



Type: Magazine Article

A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price: Part 9: Setting the Stage - The World of Abraham (Continued)

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (January 1970), pp. 56–65

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints



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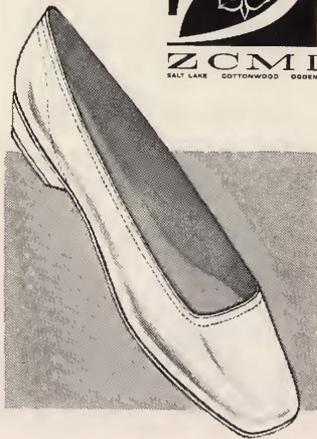
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● *Abraham the Missionary*: The Book of Abraham refers specifically to Abraham's work as a missionary. "I . . . was sixty and two years old when I departed out of Haran. And I took Sarai, whom I took to wife when I was in Ur . . . and the souls that we had won in Haran . . . and dwelt in tents as we came on our way." (Abr. 2:14f. Italics added.) The corresponding Bible text reads: "Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls [lit., living things] they had gotten [lit., made] in Haran." (Gen. 12:4-5.) The puzzling "living things they had made" was interpreted by the Rabbis exactly as it stands in the Book of Abraham, the Midrash explaining that it means the people converted in Haran.²¹⁷ It goes even further to explain that when we are told that Abraham "called upon the name of the

A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price



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Part 9 (Continued)

Setting the Stage: The World of Abraham

By Dr. Hugh Nibley

Lord" in Sechem, it means that "he summoned the people to the name, i.e., began to preach the Gospel to them and convert them." (Midr. Rab. 39:16.) According to the Sefer ha-Yashar, "the people of the land of Haran saw that Abram was good and just towards God and man. . . . Men from among the inhabitants of the land of Haran came to him, and attached themselves to him, and he taught them the discipline of the Lord and his ways."²¹⁸ As he moved on his way, "each altar raised by him was a centre of activities as a missionary," he and Sarah diligently preaching and making proselytes wherever they pitched their tents.²¹⁹ "Abraham converted the men," according to the Midrash (39:14), "and Sarah the women," and there was a tradition that "all proselytes and heathen are the descendants" of the infants of pagan mothers, whom Sarah nursed.²²⁰

The Book of Abraham clearly states that it was his preaching that got

Abraham into trouble in the first place—they "hearkened not unto my voice, but endeavored to take away my life. . . ." (Abr. 1:7.) The oldest traditions agree with this: "Abraham having overcome them by argument, the king wanted to put him to death; but thanks to a miracle, he removed to Haran, where he began to declare unto the multitude with a loud voice."²²¹ Abraham, says a famous passage in the Midrash (39:2, 14), was at home like a vessel of precious perfume lying tightly closed in a corner: God wanted the precious fragrance as widely disseminated as possible, and so he said to Abraham: "Travel from place to place, and thy name will become great in the world." Thus from the outset Abraham was "the archtypal evangelist . . . whose reputation becomes suffused by his travels as a vessel of ointment suffuses."²²² Himself "the arch-proselyte," he became "the Father of all Proselytes."²²³ He made no distinction

between men, since all alike were without the faith, and to convert a soul was to give it a new life and a new being: "One who brings a foreigner near and makes a proselyte of him is as if he created him."²²⁴ Hence "it is Abraham the missionary who makes brothers of all the world; who abolishes the differences between the nations and races. . . . In his hand God placed the power to bless all the world: this blessing descended to the Patriarchs and the priesthood."²²⁵

This missionary concept is not a modern one. It is interesting that in Abraham's time Canaan and Egypt were the scene of extensive missionary activities propagandizing for various deities,²²⁶ and it may have been for that, among other reasons, that Abraham's mission at the time won very few converts.²²⁷

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is seen in his championing of those sinners who have died without redemption. As everyone knows, the poor man in the story of Lazarus and Dives was seen resting in *Abraham's* bosom. This is because the Jews believed that he was in special charge of the spirits between the time of death and the judgment and resurrection. "Lazarus was taken to the paradise where Abraham had gone," writes a modern Catholic scholar, "and where he rejoiced while awaiting the Great Day; the poor celebrate with him there in a place of honor. So the penitent thief will go to the same paradise, which is *not* heaven, but a place where certain spirits await the resurrection and the judgment."²²⁸ Whether the Christian world wants to believe this or not, it was, according to this scholar, certainly the "current mythical concept" held alike by Jesus and the people he taught.²²⁸ The old idea that it is Abraham who does all in his power to rescue every unredeemed spirit in his great concern for the welfare of the whole human race is actually very old and, according to K. Kohler, "has not a tinge of either Christian or of late Rabbinical color about it."²²⁹ Abraham, according to the tradition, fearful for the souls of the wicked who died in his generation, proposed to Michael, who has charge of all the dead, that two of them unite their faith in prayer and supplication to the Lord in behalf of those spirits.²³⁰ For he had beheld their miserable state in a vision, and wept at the sight, and said, "I had hoped that they would come to me; but they would not give me their love, but rather praised alien things and clung to things which did not belong to them," i.e., the things of this world.²³¹ He asks Abel, the great judge, whether there is anything he can do to help the spirits which remain "in the middle state" awaiting the final judgment, and he is informed that the work that will save them cannot be done "until the Judge of all comes at the end of time and decides their fate."²³²

