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The Book of the Revelation of Abraham

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Abstract: "In January there appeared in one of the popular daily journals of San Francisco an account of what was called "A Remarkable New Version of the Apocalypse of Abraham," by Professor G. Nathanael Bonwetsch, of the University of Goettingen, Germany; and then followed a partial translation of the same. In some of its passages the writer observed many things of a character both as to incidents and doctrines that ran parallel with what is recorded in the Book of Abraham, given to the world by Joseph Smith in 1836... The first impulse was to publish so much of the book as the daily paper referred to had produced, and point out the parallel incidents and doctrines in the Book of Abraham; but talking the matter over with Elder E H. Anderson (to whom, let us here say, we have often been indebted for many valuable suggestions in connection with the publication of the ERA), he suggested that we write and ascertain from Professor Bonwetsch himself if he had issued such a work, and if so obtain one from him. This was done, and a translation of the "Revelation of Abraham" is presented to our readers. On account of its length it has been divided and will appear in two numbers of the magazine, and will be followed by a third paper the purpose of which will be to indicate the points of comparison between this translation from the old Slavic manuscript and the Book of Abraham. It will be in the second paper, that the points of comparison will be most striking, and we must ask our readers to suspend their judgment as to the value of this production until the whole of it is before them. It should also be added that how much of this story from the old Slavic manuscript is tinged with fable and how much represents the true visions of the patriarch Abraham, as related by himself, we cannot pretend to say."

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VOL. I.

AUGUST, 1898.

No. 10.

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION OF ABRAHAM.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF PROF. G. NATHANAEL BON-
WETSCH, OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GOETTINGEN, GERMANY,
BY E. H. ANDERSON AND R. T. HAAG.

THE ERA EDITOR'S NOTE.

In January there appeared in one of the popular daily journals of San Francisco an account of what was called "A Remarkable New Version of the Apocalypse of Abraham," by Professor G. Nathanael Bonwetsch, of the University of Goettingen, Germany; and then followed a partial translation of the same. In some of its passages the writer observed many things of a character both as to incidents and doctrines that ran parallel with what is recorded in the Book of Abraham, given to the world by Joseph Smith in 1836 (?). Especially was this true in relation to the idolatrous character of Abraham's immediate forefathers, his call to depart from them, the future promise of a special inheritance, the fact of his receiving a special revelation from God, making known great things concerning the structure of the heavens and the

earth, the pre-existence of the spirits of men, and the choice of certain of them to be God's rulers in the earth, Abraham being among them. All these corroborating facts of the contents of the Book of Abraham were intensely interesting and important if the old Slavic manuscript from which Professor Bonwetsch was reported to have translated his book was in existence and of great antiquity.

The first impulse was to publish so much of the book as the daily paper referred to had produced, and point out the parallel incidents and doctrines in the Book of Abraham; but talking the matter over with Elder E. H. Anderson (to whom, let us here say, we have often been indebted for many valuable suggestions in connection with the publication of the ERA), he suggested that we write and ascertain from Professor Bonwetsch himself if he had issued such a work, and if so obtain one from him. This was done, and a translation of the "Revelation of Abraham" is presented to our readers. On account of its length it has been divided and will appear in two numbers of the magazine, and will be followed by a third paper the purpose of which will be to indicate the points of comparison between this translation from the old Slavic manuscript and the Book of Abraham. It will be in the second paper, that the points of comparison will be most striking, and we must ask our readers to suspend their judgment as to the value of this production until the whole of it is before them. It should also be added that how much of this story from the old Slavic manuscript is tinged with fable and how much represents the true visions of the patriarch Abraham, as related by himself, we cannot pretend to say.

THE TRANSLATORS' NOTE.

