

## Joseph Smith and the Biblical Council of Gods.

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In a conference such as this that is dedicated to defending Mormonism, this subject is quite dear to my heart. I've had an opportunity to publish on it both in academic LDS venues and in just scholarly journals on biblical studies. So it's a topic that's dear to my heart. In fact as an Institute Instructor in Boston, I was somewhat infamous it didn't matter, whatever course you took from Brother Bokovoy, it was always: the Divine Council.

Book of Mormon: the Divine Council, Isaiah: The Divine Council, Marriage and Family Prep: the Divine Council, in fact I was talking, and we'll get to this soon, I promise. But yesterday I was talking to my doctor, and I was telling my background, he said "That's really interesting, what do you with that?" "Oh, well I do a lot work with the Divine Council, and he looked, I could see a shocked look on his face, and he is like "personally?". "No, no, no not so much, it's a textual thing", so I do a lot of work with this, it is dear to my heart, and we'll begin. Really though, concerning Mormonism this concept of a multiplicity of gods is no doubt, one of those unique tenants that represents an interesting challenge for a lot of Christian critics of the Church.

Next to the Book of Mormon itself, I suspect it's probably the most controversial thing about Mormonism for Christian critics of Mormonism. The prophet Joseph Smith, of course, produces that inspired Book of Abraham that really rocked the foundation of the Christian world at the time. When through this translation he revises Genesis, chapter one, the priestly version of Creation and introduces his concept of gods organizing the world.

Then at the end of the course of his life and ministry, he begins to teach much about this subject. From the King Follett Sermon we have this famous quote, "in the beginning the head of the gods called a council of the gods. They came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it". And then, Joseph states, I love this. "When we begin to learn this way, that God exists in this council structure with other divine beings, that he calls gods. We begin to learn the only true God, and what kind of a being we have got to worship". So this is not a superficial topic, in fact it's quite significant in terms of the of the restoration. Well, Joseph Smith, from the words of Joseph Smith, page 84 "it has been a doctrine taught by this Church that we were in the grand council amongst the gods, in the plural, when the organization of this world was contemplated. And that the laws of government were all made and sanctioned by all present. And that all the ordinances and ceremonies were decreed upon. Fascinating concept, and I don't have a slide for this, but of course it's in Joseph Smith's revelation in Section 121.

There's this interesting concept about the restoration that all of the light and truth and knowledge is going to come forward during our time period. It's the day we learn in Verse 27 that our forefathers have waited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last days, so when their minds were appointed to by angels and so forth. And it's a time when nothing will be withheld, the revelation states in Verse 28, whether there will be one of God, or many gods.

They show many gods, in the plural, that they should be made manifest to the saints. And then in Verse 32, this whole time, this organization, this process of restoration, is according to that which was ordained, states the revelation, in the midst of the council of the Eternal God of all other gods, in the plural. So an exciting restoration concept that again presents some challenges in terms of acceptance of Mormonism and the restoration from a traditional Christian perspective.

Well, just a few other concepts on this Council notion from the prophet Joseph. Joseph's poetic revision of D&C section 76 adds a lot of insights, including the concept that the council was held in Kolob, that great star nearest the planet where God resides, according to the Book of Abraham. Okay, Franklin D. Richards, "the order and ordinances of the kingdom were instituted by the Priesthood in the Council of Heaven before the world was" quoting the prophet Joseph Smith in one of his sermons at the end of his ministry.

Well, now we have the foundation doctrinally. Despite the fact that when Joseph introduces his concept of the plurality of gods to the saints, that it rocks the theological testimonies and beliefs of many of the Later-day Saints of the time period, and of course those outside of the church, and continues to be a source of controversy. Despite this fact, what about today, what do biblical scholars know about biblical theology?

How connected might this be, to what Joseph introduces through the restoration. Well, certainly there are differences, and those differences are exciting to point out as well. We would expect differences to exist. But, there are some remarkable similarities, between what Joseph introduces theologically through the restoration and what biblical scholars now know to be true, regarding the Hebrew bible, an ancient Near Eastern tradition.

