

The Apocalypse of Zephaniah

A And a spirit took me and brought me up into the fifth heaven. And I saw angels who are called "lords." and the diadem was set upon them in the Holy Spirit, and the throne of each of them was sevenfold more than the light of the rising sun.

Sahidic fragment

The seer's vision of a soul in torment.

I saw a soul which five thousand angels punished and guarded. They took it to the East and they brought it to the West. They beat its . . . they gave it a hundred . . . lashes for each one daily. I was afraid and I cast myself upon my face so that my joints dissolved. The angel helped me. He said to me, "Be strong, O one who will triumph, and prevail so that you will triumph over the accuser and you will come up from Hades." And after I arose I said, "Who is this whom they are punishing?" He said to me, "This is a soul which was found in its lawlessness." And before it attained to repenting it was visited, and taken out of its body. Truly, I, Zephaniah, saw these things in my vision.

The scene in a broad place.

And the angel of the Lord went with me. I saw a great broad place, thousands of thousands surrounded it on its left side and myriads of myriads on its right side. The form of each one was different. Their hair was loose like that belonging to women. Their teeth were like the teeth of . . .

Akhmimic Text

Fragment dealing with burial.

. . . dead. We will bury him like any man. Whenever he dies, we will carry him out playing the cithara before him and chanting psalms and odes over his body.

Scenes from above the seer's city.

Now I went with the angel of the Lord, and he took me up all my city. There was nothing before my eyes. Then I saw twomen walking together on one road. I watched them as they talked. And, moreover, I also saw two women grinding together at a mill. And I watche them as they talked. And I also saw two upon a bed, each one of the acting for their. . . upon a bed. And I saw the whole inhabited world hanging like a drop of water which is suspended from a bucket when it comes up from a well. I said to the angel of the Lord. "Then does darkness or night not exist in this place? He said to me, "No, because darkness does not exist in that place where the righteous and the saints are, but rather they always exist in the light."

And I saw all the souls of men as they existed in punishment. And I cried out to the Lord Almighty. O God, if you remain with the saints, you have compassion on behalf of the world and the souls which are in this punishment."

Recording angels from Mount Seir.

The angel of the Lord said to me, "Come, let me show you the place of righteousness." And he took me up upon Mount Seir and he showed me three men, as two angels walked with them rejoicing and exulting over them. I said to the angel, "Of what sort are these? He said to me, "These are the three sons of Joatham, the priest, who neither kept the commandment of their father nor observed the ordinances of the Lord."

Then I saw two other angels weeping over the three sons of Joatham, the priest. I said, "O angel, who are these?" He said, "These are the angels of the Lord Almighty. They write down all the good deeds of the righteous upon their manuscript as they watch at the gate of heaven. And I take them from their hands and bring them up before the Lord Almighty; he writes their name in the Book of the Living. Also the angels of the accuser who is upon the earth, they also write down all of the sins of men upon their manuscript. They also sit at the gate of heaven. They tell the accuser and he writes them upon his manuscript so that he might accuse them when they come out of the world down there."

Ugly angels carry off the souls of ungodly men.

Then I walked with the angel of the Lord. I looked before me and I saw a place there. Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels entered through it. Their faces were like a leopard, their tusks being outside their mouth like the wild boars. Their eyes were mixed with blood.

Their hair was loose like the hair of women, and fiery scourges were in their hands. When I saw them, I was afraid. I said to that angel who walked with me, "Of what sort are these?" He said to me, "These are the servants of all creation who come to the souls of ungodly men and bring them and leave them in this place. They spend three days going around with them in the air before they bring them and cast them into their eternal punishment."

I said, "I beseech you, O Lord, don't give them authority to come to me." The angel said, "Don't fear. I will not permit them to come to you because you are pure before the Lord. I will not permit them to come to you because the Lord Almighty sent me to you because you are pure before him." Then he beckoned to them, and they withdrew themselves and they ran from me.

The heavenly city.

But I went with the angel of the Lord, and I looked in front of me and I saw gates. Then when I approached them I discovered that they were bronze gates. The angel touched them and they opened before him. I entered with him and found its whole square like a beautiful city, and I walked in its midst. Then the angel of the Lord transformed himself beside me in that place.

Now I looked at them, and I discovered that they were bronze gates and bronze bolts and iron bars. Now my mouth was shut therein. I beheld the bronze gates in front of me as fire was being cast forth for about fifty stadia.

The accuser and the angel Eremiel in Hades.

Again I turned back and walked, and I saw a great sea. But I thought that it was a sea of water. I discovered that it was entirely a sea of flame like a slime which casts forth much flame and whose waves burn sulfur and bitumen. They began to approach me.

Then I thought that the Lord Almighty had come to visit me. Then when I saw, I fell upon my face before him in order that I might worship him. I was very much afraid, and I entreated him that he might save me from this distress. I cried out, saying, "Eloe, Lord, Adonai, Sabaoth. I beseech you to save me from this distress because it has befallen me."

That same instant I stood up, and I saw a great angel before me. His hair was spread out like the lionesses'. His teeth were outside his mouth like a bear. His hair was spread out like women's. His body was like the serpent's when he wished to swallow me. And when I saw him, I was afraid of him so that all of my parts of my body were loosened and I fell upon my face. I was unable to stand, and I prayed before the Lord Almighty, "You will save me from this distress. You are the one who saved Israel from the hand of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. You saved Susanna from the hand of the elders of injustice. You saved the three holy men, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, from the furnace of burning fire. I beg you to save me from this distress."

Then I arose and stood, and I saw a great angel standing before me with his face shining like the rays of the sun in its glory since his face is like that which is perfected in its glory. And he was girded as if a golden girdle were upon his breast. His feet were like bronze which is melted in a fire. And when I saw him, I rejoiced, for I thought that the Lord Almighty had come to visit me. I fell upon my face, and I worshiped him. He said to me, "Take heed. Don't worship me. I am not the Lord Almighty, but I am the great angel, Eremiel, who is over the abyss and Hades, the one in which all of the souls are imprisoned from the end of the Flood, which came upon the earth, until this day."

Then I inquired of the angel, "What is the place to which I have come?" He said to me, "It is Hades." Then I asked him, "Who is the great angel who stands thus, whom I saw?" He said, "This is the one who accuses men in the presence of the Lord."

The two manuscripts.

Then I looked, and I saw him with a manuscript in his hand. He began to unroll it. Now after he spread it out, I read it in my language. I found that all my sins which I had done were written in it, those which I had done from my youth until this day. They were all written upon that manuscript of mine without there being a false word in them. If I did not go to visit a sick man or a widow, I found it written down as a shortcoming upon my manuscript. If I did not visit an orphan, it was found written down as a shortcoming on my manuscript. A day on which I did not fast pray in the time of prayer I found written down as a failing upon my manuscript.

And a day when I did not turn to the sons of Israel -- since it is a shortcoming -- I found written down upon my manuscript so that I threw myself upon my face and prayed before the Lord Almighty, "May your mercy reach me and may you wipe out my manuscript because your mercy has come to be in every place and has filled every place."

Then I arose and stood, and I saw a great angel before me saying to me, "Triumph, prevail because you have prevailed and have triumphed over the accuser, and you have come up from Hades and the abyss. You will now cross over the crossing place."

Again he brought another manuscript which was written by hand. He began to unroll it, and I read it, and found it written in my language . . .

Leaving Hades.

two pages missing

. . . They helped me and set me on that boat. Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels gave praise before me. I, myself, put on an angelic garment. I saw all of those angels praying. I, myself, prayed together with them. I knew their language, which they spoke with me. Now, moreover, my sons, this is the trial because it is necessary that the good and the evil be weighed in a balance.

The 1st trumpet: triumph & visitation of the righteous.

Then a great angel came forth having a golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew it three times over my head, saying, "Be courageous! O one who has triumphed. Prevail! O one who has prevailed. For you have triumphed over the accuser, and you have escaped from the abyss and Hades. You will now cross over the crossing place. For your name is written in the Book of the Living." I wanted to embrace him, I was unable to embrace the great angel because his glory is great.

Then he ran to all the righteous ones, namely, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Enoch and Elijah and David. He spoke with them as friend to friend speaking with one another.

A 2nd trumpet: opening of heaven & souls in torment.

Then the great angel came to me with the golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew it up to heaven. Heaven opened from the place where the sun rises to where it sets, from the north to the south. I saw the sea which I had seen at the bottom of Hades. Its waves came up to the clouds. I saw all the souls sinking in it. I saw some whose hands were bound to their neck, with their hands and feet being fettered. I said, "Who are these?" He said to me, "These are the ones who were bribed and they were given gold and silver until the souls of men were led astray." And I saw others covered with mats of fire. I said, "Who are these?" He said to me, "These are the ones who give money at interest, and they receive interest for interest." And I also saw some blind ones crying out. And I was amazed when I saw all these works of God. I said, "Who are these?" He said to me, "These are catechumens who heard the word of God, but they were not perfected in the work which they heard." And I said to him, "Then do they not have repentance here?" He said, "Yes," I said, "How long?" He said to me, "Until the day when the Lord will judge." And I saw others with their hair on them. I said, "Then there is hair and body in this place?" He said, "Yes, the Lord gives body and hair to them as he desires."

The intercession of the saints for those in torment.

And I also saw multitudes. He brought them forth. As they looked at all of the torments they called out, praying before the Lord Almighty, saying, "We pray to you on account of those who are in all these torments so that you might have mercy on all of them." And when I saw them, I said to the angel who spoke with me, He said, "These who beseech the Lord are Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Then at a certain hour daily they come forth with the great angel. He sounds a trumpet up to heaven and another sound upon the earth. All the righteous hear the sound. They come running, praying to the Lord Almighty daily on behalf of these who are in all these torments."

Another trumpet: the coming wrath of God.

And again the great angel comes forth with the golden in his hand blowing over the earth. They hear from the place of the sunrise to the place of the sunset and from the southern regions to the northern region. And again he blows up to heaven and his sound is heard. I said, "O Lord, why did you not leave me until I saw all of them?" He said to me, "I do not have authority to show them to you until the Lord Almighty rises up in his wrath to destroy the earth and the heavens."

They will see and be disturbed, and they will all cry out, saying, 'All flesh which is ascribed to you we will give to you on the day of the Lord.' Who will stand in his presence when he rises in his wrath the earth Every tree which grows upon the earth will be plucked up with their roots and fall down. And every high tower and the birds which fly will fall . . "