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Apocrypha

Testament of Abraham

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G. H. Box (1927)

Credits

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About:

A Jewish narrative, written in Greek probably in Egypt around the 1st or 2nd century, about the death of Abraham.

God sends the archangel Michael to tell the patriarch that his hour has come, but Abraham, the hospitable man of Mamre, refuses to give up his soul.

Before dying he asks to see the whole world: in a chariot of cherubim he sees the sins of men and, at the gate of heaven, the judgement of souls, presided over by Abel, with the angels who weigh and test their works.

At last Death comes, first beautiful and then terrible, and takes him. It survives in two forms, a long and a short one; this is the long one, in the translation of G. H. Box (1927), without the notes.

Box does not number verses: the division into passages is this edition's.

Source: https://archive.org/details/the-testament-of-abraham

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CHAPTER 1

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1 Abraham lived the span of his life, nine hundred ninety and five years. All the years of his life lived he in peace, gentleness and justice, and the just man was exceeding hospitable.

2 He pitched his tent in the four-cross-roads at the oak of Mamre, and welcomed all, rich and poor, kings and rulers, the halt and the weak, friends and strangers, neighbours and wayfarers, that devout, all-holy, just, and hospitable man Abraham did welcome equally.

3 The bitter cup of death that cometh to all inexorably, even the unforeseen end of his life, overtook him too.

4 Now the Lord God called his archangel Michael, and spake unto him: Michael, chief-captain, go down to Abraham, and tell him concerning his death, that he shall take order for the settling of his temporal estates: for I have blessed him as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand that is beside the sea-shore.

5 He liveth in abundance of much substance and great estates, and he is exceeding rich. But above all else, he is just with all goodness, hospitable and loving kindly, even unto the end of his life.

6 Do thou, archangel Michael, depart to Abraham, my well-beloved friend, and tell him concerning his death; give him this assurance: "In this season thou art destined to depart from this vain world, and shalt quit the body, and thou shalt come unto thine own Master among the righteous."

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CHAPTER 2

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1 The chief-captain went out from the presence of God, and went down unto Abraham to the oak of Mamre, and found the just man Abraham very nigh unto the place, sitting by the yokes of oxen for tillage, with the sons of Masek and among others his servants, twelve in number. And behold, the chief-captain was coming towards him.

2 Then Abraham seeing the chief-captain Michael coming from afar, like unto a most glorious warrior, rose up and went to meet him, as was his wont, advancing to meet all strangers and welcoming them.

3 Then the chief-captain saluted him first and spake unto him: Hail, most reverend father, just soul, chosen of God, true friend of the Heavenly One.

4 Abraham said unto the chief-captain: Hail, most reverend warrior, beaming as the sun, all-glorious, above all the sons of men. Thy arrival is well-timed! Wherefore I beseech thee by thy presence whence hath come the youth of thy years? Tell me, thy suppliant, whence, from what host, and from what journey hath come thy beauty?

5 Then said the chief-captain; I, just Abraham, am come from the great city; from the great king have I been sent to take the place of a true friend of his, for the king doth summon him.

6 Abraham said: Come hither, my lord, with me, as far as my place. The chief-captain said: I come. Then went they and sat them down to converse in the place of the tillage.

7 Abraham said to his servants, the sons of Masek: Go ye to the drove of horses and take two horses tame, and gentle, that have known the bit, that we may sit thereon, this stranger guest and I.

8 Then the chief-captain said: Nay, my lord Abraham, let them not bring horses, for I abstain therefrom, even from ever sitting upon a four-footed beast. Is not my king rich in great possessions, having authority both over men and all manner of beasts of burden? Yet I abstain therefrom, even from ever sitting upon a four-footed beast.

9 Let us depart, then, O just soul, on foot, walking gently until we reach thy house. And Abraham said: Amen, so be it.

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CHAPTER 3

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1 Now as they were going from the field to his house, along that road stood a cypress tree, and at the bidding of God the tree spake with a human voice, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God who is summoning him to (be with) those that love him.

2 And Abraham hid the mystery, for he thought that the chief-captain had not heard the voice of the tree. Then came they nigh unto the house and sat them down in the court.

3 And Isaac saw the face of the angel, and said to Sarah his mother: My lady mother, behold, the stranger that sitteth with my father Abraham is no son of the race of those that dwell on the earth.

4 Then ran Isaac, and did obeisance to him, and fell at the feet of the spirit. And the spirit blessed him and said: The Lord God will freely grant thee his promise which he promised thy father Abraham and his seed, and he will grant thee freely even the precious prayer of thy father and thy mother.

5 Then Abraham said to Isaac his son: Isaac, my son, draw water from the well and bring it to me in the bason that we may wash the feet of this stranger. He is weary, for he hath come unto us after a long journey.

6 Then ran Isaac to the well and drew water in the bason, and brought it to them. Then Abraham came nigh and washed the feet of the chief-captain Michael, and the bowels of Abraham were moved, and he wept upon the

stranger.