Well, William Dever, the world's most renowned American biblical archaeologist, in a very exciting book entitled "Did God have a Wife" gives us this kind of summary of where we are at from an academic perspective. "A generation ago when I was graduate student, biblical scholars were nearly unanimous in thinking that monotheism, the belief in a single God, of course, had been predominant in ancient Israelite religion from the beginning. Abraham and Moses and so forth, alright "not just as an ideal" states Dever, "but as the reality".

Today all that has changed, virtually all mainstream scholars and even a few conservatives he knows, and I have to go so far as to state that in my experience, one would be hard pressed to find a contemporary biblical scholar who does not recognize this point at least at some level. All

that has changed. Virtually all the scholars acknowledge that true monotheism emerged only in the period of the exile in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

As the canon of the Hebrew Bible was taking shape, the canon, not the books themselves, because the books themselves clearly point to this concept of a multiplicity of gods who governed the affairs of the universe. “I have suggested” states Dever, “along with most scholars, that the emergence of monotheism of exclusive Yahwehism was largely a response to the tragic experience of the exile”.

Now isn't that exciting! So things have changed considerably. Okay, when this book came out in 1994, I was excited, ran out grabbed it as soon I could from the Brandeis library when I was a graduate student, and couldn't sleep that night. It was just too wonderful. Lowell Handy's “Among the Host of Heaven”, of course a non-LDS scholar, really give us this great quote, in terms of the council, we will see lots of allusions to this council of divine beings of gods all throughout the Bible.

But sometimes they are obscured by expressions that non-specialists don't recognize as allusions to the Council. So Handy makes the statement “the Bible calls the assembled beings, the host of heaven”, right, or the “heavenly host”, but it is widely understood that these were the gods, in the plural, who made up the “heavenly host” in Judah and Israel. Okay, so this concept of a multiplicity of gods existing in an assembly structure, a Council structure, that is fundamental to Mormonism, is also today central to the concept of bureaucracy from an Old Testament perspective and in terms of the ancient Near East.

This is recognized by virtually all biblical scholars today. Now one of those whose work I connect with on many levels, is a biblical scholar by the name of Mark Smith. Mark Smith does a lot of work with the Ugaritic tablets of ancient Canaan in the Northwest Semitic Canaanite form alphabetic script, and the discovery of these Canaanite documents to revolutionize the understanding of the Old Testament. Okay, it is a lot of comparison between the tradition, and what we see in the Old Testament. Great quote from his book “The Early History of God, Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel”, early on Yahweh who of course is Jehovah. Jehovah or Yahweh is understood early on, he states in Israelite tradition, as Israel's God in distinction to El”. Deuteronomy 32:8 through 9, he casts Yahweh in the role of one of the sons of El, so El ultimately is the Heavenly Father figure, Yahweh or Jehovah is the Son.

This passage presents an order in which each deity received his own nation, referring back to Deuteronomy 32. Israel was the nation that Yahweh received as his special inheritance. If you will take that verse and look at some of the more contemporary translation of it, you will see that this really is explicit in the text. There are multiple gods who govern the affairs of the universe. Yahweh is assigned Israel, and Israel worships Yahweh exclusively, but these gods, including Yahweh or Jehovah exist in the “Heavenly Assembly” or “Council structure” in many ways

congruent, with what the prophet introduces through inspiration and through the restoration... more fun.

Let me give you another quote in the present form of the biblical text the term Elyon which is “most high”, it’s from the root “Allah” “to ascend” in Hebrew. Elyon the Most High God, is understood to be an epithet for Yahweh, the God of Israel. “It is possible” he states however,” as some have argued” including Mark Smith and other biblical scholars,” that the epithet may conceal a reference to a separate deity, possibly an older god with whom Yahweh, eventually in Israelite tradition, came to be identified”.

So again reference, to Elyon or El, a high God, seems to exist textually, in early biblical tradition and eventually through the canonization process, this concept is combined, and ultimately Jehovah assumes all of these positions, certainly within later Judaism but in the early stages , we see something very much in harmony with the views of the restoration.

