
GENESIS 12-23; ABRAHAM 1-3

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OUTLINE

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 - l. The sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19)
 - m. Nahor's genealogy (Genesis 22:20-24)
- II. Abram, Lot, Ishmael, and Isaac (Genesis 15-22)
- III. Abraham's later life (Genesis 23:1-20)

INTRODUCTION

The story of Abraham is the story of all men who make covenants with God. With him, the foundations are laid for the creation of the house of Israel and the nation that God will call to be an example and a light to the world. Abraham learns line upon line about how the Lord works with him—and thus with all mankind. In the process, he also learns faith, trust, and patience.

We are first introduced to Abraham (then called Abram) in Genesis 11:26 as one of the three sons of Terah. Their names mean: Terah *terah*, a kind of ibex; Abram *'abērām*, 'exalted father'; Nahor *nāhōr*, meaning uncertain; and Haran *hārān*, 'mountaineer.' Other names that figure early in the story include Lot *lōt*, 'covering'; Sarai *sāray*, 'princess.' When Sarai is introduced as Abram's wife, we are told simply that she "was barren" and "had no child" (Genesis 11:30). This simple mention of her situation prefigures much of the story that follows.

ABRAHAM'S EARLY MINISTRY (ABRAHAM 1-3)

INTRODUCTION

The excitement must have been felt all throughout the city of **Kirtland in July 1835** when Michael Chandler came to town with his collection of mummies and writings. After viewing some of the papyri, Joseph Smith started a translation of some writings of Abraham, and he and other members rallied to purchase the mummies and papyri for \$2400. Between July and November 1835, Joseph Smith completed the translation of the book of Abraham as we now have it; there is no evidence he ever went back and did additional work. It was published in 1842 in installments in the Nauvoo newspaper, *Times and Seasons*. Franklin D. Richards included it in his small publication entitled “The Pearl of Great Price” in 1851 in England, and from there it made its way into our scriptures in 1878. The papyri themselves were sold to the Wood Museum in Chicago and mostly destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. The few fragments that remained in private possession found their way to the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1947, then were recognized by a non-LDS scholar, Dr. Aziz Atiya, from the University of Utah in 1966. Subsequently the next year, the

Metropolitan donated the fragments to the Church, which contain a damaged Facsimile 1 but otherwise are fairly standard Egyptian funerary texts (Gee, *Guide*, 1-13; Draper 239-241).

Those opposing Joseph Smith have taken his translation of the facsimiles—the only thing where a comparison with the original Egyptian characters is possible—and criticized the Prophet for being incorrect, based on the analysis of prominent Egyptologists. But in recent years LDS Egyptologists have been able to take a second look at things and provided new insights that show Joseph Smith’s translations are in many cases excellent Egyptian interpretation, especially considering the time and place of the papyri themselves (Gee, *Guide*, 33-41; Draper 241-245).

More important than a discussion of the specific images in the facsimiles is the impact the book of Abraham has had on Church doctrine. The creation stories were previously discussed. In this lesson we’ll visit the first three chapters, examining their significance and teachings.

COMMENTARY

SEEKS THE PRIESTHOOD (ABRAHAM 1:1-4)

The Abraham and Genesis records consistently state that Abraham first lived in “**Ur of the Chaldees.**” But where was that? One potential site is Tell al-Muqayyar in southern Mesopotamia, traditionally considered the Biblical Ur, and many scholars for years have settled on that location. But Paul Hoskisson of BYU has convincingly argued for a different location—either in northwestern Syria or south-central Turkey (see his article “Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?” in Peterson, 119-136; also Millet 225-227; Holzapfel 50). This makes much more sense for many reasons, including that a southern Mesopotamian location that would require a lengthy migration on Terah’s family’s part, whereas it is a relatively

short move from a northern Ur to Haran, while still fitting the requirements of escaping Egyptian influence in the move and a shared famine between the two locations.

Abraham 1:2 is a very **poetic** verse, as Abraham explains his desire to be ordained to the priesthood, follow righteousness (which could be written Righteousness as a name for the Lord; see Millet 217-219), and gain great knowledge. How did Abraham gain this desire? He says that his fathers had turned away from the Lord (v. 5), so it wasn’t from his family. In Genesis, such desires are not expressed nor do we have any background but his ancestry; the story simply starts with the Lord speaking to him. D&C 84:14 states that Abraham was ordained by Melchizedek, who will be discussed below. Here it is interesting to note

that Abraham desired to be a “prince of peace” while Melchizedek was called by that title as well as the “king of peace” in the JST changes to Genesis 14. Perhaps missionaries from Melchizedek’s Salem ranged north and encountered a young Abraham, teaching him about the gospel?