7 And Isaac saw his father weeping and himself wept too, and the chief-captain saw them weeping and wept with them, even himself with them; and the tears of the chief-captain fell upon the bason into the water of the vessel, and they became pearls of wondrous value.

8 And Abraham was astonished when he saw the marvel and took the stones secretly, and hid the mystery, keeping it with himself alone in his heart.

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CHAPTER 4

✦

1 Then spake Abraham unto Isaac his son: Depart, my beloved son, into the reception chamber, and adorn it: spread there for us two couches, one for me, and one for the guest here who is sojourning with us to-day.

2 And get thou ready for us there a large seat and a lamp-stand and a table with abundance of every good thing. Adorn the chamber, my son, and unfold fine cloths, purple and linen.

3 Burn every precious incense of high repute, and take sweet-smelling herbs from the garden, and fill our house therewith. Kindle seven lamps full of oil, that we may make merry, for the guest here who is sojourning with us to day is more glorious than kings and rulers, for even his appearance surpasseth all the sons of men.

4 Then Isaac made ready all things well, and Abraham took the archangel Michael by his side, and went up into the reception chamber; and they both sat them down on the couches, and between them he brought forward a table with abundance of every good thing.

5 Then the chief-captain arose and went outside, as if by constraint to ease himself, and ascended into heaven in the twinkling of an eye, and stood before the face of God and spake unto Him:

6 Lord and Master, may it please thy might to know that I cannot skill to announce to that just man the mention of death: I have not seen upon the earth his like, pitiful, hospitable, just, true, god-fearing, abstaining from

every evil deed. Now know, Lord, that I cannot skill to make mention to him of death.

7 Then said the Lord: Go down, Michael, chief-captain, to my friend Abraham, and whatsoever he says unto thee, that do thou even do: if he eateth, do thou too eat with him.

8 And I will send my holy spirit upon his son Isaac, and will cause the mention of his death to enter into the heart of Isaac, that even he may see in a vision the death of his father, and Isaac will tell the vision and thou shalt interpret it, and he, even Abraham, shall recognize the end thereof.

9 Then said the chief-captain: Lord, all the heavenly spirits lack bodies. They neither eat nor drink. This man spread at my side a table with abundance of all the good substance of the earth that perisheth. Now, O Lord, what shall I do? How can I escape his notice, sitting at one table with him?

10 The Lord said: Go down to him and take no thought with thyself concerning it. While thou art sitting with him I will send upon thee an all-devouring spirit, and he shall consume all that is on the table, from thy hands and through thy mouth. Be thou merry with him in all things.

11 Only thou shalt interpret fairly the truth of the vision, that Abraham may recognize the sickle of death, and the unforeseen end of his life, and make order for the settling of all his worldly possessions, seeing that I have blessed him above the sand of the sea and as the stars of the heaven.

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CHAPTER 5

✦

1 Then the chief-captain went down into the house of Abraham, and sat with him at the table, and Isaac ministered unto them. Now when supper was finished, Abraham made his wonted prayer and the archangel prayed with him, and they rested, each on his couch.

2 And Isaac spake unto his father: Father, I too would fain have seated with you on this couch, that I too also may hear your discourse, for I love to hear the excellence of the conversation of this all-virtuous man.

3 And Abraham said: Nay, my son, but depart to thy chamber and rest upon thy bed, that we may not be too wearisome to this guest. Then Isaac received his blessing, and blessed him, and departed to his own couch, and fell upon his bed.

4 And God caused the mention of death to enter into the heart of Isaac as in dreams. And about the third hour of the night Isaac awaked from sleep and rose from his couch and came running to the chamber where his father was sleeping with the archangel.

5 So Isaac knocked quickly at the door, saying: Arise, father Abraham, open unto me quickly, that I may enter and hang upon thy neck and salute thee ere they snatch thee up from me.

6 So Abraham arose and opened unto him, and Isaac entered and hung upon his neck, and began to weep with a loud voice. And the bowels of Abraham were moved with him, and he too wept with a loud voice. And

the chief-captain saw them weeping and wept himself too.

7 And Sarah, who was in her tent, heard their weeping and came running unto them, and she found them embracing one another and weeping.

8 And Sarah said with weeping: My lord Abraham, what is this, that thou weepest? Tell me, my lord, has this brother here, who is sojourning with us to-day, brought thee news concerning thy nephew Lot, that he has died? and is it for this that ye weep thus?

9 But the chief-captain broke in upon her, and said unto her: Nay Sister Sarah, it is not so, as thou sayest, but methinks, thy son Isaac saw a dream and came unto us weeping, and we saw him, and our bowels were moved in pity with him, and we wept.

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CHAPTER 6

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1 When Sarah heard the excellence of the conversation of the chief-captain, she straightway recognized that the speaker was an angel of the Lord. So Sarah beckoned Abraham to go without towards the door, and said unto him: My lord Abraham, knowest thou who this man is? And Abraham said: I know not.