Though proper "work for the dead" was only to come with the Messiah, Abraham was assured that it surely would come, and that his prayers on behalf of the dead would in time be answered. "Abraham's activity did not cease with his death, and as he interceded in this world for sinners, so will he intercede for them in the world to come. On that day he will sit at the gate of hell, and he will not suffer those who kept the law of circumcision to enter herein."²³³ At once we think of "the Gates of Hell" and the promise to Peter, the other Rock; indeed, Genesis 12:3 might be taken as

another form of the promise that what is bound and loosed on earth is bound and loosed in heaven. Abraham and Michael fell on their knees together when they were shown the broad and the narrow gates of which the Lord speaks in the New Testament, and prayed on behalf of the dead that they might yet enter into salvation.²³⁴ In answer to their prayer, God sent an angel to take the spirits to an intermediate place, Paradise, upon which Abraham rejoiced and praised God for his boundless mercy.²³⁵ A significant aspect of these other-worldly accounts is the way Abraham and Enoch can trade places—even as they do in the Pearl of Great Price. There, it is Enoch who makes the great appeal for the sinners, while he in turn is merely following the example of a higher one. (Moses 7:39.)

In the Jewish traditions Abraham claims the right of taking the place of both Enoch and Abel in sitting at the gate to examine those of his own dispensation who received the covenant from him.²³⁶ In the shorter version of the Apocalypse of Abraham it is Enoch who keeps the records by the side of Abel the Judge, while Abraham stands before them to plead as an advocate for each spirit.²³⁷ "Abraham's bosom" has been interpreted by the Rabbis as "a euphemism indicating the sign of circumcision," the sign that each of his children has received the covenant, that is, the assurance that he will give them his comfort and support in the hereafter.²³⁸ In the ecstatic manner of the Thanksgiving Hymns of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the author of a Midrash (Midr. Ps. 40:4) bursts into songs of praise when he contemplates "the wondrous works and the thought (the Plan) Thou didst conceive, by which Abraham chose the yoke of the kingdoms for himself, for our sake, that we might . . . possess life in the world to come."

In traditional Judaism, according to K. Kohler, "the *main power* of Abraham" is in his constant intercession for the spirits who have passed on and are awaiting the judgment in another world; and this is considered "a specimen" of the type of work Father Abraham will do "after having entered Paradise. He will *always* be *milakh melitz* (the intercessor); on this idea the Kaddish or Prayers for the dead rests—that Abraham is the great champion of the dead."²³⁹ Because of this work, each soul at the resurrection will be given a personal interview by one who will "effect a Tiquin for him, pray for him, and uplift him. . . ."²⁴⁰ Recently Theodor Reick has argued that the Kaddish is the survival of an old "ancestor worship and devotion to

the dead," which was actually suppressed by Moses and the prophets, but has emerged whenever Israel was in particularly close contact with Egypt, for "they felt an emotional and mental affinity with the Egyptians."²⁴¹ That Moses withheld many teachings from the Jews is well-known, but it was not because those teachings were Egyptian, but because they were not ready to receive them.

Thus Abraham remains throughout eternity preeminently the friend of man, the kind father, husband, and host, the earnest and self-effacing advocate, the rescue worker, the zealous missionary, and finally the devoted worker for the dead. In this last capacity he is concerned as ever that the weak and helpless shall not be neglected; for as he checks the signs and tokens of those Israelites who come to him at the gate, he will take away those which the wicked and unworthy have received and give them to those poor souls, especially children, who died without receiving them.²⁴² Plainly we have to do here with a tradition dealing with what the Latter-day Saints call "work for the dead." This leads us to consideration of the broader subject of Abraham and the ordinances, in which the history of Abraham on the altar, which figures so prominently in the Book of Abraham, takes on a new and startling significance.

ABRAHAM AND THE ORDINANCE

The New Abraham: Today, with the study of newly found documents that give a wholly new perspective on the early Jewish and Christian religions, the importance of Abraham has suddenly become enormously enhanced. Whereas the conventional Jewish view has been that "of only one mortal being, Moses, does Holy Scripture state that God spoke to him face to face . . . with all other prophets . . . the Deity speaks in dreams, in visions, in riddles,"²⁴³ today we are told that the covenant made with Moses on Sinai was "but the fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham," which is the true "foundation of the life of Israel ever since."²⁴⁴ Whereas it has hitherto been taken for granted that "everyone knows that it was Moses who first knew the Eternal One,"²⁴⁵ we now learn that "Abraham and not Moses was the founder of Israel's monotheism. . . . God is always described as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," not of Moses.²⁴⁶ The covenant of the B'nai B'rith is today considered to be "the covenant that God made with Abraham, the first Jew, and afterwards renewed with Moses . . . the central and deathless theme and constitution of Judaism."²⁴⁷