In volume I. of an extensive religious work being published in Leipzig, entitled, "Studies for the History of Theology and the Church," edited by Prof. G. Nathanael Bonwetsch and R. Seeberg, is found a translation of the Apocalypse of Abraham by the first named gentleman, who is a professor in the University of Goettingen. This Apocalypse

of Abraham, according to Professor Bonwetsch, was found in an old Slavic manuscript, in the University of Moscow, Russia. The old Slavic is a language from which the Russian is derived. The professor says that the old Slavic translation is very complete when compared with other fragmentary renditions of this same subject matter, made by various scholars as far back as the early part of the fourteenth century, and which renditions might more properly be called, the Testament of Abraham. He suggests, further, that the Slavic manuscript has evidently a Greek origin, judging from one thing, from the high literary and theological education of its author. Comments upon the Greek version, not yet discovered, but from which the Slavic is supposed to have been taken, have been found dated as early as the ninth century. Prof. Bonwetsch found the aid of a specialist necessary in making the present translation to German.

The translation to English, herewith presented to the readers of the ERA, has been made from the original German for this magazine. A copy of the German work, which contains besides the Revelation of Abraham a very learned discussion on its origin, genuineness and antiquity, was sent to the ERA by courtesy of Prof. Bonwetsch, upon personal application.

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION OF ABRAHAM,
 THE SON OF TERAH, THE SON OF NAHOR, THE
 SON OF SERUG, THE SON OF REU, THE SON
 OF ARPHAXAD, THE SON OF SHEM, THE
 SON OF NOAH, THE SON OF LAMECH,
 THE SON OF METHUSELAH, THE
 SON OF ENOCH, THE
 SON OF ARED.

I.

On the day when I planed (polished) the gods of my father Terah, and the gods of Nahor, his brother, I pondered:

who is in truth the strong god. I, Abraham, at the time of my offering, when I had finished the service of the sacrifice of my father Terah to his gods of gold, silver, brass, and iron, going into the temple for service, I found the god Marumath, hewn (shaped) of stone, fallen forward by the feet of Nahor's iron god. And it happened when I saw it, my soul was perplexed, and I considered that I was not able to put him back into his place, I, Abraham, alone, because he was heavy, being formed of a large stone, and I went to and made it known to my father. Then he went in with me and both of us could hardly move him onward to bring him back to his place. And his head fell from him while I yet held him by the head. It happened that when my father saw that Marumath's head had fallen off, he said to me: "Abraham," and I answered, "Here I am." Then he said to me: "Bring me the hatchet from the house." And I brought it to him. And he hewed into shape another Marumath, without a head, out of another stone, and the head which had fallen from Marumath, he put upon it, and the rest of Marumath he destroyed.

II.

And he made five other gods and gave them to me, commanding me to sell them out in the streets of the city. And I saddled my father's ass and laid them upon it, and went to the inn to sell them. And behold merchants with camels from Fandana, Syria, passed on their way to Egypt, to purchase their papyrus from the Nile. And I asked them and they answered, and I conversed with them. And one of the camels belching, the ass was frightened and ran away and threw off the gods, breaking three of them, but two were left. And it happened when the Syrians saw that I had gods, they said to me: "Why did you not make known to us that you had gods, so we might have purchased them, before the ass heard the voice of the camel, and would not have been lost? Give us now the remaining gods, and we will pay you the fit price. And I considered, troubled in my heart, how I might bring to my father the purchase price of all the gods. Noticing my embarrassment they gave me the price of all the gods

for the broken gods; and the three broken ones I threw into the waters of the river Gur which was near by, and they sank into the depths thereof, and henceforth were no more.

III.

But as I still went on my way, my heart was stirred and my mind was troubled. I said in my heart: What an evil thing is this my father does? Is he not rather the god of his gods, since they come into being by his chisel, his lathe and his skill; and would it not be more proper for them to worship my father, inasmuch as they are his creations? What an evil deception is this of my father in his works! Behold Marumath fell and could not raise himself in his temple nor could I alone move him, until my father came and together we raised him; and because we were too weak, his head fell off and he set it upon another stone of another god which he had made without a head. And likewise the other gods which were broken in falling from the ass, which could neither free themselves nor harm the ass that demolished them; neither came their broken remains from the river. And I said in my heart: This being so, how now can Marumath, my father's god, having another stone's head, and being made of another stone, save a man, or hear a man's prayer and reward him?

IV.

