

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.

ABRAHAM FLEES CHALDEA (GENESIS 12:1-5)

2 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. ² And it came to pass

that I, Abraham, took Sarai to wife, and Nehor, my brother, took Milcah to wife, who was the daughter of Haran. 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.” 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.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT (GENESIS 12:1-3; 17:1-14)

⁶ But I, Abraham, and Lot, my brother’s son, prayed unto the Lord, and the Lord appeared unto me, and said

1:31 Foreshadowing the Creation account in Abraham 4–5. *Records of the fathers.* Some apocryphal Jewish works depict Abraham as having had ancestral records from which he gained knowledge and wisdom. In one of these works, Abraham teaches the Egyptians out of the book of Enoch, while in another he learns from ancestral records the language of Adam (said to be Hebrew) and of the Creation.

2:1 The name is rendered Nahor in both the Kirtland and Nauvoo-era manuscripts. **2:3** As with 1:16–17, the name is given as Abram in the manuscripts and *T&S* printing. **2:4** The city (and land) of Haran has been widely identified with a city by the same name in southern Turkey near modern Urfa (*Şanlıurfa*). The name is attested in records from ancient Ebla. According to this verse, it appears that the city (and land) got its name from Abraham himself in memory of his brother who perished in the famine mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. **2:5** Abraham’s father reverts to his idolatry, forcing Abraham to leave him behind, thereby fulfilling the commandment he received from God to leave his “country” (that is, his homeland; *’āreṣ*), his “kindred” (that is, his ethnic group; *mōledet*), and his “father’s house” (that is, his family; *bēyt ’āb*). This both raises the stakes of the narrative and demonstrates Abraham’s great faith, as he obviously sacrificed much to secure the blessings promised to him by God. **2:6–11** *The Abrahamic covenant.* As promised at 1:18–19, and in parallel with Genesis 15 and 17, here Abraham enters a covenant with God. In its most basic definition, *covenant* in the

unto me, “Arise, and take Lot with thee. For I have 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. 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. ⁸ My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore, my hand shall be over thee. 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. 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. 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

biblical and ancient Near Eastern sense means something like “pact” or “treaty.” It involves, at a minimum, two parties, one of which typically sets the terms and conditions of the covenant, which the other is obliged to uphold. Numerous treaties or covenants between political entities (kings or rulers of city-states or empires) from the ancient Near East have been recovered. In the Hebrew Bible, as in here, it is God who sets the terms and conditions of the covenant and who acts as the ultimate authority to either revoke or sustain the covenant depending on how well His servants execute their obligations. *The covenantal pattern.* Ancient treaties or covenants typically followed a set pattern. The structure of the covenantal pattern evolved over time, but typically featured a solemn oath or ceremony, a preamble, a historical prologue, named witnesses to the covenant, stipulations, promised blessings for keeping the covenant, and promised curses for breaking the covenant. The covenant Abraham enters with God here features several of these elements, including a solemn ceremony (Abraham 2:6), a preamble (2:6–8), stipulations (2:9–10), and blessings and curses (2:11). *Lot as witness.* Lot, Abraham’s nephew, is present with him during the covenant ceremony, thus fulfilling the need for witnesses. The Lord, however, appears only to Abraham in the theophany. *Jehovah as cosmic deity.* In the ancient Near East, various gods were believed to have specialized control over the forces of nature (for example, in ancient Canaanite religion Baal controlled rain and vegetation, and Yamm controlled the sea). Jehovah’s mastery over the elements demonstrates His cosmic dominion and His preeminence among the gods of the heathen nations. *The true name of God.* As at 1:16, the Lord reveals His true name to Abraham, thereby granting him special access to the divine and forming a special covenantal bond. *Covenant and priesthood.* Importantly, the covenant blessings promised to Abraham are said here to include priesthood blessings, a detail missing in the biblical record. In return for being made “a great nation” and “great among all nations,” Abraham and his descendants are expected to bless the whole earth with priesthood ordinances. Those who enter and accept Abraham’s covenant and priesthood are blessed to be counted as his descendants and thereby as heirs to the covenantal promises. The glosses,

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.”

ABRAHAM’S SOLILOQUY

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. 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.”

ABRAHAM JOURNEYS INTO CANAAN

(GENESIS 12:4–9)

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. 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. ¹⁶ Therefore, eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation, as we journeyed from Haran by the way of Jershon, to come to the land of Canaan. ¹⁷ Now

which clarify the Lord’s instructions, provided at 2:11 make it clear that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant are conceptually tied to the priesthood. It is unclear who provided these glosses—whether Abraham himself in his record or Joseph Smith in his translation. *Blessings of salvation*. The culmination of the Abrahamic covenant is nothing less than “the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.” As with Doctrine and Covenants 132:29–33, the text here emphasizes that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant extend into the eternities. **2:12–13** Abraham recognizes that his miraculous delivery out of the hands of the murderous priest of Elkenah (see 1:12–19) serves as proof that God could fulfill His covenant promises. **2:14–20** This material parallels the account in Genesis 12:4–9 but with some notable differences, including at least one named location along the journey and Abraham’s age at the time of departure. **2:14** Here Abraham is said to have been sixty-two when he left Haran. In the Genesis account (Genesis 12:4), he is said to be seventy-five. Ancient and medieval extra-biblical sources put Abraham at, variously, fifty-two, sixty, seventy, seventy-five, and eighty years old at the time of his departure. **2:15** Those journeying with Abraham into Canaan are his wife, Sarai; his nephew, Lot; and a group of “souls” (compare Genesis 12:5) of unspecified number. In the Genesis account, Abraham “gets” these “souls” from Haran, whereas here he “wins” them; presumably meaning he converted them through his preaching and numbered them in the covenant. (In fact, this is precisely how ancient Jewish interpreters understood Abraham’s acquisition of these persons into his party.) Traveling in large numbers with plenty of provisions would have ensured an overall safer journey into the “strange” (foreign) land of Canaan. **2:16** Jershon (rendered Jurshon in Ab4, probably reflecting how it was pronounced) is named as a location Abraham and his party passed through on their way to Canaan. The location of Jershon is unknown and is not named in the corresponding chapter in Genesis. From the description given here, it appears to be located somewhere between Haran in northern Mesopotamia and Sechem in Canaan (perhaps in Syria or Lebanon). This Jershon should not be confused with the Jershon of the Book of Mormon (see Alma 27:22–24). **2:17** Abraham builds an

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. 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.

