

The Latter-day Saint Reimaging of “the Breath of Life” (Genesis 2:7)

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The creation and flood accounts in Genesis in the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) contain variations on a phrase commonly translated “the breath of life.” This phrase additionally occurs in some uniquely Latter-day Saint materials relating to creation. After overviewing and analyzing this phrase and its meaning in the Bible, this paper then examines the occurrences of the phrase “the breath of life” in important early Latter-day Saint texts.¹ The purpose of this study is to illustrate and explain how and why many Latter-day Saints have come to often employ the phrase “the breath of life,” transforming its traditional biblical meaning into a new, Restoration-oriented use referencing the embodiment of the first human’s premortal spirit and, by extension, the embodiment of all other people’s spirits.

Therefore, this is not a broad study of the all the issues related to the creation of the first humans on this earth. Rather, my effort is to make sense of one phrase, “the breath of life,” and of what seems to be a conflicting understanding and usage of this phrase. Foundational to the analysis that follows, I contend that: (1) many Latter-day Saints, like others, sometimes apply meaning to biblical texts, rather than finding meaning by

1. I originally intended to deal with the “breath of life” as an excursus in a paper on Ecclesiastes 12:7; see Dana M. Pike, “The ‘Spirit’ That Returns to God in Ecclesiastes 12:7,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 189–204. However, such a treatment turned out to be too long to include there, so my thinking on this matter is published separately here.

interpreting the text in its own context; (2) the meaning that is applied or extended to a biblical passage by Latter-day Saints in such cases is typically uniquely Restoration-derived;² and (3), to the point of this paper, this practice is exhibited in a common Latter-day Saint interpretation of the phrase “the breath of life,” resulting in the reimagining of the biblical meaning of this phrase. Furthermore, this reimagining diminishes consideration of the life-generating and life-sustaining power of God manifest in humans and our dependence upon it.

“The Breath of Life” in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament³

The majority of biblical scholars assert that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 present two originally distinct creation accounts from two different sources that were brought together in the redaction of Genesis, although Latter-day Saints usually view this juxtaposition differently.⁴ Whatever one’s approach to what lies behind the “received text” of Genesis, the focus and tone of Genesis 1 and 2 are noticeably different from each other.

2. See, for support of the claims made in points 1 and 2, Dana M. Pike, “The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord: The Anatomy of an Expression,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 2 (2002): 149–60 (on Mal. 4:5), my paper on Ecclesiastes 12:7 (see the previous note), and my forthcoming paper on Obadiah 1:21 (2017). These provide other good illustrations of this practice of applying meaning to a biblical passage. This process often involves the language of the KJV, although that is a separate topic. I do not address the *why* of this phenomenon in this paper, but I believe this situation is due, at least in part, (1) to the lay clergy utilized in the Latter-day Saint church (as opposed to a trained clergy with divinity and/or graduate school experience), and (2) to the understandable impulse to find important Restoration perspectives evidenced in the Bible.

3. The discussion that follows takes a canonical approach to the analysis of this phrase, utilizing passages and perspectives from throughout the books of the Hebrew scriptures collectively, while recognizing that these scriptures contain various sources, perspectives, and emphases.

4. For introductory comments on the source critical division between Genesis 1:1–2:4a and the rest of Genesis 2–3, see, for example, Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38–41. For brief observations from Latter-day Saints on approaching this situation, see, for example, 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), 189–90, 224; and David Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 1–4. Neither further discussion about nor analysis of the Documentary Hypothesis or other source division schema are necessary for the assertions presented in this paper.

Genesis 1 does not refer to “the breath of life” when recounting the creation of the first humans (1:26–28), but shortly thereafter God’s instructions to the first man and woman read, “God [’*ēlohîm*] said, ‘See, I have given you [plural] every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, . . . And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to . . . everything that has the breath of life [*nepeš ḥayyâ*], I have given every green plant for food’” (1:29–30, NRSV⁵). The Hebrew phrase *nepeš ḥayyâ* in this verse is often rendered “breath of life” in modern translations of Genesis (for example, NRSV, NET, ESV, NIV⁶). The noun *nepeš* has a range of related meanings in the Hebrew Bible, including “throat, breath, life, one’s inner self, and soul.”⁷

For this study, it is sufficient to note that the KJV renders *nepeš ḥayyâ* in Genesis 1:30 simply as “life,” that this Hebrew phrase also occurs in Genesis 1:20 and 24 designating animals as “living creatures” (see also Gen. 2:19), and that it occurs at the end of Genesis 2:7 in reference to the first human, where it is regularly translated “living soul” or “living being.”⁸ Although I am wary of the current rendering of the phrase *nepeš ḥayyâ* as “breath of life” in Genesis 1:30, this difference of opinion does not impact the results of this study.

5. All Bible quotations in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated.

6. These abbreviations designate the following translations: NRSV, New Revised Standard Version (1989); NET, New English Translation (2005); ESV, English Standard Version (2001/2011); NIV, New International Version (1978/2011); KJV, King James Version (1611/1769).

7. The following passages illustrate some of this variety of use and meaning: Ex. 21:23 (“you shall give life for life [*nepeš taḥat nepeš*]”); Ex. 23:12 (“so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed [*yinapeš*]”); and Ezek. 24:25 (“their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes and their heart’s [*napšām*; KJV, “minds”] affection, and also their sons and their daughters”). For a convenient overview of the range of meanings with which *nepeš* and its cognates occur in the Hebrew Bible and in Akkadian texts, see Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological and Idiomatic Equivalence with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Jersey City, N.J.: KTAV, 2009), 244–46.

8. This same phrase, *nepeš ḥayyâ*, also occurs in Genesis 2:19; 9:12, 15–16; and Ezekiel 47:9, where it is routinely translated “living creatures” in the NRSV and several other modern English translations. In the last of these attestations, it appears that this phrase refers to humans and to animals. See similarly Job 12:10, which contains the phrase *nepeš kol-ḥāy*, “the life of every living thing” (NRSV; “soul of every living thing,” in KJV).

In recounting the creation of the first human (singular), Genesis 2:7 reads, “Then the LORD God [*yhwh ’ēlohîm*] formed [the] man from the dust of the ground, and breathed [*yippaḥ*] into his nostrils the breath of life [*nišmat ḥayyîm*]; and the man became a living being [*nepeš ḥayyâ*; KJV, ‘living soul’].”⁹ The phrase translated “breath of life” employs the Hebrew noun *něšāmâ*, which means “breath, life-force.” This concept is also found in Job 33:4b, “the breath of the Almighty [*nišmat šadday*] gives me life,” which is in harmony with, if not an outright allusion to, Genesis 2:7.

A Hebrew phrase translated “the breath of life” next occurs in Genesis 6:17, where God (*’ēlohîm*) states to Noah, “I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life [*rûaḥ ḥayyîm*]; everything that is on the earth shall die” (KJV). Here the Hebrew term *rûaḥ* is used in place of *něšāmâ*, which, as indicated above, occurs in Genesis 2:7.

The noun *rûaḥ* occurs in the Hebrew Bible with a variety of related meanings. Depending on the context, it can be translated “wind, breath, or spirit.” When “spirit” is intended, *rûaḥ* can designate the internal human life force, the “spirit of the LORD,” the “spirit of God,” the “holy Spirit,” an evil spirit or influence, and a heavenly spirit personage, although this last usage is rare in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰ Understandably, this situation has occasionally led to differences of opinion as to what is intended by the noun *rûaḥ* in certain passages (see below).

A phrase translated “the breath of life” occurs only twice more in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 7:15, which reads *rûaḥ ḥayyîm*, and Genesis 7:22, which has the combination *nišmat-rûaḥ ḥayyîm*; this latter phrase could be translated “the breath of the spirit of life,” but is usually just rendered as “the breath of life.” These two passages in Genesis 7 refer, respectively, to living creatures boarding Noah’s ark and to the death of “all flesh” not safely on the ark when the floodwaters came. As in Genesis 6:17, “the

9. The affirmation that human flesh will return to the dust at death is first announced by deity to humans in Genesis 3:19 (“you are dust, and to dust you shall return”); however, that passage does not say anything about “the breath of life” at death.

10. See 1 Kings 22:21 and 2 Chronicles 18:20 for a reference to a “spirit” among the heavenly host: “a spirit [*hārûaḥ*, literally “the spirit”] came forward and stood before the LORD.” Although this *rûaḥ* may have been a premortal spirit designated to eventually come to earth, there is nothing in the passage itself that suggests this. In the case of the phrase “an evil spirit,” the Bible appears to be using *rûaḥ* as an influence or power, not in reference to a personage, although that is a possible reading as well; see, for example, 1 Samuel 16:14, 23; 18:10.

breath of life” was found in “all flesh,” both animals and humans, which indicates that the first man (Gen. 2:7) was not the only being to ever possess this divine animating power (it is, after all, the breath of *life*).