ON THE ALTAR (ABRAHAM 1:5-20)

Abraham was caught in a trap. The Egyptian priests in his land were offering sacrifices of “men, women, and children” (v. 8). Abraham mentioned a “thank-offering of a child” and the killing of “three virgins at one time” (vv. 10-11). Somehow these same priests got hold of Abraham and were able to **put him on the altar**. In his moment of peril, he prayed to the Lord who sent an angel to strike down the priest and rescue Abraham.

Many details of this story have been confirmed since Joseph Smith’s day. For example, when Joseph Smith wrote the names of the **gods** in this story (Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, and Korash), he might as well have drawn a target on his chest. People can (and did) say, ‘You just made these up—they’re not in the Bible or any other records.’ And they weren’t found anywhere—until Tell Mardikh in northern Syria (near Haran) began to be excavated in 1964. The ancient name of this city was Ebla, and in its ruins were found hundreds of cuneiform tablets dating from just before the time of Abraham (2500-2250 B.C.). In these tablets are mentioned literally hundreds of gods, including (as spelled by the archaeologist) *Il-ki-na, La-ban, Ma-mi-hi-rat, and Kur-ra-su-ur-ur*. Joseph Smith’s rendering of these names is actually a good phonetic transliteration of them from Akkadian, the language of Ebla and probably Abraham, to English. “Each of the gods/idols mentioned in Ab. 1:17 appears in the compilation of some 3800 Mesopotamian deities published in 1950 by Anton Deimel” (Millet 232; see also Draper 285-286).

Facsimile 1 was given to illustrate the event. One other similar scene has been found among Egyptian writings that states in the accompanying text that it is Abraham being pictured on the altar. Other ancient accounts of Abraham’s life have him

being sacrificed by fire, often by Nimrod, because he will not worship the local gods (see Tvedtnes).

At the conclusion of this attempted sacrifice and divine rescue, Abraham apparently first learned of God’s intention to take him away from his father’s house to a new land, put his name upon Abraham (meaning give him the priesthood), renew the covenant made with Noah, and make God’s name be known throughout the earth forever through Abraham’s ministry. There is more about this covenant in Abraham 2.

EGYPT AND PHARAOH (ABRAHAM 1:21-28)

These verses form a parenthetical statement about the history of Egypt itself, preparing us for Abraham’s later visit there. Genesis 10:6 and other Jewish sources agree that the descendants of Ham settled Egypt (Draper 254-255). Abraham concludes this section speaking of “records [which] have come into my hands, which I hold” (v. 28) which he will use to tell the story of creation (in chapters 4-5). He explains more about these records in v. 31.

FAMINE AND MOVE TO HARAN (GENESIS 11:26-32; ABRAHAM 1:29 – 2:5)

Tvedtnes, Hauglid, and Gee note twelve elements found in chapter 2 of the book of Abraham that are not in the equivalent Genesis account (see the comparison in the **Appendix**), including Haran dying in the famine; Terah returning to idol worship; Abraham holding the priesthood; Abraham’s age (62 not 75 when leaving Haran), and the Lord’s instruction to say that Sarah was his sister. They point out that each of these twelve elements are “attested in nonbiblical traditions to one degree or another” (Tvedtnes xxii; see the whole book for those non-biblical texts). None of these non-biblical texts were available to Joseph Smith.

JEHOVAH COVENANTS (GENESIS 12:1-3; ABRAHAM 2:6-13)

At the time of his near-sacrifice, the personage who appeared and spoke to Abraham was an

angel (Abraham 1:15). In this section, Yhwh himself came to Abraham. As part of their conversation, we gain the “clearest description of the **Abrahamic covenant** in the scriptures” (Draper 263 and for the summary below where verse numbers are from Abraham). The covenant consists of five promises made by the Lord: 1) a promised land (v. 6); 2) numerous posterity who will rise up and bless him (vv. 9-10); 3) rights to the priesthood for him and his posterity (v. 9, 11); 4) responsibility to preach the Gospel and thus bless all nations (v. 9); and, 5) salvation and exaltation (v. 11). Abraham promised obedience (v. 13).

After the vision, Abraham quietly reflected, “Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee” (v. 12).

MOVE TO CANAAN (GENESIS 12:4-8; ABRAHAM 2:14-20)

According to the Lord’s command, Abraham left Haran with his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and “the **souls that we had won** in Haran” (Abraham 2:15). The Hebrew in Genesis is translated “gotten” in the KJV, but carries the broader meaning of made, worked, prepared, attended to, collected, gathered, or put in order (BDB 795). Thus Abraham’s “won,” generally interpreted as Abraham converted them, is appropriate.

