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ASCENSION OF MOSES

CHAPTER 1-2

<The first lines of this book are non-extant.>

2 [And it came to pass in the 120th year of the life of Moses,] which is the 2,500th year after the creation of the earth, 3 but according to those who live in the East, the number is the [...] and [...],th, and the [...]th after the departure from Phoinike, 4 when the people left; after the exodus which had been led by Moses, until Amman across the Jordan, 5 this is the book of the prophecy which was given by Moses according to the book of Deuteronomy.¹ 6 when Moses called to himself Joshua son of Nun, a man approved by the Lord, 7 in order that Joshua might become the successor for the people and for the tent of the testimony which contained all the holy objects, 8 and in order that he might lead the people into the land which had been promised to their fathers, 9 the land which Moses, in the tent, had declared by the covenant and the oath that God would give the land through Joshua.

10 Therefore, Moses spoke to Joshua, "Keep this word, and promise me that you will² do everything which has been commanded in such a way that you will be blameless. 11 Therefore, this is what the Lord of the universe has decreed. 12 For he created the universe on behalf of his people; 13 but from the beginning of the universe, he did not make this design of creation openly known, in order that the nations might be found guilty, yes, that they might abjectly declare themselves guilty by their own deliberations.

14 "Therefore, he³ has designed and devised me, I, who have been appointed⁴ before the founding of the world, to be a mediator of his covenant. 15 But now, I will reveal it to you, because the years of my life have come to an end; and, in the presence of the entire community, I am going to the resting-place of my fathers. 16 But take this writing, so that, later, you will remember how to preserve the books which I will entrust to you. 17 And you will arrange them, and anoint them with cedar, and deposit them in earthenware jars in the place which God has chosen from the beginning of the creation of the universe, 18 a place where his name may be called upon until the day of recompense when the Lord will visit them in the consummation of the end of the days.

2.1 "But now, through you, they will enter into the land which God determined and promised to give to their fathers. 2 And in that land, you will bless them, and give to each of them their individual portions. And you will firmly-establish a kingdom for them; and, with discernment and righteousness, you will release local magistrates in accordance with the will of the Lord. 3 [...], however, after they will have entered into their land in the [...]th year, and afterwards, they will be ruled by leaders and princes for eighteen years; and during a period of nineteen years, the ten tribes will separate themselves.

4 "And the twelve tribes will move the tent of his testimony to the place where the God of the heavens will build a place⁵ for his sanctuary. And the two holy tribes will be settled there. 5 But the ten tribes will establish for themselves their own kingdom with its own ordinances. 6 And the two tribes will offer sacrifices in the chosen place for twenty years. 7 And seven will strongly build the walls, and I will protect nine. But four will violate the covenant of the Lord and defile the oath⁶ which the Lord made with them. 8 And they will offer their sons to foreign gods, and they will set up idols in the sanctuary⁷ in order to worship them. 9 And in the house of the Lord they will perpetrate idolatry, and carve images of all sorts of beasts—many abominations.

CHAPTER 3-4

"And in those days, a king from the east will come against them, and his cavalry will overrun their land. 2 And he will burn their city with fire, along with the holy temple of the Lord; and he will carry off all the holy vessels. 3 And he will exile all the people, and will lead them to his own land; yes, he will take the two tribes with him.

4 "Then the two tribes, considering themselves like a lioness in a dusty plain, hungry and parched, will call upon the ten tribes; 5 and they will loudly declare, 'Righteous and holy is the Lord! For in the same way that you sinned, likewise we, with our little ones, have now been led out with you!'

6 "Then, hearing the reproachful words of the two tribes, the ten tribes will lament 7 and will say, 'What will we do with you, brothers? 8 Has not this tribulation come upon the whole house of Israel?'

9 "Then all of the tribes will lament, crying out to the heavens and saying, 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, remember your covenant

which you made with them, and the oath which you swore to them by yourself, that their seed would never fail in the land which you have given them!'