The translation of *rûah* as “breath” in the phrase “the breath of life” helps inform the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12:7, that at death “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath [*rûah*; ‘life’s breath’ in the NET Bible] returns to God who gave it” (NRSV). Contrast the KJV rendering of this verse (“and the spirit [*rûah*] shall return unto God who gave it”), which some Latter-day Saints have used as support for a premortal spirit returning to God at death. As I have argued elsewhere, neither Ecclesiastes 12:7 nor 3:19 (“For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath [*rûah*]”) supports the Restoration view of the embodiment of premortal spirits and must be carefully distinguished from the distinctly different context and wording of Alma 40:11 (“the spirits of all men . . . are taken home to that God who gave them life”), which has the plural form “spirits.”¹¹

That the terms *něšāmâ* and *rûah* overlap in meaning, including in the phrase translated “the breath of life,” is illustrated not only by their combined use in Genesis 7:22 (cited above), but also by other biblical passages in which they occur together.¹² For example, in Isaiah 42:5 these two words could be viewed as poetically parallel: “Thus says God, the LORD . . . who spread out the earth and . . . who gives breath [*něšāmâ*] to the people upon it and spirit [*rûah*] to those who walk in it.”¹³ Similarly, Job 27:3 reads: “as long as my breath [*nišmâti*] is in me and the spirit [*rûah*] of God is in my nostrils.” The claim of having “the spirit [*rûah*] of God . . . in my nostrils” plainly points toward “breath.” To appreciate the variability that can occur in translating the nouns *něšāmâ* and *rûah*, contrast the NET Bible’s rendition of Job 27:3: “for while my spirit [*nišmâti*] is still in me, and the breath [*rûah*] from God is in my nostrils,” reversing the NRSV’s rendition of “breath . . . spirit” (see also Gen. 7:22;

11. Pike, “The ‘Spirit’ That Returns to God.” Of course, the Book of Mormon is available to us only in translation, so we do not know for certain what words, Hebrew or Egyptian, were used originally.

12. See, similarly, Karin Schöpflin, “Breath,” in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Hans-Josef Klauck and others, vol. 4 (Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 458: “Obviously, *něšāmâ* and *rûah* have become synonymous as they are sometimes set in parallel in poetic texts.”

13. Compare the NET Bible, which renders the last phrase in Isaiah 42:5 as “the one who gives breath to the people on it [the earth], and life to those who live on it.”

2 Sam. 22:16; Job 32:8; 33:4).¹⁴ And lastly, Elihu declares to Job and others, “If he [God/`ēl] set his heart upon man, if he [God] gather unto himself his spirit [*rûah*] and his breath [*něšāmâ*]; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust” (KJV, Job 34:14–15; similarly rendered in the NRSV and NET Bible). The phrase “his spirit and his breath” is routinely understood to refer to God’s spirit and breath, the life force he imparts to humans to enliven them.

The interchange of *něšāmâ* and *rûah* in the phrases translated “the breath of life,” plus the overlapping use of both these terms in other poetic passages, supports the understanding that “the breath of life” is a concept and power greater than humans and animals merely breathing and that when they no longer respire they die (although such breathing is mentioned in some biblical passages, such as Psalm 104:29). According to the passages quoted above, the Bible depicts Yahweh (the LORD/Jehovah) breathing life into the first human, and that deity gives “breath [*něšāmâ*] to the people,” so that Job, for example, can claim that in addition to his own breath being in him, “the spirit/breath [*rûah*] of God [is also] . . . in my nostrils.” Thus, “the breath of life” seems to be more than just human or animal breath, although breathing is an obvious sign of life, and the lack thereof occurs at death.

The question naturally arises then, what *is* “the breath of life”? Non-Latter-day Saint scholars have traditionally and consistently viewed the phrase “the breath of life” in all the Genesis passages (2:7 [with *něšāmâ*]; 6:17 and 7:15 [with *rûah*]; and 7:22 [with *nišmat-rûah*]) as designating a universal, God-given, animating power or life-breath—“the essence of life”—that provides and sustains life in all flesh, people and animals, during their earthly existence, and which they forfeit at death (compare Ps. 104:29; Eccl. 12:7).¹⁵ Although this “breath” comes to represent life

14. Similarly, the flexibility of the nouns *rûah* and *nepes* (“throat, life, human, soul”) are evident when they occasionally occur in poetic parallel. For example, Job 12:10 reads, “In his [the LORD’s] hand is the life [*nepes*; KJV translates “soul”] of every living thing and the breath [*rûah*] of every human being.”

15. See, as a recent example, Ed Noort, “Taken from the Soil, Gifted with the Breath of Life: The Anthropology of Gen 2:7 in Context,” in *Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life (Gen 2:7): The Problem of a Dualistic Anthropology in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten and George H. van Kooten (Brill: Boston, 2016), 1–15, who states, “I understand *nšmt hyym* in the classical way as the intangible life force which animates the body” (9).

The phrase “essence of life” is from Richard Whitekettle, “A Study in Scarlet: The Physiology and Treatment of Blood, Breath, and Fish in Ancient Israel,”

itself and is evident in all people as they inhale and exhale, the emphasis in creating the first human is on the power and action of Yahweh, who “breathed [*yippah*] into his nostrils the breath of life [*nišmat ḥayyim*]” (Gen. 2:7).¹⁶ This figurative representation of Deity instilling life into the first created human thus powerfully conveys the notion that divine power is necessary for human life to exist, illustrates that this divine input is beyond human capacity to replicate without divine assistance, and intimately connects the Creator and the created.

Significantly, not only the first man lived by receiving “the breath of life” from Yahweh (Gen. 2:7), but “all flesh”—human and animal—was animated by this “breath” (Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22). And all flesh on land with this “breath” (except for those on the Ark) died when waters covered the earth (Gen. 7:21–22). Genesis thus represents a distinction between human and animal flesh on the one hand and vegetation on the other; the latter is never said to have “the breath of life.”

Some non-Latter-day Saint scholars, such as D. H. Johnson, have emphasized that in Genesis 2:7 “God breathes into humans the breath [*nišmat*] of life,” but “the same is not said of animals, cf. Gen. 2:19.”¹⁷ Similarly, Nahum M. Sarna has claimed, “The uniqueness of the Hebrew phrase *nishmat ḥayyim* [in Gen 2:7] matches the singular nature of the human body, which, unlike the creatures of the animal world, is directly inspirited by God Himself.”¹⁸ However, Genesis 7:21–22 indicates humans *and* animals—all flesh—have “the breath [*nišmat-rûah*] of life.” And for Latter-day Saints, Moses 3:7 and 3:19 explicitly indicate that both

Journal of Biblical Literature 135, no. 4 (2016): 703. Whitekettle assesses the difference between humans and land animals, identified in the Bible as having the “breath of life,” and fish, which are not so identified.

See my comments in relation to the “breath of life” and the light of Christ and Doctrine and Covenants 88:13 at the end of this study.

16. In addition to the “breath of life,” all humans and animals also have “life blood” (for example, Gen. 9:4–5: “Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning,” and Deut. 12:23, “only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat;” compare Lev. 17:11, 14; Prov. 1:18). In the received text of the Old Testament, it is these two components, “breath” and “blood,” that animate “flesh,” and thus represent and sustain life.

17. D. H. Johnson, “Life,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. Brian S. Rosner and others (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 641.

18. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 17.

man and animals were given “the breath of life” in creation (mentioned again further below).

This assessment of “the breath of life” in Genesis as a divinely originating life force is in harmony with Ezekiel 37, in which Ezekiel saw a valley full of dead bones and was commanded to prophesy, saying, “Thus says the LORD God to these bones: I will cause breath [*rûah*] to enter you, and you shall live.”¹⁹ After the bones and sinews and flesh came together, there was still “no breath [*rûah*] in them.” But after Ezekiel commanded “the breath [*rûah*]” to “breathe [*pehiy*] upon these slain,” they lived and rose to their feet. By way of explanation, and using the reconstitution of human bodies to symbolize the future gathering of Israelites back to their land, Yahweh said, “I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And . . . bring you up from your graves. . . . I will put my spirit [or, breath; *rûhî*] within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil” (Ezek. 37:5, 8–10, 12–14). Significantly, Yahweh does *not* say he will put “your spirits within you,” but rather, “I will put *my spirit* [or, breath; *rûhî*] within you, and you shall live.” This use of “my spirit” likely draws on, or at least resonates with, Genesis 6:3: “Then the LORD said, ‘My spirit [*rûhî*] shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh.’”²⁰ The biblical emphasis is therefore on the *divine* spirit or breath that gives and sustains human life. Presumably, this spirit or breath is the same as the divine “breath of life,” which animates all flesh.

Despite the less-than-precise variety of related meanings with which *rûah* and *něšāmâ* are employed in the Hebrew Bible, it is evident that in the form we have received them, the Hebrew scriptures do not support the idea that “the breath of life” is anything other than a figurative representation of a divinely originating power that animates all earthly human and animal flesh. The notion of figurative elements in

19. Interestingly, but not authoritatively, the LDS Topical Guide includes this verse, Ezekiel 37:5, under the heading “Breath of Life.” Nine other verses in the Old Testament are also listed under this entry, although some are less relevant. On the unusual form “Lord GOD,” here and elsewhere in the Old Testament, see Dana M. Pike, “The Name and Titles of God in the Old Testament,” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 1 (2010): 17–32, especially 25.

20. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 266–69, provides an overview of the challenges inherent in this verse, including the first phrase, and various suggestions to make sense of it. The traditional translation seems preferable, but due to textual uncertainties, Genesis 6:3 can be used only as qualified support for the claims made in this study.

the biblical account of creation is nothing new for Latter-day Saints, who accept, among other things, that the account of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib is figurative.²¹

Worth noting in passing is that the Hebrew words translated as “breath of life” are rendered in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) as *pnoēn zōēs*, “wind/breath of life,” in Genesis 2:7 and 7:22, and as *pneuma zōēs*, “wind/breath/spirit of life,” in Genesis 6:17 and 7:15.²² In the Greek New Testament, Paul taught the Athenians that God “himself gives to all mortals life and breath [*pnoēn*] and all things” (Acts 17:25). And the phrase *pneuma zōēs*, “the breath of life,” occurs in Revelation 11:11 in the prophecy of the reanimation of two “prophets” of God whose dead bodies lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three and a half days.²³ These attestations exemplify the similar use and meaning of this phrase as just reviewed in the Hebrew scriptures.

Also worth noting is that when discussing the biblical concept of “the breath of life,” commentators sometimes refer to the Mesopotamian rituals that were performed to animate and thus initiate the functioning of statues of deities, particularly the *mis pi*, “washing of the mouth,” and the *pit pi*, “opening of the mouth.”²⁴ An Egyptian ritual used with

21. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign* 6 (March 1976): 71, taught, “The story of the rib, of course, is figurative.” See similarly, Bruce R. McConkie, “Christ and the Creation,” *Ensign* 12 (June 1982): 15. In the same article, after referencing Moses 3:16–17, which relates the prohibition on eating the fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil,” McConkie asserted, “Again the account is speaking figuratively” (15).

22. The Septuagint is the early Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures produced by Jews living in Egypt in the third through second centuries BC. See, for example, Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford, 2009), in which Robert J. V. Hiebert rendered Genesis 2:7 as “And God formed man, dust from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life, and the man became a living being” (7). For a recent discussion of the translation of Genesis 2:7 in the Septuagint, see Michaël N. van der Meer, “Anthropology in the Ancient Greek Versions of Gen 2:7,” in van Ruiten and van Kooten, *Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life*, 36–57. Van der Meer observes that despite some minor variations, “the Greek translation [of Gen 2:7] seems to render the Hebrew in the same literal way as we find throughout the Greek Pentateuch” (41).

23. See also “the breath of life” in relation to the creation of Adam in 2 Esdras 3:5 (Latin, *spiritum uitae*, in the Apocrypha) and in the Apocalypse of Adam 2:5 (Coptic).

24. Catherine L. McDowell’s recent volume, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the mis pi*

divine images, the *wpt-r3*, “opening of the mouth,” has also been cited in relation to Genesis 2:7.²⁵ And there are occasional references to a divine “breath of life” in other Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources. However, these attestations from the greater ancient Near East and their potential value for understanding the biblical “breath of life” require a separate study and will not be further discussed here.²⁶

Latter-day Saints and “the Breath of Life”

Latter-day Saint commentaries from the past century often present a different and fairly consistent approach to the phrase “the breath of life” as found in Genesis 2:7 and its counterparts in Restoration scripture. For example, Milton Hunter (1951) observed, “The preceding scriptures (Abraham 5:7; Moses 3:7) make it clear that man’s mortal body is composed of the elements of the earth and in that mortal body God placed man’s spirit and thereby ‘man became a living soul.’”²⁷ Since

pīt pī and the wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2015), reviews and adds to this discussion, and includes references to important earlier studies, such as C. Walker and M. Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Miš Pi Ritual* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2001). Little wonder that Israelite prophets reproved the worship of lifeless idols: “goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them” (Jer. 10:14; compare Hab. 2:19).

25. See, for example, McDowell, *Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 85–93; and Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 59–66, 139–43 (the latter focusing on the ritual animation of mummies).

26. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw is one of the few Latter-day Saint commentators who has published at least a few remarks on the ancient Near Eastern context of this topic. See his *In God’s Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Publishing, 2010), 158, where he briefly mentions the *miš pi* and *pīt pi* rituals.

27. Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* (1951; repr. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 105. See also H. Donl Peterson, *The Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 133, 291, who after quoting Moses 3:7 and Abraham 5:7 only provides quotes from Latter-day Saint Church leaders on the creation of Adam’s body and the embodiment of Adam’s premortal spirit.

I remind readers again that I am not dealing with the larger issues of the actual creation of Adam and Eve in this paper. For important statements on the Latter-day Saint understanding of the creation of Adam and Eve, see Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund (First Presidency of The

Moses 3:7 says nothing about Adam’s spirit, this raises the question of whether Hunter was implying that “the breath of life” is spirit embodiment or whether he was merely extending to Moses 3:7 the additional information found in Abraham 5:7 (discussed below); unfortunately, he did not explicate his thinking on the matter. Likewise, Ellis Rasmussen (1994) wrote concerning Genesis 2:7, “the spiritual being [Adam’s premortal spirit] who had previously been created was at this point put into a tabernacle of flesh constituted of elements of the earth,” but Rasmussen did not provide any specific comment on “the breath of life.”²⁸ More explicitly, D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner claim in regard to Genesis 2:7, “From other sources, it is evident that the term ‘breath of life’ refers to the [premort] spirit, for it is the spirit combined with the body that constitutes ‘a living soul’ (D&C 88:15).”²⁹ These “other sources” are not specified by the authors, but presumably include uniquely Latter-day Saint scripture and temple language.

In none of these three examples of Latter-day Saint commentaries is the phrase “the breath of life” really discussed as figurative or interpreted *in its context*, but rather the Restoration doctrine of premortal spirit-beings inhabiting physical bodies on this earth is *applied* to the phrase and the verse in which it occurs.³⁰ So, it is to this type of application that I now turn attention by reviewing, in chronological order, the most important points of evidence bearing on the Latter-day Saint

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 75–81 (reprinted in *Ensign* 32 [February 2002]: 26–30), and the follow-up statement in *Improvement Era* 13 (April 10, 1910): 570.

28. Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 10. Rasmussen further stated, “and this body was energized through breathing the atmosphere of this earth.” He did not indicate the basis for his last claim (about breathing the atmosphere), although we can confidently assume that the newly created human *did* need to breathe. However, scripture focuses on the act of *God* breathing into the first human the breath of life, not on humans breathing the air.

29. D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 1:32. This is their only real comment on the phrase in question. The bulk of their comments on Genesis 2:7 (pages 32–36), relate to Adam’s physical body not having evolved from lower life forms.

30. I consider the act of applying meaning to scripture passages to be one form of “eisegesis,” which means reading one’s views or beliefs into a text. This is routinely contrasted with “exegesis,” which means finding meaning by reading out of the text, by allowing the text and its context to guide the interpretation.

understanding of “the breath of life.” Readers will note that although it appears midway through this review, special emphasis is given to Abraham 5:7. Lastly, a few comments on “breath” in the Book of Mormon precede my review of “the breath of life” in Latter-day Saint sources. Brief comments of assessment are provided for each of these, after which synthesizing remarks conclude this study.

The Book of Mormon (1830). The Book of Mormon was primarily translated in 1829 and was printed and ready for distribution in March 1830. This thus qualifies as the earliest evidence for a Latter-day Saint contribution to understanding “the breath of life,” even though that phrase does not actually occur therein. However, two passages include the word “breath” that are reminiscent of Genesis 2:7 and “the breath of life.”³¹

Nephi’s brother Jacob, in preaching the plan of the “great Creator,” emphasizes that “the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls” (2 Ne. 9:12–13). The “spirits” referenced in this passage are individual spirit personages that inhabited mortal bodies on this earth and that will inhabit immortal bodies through the resurrection (see also Alma 11:45; D&C 88:15). However, a few verses later, Jacob also refers to people being “restored to that God who gave them breath” during mortality (9:26). This harks back to Genesis 2:7 (as does the phrase “living souls” at the end of 9:13) and God’s breathing “the breath of life” into the first human. Jacob’s use of “breath” in the Book of Mormon translation as we have it is distinct from the “spirits of men” referenced previously. It is thus plausible that Jacob understood the “breath” given by God as separate from spirit personages that inhabited bodies in mortality.³²

31. Of course, “breath” occurs in other contexts in the Book of Mormon. See, for instance, Ether 15:31, in which Shiz, “after that he had struggled for breath, he died.” And 2 Nephi 21:4 and 30:9 teach about God that “with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” This imagery is also found in the Bible, for example, Exodus 15:10; Psalm 18:15.