Where do we find this? Where can one turn to find such texts? Well, they’re everywhere, Job 15 for example. The question is presented by Eliphaz to Job amidst all that turmoil when they’re interacting with one other, trying to figure out the nature of God, and does Job deserve it. This Job is quite the complainer, at least in the poetic section, two different Jobs right? We’ve got the Job of prose who never says a word, and then we’ve got complaining Job in the poetry section, fascinating. Anyway , are you the first born of the human race? Yes. Were you brought forth before the hills? Now the hills are important of course, the hills are the primordial “hillock”, it’s what came out of creation, and chaos, in this concept of ancient Near Eastern creation that appears in the Old Testament. And then he asks, ultimately this question, “have you listened to the council of God?”.

Well, the implication here brothers and sisters is quite interesting. It’s that man existed prior to the creation of the earth and that he had an opportunity, at least the primordial man, to participate in some level in the Council. This is made mention by several scholars today, non-LDS scholars, including Dexter Calendar in the book “Adam in Myth and History, An Ancient Israelite Perspective on the Primal Human”.

A few of the primary Hebrew words associated with the “Heavenly Council of gods”, in the plural, in the Old Testament includes “sode” which is the term council, “moed” which means meeting or assembly, “Adagh” were the congregation, “Kedushean” which means the “Holy Ones”, “The Saints”. And that’s kind of fun too, because of course what do we belong to ultimately “ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”, and “saints” is the technical term for the “holy ones” who are members of the “heavenly assembly”.

They are the gods who interact with Jehovah in that Council structure, it’s kind of fun. “Saba”, the host, is another term that we see and of course “Elohim”, and one of the exciting ones to recognize is simply the term “sons of God”. Now you will see that expression all throughout the

Old Testament and when we see it in our King James translation, it is a reference to the “gods of the council”.

One of the great council texts from the Old Testament is Psalm 82:1 and I give you the NRSV translation, “God has taken His place in the divine council, in the midst of the gods he holds judgment”, the NRSV. So this is an exciting text, and one of course that Jesus cites when he defends his divinity in the New Testament. Well what about the “sons of God”? Two ways to understand of this, one is this, they are the “sons of God” meaning that they are the literal offspring of God. And the other possible way to interpret this, is that the term “son” in all Semitic languages, whether it’s “Ben” in Hebrew, “Bar” in Aramaic, “Mar” in Akkadian or “Wald” in Ethiopic, doesn’t matter which way you go. In all Semitic languages “son” has the connotation of referring to members of the group, cast, or guild.

So, sons of x means the members of the group x, so quite frequently in contemporary translations of Ancient Near Eastern documents and in the Old Testament when we’ll see the expression, the “sons of god” simply translated as “the gods”, the members of that group. It’s important to recognize. Now this concept has made a lot of sense of course. Again, returning back to the Ugaritic tablets that were discovered, we see this concept of the “sons of god” as a technical term not only in the Ugaritic tablets, but in Northwest Semitic tradition as a whole, referring to the “gods of the council”.

Well, we also see references to the stars, now this one is cool. Because if you think about it in terms of a restoration perspective, right, we have the book of Abraham which transitions out this great council story. Where the council is organized and God stands on it, the great and noble ones, and passed his judgment on him in a standing position, which is a very significant motif from a biblical perspective that we won’t get into the details of.

But, none the less, here’s this council story in Abraham, and then followed by the “council of the gods” organizing the world. But what sets that up, is that it’s all about astronomy in the previous chapter, in which everyone gets all excited about things okay, what does this mean, and does this really reflect the universe. You know, I don’t know if it does or doesn’t. I don’t know, I don’t care, I made the mistake of taking an astronomy class as an under-graduate, alright. Because I am a humanities guy. So I had to take a science elective, and I’m like, okay, astronomy, that’s good. You’re just going to sit back in the planetarium and look at constellations, and constellations connect with ancient mythology assignments, and so I’m in. And then, the first day of the class, the teachers like, equations and you have to memorize these, and like, this is the most miserable thing I have ever experienced. So, I am not into astronomy, those chapters don’t speak to me from an astronomy perspective. But they do speak to me in terms of typology, deeply. Because of the way that it is able to connect with star imagery and council imagery and then creation, and gods is so perfectly consistent with Near Eastern tradition.

