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Abrahamic Lore in Support of the Book of Abraham

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Transcript
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This presentation is a summary of research that will appear in a book edited by John A. Tvedtnes and Brian M. Hauglid tentatively entitled, *Early Traditions about Abraham Relevant to a Study of the Book of Abraham*.

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Abrahamic Lore in Support of the Book of Abraham

John A. Tvedtnes

Let me give you a bit of the history of the project. Actually I suppose we could go all the way back to Hugh Nibley's original article series in the *Improvement Era*, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," in which he wrote about various traditions about Abraham that supported the story found in the Book of Abraham that are not found in the Genesis account of Abraham.

I had a call over a year ago from a FARMS subscriber, Wayne Ballantyne from Fruit Heights, Utah, who asked me about some of these documents to which Nibley refers. He couldn't find them. It took me a while to find them too. The reason they were so unavailable is because they were only in Hebrew. I found these documents and there were quite a number of them. I found some that Nibley hadn't mentioned. I found several Arabic documents, some of which he had mentioned and some he hadn't. I already had quite a collection of English texts, but now I was looking at texts that had not yet been translated.

Although I've studied Arabic, we had Brian Hauglid, who is much better at it, assist in pulling together a volume of these Abraham lore texts. The result was a manuscript that actually has over seventy ancient and medieval texts relating to Abraham that cover topics mentioned in the Book of Abraham, but that are missing from the Genesis account in the Bible.

One of the things that critics have often discussed in connection with Abrahamic stories is their age: "How can you possibly support the Book of Abraham with a document that comes from 1300 A.D.? It is not from the time of Abraham; therefore how can you use it?" Well, there are several things that one could say about this. The first is that the oldest of the texts go back to first century B.C. and first century A.D., so we have some that are about two thousand years old. Now the oldest biblical documents, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, go back to about the same time.

The second point I should mention is the transmission line, particularly of the Arabic documents. There is a line of transmission given. They will say, "I heard it from so-and-so, and he heard it from so-and-so," and so on back. The same is true with rabbinic literature that is found in Judaism. They will often cite early rabbis, and say rabbi so-and-so said, on the authority of rabbi so-and-so, who got it from rabbi

so-and-so. So they are usually traditions that go back quite a ways, and most of these go back to about the second century A.D. As you can see, they go back some distance. So, we can say that this argument—that the texts we are dealing with are late—doesn't hold water. Some of them are quite early, and even those that are not early have a transmission line that goes back. The Middle East is renowned for this type of transmission.

We owe to Joseph Smith the existence of the Book of Abraham as we have it today. As far as we can determine, only one of the documents that we have in our collection so far could have been in the hands of Joseph Smith. That document is *Antiquities of the Jews*, written by the Jewish historian Josephus in the first century A.D. We are not certain if Joseph Smith had it at this early stage in his ministry, though we do know that he had it later on. He may not have had it at the time he produced the Book of Abraham. The only unique element in Josephus that we find that supports the Book of Abraham is his note that Abraham learned astronomy and taught it to the Egyptians. So, of all the elements we are going to talk about tonight that are found in the Book of Abraham but not in the book of Genesis, the only one that could have been available to Joseph Smith is the astronomy.

What is the importance of this study? Many of these elements, as I say, are found in Abraham and other documents but are not found in the book of Genesis. The pervasive nature of the documents is, to me, significant. We have texts that are Jewish in origin, some that are Christian in origin, and some that are Muslim. Most of the latter are Arabic, although we have even some Turkish and Swahili texts that we have thrown in—in English translation by the way. We aren't going to throw the original languages at you. We also have texts from the Mandaean, who claim to be descendants of the disciples of John the Baptist. They live in Iraq and Iran, and there are more than 50,000 of them. We also have some texts from the Falasha, who are the so-called "black Jews" of Ethiopia, whose Israelite origins go back so early that they don't even have the rabbinic traditions that came later on. Their Judaism predates that. We also have a few others that are unrelated to these, but these are the main groups that have given us information.

I am going to give you an overview first, then I will center in on some of the topics with a little more detail. Among the elements found in Abraham but not in Genesis is the mention of idolatry in Abraham's day. Now everyone knows that there

was idolatry in Abraham's day because of the archaeology that has been done. But there are specific things that are mentioned in the Book of Abraham that are supported by these extrabiblical texts.