Abraham 2:16-17 mentions a stop in **Jershon** not recorded in Genesis where Abraham offered sacrifice in behalf of his father’s house suffering from famine. The location of this place is not known. From there the group proceeded to **Sechem** (Shechem, today Nablus) in the hill country west of the Jordan River and about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Here the Lord again appeared to Abraham, telling him the location of his own **promised land**, “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (Genesis 12:7; Abraham 2:19). Abraham had to journey by faith prior to this point, not knowing where his land of promise was (Genesis 12:1; Abraham 2:3).

Continuing his journey south, Abraham stopped and built an altar on a mountain **between Beth-el** (‘house of God’) **and H’ai** (‘the heap of ruins’), in

the hill country due west of Jericho and about 10 miles north of Jerusalem.

The Genesis account here begins to show evidence of the hand of the **editor**, with references to things as they were in Abraham’s day but which were no longer true in the editor’s time, including “And the Canaanite was then in the in land” (v. 6). Unlike the Book of Mormon where Mormon and Moroni revealed themselves, we don’t know the editor(s) name(s) in Genesis.

IN EGYPT (GENESIS 12:9-20; ABRAHAM 2:21-25)

Because of the famine, Abraham went down to Egypt. The Genesis account has a story of Abram passing off Sarai as his sister to save his own life, which elicits much commentary. The Abraham account clarifies that it was the **Lord’s command** all along. The Abraham account does not continue the story of what happened in Egypt, however, but shifts to a great vision Abraham had.

Commenting on the wife-sister relationship, Nahum Sarna (pp. 102-103) notes that discoveries of records in **Nuzi** (near the area where Abraham lived before coming to Canaan) talk about a specific legal relationship that could be established with a man and a woman where she became not only his wife but also his legal sister, thereby giving her additional rights and privileges. He postulates that Abram and Sarai entered into such a **wife-sister** relationship (as did Isaac and Rebekah later) and that Abram felt that stating that relationship would protect them both in Egypt. But the Egyptians knew nothing of this practice, so instead of protecting them, it put Sarai in jeopardy until God intervened and saved them.

I note that if you look at their ages, Sarai had to be at least in in 50s and perhaps even older when they went to Egypt. This makes Abraham’s observation that she was “a fair woman to look upon” (Genesis 12:11; Abraham 2:22) even more fascinating.

HIS VISION (ABRAHAM 3:1-28)

Joseph Smith first learned about man’s pre-earth existence and God creating many worlds during

the translation of the Bible in the early chapters of Genesis. Abraham 3 added to his and the Church's understanding of these unique doctrines in important ways. It also adds to our understanding of how Abraham and others of his day perceived their world.

Nothing in Abraham 3 is recorded in Genesis, yet much of it is **found in other sources** that have surfaced since Joseph Smith's time, such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Jubilees*, or the *Testament of Abraham*. For more information, see Gee, *Astronomy*, 57-73.

The order of worlds (Abraham 3:1-17) Modern readers try to fit this section into the post-Einsteinian view of the world developed in the last fifty years. Others (generally outside the Church) see this chapter as a reflection of astronomical understanding of Joseph Smith's day. However, Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson (Gee, *Astronomy*, 1-16) argue persuasively that Abraham's vision of the order of the universe is a **geocentric** one that exactly fits his time and worldview—in other words, the Lord spoke to him and taught him “after the manner of [his] language” (D&C 1:24). In such a view, the earth is at the center and everything is above it in the heavens. Some things are closer and other higher, resulting in different times. The stars are the highest and are thus closest to God, and God speaks down through the heavens to the earth, thus making the things in the highest heavens govern the lower objects and ultimately the earth.

The first part of the experience (vv. 1-11) was information received through the Urim and Thummim (v. 1) and by talking with the Lord “face to face” (v. 11). There is no indication of a visionary experience until v. 12. The results of this experience are captured in **Facsimile 2**.

The ultimate purposes of the revelations are given in verses 14-15: 1) to illustrate the **vastness of the Lord's promise** of innumerable seed to Abraham; and, 2) To give him words to **declare to the Egyptians** when he went there. The story of Abraham going to Egypt is not included in the Pearl of Great Price; likely it was on the manuscript after the creation accounts but that is

where the translation ends. But **Facsimile 3** is an illustration of that visit, showing Abraham being honored while teaching the astronomical principles he had learned.

Man's pre-existence (Abraham 3:18-28) The second part of the chapter transitions at verse 18, comparing the stars at different levels to spirits at different levels. The Lord represents that eternal spirits have different levels of **intelligence**, “one being more intelligent than the other” and “I [the Lord] am more intelligent than they all” (v. 19). Abraham is noted as one of the more intelligent or “good” spirits (v. 23), but one “like unto God” (v. 24) took **existing materials** and with others (“we will go down”) and made the earth, the purpose of which is to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (v. 25). There are two who stepped forward to be sent. The one not chosen became angry and took many with him.