2 Then said Sarah: Thou knowest, my lord, the three men, the heavenly ones, who sojourned in our tent beside the oak of Mamre, when thou didst slay the calf without blemish and set a table by their side; and when the meat had been eaten the calf rose again and sucked its mother in great joy.

3 Knowest thou not, my lord Abraham, that they gave unto us Isaac according to their promise, even the fruit of my womb? Of those three holy men this is one.

4 Then spake Abraham: O Sarah, this is truth that thou hast spoken. Praise and glory from God even the Father. Yea, even I, in the late evening, while I was washing his feet in the bason of the vessel, said I in my heart: These are the feet which I once did wash among the three men.

5 And later, his tears fell in the vessel and became pearls of great price. Then took he them from his bosom and gave them to Sarah, saying: If thou believest me not, now behold these.

6 And Sarah took them and did obeisance, and clung fondly to them, and said: Glory be to God who sheweth unto us wonders. Now know, my lord Abraham, that a revelation of some event is among us, whether it be evil or good.

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CHAPTER 7

✦

1 And Abraham left Sarah and went in to the chamber and said unto Isaac: Come, my beloved son, tell me the truth; what were the visions and what didst thou experience, that thou camest running unto us?

2 Isaac cut him short and began to speak: I saw, my lord, in this night, the sun and the moon above my head, and the rays thereof, encircling me, and giving me light.

3 As I was thus beholding them and enjoying (the sight), I saw the heaven open, and saw a man bearing light coming down from heaven and flashing more brilliantly than the beams of seven suns.

4 Then that man, like unto the sun in visage, took the sun from off my head, and went up into the heavens where he had come down. And I was exceeding grieved for that he took the sun away from me.

5 And after a little, while I was still grieving and lamenting, I saw that man a second time coming down from heaven. And he took away from me the moon also, from off my head.

6 And I wept exceedingly and cried unto that man light-bearer, and said: Do not, my lord, do not take away my glory from me; pity me and hearken unto me, and even though thou hast taken away the sun from me, spare me yet the moon.

7 But he said: Let them be taken up to the king that reigneth above, for he would fain have them there. And he took them away from me, but spared to me the rays.

8 Then spake the chief-captain: Hearken, just Abraham. The sun, which thy son hath seen, thou art, even his father, and the moon likewise is his mother Sarah. The man who bore light, who came down from heaven, he is the messenger from God, who is destined to take thy just soul from thee.

9 Now know, most reverend Abraham, that thou art destined in this season to leave the life of the world and migrate unto God.

10 Then said Abraham to the chief-captain: O most novel of marvels! Indeed now, art thou he who is destined to take my soul from me?

11 The chief-captain said unto him: I am Michael, the chief-captain, who standeth in the presence of God, and I have been sent to thee to put thee in remembrance of thy death. This done I shall return to Him as we were bidden.

12 Abraham said: Now know I that thou art an angel of the Lord, and thou wast sent to take my soul. Nevertheless I will not follow thee; but do as thou art bidden.

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CHAPTER 8

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1 The chief-captain heard this word and straightway vanished from sight. He went up to heaven and stood in the presence of God, and told all that he saw in the house of Abraham.

2 This word also spake the chief-captain to the Lord: Even thus saith thy friend Abraham: I will not follow thee; nevertheless do as thou art bidden. Now, O omnipotent Lord, doth thy glory and thy deathless dominion command aught?

3 Then God spake unto the chief-captain Michael: Go down to my friend Abraham yet once again and speak thou unto him: Thus saith the Lord thy God, who brought thee into the land of the promise, who blest thee above the sand of the sea and above the stars of the heaven, who opened the womb of Sarah the barren, and blessed thee with Isaac, the fruit of the womb, in old age:

4 Verily I say unto thee, that blessing, I will bless thee, and multiplying, I will multiply thy seed, and I will give unto thee all the boons thou askest of me, for that I am the Lord thy God, and beside me there is none other.

5 But tell thou me why thou art withstanding me, and why is grief within thee? And why art thou withstanding my archangel Michael? Knowest thou not that all who are (sprung) from Adam and Eve have died?

6 Yea, none of the prophets hath escaped death: and none of those who rule is immortal; neither hath any of thy forefathers escaped from the mystery of death. All have perished, and all have made their peace in the grave —all are gathered in by the sickle of death.

7 But against thee I have not sent death, neither have I allowed deadly disease to overtake thee. I have not permitted the sickle of death to overtake thee, neither have I allowed the snares of hell to enmesh thee: never did I will thee to meet with any harm.

8 But for good comfort have I sent my chief-captain Michael to thee, that thou mayest know thy departure from the world, and make disposition concerning thine house and concerning all thy estates, and that thou mayest bless Isaac thy well-beloved son. Now recognize that I have done thus desiring not to grieve thee.