According to the Book of Abraham, Abraham's fathers worshipped idols (1:5–6). Six of the Jewish texts that we have in the collection so far mention this. The earliest one is actually from the third century B.C. Eleven Christian documents, seven Muslim documents, and one Mandaean document all support the idea that Abraham's fathers worshipped idols.

Another of the elements regarding idolatry is that Abraham's father, Terah, himself worshipped idols (Abraham 1:16–17, 27). There are eleven Jewish texts that say this, the earliest of which is from the first century B.C. There are four Christian, one Falasha, and nine Muslim texts that support the idea that Abraham's own father was an idolater.

The Book of Abraham tells us that Terah, after repenting of his idolatry, then returned again to his idols (2:5). We have five Jewish documents that mention him repenting of his idolatry, and some say he went back to it. The earliest of these is from the first century A.D. There are also six Muslim documents that give the same story.

Though the Book of Abraham speaks of Egyptian idols (1:6–7, 13, 17, 20, 29), there is no mention of Egyptian idols in the book of Genesis. But they are noted in two Christian documents that talk about Abraham's dealings with Egyptian idols. A lot of the stories, by the way, do talk about Abraham dealing with other idols, and destroying the idols his father manufactured, but only two specifically talk about Egyptian idols.

We then come to the sacrifice of Abraham, which is not depicted in the Bible but is in the Book of Abraham. Now there are several elements regarding this sacrifice in the Book of Abraham that are supported by these extrabiblical documents. First, we have the concept that children were sacrificed (Abraham 1:7–8, 10–11). Five of the Jewish documents mention this fact. The earliest of them is from the first century A.D. Six Christian documents, eight Muslim documents, and one Falasha document mention the same thing—that children were being sacrificed in Abraham's day.

Abraham 1:11 tells us that those who would not worship idols were killed. There is a single Jewish document that mentions this fact and it dates to the fourth century A.D. It's not as early as some of the others we've talked about, but there are two Muslim, one Christian, one Samaritan, and one Falasha document that say the same

thing—those who would not worship idols in Abraham’s day were sacrificed. Of course, the main point of the early part of the Book of Abraham was that he himself was brought to be sacrificed because he would not worship those idols (Abraham 1:7, 12, 15; Facsimile 1, figure 3). We find this supported in thirteen Jewish documents, the earliest of which is from the third century B.C. There are two Christian, eleven Muslim, one Samaritan, one Falasha, and one Mandaean document that say the same thing—that Abraham was brought to be sacrificed.

Who was behind it? Abraham 1:7, 30 tells us that it was Abraham’s own father, Terah. Two Jewish documents tell us exactly that, along with one Muslim document and one Falasha document. Usually the Jewish documents are the earliest, but in this case the earliest one is the Muslim document from the seventh century A.D. This happens to be the *Qur’an*, written by Muhammad.

Several of the documents also support the statement in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2) that Abraham was actually fastened when he was placed on the altar. Five of the Jewish texts say this as well as two of the Muslim texts. The earliest one is only from the tenth century A.D. and that’s one of the Jewish texts.

Abraham tells us that when his life was in danger as he was about to be sacrificed, he prayed (Abraham 1:15; Facsimile 1, figure 2). Again, we have one Jewish document and four Muslim documents that support the idea that Abraham prayed while he was being sacrificed. The earliest document is from the eleventh century A.D.

We are told in Abraham 1:15; 2:13 (see also Facsimile 1, figure 1) that the Lord sent an angel to rescue Abraham. Again we have a number of documents that talk about this. There are five Jewish documents that say that God sent an angel to rescue Abraham. The earliest is from the fifth century A.D. There are also seven Muslim documents and one Falasha document that say this. On the other hand, the Book of Abraham (1:16, 3:20) specifically states that God rescued Abraham from death. This is also found in some of the same texts. Sometimes you’ll find a Jewish text that will say that God rescued him, but it also says that he sent an angel to rescue him. So you get the two different stories that are the same in these other sources as well as in the Book of Abraham. Eleven Jewish texts say that God rescued Abraham from sacrifice. The earliest is from the first century A.D. There are one Christian, four Muslim, and one Samaritan text that give the same information.

Now, in the Book of Abraham we are told that the altar of sacrifice was

destroyed and the priest who officiated at the altar was killed at the same time (Abraham 1:20). In many of these other texts we find the same thing. The person who is bringing Abraham to be sacrificed is actually killed and sometimes the instrument, which is not always an altar (it's usually a furnace), is destroyed. Nine Jewish texts (the earliest being from the first century B.C.), eight Christian, nine Muslim, one Samaritan, and one Falasha text say this. It seems to me that the witnesses keep building up. If you're going to have a good court case, it's better to have more than one credible witness, and in some of these cases, we have quite a number of them.