10 "Then, in that day, they will remember me, saying from tribe to tribe, and each man to his neighbor, 11 'Is this not what was made known to us in prophecies by Moses, who suffered many things in Egypt, and at the Sea of Reeds, and in the wilderness for forty years: 12 when he solemnly called the heavens and the earth as witnesses against us in order that we would not transgress God's commandments of which he had become the mediator for us? 13 Behold, these things which have befallen us after that time are in accordance with his admonition, as he declared to us at that time; yes, behold, these things have been confirmed, even to the extent that we have been led away as captives into the land of the East.' 14 And they will be in bondage for about seventy-seven years.

4.1 "Then one who is over them will come upon the scene; and he will stretch forth his hands, and bow his knees, and pray for them, saying, 2 'Lord of all, king on the lofty throne, who rules the age, and who has willed that this people should be a chosen people for you; yes, who has willed to be called their God according to the covenant which you made with their fathers. 3 And yet, they, along with their women and children, have gone as captives into a foreign land, and are surrounded by the gates of strangers, and there is great majesty in that place. 4 Have regard and compassion for them, O Lord of the heavens.'

5 "Then God will remember them, due to the covenant which he made with their fathers; and he will openly show his compassion. 6 And in those times, he will inspire a king to have pity on them and send them off to their own land and country. 7 Then some portions of the tribes will arise, and they will come to their appointed place, and they will strongly build its walls. 8 And the two tribes will remain steadfast in their former faith, sorrowful and sighing because they will not be able to offer sacrifices to the Lord of their fathers. 9 And the ten tribes will grow and spread out among the nations during the time of their captivity.

CHAPTER 5-6

"And when the times of chastisement come near and punishment arises through the kings (who share in their crimes, yet punish them), 2 then they themselves will be divided as to the truth. 3 Consequently, the word has come to pass:

They will turn aside from righteousness and approach iniquity,
and they will pollute the house of their worship with the
customs of the nations,
and they will go a whoring after foreign gods.

"4 For they will not follow the truth of God, but some of them will pollute the high altar with the very offerings which they place before the Lord. They are not priests, but slaves, yes, sons of slaves. 5 For in those times, those who are the leaders, their teachers, will become admirers of avaricious persons and accept gifts; and they will pervert righteousness by accepting bribes. 6 Therefore, their city and the full-extent of their dwelling-places will be filled with crimes and iniquities. They will have judges in their midst who will act with impiety toward the Lord and will judge as each one pleases.

6.1 "Then powerful kings will rise over them, and they will be called priests of the Most High God. They will perform great impiety in the Holy of Holies. 2 And an insolent king, who will not be of a priestly family, will succeed them. He will be a man rash and perverse, and he will judge them as they deserve. 3 And he will shatter their leaders with the sword, and will do this to each one⁸ in secret places so that no one will know where their bodies are. 4 He will kill both the old and the young, and will show mercy to no one.

5 "Then the fear of him will be bitter to them in their land. 6 And for thirty-four years, he will execute judgments upon them as the Egyptians had done, and he will punish them. 7 And he will beget children who will reign after him for shorter periods of time. 8 After his death, a powerful king of the West will come into their land, and he will subdue them. 9 And he will take away captives, and he will burn a part of their temple with fire. He will crucify some of them around their colony.

CHAPTER 7-9

"And when this has taken place, the times will quickly come to an end. 2 [...] the four hours [...] nine tribes [...] three [...] seven [...] in the third part of two [...] 3 And pestilent and impious men will rule over them, who represent themselves as being teachers.⁹ 4 And these men will arouse the wrath of their souls, for they will be deceitful men, pleasing only themselves, false in every way imaginable, and who love feasts at any hour of the day—devouring, gluttonous [...]

5 [[Several non-extant lines are missing here.]]