32. Note that 2 Nephi 9:26 footnote “g” references Genesis 2:7 and 6:17, which both mention “the breath of life.” But Doctrine and Covenants 77:2 is also cited, which states, “the spirit of man in the likeness of his person, as also the spirit of the beast, and every other creature which God has created.” This seems to clearly refer to spirit personages. It is thus not clear to me whether or not those responsible for these particular scripture citations considered Jacob’s

Similarly, Benjamin encourages his people to “serve him [God] who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move” (Mosiah 2:21). Although it could be argued that Jacob and Benjamin are merely referring to God giving us life in general and thus allowing us to breathe, Benjamin’s mention that God “has created” people and lends them “breath” can plausibly be connected with the concept of “the breath of life,” the life force depicted in the Bible as given by God to the first and all subsequent humans.³³

There is nothing in these Book of Mormon passages to suggest that “breath” is equivalent to the embodying of a spirit personage in a mortal body, and what does occur is suggestive of seeing the God-given “breath [of life]” as distinct from spirit personages.

Moses 3:7 (1830–1833). The Selections from the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price were originally scribed onto what is now designated Old Testament Manuscript 1 (OT1) from June 1830 to February 1831 as part of what has become known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). Later copied onto Old Testament Manuscript 2 (OT2) in March 1831, this latter manuscript exhibits subsequent revisions, perhaps made through 1833. OT2 is thus considered the final manuscript text of Moses, although no changes were made to Moses 3:7 on OT2 as compared to its occurrence on OT1.³⁴

Again, quoting Genesis 2:7: “the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [*nišmat*] of life; and the man became a living being.” Creation of the first human is presented in Genesis 2:7 as combining the dust of the earth and “the breath [*nišmat*] of life.” The parallel passage in Moses 3:7, as attested in OT2 and all printed editions of Moses, contains additional wording at the end of the verse, but the first portion of the verse essentially matches

reference to “breath” as synonymous with “spirit personage.” Footnote “g” also cites Mosiah 2:21 and Doctrine and Covenants 93:33.

33. I thank Michael Biggerstaff for suggesting to me a potential connection between or dependence on “the breath of life” and the content of Mosiah 2:21. Also, I thank Jack Welch for wondering out loud about the report that Jesus “breathed [*enephusēsen*] on them [his apostles] and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit [*pneuma*]’” (John 20:22) and how that passage may or may not draw upon the phrase “the breath of life,” although I do not explore this latter passage further herein.

34. Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005), 3, 6–7, 9, 53.

the KJV rendition of Genesis 2:7, with the exception of the personal pronoun: “And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also” (see also Moses 3:19, in which the animals are created and animated with “the breath of life”).³⁵ Thus, Joseph Smith’s New Translation of Genesis 2:7 in Moses 3:7 makes no change to the phrase under consideration, in spite of the fact that the latter portion of the verse was expanded.³⁶

The fact that Joseph Smith did *not* revise Genesis 2:7 to provide a further or different meaning of “the breath of life” could be cited as early Latter-day Saint prophetic acceptance of the traditional biblically based understanding of this phrase as it occurs in Restoration scripture. This is further reinforced by the fact that Joseph Smith did *not* revise or expand on the phrase “the breath of life” in Genesis 6:17; 7:15, 22, in the JST process.³⁷ However, one could argue that the Book of Moses was produced early in Joseph Smith’s ministry, before he had gained a complete understanding of the doctrine of premortality, which seems to have impacted his use of the phrase “the breath of life” (discussed below).³⁸

The 1835 Edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. The 1835 Doctrine and Covenants was published in Kirtland, Ohio, under the direction of Joseph Smith and with the assistance of Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams (see the preface). Section 2 of part 1 in that edition is now known as Lecture Two of the Lectures on Faith. It contains this reference to “the breath of life” in paragraph 20: “Having

35. Jackson, *Book of Moses*, 74.

36. For clarification, Joseph Smith and his contemporaries referred to his efforts as the New Translation. Latter-day Saints began to refer to this as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) in the 1970s. Historically, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now Community of Christ) has published this work as *The Holy Scriptures: Inspired Version*. For comments on this, see Scott H. Fahrling, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 3.

37. This claim can be verified by checking the appropriate verses in Fahrling, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible*, 598, 627–28.

38. For a brief overview of Joseph Smith’s growing understanding of the concept of premortal existence, see Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152–56. See also Charles H. Harrell, “The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence, 1830–1844,” *BYU Studies* 28, no. 2 (1988): 75–96.

shown, then, in the first instance, that God began to converse with man, immediately after he ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,’ and that he did not cease to manifest himself to him, even after his fall.”³⁹ As with Moses 3:7, “the breath of life” is here presented matter-of-factly as an integral part of God’s creative activity without further explanation or interpretation. This same lecture was reprinted with no change to the paragraph in question in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁴⁰

Abraham 5:7 (1842). Abraham 5:7 provides a significant twist on the claim that “the breath of life” represents the embodying of a premortal spirit. This is because in reporting the creation of the first human, Abraham 5:7 explicitly mentions three factors: “And the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground, and took his spirit (that is, the man’s spirit), and put it into him; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” The parenthetical explanation, “that is, the man’s spirit,” clarifies the meaning of “his spirit” by distinguishing that “spirit” from the divine “breath of life,” which was “breathed into his [the man’s] nostrils” *after* the embodiment of his premortal spirit.⁴¹ There is nothing in the grammar or wording of this verse that suggests the second component, “the man’s spirit,” and the third component, “the breath of life,” are equivalent (that is, it does *not* read, “this was the breath of life”). Taken solely on its own, this verse appears to

39. There is no extant preprinting manuscript of these lectures. Thus, this 1835 text is the earliest attestation of these lectures and their wording. “Lecture Second,” in *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), [12], available online at Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/20> (accessed April 15, 2016).

40. For a discussion of the authorship of these lectures, see, for example, Noel B. Reynolds, “The Case for Sidney Rigdon as Author of the Lectures on Faith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 31, no. 3 (2005): 1–41 [the title page mistakenly identifies this issue as volume 32]; and Larry E. Dahl, “Authorship and History of the Lectures on Faith,” in *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 1–21. Even though it appears that there may be less from Joseph Smith and more from Sidney Rigdon in these lectures, they were published by the Church in early editions of the Doctrine and Covenants and thus constitute evidence worth considering in this review of “the breath of life.”

41. To explicitly reiterate, according to *my* reading of the verse, the putting of Adam’s [premortally] spirit into his physical body is not and cannot be in this particular verse the same as God breathing “into his nostrils the breath of life.”

mention three distinct factors or components in the creation of this earth's first human.

The modern history of the book of Abraham began when Joseph Smith acquired Egyptian papyri and mummies in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835. His journal entry of July 6, 1835, reads, "I, with W[illiam] W. Phelps and O[liver] Cowdery, as scribes, commenced . . . the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham."⁴² But Abraham 5 was not published until March 15, 1842, in Nauvoo in *Times and Seasons*. No preprinting manuscript survives, so we are dependent upon that first published edition for the text of 5:7. The words of this verse have not been altered in any subsequent edition of the Book of Abraham, although parentheses were added in place of commas around the phrase "that is, the man's spirit."⁴³

Some Latter-day Saint commentators have specifically equated the embodying of Adam's premortal spirit with "the breath of life" in Abraham 5:7. For example, after quoting this verse, Ehat and Cook claimed, "As shown in the last note, Joseph Smith interpreted the phrase *breath of life* in Genesis 2:7 to mean *Adam's [premortals] spirit*, which spirit (ruwach [*sic*]) was put into the body to form a living soul" (italics in original).⁴⁴ However, according to my reading, Joseph Smith was *not*

42. "History, 1838–1856, Volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838]," 596, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/50>.

43. On these matters, see Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and Brigham Young University, 2010), 4–6, 14, 43, 222. This explicit indication of a premortal spirit continues on into 5:8—"And the Gods planted a garden, eastward in Eden, and there they put the man, whose spirit they had put into the body which they had formed"—although this does not detract from the fact that "the breath of life" was also and separately mentioned in verse 7. The designation "whose spirit" in verse 8 must refer back to the premortal spirit of this first man, as mentioned in verse 7.

44. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 281 n. 4. Abraham 5:7 was quoted in n. 3 on the same page. I do not know which one of the editors was primarily responsible for this note. Furthermore, the word "ruwach [*ruah*]," *spirit*, does not occur in Genesis 2:7 (see discussion above). See similar claims about

equating “breath of life” with spirit embodiment. The plain sense of Abraham 5:7 is that after a physical body was made, a premortal spirit entered it, *and then* the Gods “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” which presumably somehow enlivened and synergized the component parts of this new creation. Thus, in *this* scripture passage, “the breath of life” does *not* appear to be the same as a premortal spirit personage entering a mortal body, since they are mentioned separately.