The fact that the priest or leader was himself smitten and died, as the Book of Abraham says (Abraham 1:20, 29), is supported in three Jewish documents, the earliest again from the first century A.D.—three Christian, six Muslim, and one Samaritan text.

Abraham held the priesthood. The Book of Abraham, chapter one in particular, dwells heavily on this subject. It talks about Abraham seeking for the priesthood. He inherited it by right from his fathers but still had to get it from the correct source. Abraham tells us that he was an heir to the priesthood of his fathers (Abraham 1:2–3, 18). We find two Jewish texts that say Abraham was an heir to the priesthood, the earliest one being from the second century A.D. Abraham specifically mentions on a couple of occasions in the book that he held the priesthood (Abraham 1:2, 2:9, 11; Facsimile 2, figure 1). Again we have four Jewish documents and one Christian document that specifically state that Abraham held the priesthood. The earliest of these is a Jewish text from the first century A.D.

We are also told in the Book of Abraham something that's not really found in the Genesis account, though it's been read into the Genesis account by many. This is that Abraham made converts while he was living in the city of Haran. The Genesis account in the King James translation simply talks about the "souls that he had gotten," which many have understood to be slaves that he had purchased while he was in Haran. The Book of Abraham makes it clear that these are not souls that he had purchased, but rather, these are people he had converted (2:15). This is, in fact, found in many, many early texts. There are twelve Jewish texts, the earliest from the second century A.D., that say that Abraham converted people in the city of Haran. Seven Muslim texts give the same story.

As a bearer of the priesthood, Abraham received revelations. Some of these revelations had to do with astronomy. That Abraham was knowledgeable about

astronomy is expressed in the Book of Abraham, particularly in chapter three (see 1:31, 3:1–18; Facsimiles 2, 3). We have eleven Jewish texts that say this, the earliest one is from the first century A.D., and happens to be the Josephus text I mentioned earlier. There are six Christian, seven Muslim, one Falasha, and one Mandaean text that say the same thing—that Abraham was knowledgeable about astronomy.

It's one thing to know astronomy, it's quite another thing to teach astronomy to the Egyptians as Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham says. Weren't the Egyptians a knowledgeable people? What's with Abraham teaching astronomy to them? But that story is in fact supported in some early texts. There are two Jewish texts, the earliest one being from the first century A.D., and two Christian texts that specifically state that Abraham taught astronomy to the Egyptians.

We also find in the Book of Abraham that he knew about the creation (1:31; 4–5). He tells us he knew of this from the records that had been passed down from the fathers, but he also had a vision by night. The Lord showed him the stars and planets. So Abraham was also shown the creation of these—how it all came about—and the last part of the Book of Abraham begins the creation story that is also found in the book of Genesis. Three Jewish texts, again the earliest from the first century B.C., one Christian and two Muslim, support the idea that Abraham had learned from God about the creation of the world.

One of the things that is unique about the Book of Abraham's version of the creation is that it talks about things as if there were planning sessions as opposed to actual working sessions, the seven days or periods of creation. They are depicted as if they are planning sessions because at the end of each one the gods are saying in the Book of Abraham "we will do this," "we will do that," "they will obey," and so on (Abraham 4:31–5:5; Moses 3:4–5). It sounds like they are just doing some planning. Now we do have one Jewish text from the first century A.D. that states that in light of Abraham's knowledge of the creation, these were planning sessions.

In connection with his vision of the heavens and the creation, Abraham also saw the premortal spirits gathered in council (Abraham 3:21–24). He was told that some of these would be God's leaders on the earth. This concept—that Abraham saw premortal spirits—is not found in the Bible. It is found in five Jewish texts, the earliest one from the first century A.D., one Christian text, and one Muslim text.

We also know that the Book of Abraham gives a little different spin on the story

of Abraham passing Sarah off as his sister. According to the book of Genesis, he just does it. It doesn't say where he got the idea. In the Book of Abraham, it's the Lord who tells him to do it so he won't be killed (2:22–25). We do have two Jewish texts and one Christian text that support this idea that it came from God. The most well-known of these texts is probably the Genesis Apocryphon, which is one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Abraham had a dream the night before going into Egypt in which he was shown what would happen to him unless his wife said she was his sister. Based on that, she told the Egyptian officials that she was, in fact, his sister.

