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Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, and the Rabbis
on Circumcision and on Fasting:
An Annotated Translation of Expositions XI and III
With a Comparison to the Rabbinic Literature

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Digest

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, was a fourth-century Church Father from Mosul in northern Mesopotamia. He composed twenty-three expositions written in a beautiful pure Syriac. The first ten expositions deal with matters of faith and were completed ca. 337 CE. The next twelve are concerned more with Jewish customs and tenets and were completed ca. 344. These first twenty-two are arranged in alphabetical order. The twenty-third is a summation of the blessings transmitted to the believer through Christ, and it was completed July, 345. In this thesis are translated Expositions III and XI, "On the Fast" and "On Circumcision."

These two Expositions have been compared and contrasted with some of the rabbinic literature. In the case of circumcision, Aphrahat and the rabbis have two completely different goals in mind. The former seeks to render it invalid while the latter define, refine, and validate it. In the case of fasting, the two are not as far apart. The differences lie in degree, Aphrahat being more stringent, and in goals, the rabbis being more this worldly.

Chapter I

Introduction

Ask any rabbinic student which course was the most difficult and the most frustrating--the answer in most instances will be Talmud. In part this is due to the cryptic style in which it is written. However, often more frustrating is the language.

The Talmud is written in an Aramaic dialect closely related to that of the biblical Ezra and Daniel. However, in the centuries which passed between their composition and the Talmud's, the language underwent some changes. Some letters were no longer pronounced if they were in certain positions within a given word. Other letters were assimilated by a neighboring letter.¹ Words in the construct state and verbs with enclitics sometimes became compound words with one or more letters ceasing to be pronounced. Instead of being a formal composition, the Talmud is a transcription of what had been passed down orally for several generations.

This transcription often leaves the novice student with the notion that Talmudic Aramaic is a whimsical language which does not merit serious study. One need only memorize the countless exceptions well enough to pass the course.

However, if one has in one's toolbox a measuring stick against which to evaluate such irregularities, it soon becomes apparent that the successful study of Talmud is within the grasp of such a person.

Such a tool is Syriac, the dialect of Aramaic in which

the Mesopotamian non-Jewish population wrote and conversed. Unlike the Aramaic found in the Talmud, Syriac was not transcribed but written according to what appear to be carefully defined rules, even when these were ignored in conversation. The beauty of Syriac lies, however, not in its conservatism but in its employment of a system whereby letters which were no longer pronounced could be recognized from the written word. Such a system was developed using a linea occultans, a line drawn above or below a letter which indicated that it was no longer pronounced. Thus the person acquainted with Syriac recognizes that a word such as 'aseq in the Talmud is not a pa'el (intensive) form of the verb '-S-Q. Rather (s)he knows that it is really 'asleq, an 'aph'el (causative) form of the verb S-L-Q.² Needless to say, such knowledge is of immense help to the student.

Aphrahat

One example of Syriac which many authorities recognize as among the best due to its purity of language, its beauty of style, and its strictly Semitic character is that employed by Aphrahat, known as "The Persian Sage."

[He] is the sole surviving representative of a type of Christian thought which was essentially Semitic, and utterly independent of both Latin and Greek philosophy. His classical Syriac was far closer to contemporary Jewish Aramaic of Babylonia than was the Syriac of later Christian writers.³

The name Aphrahat is Persian, and he was probably born of Persian parents. Aphrahat, himself, confirms that his

ancestry, if not Persian, was at least pagan in two of his expositions.⁴ Because his language and style are so completely pure Syriac, one may conclude that he must either have been born in or moved at an early age to a region wherein Syriac was spoken. Were this not the case, his writing would of necessity appear forced and full of foreign idioms, which it does not. When he embraced Christianity is not known, but that he did so wholeheartedly is attested to by his rapid rise in the Church to the office of bishop of the convent at Mar Matthew.⁵ Because he took the name Jacob, apparently upon ordination, he was later confused with Jacob of Nisibis who died in 338 CE, seven years before the expositions were completed. This confusion lasted some four centuries from when a sixth-century Armenian translator ascribed the expositions to the wrong Jacob until the tenth-century Nestorian Bar-Bahlul correctly identified their author as Aphrahat.⁶

Later generations of Syriac writers have very little to tell us about him beyond what we learn from his writings, but all alike, both Nestorians and Monophysites, testify to the orthodoxy of this fourth-century Father.⁷

The Expositions

Briefly, his expositions are twenty-three in number and were written between the years 336 and 345 CE.⁸ Each of the first twenty-two begins with a different letter of the alphabet, and in this manner they are arranged. The twenty-third exposition begins again with the first letter. The first ten are earlier, and their topics include faith, love, fasting, prayer,

wars, those belonging to the covenant, penitents, resurrection, humility, and pastors. They deal with matters of faith, viz. graces, hopes, and duties of a Christian and are usually dated ca. 337. The next twelve, dated usually ca. 344, deal with such matters as circumcision, Passover, Sabbath, persuasion, making a distinction between foods, the peoples that replaced the people (ie., the Church), the Messiah that he is the son of God, virginity (asceticism) and sanctity, the Jews' claim that they are destined to be gathered together, sustaining the poor, persecution, and death and the end of time. Of these, eight deal with specifically Jewish practices or doctrines, three with matters of faith again, and the fourteenth "seems to be a letter of rebuke on behalf of a Synod of Bishops, to clergy and people of Seleucia and Ctesiphon."⁹ The twenty-third is a "chronological disquisition which supplements the others, 'Concerning the Grape', under which title is signified the blessing transmitted from the beginning through Christ, in allusion to the words of Isaiah. . . (65:8)" and is dated July, 345.¹⁰

According to Gwynn, Aphrahat's expositions are little concerned with the great theological questions of the day.¹¹ Heresies were what most fourth-century theologians battled. Aphrahat, however, makes only passing reference to the second- and third-century heresies of Valentinus, Manes, and Marcion.¹² He is more interested in Jewish practices as he perceives them either from what he has read in Scripture only, or from what he has observed among Qaraite Jews who denounced the Oral Law

of the rabbis, or from what he has observed among the Christians of his own community.

In an age of controversy, these quiet hortatory discourses, marked by no striking eloquence of style or subtlety of reasoning, dealing with no burning question of the time, nor with disputes more recent than two previous centuries or those between Christian and Jew, would hardly attain to more than local circulation; and when penetrating Edessa or such Syriac centers, would arouse but languid interest.¹³

In this manner Gwynn accounts for the confusion surrounding Aphrahat's name and writings. However, even though it almost doomed his work to obscurity, neither did he seek to accommodate, as did later Syriac writers, his beliefs to an alien medium.¹⁴

Gwynn also adds another possible reason for the disuse into which these expositions fell. He demonstrates that the "School of the Persians" in Edessa was, in the fifth century, "infected with Nestorianism," and for this reason teachings emanating from this school, whether earlier or later, were deemed suspect of advocating this heresy.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that at least two of the three reasons that contributed to Aphrahat's relative obscurity only two centuries later make him important to the Jewish scholar today some sixteen centuries later. These are his interest in redefining Jewish practices and doctrines into Christian terms and his purity of style, language, and thought. Many scholars¹⁶ go so far as to claim that Aphrahat was very strongly influenced by rabbinic Judaism, emphasizing the first of the two above reasons. Ginzberg even calls him "a docile pupil of the Jews."¹⁷ Closer to the internal evi-

dence is Neusner who doubts whether Aphrahat ever met a rabbinic Jew, let alone was influenced by the rabbis.¹⁸ As will be evident later on in the translation of the two expositions, Aphrahat's knowledge of the Jews is limited to what anyone could have gleaned from a careful reading of the Bible, which was available to him in the Peshitto' version written in Syriac¹⁹ and which he quoted liberally.

Aphrahat's Church

Since Aphrahat wrote his expositions for his Church, it is important to know something about this Semitic brand of Christianity. Not all scholars are in complete agreement as to the origin of Christianity in Syria. Eusebius recounts The Doctrine of Addai in his Ecclesiastic History wherein the community of Edessa is in correspondence with Jesus. Whereas Burkitt states that Christianity was first preached in Edessa by the Palestinian Jew Addai²⁰ and that Addai and Aggai represent the original Christianity of Edessa²¹, Segal calls Eusebius' account "one of the most successful pious frauds of antiquity."²²

What most would agree with, however, is what Gavin proposes.²³ Mesopotamian Christianity probably originated in Edessa through the work of Jewish-Christian missionaries and the conversion of Edessan Jews late in the second century. From Edessa the new faith spread eastward to Mardin, Nisibis, and Mosul via the trade route through these cities.²⁴ Presumably this advance eastward proceeded Rome's advance thus insuring the Semitic character of the Church. That

this is probably the case is reflected in Aphrahat himself. His primary concern seems to be with the Judaizing elements in his Church who had brought with them a background of Judaism perhaps only a generation removed.'

However, another factor led to Aphrahat's polemics against Jewish practices. When, in 313, Christianity became the official state religion of Rome, Christians living under the Sassanids in Persia experienced a divided loyalty. By 363 the trade route from Edessa to Mosul had been broken by the Roman conquest of Edessa, and there was an end to the see-saw control of Nisibis with its being ceded to Persia by Jovian. Fellow Christians were then separated from one another. Recognizing the divided loyalty of its Christian subjects, the Sassanids began to persecute them, while the Jews had a friend in the court in the person of Iphra Hormizd, the Queen Mother during the reign of Sapur III (309-379). "The only ideal worth living for was a state under Christian rule, with the Church fully recognized and supreme in her own domain"--the ideal realized by Rome.

As the persecution continued, however, many Christians probably began to experience doubts as to whether they had chosen the correct path. On the one hand were Jews, monotheists like themselves, who prospered under Sassanid rule and were left unmolested.²⁶ On the other hand was the pagan population, whose cults and gods were totally unacceptable. It is no great wonder, therefore, that many Christians

of the fourth century would have become attracted to Judaism. To these persecuted Christians, many of whom either had been converted from Judaism or had come from families that had done so, becoming Jews was an acceptable compromise between Christianity and paganism. By pursuing this option, one could remain faithful to both God and country, regardless of whether (s)he had come from a Jewish or a Persian background.

Therefore, whether individual Christians had doubts either about abandoning Jewish practices while remaining Christians or about renouncing Christianity in favor of Judaism, Aphrahat clearly saw a danger to his faith. Knowing that often the best defense is a good offense, he proceeded to outline, first, matters of faith important to the continuation of a strong Christian community²⁷ and, then, arguments against various pillars of Jewish faith and practice.²⁸ By offering at the same time an apologetic and a polemic, it would appear that his goal was to keep Christians within the fold and at the same time offer to them counter-arguments to Jewish polemics who would point to the relative successes of the two groups and from this prove Judaism's superiority.

Methodology

One exposition from each group has been translated and then contrasted with the rabbinic literature. Exposition XI, "On Circumcision," is translated into English also by Neusner.²⁹ He has made some errors, and these are pointed out in the

notes to this translation. Exposition III, "On the Fast," is translated here for the first time into English. Each exposition has been translated as literally as possible but as freely as necessary, especially in the case of idioms. Biblical quotations have been translated as cited by Aphrahat. Most of the biblical references are as appear in either Wright's version of the text or Parisot's, though other biblical references do exist. The translations of both expositions follow Parisot's text with Wright's text having been used to confirm the former.

The rabbinic literature employed in the chapters comparing Aphrahat with the sages of Judaism was taken from those sources for which indices are available.³⁰ Some of these are Palestinian in origin while others are Babylonian. Some are from a later period than the fourth century. However, it is hoped, as is the case especially with some of the Rabboth, that these later compilations reflect earlier works. Works that are Palestinian and/or later than the fourth century were employed in order to lend depth to the study.

The reader knowledgeable in the rabbinic literature will notice that neither in the chapter on circumcision nor in the chapter on fasting is every reference employed, especially in the case of statements that appear in primarily halachic (legal) contexts. These were omitted because Aphrahat did not deal with them, and the purpose of those chapters is comparison with Aphrahat.

Chapter II
Exposition XI
An Exposition¹ of Circumcision

1. When God blessed Abraham and made him head of all of the believers, the righteous, and the upright, God did not appoint him the father of one nation but of many peoples when He said to him: "Your name will no longer be called 'Abram,' rather your name will be Abraham, because I have made you the father of a multitude of people" (Gen 17:5). Therefore, my dear friend,² listen to the point of the statement and basis of the instruction which is proper to say against that people who have come before us,³ who consider themselves to be of the seed of Abraham, yet do not understand that they are called "rulers of Sodom and people of Gamorrah" (Isa 1:10), "'whose father is an Ammorite and whose mother is a Hittite" (Ezek 16:45), "despised silver" (Jer 6:30), and "rebellious children" (Isa 30:1). Moses, their leader, testified against them when he said to them: "You have been rebels from the day I knew you" (Deut 9:24), and again he reiterated⁴ in the Song of Testimony (Deut 32): "Your vine is from the vine of Sodom and from the planting of Gamorrah. Your grapes are bitter grapes, and your clusters of grapes are bitter to you" (Deut 32:32). He hinted in that same Hymn of Testimony concerning the people that is from the peoples⁵ when he said to them: "I will stir you up to jealousy with a people that is a no-people, and I will provoke your anger with a foolish people" (Deut 32:21).

