

Comments on Abraham 1

The Pearl of Great Price Book of Abraham includes considerable detail concerning Abraham's personal life, which accounts are entirely absent from the Genesis account. The Genesis account deliberately avoids personal matters so as to more clearly present the Lord's agenda in the election of Abraham. In the Genesis account, the Lord's election of Abraham is presented as contrasting the Tower of Babel account. It is also not explicitly presented as a result of Abraham's personal righteousness or zeal, as it chooses to focus on the larger issue of the Abrahamic covenant rather than the man Abram. The present first-person account includes considerable detail regarding Abraham's personal spiritual experiences makes no comment whatsoever on the Tower of Babel. Where the Genesis account is intended to be a primer in covenant theology, this present text is a journal account. As such, the text is quite different in content and style.

1 IN the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence; 2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers. 3 It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me. 4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.

v1-4 Abraham needs to leave the place he is currently living (v. 1). Rather than the comfort and security of staying in his ancestral lands, he instead chooses to seek after the more important spiritual inheritance of his fathers (v. 2). He receives the priesthood through the Patriarchal Order (v. 3) according to the promises made to Enoch and Noah (v. 4).

v1 Abraham indicates he needs to get out of town. Why? The answer is in v. 5 and throughout the rest of ch. 1 as well as 2:1.

v2-4 Abraham had an ulterior motive in finding a better place to live, aside from just getting away from his idolatrous family and neighbors. He sought out the priesthood and the blessings attendant to it, which blessings are listed in v. 2.

v2 "High Priest", the title or office "high priest" has different Priesthood keys associated with it in different dispensations. Currently, we have "high priests" as offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood, but during the Mosaic dispensation there were "high priests" in the Aaronic Priesthood as well. Here we are informed that Abraham was a "high priest" under the Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood. All of these offices of "high priest" clearly are not the same thing and cannot hold the same keys. Rather, the title is dispensation specific and each one will have different Priesthood keys associated with it. Currently, the blessings and keys associated with the Patriarchal Priesthood can only be obtained within the Temple.

At this point in history the keys we presently associate with the Patriarchal and Melchizedek orders were apparently united under the heading "Patriarchal Priesthood". Currently, we differentiate between the three different orders by having specific titles and associating specific keys and ordinances with them. In Abraham's time it appears to be unlikely these lines were clearly drawn as the Priesthood was officially the "Order after the Son of God" (which was subsequently named the Melchizedek order so as to avoid profaning the name of God, cf. D&C 107:2-4) and appears to have had access to all keys. It is later with the Mosaic dispensation that Priesthood keys are handed out piecemeal.

If Abraham is obtaining his Priesthood from Melchizedek (cf. D&C 84:14-15), and he is referring to it as the Patriarchal order, then the two titles are probably referring to the same thing. Only in a contemporary setting would the two titles be referring to two different sets of keys.

v3-4 The Priesthood Abraham sought after was the Patriarchal Order, which order was instituted with Adam, cf. Moses 6:1-7.

5 My fathers, having turned from their righteousness, and from the holy commandments which the Lord their God had given unto them, unto the worshiping of the gods of the heathen, utterly refused to hearken to my voice; 6 For their hearts were set to do evil, and were wholly turned to the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; 7 Therefore they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen in offering up their children unto these dumb idols, and hearkened not unto my voice,

but endeavored to take away my life by the hand of the priest of Elkenah. The priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh.... 12 And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; ... 15 And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold, I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with the vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands; 16 And his voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father's house, and from all thy kinsfolk, into a strange land which thou knowest not of; 17 And this because they have turned their hearts away from me, to worship the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; therefore I have come down to visit them, and to destroy him who hath lifted up his hand against thee, Abraham, my son, to take away thy life. 18 Behold, I will lead thee by my hand, and I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy father, and my power shall be over thee. 19 As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.

v5-19 This section of text focuses on an incident fairly early in Abram's life, which is ironic. Here, we have Abram almost being sacrificed on an altar, not entirely unlike the events described in Gen. 22.

Verses 5-7 set the stage for this rather dramatic episode. We are informed in v. 5-6 that "my fathers", presumably his extended family, had adopted the local customs of idolatry and Abram had called them to repentance for it (given the extremely lascivious nature of the Canaanite and Egyptian idolatrous practices, its not surprising to see it being so popular and why people were drawn into it and in no rush to repent). Instead of repenting they choose to subvert Abram and arrange to have him executed as a human sacrifice to their god (v. 7).

However, at the moment he is about to be executed, Abram yells out to the Lord (v. 15), and the Lord intervenes. Abram experiences a vision (v. 16-19) and then the Lord smashes the altar, the idol gods, and somehow kills the priest who was about to execute Abram (v. 20). The vision Abram receives is one where the Lord informs him He is there to protect and preserve him (v. 16), strike down his enemies (v. 17), bestow the Priesthood upon him (v. 18), and covenant with him as he did with Noah (v. 19, cp. Moses 8:18-19).

Note the imagery occurring in the end of v. 17 and beginning of v. 18. The Lord's hand drops down to smite the murderous priest, but with Abram He takes him and leads him by the hand.

His hand falls in judgement as well as lifts up in condescension, the Lord is a Lord of both Justice and Mercy dependant upon how we behave.

v15 "the vision of the Almighty", possibly a parallel to Gen. 22:14.

v16 "Abraham", at this point in time the man "Abraham" was in fact going by the name "Abram" as he did not officially adopt that name until some time later (cf. Gen. 17). In v. 1 Abraham refers to himself as "Abraham" and this is not problematic as, in all likelihood, it would have been penned well after the fact so at the time of writing he would have been going by that name. However, in this verse we have a direct quote from the Lord being presented as calling him "Abraham" and not "Abram". This may have been a gloss by either Abraham or Smith. But, it is more likely this is a foreshadowing of Abram's future mission. Compare this with the case of Jacob/Israel. Jacob is given the name "Israel" after his wrestle with God, but he doesn't officially adopt the name and abandon "Jacob" until well after that time. The name, foreshadowing God's intents with the man is given, but not presently adopted. Rather, it is alluded to and later applied when the recipient has proven themselves.

