

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

And also with Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days. (D&C 27:11)

In various revelations, Joseph Smith learned that Adam was the same as the archangel Michael and that he is “the Ancient of Days [who] shall sit, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (D&C 116:1). In the prophet Daniel’s vision of the last days, he saw the Ancient of Days sitting on a throne while the books were opened for judgment and the “Son of man” came to him from heaven (Daniel 7:9-14). This identification is surprising, since Bible scholars and readers have long considered the Ancient of Days to be God (though the Bible never says so) and the concept of Adam was an angel, much less the archangel Michael, was unknown in Joseph Smith’s day.

In recent years, the judgment scene in Daniel 7 drew the attention of non-LDS Bible scholar Phillip B. Munoa III, who compared Daniel’s vision with Abraham’s vision of Adam on the throne of judgment as recorded in the first- or second-century A.D. *Testament of Abraham*.¹ In *Testament of Abraham* 11, Adam sits between the two gates, one for the righteous and one for the wicked, judging who will enter each gate.²

Chapter 3 of Munoa’s book is entitled “The Exegesis of Daniel 7.” It includes a section on “Adam and the Ancient of Days,”³ in which he notes, among other things, that “in the Testament of Abraham, the presence of Adam is, as Delcor puts it, ‘astonishing.’ Like the Ancient of Days, Adam is enthroned in the presence of angels and is described as a ‘terrifying’ being who looks like the ‘Master’.”⁴ At the end of the same section, Munoa writes, “Perhaps even the title given to Adam, ‘first-formed,’ which obviously can be understood as implying his great age or patriarchal stature, can be connected to the title ‘Ancient of Days’ in Daniel. This conjecture will be examined later in Chapter 3.”⁵

That promised discussion comes in sections entitled “The Ancient of Days”⁶ and “The Ancient of Days and the Most High.”⁷ In the first of these sections, Munoa discusses the various possible identifications for the “Ancient of Days.” He notes that “Even a figure like Adam, known as the fallen head of the human race in Genesis, could be interpreted as the ‘Ancient of Days’ when the characteristics of this rather ambiguous Danielic figure were interpreted in a broader light.”⁸

A. Lacocque, in his commentary on Daniel, observes how the “Ancient of Days” was interpreted by the Jewish medieval scholar Jepheth as an angel and by his Jewish contemporary Ibn Ezra as the archangel Michael . . . Lacocque writes: “The powerful Sethian sect identified the ‘son of man’ with Seth ‘the son of Adam’” . . . If Seth

could be seen as the “son of man,” the identification of Adam with the “Ancient of Days” who empowers the “one like a son of man” is not unthinkable. Both Seth and Abel are sons of Adam. Since Adam’s son was seen as the “son of man,” the next step of interpreting the Ancient of Days, appearing with the son of man in Daniel 7, as Adam, is not a big one.⁹

Munoa further notes, “That Adam looks like the ‘Ancient of Days’ seems reasonable in view of the Parables of Enoch and the *Apocryphon of John*.”¹⁰ “There is even evidence that the highest angel could share a divine name which was associated with the title the ‘Ancient of Days.’ A figure called the ‘Prince of the world,’ who appears to be related to the traditions of Metatron and Michael, is called ‘old man.’ . . . This is important for arguing that the Testament of Abraham interprets Adam as the ancient of Days. It illustrates how in a second-century CE [AD] religious system, based on the same scriptures, the Ancient of Days is not the highest God but a patriarch. To the Valentinians, he is Abraham. To others, he is obviously Adam.”¹¹ “The Testament of Abraham understood the ‘Ancient of Days’ to be Adam.”¹²

Because others have understood the Ancient of Days to be God, based on Daniel 7:21-22, Munoa explains that “An interpreter could realistically treat ‘Ancient of Days’ and ‘Most High’ as two different persons. This is a possibility since ‘Most High’ has been established earlier in Daniel as a divine title¹³ and the unique ‘Ancient of Days’ only appears in Daniel 7. By interpreting the ‘Ancient of Days’ as Adam, the author of the Testament of Abraham may be revealing his own familiarity with the ‘two or more powers’ in heaven controversy.¹⁴ These textual elements give support for an ‘Adam’ interpretation. Adam has been shown to have been a genuine interpretive possibility given first-century Jewish traditions when the Testament of Abraham was written.”¹⁵

Munoa continues this theme in chapter 4, “Adam and Abel as Exalted Figures in the Testament of Abraham and Middle Judaism.” He notes that “Adam as the ‘Ancient of Days’ is the most unusual parallel proposed between the Testament of Abraham and Daniel. Initially, it seems strange to argue that a Jewish author would interpret the ‘Ancient of Days’ as Adam, who is known in Genesis as the fallen head of the human race. Yet there are persistent Jewish speculations which view Adam as a glorified divine agent.”¹⁶

He then goes on to describe some of these speculations and, in the middle of his discussion, writes, “The description of a human being as godlike was not unheard in Jewish communities. With this in mind, the ‘Ancient of Days’ could be taken for Adam, since Adam has God’s likeness.”¹⁷ “That Adam looks like God is matched by the descriptions of [the angel] Iaoel¹⁸ and Jesus. The identification of Adam with the ‘Ancient of Days’ is in keeping with Jewish exegetical practices of the first century CE.”¹⁹ The rest of the chapter gives supporting ideas.