And as I thus reflected, I came to my father's house; and I watered the ass and fed him hay, and took out the silver and gave it into the hands of my father Terah. When he saw it he was glad and said: "Blessed are you, Abraham, by my gods, since you have brought the price of the gods, and my labor has not been in vain." And I answered and said to him: "Hear, my father Terah, blessed are the gods by you, for you are god to them, for you have made them, their blessing is destruction, and their help is vain: who could not help themselves, how shall they help you or bless me? I was considerate of you in this gain, because of my good sense, I brought you silver also for the broken gods." And when he heard my words, he was very angry with me because I had spoken hard words against his gods.

V.

But I, having reflected upon the anger of my father, went out, whereupon he called me, saying: "Abraham!" and I said, "Here I am," and he said: "Gather the shavings of the firewood from which I made gods before you came, and prepare me food for dinner." And it came to pass that while gathering the shavings, I found among them a small god which had been laid in the litter to my left; and upon his forehead was written: God Barisat. And it came to pass that when I found him I kept him, and did not make it known to my father that I had found the god Barisat among the shavings. And it happened when I had placed the shavings into the fire to prepare food for my father, that I went out to enquire concerning the meal, and I set Barisat by the lighted fire and said to him, "Take care, watch, Barisat, until I return, that the fire be not extinguished. If it goes down, blow upon it that it may burn up again." And I went forth and fulfilled my errand; and, returning, I found Barisat fallen backward, his feet terribly burned surrounded by fire. And it came to pass when I saw this, I said laughingly to myself: "In truth, Barisat, canst thou not light a fire and cook a meal?" And it came to pass that while I was thus speaking to myself and laughing, he gradually burned up and became ashes. And I brought the meal to my father and he ate; and I gave him wine and milk, and he drank and was glad, and blessed his god Marumath. I said to him: "Father Terah, bless not your god Marumath, neither praise him, but rather exalt your god Barisat, because loving you more, he has thrown himself into the fire to cook your food." He asked me: "Where is he now?" I replied: "He was burned into ashes in the fierceness of the fire, and became dust." Then he said: "Great is the power of Barisat, I will make another one today, and tomorrow he shall prepare my food."

VI.

But when I, Abraham, heard such words from my father, I laughed to myself, yet sighed in the sorrow and anger of my soul, and said: "How can a fashioned statue, made by him,

help my father? Will he now permit his body to be subject to his soul, and his soul to his spirit, and his spirit to absurdity and ignorance? For once it may be meet that evil should be suffered in order that I may dwell upon pure things and lay open my thoughts before him." Then I continued: "Father Terah, whichever of these you adore as a god, you are unreasonable. Behold the gods of my brother Nahor which stand in the holy temple, are more worthy of honor than yours: for behold Zucheus, his god, is more worthy of honor than your god Marumath, for he is artfully adorned by man with gold, and when he grows old he can be made over (remoulded), but when Marumath is worn or destroyed, he cannot be renewed, since he is made of stone. As far as the god Joauv is concerned, who stands above the other gods with Zucheus, he is more honorable than the wooden god Barisat, for he is made of silver, made costly of man for show and appearance. But your god Barisat, before he was yet prepared, and unrooted from the earth, was grand and wonderful in the glory of his branches and blossoms, but you have cleaved him with your ax, and through your skillful art, he became a god. Behold how he is withered, how his strength has departed; from his height he is fallen to the earth; from greatness, to the paltry and mean. His countenance is vanished; he himself was burned by fire and became ashes, and is no more. And you declare: 'Today I will make another, who shall prepare my food tomorrow.' Does this not leave him to his own destruction?"

VII.

Having so thought, I Abraham, came to my father saying: "Father Terah, fire is more worthy of honor than your gods of gold, silver, stone and wood, whom you revere, because it consumes your gods; your gods are burned and are subject to fire; the fire consuming them mocks your gods. But even fire I call not god, because it is quenched by water, moreover, the water not only quenches the fire, but it sweetens the fruits of the earth; but water I do not call god, because it is swallowed up by the earth; therefore, I call the

earth more worthy of honor, because it controls the nature of the water. But earth is not god, for it is dried up by the sun, and made subordinate to the labors of mankind. More worthy than the earth is the sun, because he lights the whole world with his beams. But neither do I call him god, for he is hidden by the night. And again I do not consider the moon and the stars god, for they likewise in their seasons are obscured. But hearken to this, Father Terah, let me make known to you the God who has created all these, for he is the true God, who empurpled the heavens, and gilded the sun; who made the moon to shine and with her the stars; who dried up the earth in the midst of many waters; who set you, yourself, in it, and has now found me in the perplexity of my thoughts. O, would that God, through himself might reveal himself to us!"