8 Now, at this time it was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea, for the offering unto these strange gods, men, women, and children. 9 And it came to pass that the priest made an offering unto the god of Pharaoh, and also unto the god of Shagreel, even after the manner of the Egyptians. Now the god of Shagreel was the sun. 10 Even the thank-offering of a child did the priest of Pharaoh offer upon the altar which stood by the hill called Potiphar's Hill, at the head of the plain of Olishem. 11 Now, this priest had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time, who were the daughters of Onitah, one of the royal descent directly from the loins of Ham. These virgins were offered up because of their virtue; they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or of stone, therefore they were killed upon this altar, and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians.

v8-11 A parentheses on the practice of child sacrifice among the Egyptians. Human sacrifice was common among the Egyptians, even Pharaoh himself had made child sacrifices.

Verse 11 is particularly noteworthy as it indicates some of the sacrifices performed were retaliation against those who refused to go along with the popular practices. Especially note they are three virgin "daughters of Ham" who are sacrificed for their refusal to participate in idolatry. This is included because the generally idolatrous and lascivious nature of the

Canaanites was so well known among the Israelites. This example serves to illustrate the two extremes. Their execution of the virgins simply evidences how depraved they had become. But, it also forms a polemic against making generalizations, as even among the most depraved societies there will be some few decent individuals, such as Abraham and these three virgins.

12 ... and that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record. 13 It was made after the form of a bedstead, such as was had among the Chaldeans, and it stood before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and also a god like unto that of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. 14 That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning, which manner of figures is called by the Chaldeans Rahleenos, which signifies hieroglyphics.

v12d-14 The second parenthesis gives some more mundane details concerning the mechanics of the idolatrous practices.

20 Behold, Potiphar's Hill was in the land of Ur, of Chaldea. And the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them, and smote the priest that he died; and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the court of Pharaoh; which Pharaoh signifies king by royal blood.... 29 Now, after the priest of Elkenah was smitten that he died, there came a fulfilment of those things which were said unto me concerning the land of Chaldea, that there should be a famine in the land. 30 Accordingly a famine prevailed throughout all the land of Chaldea, and my father was sorely tormented because of the famine, and he repented of the evil which he had determined against me, to take away my life. 31 But the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands; therefore a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers, have I kept even unto this day, and I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record, for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me.

v20 The Lord strikes down the false idols and kills the priest, which causes a great deal of anguish among the people of the land and even Pharaoh himself (v. 20). Then the Lord struck the land with drought to punish the wicked (v. 29) and encourage them to repent. Some do repent as a result of the drought, including Abram's father (v. 30). However, the Patriarchal Order and record continue on in Abram's hands from that point onward (v. 31).

v30 Abraham's father repents to some degree, but after the

famine abates he returns to his old ways, cf. 2:5. This explains why in v. 31 Abram remains the keeper of the Patriarchal Order and record, because his seniors were not fit.

v31 "the records of the fathers", cp. Moses 6:4-9.

21 Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth. 22 From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land. 23 The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus, which in the Chaldean signifies Egypt, which signifies that which is forbidden; 24 when this woman discovered the land it was under water, who afterward settled her sons in it; and thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land. 25 Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was patriarchal. 26 Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood. 27 Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry; 28 But I shall endeavor, hereafter, to delineate the chronology running back from myself to the beginning of the creation, for the records have come into my hands, which I hold unto this present time.

v21-28 A parenthetical comment on the lineage of Pharaoh. Ham fathers Egyptus who is mother of Pharaoh. But v. 25 indicates Egyptus is the daughter of Ham. Thus, it is incest. The first Egyptus referenced in v. 23 might be the daughter of Egyptus, but even then it is still incestuous as she would then be grand-daughter instead of daughter. Thus, Ham's incestuous nature, previously insinuated (cf. Gen. 9:22), is confirmed.

There is also the positive identification of a curse pertaining to the Priesthood which is lineage based, through Canaan. The text states "he could not have the right of Priesthood". The "right" means "a just or legal claim to". Thus, Pharaoh, while be a righteous man (v. 26), his lineage precluded any just or legal claim to the Priesthood (v. 27).

As an aside, it is interesting to note the lineage of Ham is equated with Egypt in the Bible (cf. Ps. 78:51, 105:23-27, 106:22). Also, Biblical references to the land of "Cush" are of

interest to us on this subject. The Hebrew word "cush" literally translates to the English "black". Ancient Cush is modern day Ethiopia, neighbor to Egypt. Also, Egyptians and Canaanites are repeatedly categorized as depraved with incest being one of the foremost sins among them, e.g., Pharaoh's kidnapping of Sarai in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20), Abimilech's perversions (Gen. 20; 26:7-11), offenses of Er and Onan, sons of Judah's Canaanite wife (Gen. 38), Sodomites (Gen. 19:5-8), Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph (Gen. 39), and the prohibitions against committing the kinds of acts found among the Canaanites among which matters of incest receive considerable detailed treatment (Lev. 18; 20). This present text sheds light on the original source of the behavior and illustrates how much influence one man can have over his children, even for many generations.

v23 "that which is forbidden", i.e., incestuous relations.

v24 "from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land", i.e., the curse Noah laid upon Ham's offspring, cf. Gen. 9:25-27.

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