9 Wherefore then saidst thou to my chief-captain: I will not follow thee? Wherefore hast thou thus spoken? Knowest thou not that if I give leave to Death, and he cometh upon thee, thus I should see whether thou wouldest come, or whether thou wouldest not come?

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CHAPTER 9

✦

1 Then the chief-captain took the exhortations of the Lord, and went down unto Abraham; and when the just one saw him he fell upon his face to the ground as one dead; and the chief-captain told him all that he had heard from the Most High.

2 Then did the holy and just Abraham rise up with many tears and fell at the feet of the spirit, and besought him saying: I beseech thee, chief-captain of the powers above, since thou hast deigned to come thyself altogether unto me a sinner and thine all-unworthy servant, I implore thee even now, O chief-captain, to be the medium of my word yet once (again) unto the Most High, and thou shalt say unto Him:

3 Thus saith Abraham, thy servant, O Lord God: In every deed and word which I have asked of thee thou hast heard me, and hast fulfilled every desire of mine. Now, O Lord, I resist not thy might, for I also know that I am not immortal but mortal.

4 Even so, to thy command, all things yield, and shudder, and quake at the presence of thy might, so I too. Yet one boon ask I of thee.

5 Now, Lord God, hear my request; while I am yet in this body, I would fain see all the world and all created things which thou didst stablish together, through one word, O Lord, and when I have seen these, then cheerfully will I depart from life.

6 So the chief-captain departed again, and stood in the presence of God and told him all, saying: Thus saith thy friend Abraham: I would fain behold all the world in my life, before I die.

7 When the Most High heard this request, he again commanded the archangel Michael, and said unto him: Take a cloud of light and those angels that bear command over the chariots, and go down, and take the just man Abraham on a chariot of the cherubim and exalt him into the air of heaven so that he may see all the world.

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CHAPTER 10

✦

1 Then went down the archangel Michael, and took Abraham upon a chariot of cherubim, and exalted him into the air of heaven, and led him with sixty angels on the cloud, and Abraham went up on the chariot over all the earth.

2 And Abraham saw the world just as it was that day: some ploughing, others driving wains: in one place shepherds tending flocks, and in another, watching in the fields by night; men dancing, sporting, playing the lyre; in one place wrestling and pleading, in another, weeping; and then saw he the dead held in memory by monument.

3 And he beheld too the newly-wedded being escorted, in a word, saw he all that was going on in the world, good and evil.

4 So Abraham, as he went through [the air], saw warriors bearing swords, wielding in their hands whetted swords; and Abraham enquired of the chief-captain: Who are these? And the chief-captain said: These are robbers, who intend to murder and steal, and burn, and destroy.

5 And Abraham said: Lord, Lord, hear my cry and bid that wild beasts come forth from the thicket and devour them. And even as he uttered (the word) there came forth wild beasts from the thicket, and devoured them.

6 And in another place saw he a man with a woman committing fornication with each other, and he said: Lord, Lord, bid that the earth open and swallow them up. And immediately the earth opened and swallowed them

up.

7 In another place he beheld men digging through an house, and robbing the goods of others, and he said: Lord, Lord, bid that fire may come down from heaven and devour them. And at his word, fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

8 Then straightway came a voice from heaven to the chief-captain, thus saying: Michael, chief-captain, bid the chariot to stop, and turn away Abraham, that he may not see all the world. If he sees all that are living in sin, he will destroy every existing thing.

9 For behold, Abraham has not sinned, neither pities he sinners; but I made the world, and will not to destroy any creature from among them, but I delay the death of the sinner, until he repent and live.

10 Bring up Abraham to the first gate of heaven, that he may behold there the judgements and the requitals, and may change his mind toward the souls of the sinners, which he hath destroyed.

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CHAPTER 11

✦

1 So Michael turned the chariot, and brought Abraham to the east, to the first gate of heaven. And Abraham saw two ways, the one way narrow and compressed, and the other broad and spacious; and there also he saw two gates, one gate broad on the broad way, and one gate narrow on the narrow way.

2 And outside the two gates there I saw a man seated upon a golden throne, and the appearance of that man was terrible, like unto that of the Lord. And I saw many souls being driven by angels and led in through the broad gate; and other souls I saw, few in number, that were being borne by angels through the narrow gate.

3 And when the marvellous being who sat upon the golden throne saw few entering in through the narrow gate, but many entering through the broad gate, straightway that marvellous man did pluck the hairs of his head and the sides of his beard, and hurled himself on the ground from his throne, weeping and wailing.

4 And when he saw many souls entering through the narrow gate, then he arose from the ground and sat upon his throne, rejoicing and exulting with great jubilation.

5 Then Abraham asked the chief-captain: My lord, chief-captain, who is this all-marvellous Man, who is adorned with such majesty, and sometimes weeps and wails, and sometimes rejoices and exults?

