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INTRODUCTION: ABRAHAM IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

Sean A. Adams and Zanne Domoney-Lyttle

Abraham the father. Abraham the patriarch. Abraham, the founder of monotheistic faith traditions. Abraham, the recipient of God's covenantal promises in Genesis. Abraham, the husband to Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah. Abraham, the father of nations. Abraham the exalted. First introduced in Gen. 11:27, the figure of Abraham has been given these titles as well as many others throughout the reception of his character in ancient Jewish and early Christian texts. His name has become synonymous with the foundations of Israel in the biblical texts, with covenantal promises made between God and Abraham the chosen one, with claims to land, identity, and personhood, and with themes of righteousness, sacredness, hospitality, and inheritance.

From where did these constructs of Abraham's character arise? Why is Abraham considered the ultimate father rather than a strong warrior or political leader? What aspects of his character are illuminated and remembered, and which are forgotten or suppressed? Furthermore, *how* is he remembered? This volume traces the diverse ways that Jewish and early Christian authors discussed Abraham, adapted his Hebrew and Greek Bible narratives, and used Abraham imagery in their works. The individual essays tease out the various ways that the character of Abraham was described, viewed, understood, and used, both within the Hebrew Bible and across different collections of ancient texts, including the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, rewritten Scriptures, and texts produced by Philo, Josephus, New Testament authors, early Church Fathers, Gnostic writers, and Greek and Latin outsiders.

Across these chapters, several themes have emerged concerning the representation and memory of Abraham across Jewish and early Christian texts. Most prominently, Abraham is paired with his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, forming a triad of patriarchs through whom God's covenant promises are given and reinforced. The patriarchal triumvirate is drawn upon in diverse ways, and many of the ancient authors discussed in this volume view Abraham through both a theological and an historical lens, recognizing him as a central figure of their spiritual belief and as the founding patriarch who lived in history. For Jewish

authors in the Hebrew Bible, for example, Abraham is the father of their people and the person to whom God made his covenant promise; a promise transferred and rearticulated to Jacob and Isaac. For Christian authors, such as Paul and the early Church Fathers, Abraham retains his central position, but is reinterpreted in light of the authors' understanding of the Christ event and the relationship between these two figures. A similar interpretive framework is applied by Gnosis authors, but for them Abraham is not a positive figure that needs to be incorporated into a new theological scheme, but someone who needs to be excised from the pure revelation of the true God that was offered by Jesus.

In general, depictions of Abraham are positive, with the patriarch presented as a model for emulation, the progenitor of the Jewish people, and a friend of God. This positive characterization is not surprising in that most of the people who discuss Abraham are Jewish. Some non-Jewish authors also present Abraham in a positive light, either because they are writing a history that is dependent on Scriptural texts, they are positively predisposed to Judaism (e.g., Hermippus), or because they are in the employ of a Jewish king (e.g., Nicolaus of Damascus). A majority of negative depictions come from non-Jewish authors, either historians who are writing polemical works (e.g., Manetho) or Gnostic authors (e.g., Marcion, Valentinus) who, for theological reasons, want to distance Jesus and their understanding of God with the creator God and characters from Jewish Scripture. This diversity of presentations provides a good example of the malleability of Abraham's depiction and how an author's starting point strongly influences, and perhaps even determines, how s/he will portray an individual.

Another finding of this volume is the tendency by authors, both Jewish and Christian, to expand the Abraham narrative. For example, Philo (*Rer. Div. Her.* 27, 29; *Congr.* 151–52, 156; *Abr.* 71, 248–52) and the authors of *Jubilees* (19:26–22:30) and *Genesis Apocryphon* (2.3–18; 19.17–21) use constructed speeches to emphasize specific theological elements pertinent to their argument. Crafted speech is not limited to Abraham and human characters, but statements can also be attributed to God (e.g., *LAB* 7.4; 10.2; 12.4; 14.2; 18.5; 23.5–7). In contrast, Josephus significantly abridges God and Abraham's extensive dialogue about Sodom's fate in Gen. 18:16–33 (*Ant.* 1.199–200), likely because this was not relevant/useful for Josephus' literary purpose.