Adam as Michael

A number of Joseph Smith's revelations identified Adam with the archangel Michael (D&C 27:11; 78:15-16; 107:54; 128:21).²⁰ Most early Christian texts separate Adam and Michael, but a few provide circumstantial evidence that they are the same person. The Christian Ethiopic *Conflict of Adam and Eve* I, 10:5 lends partial support to this idea by having God tell Adam, "While thou wast under My command and was a bright angel,"²¹ suggesting that when Adam lived in God's presence he was an angel. Version J of 2 *Enoch* 30:10-14 has God saying of Adam, "From invisible and visible substances I created man²² . . . And on the earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious. And I assigned him to be a king, to reign [on] the earth [and] to have my wisdom. And there was nothing comparable to him on the earth, even among my creatures that exist . . . And I assigned to him four special stars, and called his name Adam."²³

One of the Christian Gnostic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi has Adam telling his son Seth, "When god had created me out of the earth along with Eve your mother, I went about with her in a glory which she had seen in the aeon [world] from which we had come forth . . . And we resembled the great eternal angels, for we were higher than the god who had created us and the powers with him, whom we did not know" (*Apocalypse of Adam* V,5 64.6-19).²⁴

A Coptic text known as the *Discourse on Abbaton* notes that, after the fall, "the Devil went to meet Adam outside Paradise, and he said to him: 'Behold, O Adam, I was cast out of Paradise through thee, and I caused thee to be cast out because thou hast made me to become a stranger to my home in heaven. I will never cease to fight against thee and all thy seed, until I have dragged them all down to Amente with me.'²⁵ Since the archangel Michael was the cause of the devil being cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-9), this passage may suggest that Adam was Michael.²⁶

In *Apocalypse of Moses* 16:3-5, the devil says to the serpent, "Rise and come and let us make him [Adam] to be cast out of Paradise through his wife, just as we were cast out through him."²⁷ Since there had not yet been an expulsion from the garden, this again suggests that Satan was cast out of heaven because of Adam. In most ancient traditions, Satan was cast out because he would not worship Adam, the image of God. From the LDS viewpoint, it was Adam, as Michael, who expelled Satan from heaven (cf. Revelation 12:7-9).

A Gaelic (Irish) pseudepigraphic text mentions Lucifer among "the hosts of archangels" that God wanted to make subject to Adam. Lucifer objected that he was senior to Adam and said, "I will not bow down before my junior" (*Creation and Fall* 1)²⁸ "Lucifer was jealous of Adam, being certain that it was Adam who would be brought to heaven in place of himself" (*Creation and Fall* 5).²⁹ This suggests that the devil believed that Adam would become an archangel.

Commenting on the apostle Paul's comparison of Christ with Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45-49), the third-century AD Christian writer Methodius wrote that "it was fitting that the first-born of God, the first shoot, the only-begotten, even the wisdom of God, should be joined to the first-formed man, and first and first-born of mankind, and should become incarnate. And this was Christ, a man filled with the pure and perfect Godhead, and God received into man. For it was most suitable that the oldest of the Aeons and the first of the Archangels, when about to hold

communion with men, should dwell in the oldest and the first of men, even Adam.”³⁰ Though he here calls Christ “the first of the Archangels,” the comparison is particularly apt when we consider Joseph Smith’s identification of Adam as the archangel Michael.³¹

Adam the Prince

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that D&C 27:11 identifies Adam with Michael and calls him “the prince of all, the ancient of days” (D&C 27:11). A similar statement is found in D&C 107:55, where we read that “the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever.” In Daniel 12:1, it is the archangel Michael who is termed “the great prince” (see also Daniel 10:13, 21).³² Michael is called “the prince of the world” in *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer 27*, reputedly written by a first-century AD rabbi.³³ While Jewish tradition does not identify Michael with Adam, it is interesting that it makes Adam a king. *Zohar Leviticus 76b* says, “We have learnt that when man came down to earth in the supernal likeness of all who saw him, both higher and lower beings, came to him and made him king of this world.”³⁴