6 The spirit said: This is Adam, the first-created man, who is in such majesty, and he beholds the world, for all are sprung from him; and when he sees many souls entering through the narrow gate, then he rises and sits upon his throne, rejoicing and exulting jubilantly, because this narrow gate is that of the just, which leads unto life, and these that enter through it, enter into paradise.

7 And therefore the first-created, Adam, rejoices, because he sees the souls being saved. But when he sees many souls entering through the broad gate, then he plucks out the hairs of his head, and hurls himself on the ground, weeping and wailing bitterly.

8 For the broad gate is that of sinners, which leads to destruction and to everlasting punishment. Wherefore the first-created, Adam, falls from his throne, weeping and wailing for the destruction of sinners, for many are they that are perishing but few they that are being saved.

9 For in seven thousand scarce is there to be found one soul saved, that is righteous and undefiled.

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CHAPTER 12

✦

1 And while I was thus speaking, lo, two angels fiery in visage, and pitiless in intent, and harsh in looks, were even (now) driving on a thousand souls, pitilessly beating them with fiery lashes. And one soul the angel seized. And they drove all the souls into the broad gate towards destruction.

2 So we also followed the angels, and came within that broad gate, and in between the two gates stood a throne, dread in appearance, of dread crystal, flashing like unto fire, and upon it sat a wondrous Man, shining as the sun, like unto the Son of God.

3 Before him stood a table like crystal, all of gold and fine linen. And upon the table was lying a book, the thickness thereof six cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits, and on the right hand thereof and on the left stood two angels, holding paper, and ink, and pen.

4 And before the table sat an angel light-bearer, holding in his hand a balance, and on the left sat an angel, fiery, altogether pitiless and harsh, holding a trumpet in his hand, which contained within it all-devouring fire to test the sinners.

5 And the marvellous Man who was seated on the throne, himself judged and gave sentence to the souls. And the two angels on the right hand and on the left recorded. The one on the right hand recorded the righteousnesses, and the one of the left the sins.

6 And the one before the table, who held the balance, weighed the souls; and the fiery angel, who held the fire, tested the souls.

7 Then Abraham asked the chief-captain Michael: What is this which we behold? And the chief-captain said: These things which thou seest, holy Abraham, are the judgement and recompense.

8 And behold the angel who was holding the soul in his hand, brought it before the judge. And the judge said: Open me this book and find me the sins of this soul. And he opened the book and found its sins and its righteousnesses equally balanced; and he gave it neither to the testers nor to the saved, but set it in the midst.

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CHAPTER 13

✦

1 Then Abraham said: My lord chief-captain, who is this judge, most all-marvellous? and who are the recording angels? and who is the angel, like unto the sun, holding the balance? and who is the angel, the fiery one, holding the fire?

2 And the chief-captain said: Seest thou, most holy Abraham, the dread Man that sits upon the throne? This Man is the son of the first-created Adam who is called Abel, whom Cain, the wicked one, slew; and he sits thus to judge all creation, trying both righteous and sinners.

3 For God has said: I judge you not, but every man shall by man be judged. For this reason He has given to him judgement, to judge the world, until his great and glorious advent.

4 And then, O righteous Abraham, comes the perfect judgement and recompense, everlasting and irrevocable, which no one can question. For every man has sprung from the first-created, and therefore here first by his son all are judged.

5 And at the second advent they shall be judged by the twelve tribes of Israel, both every spirit and every creature. At the third time, by the Lord God of all shall they be judged; and thereupon the end of that judgement is near, and dreadful is that sentence, and there is none to release.

6 Thereupon the judgement and recompense of the world is made through three tribunals. And therefore a matter is not finally established by one or two witnesses, but every matter shall be established by three witnesses.

7 And the two angels, the one on the right, and the one on the left, these are they which record the sins and the righteousnesses. The one on the right hand records the righteousnesses, and the one on the left the sins.

8 And the angel who is like unto the sun, holding the balance in his hand, is Dokiel, the archangel, the just holder of the balance, and he weighs the righteousnesses and the sins with the righteousness of God.

9 And the fiery and pitiless angel, who is holding in his hand the fire, this is the archangel Puruel, who has authority over the fire, and tests the works of men through fire.

10 And if the fire shall burn up the work of any man, straightway the angel of judgement takes him and carries him away into the place of sinners, place of punishment most bitter; but if the fire shall try the work of any man without laying hold upon it, this man is justified, and the angel of righteousness takes him and carries him up to be saved in the lot of the just.

11 Thus, most just Abraham, all works among all men are tried by fire and by the balance.

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CHAPTER 14

✦

1 And Abraham said unto the chief-captain: My lord chief-captain, the soul which the angel was holding in his hand, why was it sentenced to be set in the midst?

2 Then said the chief-captain: Hear, just Abraham. Because the judge found that its sins and its righteousnesses were equal; so he committed it neither to condemnation nor to be saved, until what time the judge of all shall come.

