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The Apocalypse of Adam

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Abstract: In most forms of Gnosticism secret oral tradition is often associated with accounts of the creation of the world, the experiences of Adam and Eve in the Garden, and the fall of man. It is usually in this creation setting or in a temple or on a mountaintop that Gnosticism places the revelation of the esoteric mysteries and the knowledge needed to thwart the archontic powers and return to God.

Gnosticism is primarily concerned with the questions, Who am I? Where am I from? and What is my destiny? That the answers to these questions are often associated with the creation, the Garden, and the fall of man is probably due to the Gnostic presupposition that the end of all things is to be found in their beginning. Of those documents which manifest this concern, the Nag Hammadi Apocalypse of Adam is perhaps the prime example.



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The Apocalypse of Adam

Stephen E. Robinson

In 1945 a collection of thirteen leather-bound volumes, containing fifty-three separate compositions, was discovered in the vicinity of the small town of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. Since that time this collection has generally been referred to as the Nag Hammadi Library. These manuscripts, written in Coptic, the language of Egypt during the first centuries of the Christian era, are the literary remains of a group of Egyptian Christians who practiced a form of Christianity called Gnosticism. While Gnosticism was not confined to Egypt, it was there that the dry climate and a healthy distance from the watchful eyes of later orthodoxy worked together to preserve this remarkable collection of Gnostic scriptures.

In contrast to the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered two years later, there has been relatively little excitement over the Nag Hammadi find. Until recently, with the exception of the Gospels of Thomas and Philip, the Nag Hammadi materials had remained inaccessible and relatively unknown even to students of early Christianity. This is due partly to unsettled political conditions in the Near East which have made it difficult to obtain authoritative copies of the manuscripts, but it is equally a result of the scarcity of scholars in New Testament and early Church history who read Coptic confidently. Only in the last few years have authoritative texts for many of the documents become available and the value of Coptic for primary research in early Christian literature and the New Testament been recognized. Thus, thirty years after their discovery, the Nag Hammadi documents are gradually receiving the attention they deserve, although most are still not available in English. In the future these documents will prove to be of increasing importance to biblical scholars and historians in general, and to LDS scholars in particular.

The Nag Hammadi Library is important to students of early Christian literature primarily because it represents an early type of Christianity completely unlike what has long been called "orthodoxy." Walter Bauer demonstrated long ago that the traditional picture of Christian

history is one from which the victorious fourth century Church carefully erased all traces of its earlier competition.¹ Actually, in the first three centuries there were several brands of Christianity all competing for the title of “orthodoxy.” These were often as large as, if not larger than, the Universal Church, and equally powerful and influential. The rediscovery of these varieties of Christianity and their extraordinary doctrines is forcing scholars to take another look at the nature of earliest Christianity.

Although Gnosticism has long been known to scholars in a less complete form through the writings of the Church Fathers and through an occasional manuscript, it has usually been treated as a form of aberrant Christianity having only secondary significance. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library has reemphasized the fact that Gnosticism was not merely the “heretic fringe” of the Universal Church, but that in large areas of the ancient world Gnosticism *was* the Church.²

The importance of the Nag Hammadi texts to LDS scholars is that they not only witness an early Christianity significantly different from the orthodox tradition, but that they witness the existence of certain peculiar doctrines and bits of tradition in very early Christianity that in modern times are found almost exclusively among the Mormons. The following few examples will demonstrate some of these teachings and traditions.

The term Gnostic comes from the Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*). Fundamental to Gnosticism was the belief that the principle of knowledge is the principle of salvation and that it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.³ Personal revelation was crucial. The knowledge necessary for salvation consisted, according to many Gnostic writings, of higher teachings and ordinances taught by Jesus and his disciples and transmitted in oral traditions which were most often too secret and sacred to be written down or to be discussed with any who were not worthy of them. On those occasions when they were written down, they

1. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

2. It should be understood, however, that Gnosticism is itself only a general term used to identify a variety of sects which shared the same general approach to religion, but which did not necessarily agree on specific tenets. The term Protestantism is used in much the same way to denote an approach to Christianity which differs from that of Catholicism.

3. Cf. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968), p. 297; see also D&C 131:6.

appear to have been closely held and committed to writing only in an effort to preserve them for future generations. Although orthodox Christianity has emphatically denied that any such esoteric teachings ever existed, Gnosticism insisted not only that they were an important part of earliest Christianity, but also that they were the *most* important part.

Quite often this secret teaching included a knowledge of certain passwords, signs, and seals that made it possible for the Gnostic to escape from the earth, to pass by angelic beings who barred the way, and to return to God. This was a literal return, for the Gnostics believed in the preexistence of man and even in his coeternality with God. The beautiful Gnostic “Hymn of the Pearl” portrays man as a spirit child of his Heavenly Father who lived as a prince in the palace of the Heavenly King before descending to the earth.⁴

Gnosticism frequently divides mankind into three categories: pneumatics, who are spiritual; hylics, who are not; and psychics, who are a little of both. Although psychics can be saved, usually it is only the pneumatics who can be saved in the highest degree of glory.⁵

According to the Gnostic Gospel of Philip, the highest ordinance of Christianity is eternal marriage.⁶ This ordinance must be performed in this life, and the “bridal chamber” where it is performed is called the holy of holies. We read from the Gospel of Philip 117:24–25, “But the holy of the holy ones is the bridal chamber”, from 118:17–20, “But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. But those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated”, and from 134:4–8, “If anyone becomes a son of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light. If anyone does not receive it while he is in this world, he will not receive it in the other place.” There is also mention made of heavenly garments and names which must never be spoken by those who know them.⁷ Gnosticism knows a married Christ, or at least a Christ with a sexual nature, as opposed to

4. Albertus Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), pp. 120–25.

5. *On the Origin of the World* (CG II,5) pl. 125–6. The “CG” in this and subsequent citations shows the text to be part of the Nag Hammadi Coptic Gnostic Library now located in Cairo (*Cairensis Gnosticus*). The Roman numeral is the codex number, and subsequent Arabic numerals indicate treatise, page, and line.

