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Apocrypha

Assumption of Moses

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Anonymous (English translation by R. H. Charles)

R. H. Charles (1913)

Credits

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About:

Also called the Testament of Moses. A Jewish writing of the early 1st century AD, known from a single 6th-century Latin manuscript found in Milan in 1861, which has lost its beginning and end.

About to die, Moses hands Joshua secret books and tells him, as prophecy, the history of Israel: the entry into the land, the kings, the exile, the return, the wicked priests, an insolent king (Herod) and a terrible persecution, when a Levite named Taxo chooses to die with his sons rather than disobey the Law.

Then the Kingdom of God will appear and the devil will come to an end. Joshua weeps and Moses comforts him. The lost part told of the death of Moses and the dispute of the archangel Michael with the devil over his body, the scene quoted in the Epistle of Jude (verse 9).

English translation by R. H. Charles (1913). Parentheses and brackets are Charles's.

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Charles's introduction and notes are omitted. Parentheses and brackets are his.

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CHAPTER 1

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1 The Testament of Moses even the things which he commanded in the one hundred and twentieth year of his life, that is the two thousand five hundredth year from the creation of the world: [But according to oriental reckoning the two thousand and seven hundredth, and the four hundredth after the departure from Phoenicia], when the people had gone forth after the Exodus that was made by Moses to Amman beyond the Jordan, in the prophecy that was made by Moses in the book Deuteronomy: and he called to him Joshua the son of Nun, a man approved of the Lord, that he might be the minister of the people and of the tabernacle of the testimony with all its holy things, and that he might bring the people into the land given to their fathers, that it should be given to them according to the covenant and the oath, which He spake in the tabernacle to give (it) by Joshua: saying to Joshua these words: '(Be strong) and of a good courage so as to do with thy might all that has been commanded that thou mayst be blameless unto God.'

2 So saith the Lord of the world. For He hath created the world on behalf of His people. But He was not pleased to manifest this purpose of creation from the foundation of the world, in order that the Gentiles might thereby be convicted, yea to their own humiliation might by (their) arguments convict one another.

2.2 Accordingly He designed and devised me, and He prepared me before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant. And now I declare unto thee that the time of the years of my life

is fulfilled and I am passing away to sleep with my fathers even in the presence of all the people.

3 And receive thou this writing that thou mayst know how to preserve the books which I shall deliver unto thee: and thou shalt set these in order and anoint them with oil of cedar and put them away in earthen vessels in the place which He made from the beginning of the creation of the world, that His name should be called upon until the day of repentance in the visitation wherewith the Lord will visit them in the consummation of the end of the days.

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CHAPTER 2

✦

1 And now they shall go by means of thee into the land which He determined and promised to give to their fathers, in the which thou shalt bless and give to them individually and confirm unto them their inheritance in me and establish for them the kingdom, and thou shalt appoint them prefectures according to the good pleasure of their Lord in judgement and righteousness.

1.2 And it shall come to pass five years after they enter into the land, that thereafter they shall be ruled by chiefs and kings for eighteen years, and during nineteen years the ten tribes shall break away. And the twelve tribes shall go down and transfer the tabernacle of the testimony.

1.3 Then the God of heaven will make the court of His tabernacle and the tower of His sanctuary, and the two holy tribes shall be (there) established: but the ten tribes shall establish kingdoms for themselves according to their own ordinances.

2 And they shall offer sacrifices throughout twenty years: and seven shall entrench the walls, and I will protect nine, but four shall transgress the covenant of the Lord, and profane the oath which the Lord made with them. ‘And they shall sacrifice their sons to strange gods, and they shall set up idols in the sanctuary, to worship them. And in the house of the Lord they shall work impiety and engrave every form of beast, even many abominations.

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CHAPTER 3

✦

1 And in those days a king from the east shall come against them and his cavalry shall cover their land. And he shall burn their colony with fire together with the holy temple of the Lord, and he shall carry away all the holy vessels. And he shall cast forth all the people, and he shall take them to the land of his nativity, yea he shall take the two tribes with him.