Through Isaiah, the Holy One testified when he said: "I have planted a vineyard and worked it, but instead of grapes, it brought forth rotten grapes" (Isa 5:2). Jeremiah the Prophet, furthermore, also said concerning the congregation of the people: "I, Myself, have planted you as a wine-branch entirely of true seed, but have turned sour and rebelled against Me like a wild vine" (Jer 2:21). Ezekiel witnessed against the vine: "Fire has consumed its branches, its back is destroyed, and no longer does it go into production" (Ezek 15:4). "The wine-branch was planted of a true seed" (Jer 2:21) is their ancestors, but the children have been turned to the impure deeds of the Amorites.⁶

When they act in uprightness, they are called children and heirs of Abraham, their father, by all the peoples. But those same children of Abraham when they do the impure deeds of foreign peoples, they become as Sodomites and people of Gamorrah, as Isaiah testified against them: "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom and people of Gamorrah" (Isa 1:10). But show me, O sage,⁷ which rulers and people were in Sodom and Gamorrah in Isaiah the Prophet's days? For they⁸ have been overturned through divine punishment since the days of Lot never to be inhabited again! Ezekiel showed Sodom's iniquity and named her Jerusalem's sister when he says to her: "Sodom, your sister, and her daughters have not done evil as you and your daughters have done. And this is the iniquity of Sodom and her daughters--they did not take hold of the hand of the poor and the miserable. So when I saw these deeds among them, I overthrew them" (Ezek 16:

48-50). Since Sodom and Gamorrah, their companions,⁹ were overthrown from of old, why does Isaiah say: "Hear, you rulers of Sodom and people of Gamorrah?" (Isa 1:10). It can only be¹⁰ that he called them this, so that they would consider themselves warned. They are circumcized and yet uncircumcized; they have been chosen, and yet they have been rejected. [Yet] they continue boasting: "We are circumcized, chosen, and known from among all peoples!"¹¹

2. To any who understand, this is known: Circumcision without faith has no use, no advantage, because faith precedes circumcision, which was given to Abraham as a sign and a covenant, as God said to him: "This is My covenant which you will keep when you circumcize each male" (Gen 17:10). So long as it pleased its Giver, it was observed along with the commandments of the Law and gave profit and eternal life. But when the Law was not observed, circumcision gave absolutely no profit at all. Jeroboam the son of Nabat, of the children of Joseph, from the tribe of Ephraim, was circumcized as the Holy One commanded Abraham, and as Moses warned in the Law! All the kings of Israel who walked according to the Law of Jeroboam were circumcized and were separated, but a good memory of them was not preserved, because of their sins (I Kgs 16:19 among others). What profit did Jeroboam and all the kings of Israel that walked in his footsteps get from their circumcision? Or rather, what use or profit had Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, [in being circumcized]? Because of

his sins, which were many, God could not again forgive Jerusalem.

3. In every period God made His covenants with each generation and with each tribe, as it pleased Him, and they were observed in their times and then changed. He commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but because he did observe the commandment and the covenant, he was held culpable.¹² So Enoch, who pleased God. God translated him to eternal life not because he kept the commandment concerning the trees, but rather because he believed. Grace cannot be compared to the commandment not to eat from the tree. Noah, who kept his integrity and righteousness, God preserved him from the punishment of the flood and established a covenant with him and his descendants after him, that they should increase and multiply, a covenant of the rainbow in the clouds between God, earth, and all flesh. And yet circumcision was not given with any of those covenants!

When He chose Abraham, it was not through circumcision that He called, chose, and designated him to be father of all nations, but rather through faith. And after his faith (was assured), then He commanded him to circumcize. If eternal lifewas (attained) through circumcision, then Abraham should have circumcized first and then believed. And if circumcision had been givenas an advantage for eternal life, Scripture would have announced: "Abraham circumcized, and

his circumcision was considered for him as righteousness." However, this is what is written: "Abraham believed in God, and his faith was considered for him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). Thus, those who believed while uncircumcized, lived, while the circumcision of those who were circumcized, yet who did not believe, gave them no advantage. It was not through circumcision that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Shem, and Japheth pleased God, rather because each one of them observed their covenants in their times and believed that it is the same One who gives covenants in each generation, as He desires.

Melchizedeq was the priest of God Most High.¹³ While uncircumcized, He blessed Abraham and the matter is known: it is obvious that the lesser is blessed by one greater than he!¹⁴

4. Therefore, my dear friend, listen as I show you under which pretense circumcision was given. When Abraham believed, left Ur of the Chaldees, and came to reside in Haran, God had not (yet) commanded him to circumcize. Even when he had resided in the Land of Canaan for twenty-four years, he did not circumcize, because he had not [yet] had his promised son, from whom the righteous ones, kings, priests, and annointed ones would be born. But when he was ninety-nine years old, the Holy One informed him that at the end of one hundred years of age, a son would be born to him. Then He circumcized him so that when he was one hundred years old,

Isaac was born to him. He commanded him to circumcize the flesh of his foreskin as an indication and a sign of the covenant, so that when his seed multiplied, they would be distinguished from all of the peoples among whom they would go, so that they would not get involved in their unclean deeds. So Abraham circumcized the flesh of his foreskin when he was ninety-nine years old. He (circumcized) Ishmael, his son, when he was thirteen years old. And on that very day Abraham circumcized those born in his household as well as those purchased with his money, just as God had spoken with him. So after [Abraham] was circumcized, Isaac was conceived, born, and then circumcized on the eighth day. And circumcision was observed through Abraham's seed, through Isaac, through Ishmael, through Jacob and his sons, through Esau and his son, for one hundred ninety years, until Jacob entered Egypt. While in Egypt, Jacob's sons kept it two hundred twenty-five years until they went out towards the wilderness. Even Lot, when he saw that Abraham, his uncle, circumcized, he, too, circumcized his son after he had separated from [Abraham], retaining circumcision as a rite without faith.

5. Now if there is eternal life through circumcision, then Ishmael's sons, Qeturah's¹⁵ sons, Lot's sons, and Esau's sons also should live eternally, for they were circumcized. Yet while they were circumcized, they worshipped many idols. However, Jeremiah the Prophet has shown me quite clearly

that all who are circumcized without faith are as the uncircumcized and will not be delivered from the divine punishment through their circumcision. He said: "See, I will take account of all who are circumcized in the foreskin, the Egyptians, the Judeans, Moab, Edom, the Ammonites, and all those who cut the corner (of their beard) who reside in the wilderness, because all of these peoples are uncircumcized, and all of the house of Israel are uncircumcized in their heart" (Jer 9:24-5). If they profitted by circumcision, why are the Jews considered together with the Egyptians, the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and those who cut the corner (of their beard), who are the sons of Hagar or of Qeturah, unless it is supposed that their circumcision amounted to uncircumcision? For see, He commanded divine punishment on Judah as well as on all the others who are circumcized in the foreskin. For when the Holy One saw that they were saying: "Through this we live, that we are the children of Abraham and are circumcized," and that they did not bend their stiff necks toward the service of the Law, He said to them through the prophet: "Circumcize the foreskin of the heart and stiffen your neck no more" (Deut 10:16). So it is known that whosoever does not circumcize the foreskin of his heart, then the circumcision of the flesh alone is of no profit to him, just as there is no benefit for anyone who was circumcized only by the foreskin.¹⁶

6. Be assured, my dear friend, that circumcision was a sign, to separate them from the impure peoples. Notice that when He brought them out of Egypt, and they walked in the wilderness for forty years, they were not circumcized, because they were one people, and they were not mingling with other peoples. There He did not mark them, because they were living¹⁷ by themselves. As for His having marked Abraham's seed, it was not because all the peoples were not His that He separated Abraham's seed as His very own group. Rather He abandoned all the peoples who committed the evil deeds of paganism because of their deeds. And when he marked them as His people, it was not to inform Himself that they were Abraham's seed, because even when unmarked, He knew them! Rather that they should know one another and not hide under deceptive excuses.¹⁸

For it could happen that if they were not marked, then, some of them, when found worshipping idols, or debauching, or committing adultery, or stealing, or doing something outside of the Law - all those found in these circumstances - might rebel and deny that they were Abraham's children, so as to not be killed or receive punishment. And the death sentence, which is written in the Law, is [precisely] for those engaged in such [acts]. Now, anyone found transgressing the Law and engaging in one of these crimes could no longer hide under deceptive excuses, such as: "I was not of Abraham's seed or progeny," because if it is found

that he rebels, they can identify him by his circumcision and mete out to him the punishment justified by his sin.

Because if this was not the rationale for prescribing circumcision, they would have been circumcized even while in the wilderness! But because they were separated from the peoples and lived in the wilderness by themselves, they were not marked. But when they were crossing the Jordan, the Lord commanded Joshua, the son of Nun, saying to him: "Again circumcize the Israelites a second time" (Josh 5:2). And why did He say to Joshua that he should circumcize them again, unless it is because they were circumcized in their heart, as He said through the prophet: "Circumcize the foreskin of your heart and no longer stiffen your neck" (Deut 10:16). Joshua again circumcized them and marked them by their flesh again. But how is this matter understood by you that "Joshua circumcized the people again?" They were not circumcized by their flesh, because after Joshua circumcized them, Scripture testifies: "Joshua circumcized all those born in the wilderness, because all of the children born in the wilderness were uncircumcized" (Josh 5:4-5).

7. See then, my dear friend, and be amazed at this that those who were circumcized, who went out from Egypt, died in the wilderness on account of their sins, because they embittered the Holy One's spirit by not believing in Him. It is known that if only they had believed, they would not

have been prevented from entering the Promised Land. But Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Yufna, lived, from among the six hundred thousand that went out of Egypt, entered the Land and inherited it. The children that were (born) in the wilderness, who believed while uncircumcized, lived to enter and to inherit the Land. He circumcized them as they were entering the Land of the Canaanites, and it was considered for them as two circumcisions.

8. And why, when He brought the divine punishment upon all who were circumcized of the foreskin, did He consider also the Egyptians, who were not of Abraham's seed, along with the Moabites, the Ammonites, who were Abraham's brother Lot's children, and with the Edomites, who were Esau's children, and with those who cut the corner (of their beards) and live in the wilderness, who are Ishmael's children and Qeturah's children, and Judah, Jacob's seed? All of those are the seed of Abraham's household, while the Egyptians (merely) received circumcision from the Israelites living among them, as a custom, without any belief (in it). Furthermore, they received it from Joseph, who circumcized Menasseh and Ephraim when they were born to him. They, in turn, learned from Joseph and began to circumcize, because Joseph's command concerning everything was carried out within Egypt.

Indeed, some say that when Pharoah's daughter found Moses, she recognized that he was from the Israelites from the covenant which was in his flesh. The fact of the matter

is not as it would appear, because the covenant of Moses' circumcision was not different from the Egyptians' circumcision. And whosoever does not know that the Egyptians were circumcized will be convinced by Jeremiah. For when Pharoah's daughter found Moses and saw that he was floating in the river, she realized that he was from Hebrews, because it was not incumbent upon the Egyptians to be thrown into the river as Pharoah had commanded concerning the Israelites when he said: "Let every male child which is born be thrown into the river" (Ex 1:22). And she knew that this thing was done out of fear for the order (of Pharoah). When she saw that he had been placed in a wooden ark, she knew that, because they were not able to hide him, his people made the ark for him and cast him into the river.¹⁹

Now if the Israelites had been distinguished by circumcision while the Egyptians were not circumcized, then Moses could not have been brought up along with Pharoah,²⁰ because at any time during his youth, the covenant of his flesh would have become known. And if Pharoah's daughter had transgressed her father's law or command, then throughout Egypt none of Pharoah's Laws and commandments would have been upheld.

9. Now I will convince you further concerning the Children of Qeturah who also are contiguous to the Ishmaelites.²¹ When the Midianites, who are the children of Qeturah, and the children of the East, who are the Ishmaelites, gathered to-

gether and came to fight against Israel in the days of Gideon, son of Joash, in mutual alliance, and wished to subjugate Israel, they surrendered to Gideon's forces of 300 men. (Judg 7:7).²² This (thing) is what I will persuade you concerning the children of Qeturah, because their residence²³ and that of the Ishmaelites was in the wilderness. From the time that Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, Ishmael and his descendants resided in the wilderness. Thus is it written: "He resided in the wilderness and became an expert (with) the bow" (Gen 21:20).²⁴ "His hand will be against everyone, and every hand will be against him, and he will dwell upon the border of all his brothers" (Gen 16:12). On his one side, on the East, dwelt the sons of Esau, who are the Edomites, for when Israel went out of Egypt, they were led around the Land of Edom, Esau's mountain. In addition the Ammonites and the Moabites define their borders, opposite them, to the North. The children of Qeturah are neighbors with the Edomites, the children of Esau, to the East, because when Abraham sent away the children of Qeturah, he sent them away at first toward the East. The children of Hagar seized all of the south-land (Arabia Felix). The Edomites, the children of Esau, dwelt to the east of them all, as far as Bozra, for also the Lord commanded Moses: "Do not approach the land of the Children of Esau, because I am not giving you (any) of their land, even the space upon which the sole of the foot treads, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau.

Rather, buy bread from them with money, then eat, and buy water from them with money, then drink" (Deut 2:5,6). Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He did not oppress the children of Esau, rather when he had reached as far as Reqem de Gaya',²⁵ he sent messengers with words of peace toward the King of Edom and said to him: "Thus says your brother Jacob: 'You know of all of the travail that overtook us on the way and that the Egyptians placed us into servitude. Now we are in Reqem, the city that is on the edge of your border. Now let us pass through your land. We will go via the King's Highway. Sell us bread and water that we and our cattle may eat and drink. We will give you their price.' But he said to Israel: 'You will not pass over my border without my drawing the sword to meet you.'" (Num 20:14-18).