In addition to creating speeches, ancient authors also sought, on occasion, to make changes to Abraham's story. One practice was to fill in narrative gaps; Abraham's early life and post-mortem activities are subject to this approach. Scenes from Abraham's youth are infrequent, but are found in a few texts that attempt to show how Abraham deviated from the practices and ideas of his father Terah (e.g., *Apoc. Abr.* 3.2–4; 8.3–4; *LAB* 6.1–18). These narrative expansions fill gaps within Abraham's narrative and help explain why Abraham was chosen by God. Depictions of Abraham's post-mortem activities are less expected, but are prominent in Testament and Apocalypse texts and absent in most other genres. Here we find Abraham as one of the people who will be raised at the resurrection of the dead (*Sib. Or.* 2.245–49), who has escaped from Hades (*Apoc. Zeph.* 9.4–5) or, alternatively, who exists in the presence of God continuing his intercessory work,

pleading before God on behalf of his descendants and sinners (3 *En.* 44.7; *T. Isaac* 6.9–23). For many of these authors Abraham is a person who continues to exist (cf. *Mt.* 22:29–32).

Another practice was to downplay awkward passages and reinterpret them in order to make the actions of Abraham or God less problematic. A good example is found in 4Q225 2.i.9–10 in which the Prince of the Mastemah accused Abraham before God regarding his son Isaac, an incident that is presented as the catalyst for the command to sacrifice Isaac. Regarding the relationship between Sarah and Pharaoh (*Gen.* 12:10–20), certain texts minimize the event by making Pharaoh the active character (*Jub.* 13:12–13), while others indicate that calling Sarah his sister was the necessary action to preserve his life (i.e., through a dream *Gen. Apoc.* 20.14–22).¹ These changes relate to the exemplarity of Abraham and the need to ensure that what could be construed as morally questionable acts are properly understood.² The downplaying of awkward narratives highlights the tension felt by ancient authors between being faithful to the text and taking creative license. Most authors use Abraham in a way that aligns closely with the Genesis text. The *Testament of Abraham* remained true to the Genesis narrative by not creating a death-bed testimony for Abraham, but added the scene in which Abraham asks to see the entire created world before his death (*T. Abr.* A9.6) and all the faces of Death (A19.5–6).³ The rationale for such an alignment is not always clear, but could be linked to the authority of the original text, the (likely) widely-held knowledge of the Abrahamic narrative by the intended readers, the piety of the author, or a combination of the above. Nevertheless, ancient authors did not feel absolutely constrained in their handling of the character of Abraham.

Reading Abraham in light of, and in relationship to, other Scriptural passages or characters was a prominent way for ancient authors to engage with the Abrahamic narrative. The most common example is how authors throughout our chapters grouped Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob together as a triumvirate of Jewish patriarchy. Although Abraham can be, and regularly is, referenced individually, his association with Isaac and Jacob is significant as it both traces the succession approved by God and acts as a shorthand for a theological perspective on the land and God's

1. The parallel, sister-calling narrative of *Gen.* 20:1–18 is even less prominent and is regularly part of the omitted material.

2. On the exemplarity of Abraham in specific corpora, see A.Y. Reed, "The Construction of Subversion of Patriarchal Perfection: Abraham and Exemplarity in Philo, Josephus, and the Testament of Abraham," *JSJ* 40 (2009): 185–212. Cf. *Sir.* 44:19–21; *Tob.* 4:12; *CD* iii.2–3; *Heb.* 11:8–12; *1 Clem.* 10.1–2. In contrast, the author of the *Testament of Abraham*, although depicting Abraham as faithful, also recounts how he refused a request from God (9.4–6) and goes back on a promise he made to Michael (15.1–10).