Early Christian traditions indicate that God made Adam priest, prophet, and king. Among these are *Conflict of Adam and Eve III*, 5:10 and 18:12,³⁵ *Book of the Rolls* f.93a, f.94b,³⁶ *Cave of Treasures*³⁷ and several sources cited by the twelfth-century Syrian Christian Michael, Jacobite patriarch of Antioch.³⁸ *The Book of the Bee* 13 describes how Adam donned royal apparel and a crown and “was made king and priest and prophet” by God, who “set him upon the throne of His glory, and there He made him master over all creatures.” The angels then bowed down before Adam.³⁹

This latter story closely resembles an Arab tradition in which Adam, dressed in a silk robe and sporting a crown of gold, stands atop a platform to address the angels assembled by God.⁴⁰ The scene is very reminiscent of the ancient assembly for the biblical feast of tabernacles, at which the king addressed the congregation from atop a platform, and suggests that Adam was considered to be a king.⁴¹

Adam Holds the Keys

While most Bible readers view Adam solely in light of the fall, Joseph Smith held our first parents in high regard. He declared that

The Priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed, as in Gen. i: 26, 27, 28. He had dominion given him over every living creature. He is Michael the Archangel, spoken of in the Scriptures . . . The keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent. When they are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam’s authority. Daniel in his seventh chapter speaks of the Ancient of Days; he means the

oldest man, our Father Adam Michael he will call his children together and hold a council with them to prepare them for the coming of the Son of Man. He (Adam) is the father of the human family, and presides over the spirits of all men, and all that have had the keys must stand before him in this grand council. This may take place before some of us leave this stage of action. The Son of Man stands before him, and there is given him glory and dominion. Adam delivers up his stewardship to Christ, that which was delivered to him as holding the keys of the universe, but retains his standing as head of the human family. (*History of the Church* 3:385-86).

On a subsequent occasion, the prophet spoke of “Adam, who was the first man, who is spoken of in Daniel as being the ‘Ancient of Days,’ or in other words, the first and oldest of all, the great, grand progenitor of whom it is said in another place he is Michael, because he was the first and father of all, not only by progeny, but the first to hold the spiritual blessings . . . Adam holds the keys of the dispensation of the fullness of times” (*History of the Church* 4:207; see also 4:210). D&C 78:16 speaks of “Michael your prince” who holds “the keys of salvation under the direction of the Holy One.”⁴²

While the Bible does not ascribe keys to either Adam or Michael, this idea is found in several ancient pseudepigraphic texts. For example, in *3 Baruch* 11:1-14:2, we read that the prophet Baruch was shown the large gates of the fifth heaven on which the names of men were written and saw the gates opened by Michael, holder of the keys, who then received the prayers of mankind. When the gates closed, Michael brought the prayers to God (*3 Baruch* 14:1-2).

In *4 Baruch* 9:4-5, the archangel Michael offers incense and opens the gates of heaven for the righteous. The scene is reminiscent of President Heber C. Kimball’s discussion of “the vision that Joseph Smith had, when he saw Adam open the gate of the Celestial City and admit the people one by one. He then saw Father Adam conduct them to the throne one by one, when they were crowned Kings and Priests of God” (*Journal of Discourses* 9.41). We are again reminded of the depiction of Adam seated on a throne between the two gates leading to heaven and hell in *Testament of Abraham* 11, discussed earlier.

Adam’s possession of keys is confirmed in a medieval Jewish text, *Zohar* Genesis 55b, which says that “when Adam was in the Garden of Eden, God sent down to him a book by the hand of Raziel, the angel in charge of the holy mysteries . . . In the middle of the book was a secret writing explaining the thousand and five hundred keys which were not revealed even to the holy angels, and all of which were locked up⁴³ in this book until it came into the hands of Adam.”⁴⁴

We noted earlier Joseph Smith’s declaration that whenever the keys are sent to earth, it is by Adam’s authority. A Coptic Christian text, the *Mysteries of St. John the Divine*, says something similar about the archangel Michael. Speaking of the angels who serve under Michael in heaven, it says, “And the name of Michael was on all their garments, and every angel pronounced his name and no angel was allowed to descend to earth unless the name of Michael was written upon his raiment to protect

him from the Devil.”⁴⁵

Summary

If any of Joseph Smith’s teachings would have seemed radical to his contemporaries, it was surely his declaration that Adam was the Ancient of Days mentioned in Daniel 7, that he was also the archangel Michael,⁴⁶ and that he held priesthood “keys.” None of this makes much sense in the Christian world of today, yet we see that each of these points is supported by ancient texts (to which Joseph had no access) and by modern scholarship.