Israel turned aside when they saw that they could not be persuaded. So as the Israelites were crossing over their border, they took away from the Bozra, which is in the wilderness, inherited it and made it a city of refuge (Josh 22:27). Whoever is willing to accept proof that Bozra belonged to the children of Esau, who were the Edomites of old, will listen to Isaiah the Prophet "when he had seen the Holy One as He was coming from Edom, His red clothes from Bozra" (Isa 63:1, 3, 4). He trampled and tormented them, and He exacted just recompense from the children of Esau because they did not receive their brother, but He kept his anger forever (Amos 1:11). Whoever is still not persuaded concerning Bozra that

it had served the Edomites from of old, let him hear from Genesis, when the kings reigned in Edom: "Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozra reigned" (Gen 36:33). Isaiah said further: "Behold, My sword will descend upon the Edomites, upon the people who have been condemned by judgment" (Isa 34:5). And David said: "I will cast my shoes upon Edom" (Ps 60:10, 108:10). "Because Esau corrupted his pity forever, bore his grudge forever²⁶ and did not allow his brother to cross his border" (Amos 1:11). On account of this he was condemned by judgment, that he bore his grudge forever. When Israel turned aside from Esau their brother, they sent messengers to the Moabites, the children of Lot, that they might cross their border. But they neither listened nor were persuaded, rather they hired Balaam, the son of Beor, to curse them. Because they did not allow them to cross their border in peace, the Holy One commanded that the Ammonites and the Moabites not enter the Lord's gathering, not even to the tenth generation, because they did not offer bread and water to Israel on the way, rather they met them with the sword while they were tired and weary. Concerning the Egyptians and the Edomites, He commanded Israel not to drive them away, the Egyptians, because "they had dwelled in their land," and the Edomites, because "they were their brothers."

10. All of this I have explained and shown you so that you will know that Ishmael resided on the border of each of his brothers and "was a wild ass among men" (Gen 16:12).

Abraham gave gifts to the children of Qeturah and sent them to Ishmael their brother so that they would not be heirs with Isaac, the promised one. If there is eternal life through circumcision, then also the children of Ishmael, Qeturah, Lot, which are the Moabites and the Ammonites, and the children of Esau, which are the Edomites, and the Egyptians, too, should pride themselves for being circumcized, even though they worship many idols. Therefore is it clear that there is no profit in circumcision without faith. Rather, anyone who has circumcized the foreskin of his heart is a believer, lives eternally, and is Abraham's son, fulfilling what God said to Abraham: "I have made you the father of a multitude of peoples" (Gen 17:5).

11. In every aspect the Law and the Covenant have undergone change. From of old, God changed the covenant of Adam and gave another to Noah, and He gave [another] to Abraham, too. Then He changed Abraham's and gave another to Moses. But when Moses' was not being observed, He gave another in the last generation,²⁷ an immutable covenant. Adam's covenant was not to eat from the tree; Noah's was the rainbow in the clouds; Abraham's was formerly his being chosen because of his faith and afterwards the circumcision, as a sign and a seal for his descendants; and Moses' was a lamb that he sacrificed for the Paschal offering on behalf of the people. Not one of all these covenants resembles another.

The circumcision in which the Giver of the covenants

is pleased is that which Jeremiah said: "Circumcize the foreskin of your heart" (Jer 4:4). If the covenant that God gave to Abraham is true, then this one [in Jeremiah] is also true and believable, because the Lawgiver could not free Himself²⁸⁸ from those who are outside of the Law or from those who are subject to the Law.²⁹ He gave the Law to Moses with its observances and covenants. But when they did not observe it, He abolished the Law and its covenants, and He promised (Jer 31:31) to give a new testament, saying that it would not be as the first one, even though the Giver of both of them is the same.³⁰

This is the testament which He promised to give: "All of them shall know Me from their young ones to their old ones" (Jer 31:31). But in this testament there is no circumcision of the flesh or sign of the people. We know, my dear friend, truly that in every generation God gave laws which they served so long as it pleased Him, and then they (the laws) were changed, as the apostle has said: "Formerly, God's Kingdom dwelt in various forms and times" (Heb 1:1). To the sage and to the one who investigates, it is known and obvious that anyone who is a part of the [new] covenant,³¹ yet yearns³² for circumcision, has circumcized does not consider what the apostle said: "Would that they who agitate you would indeed castrate themselves!" (Galat 5:12).

Therefore, our God is true and His covenants are well believed,³³ and each covenant was true and believed in its

time.³⁴ Those circumcized in their heart live eternally and are circumcized again on the true Jordan, i.e. the baptism of the forgiveness of sins.

12. Joshua, the son of Nun, circumcized the people a second time with a flint blade when he and his people crossed the Jordan. Jesus, our Savior, circumcized the peoples who believed in him a second time with a circumcision of the heart, and they were baptized and circumcized with "the knife which is His word which is sharper than the double-edged sword" (Heb 4:12).

Joshua, the son of Nun, caused the people to cross over to the Promised Land. Jesus, our Savior, promised the land of eternal life to any who would cross the true Jordan, believe, and circumcize the foreskin of his heart.

Joshua, the son of Nun, raised stones of testimony in Israel. Jesus, our Savior, called Simon the true stone and set him up as a trustworthy witness among the peoples.

Joshua, the son of Nun, made the Paschal offering in the Jericho Valley in the accursed land, and the people ate the bread of the land. Jesus, our Savior, made the Paschal offering with his disciples in the city of Jerusalem, which he cursed: "There shall not be left in stone upon stone" (Matt 24:2), and gave there the sacrament of the bread of eternal life.

Joshua, the son of Nun, condemned the greedy Achan who stole and then concealed (his) fault. Jesus, our Savior,

condemned the greedy Judas who stole and concealed money from the cashbox which he had been holding.

Joshua, the son of Nun, destroyed unclean peoples. Jesus, our Savior, utterly defeated Satan and his army.

Joshua, the son of Nun, made the sun stand in the heaven. Jesus, our Savior, caused the sun to set at noon when they crucified him.

Joshua, the son of Nun, is a savior of a people. Jesus was called the savior of peoples.

More blessed are they who are circumcized of the heart than they who are (circumcized) of the foreskin, and [more blessed are] they who are born from the water, a second circumcision, because they are (the) heirs with Abraham, the chief believer and father of all peoples, whose faith is accounted for him for righteousness.

The exposition of the notion of circumcision is completed.

Chapter III

Aphrahat and the Rabbis on Circumcision

Aphrahat's critique of circumcision was, by no means, the first that had been leveled against the Jews. What characterizes his argument is the lack of vehemence against the Jews qua Jews. Rather he attacks only their "outmoded" rituals and practices. Even when he writes two expositions entitled "Against the Jews," he is instructing the Christian in apologetics in order to give him the necessary arguments against Jewish polemicists.¹ He does not malign the Jews except to tell his readers that they, not the Jews, possess the key to salvation, that the Jews have been rejected by God. However, this lacks the vehemence of the Hellenist writers who wished to prove the Jews were guilty of deicide as well as other crimes against humanity.²

Until the conquest of Judah by Alexander the Great, there is little evidence that Jews faced any difficulties, at least that were external to themselves, in keeping the brith milah, the covenant of circumcision. With the conquest came the uncircumcized Greeks and their not unattractive culture. Though the Empire dissolved with the death of Alexander, each of his generals maintained a parcel of it and proceeded to hellenize his territory either by force or by more subtler means.

In the books of the Maccabees and Jubilees³ is reflected this struggle in Judah, which was, at the time (198-165 BCE), part of the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucids governed

an area which included a large variety of peoples. In order to homogenize the region and thus insure loyalty from all sectors, the process of hellenization was begun. According to George Foote Moore, "Many submitted to a surgical operation to efface the blemish of circumcision, which provoked ridicule of bystanders when the Jewish youths stripped for gymnastic exercises"⁴ circa 175-174 BCE.

Yet, as all know who celebrate the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah, or who have read I and II Maccabees, an uprising, led by a family called Hasmoneans, against the hellenist Jews and against the Seleucids who came to their aid ended in victory for the Hasmoneans and approximately one hundred years of self-rule followed.

When Pompei took over in the name of Rome, the country was in a state of revolution once again. During the independence two religious parties came to the fore, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. One of their numerous differences centered on the legitimacy of the Hasmonean, a priestly house, to rule seated on the throne which was promised to the Davidic House.

With the imposition of Rome into matters and her choice of puppet kings, of procurators, and even of high priests, the flames of revolution were fanned once more until finally from 66-70 CE, the Roman government was forced to do battle with the Jews. This, of course, ended in victory for the mighty Roman Empire and in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

After the war, Rome's problems with the tenacious Jews did not end. "Hadrian made circumcision itself a crime, a measure which is said to have provoked the revolt of the Jews in 132 CE."⁵ This is the first time, apparently, when the rite was actually prohibited by law.⁶ It was not enacted directly against the Jews but against all who practiced it, and it was placed in the same category with castration and made a capital offense as well.⁷

In the Talmud, mention is made of a decree made by the Roman government "that they should not study the Torah and that they should not circumcize their sons and that they should profane the Sabbath."⁸ That it was, indeed, a capital offense is taught in several passages in the Midrash.⁹ The rabbis taught their followers that in the choice between capitulation to the idolators' demands and death that they must choose the latter.¹⁰

Despite this persecution there were probably some Romans who were attracted to the ranks of Israel. Hadrian, himself, is supposed to have discussed the matter with a certain Aquilas, who wanted to be converted and become an Israelite.¹¹ Hadrian permitted him to study their Torah but did not permit him to be circumcized. Aquilas then answered him, saying,

Unless he be circumcized, even the wisest in thy kingdom, and even a grey-beard of one hundred years old, cannot study their Torah, for so it is written, 'He declares His word unto Jacob, His statutes and ordinances unto

Israel. He has not dealt so with any nation'--
except with the children of Israel.¹²

Thus it can be seen how important the rite of circumcision was for Jews and would-be converts alike. Both would defy the Emperor himself and his proscription against the covenant of the flesh. So universal among Jews was this defiance, apparently, that later Antonius Pius made an exception in the law in favor of the Jews only. For all other groups the law remained in full force, but for the Jews circumcizing one's sons carried no penalty.¹³

So Jews had faced taunts, polemics, and laws against circumcision prior to the fourth century and Aphrahat. Yet, it was, despite all of this, still widely enough practiced in Persia by the Jews and perhaps by many Christians still faithful to the old order to merit Aphrahat's serious consideration. What was in this rite, which on the surface appears to be a holdover from a primitive tribal society, that made it one of if not the most important Jewish practice? Aphrahat has informed his readers of the worthlessness of the custom--the rabbis tell of its merits.

In the process of comparing and contrasting Aphrahat's view with that of the rabbinic sages of his time, one must always keep in mind that often the two sides' frames of reference are so different that one side will base an argument on a point which the other never would have considered. Aphrahat's Jews are not the rabbis' Jews. Rather they are

what he has determined Jews would be like who followed the laws of Scripture only. The rabbis, on the other hand, shaped the Jews in their communities into their own image, and this is reflected in their writings.

Aphrahat's first point in his exposition is that Israel has been rejected due to their sins and have, therefore, fallen out of favor with God. Nowhere in discussing circumcision do the rabbis say this. For Aphrahat this point begins his undermining of circumcision as a valid rite, a technique he employs elsewhere.¹⁴ The rabbis have no such tendenz in their writings. They wish to underline the importance of these rites despite the Diaspora and not undermine them because of it.

Be that as it may, a few references to Israel's rejection did occur during the research. For example, one may recognize the guilt of the authors of the Qorbanoth section of the Musaf 'amidah wherein they express the notion that the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent exile were the direct result of Israel's sins.¹⁵ Certainly, though, this prayer would never suggest that this was a permanent state of affairs as Aphrahat does, rather it is merely a temporary impediment to Israel's serving God completely.

One of the interesting notions that appeared concerning this topic was that the rabbis maintained that by the rejection of the very rite against which Aphrahat was arguing, i.e., ¹circumcision, Israel was sent into exile,¹⁶ and the Temple was destroyed.¹⁷

However, never did God reject Israel or abandon them. "Wherever Israel was exiled, the Shechinah, as it were, went into exile with them."¹⁸ Not only that but "every nation or tongue that subjugated Israel ruled from one end of the world to the other for the sake of the honor of Israel."¹⁹ Thus, for the rabbis of Aphrahat's time, exile was not a sign of Israel's rejection in favor of another group. Rather the exile was a sign of disappointment in Israel's behavior, and one of the sins which figured prominently in determining their dispersion was the repudiation of the covenant between God and Israel through disguising or ignoring circumcision.

Aphrahat next tells his reader that faith is more important than the act of circumcision, so much so that the rite could be ignored. He demonstrates this by employing Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed in God, and his faith was accounted for him as righteousness"--his faith, not his circumcision. The rabbis, too, extolled Abraham's great faith which was "deserving that God [should divide the sea for Israel]."²⁰ "Through faith alone Abraham our father acquired this world and the world to come."²¹ However, this faith is not devoid of commandments as Aphrahat infers. Rather, ". . .who-soever accepts one single commandment with true faith is deserving of having the Holy Spirit rest upon him."²²

Aphrahat's next point is that God has made several covenants with human beings, and all were of a temporary

nature. So long as they were adhered to by the people, they were in force. They were revoked when the people no longer supported them. With regard to circumcision, Aphrahat holds that it was among these temporary covenants. By doing so, however, he is ignoring a key biblical verse which witnesses for the eternality of this brith milah, this covenant of circumcision.²³ Some of the rabbis identify circumcision as the covenant,²⁴ and not just as the sign of a covenant, as Aphrahat would have it be called. In the next verse, one sees just how important neglecting this covenant was, for it resulted in the direst of consequences--extirpation.²⁵

In this same section, Aphrahat introduced another argument for the priority of faith over circumcision. He points to the verse wherein Abraham received a blessing from Melchi-Zedeq²⁶ and concludes that the greater personage would not have been blessed by the lesser, rather he would have blessed the lesser. By this means, Aphrahat attempts to show that Abraham's circumcision (three chapters later!) did not render him greater than Melchi-Zedeq. In the school of R. Ishma'el this same problem was brought up. However, there the solution was a bit different.