3 Abraham said to the chief-captain: What is lacking to the soul for it to be saved? The chief-captain said: If it win one righteousness over and above its sins it enters into salvation.

4 Abraham said to the chief-captain: Come hither, chief-captain Michael, let us make a prayer on behalf of this soul, and see if God will hearken unto us. The chief-captain said: Amen, so be it.

5 Then they made prayer and supplication on behalf of the soul, and God heard them; and when they rose up from their intercession, they no more saw the soul standing there.

6 And Abraham said to the angel: Where is the soul which thou didst hold in the midst? And the angel said: It has been saved by thy righteous prayer, and behold, an angel light-bearer has taken it and carried it up into Paradise.

7 And Abraham said: I glorify the name of the most high God and His unfathomable mercy:

8 And Abraham said to the chief-captain: I pray thee, archangel, hear my supplications, and let us yet again call upon the Lord and supplicate His pity and beseech His mercy upon the souls of the sinners whom I once with evil purpose cursed and destroyed, and the earth swallowed up, and the beasts tore to pieces, and whom the fire devoured through my words.

9 Now know I that I have sinned before our Lord God. Come, Michael, chief-captain of the hosts above, come, let us call upon God with tears that he may forgive me my sin, and grant them unto me.

10 And the chief-captain hearkened unto him, and they made supplication before God.

11 When they had called upon Him for a long time a voice came from heaven saying: Abraham, Abraham, I have hearkened unto thy voice and thy supplication, and I forgive thee thy sin, and those whom thou thinkest I did destroy, them I have recalled, and have led into life by my extreme goodness.

12 Because for a season I have requited them in judgement. For those whom I destroy living upon the earth, in death will I not requite them.

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CHAPTER 15

✦

1 And the voice of the Lord said also unto the chief-captain: Michael, Michael, my Minister, turn back Abraham to his house, for behold his end is at hand, and the span of his life is fulfilled, so that he may make disposition concerning everything; and then do thou take him and bring him unto Me.

2 So the chief-captain turned back the chariot and the cloud, and brought Abraham to his house. And departing to his chamber he sat him down upon his couch.

3 And Sarah his wife came and embraced the feet of the spirit, and spake as a supplicant, saying: I give thee thanks, my lord, that thou hast brought back my lord Abraham; for behold we thought he had been taken up from us.

4 Then came Isaac his son and fell upon his neck; and in like manner all the men-slaves and women-slaves surrounded Abraham and embraced him, glorifying God.

5 And the spirit said unto him: Hearken, righteous Abraham, behold thy wife Sarah, behold too thy beloved son Isaac, behold too all thy men-servants and maid-servants arrayed about thee. Make disposition of all thy possessions, for the day is at hand in which thou art destined to depart from the body, and once again to come unto the Lord.

6 Then said Abraham: Has the Lord spoken, or dost thou of thine own will say these words? Then said the chief-captain: Harken, righteous Abraham; the Lord has commanded, and I tell it unto thee. Then said Abraham: I will not follow thee.

7 The chief-captain; when he heard this word, straightway went out from the presence of Abraham and went up to the heavens, and stood in the presence of God the Most High, and said:

8 Lord Almighty, behold, I have harkened unto Thy friend Abraham in all that he has said unto Thee, and I have fulfilled his petition. I have shown to him Thy dominion and all the land and sea beneath heaven. I have shown to him judgement and retribution through a cloud and a chariot; and again he says I follow thee not.

9 And the Most High said unto the angel, Is it even so that again my friend Abraham says thus, I follow thee not?

10 And the archangel said: Lord Almighty, thus he says, and I refrain from touching him, for from the beginning he is Thy friend, and all things pleasing in Thy sight he has done; neither is there any man like unto him upon the earth, no, not even Job the marvellous man. Wherefore I refrain from touching him. Command then, Immortal King, what shall be done.

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CHAPTER 16

✦

1 Then said the Most High: Call me hither Death, who is called the shameless face and pitiless glance.

2 So Michael the spirit went away and said unto Death, Come hither, the Lord of Creation, the Immortal King, calls thee.

3 Death, when he heard, shuddered and trembled, possessed with great cowardice; and he came with great fear, and stood before the unseen father, shuddering, groaning, and trembling, awaiting the command of the Lord.

4 So the unseen God said to Death: Come hither, thou bitter and cruel name of the world, hide thy fierceness, veil thy foulness, and cast off thy bitterness from thee, and gird around thee thy youth and all thy glory, and go down to Abraham my friend, and take him and lead him to me.

5 Yet even now command I thee not to terrify him, but take possession of him with coaxing, for he is my very friend.

6 When Death heard this, he went out from the presence of the Most High and girded about him a most glorious robe, and made his countenance like unto the sun, and became comely and blooming, passing the sons of men, having assumed the form of an archangel, with his cheeks flashing like fire, and he went away unto Abraham.