Another thing that is a bit unique about the Book of Abraham is that it talks about Abraham possessing records and writing records. The Bible nowhere indicates that. The general view of scholars who even believe that Abraham existed is that he was just a nomad who traveled around with a tent and spent time with his herds, who couldn't have known anything about writing and wasn't a very sophisticated individual. But here we are told in the Book of Abraham (1:28, 31) that he possessed records that had been passed on from his fathers, some of them going back to the time of Adam, in fact. We have this supported also in a number of these early texts. There are seven Jewish texts, the earliest from the first century B.C. (Notice how many of them cluster right around the time of Christ.) There are one Christian document and four Muslim documents that have this same idea that Abraham possessed records from the fathers, and some of those texts specifically state that he had records from the time of Adam, which is what we find in the Book of Abraham.

Abraham says he wrote a record of his own (Abraham 1:31). Many extrabiblical texts are, in fact, attributed to him. But only three texts speak of Abraham actually writing, as opposed to saying, this is the Book of Abraham or the record of Abraham. There are two Jewish texts and one Muslim text, the earliest Jewish text is again from the first century B.C.

The Book of Abraham has some things to say about the king of Egypt as well. Quite a number of things about Egypt that are found in the Book of Abraham are totally foreign to almost anything else we know. They are certainly foreign to the Bible. For example, we find in the Book of Abraham that Pharaoh was a descendant of Ham but also of Canaan (1:21–22, 24–25, 27). Now, Egyptians in general are not sons of Canaan. Canaan is a brother of the ancestor of the Egyptians, whose name is Mizraim in the Bible. So how is it that Pharaoh is descended from both? I don't know, but I can tell you

this: There are early documents that support the idea. There are three Jewish texts, the earliest from the first century B.C., and one Christian, one Muslim, and one Falasha document that indicate the same thing.

Abraham and Pharaoh were at odds. They contended over who had the right to this priesthood passed down by the fathers. But one thing Abraham does mention is that the first pharaoh was a good man and was blessed by Noah (Abraham 1:26). Two Muslim documents give this idea also.

What interested me the most, depicted in Facsimile 3 in the Book of Abraham, is that Abraham was allowed to sit on the king's throne. We have two Jewish documents, the earliest from the fifth century A.D., and two Muslim documents that talk about Abraham being able to sit on the king's throne. That is really a unique thing.

Famine in the land of Chaldea, where Abraham lived, is also noted in the Book of Abraham (1:29–30; 2:1, 5). The fact that there was a famine in Abraham's homeland is confirmed in three Jewish documents, the earliest from the first century B.C., two Christian documents, and three Muslim documents. According to most of those records, the famine was caused by either crows or ravens that came in and ate up the seeds when the farmers planted them. One of the texts, however, attributes this to locusts. Locusts used to be a common source of famine throughout the Middle East and Eastern Africa.

Abraham wasn't content to just record that there was a famine. He specifically notes that he prayed to the Lord to lift the famine, that the famine would, in fact, end (Abraham 2:17). His father had remained behind and Abraham didn't want his father's family to suffer the effects of this famine. We have, in fact, a Jewish text of the first century B.C. that says that Abraham prayed to God to lift the famine. And two Muslim texts say the same thing.

Haran, the brother of Abraham, is said in Abraham 2:1 to have died in the famine. A single Muslim text does, in fact, say this—that he died in the famine. Most of the early texts about Abraham indicate that his brother, Haran, died in the furnace where Abraham was going to be tossed in and burned. According to these stories, Haran either got too close to the fire or they tossed him in and he didn't have enough faith, so he died and Abraham survived.

Now let's take some examples from this collection of things that we have. I'd like to go into some specifics here. The first deals with Abraham and written records. In

Abraham 1:28, 31 we read,

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. . . . 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.

It tells us, first of all, that Abraham knew how to read and write. It says that he had records of the fathers going back all the way to the creation. It says that he learned things about the planets and the stars from these records, and also about the priesthood. Several documents, in fact, talk about Abraham being able to read and write. Let me just note a couple of them here. First of all, in *Jubilees* 12:25–27, which is a text that was thought to have been composed in the first century B.C., we read that God himself taught Abraham the language of creation and that Abraham then copied the books of his father and studied them. A very old tradition, found in the same book, indicates that he learned writing, not from God, but from his father. Let me read *Jubilees* 11:8, “His father taught him the researches of the Chaldeans in order to practice divination and astrology, according to the signs in heaven.”

