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The Book of Abraham - Its Genuineness Established, Chapter II

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Abstract: Abraham's early life in Ur. Human Sacrifices. The causes which led Abraham to leave Chaldea. Confirmatory testimony of Joshua, Josephus, the Book of Judith, etc.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

MILLENNIAL STAR.

“HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD, O YE NATIONS, AND DECLARE IT IN THE ISLES AFAR OFF, AND SAY, HE THAT SCATTERETH ISRAEL WILL GATHER HIM, AND KEEP HIM, AS A SHEPHERD DOTH HIS FLOCK.”—*Jeremiah xxxi, 10.*

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THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM—ITS GENUINENESS ESTABLISHED.

BY ELDER GEORGE REYNOLDS.

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CHAP. II.

Abraham's early life in Ur. Human Sacrifices. The causes which led Abraham to leave Chaldea. Confirmatory testimony of Joshua, Josephus, the Book of Judith, etc.

Of the early history of Abraham's life very little is said in the Book of Genesis. The mere fact is stated that his father's dwelling-place was in Ur of the Chaldees, where the Patriarch married his kinswoman Sarai, where also his brother Haran died.* After these events, it is recorded, Terah, his father, took a portion of the family and removed to Haran, where he dwelt until the day of his death, but the causes that led to his removal are not given. The next chapter opens with the command of God to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred," etc., but the reasons why God gave him that com-

mand are not mentioned, not even hinted at. The Book of Abraham supplies many interesting details on this point not to be found in the history given by Moses, and that the details thus supplied are consistent with the condition of life in Egypt and Chaldea at that time, and in many respects corroborated by the writings and sayings of men living in later ages, it now becomes our business to prove.

Abraham states, in the second paragraph, into which his book has been divided, that his fathers had "turned from their righteousness and from the holy commandments which the Lord their God had given unto them, unto the worship of the gods of the heathens," and that "they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen in offering up their children unto their dumb idols." In the next paragraph it is written, "Now at this time it was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to offer up upon the altar which had been built

* Genesis, chap. xi.

in the land of Chaldea, for the offering unto these strange gods, men, women and children." A little further on Abraham writes, "And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me that they might slay me also. *

* * And as they lifted up their hands upon me that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with a vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands, and his voice was unto me, Abraham! Abraham! behold my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and I have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father's house, and from all thy kinsfolk, into a strange land that thou knowest not of, and this because they have turned their hearts away from me, to worship the god of Elkenah, and the god of Lebnah, the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; therefore I am come down to visit them, and to destroy him who hath lifted up his hand against thee, Abraham, my son, to take away thy life."

To substantiate the truthfulness of the above statements, we ought to be able to bring testimony in favor of four points:

1st. That human sacrifice was practiced in Egypt and adjacent countries in Abraham's day.

2nd. That Abraham's fathers were idolaters.

3rd. That he was persecuted by his fellow countrymen because he opposed their idolatry.

4th. That God commanded Abraham to leave Chaldea, because his father's house had turned their hearts away from Him to the worship of strange gods.

If the above points can be proven by other testimony than that of the Book of Abraham, we think we have strong evidence that the record is historically correct. Admit this, and we have taken a very decided step towards acknowledging the authenticity of the entire work. For it is very improbable, nay, almost absurd, to imagine that Joseph Smith, with

his limited range of ancient historical knowledge, could have produced a work of this kind that would be historically correct. Had the work been a forgery, that is, had it originated with Joseph, the probabilities are overwhelming that he would have made some egregious blunders, which could easily have been detected, and the whole affair, from beginning to end, proven a tissue of falsehoods.

Firstly, then, we have to show that human sacrifices were offered to the strange gods of the heathen in Abraham's day, more particularly in Egypt, as it is represented that it was the priest of Pharaoh who officiated on the occasions mentioned by the Patriarch.

To substantiate this point we shall make but one quotation, as its author mentions so many other historians, ancient and modern, as his authorities, that in quoting it, we call upon them to become our witnesses also. It is taken from Dissertation III, Whiston's Josephus, and is as follows: "It is evident from Sanchoniatho, Manetho, Pausanias, Diodorus, Siculus, Philo, Plutarch, and Porphyry, that such [human] sacrifices were frequent both in Phoenecia and Egypt, and that long after the days of Abraham, as Sir John Marsham and Bishop Cumberland have fully proved; nay, that in other places [though not in Egypt] this cruel purpose continued long after Abraham."

We may here draw attention to the statement that this cruel practice did not continue in Egypt after Abraham's day, owing, we doubt not, as will hereafter be shown, to the great influence that that Patriarch wielded in later life with Pharaoh and his subjects in favor of a perfect way of serving heaven.

Again, that Abraham's fathers were idolaters, though the book of Genesis carries no such inference, as also that Abraham was commanded by Jehovah to leave his father's house because of this idolatry, is proven, we consider, by the following extracts. We will first turn to the book of Judith of the Apocrypha, chap. v, verses 6-9. It is there represented that when the invading hosts of the King of Ninevah were approaching the land of Israel,

the commanding general made some enquiries with regard to the history of its people. Then Achior, the captain of all the sons of Ammon, in answer to his inquiries, replied: "This people are descended of the Chaldeans, and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldea. For they left the way of their ancestors, and worshiped the God of heaven, the God whom they knew, so they cast them out from the face of their gods, and they fled into Mesopotamia, and sojourned there many days."

From the above it is very evident that the facts relating to the "call of Abraham" were not only known to the Hebrews but to the people of the surrounding nations also. As Achior was one in high authority among the sons of Ammon, his words under the peculiar circumstances in which they were uttered, would carry great weight, and, if unauthorized, would meet with severe criticism and probable contradiction.

But the question is for ever set at rest by the words of a greater than Achior. Joshua, the valiant, godfearing leader of Israel, shortly before his death, gathered the people together and rehearsed in their hearing the great things the Lord had beforetime done for them. It is written, that at this time, "Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even

* Joshua, chap. xxiv, 2, 3.

Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, and they served other Gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed." And again,† "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose ye this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Further evidence than this we deem unnecessary, as here we have the end of all controversy, even the word of the Lord on the matter.

We cannot prove, directly from the writings of any authors at our disposal, that an attempt was made to take Abraham's life for righteousness sake; but we can show from the "Antiquities" of Josephus that he was maltreated for that cause. This historian, after referring to the doctrines taught by Abraham, regarding God, writes, "for which doctrines, when the Chaldeans and other people of Mesopotamia, raised a tumult against him, he thought fit to leave that country; and at the command and by the assistance of God, he came and lived in the land of Canaan."‡

† Joshua, chap. xxiv, 14, 15.

‡ Antiquities, book i, chap. vii.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A VOICE FROM THE VALLEY.—No. 1.

BY ELDER JOSEPH L. BARFOOT.

That must be an uncomfortable sort of a faith which has to seek for the negative consolation found in non-belief in God; which seeks for an assurance that there is no hereafter as a consequence, no responsibility for the deeds done in the body. Were it not that men are so constituted that

it is natural to them to have faith in a deity and an innate sense of morality, there would not be so much difficulty in resting satisfied with what is called "Rationalism," in contradistinction to Religion, by those who gratuitously assert that religion is not rational. But that which is lacking in assurance