7 Now the righteous man Abraham (had) emerged from his chamber and was sitting beneath the trees of Mamre, holding his chin in his hand, and was expecting the coming of the archangel Michael.

8 And behold, a smell of sweet savour came to him, and a flashing of light, and turning round, Abraham saw Death, coming towards him in great glory and comeliness.

9 And Abraham rose up and went to meet him, for he thought he was the chief-captain of God, and seeing him Death did obeisance to him, saying: Hail, honoured Abraham, righteous soul, true friend of the Most High God, and companion of the holy angels!

10 And Abraham said unto Death, Hail, thou that appearest and in form art as the sun, most glorious helper, light-bringer, marvellous man, whence comes thy glory unto us, and who art thou, and whence hast thou come?

11 So Death said: Most righteous Abraham, behold, I tell thee the truth. I am the bitter cup of death.

12 Abraham said to him: Nay, but thou art the fairness of the world, thou art the glory and the beauty of angels and of men, thou art more comely than every form, and sayest thou I am the bitter cup of death, and not rather, I am more comely than every good thing?

13 But Death said: I speak the truth unto thee, what God has named me, that I tell thee. And Abraham said: Wherefore hast thou come hither? And Death said: For thy holy soul am I come.

14 Then Abraham said: I know what thou meanest, but I will not follow thee. And Death was silent, and answered him not a word.

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CHAPTER 17

✦

1 Then Abraham rose up and went to his house, and Death too followed him thither. And Abraham went up into his chamber, and Death went up with him. And Abraham reclined upon his couch, and Death came and sat beside his feet.

2 And Abraham said: Depart, depart from me, for I am minded to rest me on my couch. Death said: I depart not until what time I take thy breath from thee.

3 Abraham said unto him: By the immortal God I charge thee speak unto me the truth. Art thou Death? Death said unto him: I am Death: I am he that blights the world.

4 Abraham said: I pray thee, since thou art Death, tell me, comest thou thus unto all in such comeliness, glory, and fairness?

5 Death said: Nay, my lord Abraham; for thy righteousnesses and the measureless sea of thy hospitality, and the greatness of thy love towards God have become a crown upon my head, and in beauty, and in great peace and winsomeness come I to the righteous, but to sinners I come in great corruption and fierceness and very great bitterness, and with a fierce and pitiless glance.

6 Abraham said: I beseech thee, harken unto me, and show me thy fierceness, and all thy corruption and bitterness. Death said: Thou wilt not be able to behold my fierceness, most righteous Abraham.

7 Abraham said: Yea, I shall be able to behold all thy fierceness, because of the name of the living God, for the power of my God which is in heaven is with me.

8 Then Death put off all his beauty and fairness, and all his glory, and the form that was like unto the sun, wherewith he was clad, and girded about him his robe of tyranny, and made his countenance gloomy, and fiercer than all manner of wild beasts, and more foul than every kind of foulness;

9 and he showed Abraham seven fiery serpents' heads, and fourteen faces, of the most burning fire, and of great fierceness, and a countenance like unto darkness, and a most gloomy countenance of a viper, and a countenance of a most horrible precipice, and a countenance fiercer than an asp, and a countenance of a dread lion, and a countenance of a horned serpent (cerastes) and of a basilisk.

10 He showed him too a countenance of a fiery sword, and a scimitar-bearing countenance, and a countenance of lightning that flashed forth lightning fearfully, and an echo of fearful thunder.

11 He showed him too another countenance of a fierce, billowy sea, and a fierce river plashing, and a monstrous three-headed serpent, and a wine-cup mingled with poisons; and in a word, he showed him great fierceness and bitterness unendurable, and every deadly disease as of the odour of death.

12 And from the great fierceness and bitterness there died servants and maid-servants in number about seven thousand. And righteous Abraham came into a deadly faintness, so that his spirit failed him.

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CHAPTER 18

✦

1 When the all-holy Abraham had thus seen these things he said to Death: I beseech thee, all-destructive Death, hide thy fierceness, and gird about thee thy beauty, and the shape which thou hadst before. Straightway Death hid his fierceness and girded about him his beauty which he had before.

2 And Abraham said to Death: Why hast thou done this, that thou hast slain all my men-servants and maid-servants? Did God for this purpose send thee hither to-day? Death said: Not so, my lord Abraham, it is not as thou sayest, but on thy account was I sent hither.

3 Abraham said to Death: How, then, have these died? Has not the Lord commanded it? Death said: Believe, most righteous Abraham, that this also is marvellous, that thou also wast not carried off with them.

4 Yet speak I unto thee the truth. For if the right hand of God had not been with thee in that hour, thou too wouldest have had to depart from this life.

5 Then said righteous Abraham: Now I know that I have come into a deadly faintness, so that my spirit fails. Yet, I beseech thee, all-destructive Death, since my servants have died untimely, let us beseech here the Lord our God, that He will hearken unto us and raise up them that have died untimely through thy fierceness. And Death said: Amen, so be it.

