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Comments on The Book of the Revelation of Abraham

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Abstract: "...Much importance is being attached to this work, brought from the oblivion of the Old Slavic language by Professor Bonwetsch, since it is being placed in an extensive religious work now being published in Leipzig, entitled, "Studies for the History of Theology and the Church." Hence it may well be concluded that it is regarded as an important chapter in such a work, by those who are deeply learned in such records of antiquity.

With this in view, we ask our young men to read again with attention this alleged Book of the Revelation of Abraham, and compare it with that given to the world through the agency of the Prophet Joseph Smith, that they may see how far in every point of excellence-literary style, largeness of information, profoundness, and nobility of doctrine-it exceeds this half apochryphal work about to find its way into one of the most pretentious religious works of the century."

COMMENTS ON THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION OF ABRAHAM.

BY THE EDITORS.

The Book of the Revelation of Abraham, translated from the German of Professor Bonwetsch, of the University of Goettingen, is before our readers, having appeared in the last two issues of the ERA; and they can now compare it with the Book of Abraham, published in the Pearl of Great Price. The last named book, it will be remembered by many, came into the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith while living at Kirtland, in the summer of 1835. A Mr. Chandler, who was traveling through Ohio, exhibiting a number of Egyptian mummies, together with several rolls of papyrus, at Kirtland heard of the ability of the Prophet Joseph to translate ancient languages by a divine gift. He therefore submitted to him the several rolls of papyrus, which had been found in the coffins of the mummies; and such was the importance of the documents, in the estimation of the prophet, that the saints purchased both mummies and papyrus; and soon afterward the Prophet Joseph, with W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery acting as scribes, commenced the translation of the rolls. To their surprise and joy, they found that one of them contained the writings of Abraham, and the other of Joseph, who was sold into Egypt by his brethren.

The whole record was never completely translated, but parts of it were, and those parts are to be found, as before stated, in the Pearl of Great Price; and we are of the opinion that this work given to the world by the great prophet of the nineteenth century can be compared with the Book of the Rev-

elation of Abraham, brought to light by Professor Bonwetsch, with very great profit by the students of our church literature; and it is for this purpose that the latter work was published in the ERA.

The Book of Abraham would occupy too much space to be reproduced in the ERA; nor do we think it necessary, since copies of the Pearl of Great Price are quite common among the Latter-day Saints, and can easily be secured of our publishing houses, for the purpose of the comparison suggested.

That Abraham was a personage of very great importance in the times in which he lived is very evident from our biblical account of him; and it also appears from the fuller account of some phases of his life as described by Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews. But it must be remembered that even these records have failed to fully set forth the importance of the station he occupied before God, as is evident from other accounts concerning him. Josephus refers to mention being made of Abraham by Berosus—though without naming him—and quotes that writer as saying of Abraham, “In the tenth generation after the flood, there was among the Chaldæans a man righteous and great and skillful in the celestial science,” that is in astronomy. Josephus also refers to a book having been written concerning Abraham by Hecatæus, and further says that “Nicalus of Damascus, in the fourth book of his history, says of the patriarch: ‘Abraham reigned at Damascus, being a foreigner, and came with an army out of the land above Babylon, the land of the Chaldæans; but after a long time he got him up and removed from that country, also with his people, and went into the land then called Canaan, but now the land of Judæa; and that is when his posterity were become a multitude.’ As to which posterity of his, we relate in another work.”*

Thus it will appear that several very ancient authorities have written of Abraham, and it is also quite evident, even from the number of apochryphal works attributed to him, that he wrote some books himself. It is not at all to be wondered

*Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. I., Ch. VII.

at that Abraham, if his character as described by Josephus is taken into account, should leave behind him some statement of the revelations of God to him. Indeed it would be more surprising to discover that he had failed to do so; for Josephus describes him as being a "person of great sagacity, both for understanding of things and persuading his hearers, and not mistaken in his opinions, for which reason he began to have higher notions of virtue than others had; and he determined to renew and to change the opinion that men happened then to have concerning God."

The same author also says of the effects of his sojourn among the Egyptians, that whereas "They were formerly addicted to different customs and despised one another's sacred and accustomed rites, and were very angry one with another on that account, Abraham conferred with each of them and confuted the reasons they made use of—every one for their own practices—he demonstrated that such reasonings were vain and void of truth; whereupon he was admired by them in those conferences as a very wise man and one of great sagacity, who could discourse on any subject he undertook, and this not only in understanding, but in persuading other men to assent to him. He communicated to them arithmetic and delivered to them the science of astronomy; for before Abraham came into Egypt they were unacquainted with those parts of learning, for that science came with the Chaldæans into Egypt, and from them to the Greeks also." It would be surprising, we repeat, if this man, so distinguished for both his knowledge and wisdom, had failed to record some part of that wide information he possessed.

