



Type: Magazine Article

---

## The Word "Kolob"

Author(s): Janne M. Sjodahl

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (April 1913), pp. 620–624

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

---

---

## The Word "Kolob"

BY J. M. SJODAHL, EDITOR OF THE "DESERET NEWS"

According to the Book of Abraham, a translation of which was given to the world by the Prophet Joseph Smith, the system of worlds to which our globe and the nearest orbs belong is "governed" by a great central sun, first in the order of creation and located near the throne of God. This great world, the Book of Abraham informs us, rotates around its axis in a period of time equal to a thousand of our years, and this is "a day" according to the celestial measurement of time. In other words, the Book of Abraham teaches that as the moon revolves around the Earth, being "governed" by it, and as the Earth and the other planets with their satellites, move around the sun, so our sun and many other suns revolve around another center, and so on, until we come to the great center around which the entire cluster of stars which form our part of the universe revolves.

The name of this great center is "Kolob."

The wonderful astronomical truth here revealed was barely suspected by a few of the most advanced scientists at the time the Book of Abraham was published. Generally the stars were called "fixed" and our sun was supposed to be a "fixed" star. Now opinions have changed. It is known that the stars are in motion through space. It is known, for instance, that the bright double star Capella is receding from us at the rate of about twenty miles a second, or more than a million miles a day. Arcturus is thought to be approaching us at the rate of five miles a second. Vega and its companion star are approaching us at the rate of thirty-five miles a second, and they seem to mark the point in space, or very nearly so, toward which our solar system is traveling. And although the orbits of the larger heavenly luminaries are too vast for human measurement, or calculation, it is a logical conclusion

that the motion observed is not aimless. The stars are not floating about at random, but they are "governed" by the same law which our planets and their satellites obey. So far science has come to accept as true the revelations given in the Book of Abraham.

The following is a brief and clear statement of the scientific view. It is by Joseph L. Barfoot, quoted by George Reynolds, in his commentary on the Book of Abraham, page 32:

"The Earth rotates on its axis, and moves in its orbit by the power imparted to its mass by the solar forces; the deflective force from the line of the sun's motion, produced by the sun's rotation on its axis, and its progression around the center of momentum of the system to which it belongs. And, since neither the Earth, nor any other body of matter, has power without motion, so, in the sun's great power we have evidence of its progressive motion. The rotation of the sun of more than 6,900 feet per second would demand a velocity of progression of over 26,000 feet per second. Herschel, by observation, was led to conclude that 'the sun, somehow, moved toward Hercules with the velocity of the Earth, of 100,000 feet per second, and to infer that the sun actually describes a great orbit around some undiscriminated center.' Sir R. Philips analogically estimated the size of this orbit, and announced that with equal centripetal and centrifugal force, it would require an orbit of 162,865 millions of miles, performed in exactly 25,868 years, the period of the precession of the equinoxes. And as the earth and the other planets of this system rotate by reason of the central solar motion, and turn on their axes by being deflected from a right line in their respective orbits, Philips has shown that the sun and all other planets rotate, as a result of the operation of the same law of motion, and the fact that all its satellites move in elliptical (egg-shaped, to be exact) orbits shows that the solar center is advancing."

But it has been asserted that the word "Kolob" is unknown to the Egyptian language. We confess our inability to perceive how that assertion can be proved, notwithstanding the fact that it has the support of so great an au-

thority as Dr. A. H. Sayce; of Oxford university. It may not be found in any inscription, or text, so far examined by the scientists, but that does not prove that it was never used by Egyptians. Some scrap of literature in addition to the Book of Abraham may yet be discovered in which the word occurs.

As an illustration, Dr. Michael Russell, who wrote his book about Egypt, in the year 1831, notes that at that time the numerals from 13 to 20 and from 60 to 100, in the demotic form of notation, had not been determined by actual discovery. But who would say that those numerals, because not actually discovered at that time, were foreign to the Egyptians? Neither Dr. Sayce, nor anybody else, would stake his reputation on such a proposition. Why do so in the case of the word "Kolob?" There is no complete list of words of any of the very ancient languages.

But, let us suppose that the word in question is not of Egyptian origin. Indeed, it is very probable that it is not. Is that any argument against the genuineness of the Book of Abraham?

Abraham spoke a Semitic language. The revelation contained in his Book concerning the construction of the universe was given to him before he went to Egypt. (Pearl of Great Price, page 61.) Naturally, therefore, the names of the stars were revealed to him in his own language. The question of interest to us now is whether "Kolob" is a Semitic word, properly used in the connection in which it occurs. One learned scholar, Dr. Mercer, asserts with a great deal of confidence that it is not Egyptian; "neither is it Semitic," he adds, "in the sense in which Smith used it." Is that true? This authority is rather positive. But with equal assurance we make the counter assertion that the word is Semitic and properly used, and, furthermore, that the Prophet Joseph is not responsible for its occurrence in the book of which he is but the translator. And this we hope to prove.