Because “stars” is the one of the technical terms that we see in not only Canaanite tradition, but also in the Old Testament as a reference to the Council. So note for example I have given you “KTU” which is a technical term for these Ugaritic tablets and in these, tablet one, and then 10 and then column one, I should say four, notice the parallelism, you can see on the slide. So you have “sons of God” as a parallel expression for the “stars” of the assembly.

They’re synonymous terms in the Northwest Semitic tradition, really exciting stuff. Well, take that perspective next time you jump into the Old Testament and really have some fun, because as you do so, you’ll come across text like Job 38:7 where the “sons of God” and the “morning stars” again in synonymous parallelism, shout for joy and have excitement. And you will see reference to human beings in the book of Daniel, becoming the “stars”, becoming the “saints”, becoming the “holy ones” in the way that’s very exciting and consistent with exaltation and apotheosis from a restoration prospective.

If also interested you can consider then, Abraham as part of his promises he receives that assurance, that his offspring will become like the “stars” in the heaven, not only will they be numerous but there is something deeper from a Near Eastern perspective in terms of exaltation, there’s no doubt.

Well, why is it not explicit? Well sometimes it is explicit, but it’s hidden in translation and sometimes there are just allusions to the Council that are non-specified, why does that occur and unfortunately, that’s part of the confusion that many readers face in terms of their contemporary analyses. Well, I don’t know for sure but in 2008 I had the opportunity to publish an article in the Journal of Biblical Literature. I put forward this proposal that in reality these non-specified allusions to the Council that we see in specific text. And I am going to give you an example okay, perhaps our reflection of Exodus 23:13, where there is in what is known as the covenant code or collection from the book of Exodus, a legal mandate not to mention or to state or to specify if you will, the names of the gods. And it very well could tie in this tradition to this legal tradition in ancient Israel. Because what we do see, are references to a divine plurality in the Old Testament that contemporary scholars believe for the most part, refers to a council allusion, for example the famous one, right.

We start from the beginning, in Genesis. Genesis chapter 1: 26, 27 it says, “God said, let us make” okay, first person plural, cohortative structure okay, from this root in Hebrew “a thought to make”, “let us make”, in the plural, “man in our image” with the pronominal plural suffix in Hebrew, “after our likeness” again in the plural, now that’s interesting, and some people aren’t aware of this. But the Septuagint which is the early Greek translation of the Old Testament, contains an interesting allusion both the Septuagint and Vulgate, the Latin translation, present Yahweh or Jehovah speaking through the masculine plural in Verse 18 chapter 2 “let us make for him a helpmeet”.

How would you know that? Of course in our Masoretic text, that the King James draws upon, it's singular. And it's all, God will make a helper fitting for man, but in some other traditions we see this and it's perhaps an allusion, it's perhaps secondary, but anyway it's interesting. But of course through Genesis 3:5 and what the serpent states to Adam and Eve, for God, Elohim in Hebrew, doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, from the fruit of course, then your eyes shall be open and you shall be as a Elohim.

Isn't that interesting? If we think that through, Elohim knows that when you eat from this fruit you will know, like Elohim "the gods" Elohim, in the plural. Now what so interesting about that, and I don't have time to explain to you in detail, I'm just going to give you hint on this, because it's so cool, is "to know" of course "in a biblical sense" refers to sexuality. The story, at least portrayed of "the fall" in Eden is not "a fall" at all, alright, it's really an ascension, and becoming more like the gods, in terms of knowing.

And that knowledge "Yadah" in Hebrew is specifically sexual in Genesis and throughout. It's really quite fascinating and of course in the Genesis version of the story of Eden, unlike some of the other contemporary LDS versions that we have, Eve is not called Eve until after she eats of the fruit. In the biblical version she only was called Eve until after she ate the fruit and that's very important because she cannot become the "mother of all living" until after she has partaken of the fruit, which will help her to know like the gods know. Implying that the gods in the council are sexual beings, which is what they are throughout the ancient Near Eastern tradition which my dissertation explores.

