

There is Only One Story

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Hugh Nibley once said: “After viewing many texts from many times and places all telling the same story, one emerges with the conviction that there was indeed one Abraham story.”¹ The *Apocalypse of Abraham* carries many uncanny similarities to the *Book of Abraham*, which Joseph Smith translated from some papyri found within the residue of Ancient Egypt. The extra-canonical account of Abraham is found within the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, a book containing Jewish legends that had been handed down from generation to generation. Abraham was obviously important to the Jews considering the pride of the Pharisees in Christ's time,² thus such an account would be carefully preserved due to its precious nature. First, the account from the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* reveals Abraham's rebellion against idolatry. Then the second part is the grand visions that Abraham saw concerning the heavens and the stars; he sees the council in heaven, and fall of Lucifer. While it is not only the extra-canonical text outside of the Standard Works, the author has chosen to focus on the *Apocalypse* and the *Book of Abraham* because it is “the only Jewish text to discuss foreordination, Satan's rebellion and the premortal existence in the context of Abraham's heavenly vision.”³ Whether the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is true or not, it records similar and complimentary material that once woven together with our Standard Work, might shed light on our own *Book of Abraham*.

In the beginning of *the Book of Abraham*, Abraham seeks out the blessings and Priesthood that his fathers had, unfortunately, they had all begun to worship false gods;⁴ a similar event, in more detail is written in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. There, his family, especially Terah, his father, have made idols of gold, wood, and stone to worship within the temple.⁵ After a series of events, Abraham and his

1 Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake, UT: Deseret Book, 1981), 30.

2 John 8:38 (33-59)

3 John Gee, B. Hauglid and others, eds. *Studies in the Book of Abraham – Volume 3 - Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*. (Provo: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies - FARMS 2005), 70.

4 Abraham 1:5

5 Charlesworth, John, ed. “The Apocapylse of Abraham.” In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha – Volume 1*. (Garden

father get into a heated argument about the truth of God and the false idols, in which his father does not listen to him.⁶ Back in the Book of Abraham within *the Pearl of Great Price*, verse five reveals a similar aspect where Abraham's fathers would not listen to him about turning back to worshipping the Lord, much like Terah in the Apocalypse does not listen to Abraham. In chapter two, Terah is alive, but a “famine waxed sore in the land of Ur... of the Chaldees,”⁷ this could be a possible punishment for Terah's idolatry and a foreshadowing of the destruction to come. In both accounts, the Lord's voice comes to Abraham, conveying a similar theme in his message: get out of your father's house, quickly.⁸ In the Book of Abraham, the cause for escape appears to be because of the harsh famine; but when compared with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Abraham receives that command to leave right before Terah's house is utterly annihilated by the Lord's hands.⁹ Putting the two together, it now sounds like Abraham had to remove himself from his father because he (Terah) and his kindred would not turn away from idols.

Following the destruction and exodus from his father's home in Ur, Abraham received a cosmic vision. It seems that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, that the main character is a youth, even from the beginning of the story in chapter one. Thus, the cosmic journey recorded in his Apocalypse may have been just a preparatory vision to the one about Kolob.¹⁰ Though many things could have occurred, such as one example—an explanation from God what these things meant after the vision—the author has taken the position that the cosmic journey in the Apocalypse was a vision granted to Abraham in his youth to ready the future patriarch for what else God had for him.¹¹ These visions had great impact on

City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983). Chapter 1:2-3 (Hereafter referred to in the footnotes as: *Apocalypse of Abraham* Chapter #:Verse #, etc.)

6 *Apocalypse of Abraham* 4-7

7 Abraham 2:1

8 Abraham 2:3 & *Apocalypse of Abraham* 8:3-4

9 *Apocalypse of Abraham* 8:5-6

10 Abraham 3:3

11 The idea here is very similar to that of what happened to Joseph Smith when he received his first vision. It wasn't until three years later that he saw another manifestation and still, it was only in preparation for Joseph to take hold of the Golden Plates. See JS-H.