DIVISION OF THE LAND (GENESIS 13:1-18)

Coming back from Egypt, Abraham returned to the same place he was, between Bethel and Hai. He and Lot both had substantial flocks and herds by this time and contention over the land forced them to separate. Abram generously gave Lot first choice. In deliberate language, the record says that “**Lot lifted up his eyes**” (v. 10) and seeing the Jordan River valley as the best land, chose to go there. Thus Lot “**pitched his tent toward Sodom**” (v. 12), a place of sin and wickedness.

After Lot's departure, the Lord came to Abram and told him to “**lift up now thine eyes**” (v. 14) and see all the land that he and his seed were given. The contrast to Lot is clear: Lot selfishly looked around and took what he wanted; Abram humbly looked around only when directed by the Lord, and gratefully accepted God's gift of land. The Lord reiterates the promise of great seed to the childless man, comparing it to “the dust of the earth” (v. 16). Then in a type of contractual agreement of that day, the Lord invited Abram to **walk the length and breadth of the land** to survey what will be given him.

In the process of his travels, Abram moved his tent to a location near **Hebron**, to “the plain of **Mamre**” (or as some translations have it, “at the terebinths of Mamre,” the tall trees marking the spot) in the south of the Judean hill country nearing the Negeb desert.

BATTLE OF THE KINGS (GENESIS 14:1-16)

Genesis 14 is a most unusual chapter in Abram’s life. Not the passive nomad, he emerges as a strategist, a warrior-general, and a peer to kings.

In a detailed description, we learn of the aggressive campaigns of various kings against each other. Those details are not particularly relevant except that in the end, Lot is captured. It is intriguing that the names of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah reflect the coming judgment on those two cities: Sodom’s king is **Bera** meaning ‘in evil’ and Gomorrah is **Birsha** meaning ‘in wickedness’ (JPS 34).

Hearing of Lot’s capture, Abram raised an army from among his own household along with recruits from his neighbors. Using a night-time strategy, they overpowered the enemy and rescued Lot, his family, and his possessions.

MELCHIZEDEK (GENESIS 14:17-24)

After the conquest in the north, Abraham was returning to his home in Hebron. Along the way, he stopped in Salem and there met with the king, **Melchizedek**. Melchizedek is a very enigmatic figure in scripture, with very little Biblical information but substantial non-biblical writings about him, none of which were available to Joseph

Smith. Yet this chapter was substantially rewritten in the Prophet’s translation efforts (see the JST Appendix in the LDS KJV Bible), giving great insight into this prophet/priest/king.

Melchizedek (*malĕkî-šedeq*) means “my king is righteousness,” interesting when referring back to Abraham 1:2 (who wanted to be a great follower of Righteousness). In the JST changes, he is also called “the prince of peace,” “the king of heaven,” and “the king of peace.” Like Enoch, Melchizedek led his people in righteousness, stopped lions and quenched fire. He was ordained a high priest after the order of Enoch and the Son of God. He and his people “wrought righteousness and obtained heaven.” Melchizedek blessed Abram and ordained him to the priesthood (D&C 84:14), and Abram paid tithes for the storehouse to Melchizedek.

Melchizedek’s name for God is “the most high God” (*ʿēl ʿelĕyôn*) (v. 18). When Abram determined not to profit from his military victory, he applied the name to his God, *yĕhōwāh ʿēl ʿelĕyôn* (v. 22).

Genesis 14 was translated by Joseph Smith probably in early February 1831. It is the first text that he translated that mentions the office of high priest. In that same month, the Prophet received D&C 42:31, which is the first time the office of high priest is mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants. The first high priests were ordained later that year. It is not coincidental that the JST message preceded the D&C revelation.

ABRAM, LOT, ISHMAEL, AND ISAAC (GENESIS 15-22)

INTRODUCTION

The rest of Abraham’s story focuses mostly on his two sons—Ishmael and Isaac—and on the fulfillment of God’s great promises already made. In many cases, it appears that those promises could not or will not be fulfilled, but Abraham is a

model of faith who continues to trust in God even when his words appear impossible.