Based on research by John A. Tvedtnes

Notes:

¹ Phillip B. Munoa III, *Four Powers in Heaven: The Interpretation of Daniel 7 in the Testament of Abraham* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series 28, 1998).

² James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1:888. For the Falasha version, see Wolf Leslau, *Falasha Anthology* (New Haven: Yale, 1951), 98-100.

³ Phillip B. Munoa III, *Four Powers in Heaven*, 46-51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³ Daniel 3:26; 4:17, 24-25, 32, 34; 5:18, 21. In Daniel 7, the title appears in verses 18, 22, 25, and 27.

¹⁴ Because of texts that suggested the presence of another ruler in heaven (usually Metatron, Wisdom, or Melchizedek in Jewish tradition), some early rabbis debated whether there was a single God or “two powers in heaven.” Early Christians, on the other hand, accepted the divinity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost and hence had no problem with the same passages. The topic is much too involved to discuss here. For a study of the subject, see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden : Brill, 1977).

¹⁵ Phillip B. Munoa III, *Four Powers in Heaven*, 80.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁸ Jaobel is the name of the angel sent to Abraham in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, while in the *Testament of Abraham*, the angel is Michael.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁰ Some of these passages are discussed in chapter 19, The Prophecy of Adam. For a discussion of other ancient patriarchs and prophets as angels, see chapter 44, Ministering Angels Belong to This Earth.

²¹ S. C. Malan, *The Book of Adam and Eve, also called The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 12.

²² This evidently refers to man’s spirit and body.

²³ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:152-3.

- ²⁴ James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library* (2nd ed., San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 279. The Gnostics wrongly attributed the creation of the earth to a lesser god, called the demiurge, hence the notion that Adam and Eve were superior to the god who created them.
- ²⁵ Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Tales and Romances* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1935), 201. Note that Amente is an Egyptian word referring to the abode of the dead, which the Christians identified with Hades.
- ²⁶ See chapter 4, The Council in Heaven. For Adam's role in the creation, see appendix A, Temple Teachings.
- ²⁷ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:277.
- ²⁸ Máire Herbert and Martin McNamara, eds., *Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected Texts in Translation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 2. Many ancient Christian and Jewish texts suggest that Satan's fall came because he and his followers refused to pay homage to Adam, who was the image of God.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ³⁰ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 6:318.
- ³¹ For a discussion of the role played by Michael/Adam in the creation, see the section "Adam and Creation" in Appendix A, Temple Teachings.
- ³² In both Daniel 10:21 and Daniel 12:1, Michael is associated with a book, which is also true of Adam in various passages of scripture. For a discussion, see chapter 19, The Prophecy of Adam, and chapter 21, Writing in Adam's Day.
- ³³ Gerald Friedlander, *Pirqa de Rabbi Eliezer* (New York: Hermon Press, 1965), 193.
- ³⁴ Harry Sperling et al., *The Zohar* (New York: Rebecca Bennet Publications, 1958), 5:81.
- ³⁵ S. C. Malan, *The Book of Adam and Eve, also called The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 148, 167. *Zohar* Genesis 191a says that Adam is "ruler and king over all." Harry Sperling et al., *The Zohar*, 2:227.
- ³⁶ Margaret Dunlop Wilson, *Apocrypha Arabica* (London: C. J. Clay, 1901), 6, 8.
- ³⁷ Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927), 53 (folio 5a, column 2, to folio 5b, column 1), 62 (folio 6a, column 2). In a Coptic document generally called the *Discourse on Abbaton*, we also read how God crowned Adam king and set him on a throne with a royal scepter in his hand. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Tales and Romances*, 198-199.
- ³⁸ *Chronicle 2.2* (footer right column, citing John of Dara), 1:17-19; *Chronicle 1.7* (footer right column, citing Dionysus the Aeropagite. In *Chronicle 1.4*, Michael indicates that Adam was the first king. See Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)* (Paris, 1899; reprint, Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963).
- ³⁹ Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Bee* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1886), 17. The text further states (p. 18) that "after God had formed Adam outside Paradise, he brought him in as a king, and made him king over all the creatures."
- ⁴⁰ W. M. Thackston, Jr., transl., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 29.
- ⁴¹ For the royal festival of tabernacles, see John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in John M. Lundquist & Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *By Study and Also by Faith, Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book & FARMS, 1990).
- ⁴² See the discussion in chapter 42, Keys of the Priesthood.
- ⁴³ Compare this statement with the idea of a sealed portion of the Book of Mormon.
- ⁴⁴ Harry Sperling et al., *The Zohar*, 1:176.
- ⁴⁵ Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Tales and Romances*, 201; also in Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha* (London: Longmans, 1910), 246. Cf. Revelation 19:16, "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (see also Revelation 14:1).
- ⁴⁶ The angel Michael is mentioned in the following Bible passages: Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7.