6. See Abraham 3:22.

7. *The Gospel of Philip* (CG II,3), 117:24–25, 118:17–29, 134:4–8, 124:6–8, 105:21–22, 102:10–12. (R. McL. Wilson, trans., *The Gospel of Philip* [London: Mowbray & Co., 1962]).

the asexual Christ of orthodoxy.⁸ The apostles also are married, and in the Second Book of Jeu the resurrected Jesus has them form a circle around an altar with their wives at their left in order to teach them the true mysteries.⁹ The Marcionites, a Gnostic sect, practiced a form of vicarious baptism for the dead, an ordinance that has since dropped out of orthodoxy although it is attested in the New Testament.¹⁰

In most forms of Gnosticism the secret oral tradition mentioned above is often associated with accounts of the creation of the world, the experiences of Adam and Eve in the Garden, and the fall of man. It is usually in this creation setting or in a temple or on a mountain-top¹¹ that Gnosticism places the revelation of the esoteric mysteries and the knowledge needed to thwart the archontic powers and return to God. Gnosticism is primarily concerned with the questions, Who am I? Where am I from? and What is my destiny? That the answers to these questions are often associated with the creation, the Garden, and the fall of man is probably due to the Gnostic presupposition that the end of all things is to be found in their beginning.¹² Of those documents which manifest this concern, the Nag Hammadi Apocalypse of Adam is perhaps the prime example.

Summary of the Apocalypse of Adam

The Apocalypse of Adam (CG V, 5) purports to record the revelation which Adam taught to his son Seth. According to the text, Adam first explains to Seth that after being created out of the earth, he and Eve possessed in unity a great glory, that Eve taught him a word of knowledge of the Eternal God, and as a result of this they were like the great eternal angels and were higher than the evil Creator God who made them. It is then told how the Creator God divided them into two aeons,¹³

8. *The Gospel of Philip* (CG II,3), 107:8–9, 111:32–37. Also, *The Gospel of Thomas* (CG II,2), 91:25–28).

9. Carl Schmidt and Walter Till, *Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften* I 303, 1–11 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962).

10. See Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* v. 10 and *De resurrectione carnis*, xlvi; see also 1 Corinthians 15:29 and Hugh Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead in the Ancient Times”, in *Improvement Era* 51–52 (December 1948–April 1949).

11. For mountains as temples see Hugh Nibley, *What is a Temple? The Idea of the Temple in History* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1968), p. 231.

12. Cf. *The Gospel of Thomas* (CG II,2) 84:9–18.

13. An aeon in a gnostic context is “one of the group of eternal beings that together form the fullness of the supreme being from whom they emanate and

apparently an allusion to the myth of the androgynous creation of Adam. Thus separated, their original glory and first knowledge leave them and enter into their seed to be manifest in future generations through the lineage of Seth. Seth himself is named after the great Savior figure who will be the manifestation of the lost knowledge and glory of Adam and Eve in some future generation. Adam and Eve, having lost their original glory and knowledge in the fall, now learn as men about dead things. They also now recognize the evil Creator God, who is roughly equivalent in Gnosticism to the Satan of Christianity.

Adam then falls into a sleep during which three men come to him whom he does not recognize, because they are not from the Creator God, but presumably from the Great Eternal God. Saying “Adam, arise from the sleep of death . . .” they restore some of Adam’s knowledge and tell him about the Savior/Illuminator who will eventually be born from his and Eve’s seed.

When Adam and Eve hear these things they give a sigh in their hearts which is overheard by the evil Creator God. He then appears before them and insists that he is their god, the god who made them. He somehow causes Adam to lust after Eve (the text is broken here) and there is a second fall.

Adam now reveals to Seth the things that the three men taught him, which consist of a vision of the future and of the appearance of the Savior/Illuminator. Adam prophesies that the Creator God will bring the Flood upon the world and destroy all men in order to kill the seed of Seth into whom the original knowledge and glory of Adam have entered.

But angels from the Great Eternal God come on clouds and, plucking the seed of Seth from the flood, transport them to the place of the spirit of life. The Creator God has in the meantime made a covenant with Noah and his sons,¹⁴ promising to save them and give them kingship over all the earth if they will bear no seed of those who will not worship him. When the seed of Seth reappears, Noah is accused by the Creator God of breaking this covenant, which Noah denies. The seed of Seth then go into a land by themselves and establish a utopian community where there is no evil for 600 years, where angels of the Great Eternal God dwell with them, and where they are called by “the Name.”

between whom and the world they are intermediaries” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* [unabridged], s.v. “aeon.”)