Abraham’s chronology can be constructed from the major events in his life as follows:

- Left Haran: 75 (or 62 in Abraham)
- Ishmael born: 86
- Name changed to Abraham: 99
- Isaac born: 100
- Isaac's sacrifice: 113?
- Death: 175

COMMENTARY

COVENANT CUT (GENESIS 15:1-21)

Abram expressed concern one day to the Lord that he was getting quite old and had no heir but his steward, **Eliezer** (whether because Abram 'adopted' him in some way or because he saw no alternative is not clear, but ancient customs would support the former; Sarna 122-123). But the Lord assured him that his heir would be his actual son, reiterating the promise of posterity as numerous as the stars. With that reassurance, Abram "believed in the Lord" (or 'put his trust in the Lord' JPS) and the Lord "counted it to him for righteousness (or 'declared him righteous'). It is worth nothing that the Lord's words in v. 1, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward," tie directly back to the previous chapter where Abram's victory was attributed to the Lord and where he took no reward after the battle.

Sometime later (implied by the transition in v. 7) Abraham again asked the Lord how, as a man still without child, he should know that the promises were true. In response, the Lord had Abram enact an ancient **contract-making ceremony**. Abraham took several animals and cut them in half length-wide (head to tail) and laid them on opposite sides of a path. Then he waited, drying away the vultures who tried to get to the dead animals all day. At night, Abram fell asleep and a feeling of great distress ("an horror of great darkness," v. 12) came upon him, immediately reminding of Joseph Smith's First Vision, where he was surrounded by "thick darkness" so that he could not speak and felt "doomed to sudden destruction" (Joseph Smith-History 1:15). In both cases, it was the darkness before the light. The Lord came and said to Abram that his seed would be afflicted 400 years (v. 13; though also four generations, v. 16) but would come out "with great substance" (v. 14). Abram himself would be buried in peace at "a good old age" (v. 15). Then

Abram saw smoke and fire, which he described as "a smoking furnace (or oven), and a burning lamp" (or torch, v. 17) pass between the animal halves. This is an ancient land-grant ceremony, where the two parties symbolically pass through the animals as representative of what will happen to them if they do not keep the contract. The difference here with a standard land-grant contract is that only the Lord passed through and carcasses, making it a **unilateral obligation**; he promised the land to Abram unconditionally (JPS 35-36; Zondervan 1:85; Alexander 146-147).

In the middle of this text is a marvelous **JST** addition that is a **prophecy of Christ**. Abram asked how he would get the land. The Lord reasons that even if Abram were dead, could not the Lord still give him the land (as an eternal inheritance in the resurrection). Then to cement the point, the Lord teaches: "For the day cometh that the Son of Man shall live, but how can he live if he be not dead? He must first be quickened." This reminds the reader of a yet future Isaiah prophecy: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10). As a result, Abram had a vision of "the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest."

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL (GENESIS 16:1-16)

Hagar was probably acquired as a slave while Abram and Sarai were in Egypt. Sarai desired for the Lord's promises to be fulfilled and saw giving Hagar to Abram as a concubine as her best solution. This might seem extreme to modern sensibilities, but keeping the family line going was a critical responsibility of the wife and Sarai was unable to meet this obligation in any other way. Additionally, the custom of giving a **slave as a**

concubine was well-known, as reflected in contemporary texts from Nuzi and may even have been part of the original marriage contract (Zondervan 1:87).

Hagar did conceive, which caused her to look down upon Sarai—suddenly Hagar had a higher status, as the bearer of Abram’s heir (cf. Proverbs 30:22-23)! After being dealt with harshly by Sarai (with Abram’s permission and according to the laws of that day, Sarna 127-128), **Hagar fled** into the wilderness. An angel (messenger) came to her, reprimanding her for running away and telling her to return and submit to Sarai—as was the law. Then he promised her a son and a great multitude of posterity. The son’s name was to be Ishmael, (*yīšmā‘ēʾ*) meaning ‘God hears’ (BDB 1035), a reminder to her that God loves her, too.

Amazed that she could see an angel of God and survive, she names the place “Beer-lahai-roi” (‘well of the living one that sees me,’ BDB 91). The JST adds that she first called the angel by that name because he said, “Knowest thou that God seeth thee?” The well took the angel’s name after the event.

NAME CHANGE AND CIRCUMCISION (GENESIS 17:1-27)

At ninety-nine years of age, a patient Abram again encountered the Lord, the Almighty God (*ʾē/šaday*) who reiterated the covenant and asked Abram to “walk before me, and be thou perfect” (or, ‘blameless’) (v. 1). As a symbol of the covenant, he required Abram and all his household to be **circumcised**. This was not a new custom in the ancient Near East, but the Lord used it for his own purposes. Typically boys were circumcised at puberty (and Ishmael reaching 13 may have even triggered the question). But the JST makes it clear that the removal of the foreskin was to happen at eight days old in the future for two purposes: 1) “that thou mayest know forever, that children are not accountable before me until they are eight years old”; 2) as a reminder to “keep the commandments which I have given thee with mine own mouth” (v. 7). This, by the way, is where Joseph Smith first learned the age of

accountability, later referenced (clearly as a known fact, though it’s the first time it’s seen in the D&C) in Section 68:25.