Abraham seems to be regaining the matchless esteem in which he was once held by the Jewish doctors, who called him "Arba, the greatest of the faithful,"²⁴⁸ *saddiq tamim*, "the perfect one,"²⁴⁹ the first proselyte, first of his generation to follow God, who brought man near to God, the eye of the world,²⁵⁰ "the saintly man [who] . . . justifies the creation of man. Because of him, man is vindicated."²⁵¹ He is the first and greatest of those "whose coinage is current in the entire world,"²⁵² who colonized the world for God, so that whereas "before Abraham the Lord was the king of heaven only, with Abraham he became the king of Heaven and Earth."²⁵³ "Abraham entered into the covenant on which the world is based," says the Zohar (Lech Lecha 91b), "and thus the world was firmly established for his sake." There was a Hasidic teaching that "man is possessed of a ghost, a spirit, and a soul in this order of importance" and that "Abraham is the ghost of Israel; Moses his spirit, and the Messiah, his soul."²⁵⁴ When at the Council in Heaven serious doubts were expressed as to the wisdom of creating the world, because of all the wickedness that would fill it, the view of Abraham and his few righteous descendants determined the deciding vote: ". . . forthwith the world was established for his sake."²⁵⁵ Through his progeny and his missionary work "Abraham united the whole world for us, like a person who sews a torn garment together." (Midr. Rab. Gen. 39:3.) Abraham, Adam, Noah, i.e., the fathers of the great dispensations and their faithful descendants, are the real "kernel" of the human race; all the others are merely the "shell" of mankind.²⁵⁶

"The figure of Abraham today is enjoying great favor," writes E. Jacob. "History and faith, returning to their sources, regard him as their father. Scholars are searching for the real Abraham as never before."²⁵⁷ The great appeal of Abraham, he points out, is the way in which he unites all men in a religion of love.²⁵⁸ The motto of the new Institutum Judaicum for the combining of Jewish, Christian, and Moslem studies and interests at Tuebingen is "Abraham Our Father."²⁵⁹ If Abraham is now being hailed as "the most pivotal and strategic man in the course of world history,"²⁶⁰ the vindication for such an apparently extravagant claim is found in the Book of Abraham: ". . . 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 . . . and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood) . . . and in thy seed

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after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel . . . even of life eternal." (Abr. 2:10-11. Italics added.)

Most surprising is the way in which certain Roman Catholic writers are now giving Abraham priority over Peter himself as "the Rock." This goes back to an old Jewish tradition that "when God sought to create the world . . . when he saw Abraham who was to arise, he said, 'Now I have a rock (petra) on which to build and establish the world. For this reason he called Abraham a rock.'"²⁶¹ And just as Abraham the fugitive became nothing less than the Rock on which the entire House of Israel was founded, "just so the outcast Peter became the foundation of the New House of Israel."²⁶² Today Roman Catholics not only write about "Thou art Abraham, and upon this rock,"²⁶³ but see in Abraham a figure of the Messiah who comes "to establish the Kingdom of God on earth,"²⁶⁴ who is more than a mere anticipation of the Kingdom, as other prophets are, but actually "recapitulates" all of Israel's history in himself, focusing all the past and future in his person, being a restorer as well as a founder—such a figure, S. Cavalletti concludes, can only be a messiah.²⁶⁵

Along with the mounting prestige of Abraham goes the growing feeling that there was something very special, something most strange and wonderful, in his relationship with God. The face-to-face conversation in Genesis 18 is "as magnificent as it is strange," writes A. Parrot.²⁶⁶ The strangest thing of all is the way in which God seems to talk to Abraham on an equal footing, as one man to another. (Midr. Ps. 18:22.) This suggests to Sol Schechter what he calls "a sort of *Imitatio hominis* on the part of God. He acts as best man at the wedding of Adam. . . . He visits Abraham on his sick-bed."²⁶⁷ "To Abraham God appeared in the form of men," says Maimonides, "but to Lot, whose faculties were feeble, they appeared in the form of angels."²⁶⁸ No one was more opposed to any form of anthropomorphism than Maimonides, and one cannot help asking, to which of the two men, Abraham or Lot, would God be more likely to appear as he *really* is? It would be hard to find a clearer, more unequivocal statement than Genesis 18:8: ". . . and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat"; yet the doctors have always declared in a single voice that they did *not* eat, since heavenly beings are immaterial.²⁶⁹ "When we read of intercourse between