1.2 Then the two tribes shall call upon the ten tribes, and shall march as a lioness on the dusty plains, being hungry and thirsty. And they shall cry aloud: 'Righteous and holy is the Lord, for, inasmuch as ye have sinned, we too, in like manner, have been carried away with you, together with our children.'

1.3 Then the ten tribes shall mourn on hearing the reproaches of the two tribes, and they shall say: 'What have we done unto you, brethren? Has not this tribulation come on all the house of Israel?' And all the tribes shall mourn,

2 Crying unto heaven and saying: 'God of Abraham God of Isaac and God of Jacob, remember Thy covenant which Thou didst make with them, and the oath which Thou didst swear unto them by Thyself, that their seed should never fail from the land which Thou hast given them,' Then they shall remember me, saying, in that day, tribe unto tribe and each man unto his neighbour: 'Is not this that which Moses did then declare unto us in prophecies, who suffered many things in Egypt and in the Red Sea and

in the wilderness during forty years: and assuredly called heaven and earth to witness against us, that we should not transgress His commandments, in the which he was a mediator unto us?

3 Behold these things have befallen us after his death according to his declaration, as he declared to us at that time, yea behold these have taken place even to our being carried away captive into the country of the east.' Who shall be also in bondage for about seventy and seven years.

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CHAPTER 4

✦

1 Then there shall enter one who is over them, and he shall spread forth his hands, and kneel upon his knees and pray on their behalf saying: 'Lord of all, King on the lofty throne, who rulest the world, and didst will that this people should be Thine elect people, then (indeed) Thou didst will that Thou shouldst be called their God, according to the covenant which Thou didst make with their fathers. And yet they have gone in captivity in another land with their wives and their children, around the gates of strange peoples and where there is great vanity. Regard and have compassion on them, O Lord of heaven.'

1.2 Then God will remember them on account of the covenant which He made with their fathers, and He will manifest His compassion in those times also. And He will put it into the mind of a king to have compassion on them, and he shall send them off to their land and country.

2 Then some portions of the tribes shall go up and they shall come to their appointed place, and they shall anew surround the place with walls. And the two tribes shall continue in their prescribed faith, sad and lamenting because they will not be able to offer sacrifices to the Lord of their fathers. And the ten tribes shall increase and multiply among the Gentiles during the time of their captivity.

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CHAPTER 5

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1 And when the times of chastisement draw nigh and vengeance arises through the kings who share in their guilt and punish them, they themselves also shall be divided as to the truth.

2 They shall turn aside from righteousness and approach iniquity, and they shall defile with pollutions the house of their worship, and they shall go a-whoring after strange gods. For they shall not follow the truth of God, but some shall pollute the altar with the (very) gifts which they offer to the Lord, who are not priests but slaves, sons of slaves.

2.2 And many in those times shall have respect unto desirable persons and receive gifts, and pervert judgment [on receiving presents]. And on this account the colony and the borders of their habitation shall be filled with lawless deeds and iniquities: those who wickedly depart from the Lord shall be judges: they shall be ready to judge for money as each may wish.

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CHAPTER 6

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1 Then there shall be raised up unto them kings bearing rule, and they shall call themselves priests of the Most High God: they shall assuredly work iniquity in the holy of holies. And an insolent king shall succeed them, who will not be of the race of the priests, a man bold and shameless, and he shall judge them as they shall deserve.

1.2 And he shall cut off their chief men with the sword, and shall destroy them in secret places, so that no one may know where their bodies are. He shall slay the old and the young, and he shall not spare. Then the fear of him shall be bitter unto them in their land.

1.3 And he shall execute judgements on them as the Egyptians executed upon them, during thirty and four years, and he shall punish them. And he shall beget children, (who) succeeding him shall rule for shorter periods.