3. Cf. Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 35.3 in R. Bauckham, "The Dispute over Abraham. A New Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, Vol. 1, eds. R. Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 58–62.

promises. The reading of these lives together is not only important for tracing the history of the Jewish people, but could also be viewed symbolically (e.g., Philo, *Abr.* 48–51), with the triad offering more than the sum of each part.

Abraham's relationship to Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah is less prominent than his pairing with Isaac and Jacob, and within the Hebrew Bible and Gnostic texts these women rarely feature. In a number of other corpora, the women are infrequently mentioned, and when they are, they are used as part of a wider argument about Abraham (e.g., Gal. 4:22–31).⁴ In contrast, certain authors, such as Philo, understand Sarah, and, to a lesser extent, Hagar as important figures in Abraham's life (*Abr.* 245–54) and as symbolically meaningful in an interpretation of the Genesis text (e.g., Philo, *Congr.*). Similarly, Josephus appears bothered by Sarah's absence from the *Akedah* narrative, and because of this, he adds that Abraham concealed God's command from her (*Ant.* 1.225).⁵

The association of Abraham and other individuals is not limited to biblical characters who appear in his narrative. For example, in the Commentary on Genesis A (4Q252), the interpreter read the life of Abraham through a wider scriptural lens, especially the book of Deuteronomy. In works of rewritten Scripture, actions attributed to Abraham mirror those of other biblical characters,⁶ and in the Gnostic *Second Discourse of Great Seth* the author viewed Abraham as following the path of Adam in contrast to that of Seth (cf. NHC VII.2 62.27–63.3). These points of contact imply a more unified reading of the biblical texts in which the character of Abraham is not read in isolation, but as part of a wider theological and literary narrative.

Ultimately, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the interpretation of Abraham is characterized by diversity. The theological or ideological perspective of the author substantially influences and often determines how they engage with Abraham and handle his narrative. In general, ancient authors, when evoking Abraham, highlighted one or more of his character traits (e.g., faith, hospitality, fatherhood, etc.) or read his story through a specific interpretive lens (e.g., allegory). When rewriting his narrative, authors regularly filled gaps, reordered events, expanded reported speech, and even made claims about Abraham's current state in the afterlife. All of these actions show that Abraham was an important character for these ancient readers, and that they saw his narrative as particularly fruitful for interpretation and relevant to their lives.

4. For a wider discussion, see J. McDonald, "Searching for Sarah in the Second Temple Era: Portraits in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Narratives", PhD diss; Brite Divinity School, 2015.

5. Another example of the expansion of Sarah's character is seen in *Gen. Apoc.* 20.1–8 and the description of her beauty.

6. E.g., Abraham's escape from the fiery furnace by the Tower of Babel (*LAB* 6.3–18; cf. Dan. 3:1–30); Abraham unlike Noah and his family (*CD* iii.2–3); Abraham tested like Job (*Jub.* 17:15–18); cf. b. Sanh. 89b; Rab. Gen. 55.4.

Chapter Summaries

This volume contains eleven chapters in which each scholar evaluates how the character of Abraham is employed in their specific author or corpus. We recognize that this type of division is not always beneficial and is regularly arbitrary (esp. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Gnostic, etc.), based on later reader or scholarly categories (e.g., canon) that were unlikely to have been germane to their ancient authors. Our volume structure is not an attempt to endorse the siloing of these texts, but is a concession to practicality.

The starting point of the author determining a certain portrayal of the patriarch is only one relationship which affects how Abraham is portrayed and perceived; another is the relationship between Abraham and the characters he is often seen interacting with in the texts of Genesis. Reading Abraham in the context of husband and father, for example, can impact how a reader may understand and receive the patriarch.