God and Abraham," a modern scholar tells us, ". . . we must not think [in spite of the form of the words] of verbal speech, but rather of such intercourse as with men now."²⁷⁰ Against this spiritual uniformitarianism, students are now realizing that the whole value of the Abraham story is that it does *not* deal with ordinary occurrences—it is completely removed from the world of everyday experiences. Learned rabbis now confess that they "cannot imagine the divine nature of the whole . . . in any other sense than of Rabbi Nobel's powerful . . . sermon of God's appearing before Abraham's tent: 'And God appeared to Abraham . . . and he lifted his eyes . . . and behold: *three men.*'"²⁷¹ However distasteful such literalism may be to the schoolmen, E. L. Cherbouner points out, the Old Testament allows us no way out of it, for there man is seen to "share the same kind of existence which God himself enjoys. To learn this is like learning that one has won the sweepstakes. It made the Israelite cry, 'Hallelujah!'"²⁷²

Abraham's epithet, "the friend of God," suggests both intimacy and equality. When he pleads for his fellow sinners, Abraham almost seems to defy God, as when he asks him, "If you put evil into the heart of men, why are you angry with them when they do evil?"²⁷³ These strange dialogues with God that still reverberate in Jewish tradition form an important part of the Pearl of Great Price, in which Abraham, Moses, and especially Enoch discuss with the Lord the state of man and God's dealings with him. It is interesting, since J. M. Ford suggests that Matthew 16:16-19 "may have an Aramaic background" and go back to "Biblical and non-Biblical material concerning Abraham,"²⁷⁴ that the Lord tells Enoch in the Pearl of Great Price: "I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the *Rock* of Heaven, which is broad as eternity; whoso cometh in at the *gate* and climbeth up by me shall never fall." (Moses 7:53. Italics added.) Another significant parallel is when Abraham, faced with a hard assignment, *said in his heart*: "Thou didst send thine angel to deliver me from the gods of Elkenah, and I will do well to hearken to thy voice" (Abr. 2:13); for in the newly discovered Genesis Apocryphon, when Abraham is being confronted with the same task, "God reminds Abraham of all the favors which He has granted him since the departure from Haran, and then promises him His protection in the future."²⁷⁵ And when he was in doubt about undertaking the unpleasant business of circumcision, his friend Mamre said to him, "When did He not stand by you—in the fiery

furnace, in famine, and in your war against the kings? Will you not obey him then in this matter?"²⁷⁶ Here we have a single tradition that is also reported in the Book of Abraham, though Joseph Smith could have known nothing of it. Though intimate meetings occur, in the Book of Abraham as in the legends, God reveals himself to the Patriarch in many different ways and at many different levels, even as he did to Father Lehi.²⁷⁷

God was not offended by Abraham's boldness in defending his children; he was pleased with it, for "he came to the Lord with a sound heart." (Koran 37:84.) He was one of those "of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness," to whom the angels administer directly, according to Moroni 7:30. And so God treats him as an equal: "My name was not known among my creatures, and thou hast made it known among them: I will regard thee as though thou was associated with me in the creation of the world." (Midr. Rab. Gen. 43:7.) The boldness of this statement is supported by others: "Rabbi Nehemiah taught that God turned over the bestowal of blessings to Abraham, saying to him: 'Until now it was my responsibility to bless my world. From now on, the bestowal of blessings is turned over to thee. Whom it pleases thee to bless, thou shalt bless!'"²⁷⁸ Another version has it, "From the Creation of the world I planned to bless my creatures. I blessed Adam and Eve and Noah and his sons; from now on it is you who shall impart blessings!"²⁷⁹ One is strongly reminded of the promise to Peter, for here God is endowing a man with his own powers. The Midrash goes even further: "If Abraham had not sought to rival God, he would not have become possessor of heaven and earth."²⁸⁰ It even asks us, "Why should not the world have been created solely because of the merit of Abraham?"²⁸¹ and claims that God "could not have created His heaven and His earth had it not been for Abraham."²⁸¹ Nay, Abraham appears well on the way to becoming a creator in his own right, for to bring people into the Covenant is the equivalent of giving them a new life—"it is as though he had created them" (Midr. Rab. 39:14); and though "not all the inhabitants of the world together can create even a single gnat . . . yet God accounted it to Abraham as though they had made them."²⁸²

Altar and Temple: Today Abraham is being described as the restorer rather than the initiator of the knowledge of God and his holy rites and ordinances. He both "recapitulates" all that went before and anticipates all that is to

come.²⁸³ This is in perfect agreement with the declaration at the opening of the Book of Abraham that Abraham's immediate ancestors had fallen away from "the order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign." (Abr. 1:26.) According to Maimonides, "it was Abraham who found his way back from idolatry to monotheism."²⁸⁴ This return to the old faith is symbolized by his rebuilding of the ancient altar of the first fathers, especially Noah. According to the Samaritan tradition, in Abraham the covenant of Noah is renewed,²⁸⁵ just as the covenant of Adam was renewed by Noah when he built his altar after the Flood.²⁸⁵ In the Book of Abraham, that patriarch is also represented as resuming the work of Noah. (Abr. 1:19; cf. 26-27.) Like Noah, Abraham's work represents the "restoration of the harmony that was broken" when men fell away in the preceding dispensation.²⁸⁶