14. See Genesis 9:9–17.

Noah then divides the earth among his sons and charges his posterity to serve the Creator God in fear and slavery. But from the seed of Ham and Japheth 400,000 men join themselves with the seed of Seth. The remainder of the seed of Ham and Japheth form twelve kingdoms and serve their god Sakla, the Creator God. Inevitably friction arises between the twelve kingdoms on the one hand and the seed of Seth with their 400,000 converts on the other. To vindicate his power in the eyes of the twelve kingdoms the Creator God sends some of his angels to rain fire, sulphur, and asphalt upon the seed of Seth. But again, the Great Eternal God sends his angels Abrasax, Sablo, and Gamaliel in clouds of light to descend upon the seed of Seth, lift them out of the fire, and take them away.

Some time after this the Illuminator of knowledge himself appears in order to leave for himself fruit-bearing trees (i.e., men who have the gnosis) and to redeem their souls from death. This is the Savior promised to Adam and Eve. He performs great signs and wonders and mocks the powers of the Creator God. Because the origin and power of the Illuminator is something that the Creator God and his angels cannot explain, they “punish his flesh.” Nevertheless, they use “the Name” in error, and ask, “Where did it come from?” In answer to this question the twelve kingdoms of Ham and Japheth attempt to explain in short enigmatic statements how he was conceived, born, nourished and thus “came to the water.” These statements follow the pattern of the first which is, in part:

He was from . . . a spirit . . . to heaven. He was nourished in the heavens. He received the glory and the power of the one who is there. He came to the bosom or womb of his mother. And thus he came to the water.

After the twelve kingdoms, a thirteenth adds its account. Then finally the fourteenth, the generation without a king, gives the correct answer which is

God chose him from all the aeons. He caused a gnosis of the undefiled one of truth to be in him. She said: “He came from a foreign atmosphere (*aer*). From a great aeon the great Illuminator came forth. He makes the generation of those men whom he has chosen for himself to shine, so that they shine upon the whole aeon.”

A great conflict follows between the seed of Seth, here referred to as “those who will receive his name upon the water” and the thirteen kingdoms. Finally the peoples cry out that the seed of Seth is truly blessed and that they themselves are in error, that they have perverted the truth and will die as a result.

In answer to this mass confession of the kingdoms, a voice is heard (a *bath kol*) addressed to the three aeons Micheu, Michar, and Mnesinous, who are over the holy baptism, condemning them for persecuting the seed of Seth, for fighting against the truth, and for polluting the waters of life in order to serve the Creator God. The voice then praises the seed of Seth (Gnostics) and assures them of their reward which they have earned by keeping the words they received and by *not* writing them down. The voice further declares that the truth will be borne through the generations by angelic beings and that the words of truth will be upon a high mountain upon a rock of truth and that those who know the Great Eternal God know all things.

In the conclusion of the document, which follows the proclamation of the heavenly voice, we are told that Seth passed these revelations on to his posterity. We are further informed that the secret gnosis is the holy baptism which is administered by the seed of Seth. Appended are the three names Jesseus, Mazareus, and Jessedekeus.

Critical Analysis

The Apocalypse of Adam is not, strictly speaking, an apocalypse, since it is only indirectly an account of the revelation to Adam. Rather, it is an account of Adam's final instructions to his son Seth. Since the 700th year (64:4) should be understood as the 700th year of Seth's life, it is also, according to the Septuagint chronology, the last year of Adam's life. This would indicate that the document is not an apocalypse, but rather a testament in the pattern of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, where the fathers also call their sons together just before their deaths for a last word of instruction and exhortation.¹⁵

The date of at least the major portions of the Apocalypse of Adam is very early. This is attested by the noticeable lack of an elaborate cosmogonic myth like those of demonstrably later Gnostic systems. The emanation of the archons, the fall of Sophia, and other characteristic elements of a more developed Gnosticism do not appear in the Apocalypse of Adam. It was the tendency of later Gnostic systems to continually refine the details of the creation and operation of the world in an effort to put distance between the highest God, the Absolute Good, and the actual created physical world, in which evil is undeniable. In the Apocalypse of Adam, however, the shift from a purely mythological to

15. Cf. The Testament of Levi 1:1–2.

a philosophical cosmogony has not yet taken place, and we do not find any such philosophical abstractions as *Sophia*, *Nous*, *Sige*, or *Ennoia*. The Apocalypse of Adam is consistently anthropomorphic and literal, showing nothing of the philosophical veneer of a more entangled Gnosticism.¹⁶ The only exceptions to this occur in the excursus on the fourteen kingdoms which, as Hans-Martin Schenke and Charles Hedrick have suggested, may be an addition to the original text.¹⁷ Attempts to date the document precisely have been only partially successful. Jean Doresse has suggested that the Gospel of the Egyptians is to a degree dependent upon the Apocalypse of Adam.¹⁸ If this is correct, the Apocalypse of Adam is at least earlier than the Gospel of the Egyptians, which is usually dated before the third century A.D.