So, from this he learned astronomy as well as how to read and write. Did Abraham keep a record? *Jubilees* 39:6 says that “Jacob used to read the words of Abraham, taken from the heavenly books.” Remember he had a heavenly vision in which he was shown many things. The *Qur’an*, the sacred book of the Muslims, Surah 87, verses 19–20, speaks of what is recorded on “the first leaves [the earliest books], the leaves of Abraham and Moses.” The Babylonian Talmud, which is one of the corpus of documents that serves as an explanation to the law of Moses, found in the first five books of the Bible, speaks of “a tradition that the [tractate] *Avodah Zarah*, of our father Abraham consisted of four hundred chapters; we have only learnt five, yet we do not know what we are saying” (TB *Avodah Zarah* 14b). The suggestion here is that Abraham wrote the original from which these five chapters were extracted and that the rest of it had been lost to them, but they knew that they had existed. The Babylonian Talmud also mentions the book of Jasher that’s spoken of in Joshua 10:13, and says of that book, “It is the Book of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (TB *Avodah Zarah* 25a).

So, there’s a clear tradition that Abraham kept records. Did he have, however,

records from before his time? Did he have records going back to the time of the creation? From *Jubilees* 21:12, when blessing his son Isaac, Abraham referred to the sacrificial ordinances that he had “found written in the books of [his] forefathers and in the words of Enoch, and in the words of Noah.” Well, Enoch goes back pretty close to the time of Adam. Adam blessed Enoch before dying. So, they were contemporaries whose lives overlapped.

The *Genesis Apocryphon*, of one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, talks about Abraham reading to the Egyptians from the Book of Enoch (1QapGen 19.25). This is particularly significant because the books attributed to Enoch that have come down to us, and which, by the way, had not been published in English in the time of Joseph Smith, all talk about astronomy. So here we have mention that Abraham is reading to the Egyptians from the Book of Enoch—reading astronomy to the Egyptians which is exactly what is depicted in Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham.

An early rabbinic work, *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 8, says that the calendric calculations of the forefathers were given by Shem to his descendant Abraham. These calculations were to enable them to know when to throw in an extra month in the year, because they followed a lunar system. If you follow a lunar calendar, your year ends up being 354 days instead of 365. So every once in a while you have to adjust it and there was a calculation that they used, and still do use, to do this. The methods they used had been written down somewhere and they were calculating by means of astronomy, of course.

Hugh Nibley cited a Mandaean text that reads as follows, “the writings of Seth and Idrisi [Arabic for Enoch] were handed down to the time of Noah and Abraham.” The *Book of Noah* and the *Sepher ha-Razim* (Book of the Mysteries), both of which are medieval Jewish documents, say that there was a heavenly book given to Adam, then passed down by the patriarchs, and ended up with Noah, saying that “Noah gave the book to his son, Shem, whence it was passed to Abraham.”

The *Zohar*, which is a thirteenth-century Jewish text based on earlier traditions, speaking of the heavenly book delivered to Adam by the angel Raziel, says, “Adam left it to his son, Seth, who transmitted it in turn to his posterity, and so on until it came to Abraham, who learnt from it how to discuss the glory of his master as has been said. Similarly, Enoch possessed a book from which he learned to discern the divine glory” (*Zohar* Genesis 55b).

Let's pass now to the sacrifice of Abraham and look at a few of the texts. Let me begin by reading portions of Abraham 1 for you:

"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; 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; 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. . . . 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. 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; . . . 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." (Abraham 1:5-7, 11-12, 15)

In another verse of that same chapter he says, "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" (Abraham 1:30). That single verse tells us that his father, Terah, was behind this attempt to kill him. Now let's support some of these ideas from the text that I mentioned.

Children were being sacrificed in the time of Abraham according to a number of early texts. Five that I'm not going to quote from, but which are early Christian documents, are *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, *The Cave of Treasures*, *The Book of the Rolls*, *Kebra Nagast*, and the so-called *Anonymous Christian Chronicle*. All these indicate that in the days of Abraham's father, men began worshipping idols and offering their children in sacrifice. The third book of the *Conflict of Adam and Eve* says, "The men in the hundredth year of Nahor [who was Abraham's grandfather], God looked down upon the children of men and saw that they sacrificed their children to idols" (25:1). *Apocalypse of Abraham* 25:1-2 has Abraham saying, "I saw there the likeness of the idol of jealousy, like a carpenter's figure, such as my father used to make. And his body was of glittering copper, and before it the man, and he was worshipping it, and

there was an altar opposite it. And boys were being slaughtered on it, before the face of the idol.”