2 Into their parts cohorts and a powerful king of the west shall come, who shall conquer them: and he shall take them captive, and burn a part of their temple with fire, (and) shall crucify some around their colony.

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CHAPTER 7

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1 And when this is done the times shall be ended, in a moment the (second) course shall be (ended), the four hours shall come. They shall be forced.... And, in the time of these, destructive and impious men shall rule, saying that they are just.

1.2 And these shall stir up the poison of their minds, being treacherous men, self-pleasers, dissemblers in all their own affairs and lovers of banquets at every hour of the day, gluttons, gourmands....

1.3 Devourers of the goods of the (poor) saying that they do so on the ground of their justice, but in reality to destroy them, complainers, deceitful, concealing themselves lest they should be recognized, impious, filled with lawlessness and iniquity, from sunrise to sunset: saying: 'We shall have feastings and luxury, eating and drinking, and we shall esteem ourselves as princes.'

2 And though their hands and their minds touch unclean things, yet their mouth shall speak great things, and they shall say furthermore: 'Do not touch me lest thou shouldst pollute me in the place (where I stand')...

3 And there shall come upon them a

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CHAPTER 8

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1 second visitation and wrath, such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time, in which He will stir up against them the king of the kings of the earth and one that ruleth with great power, who shall crucify those who confess to their circumcision: and those who conceal (it) he shall torture and deliver them up to be bound and led into prison, And their wives shall be given to the gods among the Gentiles, and their young sons shall be operated on by the physicians in order to bring forward their foreskin. And others amongst them shall be punished by tortures and fire and sword, and they shall be forced to bear in public their idols, polluted as they are like those who keep them.

2 And they shall likewise be forced by those who torture them to enter their inmost sanctuary, and they shall be forced by goads to blaspheme with insolence the word, finally after these things the laws and what they had above their altar.

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CHAPTER 9

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1 Then in that day there shall be a man of the tribe of Levi, whose name shall be Taxo, who having seven sons shall speak to them exhorting (them): 'Observe, my sons, behold a second ruthless (and) unclean visitation has come upon the people, and a punishment merciless and far exceeding the first. For what nation or what region or what people of those who are impious towards the Lord, who have done many abominations, have suffered as great calamities as have befallen us? Now, therefore, my sons, hear me: for observe and know that neither did the fathers nor their forefathers tempt God, so as to transgress His commands.

1.2 And ye know that this is our strength, and thus we will do. Let us fast for the space of three days and on the fourth let us go into a cave which is in the field, and let us die rather than transgress the commands of the Lord of Lords, the God of our fathers.

2 For if we do this and die, our blood shall be avenged before the Lord.

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CHAPTER 10

✦

1 And then His kingdom shall appear throughout all His creation,
And then Satan shall be no more,
And sorrow shall depart with him.
Then the hands of the angel shall be filled
Who has been appointed chief,
And he shall forthwith avenge them of their enemies.

2 For the Heavenly One will arise from His royal throne,
And He will go forth from His holy habitation
With indignation and wrath on account of His sons.

3 And the earth shall tremble: to its confines shall it be shaken:
And the high mountains shall be made low
And the hills shall be shaken and fall.

4 And the horns of the sun shall be broken and he shall be turned into darkness; And the moon shall not give her light, and be turned wholly into blood. And the circle of the stars shall be disturbed.

5 And the sea shall retire into the abyss, And the fountains of waters shall fail, And the rivers shall dry up.

6 For the Most High will arise, the Eternal God alone, And He will appear to punish the Gentiles, And He will destroy all their idols.

7 Then thou, O Israel, shalt be happy, And thou shalt mount upon the necks and wings of the eagle, And they shall be ended.

8 And God will exalt thee, And He will cause thee to approach to the heaven of the stars, In the place of their habitation.

9 And thou shalt look from on high and shalt see thy enemies in Ge(henna), And thou shalt recognize them and rejoice, And thou shalt give thanks and confess thy Creator.