This argument is drawn upon by Zanne Domoney-Lyttle in her chapter concerning Abraham in the Hebrew Bible. In this chapter, Domoney-Lyttle traces the reception not only of Abraham, but of his partners and the mothers of his children Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah throughout the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Domoney-Lyttle argues that, as the reader progresses through the Hebrew Bible, Abraham's name becomes greater while the memory of his partners is erased, a move on behalf of the authors which indicates Abraham's name is used to reinforce patriarchal ideologies concerning themes of land ownership and patrilineal descent; in short, the covenantal promises. Abraham's name becomes a metaphor for those promises, a metaphor which would be threatened with the inclusion of Sarah, or Hagar, or Keturah. Thus, by selectively preserving certain parts of Abraham's history, the writers of the Hebrew texts present a counter memory of Abraham, which supports a political agenda of land ownership and a social agenda of correct family lineage.

Though an important figure in the Hebrew Bible, Abraham is not one of the central figures; David, Moses, and even Solomon have stronger claims to this title. One of the emerging themes in this volume is that, despite Abraham's lack of centrality in the Hebrew Scriptures, he actually becomes increasingly popular in the ancient texts which follow. In Géza G. Xeravits' chapter concerning Abraham in the Old Testament Apocrypha, he traces common themes of Abraham's story which suggest that Abraham was not only a popular figure, but that there is strong evidence of a rich tradition of literature and history built around the patriarch. We can see this for example in the way that Genesis 22 is recalled and re-presented in various apocryphal books such as Judith, 1 Maccabees, and the Book of Wisdom, which suggest not only that the memory of events in Abraham's later life is still important, but also that he grew in popularity specifically because his name could be used as a model of faith and trust in God through the invocation of narratives such as Genesis 22. Finally, Xeravits draws attention to the malleability of Abraham's character as well as thematic variability within his biographical narratives, noting

again the approach of authors who selected and re-presented aspects of Abraham's life to reframe his character according to need.

Jared Ludlow's chapter traces the use of Abraham in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. In this chapter, Ludlow also draws the reader's attention to the creative approach of ancient authors to gaps in Abraham's life which add color and intrigue to his character, but which also remain consistent with more traditional approaches to his biography. In the *Testament of Abraham* for example, Abraham's refusal to follow the angel Michael to heaven (Recension A) almost presents him as a stubborn and disloyal character, the opposite traits which readers usually associate with Abraham. To rectify this, Ludlow discusses how Recension B of the same story foregrounds Abraham's intentions as an explanation for the trouble he causes in the text. This short example demonstrates the importance that Abraham's character should be remembered positively, and with the traits that many Jewish and early Christian communities had come to recognize him for.

Moving away from characterization, a number of the chapters identified a possible relationship between the genre of a work and how the Genesis narrative was used. In her chapter on Rewritten Scripture, Susan Docherty identifies specific approaches to Abraham's Genesis narrative by authors of Rewritten Scripture, two of which we have seen in the above chapters: 1) selective abridgement or omission of specific narratives in Abraham's story, and 2) the provision of a new context for episodes from Abraham's life. Other exegetical techniques highlighted by Docherty include: 1) the reordering of some events in the Abraham narrative; 2) the introduction of minor difference from the Genesis accounts; and 3) the inclusion of supplementary material in which the author's own emphases can be developed. On this last point, Docherty argues that it is the addition of material which reshapes the figure of Abraham rather than the tweaking of Genesis narratives. Unlike the previous chapters which have highlighted the ideological concerns of authorship in the presentation of Abraham, Docherty argues that rewritten Scriptures are exegetical in their focus (i.e., concerned with clarifying the texts) and less concerned with propagating political or social concerns.

In his chapter on Abraham in the corpus of Philo of Alexandria, Sean Adams adopts a character theory approach, and evaluates how Philo reads Abraham's life in light of his relationships. Adams argues that modern theories about how character is developed in narratives can be profitably applied to Philo's interpretation of the Genesis narrative. In particular, an interfigural approach, which identifies relations between characters within or from different texts, highlights how Philo defines Abraham through his engagement and relationship to other characters, especially, but not limited to, Sarah, Isaac, Lot, and Pharaoh.