"According to Jewish theology, Mt. Zion," on which Abraham built an altar to offer up Isaac, "is the cosmic rock uniting heaven and earth, and all the great sacrifices of the past were offered there" on an altar which was "demolished by the generation of the Division" but restored by Abraham.²⁸⁷ This was supposed to be the very spot "whereon Adam had brought the first sacrifice, and Cain and Abel offered their gifts to God—the same whereon Noah raised an altar to God after he left the Ark; and Abraham . . . knew it, was the place appointed for the Temple."²⁸⁸ There were seven who built altars before the temple existed—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron.²⁸⁹ The most important of these was Abraham: It was he, according to Maimonides, who recommended that Mt. Moriah be consecrated as the place of the ordinances forever after, and who dedicated the spot for the future temple (as did Moroni at Manti, Utah).²⁹⁰ For when Abraham was shown all the dispensations of the future in a vision, "God also showed him the future Temple service and the Law."²⁹¹ "Before he went down into Egypt," wrote Baring-Gould, "Abraham was shown the entire 'temple-worship' by God. After which he returned to Haran and instructed people in the true religion: he erected three altars and gave thanks to God."²⁹²

On this theme the Zohar (Spierling and Simon's translation) is full of remarkable hints and suggestions. It tells us that Abraham in building his altars "proceeded from grade (or step) to grade until he reached his own rightful grade (Lech Lecha 80a)." Thus "when Abraham entered Canaan, God

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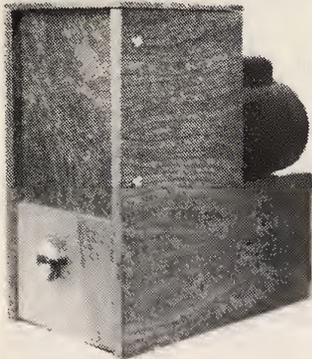
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appeared to him and he received a *nefesh* (became a living body), and built an altar to the corresponding grade of divinity." Then he went on southward and received a *ruach* (spirit); then he rose to the medium of the *neshamah* which is the highest degree." After this it was necessary for him to recapitulate all three steps "to test himself," and this was represented by his journey into Egypt (83b). It was only after his returning from Egypt and reviewing all the rites over again "so as to fix all in its proper place" and "keep the whole system united . . . that Abraham was fully endowed, and he became the lot and portion of God in real truth" (84a), the whole thing culminating in the assurance "the perfect faith which he had acquired on his first passage through the land would not depart from him and his descendants forever" (85a). An indication of the antiquity of this teaching is given in the Genesis Apocryphon, the twenty-first column of which begins: "In each place I pitched until I reached even to Beth-el, unto the place where I had built the altar, and I built it again." Thus the Zohar recounts that he reversed his course "to revisit his place and his grades, until he reached the first grade where his first revelation had taken place, back to Bethel, 'the perfect stone.'" (83b end.) The parallel to the Hopi system of *pasos* is quite astonishing.

Modern scholars tell us that Abraham's altars "had no use or significance except as a means of sacrifice," and that "nothing is known of the motive prompting these sacrifices, nor of the sacrifices themselves. . . . the type of sacrifice is not stated."²⁹⁸ But the claim of the Pearl of Great Price is that "the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, a holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world until the end thereof. . . ." (Moses 5:58-59.) This teaching is certainly borne out by the Jewish traditions, which taught that "Abraham knew the entire Thora" and even the Halacha, which "God gave to the heavenly Sanhedrin," i.e., the council in heaven, though the Jewish Doctors confess themselves at a loss to explain how he came to know it all before the revelation on Sinai.²⁹⁴ Thus "it is certain that Abraham was baptized,"²⁹⁵ for anyone entering the covenant of Abraham "when he has immersed himself and ascended from the water [he] is an Israelite in every respect."²⁹⁶ It was

only to discredit Christian baptism, according to S. B. Hoenig, that the rabbis finally came to insist that circumcision alone was the "Covenant of Abraham," though actually it never was the Covenant but only "a token or sign marking the Covenant."²⁹⁷ Likewise, though the locating of all the ancient altars on the site of the later altar of the temple at Jerusalem led to all sorts of geographical complications and speculation, its purpose was plainly to emphasize the continuity of the religion of Abraham and the other patriarchs down to Christ. Thus the tradition that Adam was made of the soil of Mt. Moriah binds all mankind "to the mountain on which Abraham would expiate our forefathers' sins."²⁹⁸

Expiation is atonement, and it was the Christians who made the most of the unbroken ritual line from Adam to Christ: "In that very place where Melchizedek administered as priest, where Abraham offered up his son Isaac, the wood of the cross was set up; at the place where the four quarters of the earth meet."²⁹⁹ No concept was more appealing to the Christians than that which identified Isaac carrying the wood for his sacrifice with the Lord bearing the cross—to the very same spot, so it was held, and still is.³⁰⁰ As Abraham stood on that spot, "he saw the cross of the Messiah, and the redemption of our father Adam."³⁰¹ There is no better known Christian legend than that which describes the cross of Calvary as resting squarely on the skull of Adam to represent the beginning and the ending of the process of redemption.³⁰² And Abraham stands exactly between them. There are five things, according to the Pirke Aboth (VI, 10), that God himself acquired in this world—the Torah, heaven and earth, Abraham, Israel, and the temple; these make up the main ingredients of the Plan of Eternity, and Abraham stands squarely in the middle: "Everything he does, Israel does later!" (Midr. Rab. 40:6.)