When [Melchi-Zedeq] blessed Abraham before blessing the Omnipresent and Abraham said to him: 'Should the blessing of the servant be given priority over the blessing of the Master?', the Holy One, blessed be He, took the priesthood away from him and gave it to Abraham.²⁷

Besides being temporary, circumcision's main function,

according to Aphrahat, was to distinguish Israel from their neighbors. In this way they would not be able to get involved with them and their unclean deeds. The rabbis, too, say that Israel is distinguished by circumcision.²⁸ However, their circumcision serves a higher purpose. Rather than making it difficult for an Israelite to sin and then deny it, saying he was not an Israelite, as Aphrahat would have it, the rabbis said that circumcision was prerequisite to receiving Revelation.²⁹ In addition the circumcision was seen as the removal of a blemish, as the perfection of men.³⁰ Reflecting this idea of circumcision as removing a blemish are the many midrashim which account for famous biblical personalities as having been born circumcized,³¹ i.e., unblemished.

To buttress his argument that circumcision was necessary only in order to make Israelites distinguishable among themselves, Aphrahat claims that the rite of circumcision was observed by Israel from the time of Abraham through the Exodus and from the time of Joshua's leadership onward. The rabbis are not left with the same impression, however. When Joseph ascended to a position second only to Pharaoh in all Egypt, he commanded all Egypt to practice circumcision, which they did only after complaining to Pharaoh.³² R. 'Abba bar Kahana said that Joseph inspired them with a longing to be circumcized, while R. Samuel said that they rejoiced because he had afforded them life in both this world and that to come through circumcision.³³ Clearly a people who was to remain

separate from all other peoples would not encourage their neighbors to be like them! Obviously, the rabbis of these three midrashim envisioned a higher purpose for circumcision.

Not all of the rabbis are in agreement concerning this point, however. In another midrash, the Hebrews did, indeed, wish to be like the Egyptians once Joseph had died. Therefore, says this author, "God converted the love with which the Egyptians loved them into hatred" so that Israel would not become assimilated.³⁴ Again this midrash would refute Aphrahat's contention that Israel observed circumcision everywhere except in the wilderness.

Before dispensing completely with Aphrahat's claim that circumcision served only to make Israelites recognizable to one another, three more rabbinic reasons must be brought in as evidence that this was not how the sages saw circumcision. One reason is alluded to in a beautiful story about King David. His circumcision set his mind at ease, when one day he fretted about being naked of any precepts of the Torah as he entered his bath.³⁵ Thus, when one has been circumcized, he is assured of having followed at least one of the dicta of Judaism. Elijah, too, when petitioning God, according to another source, argues, "If we have no merit, then look to the covenant of circumcision,"³⁶ which shows that Israel has not been altogether lost, that they still observe the covenant. Thirdly, the blood of circumcision, along with that of the Passover, are the vehicles through which

Israel attains God's forgiveness for their sins.³⁷

Also contradictory to Aphrahat's point of view that circumcision was observed by the Hebrews during their entire sojourn in Egypt are several midrashim describing the events immediately prior to the Exodus. It was noted above that some rabbis thought that the Israelites abandoned the practice of circumcision immediately upon the death of Joseph. Others relate that when the time of deliverance drew near, that in addition to the paschal offering with its blood smeared on the lintels of every Israelite household, they were required to circumcize themselves. Circumcision was and is required for participation in the Passover,³⁸ and thus if Israel had abandoned the rite, it had to be reinstituted before they could be redeemed from Egypt, and, more seriously, from the "Angel of Death." According to several authorities, this was exactly the scenario.

In one midrash, the circumcision is treated as the "seal" on the invitation to the King's feast. However, many would agree to obtaining this "seal" only after breathing in the scent of the paschal lamb, enhanced by God to resemble the Garden of Eden.³⁹ In the others, however, the rabbis say that it was the two commandments of circumcision and the paschal lamb which redeemed them.⁴⁰ Had they not performed these two commands, it may be inferred, they would not have left Egypt, and there would have been no Jewish people today. Other allusions to this are found wherein by virtue of observ-

ing the brith milah, the Sea was divided,⁴¹ and they were deemed fit to sing the Song at the Sea (Ex 15:1ff).⁴² All of this culminates in a statement by R. Yohanan--"All the luxuries and delicacies that Israel enjoy in this world are on account of the circumcision which is between the thighs."⁴³

In the fifth section of his exposition, Aphrahat argues that circumcision is not beneficial in achieving eternal life. It has already been shown that the rabbis considered circumcision not only beneficial in this world but the prime reason Israel was redeemed from Egypt and slavery. In the prayerbook, in the ge'uloth section of the morning or evening service, one becomes aware of the relationship between the redemption from Egypt and the redemption to take place at the "end of days" or in the world to come. Thus, it is not unexpected that the rabbis disagree with Aphrahat on this point also.

R. Nahman bar Isaac said that an infant may enter the future world from its circumcision onward.⁴⁴ R. Samuel, commenting on the notion that Joseph introduced the rite of circumcision to the Egyptians, said the Egyptians thanked Joseph because he had, through the institution of circumcision, given them life in this world and in the world to come.⁴⁵

A story is told, too, about an apostate, Ketiah bar Shalom, who was sentenced to death for contradicting the

Caesar concerning extermination of the Jews. Before he was thrown into the furnace, he cut off his foreskin, exclaiming, "Thou has paid the tax thou wilt pass and enter [paradise]."⁴⁶

In addition, there are a couple of instances where non-Jews who had themselves circumcized benefit greatly. In one case, a pair of brothers were aided and protected by an angel against enemies in battle due to their circumcisions.⁴⁷ In another case a Roman senator who circumcized himself prior to committing suicide in order to save the Jews is exalted above Abraham, our father. This is because Abraham received assurances that he would be made into a mighty nation if he circumcized himself, whereas the senator received no such assurance.⁴⁸

Not only did the rabbis consider circumcision the key to the world to come but also the rite which delivered Israel from the fires of Gehinnom.⁴⁹ R. Levi said that Abraham would sit at Gehinnom's entrance and permit no circumcized Israelite to descend into it. As for those who have sinned a great deal, he would take the foreskins from infants who had died prior to circumcision and set them on the sinners so they might descend to Gehinnom.⁵⁰ Rabbi Berekiah posited that heretics and wicked Israelites who felt secure that their circumcision would bar them from entering Gehinnom would have their own foreskins stretched over the membrum virile. "When Gehinnom sees their hanging foreskins, she opens her mouth and devours them. . ."⁵¹ Apparently it was the opinion of

both of these rabbis that if one acted like the uncircumcized, then a similar fate awaited him also.⁵²

This sentiment agrees fairly well with Aphrahat's to a limited extent, for what both sides are alluding to is Jeremiah 9:24-25. In these verses Jeremiah speaks of those who are circumcized in the flesh as opposed to those circumcized of the heart. Clearly, one who is uncircumcized of the heart is one who lacks faith as the heart is the seat of thought and sometimes emotion. Both understand this term in this manner. For this reason R. Levi and R. Berekiah had the foreskins of the faithless replaced, i.e., in order to reflect the uncircumcized state of their hearts. Aphrahat, on the other hand, understood these verses as advocating either being circumcized of the flesh or of the heart and not both as the rabbis understood it.

Samuel prayed, "Give us discernment, O Lord, to know Thy ways, and circumcize our heart to fear Thee. . . ." ⁵³ The term "uncircumcized" became for many a term which was applied to all non-Jews regardless of the condition of their foreskins because it implied they were uncircumcized of heart, and hence heathens, idolators, or non-believers, for their actions are alien to God.⁵⁴ Circumcizing one's heart meant ridding it of the evil inclination and turning "to serve God Who is alone in the universe."⁵⁵ Uncircumcized Israelites, due to the deaths of older brothers as a result of circumcision,⁵⁶ are considered circumcized, therefore, while circum-

cized heathens, are considered uncircumcized.⁵⁷ Circumcision of both foreskin and heart is the acceptance of God's divinity, R. Judan said.⁵⁸ It is submission to the highest authority, and because of this submission of individual whims and fancies, the believer benefits in both this world and in the world to come.

What of heathat disguises his circumcision and, by so doing, denies God's authority?⁵⁹ In proportion to the benefits of carrying on with the tradition are the punishments for not doingsso. Such a person has no share in the world to come,⁶⁰ and the Day of Atonement brings no atonement for him unless he repents. Other sins arefforgiven, according to this source, pro forma by the day itself, but this is not the case with he who would disguise his circumcision.⁶¹ The rabbis forbid such a person from coming in contact with consecrated food or water,⁶² and call him and his sacrifices an abomination.⁶³ Such a person is an apostate⁶⁴ and will be devoured by Gehinnom.⁶⁵

Buttressing his argument that circumcision's sole purpose was to make Israel identifiable to others and to each other, Aphrahat employs Joshua 5:2 which reads, "Circumcize again the children of Israel a second time." From this verse and from Joshua 5:5, he concludes that the Israelits who survived the wilderness experience were not circumcized in the flesh because the people were isolated from all other

groups. They were, however, circumcized of the heart, that is, they had faith. Hence, "a second time" refers to the physical rite undergone before entering Canaan and once again mixing with other peoples.

The rabbis also comment on this verse, but, of course, they do not ultimately show that they consider circumcision an outmoded and unnecessary rite. In one commentary on the verse,

R. Berekiah taught in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai that Moses circumcized [the Israelites prior to the first Passover], Aaron uncovered the corona, and Joshua gave them the wine to drink. Others reverse Joshua and Moses . . . [on the basis of Joshua 5:2 where it says] 'the second time'; from which it can be inferred that he circumcized them the first time.⁶⁶

Alluded to here and more explicitly explained in another rabbinic commentary explicating Joshua 5:2 is the rabbinic injunction requiring two operations in the rite of circumcision. These consist of milah, circumcision, and pri'ah, the splitting of the membrane covering the corona and the drawing of it towards the base thereby uncovering the corona.

Rabbah b. Isaac stated in the name of Rab: The commandment of uncovering the corona at circumcision was not given to Abraham; for it said, 'At that time the Lord said unto Joshua: Make thee knives of flint, and circumcize again the children of Israel a second time.' But is it not possible that this applied to those who were not previously circumcized, for it is written, 'For all the people that were born in the wilderness. . . had not been circumcized' (Joshua 5:5)? If so, why the expression, 'again'! Consequently it must apply to the uncovering of the corona. Why, then, the expression, 'a second time'?--To compare the termination of the circumcision

(pri'ah) with its commencement (milah); as the commencement of the circumcision is essential, so is the termination. . . .⁶⁷

In order to prove that circumcision is useless and provides no advantage whatsoever to the circumcized person, it is important for Aphrahat to prove that many different peoples practiced circumcision. It has already been shown that the rabbis considered circumcision essential for the Jew but not so for the non-Jew unless he desired to observe the other commandments⁶⁸ or to insure himself a place in the world to come. It has also been shown that Gentiles, whether circumcized or not, were considered uncircumcized by the rabbis.

Aphrahat, however, by showing that idolators and wicked, sinful nations also practiced this rite, demonstrates to his own satisfaction, at least, that circumcision is of no benefit. Each of his readers was well aware of the idolator's fate and knew that it could not possibly include eternal life.

One such group was the Egyptians. If he could prove that they practiced circumcision, he could begin his proof of its uselessness. In order to do this, he shows that Moses was distinguished as being a Hebrew by Pharaoh's daughter not by virtue of his having been circumcized but by virtue of his being found in the river.

The rabbis, too, wondered how it was that Pharaoh's

daughter recognized that Moses was a Hebrew baby. R. Jose bar Rabbi Hanina said that she recognized him by virtue of his circumcision,⁶⁹ thus disagreeing with Aphrahat and some of the other rabbis that the Egyptians practiced circumcision, too. Whereas another point of view agreed with Aphrahat and said that he was recognized because only Israelites had to be thrown into the river upon birth.⁷⁰

Continuing his argument, Aphrahat dwells, perhaps to too great an extent, on the idea that Israel's neighbors were evil yet they, too, practiced the rite of circumcision. The rabbis, too, leveled invectives against Israel's neighbors warning Jews to not become involved in their neighbors' sinful deeds as did the Bible before them. It has already been shown, however, that they were all considered uncircumcised⁷¹ and their fate is due to their uncircumcision.⁷² Interpreting Ezekiel 35:6, R. Levi said in the name of R. Hama bar Rabbi Hanina that Esau hated the blood of circumcision and therefore spurned its practice.⁷³ Because Esau has estranged himself from this and other commandments, said another rabbi, the Holy One, blessed be He, gives him his reward in this world, "as a laborer who does work for his employer faithfully."⁷⁴ By this the author probably intended to say that Esau would prosper in this world while forfeiting the world to come by virtue of his spurning of circumcision.