Michael Avioz argues in his chapter on Abraham in Josephus' writings, that they should be considered an exegetical project as well. Avioz' categorization of Josephus' writings as exegesis differs from Docherty's taxonomy; instead, Avioz argues Josephus' reputation as exegete is concerned with translating the Hebrew biblical text into Greek, with reconciling contradictions in the Hebrew Bible, and with addressing problematic ethical issues which might have troubled Graeco-Roman readers.

Joshua W. Jipp considers the role of Abraham within the Gospels and Acts of the New Testament. In this study, Abraham's memory is invoked inconsistently across NT texts, and Jipp draws out both the similarities and differences across the handling of Abraham's narrative to demonstrate once again that his name and memory is called upon to endorse or suggest social or political ideologies. In the Gospels (excluding Mark), Abraham is used as a link between God's covenant with Israel and the person of Jesus, through genealogical descent (e.g., the genealogical material in Matthew), but also through his acting of the deeds of Abraham (e.g., in John), for example. Abraham as model of faith, hospitality, and fatherhood is prevalent within these texts and indicates not only how the patriarch was understood, but also the qualities which were of most importance to those ancient communities.

The role of Abraham as exemplar is also debated in Pauline scholarship and is typically viewed as falling upon interpretational lines; for scholars who advocate for the "Old Perspective" Abraham represents a model of faith (esp. Romans 4), whereas, for "New Perspective" scholars Abraham is not interpreted primarily in those terms. In his chapter on Abraham in Paul's letters, Chris Tilling has argued that this classification dichotomy does not accurately represent scholarly positions, and dampens the nuance proposed by scholars in their reading of Paul.

Seth Ehorn's chapter on Abraham in the Apostolic Fathers highlights the importance of Abraham's family line (both literally and spiritually) in forming identities for early Christian writers. Ehorn here notes that these ancient authors often selected and/or modified specific narratives from the life of Abraham to support and suggest their own political and social agendas, a theme prevalent across many of the chapters. These agendas may be minor (i.e. using Abraham as a model of hospitality in *1 Clement*) or have wider significance (i.e. Ignatius Christianizing Abraham, diluting his Jewish origins in his *Letter to the Philadelphians*). Ehorn's chapter suggests the continued importance of Abraham as a character in faith traditions, but only when the invocation of his name can be used in specific ways.

Another finding of this volume is the relationship between the depiction of Abraham and the context of the author who employed him. For example, among non-Jewish authors, the depiction of Abraham changed from that of a militaristic and monarchical individual to that of religious founder knowledgeable of divine lore. This shift paralleled the rise in Christianity within the Empire and the importance of Abraham in religious discussions, an argument proposed by Margaret Williams in her chapter on Abraham in Greek and Latin authors.

Csaba Ötvös traces the reception of Abraham in the ancient Gnostic systems. As noted by Ötvös, Abraham is not a central figure in the Gnostic texts, and does not often appear in primary or secondary sources regarding that literature. Where Abraham's name does appear, it is often used allusively to suggest a connection with biblical material. In this context then, Abraham's name is used to legitimize the authority and knowledge of the writer rather than invoking the patriarch's name to highlight an agenda or suggest the moral implications of Abraham's life story. This suggests that invoking Abraham's name is a way for ancient Gnostic

authors to claim their own power and identity, a move which is arguably a step beyond the reception of Abraham discussed in the previous chapters.

The figure of Abraham has lived many afterlives throughout the texts discussed in this volume. This volume is not only a testament to the importance of the patriarch, but also adds to the living story of Abraham whose name continues to pervade religious and cultural traditions, and whose afterlife continues in these new texts which center on his character. By presenting a more thorough outline of the impact of the figure and stories of Abraham, we have created a more concise and complete idea of how his narrative was employed throughout the centuries, including how ancient authors adopted and adapted received traditions. This study only traces a few avenues of reception and there are many more paths to investigate. In particular, investigating the reception of Abraham in other faith traditions and in subsequent time periods and texts would be fruitful lines of inquiry in their own right, but would also shed more light on how Abraham was understood in the corpora discussed in this volume.