But anyway, so yeah another time, another Fair Conference, The Sexuality of God in the Old Testament, we will do that one. Genesis chapter 3:22 "The Lord God said "behold the man is become like one of us to know good and evil". So the serpent really in this sense told the truth and man became, through consuming the fruit, like the gods of the council in knowing. And he says he is become like one of us, speaking to a non specified group of gods.

Again perhaps these terms of non specification happens as a result of ancient Israelite tradition that we see in the covenant codes and elsewhere. Genesis 11 verse 7 remember go to "let us go down" again first person plural of the verb "Yahrad" "to defend" or "to go down" in Hebrew. And there confound and it's literally let us confound their language, the people, that they may that understand. So key here are what biblical scholars refer to as "council allusions to the divine beings who are governing the first the universe".

Okay, well, alright more fun. Let's consider this then, as Frank Moore Cross observed the address to the divine council from the Hebrew Bible by either Yahweh, himself, or his herald, normally appears introduced by a series of masculine plural imperatives. What does that mean? Okay, masculine plural imperative, so when a imperative is a command form, right run, go, do, talk, speak. So often times in ancient Near Eastern tradition Frank Moore Cross former Harvard biblical scholar introduces this concept.

He said look, it's very clear we survey not only the Bible but the ancient Near East, quite frequently masculine plural imperative, second person command forms in the plural are an allusion to the divine council. God speaking to command them, to do something. So as an early historical example of this literally pattern, Cross drew attention to the invocation of the council, deities, in Judges 5:23 to curse the inhabitants of Meroz bitterly curse it's inhabitants. Notice there is no specified audience.

If you do it, but who is going to do it? Those who are responsible for controlling the affairs of the universe, the council, but it came to naught and so forth. More recently the unique purpose of this literary form function as a direct allusion to the council has received attention from Mark Smith again, who states that text such as Genesis 126-28 and so forth utilize "the traditional language of the divine council as manifest, for example in the use of the first common plural for divine speech.

Well divine plurality in creation, we'll see allusions to this very similar literary technique in the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern text, which provide evidences that scholars are on the right track in terms of this interpretation.

We run out of time quickly, but let me give you this one, this is really cool, Genesis 2-3 and again taking you back to Psalm 82 remember that exciting text God stands in the divine council He judges among the gods. Well Psalm 82 is clearly influenced by the Eden tradition that we have just discussed, appearing only 22 times in the Hebrew Bible. Use of the compound grammatical form "Aghad" which is "one of" as construct meaning "one of" following the propositional "bate" in Hebrew, meaning "like" or as represents the fairly uncommon propositional construct.

Significantly one of the other occasions that a passage employs this unique grammatical form includes Psalm 82, how cool is that. Alright, a late biblical text which present Yahweh invoking the God's of the council in the process of the judgment, which thematically shares much in common with Jays narrative. So Psalm 82 verse 7. But he shall die like men, like Adam literally and fall like one of the princes Psalm 82:7, so what happens in other words what we see here – is that in Eden, Adam, or man, becomes like one of the Elohim like one of the God's and must therefore die okay.

And in Psalm 82 the Elohim become like one of the Adams or men and can therefore experience death, which if you will remember Psalm 82 and it's conclusion is precisely what occurs right, judgment is passed upon these deities for not rendering a good and proper judgment in their various affairs of their stewardship and they will die like men.

So gramatically it is exciting to see how these two texts link up. Well what is the council story or drama? Council story or drama and they are many of them follows a very specific pattern in terms of the Bible in the ancient Near East. Look quickly here and I tell you that there are really are four elements and these will sound familiar to you. So how do you know if you reading a

council story? Well first you are introduced to a council of the assembly of divine beings, whether in Mesopotamia or in Canaan or in the Bible and the pattern is always the same.