The content of Abraham 5:7 is an obvious expansion on Genesis 2:7. And while in and of itself this verse does not explain what “the breath of life” is, it does distinguish between the breath of life and the embodying of a premortal spirit. It thereby affirms the reading of Genesis 2:7 and Moses 3:7 and further adds the Restoration knowledge of the premortal existence of spirits *without conflating or equating* spirit embodiment and “the breath of life.” Draper, Brown, and Rhodes concur. Following their comment on Moses 3:7, they state, “The Abrahamic account is more detailed: . . . [quotes 5:7]. Adam’s preexistent spirit was placed in his body; *then it was animated with the breath of life* to become a living soul.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Kent Jackson has affirmed the distinction between the embodiment of Adam’s spirit and the animating “breath of life” in Abraham 5:7: “next a divine act brought the body-spirit combination to life.”⁴⁶ As further support for this assertion, Bruce R. McConkie, after referencing Ezekiel 37:5–10, stated, “Actually, as Abraham’s account of the creation points out, *there is a distinction between the spirit [personage] and the breath of life,*” after which he quoted Abraham 5:7.⁴⁷

Therefore, Abraham 5:7 provides the most official, straightforward Latter-day Saint indication of *and* the best canonical support for understanding that the “breath of life” given by God to the first human and, by extension, to all other humans and animals, is different and distinct from the embodying of premortal spirits. As indicated above, “the breath of life” appears to designate a separate, figuratively expressed divine power or animating influence that helps a physical body and a premortal spirit “click” and exist together in mortality.

Abraham 5:7 made by Milton Hunter, cited previously, and David J. Ridges, *Your Study of the Old Testament Made Easier*, 3 vols. (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2009), 1:158, 175.

45. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *Pearl of Great Price*, 223; italics added.

46. Kent P. Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 83.

47. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 105, s.v. “Breath of Life”; italics added.

Comment in *Times and Seasons* (1842). Two weeks after the publication of Abraham 5, an editorial appeared in the April 1, 1842, edition of *Times and Seasons*, entitled “Try the Spirits”; it was signed “Ed.,” which was presumably Joseph Smith.⁴⁸ He begins by noting, “Recent occurrences that have transpired amongst us render it an imperative duty devolving upon me to say something in relation to the spirits by which men are actuated. It is evident from the apostle’s writings that many false spirits existed in their day.”

Partway through his discussion of false spirits, past and present, he references Jemima Wilkinson (1752–1819), who had claimed a powerful, illness-induced (near-) death experience after which she became a well-known preacher.⁴⁹ Her claims, as understood by Joseph Smith, provided the context for him to make the following statement:

Jemimah Wilkinson was another prophetess that figured largely in America in the last century. She stated that she was taken sick and died, and that her soul [spirit personage] went to heaven where it still continues. Soon after her body was reanimated with the spirit and power of Christ. . . . But Jemimah, according to her testimony died, and rose again before the time mentioned in the scriptures. The idea of her soul being in heaven while her body was on earth is also preposterous; when God breathed into man’s nostrils he became a living soul, before that he did not live, and when that was taken away his body died; and so did our Saviour when the spirit left his body; nor did his body live until his spirit returned in the power of his resurrection.⁵⁰

Joseph Smith’s statement that “when God breathed into man’s nostrils he became a living soul,” clearly draws on Genesis 2:7. Interestingly, this statement is fronted by his reference to Wilkinson’s body and “soul” (spirit), and followed by the statement that Jesus’s dead body did not live

48. “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (April 1, 1842): 743–48, available online at “Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries,” *BYU Harold B. Lee Library Digital Collections*, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/9200/rec/4> (accessed May 20, 2016). This editorial was later included in *History of the Church*. See now “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” 1303, Church History Library, on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/477>.

49. See, for example, Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., *Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964).

50. “Try the Spirits,” 746.

again until “his spirit returned” into it at his resurrection. This could potentially be construed to indicate that Joseph Smith thought God “breathed” our premortal spirits into Adam and the rest of us. However, following his comment on God breathing life into “man,” without which we die, Joseph Smith observed that “so did our Savior when *the spirit* left his body” (emphasis added). “The spirit” does not appear to be equivalent to “his spirit,” which follows later in the sentence. God’s breath and “the spirit” are mentioned in conjunction with a person’s spirit, but it does not appear they are intended by Joseph Smith as synonymous.

Comment in *History of the Church* (1843). According to the entry in William Clayton’s journal for May 17, 1843, “In the evening we went to hear a Methodist preacher lecture. After he got through Pres. J. [Joseph Smith] offered some corrections as follows. The 7th verse of C 2 of Genesis ought to read God breathed into Adam his spirit or breath of life, but when the word ‘ruach’ applies to Eve it should be translated lives.”⁵¹ This journal entry appeared in revised form in *History of the Church* (published 1858) as follows: “In the evening went to hear a Methodist preacher lecture, after he got thro’ I offered some corrections as follows, the 7th verse of 2 ch of Genesis ought to read God breathed into Adam his Spirit or breath of life, but when the word ‘ruach’ applies to Eve it should be translated lives.”⁵²

It would certainly not be surprising that Joseph Smith was connecting the embodying of Adam’s premortal spirit with the creation account in Genesis 2, since this journal entry is recorded a year following the publication of the Book of Abraham. However, besides the question of how accurately Clayton captured what Joseph Smith actually said, there are multiple challenges with this entry as it exists, not the least of which is what was intended by “his spirit” (or “his Spirit” in *History of the Church*). Without further qualification, this phrase does not confidently reveal whether the intended “spirit” is God’s spirit (presumably what the editors of *History of the Church* understood by capitalizing “Spirit”) and thus analogous with “the breath of life,” or whether “s/Spirit” is intended to communicate Adam’s premortal spirit, equating spirit embodiment

51. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 203.

52. “History, 1838–1856, Volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” 1552, Church History Library, on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/195> (accessed April 15, 2016). For comments on the compilation and publication of the *History of the Church*, see comments provided at the web address just cited.

with “the breath of life.” The former option seems more plausible, given the fuller expression that “God breathed into Adam his spirit”; however, it does not reveal what particularly new insight was intended by Joseph Smith in the first part of his comment to the pastor, at least as it has been preserved (*if* a new insight was even intended in that portion of his comments⁵³). Additionally, this journal entry could plausibly be read to imply that the Hebrew word *rûah* occurs in Genesis 2:7. It does not.

53. On Joseph Smith’s 1843 statement quoted above, see also the brief comments of Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness*, 158, and the comments of Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 281 nn. 3, 4. I presume this is another example of Joseph Smith doing theologically expansive “translation.” See more fully my comments on this activity in regards to the King Follett sermon, in the next subsection.

Although off-topic here, the second portion of Joseph Smith’s comment, as we have it, is very challenging, but may be the context in which his new insight was expressed. Challenges include the fact that no form of the Hebrew noun *rûah* occurs in association with “Eve” in the Hebrew Bible, nor does the concept of “lives,” as in eternal lives, occur in the Bible as we have received it. I thank my colleague, Matthew J. Grey, for discussing this journal entry with me. Matt also drew my attention to published comments from W. W. Phelps that seem to provide some background to Joseph Smith’s statement just quoted about Eve and “lives” (presented here as originally published): “And again, the expression of Eve, after the birth of Seth, mentioned in the same chapter, goes to show the continuation of the priesthood. For God hath *appointed* me another seed instead of Abel whom Cain slew. The Hebrew word ‘*zarang* [*zara*’]; translated *seed* would come nearer the truth, rendered *power of lives*, as will appear by reading (Gen. 1:12, and Gal. 3:16,) for Christ is the power of life in trees, animals and man, as well as the priesthood. Instead of translating *Habal* (Abel greek) ‘*breathe*,’ it should be ‘*breath of lives*,’ for God breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul: Then Eve’s language would be: *For God hath appointed* another power of life instead of the breath of life whom Cain slew. Literally a priest for souls, I mean to be liberal and not warp an old language into national notions. My translation of a dead language is as apt to be good, as a sophomore of Oxford, or a sacerdotal tunic of St. James.” W. W. Phelps, “Despise Not Prophesying,” *Times and Seasons* 2 (February 1, 1841): 298b. It appears that the limited knowledge of Hebrew the early Church members had was being employed in their consideration of theological principles that were unfolding through the Restoration. See more fully on the use of Hebrew in that period, Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Word of the Lord in the Original’: Joseph Smith’s Study of Hebrew in Kirtland,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 249–302.

The King Follett Sermon (1844). On April 7, 1844, two years after the publication of the book of Abraham, Joseph Smith delivered a sermon at a Church conference in Nauvoo that is now commonly called the “King Follett sermon” (his remarks followed the recent death of a Church member named King Follett). The first printed report of this sermon appeared on August 15, 1844, in *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo), about six weeks after Joseph Smith’s martyrdom. Well into his remarks, Joseph Smith is reported to have said (the original spelling and punctuation have been preserved):

I have another subject to dwell upon and it is impossible for me to say much, but . . . I must come to the resurrection of the dead, the soul, the mind of man, the immortal spirit. All men say God created it in the beginning. The very idea lessens man in my estimation; I do not believe the doctrine. . . . I am going to tell of things more noble—we say that God himself is a self existing God. . . . Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? (refers to the old Bible,) how does it read in the Hebrew? It dont say so in the Hebrew, it says God made man out of the earth, and put into him Adam’s spirit, and so became a living body.⁵⁴

The somewhat revised and long-time standard text of the pertinent portion of this speech, as printed in volume 6 of *History of the Church*, reads: “God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul. (Refers to the Bible.) How does it read in the Hebrew? It does not say in the Hebrew that God created the spirit of man. It says, ‘God made man out of the earth and put into him Adam’s spirit, and so became a living body.’”⁵⁵ Given the similarity of this statement to

54. Joseph Smith, Discourse, Nauvoo, Ill., April 7, 1844, as reported in “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (1844): 615, available online as “Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by *Times and Seasons*,” on Church Historian’s Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/4>. The sermon is presented under “Conference Minutes,” with no scribe’s or reporter’s name indicated.

55. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:310 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*). As is evident, the version of this sermon printed in *History of the Church* was smoothed out and expanded compared to the version in *Times and Seasons*, which itself was created from the report of four scribes (discussed below). For example, the sentence “God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul,” included in the

Genesis 2:7, it is hard to miss the use of “Adam’s spirit” and the omission of the phrase “the breath of life,” suggesting perhaps they should be viewed as synonymous.⁵⁶

However, at least three major challenges arise in dealing with Joseph Smith’s reported statement. First, he was clearly emphasizing the concept of premortal spirits and their eternal properties and nature. So, even though Joseph Smith’s comments imply a connection with Genesis 2:7, it does not appear that his intent was to interpret that verse *per se*.

Second, the Hebrew Bible does *not* read according to how this report indicates Joseph Smith rendered it. For example, the proper name “Adam” does not occur in Genesis 2:7 (even in the KJV), although the Hebrew *hā’ādām*, “the man/human,” is there.⁵⁷ Nor does the Hebrew word *rûah*, “spirit,” occur in the verse. And this reported translation from “the Hebrew” does not mention “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*nišmat hayyim*],” which *is* found in the received Hebrew text of Genesis 2:7.⁵⁸

Despite these first two challenges, one might argue that the embodying of Adam’s spirit is Joseph Smith’s interpretation of the meaning of “the breath of life.” However, *if* Joseph Smith did say what is reported in this version of this sermon, and *if* he was saying that this teaching was

quotation above, does *not* appear in the *Times and Seasons*, but does occur in the *History of the Church* account.

56. Daniel Ludlow and Hyrum Andrus each cited Joseph Smith’s comments in his King Follett sermon in their own comments on Adam’s creation, as support for the Restoration doctrine that this included the embodying of Adam’s premortal spirit. They both used the standardized version of this statement in *History of the Church* (but, see below). And in parallel with Joseph Smith’s comments, neither of them actually discussed the phrase “the breath of life,” so it is not clear whether they understood embodiment of a premortal spirit as equivalent with “the breath of life” or not. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 109 (“Concerning the process of becoming a ‘living soul,’ Joseph Smith has stated . . .”); and Hyrum L. Andrus, *God, Man, and the Universe* (1968; repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 361, 364–65.

57. The received Hebrew text of Genesis 2:7 begins with the phrase, “And the LORD God formed man [*hā’ādām*, “the human”] of the dust of the ground [*’ādāmâ*].” The name Adam is essentially the Hebrew term *’ādām*, “person, people, humankind,” but in Genesis 2:7, as elsewhere in this chapter, it is written with the definite article, literally, “God formed the man.” This displays wordplay with the Hebrew term for “earth, ground” earlier in the verse, which is *’ādāmâ*.

58. Nor does an obvious Hebrew word for “body” appear in this Genesis 2:7, although one might argue he derived this from the Hebrew word *nepeš*.

contained in the Hebrew Bible, he was engaging in theologically expansive translation, rendering what he thought the Bible used to say or what it should say based on his current Restoration knowledge, rather than what the traditional Hebrew biblical text actually does say (see similarly his 1843 comment in *History of the Church*, just above).

Based on this view, the Hebrew Bible provided Joseph Smith with a basis, a springboard, for an expanded rendition that went beyond the actual Hebrew text in front of him. Others, including Philip L. Barlow, Grant Underwood, and Kent P. Jackson have made similar observations.⁵⁹ For example, Jackson has commented on “how freely the [biblical] commentary flowed from his [Joseph Smith’s] own consciousness, even if it might not seem to others to flow freely from the text. . . . Joseph Smith believed that he understood the Bible as it was meant to be understood, independent of any earthly source.”⁶⁰ Thus, it does not appear that Joseph Smith was trying to literally translate or interpret the whole of Genesis 2:7 in his April 7, 1844, discourse, nor can his comment be seen as an interpretation of the phrase “the breath of life.”

The third major challenge with utilizing this particular statement as well as the King Follett sermon in general is, what did Joseph Smith actually say? Our earliest knowledge of this sermon derives from handwritten reports scribed by four men who heard Joseph Smith preach: Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff. This is not the place to review the multifaceted publication history of this sermon. The important point here is that the four recorders were not completely consistent in their report of the particular statement in question, which is not all that surprising, given the task of recording what was a long, extemporaneous, passionately delivered sermon; the windy conditions of the day; and the capabilities each scribe brought to this task.⁶¹ However, there is a certain amount of overlap on

59. See Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical Antiquity,” in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, *Approaching Antiquity*, 166–67, 180–81. See Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical Antiquity,” 185–86 n. 6, for references to the comments of Underwood and Barlow.

60. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical Antiquity,” 181.

61. As reported in the *Times and Seasons*, Joseph Smith commented “the wind blows very hard” in the context of expressing concern that some might not be able to hear him speak. Smith, Discourse, April 7, 1844, as reported in “Conference Minutes,” 612. For general comments on this sermon, see, for example, Robert L. Millet, “King Follett Sermon,” in *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference*, ed. Robert L. Millet and others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 363–66.

the general gist of their reports (again, original spelling and punctuation have been preserved in what follows). In their handwritten accounts of Joseph Smith's statement,

- Bullock reported: "how does it read in the Heb. that God made man & put into it Adams Spirit & so became a living Spirit."
- Clayton reported: "(refer to the bible) Don't say so in the old Hebrew—God made man out of the earth and put into him his spirit and then it became a living body."
- Richards reported: "= in hebrew put into him his spirit.—which was created before."
- Woodruff reported: "God made a tabernacle & put a spirit in it and it became a Human Soul."⁶²

Several observations can be made on these scribes' reports of what Joseph Smith said. First, Woodruff makes no mention of the Bible or Hebrew, but since the other three do, Joseph Smith likely mentioned these in some form. Second, two reports clearly indicate Joseph Smith taught that the "spirit" God put into the first human was the man's premortal spirit (Bullock and Richards), although only one report, Bullock's, mentions the name "Adam." Third, Richards's report, which mentions "in Hebrew," and recounts "put into him his spirit.—which was created before," suggests that Adam's premortal spirit was intended, not God's animating spirit (the breath of life). This can be seen as the implication of Woodruff's report as well. Contrast Clayton's report, "put into him his spirit," which without further clarification or contextualization could theoretically refer to God's animating spirit or to Adam's premortal spirit, although, given the other reports, the latter option seems preferable. Fourth, none of these four reports has the phrase, "became a living soul," which is the concluding phrase in Genesis 2:7 in the KJV, although three of them report variations on this phrase. Lastly, as noted above, none of these reports mention "breathed into his nostrils" or "the breath of life."

62. These four quotations are from "Accounts of the 'King Follett Sermon,'" on Church Historian's Press, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-king-follett-sermon>. See also the earlier publication of Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse: A Six Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations, with Introduction and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: BYU Printing Service, 1983), 48–49.

We can only therefore presume that Joseph Smith made no specific comment on this concept, nor did he use that biblical phrasing.

The versions of this speech in *Times and Seasons* and *History of the Church* may accurately reflect the gist of what Joseph Smith taught, but given the availability of the scribes’ actual written notes of Joseph Smith’s remarks in his King Follett sermon, it is difficult to see the report of Joseph Smith’s remark as providing an authoritative statement on “the breath of life.” Furthermore, it is problematic to use the standardized version of the four scribes’ reports of what Joseph Smith taught as representing a prophetic pronouncement that has greater weight than Abraham 5:7, a verse in Latter-day Saint canonical scripture that he helped produce. Assuming that Joseph Smith did in 1844 teach that Adam’s creation involved the combination of a physical body and Adam’s premortal spirit, the larger context of his comments appears to have influenced his implicit reference to Genesis 2:7. As mentioned above, this is best seen as theological expansion to emphasize the Restoration doctrine of premortality, not as an actual translation of the received Hebrew text, and not as an automatic equation of spirit embodiment and “the breath of life,” especially since neither in this context nor in his reported comments from 1843 is the phrase “the breath of life” discussed or even mentioned.

The Latter-day Saint Temple Endowment (1843–1877). Without inappropriately discussing the sacred contents of the Mormon temple endowment ceremony, it is sufficient to note that the wording used therein, in the context of symbolically presenting the creation of this earth’s first human, seems to equate “the breath of life” with the entering of Adam’s premortal spirit into his physical body.⁶³ While this wording seems to provide support for seeing Joseph Smith representing the embodying of Adam’s spirit as “the breath of life,” the situation, again, is more complex than it first appears.

After instituting a preparatory endowment in 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith began providing a full “endowment” for the living in 1843 in Nauvoo, Illinois, first in his red brick store and then in the unfinished temple.⁶⁴ However, with the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the exodus of

63. Latter-day Saints who have experienced the temple endowment are in a position to confirm this assertion.

64. Richard E. Bennett, “Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept’: Reflections on the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and

many Mormons to Utah, and the challenges of settling into the Rocky Mountain West, the text of the endowment ceremony was not standardized or written down at that time.