After repeating a couple of themes expressed earlier in

the exposition, Aphrahat concludes that only the true circumcision, the ideal one "of the heart," is required in the new and immutable covenant. This "second" circumcision, for him, is baptism. Of interest here with respect to the rabbinic literature is the fact that for proselytes, circumcision alone did not render them Jews as was the case with the native-born. Ritual ablution, baptism, as it were, was also required.⁷⁵ Though there were disagreements concerning this matter, the majority opinion was that circumcision, immersion, and in the time of the Temple, sacrifice were required for any convert.⁷⁶

For the rabbis, then, circumcision was the rite which could never be abandoned. It was the rite of supreme importance to the Jew and to his God. "Were it not for [circumcision] the Holy One, blessed be He, would not have created His universe. . . ." ⁷⁷ It is equal to all of creation in importance.⁷⁸ It is the witness to the world that the Jewish God is the God of all the universe⁷⁹ and that as the Jews keep their promises as outlined in the covenant so, too, will God.⁸⁰

Chapter IV
Exposition III
An Exposition¹ of the Fast

1. The pure fast is preferable before God, is kept like a treasure in heaven, is a weapon against evil, and is a shield which absorbs² the arrows of the enemy. This I have not said from my (own) opinion, rather from the Holy Writings which had previously shown us that in every time the fast was a help to those who truly fasted. For the fast was not, my dear friend, that one which is from bread and water alone, rather the ways of observing the fast are many. There is the one who abstains³ from food and water until he becomes hungry or thirsty. Then there is the one who abstains in order to be a virgin,⁴ who hungers but does not eat, and who thirsts but does not drink. This fast is an excellent one. Then there is the one who abstains out of religiosity,⁵ which requires fasting,⁶ Then there is the one who abstains from meat, wine, and different sorts of foods. Then there is the one who abstains in order to make a fence for his mouth so that he does not speak hateful words.⁷ Then there is the one who abstains from passion and subdues his (evil) inclination⁸ so that he will not be vanquished. Then there is the one who abstains from possessions in order to make himself poor for His service.⁹ Then there is the one who abstains from beds¹⁰ of various kinds in order to be vigilant in prayer. Then there is the one who abstains from the desirable things of this world when in trouble so that

he is not conquered by the enemy. Then there is the one who abstains in order to be monkish so that he will be pleasing to his Lord by restraint.¹¹ And (finally) there is the one who gathers all of these together and makes them one fast. Just as a person will abstain from food until he is hungry, and so long as he abstains from eating and from drinking this qualifies for the name "fast," but if he should eat a little bit or drink, he has broken his fast. Similarly, a person who abstains from all of these, and if it is (the case) that sometimes he would break several of them, no longer is his fast considered for him. The fast of one who breaks one of all these is not considered as the fast of one who eats and drinks greedily. And the one to whom his hunger occurs (by happenstance) so that he would break his fast, his sin is not great; but the one who is abstinent¹² from all of these and betakes himself to break several of these, his sin is great and not little.

2. Hear, then, my dear friend, the exposition of the pure fast. First Abel exhibited the pure fast through his sacrifice; Enoch, in that he was pleasing before his God; Noah, because he kept his purity in a corrupting generation; Abraham, in that he superabounded in his faith; Isaac because of Abraham's covenant; Jacob because of Isaac's oath¹³ because he knew God (Gen 32:30), and Joseph because of his compassion and his administration. The purity of all of these was for them a complete fast before God. But if there

is no purity of heart, the fast is not accepted. Remember and see, my dear friend, that the wish of a person who would purify his heart, guard his tongue, and keep his hands away from evil is excellent, just as those about which I have written to you above. A person ought not to be one who mingles honey with wormwood. If a person would fast from bread and water, then he should not mingle abuses and maledictions with his fast. Your house, which is the temple of God, has (but) one door, and it is not seemly, O human being, that in that door through which the king enters¹⁴ dung and mud should exit. When a person abstains from all of these impurities and takes the body and blood of the Messiah, he should take heed of his mouth through which enters the King's Son.¹⁵ You do not have the authority, O human being, to deliver through your mouth impure words. Hear that which our vivifier said: "The thing which enters a person does not render him impure, rather the thing which goes out from his mouth, that is what soils him" (Matt 15:11).

3. Moses also observed a pure fast when he ascended the mountains and brought the Law to his people, and he was strengthened by his fast of forty days (Ex 24:18; 34:28) and received special (the best) praise when the skin of his face was made splendid (Ex 34:29, 30, 35), and he averted the divine anger from his people so that they were not destroyed (Ex 32:11; 34:9). In addition, Elijah, the man of strength, fasted in the likeness of Moses' fast when he was pursued by Jezebel and ran until Horeb by means of his fast of forty

days (I Kg 19:8) to where He had spoken with Moses, and He revealed Himself to him there and commanded him, saying to him: "Go, annoint Jehu the son of Namshi and Haza'el to do vengeance on the Israelites and (annoint) Elisha the son of Shafat to replace you (I Kg 19:15, 16). He rejoiced in his Lord's revelation by means of a complete fast, just as Moses had rejoiced when he fasted forty days (on) two (separate) occasions, averted his God's anger from his people, and brought down the tablets of the covenant which were engraved by God's finger. And the glory of both of these was in their fast and by it they were perfected.

4. Further let me show you also that fast of iniquity and of the shedding of blood which is not accepted that Jezebel, Ahab's instigator and Israel's instrument of torture,¹⁶ decreed. She wrote a letter in Ahab's name and sent it to the Jezereelites, (those) iniquitous people, obedient to the iniquitous Jezebel. She wrote in that iniquitous letter thus saying: "Declare a fast and make Naboth sit at the head of the people."¹⁷ Then designate two evil men to sit opposed to him and let them witness against him saying: 'Naboth cursed God and the King.' Then let him be stoned so that he dies" (I Kg 21:9, 10). And this, my dear friend, is what Jezebel wrote to them: "Let two men testify against Naboth," i.e., she had sent them [orders] according to the Holy Law, for it is written in the Law: "One who is condemned to death shall not be killed on account of

the word of one witness rather on account of the word of two witnesses shall he die" (Deut 17:6; 19:5). And thus it is written: "The hand of the witnesses will be upon him first in order to stone him and the hand of all the people afterwards" (Deut 17:7; 13:9). Further she wrote to them; "Thus shall they testify against him, that Naboth cursed God and the King." This, too, she wrote in her iniquitous letter to them according to the Holy Law, for it is written: "Whosoever curses God's name, let him be stoned, because he pronounced and cursed the Holy name" (Lev 24:16). Now Jezebel had no concern about God's name that it was being cursed, rather because Ahab's avarice concerned her, that he coveted Naboth's vineyard, and did not recall that it is written: "You should not covettanything that is your neighbor's" (Ex 20:17).

5. O Jezebel, Ahab's instrument of torture!¹⁶ Who is this God that Naboth cursed? Is He the One Whose altars you overthrew? Or is He the One Whose prophets you killed? Or which king did he curse? The one who annulled the Law and wanted to carry off Naboth's inheritance? Why, Jezebel, did you not fulfill what is written in the beginning of the Law's commandments: "You shall not worship other gods" (Ex 20:3,5; Deut 5:7) while you, Jezebel, served Ba'al? Further more is it written: "You shall not shed innocent blood upon the land that the Lord your God has given to you" (Deut 19:10). You ought to have remembered yourself, O Jezebel, that it is written: "The land upon which blood is shed shall not

be expiated unless the blood of the one who shed it is shed upon it" (Num 35:33b). You were afraid of this, O Jezebel, therefore you exhibited criminal zeal as if Naboth cursed God whereas he had not cursed. Furthermore is it written: "Whosoever sheds human blood, his blood shall be shed" (Gen 9:6). Yet Jezebel, the troublemaker, shed Naboth's innocent blood. Because of this, in that very place wherein innocent blood was shed by means of a criminal fast which was decreed, Jezebel's blood was shed, and dogs ate her. And Ahab, who listened to her counsel, there dogs licked his blood.

6. If Jezebel chose to extract the thing from the Law which was assistant to her utter destruction even though she was not observant of the Law,¹⁸ you evil people, Jezereelites, how could you accept a letter in which was written a criminal fast, false testimony, and bloodshed? In which generations have you heard that they fasted and then shed innocent blood? Why, then, did you not reject this criminal letter and false testimony? Because of this, Ahab and Jezebel were punished with a just sentence for Naboth's innocent blood which they shed. As for the Jezereelites who obeyed Jezebel, they, too, were punished with a just sentence, for Hosea prophesied saying: "In a little while I will avenge the blood of Jezereel from Jehu's household" (Hos 1:4b). And Jehu sought to avenge Naboth's blood¹⁹ from Jezebel and Ahab's household, and he put the Jezereelites to the sword in Ba'al's house.²⁰ Naboth's

blood came upon them as Jehu said on that day of retribution: "In the evening I saw Naboth's blood and his children's blood" (II Kg 9:26a) because retribution was his,²¹ and the Jezereelites' fasting was a liability.²²

7. Furthermore, the Ninevites observed a pure fast, when Jonah declared ruin upon them. Thus is it written: "When they heard Jonah's preaching, they decreed a serious fast and earnest supplication as they sat upon sacks and ashes, removed their luxurious clothes and instead dressed in sacks, all of the children from their mothers' breasts and all of the sheep and cattle from the pasture." Thus is it written: "Word reached the king of Nineveh. He then arose from his throne, took off his crown,²³ sat on a sack, humbled himself with ashes, and proclaimed in Nineveh, his city, saying: 'By order of the king and his nobles, neither humans nor beasts shall taste anything, nor shall they gaze, nor shall they drink water. Rather the people and the beasts shall be covered with sacks and shall call upon God mournfully so that He will turn away from us the wrath and the anger so that we will not perish.'" (Jon 3:5-10). And thus is it written: "God saw their deeds that they turned from their evil ways, and He turned away from them [His] wrath so that He did not destroy them" (Jon 3:10). It did not say: "He saw the fast from bread and water with sackcloth and ashes," rather "They turned from their evil ways and from their evil deeds."²⁴ Because of this the king of Nineveh proclaimed, saying: "Each person

should turn away from his evil path and from the plunder which is in his hands."²⁵ The fast was pure, and the Ninevites' fast which they observed as they turned away from their evil ways and from the plunder which was in their hands was accepted, for the pure fast which the Ninevites observed was acceptable and did not resemble the Jezereelites' fast through which innocent blood was shed.

8. In every instance, my dear friend, abstention from evil(s) while a person fasts is preferable to abstention from bread and water and to (a fast wherein) "a person would humbleh himself, bend his neck like a hook, and prostrate himself in a sack and ashes" (Isa 58:5), just as Isaiah said. When a person abstains from bread and water and from all foods, prostrates himself in a sack and ashes, and mourns, it is fine, and lovely, and pleasing. But this is especially pleasing when "a person humbles himself, loosens (his) ties to iniquity, and breaks (his) bonds to deceit. Then his light is turned on like the sun, his righteousness goes before him, and he is like a paradise that prospers and like a fountain of water that does not lack its water" (Isa 58:6, 8, 10, 11). He is not imitated by hypocrites²⁶ who make their faces sad, who make their countenances ugly and who announce their fasts.

9. See also the sectarian teachings, instruments of evil, fast and acknowledge their sins (Heb 10:3), but they have no employer. Who is the god²⁷ who will give a wage to Marcion

who does not acknowledge our Maker affirmatively?²⁸ Furthermore, who is the god who will reward Valentinus' fast, who proclaims that his makers are many and says that the perfect God is not spoken of by mouth nor may the mind inquire of Him?²⁹ And who will give a just desert to the sons of darkness of the teaching of Manes, the evil one, who dwell in darkness like snakes and practice divination, a teaching of Babylonia?³⁰ See that all of them fasted, but their fast was not accepted.

10. Listen further, my dear friend, as I show you the acceptable fast which Mordecai and Esther observed. Their fast³¹ was a saving shield for all of their people. They annulled the boasting of Haman, their antagonist, and his injustice was overturned upon himself and his scheme returned on him. He was judged by the very judgment process that he wished to employ and was himself measured by the very measure he sought to utilize. As he had considered doing was done to him, and he was bound by the rope of his (own) sins. Since he boasted of his riches, they did not accompany him. His sagacity did not save him, since he schemed for evil, his pride was subdued, and his honor passed away from him. His pomp was destroyed, and his fortitude was laid low. He was hit by the blow which he wished to cause and was killed by the murder he wished to commit, because he wished to destroy all of the Jews in the realm of King Ahashueros.

However, the fast of Mordecai and Esther was a shield which absorbed Haman's arrows, and Haman was caught in his own iniquity. His destructive sword entered his own heart, and his bow drawn for (the purpose of) iniquity was broken. As it is written concerning the wicked person: "Their sword shall enter their heart, and their bows shall be broken" (Ps 37:15). This (prophecy) was fulfilled concerning Haman. Even though he erected gallows for Mordecai and his children, Haman and his children were hung upon them.^{**} He was caught in the pit he had made, snared in the trap he had hidden, his net was spread over him, he fell into his (own) iniquitous snares, and that was his end forever.

11. Why, then, my dear friend, did Haman seek from the king that all Jews be destroyed if not because he wished to be avenged for his people's children and to erase the Israelites' name as the memory³² of Amalek had been erased from under heaven?³³ For Haman was left over as a survivor of the Amalekites. Thus is it written: "Haman the son of Hamadath the Agagite."

While he (Haman) was being honored in King Ahasueros' household, Mordecai was sitting in the King's gate all day because of Esther, his pupil, who had pleasingly conducted herself before King Ahashueros, more so than any of her other maiden companions, so that she had begun to sit (on the throne) instead of Vashti the queen,³⁴ while Mordecai was sitting in the first (position) in the King's gate, Haman

was third to the King (in power) and was honored in all his reign. As soon as anyone who was in the king's gate would see Haman, he would fall and worship before him, but Mordecai would not comply. Because of this, he wished to avenge himself on account of his people's children and to seek the Amalekites' vengeance from them through this pretext, because Haman was from the family of the household of Agog, the Amalekite king, whom Saul brought and whom Samuel tore to pieces before the Lord (I Sam 15:33), while Mordecai was from the family of the household of Saul of the tribe of Benjamin from the children of Qish (Esth 2:5). Because Saul slaughtered the Amalekites, Haman wished to seek vengeance for his people's children from Israel and for Agog's murder from Mordecai.

The insane one³⁵ did not know that it had been decreed concerning Amalek that his memory be erased from under the heaven, for it is written in the Holy Law:³⁶ "God said to Moses: 'Command³⁷ Joshua the son of Nun to choose for himself men in order to make war with Amalek.' Joshua armed himself and made war with Amalek" (Ex 17:9). Amalek was overpowered by the sign of the cross³⁸ by the stretching out of Moses' hands. While those who had gone to war were being slaughtered, (the others) of them remained as a remnant among their dwellings. Then the Lord said to Moses: "Write a memorial book and place (it) before Joshua the son of Nun, because I will surely erase the memory of Amalek

from under the heaven" (Ex 17:14).