The text shows unmistakable signs of dependence on a tradition sympathetic to that of the Old Testament, and there is in all probability a Jewish source behind the Apocalypse of Adam. Evidence of this can be found in the testamental form of the document, the Jewish angelology, the myth of the androgynous creation of Adam and Eve, the heavenly voice (*bath kol*), the importance placed on “the Name”, and the fact that in this text Adam and Eve commit a real sin and experience a real fall. Likewise the account of the destruction of the Sethian city in 75:9–11 almost certainly draws upon the Old Testament account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁹ Furthermore, Josephus, a first century Jew, is already familiar with the tradition found in our text of Sethians who live apart in their own land, believe that the earth will be destroyed by water and fire, and who write their knowledge on pillars of stone.²⁰

In contrast to these Jewish elements, the Apocalypse of Adam does not contain any elements which are necessarily Christian. All of the

16. Cf., for example, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 1, and The Apocryphon of John (CG II,1).

17. Charles Hedrick, “The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis,” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature*, 108 (1972): 586; and Hans-Martin Schenke, “Zum Gegenwärtigen Stand der Erforschung der Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften,” *Koptologische Studien in der DDR* (Halle-Wittenberg: Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität, 1965), pp. 124–35.

18. John Doresse, “Le Livre sacré du grand Esprit invisible ou l’Evangile des Egyptiens II: Commentaire,” *JA* 256 (1968):370–76.

19. Genesis 19:24–28; see also PHEME PERKINS, “Apocalyptic Schematization in the Apocalypse of Adam and the Gospel of the Egyptians,” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature* 108 (1972):593.

20. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.2.3.

apparent Christian references can easily be explained from pre-Christian or non-Christian sources. Hellenistic mystery religions had many revealer/redeemer figures who taught their chosen followers the mysteries of salvation. Pre-Christian Judaism had a doctrine of a suffering Messiah as Jeremias has shown,²¹ and thus George MacRae suggests that the section from the Apocalypse of Adam that deals with the suffering Illuminator is in essence a midrash on Isaiah 53.²² If this is true, the suffering-Messiah passage does not establish a Christian origin for the document, but rather strengthens the contention that it rests on a Jewish *vorlage*. The same result obtains in respect to the apparent reference to baptism. The refrain of the thirteen kingdoms “and thus he came to the water,” is, to begin with, something of a riddle. Schenke goes back to an older Egyptian meaning for *MOOY* to get the translation “and thus he came into appearance,” making the refrain refer to an epiphany.²³ While this makes the phrase understandable, it relies on a meaning for *MOOY* which is not attested in Coptic. It is more likely that “and thus he came to the water” refers to the baptism of the gnosis (85:24–25) and would therefore have the sense of “and thus he came (at baptism) to knowledge and power.” Since initiatory baptism was not an exclusively Christian rite, there is no reason to insist that these passages were written by a Christian or that they refer to the baptism of Jesus. In the final analysis, however, the conviction that the Apocalypse of Adam is pre-Christian is based on an argument from silence, and MacRae cautions us with the reminder that while *The Concept of Our Great Power* (CG VI, 4) also contains no single indisputably Christian passage, the combined weight of its allusions and parallels makes its Christian origin certain. In summary, it can be fairly stated that the Apocalypse of Adam is early, that it reflects a Jewish *vorlage*, and that it may be an example of pre-Christian Gnosticism.

The Apocalypse Iranian?

Alexander Böhlig has suggested more specifically that the Apocalypse of Adam may be an example of pre-Christian Gnosticism under the

21. Walter Zimmerli and Joachim Jeremias, *The Servant of God*, Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 20, (London: SCM Press, 1957), pp. 57ff.

22. “George MacRae, “The Coptic Gnostic Apocalypse of Adam,” *The Heythrop Journal* 6 (1965):33.

23. Hans-Martin Schenke, “Gegenwärtigen Stand,” p. 133 (from *Worterbuch*, II, 52/53 [D])

influence of Iranian religion.²⁴ In evidence he offers some Iranian parallels to the Apocalypse of Adam. For example, Böhlig notes that the three men who come to Adam at 65:26 correspond to the three Uthras in the eleventh book of the Mandaean *Ginza*. The descent of holy angels and the polluting of holy waters are also found in the same book of the *Ginza*. Surely the fact that all three of these motifs from the Apocalypse of Adam are found in the same book of the *Ginza* is striking and must be given due consideration. But at the same time, it remains that all three of these motifs have Jewish and Hellenistic parallels as well. As Böhlig himself points out, it is likely that the reference to the three men in 65:26 is ultimately derived from the three angels who appear to Abraham in Genesis 18:1ff. PHEME PERKINS has drawn attention to a similar passage in *The Death of Adam*, vv. 15–22, where Eve sees three men enthrone Adam after his death.²⁵ The three descending angels, Abrasax, Sablo, and Gamaliel are also found in the Gospel of the Egyptians. Although they are not accused of polluting the waters, the aeons Micheu, Michar, and Mnesinous are specifically said to be over the living waters in Codex Brucianus.²⁶

The scheme employed in the Apocalypse of Adam of three world ages separated by flood and fire also appears typically Iranian. But first century Judaism was already familiar with the same idea, even though it may ultimately have been borrowed. Josephus speaks of the Sethians setting their knowledge up on pillars of brick and stone that would survive these twin cataclysms.²⁷

Böhlig has further suggested that the formulas of kingdoms seven, eight, ten, and eleven in the excursus on the fourteen kingdoms refer explicitly to the birth of the savior/illuminator Mithra. However, all fourteen formulas are vague at best, and while it is true that some of them contain elements identified with Mithra, these elements are also found in connection with a number of other Hellenistic saviors. If the allusions were more specific we would probably find that the statements of the thirteen kingdoms represent various “counterfeit” saviors from

24. Alexander Böhlig and Pahor Labib, *Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypsen aus Codex V von Nag Hammadi im Koptischeh Museum zv Alt-Kairo* (Halle-Wittenberg: Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität, 1963), p. 90.