THE LORD APPEARS AGAIN TO ABRAHAM

(GENESIS 12:7-8)

¹⁹ And the Lord appeared unto me in answer to my prayers, and said unto me, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." 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.

altar at Jershon and offers sacrifice to the Lord, an action he will repeat at Sechem and Bethel (see Abraham 2:18, 20; Genesis 12:7-8). In the first instance, Abraham offers sacrifice in a sort of intercessory prayer for his father, demonstrating his continued love for him despite his idolatrous (and murderous) behavior. Besides this, Abraham's offering of sacrifice expresses gratitude to God for safe entry into Canaan and consecrates this new land, thereby making it suitable for sacred ritual activity. (This is necessary because Canaan is said to be an "idolatrous nation" at Abraham 2:18.) The text does not specify what kind of sacrifice Abraham made. Both animal and vegetable or cereal sacrifices were ubiquitous in the cultures of the ancient Near East and could be offered as tokens of gratitude or as gifts for a deity, to fulfill ritual duties, in funerary practices, in divinatory and exorcism practices, and to ratify covenants and treaties. (This last category appears to explain Abraham's actions in Genesis 15:9-11.)

2:18 Sechem. Rendered Sichern in the King James Version. The name of this location is attested in Egyptian sources from Abraham's day and is widely identified with Tell Balata in the modern West Bank. *The plains of Moreh.* Sechem is said to be situated adjacent to a location called the plains of Moreh (compare Genesis 12:6), or more properly, the "oak" or "terebinth" (*elón*) of Moreh (or, even more literally, "the oracle/teacher oak"). The rendering here is most likely dependent on the King James Version (at Genesis 12:6). But the text captures something quite authentic. Several authorities agree that the oak of Moreh was probably a local Canaanite shrine (a sacred tree). Unlike in the Kings James Version Genesis account, here Abraham identifies the land of Canaan as an "idolatrous nation" and explains that he offered authorized sacrifices and called upon the Lord "devoutly" to, it appears, counter this local idolatry. **2:19** In response to Abraham's devotion, the Lord appears to him and gives him his own oracle (right there at the "oracle tree," as it were) that his "seed" would inherit this land. The play on horticultural imagery cannot be missed. **2:20 Bethel.** This location is widely identified with modern Beitin in the West Bank (with a minority favoring the site of el-Bireh not far from Beitin as an alternative candidate). It is here that later, in Genesis 28:10-22, Abraham's grandson Jacob would experience his famous dream and theophany. *Hai.* Also rendered Ai in modern biblical translations (meaning "the ruin"), this site, a sort of sister city to Bethel, is identified by most scholars with et-Tell just east of Beitin in the West Bank. It plays a prominent role in the book

ABRAHAM TRAVELS ON TO EGYPT

(GENESIS 12:9-10)

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.

THE LORD INSTRUCTS ABRAHAM BEFORE ENTERING EGYPT

(GENESIS 12:11-13)

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. 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: 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.’”

ABRAHAM RECEIVES A REVELATION BY THE URIM AND THUMMIM

3 And I, Abraham, had the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given unto me, in Ur of the Chaldees. ² And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the

of Joshua as a city captured by the Israelites (Joshua 7-8). **2:21** The motivation for the journey to Egypt is, as with the motivation to leave Haran, to escape a famine. In the extant text of the book of Abraham, however, the patriarch never actually sets foot in Egypt. **2:22-25** Unlike in the parallel account in Genesis 12:11-13, here the Lord instructs Abraham to call Sarai his sister instead of his wife. The concern behind this subterfuge is clear from the text. Given that ancient Egyptian texts depict pharaohs as taking any women they wanted, and given the capacity for callousness in ancient royalty, this fear was not unrealistic. The text is taking advantage of an ambiguity in ancient Egyptian language and culture. In ancient Egyptian, the word for *wife* (*hmt*) meant “wife,” but the word for *sister* (*snt*) could mean either “sister” or “wife.” In any case, Genesis 20:12 identifies Sarai as Abraham’s half-sister. The Lord was thus not instructing Abraham to lie but rather to be evasive or purposefully ambiguous. Interestingly, a text recovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls depicts Abraham as being warned of this impending danger in a dream.

3 This chapter features some of the more distinctive (and important) elements of Latter-day Saint cosmology. The depiction of Kolob, a great star (or planet) nearest to the throne of God, and some of the most explicit details in Restoration scripture about the premortal council in heaven are derived from this chapter. **3:1-2** *Urim and Thummim*. Abraham is said to have had the Urim and Thummim, by which he communicated with God. Note that Abraham does not necessarily see his cosmic vision through the Urim and Thummim but rather seems to use it to, at a minimum, speak with God (Abraham 3:4). That Abraham’s Urim and Thummim was the same as the one possessed by the brother of Jared (Ether 3:21-28) is unlikely. Rather, it seems more probable that Abraham possessed a separate seeric or oracular instrument that was rendered as “Urim and Thummim” by Joseph Smith in his translation. (No physical de-