Abraham's life as later, as he was commanded by God, to teach what Abraham had seen and had been taught by God to the Egyptians. Josephus records Abraham having a mighty status in Egypt: "...he (Abraham) was admired by them (the Egyptians) [and seen] as a very wise man... [who] delivered to them the science of Astronomy."¹² What does this mean? It means that Abraham's knowledge of Astronomy, given to him by Jehovah through two means (one, by a vision, and two, by the Urim and Thummim), was very spectacular to Egyptian minds who were trying to figure out the stars and heavens for themselves. Even while in the land of Chaldea, Abraham had a grand knowledge of celestial science.¹³ So what were these grand visions that led Abraham to become so keen in astronomy?

In the beginning of Abraham's Apocalypse of the heavens as recorded in *the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, God calls out to Abraham, asking him for a sacrifice and then to head to his holy mountain.¹⁴ Then He says, "... there I will show you the things which were made the ages and by my word, and affirmed, created, and renewed."¹⁵ Note here that Abraham is not given an Urim and Thummim yet (see Abraham 3:1-2); instead an angel appears and guides him along the way, taking him by hand to see the stars of heaven. There, above and far from the earth, the young patriarch sees the stars themselves go through their own life-cycles, and, according to Hugh Nibley's description in *Temple and Cosmos*, Abraham sees the stars altering themselves and consuming each other.¹⁶ However, he does not necessarily see the stars as actual stars, he sees them in the form of men.¹⁷ This is an interesting description of the stars for Abraham because the Lord showed unto Abraham all the stars, saying, "I will multiply thee, and thy seed after thee, like unto these (the stars)."¹⁸ This would be the

¹² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1.8.2

¹³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1.7.2

¹⁴ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9: 1-8

¹⁵ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 9: 9

¹⁶ Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 279.

¹⁷ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15: 6-7

¹⁸ Abraham 3:14

size of Abraham's seed, who would be born into the *forms of men* like the forms he saw of the stars in his Apocalypse.

Continuing on with his extra-canonical account, the young Abraham, like in the Book of Abraham, sees the throne of God¹⁹ and also multiple firmaments in heaven. There, Abraham sees greater stars giving orders or perhaps sending their light to the lesser stars in the form of “fiery” and “incorporeal” angels, giving orders to the lesser angels and then to the lowest firmament where the stars lay.²⁰ What does Abraham's physical description of the higher stars (the angels) mean? As a youth, it seems that Abraham was trying to comprehend, without the full knowledge of God, what these beings were. It is certain that many of us, without the knowledge of the lifecycles of stars, would be puzzled, if not completely overwhelmed at the sight of it all. As stated before, this may have all been in preparation for what Abraham was to see later on in the Book of Abraham.

To explain the points of his confusing and astonishing heavenly view, Abraham (in the Book of Abraham) uses the Urim and Thummim to see the Kolob, the great star nearest to God and His throne. The Lord tells the names of His creations to Abraham as he speaks “face to face”²¹ to the Lord, just like earlier in his Apocalypse where the Lord promises to show Abraham all that he had created. Much like what Abraham saw as a youth, God shows him the Kokaubeam, “which signifies stars,”²² and how they borrow light²³ from the Kolob, the great one that governs over all the stars along with all the other great ones.²⁴ This is exactly like what Abraham saw before, seeing the fiery and incorporeal angels giving orders to the lesser beings in the lower firmaments. Through the Urim and Thummim, the Lord shows him these things again and then explains it. Abraham may have had to see all the Kokaubeam and the great governing stars first in order to temper him from the shock of seeing all of them—allowing the

¹⁹ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 18

²⁰ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 19: 6-9

²¹ Abraham 3:11

²² Abraham 3:13

²³ Facsimile from the Book of Abraham 2 – Figure 5

²⁴ Abraham 3:3 (2-6)

Lord to calmly (or majestically) explain to Abraham what all these stars meant, what they did, and what they had to do with him.