25. PHEME PERKINS, “Apocalyptic Schematization,” p. 594; see also Michael Stone, “The Death of Adam—An Armenian Adam Book,” *Harvard Theological Review* 59 (1966): 283–91.

26. Codex Brucianus, Baynes Papyrus LXI 18–21.

27. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.2.3.

the Hellenistic mystery religions, including Mithraism, while that of the fourteenth, the generation without a king, represents the “true” understanding of the Savior professed by the Gnostics who produced the Apocalypse of Adam. In any event, it is unlikely that all or most of them refer to Mithra, since Mithra himself is never pictured as a suffering Savior as is the Illuminator in this text.

It has also been suggested that the fourteen kingdoms may be paralleled in Iranian religion by the fourteen light aeons of Mani.²⁸ But it seems more probable that we are presented here with a contrast of thirteen false kingdoms against the one true generation,²⁹ since we are specifically told in 75:18–22 that the generations of the powers use the name, whatever it may be, erroneously.

While there are solid Iranian parallels to the Apocalypse of Adam, it may be that the traditions found in the Apocalypse are just as likely to have their antecedents in Jewish and Hellenistic literature and ideas. But, while it may be unnecessary to draw on Iranian religion for ideas that are already found in the Mediterranean world, the fact that parallels can legitimately be called up from both the East and the West suggests that the mythical and religious preconditions of Gnosticism were more ubiquitous in the ancient world than is generally thought.

The Apocalypse and the Latter-day Saints

To Latter-day Saints, interest in the Apocalypse of Adam lies particularly in the following parallels to LDS religion. The document is a testament which Adam in the last year of his life leaves to his righteous posterity, the seed of Seth. Adam says that he and Eve were originally created with glory and knowledge. Eve brings knowledge to Adam and as a result “we were as the great eternal angels,” (64:14–16). The Creator God (Satan) separates them, thus bringing about a fall. Their original knowledge and glory leave them, and they become mortal. Now they recognize the Creator God. Adam falls into a sleep during which three

28. Kephalia, 10.42ff.

29. There are also thirteen aeons in the Pistis Sophia. See G. R. S. Mead, *Pistis Sophia* (London: John Watkins, 1947), p. 156ff. It should be noted here that if we are correct in interpreting the formulas of the thirteen kingdoms as representing inaccurate or false utterances, then the formula of the ninth kingdom which may be a reference to the fall of Sophia, may also be the polemic of one Gnostic sect against another.

men come to him and say “Arise, Adam” (66:1–2).³⁰ They then instruct Adam and Eve and promise them that a Savior shall come into the world who shall suffer in the flesh. The content of their revelation to Adam consists of a vision of world history, which when combined with what Adam has already told Seth, makes the Apocalypse of Adam an account of this world from the creation to the consummation, with emphasis on the role and fate of the seed of Seth. The climax of world history is the coming of the Savior/Illuminator.

The power of the gnosis is bound up with “the Name” at three points in the text (72:5–7, 77:20, and 83:6), although we are never told what the name is. The Gnostics will be rewarded for *not* writing down the words of the secret knowledge for they are to remain oral and secret (85:5–6). In the epilogue to the Apocalypse all of this is placed in a ritual setting, and the secret gnosis of Adam is identified with a ritual baptism or anointing (85:22–28).

Much of this has a familiar ring due to similar constructs in the book of Moses, the Book of Mormon, and LDS ritual. But easily the most striking parallel is to the account of Adam-ondi-Ahman in D&C 107:41–57. Here we are told that three years before his death Adam called his righteous posterity to him to receive his final blessing; in the Apocalypse of Adam this occurs in the last year of Adam’s life. In D&C 107:53, all of the patriarchs mentioned by name are of the seed of Seth; in the Apocalypse the revelation is given to Seth and is about his seed. In D&C 107:42 Seth is told by his father that “his seed should be the chosen of the Lord and that they should be preserved unto the end of the earth”; in the Apocalypse, the glory of Adam passes into the seed of Seth, they are designated as the seed through whom the Savior will come, and their miraculous preservation from the attacks of the Evil One is foretold. In the Apocalypse there is an appearance of three angels; in D&C 107:54 it is the Lord himself who appears. In the Apocalypse the history of the world to the final consummation is portrayed; in D&C 107:56 Adam is said to have “predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation.”

A final caveat to this study must recognize, however, that parallels of themselves are neutral; they prove nothing. While it is hoped that Latter-day Saints will become excited and enthusiastic about such parallels as can be found between ancient literature and the beliefs of the

30. The “awakening of Adam” occurs elsewhere. See *The Apocryphon of John* 70:20–21 and 79:4–25.

Church, it is even more to be hoped that this enthusiasm will lead to an increased participation by Latter-day Saints in the competent study of this literature for its own sake and not merely for the sake of those parallels.