The first thing that occurs is a crisis, so the high God of the council call some volunteers who is going to present a plan, who is going help us, who is going to solve these various proposals are considered and finally a savior or a messenger is commissioned. Now that happens all over the place a “Numal Elish”, which in Babylonian means “one upon high”, one of the great Babylonian creation myths, that’s one of them. And in this great story of creation Myrduch, there’s a crisis “Piomat” a monstrous goddess wants to consume the minor gods of the assembly.

There is a crisis. High God calls for volunteers, “Myrduch” steps forward and says an essence, here am I send me, I will be the savior of the council. I will save all of the gods, just send me. But then the Babylonians take an interesting perspective on this and they say that Myrduch turns to father the high God and says, but your glory and honor will be mine. And from their perspective in each of that one that is how Myrduch, the local God of Babylon becomes the chief deity of the universe.

It is all over the ancient Near East and it is so cool okay. It is everywhere the same pattern and once we recognize this pattern, brothers and sisters we will start to see it in terms of prophetic call narrative, think Isaiah chapter 6, because what happens in all of the prophetic call narratives, the councils structure and governs the affairs in the universe, as in chapter 6, councils referred to as “the seraphim”. Isaiah a prophet steps forward in the council and is ordained to be a messenger of that council and becomes an official member of this council.

Prophets in the Old Testament interact with this council in a very interesting way, Amos 3:7, the famous passage that we use as LDS missionaries right in the field, I don’t know if they still do. But they used to when we had to memorize discussions. “Surely the Lord God doeth nothing, save he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets”. But the Hebrew word there is “Sote”, which means not secret but council, council assembly. They are ones who stand in the assembly Jeremiah 23:18, Jeremiah turns and he is talking about the false prophets and he says you can distinguish a false prophet from a true prophet, because a true prophet has stood in the council.

And he is called in that council to be a messenger and mediator for the council. And it’s the crisis in Israel is in apostasy, judgment is at hand and so forth. It makes the Old Testament come alive. Isaiah chapter 1, all you have to do is start reading and Isaiah starts talking and invokes heaven and earth as witnesses in allusion to the council. Heaven and earth serves in metonymy which is the technical term from a literally perspective, it’s a type of personification, where in the location refers to the individuals there in.

In other words, a reporter steps forward on the news and says the White House said today, the White House didn't speak. Reporters referring, to, using the metonym of the assembly. Isaiah chapter 1, Hear O Heaven, give ear O Earth, the Lord hath raised up unrighteous children.

And it's a legal case that Isaiah presents all through chapter 1. It is a divine arraignment and Isaiah steps forward as prophetic mediator and calls the assembly of gods to render judgment against Israel. It makes it come alive, there is crisis in all of those, this is the same pattern. Well what is cool, there is when we turn it to restoration and start to say okay, that's Old Testament tradition. What do we see in terms of the restoration.

Well, texts like this, D&C 107 verse 19 "those who pass through the order of the Melchizedek priesthood have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heaven's opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly, which is simply a technical term for the assembly or a council. The Church of the Firstborn to enjoy the communion of the presences of God the Father and Jesus the mediator, through covenant. I throw this verse out there, just as an example of when we have these lens's that we obtained through a technical understanding to the Old Testament and Eastern tradition, how exciting is it to approach the scriptures of the restoration. They come alive, add meaning, they do. I was studying in D&C section 76 the other day and I could not believe the council \ allusions there and how well they linked with Near Eastern tradition.

And how that tradition makes even a modern text like section 76 come alive with meaning very fun and exciting to be Mormon. In fact if we go to several interesting allusions to prophets from our day receiving prophetic commission, even though they don't link it with Old Testament tradition that we now understand more fully through scholarship than we did at an earlier point in history. You will still find some interesting quotes like this one you know love this one. Heber J Grant, check this out, I communed with High Heaven's it was revealed to me, now I've got to give it background, Heber J Grant's traveling through southern Utah and he's feeling insecure about his apostolic call.

And so he is praying for help, how he can feel better about this. He has a vision "a council has held in heaven, exactly as the same as we hold councils here", he says "matters were discussed, various proposals were made". And of that there was presented the question of filling the two vacancies existing in the quorum of the twelve apostles. That the conference had adjourned and those two vacancies remained and ought to be filled.