The concept that those who would not worship the idols would be sacrificed and killed is also found in a number of places. An Arabic writer, al-Kisa’i, writes as follows: “The old woman [who had come to listen to Abraham’s message] took the bundle, broke the idol with a stone and believed in Abraham’s god. After this, she went about the city of Kutarab saying, ‘Oh, people, worship God who created you, and has given you substance.’ When news of the old woman reached Nimrod, he ordered her hands and feet to be cut off.”

In most of the stories, Abraham was brought to be killed for the very reason that he would not worship the idols, in some cases because he destroyed the idols. (Many of the stories say he specifically destroyed them.) For example, the second-century-A.D. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, commenting on Genesis 11:28, says, “And it came to pass when Nimrod cast Abraham into the furnace of fire, because he would not worship his idol, the fire had no power to burn him.”

The *Anonymous Christian Chronicle*, which is a Latin text, says: “And Nimrod threw Abraham into a fiery furnace because he did not approve the worship of idols. But the flame of the furnace was changed into pleasant dew.” Well, in some texts, it becomes roses and other flowering vines, which is even better.

An Arabic writer, al-Mas’udi, wrote a text called *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*. (This is one that Brian Hauglid has translated.) I’ll read part of it for you: “Abraham blamed his people for their idolatry. When they were annoyed by the disdain by which Abraham scorned their gods, and which had attracted public notice, Nimrod threw him into the fire. But God converted the fire into coolness, and he was preserved.”

The Falasha of Ethiopia have the following story of Abraham (it’s literally called the *Story of Abraham*): “[Nimrod] said, ‘Oh, Abraham, let us worship this idol. Perhaps thou dost not want to?’ Abraham was obstinate and refused. Nimrod said to him, ‘I shall surely cast thee into the oven and burn thee in the flames.’ Abraham heeded it not, and would not change his mind and worship the idol. He threw him into the flames.” All well and good, but was his father, Terah, behind this? *Qur’an* 19:46 has Terah saying, “Do you detest my gods, Abraham? If you do not cease, I shall stone you!” The book of *Jasher*, the *Falasha Story of Abraham*, and several other texts indicate that it was

Terah who delivered Abraham to Nimrod. The tenth-century-A.D. Jewish rabbi Rashi, commenting on Genesis 11:28, wrote, “Now, the *Midrash Agadah* says that because of his father he died, that Terah complained about Abraham’s son before Nimrod, because he smashed his idols, and he cast him into the furnace of fire.”

That was just a sampling. There’s not time to do more than scratch the surface on this. So far, there are 412 pages, and that doesn’t count the four great texts that John Gee has recently translated that are going to be added, and several others that will be added as well. It’s just amazing to me to see how so many documents support the story that’s found in the Book of Abraham. So far, we have a collection of over seventy of them. We’re still looking, and we may find a few more. The nice thing is that as we write up each chapter we’re having the material source checked and edited, so we don’t have to wait until the whole thing is done and have an editor sit down and plow through this thing for months on end. Everything that’s been written so far has, in fact, gone through editorial hands. So that, we hope, will save us some time in trying to get this book out.

I’d just like to tell you that for me the Book of Abraham has long been one of my great interests. I first read the Book of Abraham when I was about twelve years of age, and it fascinated me, and I began delving into it. I wanted to get into Egyptology and learn some of the Semitic languages and so on. It’d be nice to do some of that and accomplish some of my goals—not so much to support the Book of Abraham, but rather to understand it better, so that I can enjoy it more. I enjoy the scriptures when I understand the background of the scriptures. Some people don’t need that. If you don’t need it, that’s fine. I suppose the real importance of the scriptures is not the material. It’s not the support that we can find from the various kinds of investigations we can make into the scriptures, but it’s from the spiritual aspect of those scriptures—the fact that we can learn from them how to conduct our own lives, and that we can learn about how God has dealt with our ancestors, and with other people in the past. He certainly dealt well with Abraham. Abraham came through every one of the ten tests, to which he was put in tradition, and comes out as a great example for all of us. I think there’s much to be learned from Abraham. I hope that having attended some of these lectures and reading some of the forthcoming publications on the subject that you will look to Abraham as an example for your own lives as well. I pray that we may all follow our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the one who guided Abraham in all of these things. I say it in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.