In conjunction with this covenant of circumcision, the Lord changed Abram’s name (meaning ‘exalted father’) to **Abraham** (‘father of a multitude’) (v. 5) and Sarai’s name to **Sarah** (both names meaning ‘princess’). Abraham is told that Sarah will bear a son, at which Abraham laughed (JST “rejoiced”), and plead that perhaps Ishmael might “live before thee” (or ‘dwell in your presence’). But God repeated that Sarah will have a son and Abraham was to call him **Isaac** (*yisēḥāq*), meaning ‘he laughs’ or ‘he rejoices.’ Ishmael will indeed be blessed, but it will be through Isaac that the covenant will be established.

The text records that Abraham faithfully took himself and “every male among the men of Abraham’s house” (v. 23) and circumcised them that very day.

ISAAC FORETOLD (GENESIS 18:1-15)

Shortly after the circumcision event, Abraham was visited by **three men**. They were “angels, which were holy men” (JST v. 22). Abraham showed them great hospitality, after which they repeated the promise of a son for Abraham and Sarah. Apparently Abraham had not yet told Sarah about his previous encounter, because as she heard this pronouncement, she, like Abraham, laughed (yes, the word also means to rejoice, but the context is clear that she laughed now, rejoiced later). In the JST, it is the angel or messenger that delivered the entire message to Abraham, including promising to return after his journey to Sodom to confirm his words (vv. 13-14).

BARGAINING FOR SODOM & GOMORRAH (GENESIS 18:16-33)

In the JST version of Abraham’s **bargaining** with God for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, the angel tells Abraham to go near Sodom and be a witness of their wickedness. Thus the conversation Abraham has with the Lord happens

as he is close by looking at the city. The challenge is turned around—Abraham is to do the finding of righteous souls, and if he cannot, the Lord will destroy the city. Though not explicitly stated, Abraham evidently could not even find ten righteous souls, as it is recorded that he “went his way” and “returned unto his tent” (v. 33).

DESTRUCTION OF SODOM & GOMORRAH (GENESIS 19:1-29)

The JST makes several changes to these verses reporting the **destruction of Sodom**, whose destruction is witnessed firsthand by Lot and his family, and Gomorrah, whose destruction Abraham witnesses from a distance. The JST continues the story of three visitors—just as Abraham experienced—not two as the Genesis text has. Lot sat in the city gates, perhaps because he was serving an administrative function as one of the city elders. He invited the three messengers to stay with him, which they reluctantly accept, and they ate a feast. But soon the men of the city attacked Lot’s house, demanding to have the men and Lot’s daughters as well (in the JST, Lot does not offer his daughters as ransom for the men but does his best to protect them). Their request to “know” the men and Lot’s daughters (v. 5 and JST v. 9) is sexually related. The number of men hearkens back to Abraham’s bargain with the Lord—they are all the men of the city, young and old, from every quarter, thus demonstrating that ten good men indeed cannot be found in Sodom.

The visitors smote the crowd, temporarily blinding them and allowing Lot time to try and warn his sons in law. When that is unsuccessful, the angels forcibly take Lot, his wife, and two unmarried daughters out of the city. **Lot fled** to the nearby city of Zoar, after which “the angels called upon the name of the Lord for brimstone and fire” (JST v. 24). What was the nature of the sins that required such a destruction? “Because the cry of them is waxen great” (v. 13). The “cry” is from the victims of injustice, inequality, and oppression. It is the same cry the children of Israel later give that causes the Lord to send Moses to free them, and the Lord to flood the earth in Noah’s day (cf. Ezekiel 16:49-50).

The destruction was so bad that Lot and his family left Zoar and fled to the mountains, but his wife “looked back” and “became a **pillar of salt**” (v. 26). The ‘looking back’ was probably more than stealing a glance; she could well have left Lot and returned to the city and was thus caught up in the destruction.

The section concludes with a verse that says in the KJV that Lot was saved because “God remembered Abraham” (v. 29) but the JST changes it to say that the “God spake unto Abraham, saying, I have remembered Lot, and sent him out of the midst of the overthrow, that they brother might not be destroyed.” As a result of this revelation, “Abraham was comforted.”

LOT’S DAUGHTERS (GENESIS 19:30-38)

This strange incident where **Lot’s two daughters** got him drunk and then both became pregnant by him has been explained by some that the women believed they were facing the end of the world and needed to have children to perpetuate the species (JPS 42). But it is probably best seen as a story to explain the origins (in an unflattering way) of Moab and Ammon, two of Israel’s neighbors and perennial enemies.