The question was who shall we call? In sending a revelation to fill those vacancies, my father, Jedidiah M Grant who died, when I was baby, only nine day old asked God or Heavenly Father that is son Heber J Grant be called as an apostle. Joseph Smith the prophet and that's of course significant right, those who know Church History why those two men are involve with this.

Joined in the request made by my father and the revelation was sent calling me to be an apostle of the Lord God Jesus Christ, very Old Testament like in this tradition and if we search, search

history we will find some interesting allusions to this concept of council and prophetic interaction. Very Old Testament, alright, now I've got to show you this one, okay, we have a couple of minutes left.

So remember back that few minutes ago I was telling about Frank Moore Cross and the divine plural that we see in terms of command forms or imperatives. Well, with this background scholars almost universally have the opinion that a text like Isaiah 40 gives an allusion to the divine council. So I am going to open up there and I am going to give this to you really quick.

So Isaiah 40, now this is a pivotal chapter, this is the start of a new section in Isaiah 1 to 39 the theme is yell at my people because they have gone astray, in 40 the theme changes. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Notice the King James translation "ye". It's an archaic English pronoun "you all", well who is God talking to? The gods of the council to comfort Israel in the restoration and redemption. "Speak" in the plural "speak ye" O "council" we could insert comfortably through Jerusalem "cry" or "council" you gods under her, that are – accomplished and so forth.

And then you have this reference to the "voice of him that crieth in the wilderness" and so forth and voice becomes a very significant theme here to the point that well, verse 6 "the voice of the council says cry". And then we have to ignore the King James here, we have to go to the Dead Sea Scroll version earliest, Hebraic version of this text to make, so it makes sense, because instead of third person masculine singular "he" the pronoun is first person common singular 'I'. Because Isaiah as speaking to the council, so "the voice" that theme said "cry" and I said "oh, what shall I cry?" and then the message is given. It's his prophetic hesitancy, that happens in every prophetic call, in the narrative of Jonah of course carries to the extreme.

Well this is a "council story" and it is interpreted universally of scholars as such, check this out. The way the doctrines and the revelations of the prophet Joseph Smith tie in to these concepts is so wicked cool, okay sorry I am just came from New England. D&C 128 verse 19 Oh so what do we here in the gospel which we have received a "voice of gladness", the voice becomes a "light port" or a "theme word" in this text, in good biblical tradition repeated for emphasis.

A "voice of gladness", a "voice of mercy" from a heaven and a "voice of truth" out of the earth "glad tidings for the dead" "a voice of gladness for the living and the dead, glad tidings of great joy" and then a direct allusion to the latter half of Isaiah that we, is the focus of this council text. Isaiah 52:7 "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good joy" and so forth, remember that Isaiah 40 is the council text, a "council" is "the voice, the voice, the voice".

Again well what do we hear, "glad tidings from Cumorah". Moroni, one of the members of course of the heavenly assembly. An angel from heaven declaring the fulfillment of the prophets, the book to be revealed, a voice of the Lord in the wilderness, and there in fact declaring the three witnesses to bear record of the book. "The voice of Michael", notice the voice is always linked with the members of the assembly in heaven. "Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna

detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light. The voice of Peter, James and John in the wilderness before Harmony, Susquehanna county and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna River declaring themselves and possessing the keys of the kingdom, the dispensation of the fullness of time and again the voice of God”. Notice the council members,” voice, voice” and the Isaiah allusion. In the chamber of old father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca county, and at sundry times and diverse places through all travel relation to this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the voice of Michael the archangel, the voice of Gabriel, of Raphael, of diverse angels we have got the whole council now right.

Everybody is participating in the restoration. All declaring their dispensation, their rights, their key, their honors, their majesty, their glory the power of the priesthood, giving line upon line, precept upon precept, again the Isaiah reference. And I have inserted it there, here a little, there a little, and what is the purpose of the voice in the council and restoration and the bringing back? Giving us hope, by holding forth that which is to come, to confirming our hope, giving us consolation or comfort. That text blows me away and it’s one of thousands, of them all over the place in form or another.