Abraham and Adam: Everything that Abraham does Adam did before him. As Adam left his Father's heavenly home for an earthly paradise, so also did Abraham. (Gen. 13:10.) "Get thee out" meant for Abraham a new opportunity for advancement, says the Zohar, "for thine own advantage, to prepare thyself, to perfect thy degree." (Lech Lecha 77b, end.) Finding himself in the new land, Abraham was instructed by the Lord, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Gen. 13:17; Gen. Apocr. XXI, 8 ff), just as Adam was given the same order, to go forth and inspect the garden, possess it, and take

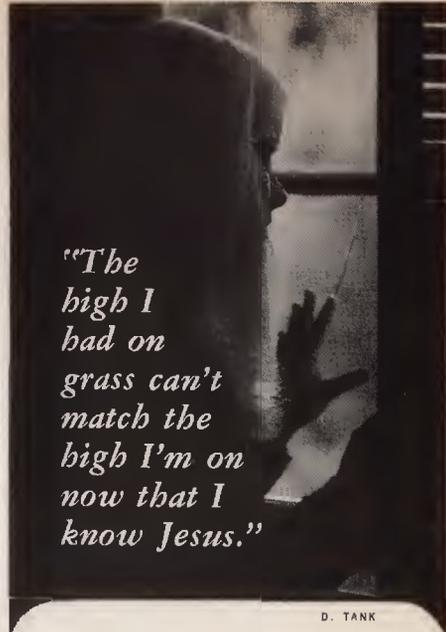
care of it. And as Adam was given charge of the animals to see to it that every form of life should flourish in its proper sphere and element and have joy therein, so "God said to Abraham: As I put Adam and then Noah in charge of all my creatures, I now put you in charge of them, and order you to give my blessing to them."³⁰³ So Abraham like Adam has his Eden, his "Mystic Garden," where he protects all creatures from the withering blight of the empty spaces without.³⁰⁴

Both Adam and Abraham, when forced to go forth into a lone and dismal world, are designated by the code name of Jared, which Eisler points out means "fallen from high estate."³⁰⁵ They become the ancestors and the type of "the Remnant saved and saving . . . the chosen tribe of Levi and . . . the suffering Jewish people,"³⁰⁶ dramatically embodied in the sectaries of the desert, who in their way of life considered themselves "the free seed of Abraham" preserving their integrity in a real wilderness.³⁰⁷ One remarkable episode in the Apocalypse of Abraham (10:2ff) shows us the hero lying unconscious on the earth while a voice says, "Go Jael [a sectarian name for Jehovah] in the power of my unutterable name, and raise that man up for me!" Then, says Abraham, speaking in the first person, "the angel whom He sent to me came to me in the likeness of a man, took me by the right hand, and raised me to my feet saying, 'Abraham, arise! . . . I have been sent to thee to strengthen thee and bless thee in the name of the Lord . . . the Creator of Heaven and earth.'" (10:5-7.) "Jaol" tells Abraham, "I have been commissioned to visit you and your posterity, and along with Michael to give you our blessing eternally. Be of good cheer and go to!" (10:16.) As G. H. Box explains the passage, "The archangel Jaol . . . here seems to play the part of Metatron-Michael. . . The archangel Jaol was specifically sent by God to instruct him [Abraham] and to initiate him into the knowledge of the heavenly mysteries."³⁰⁸ The fact that the confusion of the names Jehovah, El, Michael, and Metatron is permitted to stand by the rabbis, who do not pretend to understand their relationships, is an indication of the high authority and antiquity of the text.

These words of cheer to Abraham follow immediately upon instructions that he is to build an altar and offer sacrifices. (10:16.) In the very old Pseudo-Jonathan, the Lord says to Abraham: "This is the spot where Adam, when he was driven out of Paradise, built an altar, and offered up the first

sacrifices to me. . . . It is now thy duty, Abraham, to build it again!"³⁰⁹ Having built his altar as instructed, "Abraham opened his mouth and spoke in the Adamic language, which had ceased from the earth since the time of Babel," calling upon the Lord.³¹⁰ This, it is claimed, was the beginning of Jewish liturgy,³¹¹ and the sacrifice offered by Abraham was identical with that offered by Adam and Noah before him.³¹² It was up to Abraham to make the first move, since "there is no stirring above till there is a stirring below. . . . we do not say grace over an empty table." (Zohar, L.L., 88a-b.) But the prayer did not go unanswered; again Abraham was visited and received yet more light and knowledge, thereafter building three altars for the specific purpose of instructing his children and warning them against apostasy.³¹³ The last time Michael called upon Abraham, the Patriarch, in washing his guest's feet, recognized them as the feet of one of the three men who had visited him in Mamre long before (Gen. 18), whereupon he said, "Now I know that thou art an angel [lit., messenger] of the Lord, and wast sent to take my soul," but he hesitates to go with him save on certain conditions; "Michael returned to heaven" and reported to God, who told him, "Go and take up Abraham in the body and show him all things, and . . . do to him as to My friend."³¹⁴