¹ most scholars consider this to be an obvious late interpolation

² possible emendation "[Be strong] and of a good courage, so that you may"

³ Lat / Gk "God"

⁴ Gk / Lat "prepared"

⁵ emendation / manuscript "an iron"

⁶ emendation / manuscript "end"

⁷ emendation / manuscript "idols on stage"

⁸ possible emendation "and will exterminate them"

⁹ possible emendation "righteous"

6 “But in reality, they consume *the goods of the poor*, saying that their acts are grounded on compassion, 7 *while in fact they are simply* exterminators, deceitfully seeking to conceal themselves so that they will not be recognized as completely impious on account of *the lawlessness and iniquity which they commit* from sunrise to sunset, saying, 8 ‘We will have feasts and luxury, eating and drinking; and we suppose that we are princes.’

9 “And though their hands and their minds will touch impure things, yet their mouths will speak enormous things, and they will even say, 10 ‘Do not touch me, lest you pollute me in *the position I occupy* [...]’

8.1 “And suddenly revenge and wrath will come upon them, such as has never happened to them from *the creation* till that time, when he will stir up against them a king of *the kings of the earth* and one who has supreme authority, who will crucify those who confess their circumcision. 2 And those who kill¹⁰ it, he will torture and hand them over to be led to prison in chains. 3 And their women will be given to *the gods of the nations*, and their young sons will be cut by physicians in order to bring forward their foreskins. 4 And others among them will be punished by tortures, and by fire, and by sword; and they will be compelled to publicly bear idols *which are no less* polluted *than* those that contain them. 5 And likewise, they will be compelled by their torturers to enter into their secret place, where they will be compelled to outrageously revile *the word*, and finally to revile both their laws and what they had placed upon their own altar.

9.1 “Then even as he is speaking, there will be a man from *the tribe of Levi*, whose name is Taxo. He, having seven sons, will speak earnestly to them, 2 ‘See my sons, behold a second punishment has befallen *the people*; cruel, impure, going beyond all bounds of mercy, and *even exceeding* the former one. 3 For which nation or which province or which people, of those which have done many crimes against *the Lord*, have suffered such evils as *those which* have covered us? 4 Now, therefore, my sons, heed me. For if you investigate, you will surely know that *our fathers* and their forefathers never tempted God by transgressing his commandments. 5 Yes, you will surely know that this is our strength. And this is what we will do: 6 We must fast for a three-day period; and on *the fourth day*, we will go into a cave, which is in *the open country*. And there, let us die rather than transgress *the commandments of the Lord of lords, the God of our fathers*. 7 For if we do this, and do die, our blood will be avenged before *the Lord*.’

CHAPTER 10

“And then his kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation,
and then *the Slanderer* will have an end;
yes, sorrow will be led away with him.

2 Then *the hands of the messenger* will be filled,
who is appointed as chief;

yes, at once he will avenge them of their enemies.

3 For *the Heavenly One* will arise from his kingly throne;
yes, he will go forth from his holy habitation
with indignation and wrath on behalf of his sons.

4 And *the earth* will tremble; it will be shaken even to its ends,
and *the high mountains* will be made low;
yes, they will be shaken; and they will fall as enclosed valleys.

5 And *the sun* will not give light,
and *the horns of the moon* will flee in darkness;
yes, they will be broken in pieces.

And it will be turned wholly into blood;
yes, even *the circle of the stars* will be thrown into disarray.

6 And *the sea* will return all *the way to the abyss*,
and *the sources of waters* will fail;
yes, *the rivers* will vanish away.

7 For God Most High will surge forth, *the Eternal One* alone;
and in full view, he will come to work vengeance on *the nations*;
yes, he will destroy all their idols.

8 Then you will be happy, O Israel!
And you will mount up above *the necks and the wings of an eagle*;
yes, all things will be fulfilled.

9 And God will raise you to *the heights*;
yes, he will fix you firmly in *the heaven of the stars*,
in *the place of their habitations*.

10 And you will look down from on high;
yes, you will see your enemies on *the earth*.

And recognizing them, you will rejoice,
and you will give thanks;
yes, you will confess your creator.

11 “But you, Joshua *son of Nun*, keep these words and this book; 12 for from my death, my ascension, until his coming there will pass 250 times. 13 And this is

the course of events which come to pass, until they will be completed. 14 But I will be asleep with my fathers. 15 Therefore, you, Joshua *son of Nun*, be strong; God has chosen you to be my successor in *the same covenant*.”