The Arabic is, next after the Hebrew, the most important of the Semitic lan-

guages and a source of information concerning the meaning of Semitic words. Now it happens that in this branch of the Semitic languages the word "Kolob" has been retained to this day with the very meaning clearly attached to it in the Book of Abraham. The verb is "qalab," which means to "turn." The noun "qalb" means "heart," "soul," "center," "core," etc. But the plural of "qalb" is "qulob" (or "qolob"), and this is the very name given to the great Center of our part of the universe. We append a photographic reproduction of part of a page of the dictionary by Messrs. S. Kassab and G. Hamman, containing the word with its English equivalents. We have spelled the word in this paragraph with a "q" because we believe it is the most common custom of so rendering the Arabic letter "qof," but that letter is also called "kaf," and it would have been equally correct to render it with a "k." There is another "kaf," though, in the Arabic alphabet, and it is customary, we believe, to render one with "q" and the other with "k."

٥٦٢	قلب
قلب	Heart; soul, قلب ج قلوب
قلب	mind, secret thought;
قلب	centre, core; kernel; best
قلب	and purest part, essence.
قلب	Inversely بالقلب
قلب	In re. بالقلب وبالقلب (ع)
	be wrong

Our learned critics have realized the importance of this controversy. They are aware of the fact that when it is proved that the names which occur in the Book of Abraham are true Semitic, or Egyptian words, correctly used, they will be compelled by the force of logic to accept as true the claim of the Latter-day Saints as to the inspiration of the translator, and the genuineness and authenticity of the books he reproduced. There is no escape from this conclusion. For the Prophet Joseph was not a scholar, in the generally accepted meaning of that word, any

more than was Peter or John. Without the light of inspiration illuminating his mind he would never have been able to discover the truths revealed in the writings he was instrumental in giving to the world.

But the word "Kolob" is plural, and this fact deserves special attention. In the Book of Abraham we read:

"And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it; and the Lord said unto me, These are the governing ones; and the name of the great one is Kolob."

That is to say, as we read it, Kolob is not a single star, but an aggregation of stars, one of which is nearest unto the throne of God, and all of which together form the "great one"—Kolob; for "these are the governing ones." And that is the reason why the word is plural. It stands for a plurality of stars in the great star center. The name then is analogous to the Hebrew "mayim," or "shamayim," or "Elohim," all of which are plural forms, denoting respectively a plurality of lakes, or oceans, of water," of "heavens," and of persons in the Godhead.

Here, then, we have another great astronomic truth indicated, which was not known at the time this book was translated. Astronomers now tell us that the spectroscope has revealed the fact that many of the brightest stars are double, consisting of one sun revolving around another, and that the group of stars known as the Pleiades consists of a great many large stars. How far distant this beautiful constellation is from us is not known. All that scientists can tell us is that it takes the light two or three hundred years to reach us from that part of the universe, or perhaps more, though it travels at the rate of 186,400 miles a second. But by means of photography it has been ascertained that there are over 3,000 stars in that group, where the naked eye can see only six or seven. They all have the same general movement in the heavens, and by the fact that they are all of one type, the "Sirian," it is thought that they must

be closely related in origin and development.

Kolob, according to the Book of Abraham, is a group of stars. The name is therefore plural, for the same reason that we use the plural form of the word "Pleiades."

We have in these paragraphs, considered only the word "Kolob." There are others which are very clearly Semitic. "Libnah" is Hebrew, and also Arabic. The verb is "laban," which means "to be white." It is found in "Lebanon," "Libnah," and many other words in the Semitic languages, and, what is of peculiar interest to us, it is said to occur in the Egyptian in the form "labitu." (Gesenius Hebraisches und Arameisches Handwoerterbuch.) "Elkanah" is Hebrew. "Korash" may be the Egyptian "Kerasher," and "Mahmackrah" may be a variation of the Egyptian "ma-ka-ra," meaning, we understand, "truth, the life of Ra." The Egyptians, in the early period, had the habit of using superfluous letters in their writings. They would represent the word "pyramid," "mer," for instance, with signs which might be read "mermer" instead of "mer." In the same way the word "babau," "hole," is found with a "ba and an "a" too many. This may account for the duplication of "Ma" in "mahmackrah," but this suggestion is offered merely as an hypothesis.

There is one peculiarity about the work of God, both in nature and in revelation, and that is that the closer they are examined the more wonderful they appear in beauty, in perfection, in fullness. It is so in nature. The most humble flower, the most insignificant animal, no less than the brilliant star cluster, contains inexhaustible material for study and contemplation. It is so with the Bible. Every text is a gem, every chapter a treasure. It is the same with the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants. Every part of these records contains some evidence of their divine inspiration. To the student who examines them with a heart open to truth they are full of information.—Deseret News.