In these accounts "Abraham is the prototype of the novice who is initiated into the mysteries, just as in the Sefer Yetzira into the mysteries of its cosmological speculation,"³¹⁵ in which the Book of Abraham is so rich. The Talmud explains that in choosing Abraham rather than Adam to transmit the teachings, he reasoned, ". . . should Adam become corrupt, then Abraham will come and restore order."³¹⁶ It goes even further than that: "The Jews even attributed a Messianic character to Abraham, as completing or correcting the work of Adam," so that in Genesis 14:6, Abraham restores what Adam had lost.³¹⁷ If many studies have appeared in recent years discussing the early Christian equation of Adam and Christ, it must also be admitted that Abraham too partakes of the nature of both. There is no doubt that Christ and Abraham in the historical and doctrinal records alike (*geschichtlich und überlieferungsgeschichtlich*) present striking parallels. J. Soggin admits, though he is reluctant to admit any significant resemblance.³¹⁸ When Satan says to Abraham, "Why are you on the top of this dangerous mountain? You will be consumed!" trying to intimidate and coerce him;³¹⁹ or when Abraham is



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described as "one despised and smitten;"³²⁰ or when the jailer calls in a loud voice at the mouth of the pit: "Abraham, are you living or dead?"³²¹ or when we are told that "the act of Abraham [the covenant and circumcision] remains a never-ceasing atonement for Israel,"³²² we naturally think in terms of Jesus Christ, as the New Testament bids us. One of the earliest Christian writings insists that it was Christ, "the True Prophet," who "appeared to Abraham and taught him the knowledge of godhead; showed him the origin of the world and its end; revealed to him the immortality of the soul and the manner of life which was pleasing to God; declared also to him the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, of the future judgments, and of rewards and punishments to come. And then He departed again to the invisible abodes."³²³ This agrees with the report of IV Ezra 3:13f, that Abraham alone was favored by God with a full revelation of "the end of the times, secretly by night."

To make the story complete, Satan deals with Abraham exactly as he does with Adam. He was waiting for Abraham in the land of Canaan just as he was waiting for Adam in the Garden: "The wicked serpent that was cursed held sway over the land of Canaan," though "it was in that land that Abram drew near to God." (Zohar, L.L., 79b.) It is significant that Satan in this particular context should be designated as the serpent. When Michael comes to make Abraham "acquainted with the higher wisdom which he had not known previously," i.e., to give him further light and knowledge (*ibid.*, 80a), he recognizes Satan as the old enemy whom he had cast out of heaven and rebukes him.³²⁴ In the Apocalypse of Abraham it is Jael who rebukes the devil, telling him, "God will not permit you to possess the bodies of the righteous. . . . Depart from this man! For there is enmity between him and all that follow thee. . . . For behold, thy garment which was thine in heaven, is now reserved for him, and the perishable corruption that was his has gone over to thee!"³²⁵ This, incidentally, offers a significant parallel to the story of the *two garments* of Moroni (Al. 46:23-26) and Tha'labi. After dismissing Satan, the Lord commands Abraham not to consort with him anymore, "lest he fall under the influence of his powerful mind."³²⁶

The Satan of the Abraham traditions is no fantastic monster with claws and horns; he is a handsome, well-dressed man and a persuasive speaker. As such he appears to the troubled king to instruct him on how to deal with

Abraham; as such he appears to Abraham on the altar, advising him to yield sensibly to the monarch; as a venerable sage he argues with Abraham and Isaac and, approaching Sarah when she is alone, tries by convincing arguments to weaken her faith in the religion of her husband. He can be recognized not by frightful deformities but, according to the Pirke Aboth (V, 22), by (1) a disturbing eye, (2) a haughty spirit, and (3) a proud mind, whereas a disciple of Abraham has a good eye, a lowly spirit, and a humble mind. Such signs of recognition were considered important. Thus we are told that when Joseph revealed his identity to his brethren in Egypt, it was by showing them "the sign of the covenant, and he said to them: 'It is through this that I have attained to this estate, through keeping this intact.'" (Zohar, Lech Lecha 93b.) The Zohar explains that "this" is a sign imprinted in the flesh, and that "whenever a man is stamped [sealed] with this holy imprint, through it he sees God. . . . So if he does not guard it, 'they lose the nehamah given by God.'" (94a.) We are told that Jacob recognized the garment of Joseph when it was brought to him by "three marks or tokens that were on the garment," which showed it to be "the very one that had belonged to Abraham, having already had a long history," going clear back to the Garden of Eden.³²⁷