VIII.

And it came to pass while I thus spake to my father Terah, in the court of my house, the voice of a Mighty One from Heaven came from a fiery cloud saying and calling: "Abraham, Abraham." I answered: "Here am I." And he said: "The God of Gods, the Creator, you are seeking in your heart; I am he. Go out from your father Terah, get you out of his house, lest you also be killed in the sins of the house of your father. And I went forth. And it came to pass as I went out, having hardly reached the door of the court, there was a voice of great thunder, and he was burned, and his house, and all that was in it, even to the earth of forty ells.

IX.

Then a voice spake to me twice: "Abraham, Abraham!" I answered: "Here am I." And he said: "Behold it is I, be not afraid, for I am before the world was, a strong God who created even before the light of the world. I am your shield and your helper. Go hence, and take for me a three-year old heifer, and a three-year old goat, and a three-year old sheep, and a turtle dove, and a pigeon, and bring me a pure sacrifice. And in this offering I will show you the Aeons, and reveal to

you that which is secret; and you shall see great things never before beheld by you; for you have loved to seek me, and I have called you my friend. But abstain from all food which comes from the fire, and drink no wine; do not anoint yourself with oil for forty days, and then present to me the sacrifice which I commanded you, at the place which I shall show you, upon a high mountain, and there I will show you the Aeons which have been wrought by my word, and firmly established, created and renewed, and I will reveal to you that which is to come to pass within them to those who do evil, and to those who work righteousness in the generations of men."

X.

And it came to pass as I heard the voice which spoke such words unto me, I looked hither and thither, and behold there was breathless silence, and my soul was frightened, and my spirit fled from me, and I fell like a stone to the earth, there being no strength left in me to stand. And while yet my face was upon the ground, I heard the voice of the Holy One speaking: "Go Iaoel, by the power of my unspeakable name, raise up this man for me, strengthen him, and quiet his trembling. And the angel came who had been sent to me in the likeness of a man, and took me by my right hand, and, putting me on my feet, said:

"Arise, Abraham, friend of God who loveth you, let not the fear of man encompass you, for behold, I have been sent to you to strengthen you and to bless you in the name of God, the creator of the heaven and the earth, who loveth you. Be courageous and draw near unto him. I am called Iaoel by him who shaketh the creations of the firmament to the breadth of the seventh heaven, power being vested in me through his unspeakable name. I am he to whom it is given, through his command, to reconcile the cherubim, and teach those who take upon them his name the song of the seventh hour of the night of man. I am set apart to control the Leviathan, for through me the attacks and threatenings of every reptile are subdued; I have been commanded to unbind Hades, and to destroy those who gaze at death! I am he who was com-

manded to set on fire your father's house, and to destroy him because he worshipped dead gods. I am now sent to you to bless you, and the land which the Eternal One has prepared for you, unto whom you have called: and for your sake I have made my way to the earth! Arise, Abraham, with courage, go with great joy and gladness. I am with you, for the Eternal One has prepared for you honor everlasting. Go, finish the sacrifice of the commandments, for behold I am set apart with you and with the generations which have been before prepared, out of you; and with me, Michael blesses you forevermore. Be courageous, go!"

XI.

And I arose and saw him who had taken hold of my right hand, and placed me upon my feet: and this was the appearance of his body: his feet were like sapphire, and his countenance like chrysolith, and the hair of his head was white as snow; and the turban upon his head was like the appearance of the rainbow; his garments were like purple, and he held a golden scepter in his right hand, and he said unto me:

"Abraham!" And I answered: "Behold, thy servant!" And he said: "Let not my countenance nor my speech frighten you, that your soul be not confused. Go with me, and I will go with you to the visible sacrifice, and I will go with you eternally to the sacrifice which is invisible. Be of good cheer and go!"