Prior to 1877, the temple endowment was performed only for the living (including in Salt Lake City's Council House and Endowment House).⁶⁵ Vicarious endowment ceremonies for the dead were first performed in January 1877, in the then recently dedicated St. George temple.⁶⁶ Brigham Young had appointed Wilford Woodruff as its first temple president. Documents indicate that under the direction of and with direct input from Brigham Young, Woodruff was responsible for transcribing and refining the temple endowment ceremony between January and April 1877.⁶⁷ This is the first known written record of the endowment ceremony.

Thus, there are at least two relevant considerations concerning the phrase "the breath of life" in the temple endowment ceremony. First, the absence of earlier textual evidence does not allow certainty as to whether the wording of the phrase in question really goes back to Joseph Smith, whether it represents the later efforts of Young and Woodruff to capture what they thought Joseph Smith had taught, or whether they themselves were newly inspired to state the concept as it is.⁶⁸ Whatever

Sealings of the Dead," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 41, 44; and Richard E. Bennett, "Which Is the Wisest Course? The Transformation in Mormon Temple Consciousness, 1870–1898," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2013): 19. See also Devery S. Anderson, ed., *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), xxiv–xxv.

65. Overviewed by Anderson, *Development of LDS Temple Worship*, xxvi–xxx. Bennett, "Which Is the Wisest Course?" 11, 20, has claimed that "the period from 1847 to 1877 witnessed a comparative wilderness retreat from temple labors."

66. Blaine M. Yorgason, *All That Was Promised: The St. George Temple and the Unfolding of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 280; Bennett, "Which Is the Wisest Course?" 19.

67. Yorgason, *All That Was Promised*, 282–85. As Yorgason indicates, a few other men were also involved in this process. See also Bennett, "Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept," 59, 61–62. Terryl L. Givens, referencing L. John Nuttall's journal, observes that Joseph Smith had instructed "Brigham Young to more fully 'organize and systematize all these ceremonies,' which he did as they moved into the Nauvoo Temple." Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 113, 343 n. 8.

68. This latter option is a real possibility if the following statement accurately reflects what Joseph Smith told Brigham Young a few months before his death: "Brother Brigham, this [endowment ceremony] is not arranged perfectly; however we have done the best we could under the circumstances in

the case, the wording of the current temple endowment ceremony does seem to equate “the breath of life” with the embodying of Adam’s premortal spirit.

The second and more important consideration is that the endowment by its very nature is an enacted ritual that embeds covenant-making opportunities into a symbolically and cosmically oriented presentation of aspects of the plan of salvation. It builds and expands upon truths taught elsewhere but does not necessarily supersede what is taught in scripture; that is, it is not automatically normative.⁶⁹ So, as with certain statements from Joseph Smith, it is not clear that the wording of the endowment is really intended to interpret or explain “the breath of life” as spirit embodiment or whether it is to emphasize a significant Restoration principle, the doctrine of premortal spirits inhabiting physical mortal bodies. If the former option is preferred—that “the breath of life” *is* spirit embodiment, then one must consider this view in conjunction with Abraham 5:7, which seems to separate spirit embodiment from “the breath of life.”⁷⁰

Synthesis and Conclusion

This survey of biblical and early Latter-day Saint evidence relating to “the breath of life” illustrates a number of points:

1. The phrase “the breath of life” as found in Genesis seems to best be understood as a figurative designation for a divinely originating animating “breath” or life-force that enlivens all human and animal flesh, and is

which we are placed. I wish you to take this matter in hand: organize and systematize all these ceremonies.” Quoted in Yorgason, *All That Was Promised*, 14 (see also Givens in the previous note).

69. I thank Richard E. Bennett for discussing this concept with me. An easy example of differences between scripture (Gen. 1, Moses 2, Abr. 4) and the language of the endowment involves the recounting of what activity took place on each of the earth’s days/times of creative activity. For summary comments on the nature of the endowment, see Andrew C. Skinner, “Endowment,” in Millet and others, *LDS Beliefs*, 182–86.

70. It could conceivably be argued that this endowment language represents an ancient temple teaching and is not the result of Restoration-influenced emphasis on premortal spirits tabernacled in flesh as part of their mortal existence. However, there is no way to analyze or prove this, and if one does take this approach, one is still left with the need to harmonize this view with the content of Abraham 5:7, as I have argued herein. I have presented what I think is the most likely reason for the language of the temple endowment on this point.

something beyond mere respiration. Such a divine breath/spirit is also referenced elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, especially in poetic passages. It is no surprise that this is not depicted as or in association with the embodying of premortal spirits, since that doctrine is so rarely and so obtusely evident in the Hebrew Bible as it has come down to us.

2. The Book of Mormon explicitly affirmed to Joseph Smith that spirit beings inhabited peoples' mortal and resurrected bodies but also seems to have separated these from the "breath" by which God enlivens mortal bodies (2 Ne. 9:26).⁷¹ Furthermore, Joseph Smith left the language of Genesis 2:7 essentially unchanged in Moses 3:7, his 1830 inspired revision of that text (although he expanded the latter part of the verse, and although the premortality of Jesus and Satan is taught in Moses 4:1–4). Similarly, the second section in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (now Lecture on Faith 2, paragraph 20) uses the phrase "the breath of life" with no additional explanation. Abraham 5:7 includes a reference to the embodying of Adam's premortal spirit *and* retains as separate the concept represented by the phrase "the breath of life." Thus, Latter-day Saint scriptures can be seen as consistent in their portrayal of "the breath of life," not explicitly defining what it is, but never equating it with spirit embodiment.

3. Whatever Joseph Smith's earlier understanding of premortal spirits may have been, it is clear that as his prophetic ministry progressed he had greater understanding of people's premortal existence and its significance, including what he learned from his 1842 rendition of the contents of Abraham 3.

4. Between the publication of the book of Abraham (1842) and the end of his life (1844), Joseph Smith is reported to have prominently mentioned premortal spirit embodiment when referencing the creation of Adam, a concept also found in the temple endowment. He does not appear, however, to have intentionally or explicitly equated the embodying of a spirit with "the breath of life." As reviewed above, there appears to be no official statement from Joseph Smith or his successors on what "the breath of life" is or is not.

This paper cannot include an exhaustive survey of all the occurrences of the phrase "the breath of life" in Latter-day Saint conference addresses, manuals, and other officially published sources. However,

71. Ether 3:12–16 does recount Jehovah's/Jesus's appearance as a premortal spirit to the brother of Jared, but Jesus's premortal existence was already evident from the New Testament, although variously interpreted.

summarily, this phrase has infrequently occurred in general conference addresses during the past seventy-five years, and then is only quoted in passing, not explained, with one exception.⁷² This comes in the 1975 remarks of Marion G. Romney, who quoted Genesis 2:7 with these bracketed interpretive interjections: “And the Lord . . . formed man [that is, his physical body out] of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [that was his spirit]; and man became a living soul.”⁷³ The explanation “his spirit” presumably refers to Adam’s pre-mortal spirit, not God’s spiritual power. So, in this instance, President Romney appears to have reiterated the concept as seemingly taught in the temple endowment, that “the breath of life” is essentially equivalent to the embodiment of Adam’s premortal spirit.

Occurrences of the phrase “the breath of life” in an earlier collection of sermons known as the *Journal of Discourses* demonstrate it was used to express regular respiration or God-given life in a person and, by extension, in an organization,⁷⁴ either with little or no explanation (it is not often clear what explicitly is intended) or in a manner contrary to

72. For mention without explanation, see, for example, George Albert Smith, “The Origin of Man and Prophecy Fulfilled,” in *Official Report of the 115th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1945), 135 (hereafter *Conference Report*); Thomas S. Monson, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,” in *Conference Report*, April 1966, 60–63; David O. McKay, “The True Purpose of Life,” in *Conference Report*, October 1963, 5; and Donald L. Hallstrom, “Cultivate Righteous Traditions,” *Ensign* 30 (November 2000): 27–28.

73. Marion G. Romney, “Easter Thoughts,” *Ensign* 5 (May 1975): 82. A few lines earlier, he taught, “The book of Genesis teaches that there was a spiritual creation of the earth and everything that was to be placed upon it, including man, whose spirit God created ‘in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them’ (Gen. 1:27).”