Then the Lord shows unto Abraham, in the Book of Abraham, all the beings, called intelligences “that were organized before the world was; and among these were many noble and great ones [...] and he (the Lord) said unto me, thou art one of them; thou was chosen before thou wast born.”²⁵ It is common knowledge among those who had studied *the Pearl of Great Price* that this scene begins the vision of the premortal council in heaven about the creation where Satan rebelled against God, “and kept not his first estate; and at that day many followed after him.”²⁶ How does this tie into the *Apocalypse of Abraham*? Or does it tie into the extra-canonical account to help bring about a single story? The answer to this question is yes, it does; however, the knowledge of Satan's rebellion and the premortal council are not revealed together in the Apocalypse. In chapter thirteen (before Abraham sees the stars), the angel was about to guide him to see the heavenly visions, when they are suddenly confronted with a being known as “Azazel.”²⁷ Azazel tries to tempt Abraham, but is rebuked by the angel saying, “For Abraham's portion is in heaven and yours is on earth, ... (and) [you had] become enamored of the dwelling place of your blemish. Therefore the Eternal Ruler, the Mighty One, has *given you a dwelling on earth*.”²⁸ Note the contrast between Azazel and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God without blemish. Azazel, however, seems to revel in his blemishes and filthiness and because of this, the Lord has thrown him out of heaven. Azazel, therefore, is apocryphal name for Satan. The event that the angel speaks of sounds similar to Satan's rebellion, the war in heaven and the casting out of the devil with the one-third of the hosts of heaven to the earth.²⁹

Long after seeing the stars in his Apocalypse, Abraham records in his extra-canonical account a

²⁵ Abraham 3:22-23

²⁶ Abraham 3:28

²⁷ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:7

²⁸ *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:8-9; italics added.

²⁹ JST Revelation 12; Moses 3:1,3-4

grand statement from the Mighty One, Jehovah that alludes to what is stated in Abraham 3:22-23:

“This is my will with regard to what is in the light³⁰ and it was good before my face. And then afterward, I gave them a command and by my word and they came into existence. Whatever I had decreed was to exist had already been outlined in this and all the previously created (things) you have seen have stood before me.”³¹ While the text may be corrupted,³² there is a definite message about a spiritual creation and possibly the premortal existence. Then Abraham sees the image God lays before him and sees that the people are divided in two sides, one on God's left and the other on His right.³³ This is where the Mighty One explains to Abraham about the foreordination of people before they were born. Thus He says, “Those on the right side of the picture are the the people set apart for me ... these are the ones I have prepared to be born of you and to be called my people.” It almost like what the Lord said unto Abraham when he saw the 'noble and great ones' in the Book of Abraham. “Thou was chosen before thou wast born.” (Abraham 3:23). Therefore, he showed all the intelligences and the spirits before the earth was made and when the plan of salvation was still on the drawing board.

Now, if it assumed that the visions in Abraham's Apocalypse come from a youthful Abraham, why would it be that Abraham would revisit these things later on in the Book of Abraham? If the Apocalypse *is* true, then the Lord has His reasons. Within scripture, points or phrases are repeated for emphasis and power. God probably wanted these to stick deeply within Abraham's mind by showing unto him the things of heaven before he grew older that he might know the full details about the stars and the premortal council and how they effected him in the overall sense.

Tying it all together, we have a fascinating story about Abraham, starting with his revolt against idolatry to his heavenly visions. *The Apocalypse of Abraham's* text may be far too corrupted to be the

30 The word “light” here, according to n.22b in the footnotes of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, may be missing a letter. This would change the meaning to “council, counsel.” This sounds like something about the premortal council.

31 *Apocalypse of Abraham* 22:2

32 John Gee, B. Hauglid and others, eds. *Studies in the Book of Abraham – Volume 3 - Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*. (Provo: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies - FARMS 2005), 64.

33 *Apocalypse of Abraham* 22:3,4

truth, but at the same time many things within the book line up with the Book of Abraham, showing what ancient Jewish Traditions might have preserved about the truth behind Abraham, the Kolob and more. There is, like Hugh Nibley said before, indeed a single Abraham story that will help the Lord spread the knowledge and wisdom of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Book of Abraham.

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