However, He was patient with the Amalekites so that they would, perhaps, listen to what was written in God's Holy Book which said: "I will surely blot out the Amalekites" (Ex 17:14), cf. Num 24:20) and return toward Him so that He would turn toward them. Had they returned there would have been penitence as there had been penitence for the Ninevites when He threatened them (with) destruction. They demonstrated repentance and turned His anger away from them. Or as the giving of an oath to the Gibeonites that they would not be lost with the Canaanites. Or as the giving of penitence to Rahab who had faith. So also would penitence have been given to the Amalekites had they had faith when He was patient with them for four hundred years.³⁹ After that, any time He saw that they had not returned, His anger against them became confirmed as He recalled what Moses had set down in his Holy Book. When Saul reigned,⁴⁰ God said to Samuel: "Say to him: 'I remember that which Amalek did to you as you went out of Egypt, meeting you with the sword. Now, go, lay waste to the sinful Amalek!'" (I Sam 15:2,3). So Saul went and laid waste the Amalekites, but because Saul showed compassion upon Amalek, he was rejected from his reign because he left a remnant. And that Haman was a survivor of the household of Agog whom Saul left, and Mordecai was of the family of the household of Saul who laid waste those of the household of Agog.

12. There are people,⁴¹ my dear friend, who bring blame upon Mordecai saying: "Why did he not stand in the presence of Haman, for, after all, he was the most honored of the entire kingdom? How would he have been diminished, if he had paid him honor?" And thus they say: "If Mordecai had stood in the presence of Haman, this evil would not have been considered regarding Mordecai and his people." These (above) are what one who does not know the power of Scripture says. Mordecai did this, like a righteous man who keeps the law; he did not stand in the presence of the villainous Haman, because he gave heed to Saul, of his family, who, because he showed compassion upon Agog the King (of) Haman's family, was rejected from his reign, as the divine anger was upon him. Mordecai, too, if he had paid honor to the wicked Haman, the divine anger would have arisen against him as (it had) against Saul.

13. Why, then, my dear friend, did Amalek, of all of those peoples, go out to meet Israel for (the purpose of) war? Thus thought Amalek: "We will go out and devastate Jacob's children, and we will annul Isaac's blessings. He⁴² was afraid of the servitude to Jacob's children. Thus Isaac said to Esau: "You shall serve Jacob, your brother, but if you repent, he will pass his yoke from off your neck" (Gen 27:40). For this you have known--that Amalek was the son of the maid-servant⁴³ of Eliphaz, Esau's son, and did not want to be subject to Jacob's children.

Why, then, my dear friend, did Isaac say to Esau: "You shall serve Jacob your brother"? Thus Scripture informs (us that) because Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan, who was accursed to Noah, his father. Thus said Noah to him: "You will be as a slave of slaves to your brothers" (Gen 9:25). Because Abraham and Isaac knew that the Canaanites were accursed, they did not take wives from their daughters for their sons. Abraham did not take [one] for Isaac, nor did Isaac take [one] for Jacob, so that the accursed seed of the Canaanites should not be mingled with the seed (about which) it is noted that it was blessed by Noah.

Because of this Amalek the son of Eliphaz the son of Esau wished to annul Noah's curse and Isaac's blessings and to make war with Jacob's children. God also wrote justly concerning Amalek: "His⁴² memory shall be erased by Rachel's children!" (Deut 25:19). First, Joshua the son of Nun of the tribe of Joseph made war with him,⁴² afterwards Saul of the Benjaminites, and (finally) Mordecai, through his fast, destroyed their remnant. Of all of Esau's children, Amalek (only) wished to make war with Jacob's children, and therefore his⁴² very memory was erased. See that through Mordecai and Esther's fast, Haman was overthrown from his position and the remnant of the Amalekites perished. Mordecai received Haman's honor and was the greatest in all of Ahashueros' kingdom, while Esther was queen instead of Vashti.

14. Furthermore, Daniel observed an acceptable fast (for) twenty-one days⁴⁴ (Dan 10:2,3) for the sake of his people so that they would not have an increase in Babylonia more than seventy years,⁴⁵ and through his fast of twenty-one days, he gained acceptance⁴⁶ before his God. During those very days Gabriel arose to his aid, as he is the one who receives prayers at all times, and along with Gabriel, Michael, the archangel, also gave aid. They stood up against the Persian ruler (for) twenty-one days while he⁴⁷ aided Daniel with his fast. You have known, my dear friend, that Gabriel is the one who receives the prayers before God. As Daniel prayed, Gabriel came to him and strengthened him saying to him: "Your prayer has been accepted⁴⁷ by God, and I have come because of your words" (Dan 10:12). He enheartened him saying to him: "Take courage, O precious man" (Dan 10:11,19).

As he had come to him⁴⁸ because of the prayer of his⁴⁸ fast,⁴⁹ so too Gabriel offered Zachariah's prayer near before God when he brought tidings about John (the Baptist's) birth saying to him:⁵⁰ "Your prayer has been accepted"⁴⁷ (Luke 1:13). He also offered Mary's prayer before God when he brought tidings about the Messiah's birth saying to her: "You have found favor before God" (Luke 1:30). How did Mary find favor if not through her fast and her prayer? Because Gabriel was receiving the pure prayers and offering them before God.

Michael was the Archangel of the Israelites. He is the one⁵² (about) which (God) said to Moses: "See, My angel shall

go before you and rout the inhabitants of the land from your presence" (Ex 23:20,23). He is the one⁵¹ that appeared to Balaam's ass as Balaam was going to curse Israel (Num 22:22). He, furthermore, appeared to Joshua the son of Nun who with his sword drawn, stood in the valley of Jericho. But when Joshua saw him, he thought him to be one of the enemy,⁵² so Joshua said to him: "Are you one of us or one of our enemies?" Michael said to him: "I am chief of the Lord's hosts, and now I have come" (Josh 5:13-14). He (is the one that) cast down Jericho's walls before Joshua the son of Nun (Josh 6:19, of Heb 11:30). Furthermore, he (is the one that) routed the thirty-one kings from his presence (Josh 12:7-24), and he routed the million⁵³ Cushites from 'Asa's presence. (II Chr 14:12). Furthermore, he routed the Assyrian camp (of) one hundred eighty-five thousand (II Kgs 19:35). Also, when the Israelites went to Babylonia, he, too, went with them and fought on their behalf.

15. Why, then, my dear friend, did Daniel fast those three weeks,⁴⁴ seeking from God and making supplication, yet previously it is not written that he fasted? Thus is it written: When the seventy years' (anniversary) of Jerusalem's destruction had been completed as Jeremiah the Prophet had said: (Jer 25:12; 29:10). He offered his prayer and made supplication before his God (Dan 9:2) that they would not continue to remain more than seventy years just as He took

away from the generation of Noah's days, just as He added to those of the Israelites in Egypt, and just as He took away those of the Ephraimites. Daniel thought that because of his people's sins that He might delay more than those seventy years which Jeremiah had said. So Gabriel and Michael, the Archangel, gave him aid in his fast. Also Michael would have satisfaction through them when they would return to their (own) land (as well as) Gabriel, who gave aid to his people so that the fruit of their prayers as well as the sacrifices which he offered daily before God would be multiplied. But the ruler of the Persian kingdom did not wish the holy seed of Israel to be separated from the sinful kingdom of Persia, which had been entrusted to him by God, for as long as they were there, there were righteous ones among them⁵⁵ in which he also rejoiced. See that Daniel's excellent fast was profitable as he overthrew his people's captivity at the conclusion of seventy years.

16. The leader of our camp is greater than Gabriel, better than Michael, and more powerful than the ruler of Persia, since he is our vivifier, our Lord, Jesus Christ,⁵⁶ who came dressed in our humanity, suffered, was afflicted in the body which he took from us, and is able to give aid to those who are afflicted (Heb 4:15). He fasted for us and conquered our enemy, and he commanded us to fast and to watch at all times that by the power of the pure fast we will reach his rest.⁵⁷

Chapter V

Aphrahat and the Rabbis on the Fast

Aphrahat's exposition on the fast is, unlike the one on circumcision, not apologetic or polemic in character. Rather his purpose was to define for his reader exactly what constituted an acceptable fast which one could strive to keep in fulfillment of a Christian duty. This being the case, one notices a considerable lack of antagonism for any group except those who are considered heretical by Aphrahat's Church. These he attacks mercilessly as has been seen in the short paragraph dealing with their fasts in the text.¹ With regard to the Jews, one finds no reference at all except where biblical figures are used to illustrate his points. Contrary to the case of circumcision, Aphrahat's sentiments concerning the fast are very close to those of the rabbis who were his contemporaries. It is only in the degree of implementation where there may be found any serious disagreement.²

Aphrahat opens the exposition by declaring the "pure fast" to be "a weapon against evil," "a shield," and "a help to those who truly fasted." So, too, do the majority of the rabbis find the fast beneficial. As "a weapon against evil," the Talmud cites an instance where "a fast of three days and three nights was ordered, whereupon the evil desire, tempter of idolatry, surrendered to them."³ In the days of R. Hiyya b. Abba, the Land of Israel was rid of a re'em's whelp⁴ through the proclamation of a fast and the

prayer of R. Hiyya.⁵ R. Huna said that fasting was one of the things which nullify an evil decree,⁶ and Raba b. Mehasia advocated it as potent against a dream.⁷ Wondering why Caleb is known as Ashhur, the answer is given that he is so called because his face was blackened (hushhur) through his fasts.⁸

Public fasts were called when the land lacked rain⁹ or suffered from pestilence,¹⁰ when a wind spoiled a quantity of grain,¹¹ when wolves devoured two children,¹² and when there was persecution.¹³ One source said that there was no need to fast when in danger because it sapped one's strength.¹⁴ Fasts cause the Holy One, blessed be He, to grant eternal forgiveness and to send relief to His world, according to R. Berekiah and R. Hama b. Papa, respectively.¹⁵

Aphrahat then enumerates eleven different ways of observing the fast ranging from eating only when hungry or thirsty to an asceticism including abstinence from food, speech, sexual relations, possessions, and too much sleep. A good many of these appear in the rabbinic literature as well, though few escape both pro and con discussion.

"Fasting by hours is considered a fast, so that if he completed the day, he may say the prayer for a fast. . . ."¹⁶ This corresponds roughly to Aphrahat's category of one who fasts until hungry or thirsty. R. Ammi answered the question concerning one who is keeping a voluntary fast, if he may take a taste of food to see if it has been prepared properly. His answer was in the affirmative adding that it

may be as much as a rebi'ith.¹⁷ On the other hand,

Our Rabbis taught: If one fasted on account of some visitation and it passed, or for a sick person and he recovered, he should nevertheless complete his fast.¹⁸ If one journeys from a place where they do not fast to a place where they do, he should fast with them; from a place where they do fast to a place where they do not, he should nevertheless complete his fast. If he forgot and ate and drank let him not make it patent in public. . . .¹⁹

This statement, then, would seem to contradict the earlier one endorsing fasting by hours. Rather one should fast for the duration of the fast, according to their view.

Concerning asceticism, which Aphrahat singles out as an excellent fast, the rabbis appear to disapprove. The strongest disapproval in the Babylonian Talmud is registered by Abaye who sums up the opinionsoof Simeon the Just, R. Simeon, and R. Eleazar haQappar that a nazir is a sinner. They reach this conclusion through an interesting interpretation of Numbers 6:11. Abaye then asks,

Now does this not afford an argument from the minor to the major? If one, who afflicted himself only in respect of wine, is called a sinner: how much more so one who ascetically refrains from everything. Hence, one who fasts is called a sinner.²⁰

Other examples of disapproval may also be found in the literature. "Three things weaken a man's strength, viz., fear, a journey, and fasting."²¹ Tanhum b. R. Jeremiah listed four—"fasting, a journey, sin, and the Kingdom of Babylon."²² Concerning the scholar who would afflict himself by fasting, both R. Shesheth and R. Jeremiah b.

Abba in the name of Resh Iaqish condemn him heartily.²³

Though comparatively few, there are some neutral or positive statements with regard to asceticism. R. Eleazar maintains that "he who is able to bear self-affliction is termed Holy while he who is not is termed a sinner."²⁴

Raba said that Nahmani, whom the Soncino Talmud identifies as Abaye, "practices hunger."²⁵ Finally R. Johanan stood up in honor of R. Zadoq, who was known for living an ascetic life. When asked by Vespasian why he should do this, R. Johanan has only the highest praise for R. Zadoq's abilities despite his "numerous abstinences and fasts."²⁶

Moore, in defense of the rabbis, states that their anti-asceticism represents, rather than a "spirit of Judaism,"

. . . expressions of personal temperament, circumstance and surrounding, and are not to be broadly generalized. From an early time, also, antipathy to Christian monasticism was an influence not to be left out of account.²⁷

These considerations are very likely valid especially when coupled with the Jewish antipathy to a dualism which separates matter and intellect or spirit, as he points out earlier in the same chapter.²⁸ This dualism provided many ascetics with the impetus to abstain from all that the material world, which was evil, had to offer, so that their intellects or spirits would be emphasized. This kind of thinking was quite alien to the rabbis.

In complete contrast to the notion of asceticism is an interesting reference attributed to Resh Iaqish wherein

he says that anyone who eats gluttonously on the Day of Atonement is free from punishment because overeating, like not eating at all, is an affliction, and one is punished for not afflicting himself.²⁹ Equally curious is the dictum that for all but the most mortal of sins, the Day of Atonement, itself, atones whether it is observed properly or not.³⁰

For the rabbis as well as for Aphrahat, fasting meant more than abstention from food. From very early on, the term for "fast" in Hebrew, zom, was used interchangeably with the phrase "afflicting oneself," 'inui nefesh.'³¹ In the Bible and further delineated in the Mishnah are those actions which constitute affliction. These vary with the seriousness of the fast.