Of course, from the writings of Abraham, brought to light through the Prophet Joseph Smith, we are sure that he did not neglect to do this; while the several writings attributed to him, yet held to be more or less apochryphal, strengthen the belief that he did commit to writing the knowledge that God had imparted to him; and it is for this reason that this Book of the Revelation of Abraham is of so much interest. How many of his writings may have been distorted by the folly and traditions of men, we are at a loss to know; and how much of truth is in this or that writing attributed to him, we

cannot say; but certainly it is both interesting and of importance to take what has been brought to light of the old patriarch's writings by the great modern prophet, and note the points of comparison between them.

In this way the Book of the Revelation of Abraham may be compared with the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price; and it will be found that they agree in the following points:

First, in the fact that the immediate ancestors of Abraham were idolators.

Second, that the Lord revealed himself to Abraham, and called him to leave the home of his fathers, and that the Lord would give to him a particular land for his inheritance.

Third, the sending of an angel to be a deliverer and a guide to Abraham.

Fourth, the revelation of the Lord to him concerning the creations of God, not only as pertaining to the earth, but to the heavens also.

Fifth, and perhaps the most important, the fact of the pre-existence of spirits and the choice of a special people from among them, described in the Book of the Revelation of Abraham, under the divisions marked XXI., XXII., and XXIII.

Sixth, in both productions Abraham is represented as being the head of a chosen race, especially separated unto the Lord.

We have stated that the most important point of comparison is that which relates to the pre-existence of spirits, and the choice of a special people from among them. We here quote the reference to this subject from both books, first from the Book of the Revelation of Abraham:

'He said to me: 'Now look beneath your feet upon the plane and recognize the *pre-formed creature upon this firmament, and the beings thereon; and the æons prepared before.*' And I saw below the plane of my feet the fifth firmament and what therein was, and in it the earth and its fruits, and all that moved upon it, and its spirits, and the power of its men, and the wickedness of their souls, and their dispensations of righteousness, and the beginnings of their works, the abyss with its tortures, and the lowest, and the destruction therein. And I saw there the sea, its islands, animals and fishes, the Leviathan and his possessions and his home and his lurking place and the world which lay upon him and his movements and the disturbances

of the world for his sake. And I saw rivers, their sources and their courses; and I saw there the Garden of Eden, its fruits and springs, and the river which flows from it, its trees and their blossoms, and those who deal honestly. And I saw in the garden their food and their salvation. And I saw a host of men, women, and children, one-half on the right side, and the other one-half on the left side of the picture. And I said: 'Primeval One, Strong One, what is this picture of the creature?' And he said to me: 'This is my will in relation to that which has a being in the council, and it became pleasing before me, and then afterwards I commanded them to *be* [i. e. exist] through my word. *And it came to pass that as many as I had authorized to exist, before portrayed in this picture, and had stood before me pre-created,—as many as you have seen.*' And I said: 'Ruler, Strong One, Thou Who Wast Before the World, *who are the multitude in this picture, on the right hand and on the left?*' And he said to me: 'These upon the left side are the multitude of former generations, and those to come after you. These for judgment and order; those for vengeance and destruction at the end of the world. *But those on the right side of the picture are the people chosen for me, separated from the people of Azazel. These are those which I have prepared to be born through you and to be called my people.*'"

In the Book of Abraham, found in the Pearl of Great Price, the passage relating to the same subject stands as follows:

"Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; and God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said, these will I make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me, Abraham, thou art one of them, thou wast chosen before thou wast born. And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him, we will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; and they who keep their first estate, shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate, shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate, shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever."

There are other points of comparison, but these are sufficient to be mentioned here. Much importance is being attached to this work, brought from the oblivion of the Old Slavic language by Professor Bonwetsch, since it is being placed in an extensive religious work now being published in Leipzig,

entitled, "Studies for the History of Theology and the Church." Hence it may well be concluded that it is regarded as an important chapter in such a work, by those who are deeply learned in such records of antiquity.

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TO TIME.

O time, thou know'st a lenient hand to lay
Softest on sorrow's wounds, and slowly thence
(Lulling to sad repose the weary sense)
The faint pang stealest unperceived away;
On thee I rest my only hope at last,
And think, when thou hast dried the bitter tear
That flows in vain o'er all my soul held dear,
I may look back on every sorrow past,
And meet life's peaceful evening with a smile—
As some lone bird at day's departing hour
Sings in the sunbeam of the transient shower,
Forgetful though its wings are wet the while:
Yet ah! how much must that poor heart endure,
Which hopes from thee, and thee alone, a cure.

BOWLES.