biblical iterations of this type-scene is widely recognized by scholars.¹⁰

The mythic tales of Illuyanka and Kumarbi from ancient Anatolia might also provide additional parallels to the rebellion of Lucifer in the Book of Abraham.¹¹ In the Illuyanka tales, which date to the Old Hittite period (ca. 1750–1500 BC), the chief deity of the people of Hatti, a storm god, is “defeat[ed] and incapacitat[ed] . . . by an evil and powerful reptile. . . . In both versions of the myth, the Storm God needs the help of a mortal and a trick in order to regain supremacy over the serpent.”¹² In the second version of the myth, the storm god battles and ultimately prevails over the serpent at “an unspecified sea.”¹³

Finally, in the Hurrian Kumarbi Cycle (ca. 1400–1200 BC), “the central theme . . . is the competition between [the gods] Kumarbi and Tessub for kingship over the gods.”¹⁴ This mythic cycle depicts how Kumarbi “attempt[ed] . . . to supplant Tessub as king of the gods” through stratagem. This included one attempt where Kumarbi raised up his son Ullikummi “to destroy . . . the city of Tessub, and to dethrone Tessub” himself. Tessub, however, concocts his own plan for defeating Ullikummi with the help of members of the divine council, which he eventually does.¹⁵

8. Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 22.

9. Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 22, 107 n. 42. A translation of the Baal Cycle can be accessed in Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 81–180.

10. For a summary of the scholarly consensus, see Page, *Myth of Cosmic Rebellion*; compare Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 22–24; and Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith, eds. and trans., *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 97–109.

11. For translations of these texts, see Harry A. Hoffner Jr., *Hittite Myths*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1998), 9–14, 40–80.

12. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 10–11.

13. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 13.

14. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 41.

15. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 55–56.

There are very clear differences between these texts and the Book of Abraham. For instance, the mythological texts from Ugarit and elsewhere just reviewed appear to be largely about competing deities who are associated with the agricultural cycle or are represented as chthonic and sky deities in competition. These elements are missing from the Book of Abraham's depiction. While we should be cautious not to suggest that the Book of Abraham is directly drawing from these texts, or vice versa, important parallels nevertheless do remain which are indicative of a general shared cultural and religious backdrop. The common elements in these ancient Near Eastern and Anatolian myths and the Book of Abraham include the divine council as the setting, the involvement of multiple divinities or gods, some kind of attempt to supplant or overthrow the chief deity of the council in an overt act of rebellion or defiance,¹⁶ and the ultimate humiliation or downfall of the rebellious character.

From this and other evidence,¹⁷ "several striking affinities with Semitic traditions are immediately available" in the Book of Abraham. As seen above, "the council scene in particular is consistent with a standard motif in Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature, wherein a divine assembly convenes to consider a problem and a series of proposals is offered."¹⁸ This in turn reinforces the overall sense of antiquity and historical believability of the book.

16. The Book of Abraham does not make this point as explicitly as other Restoration scripture, such as the book of Moses, which depicts Satan as seeking "to destroy the agency of man, which . . . the Lord God, had given him," and also demanding "that [God] should give unto him [his] own power." This Satan does by proclaiming, "Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1, 3). Nevertheless, the implication that Satan is actively rebelling against God in the Book of Abraham can be seen in his being described as "angry" at God's decision to choose the one "like unto the Son of Man." Additionally, that "many followed after [Satan]" (Abr. 3:27–28) also suggests a collective act of rebellion.

17. 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, no. 1 (2007): 267–313, esp. 272–79; Stephen O. Smoot, "Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 28–39.

18. Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215–16; compare Terryl Givens with Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 125–28.

Further Reading

Gee, John. "The Preexistence." In *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 121–27. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 2017.

Smoot, Stephen O. "Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham." *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 28–39.