CHAPTER 11

And when Joshua heard *the words of Moses* (this is what was written in his testament), everything which he had said, he tore his garments and fell at Moses’ feet.¹¹ 2 And Moses, though he wept with him, encouraged him.

3 And Joshua answered him, saying, 4 “Why are you consoling¹² me, master Moses? And how can I be consoled¹³ concerning that bitter message which you spoke (which has come out of your mouth, a message full of tears and lamentation), that you are departing from this people? 5 What place will receive you? 6 Or where will *the marker of your tomb* be? 7 Or who, as a man, will dare to move your body from place to place? 8 For accordingly, there are tombs in *the earth* for everyone who dies; but your tomb is from *the rising to the setting of the sun*, and from *the south to the limits of the north—the entire universe* is your tomb.

9 “Now, master, you are going away; and who is going to sustain this people? 10 Or who is going to have compassion on them, and *who* is going to be a leader for them on *their way*? 11 Or who is going to pray for them, not omitting a single day, in order that I may lead them into *the land of their forefathers*?¹⁴ 12 Therefore, how can I be guardian of this people, as a father is to his only son; or as a mother is to her virgin daughter *who* is being prepared to be given to a husband; or as a mother who is disquieted, guarding her daughter’s body from *the sun*, and *seeing to it* that *the daughter’s feet* are not without shoes when she runs upon *the ground*? 13 And from-where will I supply them with food, since they desire and drink *as much* as they please? 14 For there were 600,000 of them; for they have, by your prayers, increased so much, master Moses. 15 And what wisdom and intelligence do I have, either to judge or give an opinion in *the house of the Lord*?

16 “Moreover, when *the kings of the Amorites* hear of *your death*, and believe that *the holy spirit* is no longer with us—the spirit which is worthy of *the Lord*, manifold and incomprehensible, master of leaders, faithful in all things, *the divine prophet for the universe, the perfect teacher* in this age—they will believe that they can now storm us; they will say, ‘Let us go up against them. 17 If *the enemy* has, even once, acted impiously against their lord, they now have no advocate who will bear messages to *the Lord* on their behalf as did Moses *the great messenger*. He, every hour, both day and night, had his knees fixed to *the earth*, praying and looking steadfastly toward Him who governs *the whole earth* with mercy and righteousness, reminding *the Lord of the covenant of their fathers, and the resolute oath*.’ 18 They will say the following, ‘He is no longer with them. Therefore, let us go up and crush them from *the face of the earth*.’ 19 Therefore, what will happen to these people, master Moses?”

CHAPTER 12

And when he had finished *speaking these words*, Joshua again fell at *the feet of Moses*. 2 And Moses grasped his hand and raised him into *the seat* before him; and responding to him, he said, 3 “Joshua, do not despise *yourself*, but free your mind from care and pay attention to my words. 4 All *the nations in the universe*, God has created, along with us. And he has foreseen both them and us from *the beginning of the creation of the universe* even to *the end of the age*. And nothing, even to *the least thing*, has been overlooked by him. But *rather*, he has seen everything, and he is *the cause of everything*. 5 [*The Lord*] has foreseen everything which might come to exist in *the universe*; and, behold, they have come to pass [...6 *The Lord* has] established me for them, and appointed for them and for their sins, that I should pray and make-supplication for them. 7 Yet, *this is* not on account of either my strength or weakness, but simply that his mercies and longsuffering have descended upon me.

8 “For I say to you, Joshua: it is not on account of *the piety of this people* that you will drive out *the nations*. 9 However, everything of *the heavens, the firmaments of the world*, have been created and approved by God, and are under *the ring*¹⁵ of his right hand. 10 Therefore, those who truly fulfill his commandments will flourish and will prosper. 11 But those who sin by disregarding *the commandments* will deprive themselves of *the good things* which were previously mentioned, and they will be punished by *the nations* with many tortures; 12 but it is not possible for *the nations* to completely drive them out or to completely leave them. 13 For God, who has foreseen all things in *the ages*, will go forth; and his covenant has been established, and by *the oath* which [...]”