An essay written for the Hugh Nibley festschrift, "Tinkling Cymbals," ed. John W. Welch, assembled on the occasion of Dr. Nibley's retirement. Copies of all festschrift essays are on file in casual publication in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

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TEXT

Plate 64

1. The Apocalypse of Adam
 2. The revelation which Adam
 3. taught his son Seth in
 4. the seven hundredth year, saying:
 5. "Listen to my words my
 6. son Seth. When God
 7. had created me from
 8. the earth along with Eve your
 mother
 9. I walked about with her in a
 10. glory which she had seen from
 11. the aeon we were from.
 12. She taught me a word
 13. of knowledge of the
 14. eternal god. And we were as
 15. the great eternal angels.
 16. For we were higher than
 17. the god who made us and
 18. the powers with him whom
 19. we did not know.
 20. Then the god, the ruler
 21. of the archons and the power
 22. separated us in wrath.
 23. Then we became two aeons.
 24. And the glory that was in
 25. our heart left us,
 26. me and your mother Eve
 27. along with the first knowledge
 28. that breathed in us. And
 29. it fled from us
 30. and went into
 31.
 32. which did not come

Plate 65

1. forth from this aeon which
 2. we were from, I
 3. and Eve your mother, but
 4. it went into the seed of
 5. great aeons. For this reason
 6. I myself have called you
 7. by the name of that man
 8. who is the seed of the great
 generation
 9. or from whom it comes. After
 10. those days, the eternal
 11. knowledge of the god
 12. of truth was far from
 13. me and your mother Eve.
 14. From that time on we
 15. were taught about dead
 16. works like men. Then
 17. we recognized the god who
 18. had created us. For we were not
 19. strangers to his power and
 20. we served him in
 21. fear and bondage. And after
 22. these things we were
 23. darkened in our heart.
 24. And I was sleeping in the
 25. thought of my heart.
 26. And I saw three
 27. men before me
 28. whose likeness I was
 29. not able to recognize because
 30. they were not from the powers
 31. of the god who made
 32. us. They surpassed
 33.
 34.

Plate 66

1. said to me: "Arise,
2. Adam, from the sleep
3. of death and hear
4. concerning the aeon and the seed
5. of that man, the one to
6. whom life has come, the one
7. who came from you and
8. from Eve your wife."
9. Then, as I listened to these words
10. from those great men,
11. who stood
12. before me, then we gave a
13. sigh in our heart, me and
14. Eve and the Lord God
15. who created us stood
16. before us. He said
17. to us "Adam, why have
18. you sighed in your heart?
19. Don't you know that I
20. am the god that created
21. you? And I breathed into
22. you a spirit of life,
23. a living soul." Then
24. there was a darkness upon our
25. eyes. Then the god who
26. created us created
27. from him
28. I am
- 29.
- 30.
- 31.

Plate 67

1. in my thought and
2. my heart I knew
3. a sweet desire
4. for your mother. Then
5. the bloom of our
6. eternal knowledge
7. was lost to us.
8. And weakness
9. plagued us.
10. For this reason the days
11. of our life became few.
12. And I realized that
13. I was under the power
14. of death. And now
15. my son Seth I will
16. reveal to you those things
17. which were revealed to me
18. by those men
19. whom I saw
20. at first
21. before me:
22. "After I complete
23. the times
24. of this generation,
25. and the years
26. of this generation
27. are gone
- 28.
- 29.
- 30.

Plate 68

(Plate 68 is blank.)

Plate 69

- 1.
2. For torrents of rain
3. from God the Almighty
4. shall be raised up
5. that he might
6. destroy all flesh from
7. God the Almighty that
8. he might destroy
9. all flesh³¹ from the earth
10. by means of that which was
11. round about them together with
12. some of the seed of
13. those men into whom
14. has passed the life of
15. the knowledge which
16. came from Eve
17. your mother. For they were
18. strangers to him.
19. After these things
20. great angels will come
21. on high clouds.
22. They will take those
23. men to the place
24. where the spirit
25. of life is
- 26.
- 27.
- 28.
- 29.

31. dittography

Plate 70

- 1.
2. which are there
3. from heaven
4. to the earth and the entire
5. multitude of flesh will be
6. left behind in the water. Then
7. God will rest from
8. his wrath and he will put
9. his power upon the waters
10. and he will spare Noah and his
 sons
11. and their wives by means of the
12. ark together with the animals
13. which he allowed them and
14. the birds of heaven which he
15. called and released
16. on the earth. And God
17. will say to Noah—he
18. whom the generations will
19. call Deucalion: “Behold
20. I have watched over you in the
 ark
21. together with your wife and your
22. sons and their wives, with their
23. animals and the birds of
24. heaven which you called
25. and released on the earth .³²

10. great light. Those men
11. will come who were
12. cast forth from the knowledge
13. of the great aeons and
14. angels. They will stand
15. before Noah and the aeons.
16. And god will say to
17. Noah: “Why have you
18. departed from what I told you?
19. You have created another genera-
 tion that
20. you might scorn my power.” Then
21. Noah will say: “I will
22. testify in the presence of your
23. might that the generation of
24. these men came neither from
25. me nor from

Plate 71

1. Because of this I will give the earth
 to you,
2. to you and your sons. In
3. royalty you will rule over it, you
4. and your sons. And none of
5. that seed will come from you
6. of those men from another
7. glory who will not stand
8. before me. Then they will
9. be like the cloud of the

32. cf. 1. 14–16 above.

