

ALEXANDER NEIBAUR

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As heretofore discussed, the Lord is not an angel in the usual sense. However, he does play the part of an angel and is the messenger of salvation. We now call a witness who had to do with more than one angel, as we shall see. He was ministered to by the Lord of all angels.

Alexander Neibaur was born in Ehrenbriestein, France, January 8, 1808. It was then a part of Alsace-Lorraine, but it now [is] German territory. The parents of Alexander were Nathan and Rebecca Peretz Neibaur. They were of the higher class of Hebrews. This is evidenced by the fact that the father was well educated, being a physician and surgeon, as well as a facile linguist. He intended his son Alexander for the Jewish ministry and had him educated for a rabbi to elucidate the Law of Moses; but when the boy was seventeen years old he decided that he did not wish this career, and chose the profession of a surgeon and dentist. He attended the University of Berlin, graduating before he was twenty years of age.

He set out on his travels immediately after leaving the University, and became converted to the Christian faith. He finally located for some time in the city of Preston, England, where he met and married an excellent wife, by name, Ellen Breakel. Here the couple were found on July 30, 1837, when the first "Mormon" elders came over to open the Gospel door to the British mission at the famous "Cock-pit," Preston, England.

The story of his conversion is full of interest. It was one morning very early. . . . The women of Preston . . . had the custom of going out before sunrise to give their front stone steps and porticos a coat of whitewash. . . . It was on one of these mornings that the young wife of Alexander Neibaur was on her knees polishing to the last degree of whiteness her own steps, when a neighbor challenged her attention with the remark:

"Have you seen the new ministers from America?"

"No," answered the younger woman, still intent on her work.

"Well," asserted the neighboring housewife laconically, as befits great tidings, "They claim to have seen an angel." "What?" rang out an abrupt voice from an inner chamber, as the young Hebrew husband sprang from his couch and put his head out of the window. "What's that you say?"

The information was repeated for his benefit, and hurriedly dressing, the young man secured the address of the American preachers of this strange religion; and not many hours after he was in close conversation with Elders Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Orson Hyde and Joseph Fielding. His was the swift conversion of spirit that demanded baptism on the spot. One of the first questions he asked, was, "You have a book?" And nothing could satisfy that eager, inspired question till he had a copy of the Book of Mormon in his own hands, for he had seen it, so he declared, in his night visions and recognized the Book on sight. He was waiting for the great message.

He was advised by the elders to wait and investigate further. Taking the book home with him, he read it through in three days. He said later that he could neither eat nor sleep till he had mastered all the contents of that wondrous volume. When he returned the book he offered himself for baptism, but was advised to wait till he was prepared. He answered, "Gentlemen, I am prepared." And his subsequent life found him always prepared. He accepted the counsel, however, and waited till the following spring. . . .

Brother Neibaur's wife could not see the gospel so quickly nor so easily as did her husband. He sat long evenings reading the Book of Mormon to his wife. . . .

His baptism occurred on April 9th, 1838. . . . This step was not taken without many sacrifices and trials. His new friends and former associates were indeed bitter and relentless in their opposition to the further conversion of this brilliant young Hebrew. He had made friends through his business associations as well as through the genial manner and the honest nature of his life and dealings. He was of considerable promise, and all who knew him deplored the step he had taken and tried to dissuade him from wrecking his life.

Alexander Neibaur was a Jew, and he was the first of his race to accept the Gospel. . . .

. . . When he was convinced of the mission of Jesus as a Savior, he left his father's roof-tree to become a soldier of the cross; and thus when the Gospel star shone upon his horizon, he hesitated not in following its course, though it led him across the sea, into dangers manifold, and swept from him all former friends and associates. . . .

. . . He sailed from Liverpool, Sunday, February 7, 1841, in the ship "Sheffield," under the leadership of Hiram Clark with a company of 235 Saints on board. He was a student well aware of the value of history and record keeping. He began a daily journal with the sailing of that ship in which he faithfully set down the events, both great and small of that historic voyage. . . .