<An indeterminate number of non-extant lines are missing here.>

¹¹ emendation / manuscript “at my feet”

¹² emendation / manuscript “concealing”

¹³ emendation / manuscript “concealed”

¹⁴ emendation / manuscript “of the Arabians”

¹⁵ emendation / manuscript “nothing”

¹⁰ possible emendation “conceal”

CONCLUSION

<*The remainder of this book is non-extant; but a possible summary has been composed using the surviving fragments, most which derive from the quotations of various early writers who had this book still in their possession.*>

And Moses said to Joshua son of Nun, “Let us go up into *the* mountain.” And when they had gone up, Moses saw *the* land of promise and said to him, “Go down to *the* people and tell them that Moses is dead.”

And Joshua began to go down toward *the* people, but Moses came to *the* end of his life. When Moses came-to-his-end on *the* mountain, Sammael *the* slanderer tried to bring his body down to *the* people so that they might make it *a* god, but Michael the chief-messenger, commanded by God, came with other messengers to take it, in order to have it buried. But Sammael would not allow him to remove *the* body to be buried. Wishing to deceive, he resisted him, and they argued.

The slanderer said, “*The* body is mine, for I am *the* master of material things.”

And the messenger said, “For by a spirit of his which is holy, we were all created; and from *the* face of God, his spirit went forth and *the* world became.”

The slanderer also said, “God has lied by bringing Moses into *the* land which he swore he should not enter.”

Michael answered and said, “For *the* serpent, which you inspired, was *the* cause of *the* transgression of Adam and Eva.”

The slanderer also slandered Moses, proclaiming, “Moses is *a* murderer; he struck *a* man in Egypt and hid him in *the* sand.” And because of this, the slanderer would not allow him to receive the honorable burial.

Michael the chief-messenger did not tolerate the revilement against him. Yet, since he lacked authority, he dared not bring *a* reviling judgment against him; instead, he declared to the slanderer, “I wish that *the* Lord would rebuke you, slanderer!”

Then Michael prayed to God. And *the* Lord, in answer, sent thunder and lightning out of *the* heavens. And so *the* slanderer, being defeated, suddenly took flight and disappeared.

It seemed that, then, some cloud or shining light came upon *the* place, obscuring it and walling it off from *the* onlookers, so that they might not know *the* location of his grave. But Joshua son of Nun saw this spectacle from above, when he, along with Caleb, was lifted up by a spirit.

Two Moseses became visible: indeed, one was alive in a spirit; but *the* other was dead in *the* body. Indeed, *the* one went along with the messengers as their companion, where *a* new name was given to him in *the* heavens: Melchi. But *the* other, by *the* command of God, was removed by *the* chief-messenger Michael and committed to *the* earth, being honored with a burial in the ravines on the mountains, where Michael buried him with his *own* hands. And the messengers who had prepared the body of Moses for entombing were not made unclean¹⁶ by touching the holy body.

Instead, both Joshua and Caleb did not similarly behold this. Instead, indeed, one came-down with greater speed, (as if *the* weight he carried was greater); while *the* other, on descending after him, subsequently described the glory which he was beholding, (since, being purer than *the* other, he was able to perceive more).¹⁷

POSSIBLE FRAGMENTS

Possible Fragment #1 (Gelasios Kyzikenos: Church History 2:17:18)

And in *the* book of *the* mystic words of Moses, Moses himself prophesied about David and Solomon. About Solomon he foresaid *the* following, “And God will pour forth upon him wisdom and righteousness and full experience, *and* he will build the house of God,” and what follows.

Possible Fragment #2 (Clemens of Alexandria)

This is also how Moses names *the* virtue of *the* messenger Michael, by *a* messenger near to himself and of lowest grade. *The* like also we find in *the* holy prophets; but to Moses *a* messenger appeared near and at hand. Moses heard him and spoke to him manifestly, face to face.

¹⁶ literally “common”

¹⁷ parenthetical clauses may be comments made by *the* quoter, rather than part of *the* original text