10 And do thou, Joshua (the son of) Nun, keep these words and this book; For from my death [assumption] until His advent there shall be CCL times. And this is the course of the times which they shall pursue till they are consummated. And I shall go to sleep with my fathers. Wherefore, Joshua thou (son of) Nun, (be strong and) be of good courage; (for) God hath chosen (thee) to be minister in the same covenant.

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CHAPTER 11

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1 And when Joshua had heard the words of Moses that were so written in his writing all that he had before said, he rent his clothes and cast himself at Moses' feet. And Moses comforted him and wept with him. And Joshua answered him and said: 'Why dost thou comfort me, (my) lord Moses? And how shall I be comforted in regard to the bitter word which thou hast spoken which has gone forth from thy mouth, which is full of tears and lamentation, in that thou departest from this people? (But now) what place shall receive thee? Or what shall be the sign that marks (thy) sepulchre?

1.2 Or who shall dare to move thy body from thence as that of a mere man from place to place? For all men when they die have according to their age their sepulchres on earth; but thy sepulchre is from the rising to the setting sun, and from the south to the confines of the north: all the world is thy sepulchre.

2 My lord, thou art departing, and who shall feed this people? Or who is there that shall have compassion on them and who shall be their guide by the way? Or who shall pray for them, not omitting a single day, in order that I may lead them into the land of our forefathers?

2.2 How therefore am I to foster this people as a father (his) only son, or as a mistress her daughter, a virgin who is being prepared to be given to the husband whom she will revere, while she guards her person from the sun and (takes care) that her feet are not unshod for running upon the ground.

2.3 (And how) shall I supply them with food and drink according to the pleasure of their will? For of them there shall be 600,000 (men), for these have multiplied to this degree through thy prayers, (my) lord Moses. And what wisdom or understanding have I that I should judge or answer by word in the house (of the Lord)?

3 And the kings of the Amorites also when they hear that we are attacking them, believing that there is no longer among them the sacred spirit who was worthy of the Lord, manifold and incomprehensible, the lord of the word, who was faithful in all things, God's chief prophet throughout the earth, the most perfect teacher in the world, [that he is no longer among them], shall say "Let us go against them. If the enemy have but once wrought impiously against their Lord, they have no advocate to offer prayers on their behalf to the Lord, like Moses the great messenger, who every hour day and night had his knees fixed to the earth, praying and looking for help to Him that ruleth all the world with compassion and righteousness, reminding Him of the covenant of the fathers and propitiating the Lord with the oath."

4 For they shall say: "He is not with them: let us go therefore and destroy them from off the face of the earth." What shall then become of this people, my lord Moses?'

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CHAPTER 12

✦

1 And when Joshua had finished (these) words, he cast himself again at the feet of Moses. And Moses took his hand and raised him into the seat before him, and answered and said unto him: 'Joshua, do not despise thyself, but set thy mind at ease, and hearken to my words. All the nations which are in the earth God hath created and us, He hath foreseen them and us from the beginning of the creation of the earth unto the end of the age, and nothing has been neglected by Him even to the least thing, but all things He hath foreseen and caused all to come forth.

1.2 (Yea) all things which are to be in this earth the Lord hath foreseen and lo! they are brought forward (into the light.... The Lord) hath on their behalf appointed me to (pray) for their sins and (make intercession) for them.

2 For not for any virtue or strength of mine, but of His good pleasure have His compassion and longsuffering fallen to my lot. For I say unto you, Joshua: it is not on account of the godliness of this people that thou shalt root out the nations.

2.2 The lights of the heaven, the foundations of the earth have been made and approved by God and are under the signet ring of His right hand. Those, therefore, who do and fulfil the commandments of God shall increase and be prospered: but those who sin and set at nought the commandments shall be without the blessings before mentioned, and they shall be punished with many torments by the nations.

2.3 But wholly to root out and destroy them is not permitted. For God will go forth who has foreseen all things for ever, and His covenant has been established and by the oath which...

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