On the Day of Atonement, for example, "from evening to evening, strict fasting is enjoined under penalty of extirpation,"³² and "it is forbidden to eat or drink, or bathe or anoint oneself or wear sandals, or to engage in conjugal intercourse."³³ Included in the biblical injunction is a prohibition against work also. On the Ninth of Av, in addition to these, reading the Law, the Prophets, or the Hagiographa is forbidden, as is studying any branch of the Oral Law. One might study unfamiliar or different parts of the Law, read Job, Lamentations or any other ominous prophecies.³⁴

Rabbi said that priests should not drink wine at any time. However, he could not enforce this because the reason

for abstention, the Temple, was destroyed. With its destruction went the priests' duties, and this being so, they were free to drink wine.³⁵ Mourners and those who submitted to self-imposed abstinence as a means of doing penance often abstained from wine and meat or appetizing foods.³⁶

R. Meir praised Adam, the first man, and called him "a great saint."

When he saw that through him death was ordained as a punishment he spent 130 years in fasting, severed connection with his wife for 130 years, and wore clothes of fig [leaves] on his body for 130 years.³⁷

Thus, the rabbis, too, recognized many ways of observing the fast, whether public or private, many of which correspond to those listed by Aphrahat. Others, such as the abstention from reading or studying on the Ninth of Av, were not even considered by him. Some of the fasts were highly ritualized, especially those in the realm of public fasts, while private fasts were less so. This high degree of ritualization leaves the rabbis vulnerable to attack from those who find Jews who fasted pro forma but lacked any sign of sincerity. Just as Aphrahat recognized that an acceptable fast is accomplished through purity of heart, so, too, did the rabbis.

Aphrahat begins his proof of this point by showing that several key biblical figures were rewarded for the purity of heart they displayed in their fasts. The rabbis, too, often draw on biblical personalities for examples. Moore

points out that in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Joseph, Judah, and Reuben each practice a specific form of abstention as self-imposed penance.³⁹ In the midrash, Reuben does afflict himself as a form of repentance.⁴⁰ R. Tanhūm b. Ḥanilai quoted II Chronicles 12:6. Using the same form as Aphrahat would have used, he remarks, "It is not written here, 'and when the Lord saw that they had fasted' but 'that they had humbled themselves.'"⁴¹

Ishma'el, as does Aphrahat, points to ^{**}Moses, who fasted forty days and nights. The difference in the reference, however, is that Ishma'el wishes to prove that if Moses neither ate nor drank for forty complete days, than angels have no need of it ever.⁴²

Abaye, too, almost says word for word what Aphrahat tells his reader:

Our brethren, neither sackcloth nor fastings are effective but only penitence and good deeds, for we find that of the men of Nineveh Scripture does not say, 'And God saw their sackcloth and fasting,' but, 'God saw their works that they turned from their evil way' (Jonah 3:10).⁴³

Often in Aphrahat and often in the rabbinic literature as well, the acceptable fast is the one which is accompanied by sincerity and an attempt at self-correction and repentance.⁴⁴ This may become manifest through compassion for one another⁴⁵ or through a broken and contrite spirit.⁴⁶ No fast is acceptable except that in which the sinners of Israel participate as well as the pious, according to R. Hana b. Bizna in the name of R. Hisda the Pious.⁴⁷ R. Eleazar

said, "Fasting is more efficacious than charity. What is the reason? One is performed with a man's money, the other with his body."⁴⁸ R. Shesheth, too, remembering that atonement in the time of the Temple was accomplished through animal sacrifice, prayed that his fast wherein his fat and blood had been diminished would be accounted as if he had offered them upon the altar.⁴⁹

More efficacious, however, is charity dispensed on a fast day.⁵⁰ "If, on a fast day, the distribution of alms is postponed overnight, it is just as though blood were shed. . . ,"⁵¹ and others entering a community in which there was a fast were called upon to contribute to charity also, as in the case of a fast proclaimed by R. Huna.⁵² If there was a persecution during which fasting was prohibited as in the time of R. Zera, the good intention was as acceptable as the deed itself.⁵³

When Aphrahat, after informing his reader about Esther and Mordecai's fast which succeeded in saving the Jews of Persia, about the cause of the enmity between Haman and Mordecai in the story, and about Daniel's fast which released the Jews from exile, concludes with praise for Jesus.

He fasted for us and conquered our enemy, and he commanded us to fast and to watch at all times that by the power of the pure fast we will reach his rest.

While the rabbis instructed Jews in fasting in memory of a person⁵⁴ or an event,⁵⁵ or in penance for a wrong-doing,⁵⁶

or for the safety of others⁵⁷ in this world, Aphrahat asks his reader to fast for an apocalyptic world. Whereas the rabbis are careful to define days upon which it is forbidden to fast,⁵⁸ Aphrahat does not. The focus of each side is different--Aphrahat's is upon what happens after death, and the rabbis' is upon what happens preceding it. Thus, though they employ similar means with regard to the fast, though the majority of the rabbis never would have advocated asceticism to the extent Aphrahat does,⁵⁹ the ends of their respective abstentions are, literally, worlds apart.

Notes
Chapter I

¹As in the English word "illogical" which consists of the prefix "in" plus the word "logic" and the suffix "al".

²Using the English word "illogical" once again, it is apparent that if English employed the linea occultans, the word would be written "inlogical."

³Frank Gavin, Aphraates and the Jews, p. 1.

⁴Cf. XVI:17 and XVII:8. "Who have cast away idols, and call that a lie which our father bequeathed to us" and "who ought to worship Jesus, for that He has turned away our forward minds from all superstitions of vain error, and taught us to worship one God our Father and Maker." Cited in and translated by J. Gwynn, "Select Demonstrations of Aphrahat," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, Vol. XIII, 1898, p. 157.

⁵William Wright, A Short History of Syriac Literature, p. 33. F. C. Burkitt, Early Eastern Christianity, p. 81, informs his readers that this tradition is a rather late one. That he was a bishop, however, is attested to by his address to other bishops of Seleucia, Ctosphon, and the surrounding area in the opening of Exposition XIV.

⁶J. Gwynn, op. cit., p. 155.

⁷F. C. Burkitt, op. cit., p. 82.

⁸Internal evidence for this may be found in V:5, end of XIV, XXII:25, and XXIII:69 as cited by J. Gwynn, op. cit., p. 153.

⁹William Wright, op. cit., p. 153.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹J. Gwynn, op. cit., p. 159.

¹²See infra., "Exposition on the Fast," paragraph 9.

¹³Gwynn, loc. cit.

¹⁴Gavin, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

¹⁵Gwynn, loc. cit.

¹⁶Gavin and Ginzberg among others.

¹⁷Louis Ginzberg, "Aphraates," Jewish Encyclopedia, I, pp. 663-664. Cf. Gavin, op. cit., pp. 32-37.

¹⁸Jacob Neusner, Aphrahat and Judaism, pp. 150ff.

¹⁹Wright and Moore as well as others see Jewish hands in the translation of the Bible into Syriac with later Christian revision harmonizing key texts with the LXX. Cf. Wright, op. cit., pp. 3-5, George Foote Moore, Judaism, I, pp. 102-3, Burkitt, op. cit., pp. 71-73.

²⁰Burkitt, op. cit., p. 34.

²¹Burkitt, op. cit., p. 37.

²²J. B. Segal, Edessa, 'The Blessed City,' p. 64. For more information on The Doctrine of Addai and the story of Abgar and Jesus, see Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Book I, section 13, Burkitt, op. cit., pp. 34-38, and Segal, pp. 62-65.

²³Gavin, op. cit., pp. 11-18.

²⁴Segal, op. cit., pp. 62-65, does not agree as to the dates. He does not see Christianity as a dominant force in Edessa until the fourth century after Eusebius' account had become famous throughout Christendom.

²⁵Gavin, op. cit., p. 30.

²⁶For more information on the Jews in Persia during this time see Jacob Neusner, A History of the Jews in Babylonia, especially vol. IV, The Age of Shapur II, and an article by J. B. Segal, "The Jews of North Mesopotamia Before the Rise of Islam," Publications of the Israel Society for Biblical Research, vol. XVII, Studies in the Bible, pp. 32*-63*.

²⁷Such as prayer, fasting, and celibacy.

²⁸Such as circumcision, Sabbath, and Passover.

²⁹Cf. Neusner, Aphrahat and Judaism, pp. 19-30.

³⁰Cf. Bibliography and notes.

Chapter II

¹The usual translation of the Syriac Tahwitha' is "Demonstration" or, loosely, "Homily." Tahwitha' is a "Talmid-type" noun, common in Aramaic, whose root is H-W-'. Not appearing in Syriac in P'al, in Pa'el the root means "to show, make manifest." Cf. J. Payne-Smith, A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, p. 129a. In Jewish Aramaic, the root has the meaning "to show, to tell" in the Pael and Haphel/Aphel (no Qal); Marcus Jastrow, Dictionary of Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, Midrashic Literature and Targumim, p. 432a. In Jewish Aramaic, the noun 'ahwayah means "telling, interpretation" (Jastrow, op. cit., p. 39a) and is linked to the Hebrew noun (also in the noun form of the causitive Hiph'il/'aphel) Haggadah (also an Aramaic Mishgal). In the literature of the Talmud and of the Midrashim, Haggadah is always used in contrast to Halachah, which means "practice, rule, traditional law" (Jastrow, op. cit., p. 353a). Haggadah/'aggadah is defined by Jastrow as "tale story, lesson, esp. Agadah, that class of Rabb. literature which explains the Bible homiletically" (op. cit., p. 11a). Haggadah, then, can be taken as an exposition of the Bible. Therefore, the translation of the Syriac Tahwitha' as "exposition" is entirely in line with the usage of the day and more descriptive of Aphrahat's purpose in setting down his views on the subjects that he chose. See also T. Jansma's article "Aphraates' Demonstration VII paras, 18 and 20. Some Observations on the Discourse on Penance" in Parole De L'Orient, vol. V, Number 1, 1974, p. 39, where he describes these works of Aphrahat's as expositions. On page 41, he continues with a similar analysis of the word Tahwitha' wherein he says that "Verbal derivatives of the root hwy meaning to explain, to expound, to demonstrate. . ."

²Gavin, ". . . that he wrote the first ten Homilies at the request of a fellow-monk is possibly a literary fiction as they were written for a larger audience to be read and

discussed by fellow-monks (465:1-6)" and Jansma, "This is highly likely. The questioner is introduced at the beginning of those paragraphs which mark the turning-points (3 and 8) and the climax (11) of the exposition. In other instances he seems to be a sort of corporate personality which represents the whole grade of the ascetics. He is reviewing Demonstration VII . . . The transition to the friend in § 7 strikes one as rather artificial. . . ." Cf. Frank Gavin, Aphraates and the Jews, p. 4 and Jansma, op. cit. vs J. Gwynn, "Select Demonstrations of Aphrahat," Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. XIII, 1898, pp. 157-158: ". . . address Bishops, Clergy, and people of Seleucia and Ctesiphon in the name of a Synod over which he was President, probably of Bishops suffragan to Nineveh, in XIV.1." I tend to believe that this is a convention much like "my dear reader" today.

³Jacob Neusner, Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran, p. 19: "Now, beloved friend, hear concerning the sign of which he spoke and the foundation about which he gave instruction, what it is right to say against that people which he came before us and believes about itself that it is the seed of Abraham." Neusner is wrong here as can be seen by the way his sentence does not flow. Mamllo' is a noun and not a verb! Qodmain here is an auxiliary verb and is in the plural!

⁴The verb is Tana', the same as in Jewish Aramaic which means "repeat," "recite," "tell," or "study."

⁵The Church, a people that is made up of not one people but from many peoples.

⁶Neusner, op. cit., p. 20: "The shoot was planted, a true seed' (refers to) their original fathers. But the children have turned to the unclean deeds of the Amorites."

⁷Hakkima' here refers to an imaginary Jewish disputant set up as a straw man in Aphrahat's attempt to show his Christian readers that Judaism is not the way. The "sage" here is like Trypho in "Dialogue with Trypho." Wright and Segal, however, do not agree. Cf. J. B. Segal, Edessa, 'The Blessed City,' p. 100 and William Wright, A Short History of Syriac Literature, p. 143. Just as habibi appears to be a literary convention (see note 2), so, too, does hakkima' appear to be another literary convention.

⁸Sodom and Gamorrah.

⁹Not as Neusner, loc. cit. writes: ". . . Sodom, Gomorrah, and their companions."

¹⁰This is the 'ele' found each time the Rabbis ask a question. . . and they introduce the answer with 'ele'= rather (except that), it can only be, etc.

¹¹Neusner, loc. cit. "We boast that we are circumcized. . . ." Neusner made the mistake because in Talmudic Aramaic one finds the ending in for the common plural! So, he transferred a noun ending to the participle, without too much scrutiny! It is definitely a mistake.

¹²Neusner, op. cit., p. 21. "condemned."

¹³'el 'elyon.

¹⁴Implying that uncircumcized Melchizedeq was at a higher station than Abraham at the time, and circumcision did not turn the situation around.

¹⁵Abraham's second wife, cf. Genesis 25:1.

¹⁶Neusner, op. cit., p. 24. ". . . in his uncircumcision. . ."

¹⁷Lit., grazing, herding.

¹⁸Neusner, loc. cit. "...might not take refuge through lying..."