74. See, for example, Wilford Woodruff, “there is not an Apostle or Latter-day Saint on the face of the earth but would have to seal his testimony with his blood, as has almost every other Apostle that ever breathed the breath of life” in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 18:116 (September 12, 1875); and John Taylor, “Our organizations are very good; but we need, I think sometimes, the breath of life from God breathing into them all through, that the Spirit and power of the Most High may be in our midst,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:176 (April 8, 1879). This latter usage also occurs occasionally in later general conference addresses, such as LeGrand Richards, “Our Historic Tabernacle,” in *Conference Report*, October 1960, 69–71, “The Lord has put into this Church the breath of life.”

premortal spirit embodiment.⁷⁵ Illustrative is a statement from Charles Penrose, “In a moment He could withdraw the breath of life from among them, and they would perish.”⁷⁶ The withdrawing of “the breath” from “among them” (people, plural) does not sound like the withdrawing of individual spirit personages. Additionally, John Taylor taught, “We breathe what we call the breath of life; is it by any action of ours? God made us and planted that principle within us,” and “God has made us and he is our Father. He has planted within us the breath of life and we continue to inhale and breathe day after day.”⁷⁷ Even if John Taylor was merely saying God causes us to live by our own breathing, it is difficult to construe this “planting” of the “principle” of “the breath of life” in humans as the embodying of premortal spirits.

Again, although not exhaustive, the occurrence of the phrase “the breath of life” in sermons given by early and later Latter-day Saint Church leaders illustrates that what statements have been made about “the breath of life” provide various perspectives, with only one sermon giving support to the view that “the breath of life” is analogous to spirit embodiment, and then in only the briefest of comments, with no discussion. I assume this latter perspective is based primarily on the language of the temple endowment (discussed above), which superficially appears to be out of harmony with Abraham 5:7 (at least according to my and others’ interpretation of it, cited previously).

Latter-day Saint scripture *does* teach that a premortal spirit combined with a physical body constitutes “the soul of man” (D&C 88:15; see also 2 Ne. 9:13). The text of section 88 was produced late in December 1832 through January 3, 1833. Some Latter-day Saints have applied this view to the phrase at the end of Genesis 2:7—“man became a living soul”

75. I recognize the challenges in utilizing the *Journal of Discourses* as a source, since these are transcriptions of what was said over the pulpit. On these challenges, see, more fully, Gerrit Dirkmaat and LaJean Purcell Carruth, “The Prophets Have Spoken, but What Did They Say? Examining the Differences between George D. Watt’s Original Shorthand Notes and the Sermons Published in the *Journal of Discourses*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015): 24–118.

76. Charles Penrose, in *Journal of Discourses*, 25:338 (November 4, 1882).

77. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:371 (April 8, 1875); and *Journal of Discourses*, 20:132 (December 1, 1878), respectively.

(KJV)—which of necessity in Latter-day Saint doctrine requires a body *and* a spirit.⁷⁸

According to my assessment, this unique Latter-day Saint conception of a “soul,”⁷⁹ the phrase “a living soul” at the end of Genesis 2:7, the standardized language of the King Follett sermon, and the language of the temple endowment have collectively contributed to a common Latter-day Saint perception that “the breath of life” is the embodying of a premortal spirit required to create a living “soul.” This is illustrated not only in the Latter-day Saint commentaries quoted above, but also by this claim in the current LDS Institute manual on the Pearl of Great Price: “Moses 3:7 states that God ‘formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.’ Abraham 5:7 helps us understand that the breath of life was ‘the man’s spirit.’ . . . Man is a dual being, made up of mortal flesh and an immortal spirit (see D&C 88:15).”⁸⁰ However, as outlined above, Abraham 5:7 clearly mentions three factors, indicating that “the breath of life” and spirit embodiment are *not* the same.

78. See, for example, the commentaries by Hunter and by Ogden and Skinner, cited previously.

79. Most Christians now consider a “soul” to be an individual spirit entity, although the biblical and early Christian picture is variegated; thus, a typical definition is, “the spiritual part of a human, distinct from the physical or as an ontologically separate entity constitutive of the human person.” Joel B. Green, “Soul,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfield and others, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 358.

Somewhat off topic for this paper, the idea that a plant is also a “living soul” comes from Moses 3:9. See support for this view in Ridges, *Your Study of the Old Testament Made Easier*, 1:32. See the caution about this view in Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness*, 159.

80. *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 41, s.v., “Abraham 5:7. The Breath of Life.” The ellipsis in the quotation replaces this text, “(see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 301),” which relates the standardized version of what William Clayton reported Joseph Smith taught to a Methodist pastor in 1843, as discussed above. I admit to being surprised and confused by this manual’s claim regarding Abraham 5:7. Surprisingly, the phrase “the breath of life” receives no discussion in the LDS Institute *Old Testament Student Manual, Genesis—2 Samuel*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003) in relation to anything in Genesis. The phrase appears only once in that manual, in a quote from Bruce R. McConkie about Jesus (p. 314).

Based on all this evidence, I assume that after Joseph Smith received several revelations referring to premortal existence (for example, D&C 29:36–37; 49:17; 93:29; as well as Moses 4:1–4; 6:36) and after he produced and published Abraham chapters 3 through 5, the fuller understanding and importance of premortal existence so powerfully impacted Joseph Smith’s thinking that it became a focal point in the Nauvoo period when he taught about the eternal nature of each person’s spirit and the creation of human life on this earth. However, the maintenance of the phrase “the breath of life” in Moses 3:7 and especially in Abraham 5:7, the latter of which was published during the Nauvoo period and which includes a separate reference to Adam’s premortal spirit, should be seen as strong evidence that Joseph Smith did not simply equate “the breath of life” with the embodying of a premortal spirit, nor that this was his interpretation of what “the breath of life” is. I therefore disagree with Latter-day Saint commentators who make this connection.

Rather, some Latter-day Saint commentators and Church leaders seem to be *applying* true, additional Restoration knowledge about premortality to Genesis 2:7/Moses 3:7/Abraham 5:7 in a way that reimages the concept of “the breath of life” itself. This is not an argument against the authority of latter-day prophets to interpret biblical passages differently than scholars or other faith traditions. There just appears to be no official Latter-day Saint prophetic pronouncement on the topic of “the breath of life,” and there are differing ways in which the phrase has been employed in scripture and by Church leaders in the nearly two centuries of LDS Church history.

Indeed, Moses 3:7 and Abraham 5:7 (Restoration scriptures associated with ancient Hebrew prophets) do nothing to overturn the biblical depiction of “the breath of life” as found in Genesis. And Abraham 5:7, which was published during the doctrinally dynamic Nauvoo period of Church history, indicates most clearly three creation components—dust, breath, and a premortal spirit.

I am thus asserting that the Bible accurately depicts deity’s “breath” as a key animating force separate from spirit embodiment, and that Genesis 2:7 and Moses 3:7 each contain only two of the three components or factors that scripture mentions in connection with the Lord’s creation of the first man (and all other humans by extension): “the dust of the ground” and “the breath of life.” Latter-day Saints can thus read these passages and mentally supply what they understand is missing—the embodiment of a premortal spirit.

As a result of increased understanding about premortality and the embodiment of spirits into mortal bodies, Joseph Smith chose during the final years of his life (1842–1844) to emphasize this new knowledge when commenting on the eternal nature of humans and the creation of Adam. The language of the temple endowment draws on such teachings, focusing on a Restoration doctrine and emphasizing only two components of creation—“the dust of the ground” and the premortal spirit—rather than all three of them as preserved in Abraham 5:7. I am therefore suggesting that Latter-day Saints can mentally supply “the breath of life” as a separate, animating power, when encountering these other creation teachings. In this way, a fuller and more accurate understanding of the role of all three components is obtained, and due recognition is given to the divinely originating, animating force figuratively called in scripture “the breath of life,” by which God instills life in all animals and humans.

Throughout this study my focus has been to demonstrate that “the breath of life” is not simply to be equated with the embodiment of premortal spirits, since Abraham 5:7 removes this interpretive possibility. However, there is no unambiguous Latter-day Saint prophetic statement on what “the breath of life” actually is. At the very least, it is one of several factors emphasizing “the nature of humanity’s divinity.”⁸¹ Although we do not currently know exactly how to define it, this figurative “breath,” this animating power, is of divine origin, is essential to our mortal existence, enables the coexistence of a spirit and mortal body, and evidences God’s great and beneficial creative and sustaining power.⁸²

81. This phrase comes from Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “The Divinity of Humankind in the Bible and the Ancient Near East: A New Mesopotamian Parallel,” in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay*, ed. Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 265.

82. After having personally wondered if “the breath of life” was one way of referring to, or at least had some connection with, the Light of Christ and its role in sparking and sustaining mortal life, I was interested to find this possibility also expressed by Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price*, 223, drawing on Doctrine and Covenants 88:13 (“the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things”); and in Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*, 447, s.v. “Light of Life,” where he has stated, “Life exists in and through and because of the light of Christ. . . . Without this light of life, planets would not stay in their orbits, vegetation would not grow, men and animals would be devoid of ‘the breath of life’ (Gen. 2:7), and life would cease to exist (D&C 88:50).” The

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phrase "the light of Christ" does not appear in the KJV of the Bible, although it does appear in Alma 28:14; Moroni 7:18–19; and Doctrine and Covenants 88:7. However, it does not appear that Joseph Smith ever used the phrases "the breath of life" and "light of Christ" in conjunction with each other. Of course, "breath" and "light" draw on differing images and symbolism to emphasize essential aspects of and requirements for mortal life, so perhaps light should be understood as additional to "the breath of life." Doctrine and Covenants 45:1, for example, expresses a more generalized approach: "give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth . . . and by whom all things were made which live, and move, and have a being."