6 So Abraham rose up and fell upon the face of the earth and prayed, and Death with him. And God sent a breath of life upon the dead, and they were quickened with life. Then the righteous Abraham gave glory unto God.

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CHAPTER 19

✦

1 And going up into his chamber he lay down; and Death came also and stood before him. And Abraham said unto him: Depart from me, for I am minded to rest because my spirit is in (a state of) weariness. Death said: I depart not from thee until I take thy soul.

2 And Abraham, with harsh countenance and angry glance, said to Death: Who has commanded thee to say this? Thou sayest these words of thyself boastfully and I will not follow thee until the chief-captain Michael come to me and I shall go away with him, yet even this do I tell thee:

3 If thou desirest that I follow thee, explain unto me all thy changing shapes—the seven fiery heads of the serpents, and what means the countenance of the precipice, and what the sharp sword, and the raging river, and the turgid tempestuous sea. Teach me too concerning the unendurable thunder and the fearful lightning, and what was the ill-savouring cup mingled with poisons. Teach me concerning all.

4 And Death said: Harken, O righteous Abraham, for seven ages do I ravage the world, and drive down all into hell, kings and rulers, sick and poor, slaves and freemen, do I send to the depth of hell. Therefore showed I thee the seven heads of the serpents.

5 And the countenance of the fire I showed unto thee because many are burned to death by fire, and through the countenance of fire they see death.

6 The face of the precipice I showed thee, because many men die coming down from high trees or fearful cliffs, and swoon and die, and they see death in the shape of a fearful precipice.

7 The face of a sword I showed thee because many fall by the sword in wars, and see death in a sword.

8 The face of a mighty surging river showed I to thee because many are snatched away by a flood of many waters, and are carried off by very mighty rivers, and are choked and die, and see death untimely.

9 And the face of the rude, rough sea I showed thee because many are shipwrecked in a sea by a mighty wave and are overwhelmed, and see death as the sea.

10 And the unendurable thunder and the fearful lightning I showed thee because many men, when they encounter a season of (divine) wrath, at the onset of unendurable thunder and fearful lightning suffer violent death, and thus behold death [as unendurable thunder and fearful lightning].

11 I showed thee also venomous beasts, vipers and basilisks, leopards and lions, and lions' whelps and bears, and vipers—in a word, I showed thee the face of every wild beast, most righteous one, because many men are made away with by wild beasts, while others, being breathed upon by venomous snakes, serpents and vipers, and horrid reptiles and basilisks, breathe their last.

12 I showed thee also deadly cups filled with poison because many men are given poisons to drink by other men, and in a moment unexpectedly are carried off.

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CHAPTER 20

✦

1 Then said Abraham: I beseech thee tell me: is there an untimely death? Death said: Verily, verily I say unto thee as God's truth there are seventy-two deaths. One is the just death that has its allotted time. And many men (there are who) within one hour go to death, and are consigned to the grave.

2 Behold, I have told thee all thou hast asked. Now say I to thee, most just Abraham, put away every device, and leave thy questioning once and for all, and come follow me as the God and judge of all has commanded me.

3 Abraham said to Death: Depart from me yet a little while, that I may rest on my couch, for I am in great despondency. Ever since I have seen thee with my eyes my strength has failed me, and all the limbs of my flesh are as a weight of lead, and my breath labours distressfully. Depart for a little, for I have said, I cannot bear to see thy form.

4 Then came Isaac his son and fell upon his breast weeping. And his wife Sarah, too, came and embraced his feet, lamenting bitterly. And all his slaves and women-slaves came and stood around his couch, greatly lamenting.

5 Then came Abraham into indifference of death, and Death said to Abraham: Come, embrace my right hand, and let cheerfulness and life and strength come to thee. For Death deceived Abraham; and he embraced his hand, and straightway his soul clave to the hand of Death.

6 And straightway Michael the archangel stood by him with a host of angels, and they raised his precious soul in their hands in a cloth divinely woven, and they tended the body of the just Abraham with exquisite ointments and perfumes until the third day after his death; and they buried him in the promised land, by the oak of Mamre;

7 but the angels escorted his precious soul, and ascended into heaven singing the hymn of the "Thrice-holy" to the Lord God of all; and they set it to adore the God and Father.

8 And after much praising and glorifying unto the Lord, and when Abraham had adored, there came the pure voice of the God and Father, saying thus: Uplift, then, my friend Abraham into Paradise, where are the tabernacles of my righteous ones, and the abodes of my holy ones, Isaac and Jacob, in his bosom, where is no toil, neither grief nor mourning; but peace and exultation, and life everlasting.

9 [Let us, too, my beloved brethren, imitate the hospitality of the patriarch Abraham, and let us gain his virtuous behaviour, that we may be counted worthy of eternal life, glorifying the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: His be the glory and the power for ever. Amen.]

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