Arriving in Nauvoo, Brother Neibaur was welcomed by his former friends, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards. Under the hands of Willard Richards and John Taylor he was ordained to the priesthood, January 18, 1843, and ordained a seventy in 1844. He was honored with the friendship of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and was fired with the same passionate zeal for the Gospel and the fearless Latter-day Prophet which characterized the leaders and other faithful members of the Church. He had the extreme pleasure of becoming instructor to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the German and Hebrew languages, and treasured all his life the blessedness of that memory and association.

Asked by one of his daughters in later life how it was that he came to accept the Gospel, he replied that he was converted to the mission of Christ long before he ever heard a Latter-day Saint elder preach. He added that subsequently he had been visited in dreams and visions and had seen the Book of Mormon brought forth in vision; also that he had become familiar with the endowment ceremonies in the same mystic manner. On this point he once had a conversation with the Prophet Joseph Smith, and told the Prophet many things that had been manifested to him in his early youth. The prophet put his arm affectionately around Brother Neibaur's shoulder and said,

"You are indeed one of us, Brother Neibaur."

. . . He practiced his profession of dentistry when there was a chance, which was not often in that pioneer struggling community. . . .

It was while living in Nauvoo that Elder Neibaur wrote some of his best poetry. . . .

It is related by one of his daughters that one day he was singing hymns, as was his frequent custom and some question was asked of her father concerning this hymn, who repeated it for her.

"Yes," he admitted, "this was written by your humble servant." When asked why his name did not appear attached to it, he replied that he had taken the poem to Brother Parley P. Pratt, who had edited it in some places. And this small assistance caused the sensitively honest soul of Elder Neibaur to shrink from asserting his authorship. . . .

. . . When the pioneers who had been to Salt Lake Valley returned, and word went out that the first company of 1848 would make ready to move westward, the soul of Elder Neibaur was wrought up within him. . . .

When once in the Valley, Elder Neibaur shared the toils and the privations of pioneer life here. He was not fitted for hard or difficult labor, but he was industrious and he did as did his associates, made the best of all his opportunities. He did not go into debt nor was he a burden to any one. He taught his family to honor the God of the Former and Latter-day Saints. He taught them lessons of morality, of frugality, and of honesty and independence.

Elder Neibaur made the adobes for his own house which was the crude one-roomed, mud-roofed affair of those very primitive days. He added a log lean-to afterwards. Then as his fortunes mended, he later built him a good adobe house on Second South and Second East where he reared his large and industrious family.

He was the pioneer dentist of Salt Lake City, he was also the pioneer match manufacturer. . . . Elder Neibaur was also engaged each winter for some years in teaching German classes. He was himself an accomplished linguist. He spoke seven languages. . . .

Shortly before his death his son said to him,

"Father you have been telling us of your long and hard experience, and we have listened with intense affection and interest. But let me ask you, is it worth it all? Is the Gospel worth all this sacrifice?"

The glow of testimony and of truth lighted the torches in the dimming eyes of that ancient Hebrew prophet and poet and he lifted his voice in firm and lofty assurance as he said:

"Yes! Yes! and more! I have seen my Savior. I have seen the prints in his hands! I know that Jesus is the Son of God, and I know that this work is true and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. I would suffer it all and more, far more than I have ever suffered for that knowledge even to the laying down of my body on the plains for the wolves to devour." . . .

. . . A short time before the end, his face suddenly lit up and his countenance brightened. He cast his eyes upward as if he could see far into upper distant spaces.

"What do you see, father?" they asked. The dying man murmured clearly,

"Joseph--Hyrum--" then his weary eyes closed forever.

With the burning testimony of truth on his lips he closed his life mission, laid down his body, and his soul went to meet and mingle with the redeemed of God. . . . Of such is the kingdom of heaven.