That Abraham had the priesthood is perfectly clear from the Book of Abraham and the Jewish traditions alike. The only problem for the learned Rabbis is just how and when he could have obtained it. One account tells us that Isaac asked his father as they climbed the mountain together, "Are you a priest, to make a sacrifice?" to which Abraham replied, "Shem the High Priest will make the sacrifice."³²⁸ In another version Abraham asks himself, "Am I fit to perform the sacrifice, am I a priest? Ought not rather the high priest Shem to do it?" and God replies, "When thou wilt arrive at that place, I will consecrate thee and make thee a priest."³²⁹ Still another has it that when Abraham asked, "Where is the priest to officiate?" the voice of God answered: "Henceforth thou art clothed with that dignity, as was formerly Shem, Noah's son."³³⁰ According to the Midrash (Mid. Rab., 44) Melchizedek himself instructed Abraham in all the functions of the high priest, and we can easily surmise from this how Shem and Melchizedek came to be identified as one, though living centuries apart: It was indeed the priesthood of Shem that Abraham inherited (Abr. 1:19, 28), but since the practices of the priesthood had fallen into disuse in his

family (Abr. 1:5), it was Melchizedek who gave him the necessary instructions.

It is common to trace the priesthood of Abraham back to Adam: "The Lord said to Abraham: 'Follow me, and I will make thee a High Priest after the order of Adam, the first man.'"³³¹ The Zohar reports that "Elihu was a descendant of Abraham and also as a priest" by his "exemplary behavior earned . . . the honorable title of 'The Man Adam,'" Adam being the archetype of the high priest.³³² The garment of Abraham just referred to was nothing less than "the garment of skin which God gave Adam," which was handed down as "a High-priestly robe" in a direct line to Seth, Methuselah, Noah, Japheth, Shem, and Abraham, and so on to Moses.³³³ What has been called the "peculiar emphasis on covenants" in Abraham's career,³³⁴ is closely connected both with Abraham's priesthood and with his celebrated hospitality. For hospitality is the receiving into one's own tent or family (the Hebrew word for tent is the Arabic word for family) of a stranger and outsider, that being the express purpose of the covenant. It was as a guest in Abraham's tent that the Lord covenanted with him. (Gen. 18:10, 14.) When by circumcision 318 strangers became members of Abraham's family, they were simply repeating Abraham's own covenant with the Lord, following his example as the type *convert*. (Midr. Ps. 17:12.) The circumcision itself was not the covenant, as many have falsely assumed, but only "a token or sign marking the covenant,"³³⁵ and as such subject to being supplanted in time by other signs and tokens.³³⁶ But whatever the signs or tokens may be, the important thing about them, as about the covenant itself, is that no one is born to them; they cannot be acquired unconsciously or automatically; everyone, including Abraham himself, is a convert; he inherits the kingdom not by birth but by willingly and knowingly entering a covenant. As far as birth is concerned, as Lehi told his haughty sons, "the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God." (1 Ne. 17:35.)

FOOTNOTES

- ²¹⁶ Bez, cited by Beer, p. 90.
²¹⁷ Midrash Rabbah, Gen. 39:14; D. M. Eichhorn, ed., *Conversion to Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1966), p. 14.
²¹⁸ Vernes, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
²¹⁹ Ginzberg, *L. J.*, I, 219.
²²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 263. "Abraham our father used to bend men to and lead them under the wings of the Shekinah. And not Abraham alone did this, but Sarah as well . . ." J. Goldin, *R. Nathan*, p. 68.
²²¹ Ka'ab al-Akbar, cit. B. Chapira, in *Revue Etudes Juives*, Vol. 69, p. 104; also in *Mishna Torah*, Aboda Zara I, 3.
²²² R. J. Loewe, in A. Altmann, *Biblical*

Motifs, p. 179, n. 91.
 223 N. N. Glatzer, *Faith and Knowledge*, pp. 119f.
 224 G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, I, 344.
 225 F. Weber, *System der altsynagogischen Theologie*, p. 257.
 226 P. Montet, *Le Drame d'Avaris*, p. 33: "At Beyrut, Qatna, and Ugarit sphinxes and statuettes have been found, left there by missionaries." An Egyptian funerary text states that whatever one does for Re as a missionary or officiant in this world, he will do for one in the next, C. E. Sander-Hansen, *Sarg der Anchnesneferibre* (Copenhagen, 1937), p. 64.
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 232 Kohler, *op. cit.*, p. 587.
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 234 Kohler, *loc. cit.*
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 249 Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N. T.*, I, 386; Gen. 17:1; Matt. 5:48, 19:21. He was the perfect one after Noah.
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