ENCOUNTER WITH ABIMELECH (GENESIS 20:1-18)

The **Abimelech** (meaning ‘my father is king’) encounter is a repeat of the encounter with Pharaoh and Sarai, only now Sarah is almost 90 years old—and pregnant. In both cases, Abraham is enriched, Sarah’s virtue is preserved, and the king suffers for even having taken Sarah in.

ISAAC BORN (GENESIS 21:1-8)

Finally came the day that Abraham has been waiting for for decades—Sarah bore him a son. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. **Isaac** was circumcised at 8 days (the first one mentioned in scripture, though likely others in Abraham’s house had been circumcised when they were born in the intervening years). Isaac’s name is appropriate because Sarah (and Abraham) both laughed when

she heard the news and rejoiced when he was born.

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL CAST OUT (GENESIS 21:9-21)

It's not clear what the nature of Ishmael's "**mocking**" (v. 9) was; the verb means 'to laugh, play, make sport, make a toy of' (BDB 850). Because the word is related to "Isaac," some believe it means he was trying to take Isaac's place (JPS 44). Whatever it was, it "troubled" Sarah (JST v. 9). It also must not have been the first occurrence because Abraham agreed with Sarah that Hagar and Ishmael, now probably 16, had to leave. Taking it to the Lord, it was confirmed that this was the right choice. Rising early in the morning (the same language used in 22:3), Abraham gives them provisions and sent them away. Perhaps Hagar got lost, but as before, an angel intervened to assist her, directing her to water at a critical moment. We are thus assured that the promise of Ishmael becoming a mighty nation was fulfilled.

ABIMELECH AND THE WELLS (GENESIS 21:22-34)

This is perhaps not the same Abimelech as in chapter 20, as some time has passed and the word is more of a title than a name. This story illustrates how Abraham's **fortunes** continued to **grow**, along with his land holdings.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC (GENESIS 22:1-19)

The pinnacle of Abraham's story is found in this chapter. Called by the Jews "**Akedah**" ('binding' because of what happens to Isaac), the story is important to Jews, Muslims (though it is Ishmael in their version), and Christians. The story is told simply, without emotion or lengthy description, though we tend to read much between the lines. The JST offers no substantial changes other than to clarify some pronouns (e.g., changing "he" to "Abraham" or "the angel").

The **parallels** to Abram's early story are not to be missed. In both cases, the Lord calls him to go to a

new land that will be named later; he leaves homeland and family when departing Haran, and is asked to 'leave' his son, his only son in the *Akedah*; there is a related story of danger to Sarah (in Egypt and with Abimelech); both stories involve sacrifice and blessings (Sarna 160-161).

The order of God's description "thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest" (v. 2) adds to the tension of the moment, with each phrase building on the next (JPS 45).

Moriah has been identified with Jerusalem. But if Melchizedek's city, Salem, was at that location, this might not be a wilderness experience—unless Salem had been taken up, like Zion (hinted at in Genesis 14 in the JST). The location is significant, for some two thousand years later, God would offer his Son for a sacrifice on the same mountain. That explains why a man who was perhaps 113 years old had to make a three-day journey to perform an act that must have been heinous to him.

And yet Abraham did it without complaint or argument. Though he had nearly been a victim of such a crime, his only response was to saddle his ass and **leave early** in the morning. Though he had plead for the innocent in Sodom, now he had an innocent before him, his beloved son, and he left to make the sacrifice **without a comment**.

The **parallels** to Jesus' later sacrifice are evident to us but were surely not to Abraham until perhaps much later. Besides the location, Isaac carried the wood; he was a willing sacrifice, for once he discovered it was him, he did not resist.

Abraham's response to Isaac's question about the sacrifice in verse 8 can be read in Hebrew in a fascinating way: 'Elohim will provide the lamb for the offering—my son.' This double-entendre not only conveys the irony of the response but foreshadows the future sacrifice of Elohim on the same location, who will give up his own Lamb for our sakes.

Later, when Isaac is saved and the ram (not a lamb) is found as a replacement, Abraham calls the place "**Jehovah-jireh**" (*yěhōwāh yirē'eh*), meaning not the lengthy "In the mount of the Lord

it shall be seen” as the KJV renders it, but simply ‘Jehovah will be provided.’

NAHOR’S GENEALOGY (GENESIS 22:20-24)

Chapter 22 concludes with a prelude that sets us up for Isaac’s later life—a brief genealogy of Abraham’s brother, **Nahor**. His wife, Milcah, bore him eight sons, one of which was Bethuel, who, by the way, had a daughter named **Rebekah**.