“Comfort ye my people”, voice and was only a few years ago, decades ago, that this Isaiah 40 was understood as a council allusion, of comfort in terms of restoration of Israel and bringing them back. Okay, if we had a couple of hours I would show all of these, because they’re just so fun, and you guys would never get bored, but I am going to give this to you really quick. Suffice it to say that in Northwest Semitic tradition and in the Bible the location of the council, the physical setting was of course the high mountain top.

We see this alluded to not only in Northwest Semitic traditions but specifically in the Bible, okay. So we will see this in various texts, I am not going to, I don’t have time to give them all to you. But I just want to give you quick allusion of this then, so then with this understanding that we have talked about, you find it in texts like 1 Nephi 11:1. Nephi said, pondering in my heart “I was caught up away in the spirit of the Lord in to an exceeding a high mountain”. If we read our Book of Mormon, with the lens of the ancient Near East, being “caught away”, is an allusion from a biblical prospective to something that happens in abduction, spiritual abduction that I we don’t have time to talk about it kind of cool.

But, what we see happening in terms of the Old testament are the divine council members with their primary job being to serve as witnesses, supporting and making judgment on individuals and nations under the direction of the high God of the universe. So for example, in Genesis 22 Gods heavenly “malagh” where angel messenger appears suddenly informing Abraham that he had successfully passed Gods test with the statement, “do not raise your hand against the boy, nor do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God. Since you have not withheld your son, your only favorite son from me”, notice that angel speaks about God and then switches to first person narrative speaking as if he is God.

This is typical messenger formula, for that first part need not create confusion because that expression in Hebrew “Yahdahte He” “now I know that”, is always used for those who are evoked as witnesses. So the angel said to Abraham on the mountain top that he has proven to the angel his worthiness to receive further light and knowledge from God. Oh, what so cool then, is to understand exactly what happens in 1 Nephi chapter 11, because what does the angel do? Would you believe the words that your father said, it is the spirit of Lord sorry. Do you believe the words? The spirit of the Lord already knows he believes so why do you ask him? So he can be a witness in the council setting.

He says “Yea, I believe thou knowest that I believe all words my father has spoken. And what does the spirit of the Lord do? Praises God then as the most high God. And introduces Abraham to further light and knowledge. This is the same scene in the Book of Mormon, you find the same thing with Benjamin asking the people at the end of his sermon. Do you guys believe my words? They sent out a letter and said, yeah we believe and then he introduces him to the covenant at the end. Brother of Jared, on the mountain top setting, to the divine council, to the Lord same process, it’s the same scene, it happens all the time, that it is so fun okay. And it so great to be a Latter-day Saint. You will see this doctrine expressed by the prophet Joseph, “I call God and angels to witness that, I have unsheathed my sword with a firm determination that the people shall have their legal rights and be protected from mob violence or my blood”, he states, “shall be upon the ground like water invoking God and the council the angels as witnesses”.

And of course Brigham Young’s famous statement on the endowment “where we must pass by the angels that stand as witnesses and giving them the information to enter in to further light and knowledge. What’s interesting for Nephi then, we read, that we receive no witness until after the trial of our faith which is precisely what takes place in council setting and structure. Ultimately what the priest would do at the temple in ancient Israel asking questions for, to the temple worshippers such as “or“ who will stand in his holy place”.

And then if you are tested he give a right answer in this temple setting, you are introduced in to further light and knowledge. Well we could go on for hours, I think we are on time right. So I take a question or two and a kind of try and sum it all up. Thank you.

Alright, oh man, we have two minutes, two minutes, alright. Five minutes, okay we will see this alright. Let me sum this up here really quickly and then we will get to this and I will answer the question. We really could go on for hours and looking it amazing text of the restoration unlighted and then, if you get excited about that, you can look at I guess some work that I do. What, just let me tell you I love prophet Joseph Smith, okay, I have testimony when I was in academic conference with you I testify to you. The restoration is true, mingling with Gods he plans for his brother and sisters.

I love him and I love the restoration. I share this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen