

BIBLICAL CHARACTERS AS PORTRAYED
IN THE MINOR MIDRASHIM

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In studying the characters as portrayed in the minor midrashim, one is struck with their essential human qualities. They are rough, crude, and at times selfish. Throughout the field of Jewish literature, one is impressed by the fact, that unlike the Christian heroes, these old Jewish characters are not saints. Their earthly qualities are always paramount. If the midrash plays up a good quality, it is usually a general trait, such as wisdom as in the case of Solomon, or faith in the case of Abraham.

The theology is never complex. God is always interested in the deeds of men, and in general seems to favor the cause of the righteous. He is willing to rescue them from trouble, and is paternally interested in the doings of men. At times the ideas are primitive, and more often than not, the miracles are rather pointless. But always there is a stern moral lesson hidden in the text.

These legends could well be utilized in the field of child education; for they are bold, imaginative, and original. They leave the reader with a sense of faith; they are red-blooded and human. Above all they are human; loving, hating, fighting, and dying, the characters rivet our attention. When a man sees the devil, he fights him; when a man chooses the wrong path, he is punished. There is no middle path, no easy road, for the righteous. They must ever cleave to the straight and narrow path of moral justice and truth. The sinner is doomed, and loses not only his place in this world, but he forfeits his chances in the world to come.

In presenting the Biblical characters as portrayed in the minor midrashim, the method has been to give the full translation of some

of the midrashim. Others have been outlined or merely summarized. In places, the translations are rough and perhaps imperfect. Certain liberties have been taken with the text. Some have been edited, others eliminated; depending upon their usefulness to the larger plan of the thesis.

The characters are treated in their chronological order. Each is given a limited amount of space. Before each midrash is given, comments are made concerning the type of midrash, the idea motivating its origin, and the type of personality of the Biblical character involved. Some characters are drawn at length, others are merely outlined. Abraham, Moses, and Solomon are treated in detail. Many stories are translated or explained. Other characters are barely mentioned.

Obviously, the minor midrashim, here treated, barely touch the surface of the vast field of midrashic literature. It is only, as the name implies, a short collection of midrashim that perhaps have been set down in other collections.

The thesis is divided into chapters, each dealing with one Biblical character. The conclusion summarizes the various chapters and compares and analyzes their contents. The translating was done without the aid of written translations that may exist, and the form of the thesis is popular rather than technical.

Elite type print has been used in order to prevent the thesis from becoming too bulky.

(1)

ENOCH

The character of Enoch is a study of perfect piety. The ideal however, is not typically Jewish, but Christian. Enoch is an extremist, therefore un-Jewish. Yet in the midrash, he is unable to stay out of the world. He is commanded by God, to enter into the world and teach the children of men. To Enoch, study and perfect solitude are indispensable to true happiness. Torah is the central pillar of his faith. He is the ideal monk, the soul that craves separation from all that is profane and impure. Yet his duty is obviously to his generation. So this pure soul, made up of all that is purest and most noble, re-enters the world, and amazingly enough is able to rule all the peoples. This in fact is more of a miracle than his entering heaven in a chariot of flame. His death and departure, are in a way the ideal solution of the conflict of body and soul, of pure and impure. For in reality there can be no compromise between the two.

Enoch is a person difficult to understand. The character is too finely drawn, we have nothing but the ideal of a pious soul. Unlike the stern founders of our faith, Enoch, in spite of the fact that he maintained his political leadership for many years, is only an ideal type that is inconceivable to understand or follow. Therefore, in the midrash, the character in no wise adds or detracts from the larger concept of Torah and piety.

Enoch is not holy enough to die by the kiss of God, as are the three patriarchs Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, but he still manages to leave the earth without bodily pain in the heavenly chariot. Enoch demonstrates that justice, righteousness, piety and Torah can be made into real ways of life that can be followed by all the people.

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THE LIFE OF ENOCH

Gen. 5: 22,23

"And Enoch walked with God, after he bagat Methuseelah". And he served the Lord. And he rejected the ways of evil men, and the soul of Enoch clung to the instruction of the Lord, and to knowledge and wisdom. And he understood the ways of the Lord. And in his wisdom he meditated secretly many days. And after a long time, while praying before the Lord, an angel called to him from the heavens, and he answered and said, "Here am I."

And the angel said, "Go out from your house and from your place of hiding, and go to all men, in order that you may teach them the way of life and the deeds necessary in order to walk before the Lord." And Enoch rose and left his house, according to the word of the Lord. And he taught the people the ways of God.

And many people gathered around Enoch, and he taught them of God. And a voice was heard, "Whosoever is desireth of hearing the word of God, let him join Enoch."

And Enoch ruled over the people according to the word of the Lord. And they came and bowed down to him, and all together they would listen to his voice, and his teachings.

And the spirit of the Lord was upon Enoch and he taught the people, and they served God all the days of his life. Even the kings and princes, from the former and the latter generations, the judges and lawgivers, all came and harkened to the wisdom of Enoch. And there were a hundred and thirty kings besides the many noblemen and princes that came to place themselves under the dominion of Enoch and to learn the ways of the Lord. And throughout the life of Enoch, peace reigned in the land.

And Enoch ruled for 243 years. And he saw that justice and righteousness ruled throughout the land, according to the word of the Lord.

These are the generations of Enoch: Methuselah, Eleshua, Alamelech, and the daughters were Milka, and Naomi. "And Methuselah lived a hundred and eighty seven years, and he begat Lamech.". And in the 56th years of the life of Lamech, Adam died, and at his death he was 730 years old. And his two sons buried him with the help of Enoch and Methuselah, with much honor, as one buries a king, according to the word of the Lord. And all the people mourned greatly, which started the custom that is kept up to the present day. "And Adam died, because he ate of the tree of knowledge, he and his sons, according to the word of the Lord".

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After the death of Adam, Enoch separated himself from men and communed with God. From time to time, he would come out of his solitude and teach the people the ways of God. However, when he retired, he did not retire suddenly, but little by little, so the people would become accustomed to the idea. For example, first he would teach once a week, then once a month, and then once a year. The people were awed by Enoch and always listened very carefully to his message. One day an angel appeared to him while he was teaching, and told him that he was called from the earth to rule over the heavenly hosts. So he told the people, and agreed to teach them as much as possible before he was forced to leave.

One day while he was busy teaching, the people saw the image of a gigantic horse. Enoch told them that the horse had come to waft him to heaven. "And the horse descended to earth and stood by Enoch". Enoch mounted the animal and all the people gathered about and followed him. After the first days journey he urged them to return to their homes, but many refused to leave him, for he was teaching them of God while riding on the horse. After six days he ordered the few remaining faithful to go back, but some stayed, though he told them that it would cost them their lives. On the seventh day, Enoch ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot drawn by horses of fire, midst the storming of the elements.

On the eighth day, all the kings and the people went out to see what had happened to the few who refused to leave Enoch; and at the spot of his ascension they found snow and hailstones. And beneath this they found the bodies of the faithful. And they sought Enoch, but they were unable to find him, "For he had gone up to heaven."

And after the death of Enoch, all the people anointed his son Methuselah as ruler, and he continued in the ways of his father, and taught the people the ways of the Lord. "And God looked on his days and saw that he did not stray from the correct path, neither to the right nor to the left."

C H A P T E R I I

(1)

NOAH

The midrash called by the name of Noah has little or nothing to do with either his personality or character. Noah is merely used as a springboard to enter the larger subject.

The midrash itself deals with the history of medicine. "The Book of Remedies" being transmitted from generation to generation and from people to people. It is a rather dry account of ancient people's specialization in various branches of medicine.

In the second part of the midrash, an entirely different attitude is taken. From a dry account of medical properties, a passionate religious prayer is offered. Biblical language is used and a fine spirit is portrayed. The prayer, however, is weak from a technical point of view, as no central thought is portrayed and the authors religious bias is projected too openly upon the framework of the biblical character. For example, after a prophetic outburst concerning God's power and majesty, Adam then complains of eating of the tree of knowledge.

But then just as suddenly the narrative is again taken up with an account of the handing down from generation to generation of the Book of Knowledge and an explanation of its contents is given.

The midrash strives to point out that just as the Torah came from God, so did the book of medical remedies. It is a constant chain of tradition, much as the "Ethics of the Fathers".

Due to the afflictions suffered by his children, Noah entreats God for help. Whereupon Noah is given the books of remedies and medicines, the various grasses and herbs of healing quality were revealed, and the angels helped Noah drive forth the evil spirits and cure the children of men. Noah recorded all these medicines and remedies and transmitted the book to his son Shem. All

(1) Vol. III page 155f.

(2) Vol. III page 155

the people in turn derived their medical knowledge from this book. For example: The Hindus became experts in understanding the special qualities of barks and spices. The Arameans in seeds and spices. The Macedonians were the first who actually went out and practiced medicine, while the Egyptians used magic and astrology. Medical skill and knowledge spread far and wide till Aesculapius, the Macedonian, gathered forty magicians and traveled from land to land seeking for the original tree of life. They went beyond India and indeed found the tree, but as they stretched their hands to gather in the fruit, their plan was frustrated, for God sent the angel with the ever turning sword and they were destroyed. Thus all knowledge of medicine was lost until the reign of Artaxerxes under the Macedonian Hypocrates.

This is the prayer of the first man, which he uttered when he was driven from the garden of Eden, before he was given this holy book. And he pleaded before the Almighty and said, "Lord God of the world, you have created the universe to glorify Your splendor. You do as You wish, Your kingdom is everlasting and Your greatness is for all generations. Nothing is hidden from before You nor is there anything concealed from Your eyes. You have founded man among the works of Your Hands, and have caused him to rule over all Your creatures and to govern all Your works. You know that the cunning and cursed snake enticed me with the fruit of an exceedingly desirable tree. Even my wife persuaded me without telling me of the results not only to me, but to all future generations. I know and understand that no man is totally righteous before You, I dare not answer You, nor raise my eyes to You, for I have sinned and done perversely and have been driven away for my own faults.

And today, I split and till the earth and cultivate it in order to take food from it. The animals of the earth no longer fear me. For from the time I ate from the tree of knowledge and transgressed Your words, wisdom has removed itself from me, and I am a boor and do not know, and I am a fool and understand not. And now O Merciful and gracious God, return in Your mercy to the chief of Your creations; to the spirit You infused, to the soul You have bequeathed. Greet me with Your kindness, for You are gracious and long suffering; let my prayer ascend before the throne of Your glory, and my pleading reach the seat of Your mercy. And grant me grace. May the words of my mouth be acceptable in Thy sight; turn not from my prayer.

You have been and You will be forever. You have ruled, and will rule; have mercy on the work of Your hands, and grant me wisdom. Tell me what will happen in the future to my descendants, and hide not from me the knowledge of Your help.

After this prayer, the angel Razael comes down and tells Adam how to till the soil, and points out various geographical facts to him. He explains the changes of season, how to discern future events, such as climate, plagues, wars, etc. He also gives him a book in which is written all sorts of knowledge.

After four years Hanoch, the righteous man, learned in a dream the hiding place of this book. Concerning this same Hanoch, one day he went into a cave at noon during the heat of the day, and there God appeared to him, and from that time on he gradually became purer and purer, until one day "he was no more".

In the book of knowledge he learned so much that his understanding caused him to realize that the peoples could not learn all these things and so he, too, hid the book, and it remained hidden till the rise of Noah.

After 500 years, when Noah saw the perversion of all the earth, the angel appeared to him and told him how to escape, and then showed him the book, and explained its contents. The angel instructed him concerning the ark and the evil of his generation, no sooner did he read it than the spirit of the Lord came to him and he constructed the ark according to its proper dimensions.

After the ark rested on Ararat, Noah gave the book to his son. And his son Shem held it till the time of Abraham, and Abraham gave it to Isaac, and Isaac to Jacob, and he to Levi, and Levi to Moses. And Moses to Aaron, and he to Phineas, and he to his son, and then it was handed on from generation to generation.

The book was written distinctly upon stones of Saphire. And it contained unusual knowledge, humble thoughts, and secret things, all that was in the heaven was included; the zodiac and the names of all the

stars with their properties. The knowledge of the seasons, and the understanding of good and evil. Interpretations of events, past and future, and wisdom of all things.

This book enabled Noah to construct the ark, and after its construction, and he put the book in a golden chest. After the ark landed he handed the book on for future generations, till Solomon acquired it.

ABRAHAM

There are five major divisions of the midrashim concerning Abraham, namely:

1. The birth of Abraham
2. Abraham's discovery of God
3. Abraham justified before the adversary
4. Abraham demonstrates the One and Only God
5. Abraham in the fiery furnace.

Two of the three midrashim deal with only one or two of these incidents. The five accounts given above are found only in the midrash in Volume I. Yet there is a close affinity in the various accounts, therefore the full translation has been given of each; in order that they may be compared in full. Two of the midrashic accounts speak of the birth of Abraham. The details are different, but the basic ideas are the same. They agree that the heralded child would be unusual, and destined for greatness. The natural courses of the heavens are disrupted, as a portent of the earth shaking consequences of his birth. In a way it is the death rattle of the old order of society and the birth of the new. For as one star swallows the others, so the future world of Abraham is to destroy the status quo.

The midrashic technique is interesting throughout the Abraham cycle. Abraham, the servant of God, constantly provokes fights and trials of strength. However, when in trouble, he calls upon God to rescue him, and is always saved in the miraculous fashion. Even as a tiny child, he is faced with the armed might of a regimented society. Yet the material power of the king cannot conquer Abraham when he is aided by God. At the crucial moment, like a fairy tale, he is saved in the nick of time. His whole life is a long series of miracles. The midrashim however, use the vehicle of the miracle to good literary effect. Before

Abraham is delivered, the reader is forced to wait in suspense while his merit is debated on high.

He is tempted constantly by Satan to choose the easy way. But through his faith in God, he is able to resist and discover the tempter. Satan is used as a foil. He first advises the king how to destroy all the children, then how to destroy Abraham. He then changes his form and tempts Abraham. Satan is nothing of himself—he merely aids the midrash to develope and take form.

Abraham is above all a representative of the church militant. He constantly converts people to the true faith. Some suffer martyrdom for their principles, but some are saved through their faith. In his breaking the idols, Abraham demonstrates that Jews too, if given the chance, would react exactly as the Catholic church. For when Abraham fails to win the people by reason, he does not hesitate to use force. Abraham is no recluse, he does not withdraw from society to study Torah. He knows God instinctively, and then goes out and smashes the idols. He does not try to show the people an ideal government, but expects mankind to be cleansed and purified through their faith and righteousness. If he were tracing the original crime of humanity, he would blame Adam, or Eve, or the serpent, he would not think of removing the apple, the root of the trouble.

In the accounts of Abraham in Volume I and II, Abraham discovers God. The accounts are almost identical, both in language and content. Both are masterful demonstrations of the first cause argument of God. Other than the miracles that constantly help Abraham in his time of need, these are the only proofs of the existence of God that are attempted in the Abrahamic cycle.

The midrashim constantly exploit human emotion. When Abraham is tied upon the catapult and the king orders him thrown into the furnace, his mother comes and begs him to accede to the request of the king. But Abraham remains firm to his mother's appeal. Ridicule is frequently used, especially in dealing with the idols.

Abraham's character is simplicity itself. He is above all the simple, unthinking man of faith. The man who refuses to make any sort of compromise. Above all he is militant; he is ever ready to use the club to gain his viewpoint. For him, there is no half-way mark, no middle road. A person is either totally good, or totally bad. If man has not perfect faith, then he will be destroyed. Thus, in one midrash, Haran, because he was not perfect in his faith, was consumed. But the jailer because he trusted completely was saved. He is the iconoclast, the man who debunks and smashes idols and false ideals and ideas. A man is either an enemy or a believer. He is the first true reformer, the first man who is violently righteous. He is no philosopher, he guesses intuitively rather than reasons out his beliefs. He is robust in a purely physical sense. His dynamic convictions makes him the first true missionary to the peoples.

The style and the Hebrew is excellent, and the thought content flows smoothly, the midrashic authors demonstrate a rare sense of irony and sarcasm, the taunts, the reasoning, the undeniable logic, Abraham shows his opponents' weakness and exhibits the true faith of God.

(1)

ABRAHAM

The sages tell that there were 65 kings sitting before Nimrod, the mighty hunter at the time that Abraham our father answered a difficult question. For Nimrod had asked him, "Why did you rebel against me in breaking my idols?" Abraham answered him, "This axe which is in my hand shattered them." And Nimrod asked, "And is there strength or knowledge in the axe to do thus?" And he answered, "Is there strength or knowledge in your images that you should call them your gods; why did they not prevent their being broken?" And the king answered, "I am the Lord, and I created the universe."

And Abraham said, "If you are a god, change the seasons, and make the sunshine in the night, that it may rise in the west and set in the east. By these signs, I shall know that you are a God. Or at least let me know the innermost thoughts of my heart."

"And with these words, Abraham leaned forward and grasped the beard of Nimrod and said, "You are no god, O son of Cush. For if you were why did you not deliver your father from death? And so in the future, you too will die."

Nimrod then asked his noblemen for advice, how to deal with Abraham. They said that as he had destroyed the idols, so should he be punished. And so Abraham was to be burnt in fire. He was bound and spent twelve years in prison. And all the kings gathered wood from the provinces round about. And after twelve years Abraham was brought out of the prison, and they bound him and surrounded him with great quantities of wood. Yet when the wood burned, the kings saw that Abraham was not touched by the flame. Whereupon they said, "The brother of Abraham is a magician, and is saving him from the fire." Immediately,

(1) Vol. V page 41f.

a tongue of flame shot out and consumed Haran, the brother of Abraham. As it is written in scriptures, "And Haran died at that time."

And then Gabriel asked God if he might go down into the furnace and deliver Abraham. But God said "By my honor, I will deliver him. And his descendants, Mishael, Hannaniah, and Azairia you will deliver."

And when Abraham went out of Ur Casdim, all the kings bowed down to earth before him, and they cut down cedar trees and built him a big house. And they brought forth their children, and said, "Teach us your ways, that we may be established in this life, and in the life to come. For you had no teacher to instruct you, other than your innermost thoughts, as it is written, "I will bless the Lord, who counsels me, yea even in the night, He instructs my reins." And all the kings were converted, and entered under the wings of Schochina and concerning them is it written, "The princes of the people are gathered, the people of the God of Abraham".

(1)

THE BIRTH OF ABRAHAM

Before the birth of Abraham, Nimrod the idolat^{or}ous, saw through his knowledge of the stars that a child would be born who would rebel against him and destroy his religion. He took counsel with his princes and advisors. They told him to erect a huge building, station guards at the entrance and then proclaim throughout his kingdom that all pregnant women must enter the structure and stay there until their children were born. Then it was the duty of the midwife to slay the child if it were a boy, but if it were a girl, the mother was to be given gifts and loaded with honors. This counsel was approved and accepted by Nimrod, the blasphemer.

And the chronicler tells us that more than 70,000 boys were murdered in this fashion. Finally, the angels appeared before God and said, "Do you not see that Nimrod, the blasphemer, is slaying the innocent babes?" And God answered, "I know and I see, for I neither sleep nor slumber. I behold and know, both the hidden and the revealed, and you will see what I shall do to this blasphemer, for I will stretch forth my hand to destroy him."

At this time, Terah married and his wife soon became pregnant. After a few months her body became large and she grew pale. Her husband asked her the reason and she claimed she so suffered every year. But Terah fearing the edict of King Nimrod insisted she was pregnant and demanded a view of her body. Upon his passing his hand over her body a miracle occurred. The child rose until it lay under her breasts, and Terah was forced to acknowledge the truth of her statements, and tell the day of her delivery nothing was visible.

When her time came to bear her child she left the city in her terror and went into the wilderness. There she found a cave next to a river. She entered and there Abraham was born. At his birth the cave was filled with light as the splendor of the sun.

His mother lamented the death of the 70,000 babes for it was Abraham for whose sake they were slaughtered. It were better for Abraham to die in the cave than deliver him to Nimrod, and so she left him with the prayer, "May the Lord be with you, may he not fail you nor desert you." And so she left the cave.

And Abraham was left in the cave without a nurse and at his wailing God sent Gabriel down to nurse him and give him milk. It flowed from a finger on his right hand. And Abraham sucked it until he was ten days old.

After ten days Abraham left the cave and walked along the edge of the river. And when the sun sank and the stars arose he said, "These are the Gods". But the dawn came, and the stars disappeared. He said, "These cannot be the Gods", and then the sun rose and he said, "This is my God and I will extol him." But the sun sank and Abraham turned to the moon to worship. But the moon too was overcast, and Abraham cried, "There is a Being who has motivated all these." Scarcely had he finished speaking when the angel Gabriel met him. After greeting, Gabriel led him to a spring of water, and there Abraham washed his hands and feet and worshipped God.

Finally the mother of Abraham became worried concerning her child, and returned to the cave. But Abraham was not there. She left weeping bitterly. By the river she met her son, whom she failed to recognize because he had grown so large. They greeted each other, and Abraham asked her why she was crying. She told him the whole story. Abraham

then cross-examined her as to the truth of her statements, asking the exact age of her son and why she deserted him. Finally, he reveals himself to her as her son. She was both amazed and inquisitive as to how he survived. Abraham then teaches her the truth concerning the one True God. "Know my mother, that there is in the world a God, great, mighty, living and fearful, who sees, but is not seen, and He fills the heavens and the earth with his glory." And Abraham then ordered his mother to take this message to Nimrod.

Abraham's mother told Terah all about finding her son. And as he was a great prince in the court of Nimrod he went before the king and bowed down before him and told Nimrod the events concerning Abraham. Nimrod was in mortal terror, but his advisors reassured him, and taxed him with being afraid of a tiny infant. But when they were informed of the miracles of Abraham's size and birth, they too were abjectly afraid. However, Satan appeared in human form and advised Nimrod to arm all his hosts and go out and fetch Abraham and bring him back as a captive.

When Abraham saw this mighty host approaching he lifted up his head and cried to God. God heard his prayer, and caused the angel Gabriel to deliver him. "Why are you crying Abraham?" And he said, "I am afraid of these men who are coming to slay me." And Gabriel said, "Fear not, neither be afraid, for the Lord Thy God will deliver thee from the hand of thine enemy."

God commanded Gabriel to place a thick cloud of darkness between Abraham and his enemies, and when they saw it they became afraid and returned to Nimrod, and left his realm. In fear he also gave all his princes and servants money and presents, and they departed for the province of Babylon.

And after they had journeyed to Babylon, God commanded the Angel Gabriel to order Abraham to follow the enemy there. Abraham objected for he had neither food nor equipment to undertake the trip. However, Gabriel said, "Thou hast no need for horses or soldiers or food for the journey; ride upon my shoulders." And so Abraham rode upon the shoulders of the angel Gabriel, and in the twinkling of an eye he was in Babylon. And the angel commanded him to enter the city and proclaim in a loud voice, "The Lord He is God, in the heaven above and in the earth beneath, there is none else. He is perfect unity and there is no second. He has neither form nor body, and He is the Supreme Being. And know ye also that I am Abraham His servant, the trusted steward of His house!" And Abraham entered the city and so declaimed.

Abraham met his parents there and the angel Gabriel told him to reveal the true faith to them. And so Abraham said, "You are serving a man such as yourselves, and you worship an image of Nimrod. Know ye that it has a mouth but does not speak, and eyes and sees not, ears and hears not, neither does it walk up on its legs. It can help neither itself or others."

When Terah heard all these things, he invited Abraham into his house, and there Abraham told him all that had happened to him since they had last seen each other. Then Terah went before Nimrod and told him how Abraham had made the long journey in one day. And when Nimrod heard this, a great terror came upon him, and he sent to his nobles and princes for advice. With one voice they advised him to proclaim a seven day's feast, and each man was to wear his best ornaments and apparel and appear before the king. And the king so proclaimed throughout the land of Babylonia.

And it came to pass after these things that Nimrod sent for Abraham

and ordered him to appear before him. And so Abraham and Terah arrived in the palace. And Abraham laid hold of the royal throne and shook it and proclaimed in a loud voice. "O Nimrod, blasphemer, ~~who~~ denies the living and only God, and Abraham His servant the trusted one of his household! Acknowledge God and say with me that God, He is the Lord, One and there is not another! He has neither form nor body and lives for ever. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. Confess also that I am His servant and that He has created the universe."

And when Abraham thus proclaimed in a loud voice, behold the idols fell upon their faces. And when the nobles and princes saw this, they, too, fell on their faces, with their king Nimrod. And the heart of Nimrod melted within him, and his breath deserted him, and he lay senseless for two hours. And when his soul returned to him, and he asked, "Was that your voice, Abraham, or the voice of God?" And Abraham answered and said, "The voice you heard was the voice of the least of God's creatures." And then Nimrod acknowledged, "Verily thy God is great and powerful, He is the King of Kings." And Nimrod commanded Terah to leave his presence with his son, and so they returned to their city together.

ABRAHAM DEMONSTRATES THE TRUE RELIGION

And it came to pass after these things, that Abraham attained the age of twenty years. And Terah became ill. And he said to his sons Haran and Abraham, "As ye love me my sons, go out and sell these two idols, for I do not have enough money to meet our expenses." Haran went out and did as his father wished. But Abraham took two other idols, and tied a rope about their necks, and dragged them through the streets, and cried, "Who would purchase an idol that has eyes, yet sees not, ears and hears not, a mouth and speaks not, that helps neither itself or others?" All the townspeople were astounded at Abraham's behavior. But one old lady approached him and asked for an idol to serve and to love. Abraham said to the old lady, "And the idol you bought from my brother, what happened to it?" And she said, "Robbers entered my house during the night and stole the idol." And he said, "If this from thieves, how can you expect it to deliver others?" After more questions and explanations, the woman asked Abraham in what she might believe. Whereupon he told her of the One and only God. When she discovered the thieves, she broke the idol into pieces herself and went through the streets proclaiming the True God. And the Midrash points out that the woman converted many people to the true faith.

Finally, the king heard what the old woman was doing, and he sent for her and asked, "Why do you not serve me, how do you dare serve another man's God?" And the old woman answered, "You are a liar; you are a blasphemer of the One and Only God, to whom there is no second. You live by his goodness, but you worship another. You repudiate Him, His Torah, and Abraham His servant. And when the king heard these words, he ordered her slain. Nevertheless, he was in great fear, because more and more people were believing in the teachings of Abraham.

And when the nobles and the princes saw the state of their king, they advised him to arrange a seven days' feast, and all the people were told to appear in their robes of office, their gold and silver apparel. Thus, when Abraham saw such power and wealth he would be afraid, and thus return to his faith in the king. And Nimrod made such a proclamation, and Terah, the father of Abraham was ordered to bring his son to the festival. But Abraham refused to appear before the king and agreed to take care of his father's idols and the idols of the king while his father appeared at the banquet.

And when Abraham saw that he was left alone with the idols, he took axe in his hand, and saying over and over, "The Lord, He is God", he threw the idols to the ground, and laid about him lustily with the axe. One's head he cut off, and another's feet. He demolished the eyes of one, and other's hands he crushed. He started with the smallest and finished with the largest. And then he placed the axe in the hand of the biggest idol of them all.

When the king returned from the feast, he saw all his idols broken in pieces. Asking who had done the outrage, the people, crying, answered that it was Abraham. The king summoned him and asked why he had shattered the images. Abraham denied the deed and asserted that the largest idol had committed the atrocity. Furthermore, if the king doubted his word, he might ask the idol himself and hear it from his lips. The king was furious and ordered Abraham to be cast into the prison house. And he commanded the warden to give him neither food nor water.

ABRAHAM IN THE FURNACE

The preacher goes on to say, that when Abraham our father was shut in the prison, he lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed, "O Lord My God, Thou knowest the hidden. Thou knowest that but for my faithfulness, I would not have come to this sorry state." And God hearkened to the prayer of Abraham, and sent the angel ~~angel~~ Bagriel to rescue him from the hand of the tyrant. After greeting the angel advised Abraham, "Fear not, for the Lord Thy God is with thee." And the angel showed him a spring of living waters, and stayed with him and fed him for a whole year. And after the year was completed, the advisers of the king counseled him to command all his followers to bring wood and build a huge fire, and then cast Abraham into its midst. And so the king commanded all his people. All this time Abraham was in the prison.

And the king ordered the furnace lit, and the flames shot up to the heavens. And all the people were sore afraid because of the greatness of the fire, and the king sent to the warden of the prison to bring Abraham before the king. The warden reminded the king that Abraham had neither eaten or drunk for a year and was therefore dead, nevertheless the king commanded to call him. And great was the wonder of the warden when Abraham answered him. Abraham further told the warden that God had fed and given him water. And when the warden heard this he believed in God and in Abraham.

When the king heard this development, he sent to the head warden and asked him concerning his actions. The warden accused the king of blasphemy. Whereupon the king commanded his men to kill the warden. And the warden testified to the unity of God and prepared himself for the executioner. And the preacher recounts that when the hangman tried

to cut his throat, the sword broke into many pieces.

The king then commanded them to bring Abraham out and cast him into the fiery furnace. When the princes brought him forth, the king commanded them to throw him into the fire. So one of the men tried to throw him in, but the flames ^{lept} out of the furnace and burned him instead. And many other noblemen were thus consumed.

Finally Satan came disguised as a man, and begged the king to take some advice. He advised the king to construct a catapult and cast him into the flames. Thus the princes would not be burnt. The king was very happy to get this advice, and ordered them to build a catapult. After its construction they tested it with big stones and found it good. Then they bound Abraham hand and foot and prepared to throw him into the flames. And when Abraham saw his plight, he lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed, "Lord my God, Thou seest what these evildoers would with me." The angels also petitioned God concerning Abraham. And God answered the angels and assured them that he knew the plight of his servant.

And the preachers tells how Satan, in the guise of a man, appeared to Abraham to tempt him. He advised him to bow down before Nimrod. But Abraham rejected him with the words, "May God punish you, vile, contempt, ^{now} blasphemer!" And so Satan departed. And then the mother of Abraham

shall I save you from the fire?" And Abraham said, "The Lord in whom I trust, the God of heaven and earth, He will deliver me." And when God saw his inclination He favored him in His mercy, and commanded the fire that it should cool, and do no harm to Abraham.

The fire was quenched without water, and the wood put forth buds, and then fruit, each after its kind. And the furnace was transformed into a garden, like that of kings. And the angels sat therein, and conversed with Abraham. And the king said to Abraham, "Behold this is a great miracle. You have made it known that the fire has no power over you, and furthermore, you show yourself to the people in the midst of a pleasant garden." And all the noblemen said to Nimrod, "No our Lord. This is a great miracle, but it is the work of a great and powerful God, the God of Abraham, beside whom there is none else. And Abraham is his servant." And at that time, all the princes of Nimrod, and all his people believed in the God of Abraham and together they said, "The Lord He is God, in the heaven above, and on the earth beneath; there is none else."

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ABRAHAM

When Abraham our father, of blessed memory, was born a star in the east swalled^{ed} four other stars in the corners of heaven. The soothsayers of King Nimrod said to him, "A son is born to Terah who will gather a nation which will inherit this world and the next. If you wish, we can give his father a house full of silver and gold to kill him." Immediately, Nimrod sent to Terah saying, "A son was born to you yesterday. Now give him to me and let me kill him and I shall fill your house with silver and gold." And Terah replied, "Let me tell a parable. A horse was once asked, 'Let us cut off your head, and we will give you a house full of oats.' Answered the horse, 'Fools, if you cut off my head, who will eat the oats?' And so it is, if you kill my son, who will inherit the silver and gold". And the king answered, "From your words, it is evident that you have a son." And Terah replied, "a son was born to me, but it is dead." And Nimrod said, "I am speaking of a living, not a dead son." And then Terah hid his son in a cave for three years. And the Holy One Blessed be He, made two windows. From one, flowed oil, and from the other flour.

Now when Abraham was three years old, he left the cave and wondered to himself, "Who created the heaven, and the earth, and me?" He prayed all day to the sun, but in the evening the sun sank in the west and the moon rose in the east. When he saw the moon, and the stars around it, he said, "This is the creator of the heaven and the earth. And the stars are his nobles and servants." So he prayed all night to the moon. In the morning the moon set in the west, and the sun rose in the east. Said Abraham, "These have no power." There is a lord over them and to Him

I shall bow and pray." He went to his father and said, "Father, who has created heaven, earth and myself?" His father told him, "My God has created Heaven and earth and all these." Said Abraham, "Show me your God. Perhaps He has the creative power." Immediately Terah showed Abraham idols. Abraham returned to his mother and said, "Mother, cook me some fine savory dishes that I may bring them to the gods of my father; perhaps they will accept my sacrifice." His mother then prepared fine foods and he took them before the gods of his fathers and put them before the biggest, but there was no sound or response. He returned them, and he brought them before the idols again finer dishes which his mother had prepared, and still there was no response. Then the Divine presence descended on him, and he applied to the idols the verse, "A mouth have they, and they do speak not, eyes, and they see not." Whereupon he grasped a torch and burnt them. And he put the biggest outside and placed the torch in his hand.

When his father returned home and found his idols burnt, he said to Abraham, "My son, why have you burnt my gods?" Said he, "I didn't burn them. The biggest was angry, and burnt them." His father asked, "Silly son, have they power, or the breath of life, that they are able to do all this? Have not I made them of wood?" Said Abraham, "Let your ears hear what your lips utter! If they have no power, why did you tell me, 'My gods have created Heaven and earth?'" And so Terah went to Nimrod and said, "My son has burnt my Gods with fire." Nimrod sent for Abraham and asked him why he had done the deed. Abraham repeated, "It was the biggest idol that burnt them." And Nimrod said, "Have they breath of life that they are able to do this?" And Abraham said, "Let your ears hearken to the utterance of your mouth. If they have no power, why do you neglect the creator of heaven and earth and worship wood?" And Nimrod

said, "I have created the heaven and the earth with my power." Said Abraham, "Are you able to create? When I got out of my cave, I saw the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. Now you cause it to rise in the west and set in the east, and I will worship you. And if you cannot, He who has given me strength to burn the idols, will help me kill you!" Said Nimrod to his wise men, "What is to be done with him?" And they told him, "This is he, about whom it was said 'a nation would stem from him, that will inherit this world, and the world to come. And now, as he did, let that be done to him.'" So they threw Abraham in a furnace.

Then the Holy One, Blessed be He, filled with compassion, and He delivered him, as it is said, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of the Ur (furnace) Casdim."

CHAPTER IV

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JACOB

The midrash of Jacob has little or nothing to do with the character of that Patriarch. The Biblical verses are utilized by the midrashic authors as a peg to hang their tale. They use Jacob as a jumping off spot to take a view of the future, and to speak of things to come.

The technique is that of pseudo prophecy. Had the midrashic authors not found the verses dealing with Jacob acceptable to their purposes they might have taken ~~another~~ other verses just as easily. Jacob as a personality is not treated in any of the midrashim.

In the midrash, Jacob wishes to reveal the secret of the future to his sons. However, he is deterred by the presence of God. In its running commentary, the Midrash seeks to find in Jacob's blessing the prophecy and the foresight of those things which traditionally came to pass. Another purpose was to give an apologia for such misdeeds as they have been, traditionally accused of. For example, ~~Rubean~~ Reuben was accused of incest. The Midrash however points out that this was a fiction. That the true story was that after the death of Leah, Jacob had intercourse with Bilah. Rubean, thinking the time too close to the tragedy of Leah's death, stole into the room, and turned the bed over upon the two. The midrash proves this point, by quoting the blessing of Moses before all the tribes. When he said, "Cursed be he who defiles the wife of his father!", all Israel knew that ~~Rubean~~ Reuben was considered innocent, this was inferred by the use of the word " \uparrow " to go up.

Judah is given much consideration, and is obviously a favorite of the midrashic authors.

In this midrash, use is made of corresponding words in the text. Most of the arguments are hung on the text. They are very flimsy and unworthy of much consideration. However a sample has been given.

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THE BLESSING OF JACOB, OUR FATHER, MAY HE REST IN PEACE

"And Jacob called his sons." The Scriptures should have said, "And Esau called", for he was the eldest. Why did it say, Jacob? Because Scriptures also states, "The dead do not praise Thee." Then who acknowledges God? He who is living worships the living God. As it is written, "The living praise Thee."

Rabbi Hanninah said, it is customary that a slave may not draw up the will of his master. Then who draws it up—a free man? Then why was not Esau allowed to make the will of his father. It is shown that Esau was not living, for unless a man recognizes the living God, he is not to be accounted as living. Therefore it is written, "And Jacob called to his sons."

That which Scripture says "He retrains the speech of the faithful" is written concerning Isaac and Jacob. For they both sought to reveal the secrets of the Almighty. Isaac called Esau in order to tell him about the end of time and the Almighty hid Esau from him. As it is said, "And he called Esau his eldest". And Jacob sought to reveal the end of time to his sons as it is written, "Gather yourselves, and I will tell you." To what is the matter likened? To a servant appointed by the king over all that was his. When the servant was about to die, he called his sons in order to free them and to tell them how they can acquire an inheritance. The king knew about it, and went and stood near him; and the servant saw him and changed what he was going to tell them. Instead he said to them "I ask of you, for you are servants of the king, to honor him as I honored him all my days." So Jacob our father said, "I'll call my sons and tell them when the end of days will come." Immediately the Almighty appeared and said to him, "You call your sons, but not Me", as

(1) Vol. II page 73 f.

Isaiah said: "You haven't called me, O Jacob." As soon as Jacob saw him, he said to his sons, "I ask of you, my sons, to give honor to the Almighty as my father honored him" as it is written: "The God before whom my fathers walked." They said to him, "We know what is in your heart. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." When Jacob heard this he bowed, as it is written, "And Jacob bowed at the head of the ~~head~~." He began to whisper, "Blessed be the glory of His kingdom forever and ever." The Almighty said to him, "the glory of God is a secret; the attributes are not yours; as it is said, "The talebearer reveals secrets." And another explanation, "And Jacob called his sons." that is what Scriptures says, "I will call to the Almighty on high, 'to the God who rules over me.'". Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, three things, the earthly courts decreed; and the Almighty agreed, and these are they; one was in the days of Ezra, when the Jews returned from Babylon; the Almighty wanted to free them from tithes, what did they do? They went and decreed tithes over themselves, for so it is said, "The first of our produce and fruit of all trees and vine and oil and so forth." What did they do, they wrote it in a book and sealed it and placed it in the Temple. On the morrow they entered and found it sealed. And from whence do we know that God agreed to this? For we seal this, and write an inscription on it. And the second, at the time of Mord^{ch}cai and Esther, as it is written, "And the Jews arose and accepted." How do we know that God agreed to this? For it is not written, "They accepted", but "He accepted". Hence we know that God agreed.

The third one was in the days of Joshua when the Jews entered Palestine. Joshua spoke to them and the city was set apart for God. Joshua did this on his own authority, and how do we know that the Lord agreed to this?

For it is written, "Israel sinned and they transgressed my covenant", hence we know that God agreed to it. Therefore, it is written "I will call to the Lord on High, to the God who rules over me."

When the sons of Jacob entered his room, he began to ~~them~~ ^{give} them instructions. And how do we know that God agreed to these words, for we find that later Moses repeated the same blessings to the children of Israel in the wilderness. We also learn that the Lord agreed with Jacob on every blessing that he gave at the time he departed from the earth. Hence, "And Jacob called his sons."

CHAPTER V

MOSES

Moses is the outstanding character and personality ever produced in Jewish history. And the legends dealing with his figure are representative of this greatness. He is always shown as a leader of men. He is a giant of body and of spirit. With one blow of his fist he kills an oppressor; he argues with the Almighty Himself. In all our history he is the only man to speak to God face to face.

Yet the Moses is the most powerful of men, the midrash portrays grave faults in his character. His pride is demonstrated, his temper is revealed; his haste and at times his selfishness are revealed.

Yet in his very weakness there is strength. We love and admire Moses because he is so intensely human. We feel that here is a man who was by no means perfect. He sinned and made grave errors; yet in the final analysis he was able to overcome his handicaps and emerge triumphant in his struggle with life.

Unlike Father Abraham, who fought regardless of the consequences, Moses was always reasonable. He was always able to look ahead and see the results of his actions. Above all he was a thinker and a law giver. Powerful both of body and mind, he coordinated the two. He insisted on progress, he always sought the best means to attain his ends. Abraham battled when he might have reasoned. Moses, just as much an idealist, reasoned and thought his way out of difficulties.

The real beauty of Moses' character is revealed in the midrash concerning the death of Aaron. With what tenderness, with what delicacy of feelings, does Moses pay his last respects to his brother. He points out the timeliness of Aaron's death; the future bliss in store for his soul. He tells him of the sorrow of those he leaves in this world. He personally serves him before his death.

The whole life of Moses is a preparation for the job of redeeming the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt. As Abraham came to teach all mankind the greatness of God, so Moses might be named as the deliverer of the Israelites. All his training fitted him to be a leader of men. Raised in the court of the Pharaoh, elected king of Edom, caring for sheep in the wilderness, he was made to think and plan not only for himself but for others. He was taught patience and gentleness, kindness and forbearance.

Even the miracles that take place pertaining to his childhood are treated in a different manner from the miracles concerning Abraham. For even as a child of ten days old, Abraham participates in the miracle; whereas Moses is a passive creature. The miracle of light filling the tent or cave is used to illustrate the greatness of both men at their birth. Both are saved from death, time and again, by the hand of God, yet, in the case of Moses, the miracle is made to appear more or less reasonable. In other words, miracles are divorced from the real character of Moses and in no wise affect the development of his character.

In the midrash dealing with the death of Moses, the intellectual honesty and generosity of his nature is revealed. Though he argues with God—in the manner of a Jeremiah or a Job, in the final analysis, we realize that he is always reverent and obedient. For example, on one occasion, when God offers him his life on condition that the children of Israel die, he answers, "Better the death of a thousand like Moses, than one man perish of any of the tribes of Israel."

This same greatness of character is revealed when Moses, told that other men are prophesying about the camp, replies, "would that all the children of Israel were prophets."

But above all, Moses is the lawgiver, the man who stormed the heavens

and obtained the Torah. Because of his moral qualities, and his strength of character, he is rightly deemed the greatest of all men.

Setting off the character of Moses is the adversary, the arch fiend Baalam. This satan-like creature serves as a foil for Moses. He is the enemy of Israel, a master of the black arts! He opposes Moses, and therefore Israel at every step. Afraid of the Israelites' pursuit of moral purity and religious zeal, he constantly tries to lead them astray. Yet the real tragedy of the character is revealed in his attempt to curse the children of Israel in the Biblical verse of Numbers, Chapter VIII, Verses 8-10; "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed....Let me die the death of the righteous and let mine end be like his!" For knowing the future of Israel, Balaam yet must constantly strive to overcome their upward climb to the heights.

Balaam it was who advises the Pharoah to drown the Israelite male children. For God could not punish them if they destroyed the children of Israel by water, due to God's promise to Noah after the flood. "I will no more bring water upon the earth to destroy the children of earth." However, Balaam did not know what God could bring the children of men to the water and thus destroy them. This was later illustrated in the destruction of the Egyptians at the waters of the Red Sea.

Moses, the ideal leader of men, was proved in the crucible of adversity. He first had to overcome the machinations of Balaam, escape Pharoah's wrath, overcome Balaam, as the king of Cush, conquer the will of Pharoah by means of the plagues, and finally he had to constantly guide and control the outbreaks of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Intensely human, Moses is no super-man, but in his greatness of spirit he overcomes these human weaknesses and stands as the Jewish prototype of ideal leaders.

He is the ideal Jew. Never superhuman, never a saint, he is the perfect man. The midrashic authors repudiate the Christian ideal, the monk. Moses is of the people, he never withdraws from their midst, he never tries to wear a halo. Well has it been written, "and there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord
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knew face to face."

In the midrash of Moses in Volume II, we have a collection of legends each more or less complete in itself. Whereas in Volume I, the legend concerns itself only with the death of Moses.

There are eight different legends in the Moses cycle in Volume II:

1. Dealing with the background of all the persecutions of the Egyptians and might be put under the title of "The troubles of the Israelites.
2. Concerning "The leadership of Amram".
3. "The rescue of Moses from the river"
4. Telling the tale of "Moses and the fiery coals".
5. Speaking of "The Youth of Moses".
6. "The conflict of Balaam and Moses".
7. Describing the "Marriage of Moses".
8. Moses' meeting with Aaron, and the "Plagues of Egypt".

The style and the Hebrew is superior to most of the other midrashim, and the sense of the dramatic and the beautiful is manifest in each legend. The order is logical, and the moral and ethical values portrayed, are of a high nature.

(1) Deut. 34:10

MOSES

The most complete and perfect portrayal by the midrash of a Biblical character is in the midrash of Moses. All the well known traits of his character are portrayed. He is shown as the great law-giver, the friend of God, and the leader of his people. Though chosen to perform miracles, he is at all times human.

The midrash uses Biblical verses to good advantage, and this is especially effective in the passages dealing with Moses' request to the elements and creatures to pray and deliver him from death.

"When Moses saw that God refused to hear his prayers that he might live, he tried to invoke God's mercy through the pleadings of others. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the sun. As long as Moses was not yet called upon to die, everything was in his power, but when the time drew near, he sought the help of others.

So he went to the earth and asked for aid, but the earth said, "I am without form and content, and I shall soon wax old like a garment." The heavens next said, "The heavens are not clean in his sight," and "the heavens shall vanish away like a smoke". The sun and moon made no answer. "The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed".

The hills and mountains answered his appeal, "The mountains shall
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depart, and the hills be removed".

And so all the elements replied to Moses' plea by quoting Scriptures showing that they, too, were under the dominion of God's hand.

(1) Volume I, page 120.

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THE TROUBLES OF THE ISRAELITES

One hundred and thirty years after the children of Israel went down into Egypt, after the death of Joseph, Harosh dreamed a dream. And in this dream he saw an old man holding a pair of scales in his hand. In the one side all the princes and nobles of Egypt were placed, and in the other a baby lamb. Yet the lamb outweighed the Egyptians. And the princes of Egypt interpreted the dream as meaning that a child would be born to the Israelites who was destined to destroy Egypt, and they advised Pharaoh to kill all the male Israelite children.

Many Israelite therefore separated themselves from their wives, but many carried on their marital relations as usual. However, when the women were ready to bear children, they went out into the fields and hid their male children there. The angels attended them and wrapped the infants in the birth stones, and buried them in the earth. One of the birth stones would give the child milk, and the other would cause the hair of the child to grow down to its knees. When the child was old enough, it returned to its family well grown.

To counteract this measure, the Egyptians in their hatred began to plow the fields in order to destroy the infants. However, the angel merely caused the children to sink deeper into the earth. In Psalm 129: 3, it is written, "The ^epowers plowed on my back."

CONCERNING AMRAM

And Amram, the Levite, married his aunt Jochebed. And she conceived and bore a child, and she named it Miriam. Then she bore Aaron a few years later. After this, Amram told the people to separate themselves

from their wives, due to the persecutions of the Egyptians. However, when Miriam prophesied and declared the future greatness of Moses, all the people took back their wives, for it was not right to deprive the children, not only of this life, but of the life to come.

It was told at this time that one of the tricks played by the Egyptians to discover male children was for the Egyptian women to visit the Israelite homes with their children, then pinch them. Naturally, the child would cry, whereupon the Jewish child hidden in the back would answer the other child's cry, and thus be destroyed.

THE RESCUE OF MOSES

The midrash then tells the story of Moses' rescue from the waters of the Nile by the daughter of the Pharaoh, and how Miriam stayed and managed to get the king's daughter to engage the Mother of Moses as his nurse.

MOSES AND THE FIERY COALS

When Moses was still a small child, he stretched forth his hand and took the crown of Pharaoh off his head. The wise men pointed out that this was a terrible calamity. However, they agreed to test the intelligence of the child. They placed before him two bowls, one full of precious stones, and one full of burning coals. Moses reached for the stones, but an angel guided his hand ^{and} he grasped the live coal. Feeling the intense heat, he placed the coal to his lips, whereupon Moses stuttered all the days of his life.

THE YOUTH OF MOSES

And Moses grew up as a prince in the house of Pharaoh, and he was

educated in all the secrets and mysteries of that time.

One day, while Moses was walking in the field, an Israelite came to him and complained that his wife had been violated by an Egyptian taskmaster. Moses looked all about, found no one watching, and slew the taskmaster. The next day Moses learned that the deed was known, for when he interceded in a quarrel, he was taunted by the Israelites of the murder. And the thing became known, and Pharaoh ordered his execution. But when the executioner tried to kill him, God changed his neck to marble. This was not all, but Gabriel, the angel, changed the form of Moses into that of the hangman, and thus the hangman himself was killed.

BALAAM AND MOSES

When Balaam's advice misfired concerning the slaughter of the Jews, he fled to the land of Edom, and when the king went off to the wars, Balaam took over the government with his two sons. He fortified it and hedged it about with traps, then put snakes and scorpions about it. And when the king and his men returned, they were not permitted to enter, and many were destroyed in their attempt to conquer the city.

Moses, who had fled Egypt, was proclaimed king after the death of the rightful king of Edom. Moses continued the war against the city, and by means of storks he cleared the wilderness of the serpents, stormed the city's walls and conquered the city.

But though the people gave Moses the wife of their former king to wife he refused to approach her; so after many years, she organized a revolt and set her son on the throne. And so Moses journeyed to the land of Midian.

THE STORY OF THE STAFF

Jethro had placed a staff in the grounds, and promised any who were

able to wrest it from its place, his daughter Zipporah in marriage. Many kings and princes tried to take the staff, but failed. Moses, however, merely repeated the name of God, and the staff jumped into his hand. When Jethro saw the staff in his hand, he gave him his daughter.

THE MEETING OF MOSES AND AARON

After God appeared to Moses in the bush, he was ordered to meet Aaron his brother. When they met they told each other of their state of health and the events of their lives. Moses then unfolded his plans to Aaron and later to the elders of the Israelites.

The plagues are described in detail in the midrash. The children of Israel are delivered out of their bondage, they wander for forty years in the wilderness. And the legend closes with the death of Moses.

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THE DEATH OF MOSES

The scene of the midrash opens in the land of Egypt, at the time when Israel was preparing to leave. While they were busy getting gold and gifts from their Egyptian masters and acquaintances, Moses was occupied with caring for the bones of Joseph. For this reason, God promised to be ~~the~~ undertaker of Moses, when he should die.

However when the day finally arrived for Moses to die, he refused to agree to the justice of his death, and argued with God. God pointed out that all men had died in the past, but Moses proved that they all deserved death. Adam and Eve were enticed by the serpent. Noah neglected to pray for the welfare of his generation. Abraham had failed to raise Ishmael correctly. Isaac had a bad son. Then God changed his tactics and accused Moses of manslaughter. To which Moses answered that God Himself had destroyed all the first born of Egypt at one time. To this

(1) Vol. I, page 115 f.

God reminds Moses not to forget his place. Again God changes his approach and reminds Moses of the many times He has come to his support in time of need. He reminds Moses of the rebellion of Korah, how Moses prayed to Him, and God had caused the earth to open and swallow Korah, according to the demand of Moses. Again God points out that in answer to the prayer of Moses, he had forgiven the whole congregation of Israel after they had sinned in the wilderness. Then God offers to let Moses live, but he will revoke his past mercy to Israel. Moses then admits the justice of God, and answers, "Let a thousand like Moses die, but touch not one man of Israel".

Moses then asks all the creatures to plead in his behalf, but they refuse, for they too are subordinate to God.

Joshua then enters and asks Moses how to deal with the children of Israel. Moses, now mellow, tells him that God would help him, that he should neither worry ^{or} be afraid.

Moses then persuades the Israelites to pray that he may continue to live, whereupon a bas kol is heard, demanding to know why so much noise and confusion is being made. At this point, Moses sees that he is waging a losing battle, and ~~sees that he~~ must give in.

He then writes the book entitled "The Book of the Righteous", the "se^{fer} er ha yoshar", and gives it to Joshua, ^{whom he} And personally serves Joshua for many days as a servant. Finally, he finds that though he can see Joshua, yet Joshua is unable to see him. By this means he was made to see that his usefulness was finished, and that Joshua was the real leader.

Still Moses refuses to agree to die, so God sends down the angel Michael to bring back his soul. However, Michael was unable to approach the soul of Moses.

Then Satan approached to get his soul, but as Moses was busy writing

the Name of God, he too failed in his purpose ^{and} fled from his presence.

Finally God Himself went to Moses and Moses died with a kiss of the Almighty.

CHAPTER VI

AARON

Aaron is one of the few characters in the minor midrashim that is not life-like. Moses and Miriam are portrayed as dynamic personalities, but Aaron is always the man of peace. He always temperizes to prevent a quarrel. Thus, even in the midrash that concerns his death, we find that his character is dominated by that of Moses. In several places the story digresses in order to tell of Moses, or even of Eliazar, the son of Aaron. All in all the midrash paints Aaron as a wishy-washy character who can be molded to almost any purpose.

However, in one respect Aaron is shown to be more highly loved than Moses; he was above all the people's friend. The midrash tells how he personally felt guilty for the fact that the people worshipped the golden calf; and so he used to spend his time teaching the ignorant in paying social calls, in visiting the sick, and all in all trying to make amends for his past mistake.

The midrash itself is a charming story of the death of Aaron. It is touching and beautiful in depicting the characters of all the people involved. Aaron, though definitely out of this world, is still a human being, still warmly loved for the finer traits of his character. The very fact that he ministered so sincerely to the people, because of his feeling of guilt, shows that he felt deeply his past error. He is a sincere small person, who in his own eyes, failed to measure up to the high standards set by the other members of his family. He is pathetic in his desire to be a good fellow, yet try as he might, be ever so popular as he may be, he realizes that he will never be half the man that his brother is.

It is rather interesting that God is unable to tell Aaron of his

approaching death, and Moses is appointed to break the news. Moses here too shows a reluctance to speak to his brother concerning his death.

The midrashic authors show with what respect the priestly garments are held, and with what care they are guarded.

(1)

THE DEATH OF AARON

"When the time came for Aaron to die, God asked Moses to reveal the matter to his brother, for God had not the heart to tell him. So Moses tried by hints to tell Aaron, but in the end, he had to come out and tell him man to man. Moses took Aaron up to the mountain with his son, then persuades Aaron to take his priestly garments off and put them on his son, Eliazar, for they were about to enter a cave that had opened before them.

When Moses and Aaron entered the cave, Aaron was consoled that he had to die, for Moses pointed out that he was taking care of him, and that the angels were ministering at his bedside. So Aaron lay down on the bed that appeared, and God took his soul with a kiss.

When Moses returned to the children of Israel, they thought that Eliazar or Moses had killed Aaron out of envy. For they had remembered that Aaron had been more loved than Moses, for he had busied himself more in pastoral duties and in personal teaching than the others. So Moses, seeing the dangerous mood of the Israelites, prayed to God. And God split the mountain and the children of Israel were able to see the bier of Aaron in the cave. And while they watched, the cloud of glory rested over the body of Aaron, and from that time on the cloud of glory was no more seen from the camp of Israel."

C H A P T E R V I I

GOLIATH

The midrash entitled "Goliath" actually deals with King David. It is a charming story of David's pride and his attaining a sense of dependency. It is popular, and so constructed as to explain a Biblical verse. It has little theology, and that little, of a primitive nature. It deals with the brother of Goliath and his attempt to kill David, who has been trapped by the mother of the slain champion, Goliath.

This midrash strangely enough is the only one in the minor midrashim that deals with David in any shape or form.

David is depicted as a fun loving monarch who feels he is superior to God's moral law. Through miracles and the intervention of his friend he is rescued from mortal danger and thus learns that God is supreme.

(1)
GOLIATH THE GIANT

It is written, let not the warrior pride himself ⁱⁿ his strength. This was said of David, the King. When David was in battle, he would throw and kill 800 men at a stroke. And when he sheathed his sword 300 men died. When David saw this, he was very proud, and said, "There is none such as I in the world, nor will there be after me." The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, "Do not be prouder of your own strength than appreciative of God's help." Now you shall see that it is not your own strength.

What did God do? He caused a deer to run before him. And Abishai was with David at the time. The two followed the deer too far and lost their way. And the lace of Abishai's shoe became untied, and while he was tying it, David went ahead to a fine tower that he saw. He entered and saw an old woman, the mother of Goliath, the Philistine. She was sitting and weaving with the loom. She recognized him as the slayer of her son Goliath, the Philistine. But he did not know her. As she wove, she broke her thread, and said, "My son give the spindle which has dropped. David said, "With all good wishes, maam." And when he bent down to take the spindle, she hid ^{it} in her hand. And as he was looking for to ~~take~~ the spindle on the floor, she dropped a leg of the bed, (on which she was sitting) ^{over} him, to break his bones. Immediately, the Holy One Blessed be He, before Whom there is no forgetfulness or favoritism, caused a depression to appear under him, into which he fell. And when the brother of Goliath, the Philistine, returned, his mother said to him, "Do you know, my son, what I have caught?" And he answered, "No." She said, "I have caught David who killed your brother." He said, "Mother, what have you done with that wicked one? Give him to

me that I may kill him." She said, "Go and you may see him under the foot of the bed. For I have broken all his bones." He went and saw him sitting in the pit. When he saw him, he said to his mother, "He is yet alive." And he went to fetch his spear. Outside, he stuck his spear in the ground with his sword. In order to catch David. Then he went and took David, and threw him up to the spear so that he would fall on the spear. But the Holy One Blessed be He caused David to remain hanging in the air. In the meantime Abishai came and saw what was happening, he went to Goliath's brother and said, "Give me the spear that I may kill him." He said, "Take it," and when Abishai took it, he killed that evil doer. Then did David fall to the earth. And they returned to their place. Then did the people say, "The might is not David's, but of God." And this is the meaning of the verse, "And Abishai helped David, and he smote the Philistine."

CHAPTER VIII

SOLOMON

In dealing with the character of Solomon, the midrash stress his worldly wisdom and knowledge. However, as a whole, they are woven around him as a central figure, rather than dealing with his deeds and character. As long as King Solomon cleaves to God and His way, he is the absolute ruler of all the earth. Like Moses, he commands the elements. He understands the language of men and animals. Nature hides no secrets from his eyes. However, when he deserts God's ways, he comes to grief. In his trials and troubles, he learns proper respect for the Divine creations. As in the other midrashim, Solomon was opposed by an adversary, by Asmodeous the demon. Just as in the previous Biblical characterizations, the adversary is not powerfully created. Its real character is difficult to understand. It is all bad, with no good features. It is pure evil, rather than a characterization.

Solomon, is a public man. Unlike Abraham, the simple man of faith, he has a kingdom to lead and guide. Abraham is always the individual with a mission. Solomon is always the public leader, the king. His wisdom is used for public purposes. He is the judge; he it is who erects the magnificent buildings, who teaches his subjects the correct laws and sayings of the Bible.

The midrashim themselves are a charming collection of folk-tales and legends. Most are ^{un}irreligious in tone. They all illustrate the pomp and wisdom of the king. Their attitude is moralistic rather than moral. Wisdom is second only to being at unison with God.

The miracles performed in behalf of Solomon are not the awe

inspiring type we behold in conjunction with Abraham or Moses. They are small affairs. He finds the ring inscribed with the ineffable name in the belly of a fish. True, the demon conjures up a two-headed man, but the demon finds he is not powerful to see him back to the netherworld. Solomon is thrown through space. Even when describing the throne of Solomon, the midrashic writer keeps it within imaginary bounds. The real miracles performed, are those of judgement, and these only because Solomon's spirituality is at one with God.

Solomon as a man is not too well painted. He is the central hero of the midrash, yet, the story itself is the essential part. Any character would have served the purpose. The midrashic authors merely take advantage of the classical conception of Solomon as a man of great wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. True he beats the demon, he solves difficult law problems, he rules wisely, he loves well, but in the final analysis, we do not truly know him as a man, as we learned to know the other Biblical characters. He remains the instrument of the story; the story never takes second place to the character.

(1)
THE THRONE OF SOLOMON

The sages, of blessed memory, tell that ^{by} Ahasuerus wished to sit upon the throne that Solomon had fashioned for himself. And the Israelites prayed before the Holy One, Blessed be He. "O Master of the Universe, how can you permit such a villain to sit on the throne that Solomon used to sit on and judge Israel?"

For after the death of Solomon, Shishak, the father-in-law of Solomon, took it as indemnity for claims in behalf of his widowed daughter. Sennacherib conquered Egypt, and carried the throne away with him, but marching through Palestine, he lost it to ^{to} Nezekiah. Pharaoh Necho conquered it from Jehoash. And Nebuchadnezzar got it from Egypt.

The throne had six steps in honor of the six descendants of David, with lions standing on each step. When the Pharaoh tried to mount the throne, the lions dwelt him such a blow that he limped for the rest of his life. Therefore, was he called Pharaoh Necho, or the lame.

Nebuchadnezzar also wished to mount the throne, but he too was hit by the lions, and he never again tried to sit on the throne of Solomon.

Darius, the Mede, took the throne to India, but he did not venture to sit on it himself. And Ahasuerus later followed him in his caution^{was} policy. Ahasuerus tried to have the throne imitated, but naturally failed in this project.

And this is a description of the glory and the beauty of the throne; six steps flanked with gold rose to the throne, and whenever the king mounted, the lions would raise their paws and recite some law of justice.

Gad and Nathan, the prophets, had a platform on either side of the throne. All in all there were 70 such platforms for the elders of the tribes. Whenever witness' testified before the King, if they spoke falsely, the images of the brutes on the steps would make an uproar to confuse the liar.

(1)
AS MODEUS

After the Temple was finished, Asmodeus was still kept in chains in the palace of King Solomon. Once Solomon questioned him concerning the power of the demons. Asmodeus told Solomon that he would reveal his secrets if he could wear the royal ring engraved with the ineffable name. Solomon consented, but as soon as the demon had it in his hands, he took hold of the king and hurled him far out of the country into another land.

Thus, Solomon learned that he was no longer great and powerful, but one of the poorest of the poor, and he wandered about as a beggar. And he was finally taken into the kitchen of the king, and he served the head cook. After many days he was promoted to head cook. But he was unable to convince anyone of his former position and royal station. He knew that he was being punished for multiplying women, horses, and material possessions" while he was king in Jerusalem.

The daughter of the king fell in love with Solomon. The king threw them both out of the Palace and exiled them to the wilderness. There, Solomon bought a fish, and in it discovered the ring, which the demon had cast into the sea. Solomon then was again in possession of

the name of God. So he returned to Jerusalem, and after many trials, proved himself the true king. When he finally confronted the demon, the demon clapped his wings together and vanished into space.

A big reception was given and the father of Solomon's wife was reconciled to his daughter. Because of her love and loyalty, she was blessed with a son, Rehoboam, under whose reign the kingdom split.

(1)

SOLOMON

Once upon a time there was a very wealthy man who had servants and property and all that a man's heart could desire. He sent his son on a business trip to Africa and during his absence, died. On the boy's return he learned that one of his father's servants had succeeded in getting rid of all the others, and claimed to be the son of the wealthy man. As the boy could find no witnesses to testify in his behalf, he was in danger of losing his estate. But Solomon heard of the matter and he took a drop of blood from each claimant. The blood of the natural son dyed the bones of the father, and the blood of the servant was not absorbed by them. And thus Solomon was able to discover the true son. Therefore was it written, "And Solomon was the wisest of all men."

During the days of Solomon, the king, there was a handsome young man who went from Tiberias to Bethar to study Torah. A young girl saw him and asked her father to betroth her to that young man. Whereupon her father followed him and said, "If you wish to marry, I will give my daughter to you for a wife." And the young man agreed. They were

(1) Volume IV, page 145 f.

married and established a home where they lived happily for a year. At the end of the year, his wife said to him, "Please take me back to my parents that I may see them." So he provided himself with horses and food and drink and many dainties, and went with his wife to visit her parents. While they were upon the way, a highwayman held them up. When he saw the young wife, he fell in love with her and she returned his love. They tied up the young man, and the highwayman had intercourse with the woman. And afterwards he sat down to enjoy a good meal with her. And all the while the young man was tied to a tree and saw what was going on. Then the highwayman took a pitcher and put it under his head and went to sleep. While he was asleep, a serpent came and drank of the wine, and spit its own poison therein. When the highwayman awoke he drank the contents of the pitcher and died. And the young man beheld the miracle that had taken place. He said to his wife, "please free me of these ropes," and she answered, "I am afraid that you will kill me." He swore that he wouldn't. Then she freed him, and they returned to the house of her father. When her parents saw her they were very happy and prepared a feast. But her husband said, "I cannot eat or drink till I tell you what happened to me." He told them the whole story concerning the highwayman, whereupon her father killed his daughter. And concerning this Solomon said, "And a woman in all these I have not found."

(1)

LOYALTY

The Scriptural verse, "I have found one man in a thousand, but I have not discovered one woman in a thousand", is explained in this midrash.

A man noted for the happiness of his family life was approached by the king who said, "If he would get rid of his wife, Solomon would make him one of the great men of the land, and give him one of his own daughters for a wife." The man, however, on his return home was unable to slay his wife.

Solomon then approached the wife with the same type of proposition. However, in her case, he gave her a lead sword, rather than one of steel. And during the night, she attempted to slay her husband, and thus the king proved the truth of the verse, "I have found mne man in a thousand, but a woman have I not found."

Once upon a time there were three brothers, and they came before King Solomon in order to learn wisdom. Solomon agreed on condition that they served him for a period of time. At the end of the time, they were not satisfied with their progress, so Solomon paid them a sum of money and they left. After travelling for a time, the youngest decided to return and give the wages back, for he had come to learn wisdom. Solomon agreed. He taught him three things; always camp before night falls, never cross a river in flood, and last, never reveal a secret to a woman.

The youngest brother then left and soon overtook his brothers. That night he camped early, but they decided to press forward. During the night a blizzard arose and froze them to death. The next day the brother overtook them, found them dead; took the money and pressed on. Soon he came to a river in flood. He waited, but some treasure bearers tried to swim across and they were all drowned. The brother then took the gold. After he returned home, he married, and one day he told his wife his secret. Sure enough, in a quarrel he was accused of killing his

brothers and robbing the caravan. He was in danger of losing his life, but he sent to the king who backed him up in his story. Thus he learned part of Solomon's wisdom.

THE GOLD IN THE JARS OF HONEY

In the days of King Saul, an old man died, and left his young widow all his wealth. The Philistine overlord looked upon the woman and desired her. So she hid her money in jars of honey, and gave them to an old friend of her husband to guard. Whereupon she left the country. After many days the man gave a feast, and running short of honey opened the jars, and discovered the money. He stole it, and no man knew of his theft.

After many days the widow returned and discovered the theft. She appeared before King Saul, but as there were not witnesses, he refused to try the case. However, young David heard her troubles and agreed to represent her. He showed that there were still several coins in one of the jars, and that therefore the widow was telling the truth. Whereupon all Israel agreed, that the spirit of God was upon David.

Once upon a time Solomon was talking to Agmodeus who questioned him concerning the wisdom of the king. And the demon offered to show him a thing or two. So he conjured up one of the inhabitants of the nether world. A creature with two heads and four eyes. All the people were amazed, and then asked the demon to return the creature to its place. However, this was beyond his power. So the creature took a wife, and she

bore seven sons, six normal, but one like the father. After the death of the creature, the two headed son demanded a double inheritance, for was he not two people? However, Solomon poured hot water mixed with wine on his arm, and with both his mouths the creature called, "Behold, I am dying." And so he was granted only one portion, for he had only one mind.

CHAPTER IX

HIRAM

This short midrash is similar to several others given in the minor midrashim. It is the story of a man who feels that he is superior to God, and above all the moral and physical laws of nature. Hiram is powerful, it is true, yet in the final test, he is found wanting. He ends his life in disgrace and suffers a cruel and harsh death, and all his work was swallowed up as if it had never been. The king is taken as a prototype to show that wealth and power when employed for profane purposes will always come to naught.

(1)

HIRAM

Hiram, the king of Tyre was a very proud and vain man. He considered himself a god, and tried to make men believe in his divinity by making artificial heavens. In the sea, he erected four iron pillars on which he built seven heavens, each larger than the one below. In the highest, he had pearls and diamonds so placed that they ^{shone} ~~shined~~ like stars.

As Hiram was floating above the earth, he suddenly saw the prophet Ezekiel next to himself. Ezekiel told him that God had put him there, and demanded to know why Hiram was so proud of himself. Hiram answered that he had survived many kings and had buried many prophets and priests. Whereupon God said; "I will destroy My house, and therefore Hiram will have no reason to be so proud."

And the end of the matter was that Hiram suffered a cruel and harsh death. His kingdom was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, and he was taken captive and forced to eat two fingers breadth of his own flesh soaked in vinegar every day until he died. His palace was swallowed up by the earth, and it will emerge in the future world as the habitation of the pious.

C H A P T E R X

JONAH

The character Jonah is the most human of all the Biblical characters portrayed in the minor midrashim. In his pathetic desire to conform, to be one of the honest people, well thought of and admired, he refuses to go and warn the peoples of their danger, "lest they repent, and he be known again as a false prophet." Therefore, he flees far away. The miracles, in a way, differ from those performed by a stern and wrathful God. The ship is brought to port, though it is "two days journey out" so that Jonah may enter. There, like a child who has tricked his parents, he goes to sleep. When he is later thrown overboard and taken within the fish, he is so comfortable that he neglects to repent. He is always the comfortable man who above all wishes to be left alone. There is nothing heroic or noble in any of his actions. Above all, he is concerned with his own welfare, with the good opinion of the world. However, when he finally is brought by God to see the error of his ways and repent, the whole affair does turn out as he had foreseen, the people repent, and he is again the false prophet.

The character of Jonah is admirably set off by the unselfish actions of the pagan sailors. In their solicitude for Jonah's life, they follow the spirit of the Biblical narrative. The people of Niniveh also, in their desire to do that which was right, showed Jonah, the man of God, to be weaker than they. Thus, in steadfastness of purpose, in strength of faith, Jonah is by far the weakest of all the Biblical characters treated.

(1)

JONAH

Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh only to show that God is everpresent, that He rules not only in the heavens and the earth, but in the sea as well.

Jonah did not wish to go to that city for he had twice prophesied concerning Jerusalem and on both occasions the people had repented, and God did not destroy the city. And so Jonah became known as the false prophet. Fearful lest the same term be applied to him in other lands, he determined to flee. To test him God went so far as to bring back a ship to the port of Joppa when upon Jonah's arrival there were none in port.

So anxious was Jonah to get away from God that he paid his full passage money in advance. Once on the ship he retired to sleep, and while he was asleep a great storm arose. The sailors prayed to no avail. Finally, they called to Jonah and he admitted that the storm had arisen because of him. The men finally agreed to throw him overboard, but only after several reluctant attempts, and only after they saw that it was absolutely necessary to get rid of him.

Jonah was then swallowed by the fish, who told him that at the creation of the world it was agreed that he would swallow Jonah at this time. Jonah was so comfortable that God had to send a female fish, big with swarms of young, she threatened to put Jonah in her belly. Whereupon he agreed to go to Nineveh. As soon as Jonah agreed to go to Nineveh the fish spewed him upon the land.

When Jonah prophesied concerning the city, the people repented of their ways. They even separated the cattle from their young so that their cry also would reach up to heaven. Of their own accord they

confessed their past crimes and demanded punishment for their sins.

And so God forgave the people, and ^{as} Jonah was anxious that God be still angry, ~~that~~ he fled from doing his word. So God caused a tall gourd to grow up to shelter Jonah from the heat of the sun. When this withered, Jonah learned the lesson of God's mercy to men.

The midrash compares Jonah in the heart of the ship to the soul of man that is located in the depths of his body. The captain of the ship in asking Jonah where he was from, what was his object, and where was he bound is compared to the good inclination that constantly demands a man to review his aims and objectives. The storm at sea is compared to the troubles of life, that cause a man to reflect on his methods and actions. The rocks and the dangers of shipwreck remind a man's soul of the moral dangers and crises that are ever present, and force a man to steer his course carefully.

When Jonah is cast overboard and is taken into the belly of the whale he resembles man's course to the grave, and the three day stay in the belly of the whale is compared to the period in which a man's body rots and decays. Just as there was peace and darkness in the belly of the whale, so is there peace and quiet in the grave.

And so just as Jonah found that God existed in the belly of the whale, so God can rescue from the grave. And just as Jonah was rescued and spewed up upon the land, so man may be resurrected in the life to come.

This acceptance of interpretation is important and should have received more attention.

C H A P T E R XI

(1)

DANIEL

The midrash makes use of the figure of Daniel as a mere peg upon which to hang an apocalyptic utterance, about things which have already come to pass. Evidently written after the coming of Mohammed and Abu Bekr, the story purports to be a prophetic vision of Daniel after he had seen the desolation that had come upon the site of the Temple. The biography of Daniel himself is a fantastic condensation of Jewish History from the time of Zedekiah in Jerusalem until the age of Darius, in which both fact and circumstance are telescoped and distorted into a meaningless miniature. It is a sort of vengeful thinking about the fall of the enemy of a later day. It is very similar to the political pamphlet and is poor both in content and structure.

I am translating a short section as an example of the style and
(2)
content.

"And I Daniel saw, that in their days, a king would arise, short of stature and red in appearance (Red from Edom). Treasure he had not, and the written word of God he does not observe. And he shall say that he is a prophet, and he shall travel on a camel. He shall be a camel driver coming from the south to conquer the sons of man. He will greatly oppress Israel, and some of them will submit to him and to his faith. But you, Daniel, warn Israel not to listen to him, nor to desert the laws of Moses and the true faith of Israel. And as to the man who rides the camel from the south, saying that he is a prophet, of him tell them, Daniel, that from the south, never shall a prophet come. And

(1) Volume V page 117-130

(2) Volume V page 124

that which he speaks is falsehood and deception. From him and from those who cleave to him, will emanate many troubles for men. Their kingdom shall last eleven years and he shall die in the south. And after him another king shall arise with a long beard and long hair....."

CONCLUSION

In reviewing the various characters that are treated in the minor midrashim, we find that there are only four characters that stand out in bold relief. The others are obscure and ill-defined; they fail to leave us with any real impression. We feel that we do not really understand ~~know~~ ^{under} the ~~innate~~ personality of the Biblical character. The reason for this vagueness of characterization is due to the ~~midrashim~~ ^{fact that are} using these individuals as foils, as a background for the message, for the utilization of an idea.

However, in the four that are treated more fully, namely: Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and Jonah, we find their peculiarities well defined. We can discern their true characters. We can see their common traits. They register as real personalities, as real flesh and blood people.

These four, are first and foremost, men of this world. They work with human qualities, they are realistic and vital. All are called upon to propagate the word of God among people who are mostly non-receptive to their ideas. All meet trial and temptation in the pursuit of their office, all are forced to spread the truth, regardless of their personal reactions. The difference of their characters are tied up directly with their nearness to God. Jonah, for example, is the least God conscious of these men. He seeks to escape doing God's word, and the midrash deals with his return and punishment. All are prophets, Solomon, Moses and Abraham, all use the miracles to aid them in their work. All are punished when they refuse to obey. Thus, both Solomon and Jonah meet punishment because they seek to overrule God's

voice. Moses is punished for presumption. Working in different ways, they all illustrate that life is tied up with the knowledge of the Almighty. Nature, too, is under Divine sway. The natural courses of the heavens bend to do the Divine will. Nothing is out of place if it illustrates God's power and majesty. As long as the character is in sympathy with God's ways, he prospers, but once he works for other than the Ends of God, then he falls upon hard times. Thus, Solomon, is the apostle of God. He sees the larger picture of the world. He utilizes his wisdom and power to glorify his reign, but once he rids himself of the ring, inscribed with the name of God, then he is cast aside and suffers hardships and evil times. As a militant messenger of God, he is always in sympathy with the purposes of the world, but once he forgets these ends, he is of no use. Hiram, too, though a minor character, sins because, like Solomon, he considers himself above the laws of God.

Moses, is an unhappy character at times. For it is his task to harmonize the idea of a wrathful and vengeful God, with a people all too prone to sin and evil. Yet, unlike Jonah, he does not try to run away from his mission. He always reasons and softens the extremes. He uses the golden mean to achieve his ends. His role as the supreme law-giver of mankind is not used to its greatest possibilities, but always in the background is the ideal of the perfect leader. Human, often erring, often mistaken in his ends, but never above our understanding and love.

Abraham is the most primitive character in the minor midrashim. It is his naive, healthy, unquestioning faith that typifies his character. It is this unswerving loyalty to his ideal, to God, and His redeeming power that makes him so child-like and lovable a character.

He it is who undoubtedly inspired the medieval martyrs to sanctify God's name. Lusty, vital, with an eye to physical action, there is no subtlety or dishonesty in his make-up. He is always absolutely honest, brave, and uncompromising. A man who sees things simply, without complications or ramifications. He is the man who cuts straight to the heart of a matter. For example: He asks Nimrod one question, the answer must be a "yes" or a "no", there can be no "maybe". And Nimrod, the little opponent, is pathetic in trying to answer this question. He asks what he might do with this simple man of faith?

All these men use miracles to aid their cause. But Moses' character is independent of the miracle, whereas, Abraham, from birth, is directly aided and helped by the miracle. When Abraham fights idolatry the idolaters haven't a chance. It is an uneven battle, and as such we tend to lose interest in the character. Supermen do not hold one's interest. The fight is a battle against the power of God, not Abraham.

As for the minor characters, they are more or less traditional. Aaron is above all the peace-maker. There is little or no bite in his make-up. And as the world loves a fighter, he is largely ignored in the minor midrashim. He is a good man, and as such is dismissed with a few words. He is lovable in a quiet sort of way. But the midrashic writers obviously prefer to tell of the fighting fathers of our faith.

Enoch, or as he is sometimes called Hanoah, is completely out of this world. He is so holy and sacred, that when he dies, he merely changes his address. He moves up to heaven and suffers no pain or difficulty in his change of abode. A recluse, saint and idealist, his

character is negligible. He is used as a vehicle to demonstrate an ideal form of government, a way of life.

Hiram is treated only in a superficial manner. Proud, vain, small of nature, he is portrayed only to show his punishment. He is used as a device to speak of various Biblical verses. The midrash is itself duplicated in one of the Solomon series.

David as a character is not well defined in the minor midrashim. He is a minor Solomon. The midrash parallels one of the Solomon midrashim. He sins, in presuming to be above the moral law, a common theme in the minor midrashim, and is therefore punished. However, his adventure with Goliath's brother could have occurred to any one of his generals. He is not distinct, and knowing the high place he holds in Biblical and midrashic literature, it is rather amazing that he has not been used as a basis for more legends and midrashim.

The treatment tendered the Biblical characters, their adventures and attitudes to the basic realities are easily seen in the midrashim themselves. They are well-drawn, they do not have split personalities. They are popular legends, drawn from different sources. But regardless of their form, they reflect the Biblical influence. Though popular and light at times, they are always bent on pointing a moral lesson.

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