Plate 72

1. the knowledge
2. those men
3. and he will bring them into their proper land
4. and he will build them
5. a holy dwelling place and
6. they will be called by that
7. name and they will dwell there
8. six hundred years in an
9. incorruptible knowledge.
10. And angels of the great light
11. will dwell with them.
12. Nothing abominable shall
13. dwell in their heart
14. only the knowledge of God.
15. Then Noah will divide the
16. whole earth between his sons
17. Ham and Japheth and Shem.
18. He will say to them: "My sons,
19. hear my words. Behold, I have
20. divided the earth between you.
- But
21. serve him in fear and
22. bondage all the days
23. of your life. Let not
24. your seed depart from the face
25. of God the Almighty
26. I and your
- 27.

Plate 73

1. son of Noah: "The
2. seed will be pleasing before you
3. and before your power.
4. Seal it in your sharp
5. hand with fear and
6. commandment, that
7. all the seed which came from me
8. will not turn away from you
9. and God the Almighty
10. but they will serve
11. in humility and
12. fear of their knowledge."
13. Then others will come forth
14. from the seed of Ham and
15. Japheth. Four hundred thousand
16. men will go and enter
17. into another land and they will dwell
18. with those men who
19. were from the great
20. eternal knowledge because
21. the shadow of their power will
22. protect those who have dwelt
23. among them from every evil thing
24. and from every abominable desire.
25. Then the seed of Ham and
26. Japheth will form twelve
27. kingdoms and the
28. Seed will enter into
29. another people
- 30.
31. for

Plate 74

1. who are dead the great
 2. aeons of incorruptibility.
 3. And they will go to Sakla
 4. their God. They will enter
 5. into the powers, accusing the great
 6. men who are in their
 7. power. They will say to Sakla
 8. "What is the power of these men
 9. who stood before you,
 10. those who were taken away from
 11. the seed of Ham and Japheth
 12. who will amount to 400,000 men?
 13. They were received into another
 aeon
 14. from which they came and
 15. they have turned away from all
 the glory of
 16. your power and the rule of your
 hand,
 17. because the seed of Noah through
 18. his son has complied with your
 19. every wish, and also all the
 powers
 20. in the aeons over which your
 21. power rules. But neither those
 22. men nor those who
 23. dwell in their glory
 24. have done what you want.
 25. But they have turned your
 26. whole multitude." Then the God
 27. of the aeons will give them some
 of
 28. those who serve him
 29.
 30. they will come upon that land

Plate 75

1. where the great men
 2. will be, those who
 3. neither have been defiled nor
 4. will be defiled by any lust
 5. because their soul was not
 6. in a defiled hand but it
 7. was from a great commandment
 8. of an eternal angel
 9. The fire and sulphur and
 10. asphalt will be cast upon
 11. those men and
 12. fire and a mist will come upon
 13. those aeons and the eyes of the
 powers
 14. of the Illuminators will be
 darkened.
 15. And the aeons will not see
 16. them in those days.
 17. And great clouds of light
 18. will descend and
 19. other clouds of light from the
 20. great aeons will come down
 21. upon them. And Abrasax,
 22. Sablo, and Gamaliel will
 23. descend and lift those
 24. men out of the
 25. fire and the wrath and they
 26. will carry them above the angels
 27. and rules of the powers. And they
 28. will take them out
 29. of life
 30. they take them to
 31. aeons

Plate 78

1. A spirit to heaven. He was
2. nourished in the heavens. He received the glory
3. and the power of the one who is there. He came
4. to the bosom of his mother.
5. And thus he came to the water.
6. But the second kingdom says
7. of him that he came
8. from a great prophet.
9. And a bird came and carried the
10. child which was begotten and took him
11. onto a high mountain
12. and he was nourished by
13. the birds of heaven. An angel
14. came forth there. He said to him:
15. "Arise! God has given you
16. glory. And he received a glory and a strength.
17. And thus he came to the water."
18. The third kingdom says of him
19. that he came from
20. a virgin womb.
21. He was cast out of his city,
22. he and his mother. He was taken
23. to a place in the wilderness. He
24. nourished himself there. He came and he received
25. glory and power. And thus
26. he came to the water.
27. The fourth kingdom says
28. of him that he came
29. virgin
- 30.

Plate 79

1. her, he and Phersalis
2. and Sael and his armies
3. which were sent. And Solomon
4. himself sent his army of
5. demons to seek after the
6. virgin. And they did not find
7. the one they sought after, but
8. the virgin who was given to them.
9. She was the one they brought.
10. Solomon
11. took her and the virgin
12. conceived. She brought forth
13. the child in that place.
14. She nourished him on the edge
15. of the wilderness. After he had
16. been nourished, he received glory
17. and power from the seed
18. which was begotten by him.
19. And thus he came to the
20. water." But the fifth
21. kingdom says of him:
22. "He came from a
23. drop from heaven. He was sown
24. in the sea. The deep
25. received him, gave him birth,
26. and raised him to heaven. He received
27. glory and power. And thus
28. he came to the water.
29. The sixth kingdom
30. says of him: "He came into existence on account of

Plate 80

1. Which is above that he might spread
2. flowers. She conceived from the
3. desire for the flowers. She
4. brought him forth in that place.
5. Angels of the flower-garden
6. nourished him. He received
7. a glory in that place
8. and power. And thus he came
9. to the water.” But the
10. seventh kingdom said
11. of him: “He is a drop.
12. He came from heaven to earth.
13. He was carried down to caves of
14. dragons. He became a child
15. A spirit came upon him. He
16. took him to the height, to the place
17. where the drop was from.
18. He received glory and power
19. in that place. And thus
20. he came to the water.” But the
21. eighth kingdom says
22. of him: “A cloud came
23. over the earth. It wrapped around
24. a rock, and he came
25. from it. The angels
26. in the heaven nourished
27. him. He received glory and
28. power in that place and
29. thus he came to the water.”