ABRAHAM’S LATER LIFE (GENESIS 23:1-20)

Sarah died when she was 127. She was at Kirjath-arba at the time; Abraham appears to have been elsewhere, because he had to come there to “weep for her.” Going to the locals, he bargained for a burying place, a cave where he could place her body, as was the custom in those days (and indeed, for the next two thousand years). Abraham purchased a

cave and a field called Machpelah, which became the burying place for Sarah, himself later, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, and perhaps others of his family. He paid an exorbitant amount (400 shekels) but as was typical of Abraham, did not count the cost of keeping good relations with the neighbors.

APPENDIX

Abraham chapter 2 and Genesis 11-12 have overlapping accounts. The differences in Abraham 2 are interesting and helpful in gaining a fuller picture of this part of his life. The two are places side-by-side below to make that comparison easier.

The Book of Abraham, the Parallel Genesis Account, and Nonbiblical Tradition (from Tvedtnes xvii-xxii).

Genesis	Abraham 2
11:28 And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.	1 Now the Lord God caused the famine to wax sore in the land of Ur, insomuch that Haran, my brother, died; but Terah, my father, yet lived in the land of Ur, of the Chaldees.
11:29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.	2 And it came to pass that I, Abraham, took Sarai to wife, and Nahor, my brother, took Milcah to wife, who was the daughter of Haran.
12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:	3 Now the Lord had said unto me: Abraham, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.
11:31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.	4 Therefore I left the land of Ur, of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and I took Lot, my brother's son, and his wife, and Sarai my wife; and also my father followed after me, unto the land which we denominated Haran.
	5 And the famine abated; and my father tarried in Haran and dwelt there, as there were many flocks in Haran; and my father turned again unto his idolatry, therefore he continued in Haran.
	6 But I, Abraham, and Lot, my brother's son, prayed unto the Lord, and the Lord appeared unto me, and said unto me: Arise, and take Lot with thee; for I have

	<p>purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, when they hearken to my voice.</p>
	<p>7 For I am the Lord thy God; I dwell in heaven; the earth is my footstool; I stretch my hand over the sea, and it obeys my voice; I cause the wind and the fire to be my chariot; I say to the mountains—Depart hence—and behold, they are taken away by a whirlwind, in an instant, suddenly.</p>
	<p>8 My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.</p>
<p>12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:</p>	<p>9 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;</p>
	<p>10 And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father;</p>
<p>12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.</p>	<p>11 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.</p>
	<p>12 Now, after the Lord had withdrawn from speaking to me, and withdrawn his face from me, I said in my heart: Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee;</p>
	<p>13 Thou didst send thine angel to deliver me from the gods of Elkenah, and I will do well to hearken unto thy voice, therefore let thy servant rise up and depart in peace.</p>
<p>12:4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.</p>	<p>14 So I, Abraham, departed as the Lord had said unto me, and Lot with me; and I, Abraham, was sixty and two years old when I departed out of Haran.</p>
<p>12:5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.</p>	<p>15 And I took Sarai, whom I took to wife when I was in Ur, in Chaldea, and Lot, my brother's son, and all our substance that we had gathered, and the souls that we had won in Haran, and came forth in the way to the land of Canaan, and dwelt in tents as we came on our way;</p>
	<p>16 Therefore, eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation, as we journeyed from Haran by</p>

	the way of Jershon, to come to the land of Canaan.
	17 Now I, Abraham, built an altar in the land of Jershon, and made an offering unto the Lord, and prayed that the famine might be turned away from my father's house, that they might not perish.
12:6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.	18 And then we passed from Jershon through the land unto the place of Sechem; it was situated in the plains of Moreh, and we had already come into the borders of the land of the Canaanites, and I offered sacrifice there in the plains of Moreh, and called on the Lord devoutly, because we had already come into the land of this idolatrous nation.
12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.	19 And the Lord appeared unto me in answer to my prayers, and said unto me: Unto thy seed will I give this land.
12:8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.	20 And I, Abraham, arose from the place of the altar which I had built unto the Lord, and removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched my tent there, Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east; and there I built another altar unto the Lord, and called again upon the name of the Lord.
12:9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. 12:10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.	21 And I, Abraham, journeyed, going on still towards the south; and there was a continuation of a famine in the land; and I, Abraham, concluded to go down into Egypt, to sojourn there, for the famine became very grievous.
12:11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:	22 And it came to pass when I was come near to enter into Egypt, the Lord said unto me: Behold, Sarai, thy wife, is a very fair woman to look upon;
12:12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.	23 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see her, they will say—She is his wife; and they will kill you, but they will save her alive; therefore see that ye do on this wise:
12:13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.	24 Let her say unto the Egyptians, she is thy sister, and thy soul shall live.
	25 And it came to pass that I, Abraham, told Sarai, my wife, all that the Lord had said unto me—Therefore say unto them, I pray thee, thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee.

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