As to Accuracy

There is, perhaps, no book published that is entirely free from typographical errors, and so readers have learned to excuse these to some extent. In the case of "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator," an inquiry conducted by Rev. F. S. Spalding, D.D., there are many errors of this class, and some of these it is difficult to overlook as mere typographical errors. They smack of carelessness in copying or proof-reading, and confirm the criticisms that have been made that the author's "inquiry is shown to have been of the loosest scientific

Apostle George Q. Cannon published, in 1888, "The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet," and his account of the Book of Abraham gives further evidence--most valuable as coming from one who was intimately acquainted with the feelings of his fellow churchmen--that the translation we are considering was believed by Joseph Smith, Jr., and his contemporaries to have been given him by revelation and inspiration:

g | "While Joseph Smith had been laboring in Kirtland, journeying to and from Missouri, teaching his brethren and being taught of God, there were coming to him, from one of the catacombs of Egypt, the writings of Father Abraham and of Joseph, the governor of Egypt. moving in  
who was |  
day | "On the 7th of January, 1831, a French traveler and explorer penetrated the depths of a catacomb near the site of ancient Thebes. It had cost him time and treasure and influence to make the entrance. After securing the license to make the researches, he employed more than four hundred men for a period of some months to make the necessary excavations. When he was able at last to stay stand  
his | within this multiplied tomb, he found several hundred mummies; but only eleven of them were in such a state that they could be removed. He carried them away, but died on the voyage to Paris. By his will the mummies were bequeathed to Michael H. Chandler, his nephew, and in search of this gentleman they were sent through Ireland and finally across the sea. After two years' wandering to of  
his | they found their owner. Hoping to discover some treasure of precious stones or metals, Mr. Chandler opened the coffins or embalming cases. Attached to two of the bodies were rolls of linen preserved with the same care and apparently by the same method as the bodies. Within the linen coverings were rolls of papyrus bearing a perfectly preserved record in black and red characters, carefully formed. With other of the bodies were papyrus strips bearing epitaphs and astronomical calculations. The learned men of Philadelphia and other places flocked to see these representatives of an ancient time, and Mr. Chandler solicited their translation of some of the characters. Even the wisest among of them were only able to interpret the meaning of a very few signs. From the very moment he discovered the rolls. in when  
of the | Mr. Chandler had heard that a prophet lived in the West (C) who could decipher strange languages and reveal things hidden; and after failing with all the learned men and having parted with seven of the mummies and some few strips of papyrus, bearing astronomical figures, he finally reached

nature." There are few quotations in the whole pamphlet free from errors, some of which are quite material; for example, on page 16, in the statement of the Prophet Joseph relating to the presentation of the characters to Prof. Anthon the word "Egyptain" is omitted in the professor's description of the characters. Two pages of the pamphlet are herewith presented showing the errors that occur in a quotation from Cannon's "Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet." If our author displays such carelessness in reproducing quotations from a printed page, how are we to know that he has quoted his own authorities correctly from their manuscripts, or that he has presented the case to them correctly and without prejudice?

anciently  
 2  
 of the  
 Kirtland and presented himself to Joseph with the <sup>13</sup> remaining bodies and with the rolls of manuscript. The <sup>four</sup> Prophet, under inspiration of the Almighty, interpreted some of the writings to Mr. Chandler's satisfaction. So far as the learned men of Philadelphia had been able to translate, Joseph's work coincided with theirs; but he went much further, and in his delight, Mr. Chandler wrote a letter to the Prophet certifying to this effect.

"Later, some friends of the Prophet purchased the four mummies with the writings. Joseph engaged assiduously to interpret from the rolls and strips of papyrus. The result of his labor was to give to the world a translation of the Book of Abraham. This book was written by the hand of Abraham while he was in Egypt, and was preserved by the marvelous dispensation of Providence, <sup>12</sup> through all the mutations of time and the dangers of distance, to reach the hand of God's Prophet in this last dispensation. By this record the Father of the Faithful makes known what the Lord Almighty had shown to him concerning the things that were before the world was; and he declares that he did penetrate the mysteries of the Heavens even unto Kolob, the star which is nearest the throne of God, the Eternal One. \* \* \* At the time when Joseph, aided by the inspiration of the Almighty, was enabled to make those translations, he was studying ancient languages and the grandest sciences, while he was also imparting instruction in the school of the brethren at Kirtland, that others than himself might have their minds fitted to grasp the sublimities of truth in theology and history and the laws governing the Universe."<sup>12</sup>

(l.c.)  
 e  
 (l.c.)

That the prophet most sincerely believed in the authenticity of the Book of Abraham and the correctness of its translation, the testimony of Mr. T. B. H. Stenhouse, an unfriendly critic, is of value. After treating the subject at some length, he concludes:

"The author, notwithstanding, still clings to the assertion that Joseph believed sincerely that he was inspired, and the pride with which he gave this translation to the world supports that conclusion."<sup>13</sup>

12. The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet, by George Q. Cannon, Juvenile Instructor Office, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1888, pages 187-188.

13. "Rocky Mountain Saints," page 520.