Plate 81

1. But the ninth kingdom says
2. of him: “From the nine
3. Muses one divided off.
4. She came to a high mountain. She
5. spent awhile sitting there in
6. order to desire herself alone
7. that she might be both male and female.
8. She fulfilled her desire and
9. conceived by her desire.
10. He was born. He was nourished by
11. the angels who are over the desire.
12. And he received glory in that
13. place and power. And then
14. he came to the water.” The
15. tenth kingdom says of him:
16. “His God loved a cloud
17. of desire. He ejaculated
18. into his hand and cast
19. some of the drops into
20. the cloud beyond him.
21. He was born. He received glory
22. and power in that place. And
23. thus he came to the water.”
24. But the eleventh kingdom
25. says of him: “The father
26. desired his own daughter.
27. She herself conceived by
28. her father. And she cast
29. a tomb

Plate 82

1. out in the wilderness. The
 2. angel nourished him in that
 3. place and thus he came to
 4. the water.” The twelfth
 5. kingdom says
 6. of him: “He came from
 7. two Illuminators. They nourished
 8. him there. He received glory
 9. and power. And thus he came
 10. to the water.” But the
 11. thirteenth kingdom says
 12. of him: “Every birth
 13. of their archon is a word.
 14. And this word spoke a
 15. command in that place. He
 16. received glory and power
 17. And thus he came to the water
 18. that the desire of these powers
 19. might be satisfied.” But the
 generation
 20. without a king over it says:
 21. “God chose him
 22. from all the aeons.
 23. He caused a knowledge of the
 24. undefiled one of truth to be
 25. in him.” She³³ said: “He came
 26. from a foreign atmosphere.
 27. From a great aeon the
 28. great Illuminator came forth.

Plate 83

1. He made the generation of those
 men
 2. whom he has chosen for himself
 to shine
 3. so that they shine upon the
 4. whole aeon.” Then the seed will
 fight
 5. against the power, those who will
 receive
 6. his name upon the waters and by
 means of
 7. them all.³⁴ And a cloud
 8. of darkness will cry out in
 10. a loud voice saying:
 11. “Blessed is the soul of those
 12. men because they have known
 13. God with a true knowledge.
 14. They shall live forever and
 15. ever because they did not
 16. perish in their lust
 17. along with those angels. Nor did
 18. they fulfill the works of the
 19. powers. But they stood
 20. before him in a knowledge
 21. of God like light
 22. which has come forth from
 23. fire and blood. But we
 24. have mindlessly done every
 25. deed of the powers. We
 26. have taken pride in the
 27. transgressions of our works.
 28.
 29. his works
 30. black

33. i.e., the knowledge

34. i.e., all the waters

Plate 84

1. is eternal. But these are
 2. spirits. For now we have realized
 3. that our souls shall die in death.
 4. Then a voice came to them
 5. saying: "Micheu, and
 6. Michar and Mnesinous, who are
 7. over the holy baptism
 8. and the water of life, why
 9. have you been crying out against
 10. the living God in lawless voices
 11. and tongues which have
 12. no law with souls
 13. full of blood and abominable
 14. deeds? You are full of
 15. deeds which are not those of the
 truth
 16. but your ways are full of
 17. gladness and joy, even though you
 18. have defiled the water of life.
 19. You have brought it under
 20. the will of the powers
 21. to whom you have
 22. been given, to worship
 23. them. And your thought
 24. is not like that of
 25. those men whom
 26. you persecute
 27.
 28. desire

Plate 85

1. their fruit does not wither. But
 2. they will be known
 3. to the great aeons because the
 words
 4. of the god of the great aeons which
 5. they have kept, they have not put
 6. in the book, nor have they written
 them down.
 7. But angelic ones will bring those
 8. which all the generations of men
 9. will not know. For
 10. they will be on a high
 11. mountain upon a rock of truth.
 12. For this reason they will be named
 13. "The words of incorruptibility
 14. and truth of those who know
 15. the eternal God in
 16. wisdom of knowledge and
 17. teaching of angels forever,
 18. for he knows all things."
 19. These are the revelations which
 20. Adam revealed to Seth his
 21. son. And his son taught them to
 22. his seed. This is the knowledge
 23. of the hidden things of Adam
 24. which he gave to Seth, which
 25. in the holy baptism of those
 26. who know the eternal knowledge
 27. by those born of the word and
 28. the imperishable Illuminators
 who
 29. came from the holy seed.
 30. Jesseus, Mazareus,
 31. Jessedekeus
 32. The Apocalypse of Adam