¹⁹Neusner, op. cit., p. 26. ". . . she knew that they had hidden him, made the ark for him, and threw it in the river, so that his (Pharoah's) men could not find (him)." Also notes Bert: ". . . erkannte sie, dass sie ihm das Kästchen gemacht und es in den Fluss gesetzt hatten, damit seine Männer es nicht versenken könnten." In note concludes "I take str to be palet hence 'shelter, protect." Both men present interesting translations, nevertheless I cannot agree with either one. The plain sense of the sentence and the "facts" as presented in the original Biblical story support, I believe, my translation over theirs. Cf. Exodus 1:22, 2:1-7.

²⁰Ibid. ". . . in the house of Pharoah." On the surface, this is an acceptable translation and gives the sense of the sentence, though I do miss the preposition "in" (bveit). My translation is taken from the notion that Beit is really Beint, and thus indicates that Moses grew up not just in Pharoah's household, where he may or may not have seen Moses, but with him, before his very eyes. This would reinforce Aphrahat's claim that the Egyptians were circumcized because Moses was under the close scrutiny of Pharoah, and therefore any distinguishing characteristic like that would have been

noticed. Circumcision is a very private matter, and therefore only those closest to a person would notice it.

²¹Ibid. ". . .that they also are neighbors of. . ."

²²Judges 7:7 - Rishin here are not chiefs as Neusner translates (p. 26) but heads, literally, three hundred heads (of men).

²³Neusner, loc. cit. ". . .were dwelling. . . ." Ma'-marhun is a noun!

²⁴Ibid. ". . .and learned the bow."

²⁵The Glorious Reqem? Reqem is identified with the Hebrew Qadesh and is located in desert to the South of what is now Israel. Reqem de Gaya' is identified with Qadesh Barne'a. Cf. R. Payne Smith, Thesaurus Syriacus, vol.II, p. 3978b. Bozra is a city in Idumaea. Cf. R. Payne Smith, vol.I, pp.473a and Jastrow, op. cit., p. 148a.

²⁶Lit., "kept his anger."

²⁷Neusner, op. cit., p. 28. "(=thatoof Jesus)".

²⁸Ibid. "And he cannot (again) give a law that is rejected by those. . . ."

²⁹Christians Jews.

³⁰This is against the heresies which considered the Jewish Bible to be the product of the demi-urge while the new covenant was to have been the product of the transcendent deity. e.g., the Manicheans.

³¹Neusner, op. cit., p. 29. "(of Christ)".

³²Payne-Smith, op. cit., p. 560b. "with Bothar to go after, yearn after."

³³Neusner, loc. cit. "very trustworthy."

³⁴Ibid. "trustworthy."

Chapter III

¹See #18 and #19 translated into English in Jacob Neusner, Aphrahat and Judaism, pp. 76-96.

²Cf. St. John Chrysostom, Patrologia Graeca, vol. 48, cols. 847, 848, 852, a fourth-century contemporary of Aphrahat.

³Cf. I Maccabees 1:13ff., II Maccabees 4:9-14, Jubilees 15:33f mentioned in George Foote Moore, Judaism, vol. I, p. 198.

⁴Moore, op. cit., vol. I, p. 49.

⁵Cf. Historia Augusta, Hadrian, 14, 2, cited in Moore, op. cit., vol. I, p. 351.

⁶Moore, however, also says that I Maccabees 1:41-50 shows that Antiochus Epiphanes also decreed a prohibition against circumcision, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 19-20.

⁷Moore, op. cit., vol. I, p. 351.

⁸Rosh Hashanah 19a, Ta'anith 18a. Unless otherwise noted, all of the passages cited will be as translated in Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein (editor), The Babylonian Talmud.

⁹Jacob Z. Lauterbach, Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, vol. II, p. 247, ll. 136-143; Leviticus Rabbah 32:1. Unless otherwise noted, all of the passages cited from the Rabboth will be as translated in Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (eds.), Midrash Rabbah.

¹⁰Exodus Rabbah 15:7:

. . . Israel cannot be joined with the idolators of antiquity, but must keep themselves apart. For even if an enemy decrees that they should desecrate the Sabbath, abolish circumcision, or serve idols, they suffer martyrdom rather than be assimilated with them. . . .

Lauterbach, op. cit., vol. III, p. 204, ll. 112-117. See also Exodus Rabbah 21:5 which contrasts Israel's stubbornness to do the will of the heathen with their willingness to obey God.

¹¹Exodus Rabbah 30:12.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Moore, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 351. Therefore, Aphrahat's belief that others were circumcized may have been without basis.

¹⁴Cf. expositions on Passover, Sabbath, Making Distinctions Between Foods translated in Neusner, op. cit.

¹⁵R. Isaac ben Aryeh Yosef Dov, Seder 'avodath Yisra'el, p. 238 and p. 352. These prayers may be too late to be considered contemporary with Aphrahat. Earliest reference is in Massecheth Soferim 19:7 and Siddur R. Amram. The first prayer cited is from the Additional Service for Sabbath and the New Moon, and the other is from the same service for the Major Festivals.

¹⁶Lamentations Rabbah 1:1, #1, #20. Other reasons included repudiating the Divine Unity, the Decalogue, and the Pentateuch, all of which indicate rebellion against God's authority and divinity. Therefore, circumcision, too, must be a sign of submission to God's authority and recognition of divinity.

¹⁷Menahoth 53b.

¹⁸Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 114-115, ll. 99-112.

¹⁹Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 196-197, ll. 126-142. Lauterbach's note here is helpful, wherein he states that the humiliation is less when a mighty empire oppresses Israel than if a lesser power had managed to do so.

²⁰Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 220, ll. 58-61.

²¹Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 255, ll. 165-167. Cf. also pp. 252-255, ll. 130-167.

²²Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 252, ll. 134-136. Cf. also Vol. II, p. 247, ll. 134-135.

²³Genesis 17:13.

²⁴Berachoth 48b-49a. Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 204, ll. 43-45, Vol. III, p. 139, ll. 25-27.

²⁵Genesis 17:14. Cf. Kerithoth 1:1.

²⁶Genesis 14:18.

²⁷Leviticus Rabbah 25:6. Cf. also Genesis Rabbah 46:5 wherein Abraham is assumed to be high priest "after the manner of Melchi-Zedeq" (Psalm 110:4). This midrash goes on to define the only spot on Abraham's body whereupon he could be circumcized and still be fit to offer sacrifices, i.e., the foreskin of the body. See infra for more references.

²⁸Numbers Rabbah 12:8; Lamentations Rabbah 2:13, #17; Song of Songs Rabbah 3:11, #1, 2:7, #1, 1:15, #2, 4:1, #2.

²⁹Numbers Rabbah 12:8; Lamentations Rabbah 2:13, #17; Song of Songs Rabbah 3:11, #1; Genesis Rabbah 42:8, 48:2, 48:9, 49:2.

³⁰Numbers Rabbah 12:8; Lamentations Rabbah 2:13, #17; Song of Songs Rabbah 3:11, #1, Genesis Rabbah 11:6, 46:1, 46:4; Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:5; Shabbat 108a; Nedarim 32a; Tosefta Nedarim 2:5.

³¹Shem - Genesis Rabbah 26:3; Jacob - Genesis Rabbah 63:7; Joseph - Genesis Rabbah 84:6; Moses - Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:10, Exodus Rabbah 1:20, Leviticus Rabbah 20:1, Sotah 12a; David - Sotah 10b.

³²Genesis Rabbah 91:5.

³³Genesis Rabbah 90:6, 95. See infra for more on world to come and circumcision.

³⁴Exodus Rabbah 1:8.

³⁵Menahoth 43b.

³⁶Leviticus Rabbah 31:4.

³⁷Exodus Rabbah 15:12.

³⁸Exodus 12:43-49; Pesahim 5:3, 6:6; Tosefta Pesahim

8:18; Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 119, ll. 26, 30-31, pp. 127-128, ll. 131-134; Moore, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 330-331.

³⁹Exodus Rabbah 19:5.

⁴⁰Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 33-34, ll. 8-12, pp. 140-141, ll. 169-171; Exodus Rabbah 17:3; Ruth Rabbah 6:1; Song of Songs Rabbah 1:5, #1. All of these use the proof text Ezekiel 16:6, which uses the dual for "blood" (bdamayich). To the rabbis, the two bloods refer to those of circumcision and of the Passover sacrifice.

⁴¹Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 218, ll. 31-35.

⁴²Exodus Rabbah 23:12.

⁴³Song of Songs Rabbah 7:2, #3.

⁴⁴Sanhedrin 110b.

⁴⁵Genesis Rabbah 90:6, 95.

⁴⁶'avodah Zarah 10b. The Soncino translator believes him to be a non-Jew (see his note), however, due to his name, it would appear that he is an apostate.

⁴⁷Genesis Rabbah 46:10.

⁴⁸Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:24.

⁴⁹Genesis Rabbah 21:9, 48:8; Exodus Rabbah 19:4.

⁵⁰Genesis Rabbah 48:8. Two interesting points here-- Abraham, who first circumcized himself, is the one who checks for the circumcision in others, and innocent babes who died prior to the removal of their blemish, their foreskin, provide the foreskins for sinners thus vindicating the innocent and meting out justice to the wicked.

⁵¹Exodus Rabbah 19:4.

⁵²For the fate of the uncircumcized see Tosefta' Nedarim 2:4, Nedarim 3:11, Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:21, in addition to Exodus Rabbah 19:4.

⁵³Berachoth 29a.

⁵⁴Nedarim 31b; Zevahim 22b; Exodus Rabbah 19:4.

⁵⁵Sifra' Dvei Rav, p. 43, col. 4.

⁵⁶Cf. Yevamoth 64b and Hullin 4b-5a.

⁵⁷'avodah Zarah 26b-27a. Here Aphrahat and the rabbis agree, except that for the latter, this is a highly exceptional situation whereas for the former, it is the rule. See also Yevamoth 48b, 'avodah Zarah 57a-b, and Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 178-179, ll. 141-147 for equation of uncircumcized with idolatry with regard to slaves and resident aliens.

⁵⁸Genesis Rabbah 46:9.

⁵⁹Sifrei Bamidbar, 112.

⁶⁰'avoth 3:11.

⁶¹Kerithoth 7a; Shevu'oth 13a.

⁶²Yevamoth 72a-b.

⁶³Sifra' Dvei Rav, p.4, col. 3; Leviticus Rabbah 19:6.

⁶⁴Sifra' Dvei Rav, p. 4, col. 3.

⁶⁵Genesis Rabbah 21:9, 48:8; Exodus Rabbah 19:4.

⁶⁶Numbers Rabbah 11:3; Song of Songs Rabbah 1:12, #3, 3:7, #4.

⁶⁷Yevamoth 71b. For other midrashim involving proper circumcisions see Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:1; Yevamoth 47b; Genesis Rabbah 46:13; Lauterbach, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 120, ll. 41-45. Somehow, when Neusner set up his chart comparing Aphrahat with the rabbis, he failed to come across these two midrashim for they are not listed. See Neusner, op. cit., p. 182. He employed a different methodology wherein he compared not the general topic but the manner in which each verse was employed. Therefore, it is doubly surprising that he would not have included these two as they are as close to a refutation of Aphrahat as one can find, as they show that Joshua 5:2 is not what it seems

to be at all.

Joshua 5:3 is also used as a proof text in the proposition that circumcision is as sweet as incense to God; see Numbers Rabbah 14:12.

⁶⁸Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:21.

⁶⁹Sotah 12b: Exodus Rabbah 1:24.

⁷⁰Exodus Rabbah 1:24.

⁷¹Nedarim 3:11

⁷²Tosefta 'Nedarim 2:4.

⁷³Genesis Rabbah 63:13.

⁷⁴Ruth Rabbah, Proem III.

⁷⁵Berachoth 47b; 'avodah Zarah 59a; Yevamoth 46a, 47a-b; Sifrei Bamidbar 108.

⁷⁶R. Eliezer permitted circumcision without immersion, while R. Joshua permitted immersion without circumcision; see Yevamoth 46a. The Sages, however, were not swayed by either one's argument.

⁷⁷Nedarim 3:11.

⁷⁸Tosefta 'Nedarim 2:5.

⁷⁹Genesis Rabbah 46:3.

⁸⁰Moore, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 232.

Chapter IV

¹See note #1 in the Exposition of Circumcision.

²The shield's purpose is "to absorb" enemy arrows or to deflect them. This then is the meaning of Mqabblath "absorbs."

³As opposed to fasts. Later this differences will be felt as more significant.

⁴Bthula' - a very difficult word to translate in this context of food and water. In most of the cases where this word or its derivatives appear, it does, indeed, mean "virgin." However, here I feel that its meaning is different like "ascetic" or "unadulterated."

⁵Lit., "in holiness." D. Ioannes Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca Vol. I, p. LXV, connects the word Qaddishe' with a level of religious orders in his preface which practices moderation.

⁶Parisot, op. cit., "which is also a fast."

⁷Vow of silence.

⁸Exactly parallel to Hebrew concept of Yezer or Yezer Hara'. Could one have borrowed from the other?

⁹This is a difficult sentence to translate because of the preposition Iam and the suffix eh for which there seems to be an antecedent which, because of the Iam, cannot be Qenyana' which is a masculine, singular noun meaning possessions. This leads Parisot to translate Lmuhoneh as "ab earum servitute" or "From their service." However, in the examples given in Payne-Smith, A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, p. 393a, the preposition used with the verb S-R-Q in the intensive is always men when the meaning is "of" or "from." Therefore, I must conclude that the Iam indicates "for" and the service is for Him, i.e., God.

¹⁰Root SH-W- means to be equal. In the Pa'el, it means "to lay even" hence "to lie down." TaSHWITHa', then, like TaHWITHa', derives from the Pa'el verb and thus means "bed, carpet, mattress."

¹¹'ulzana' is not translated by Parisot.

¹²i.e., taken the vow of the nazir.

¹³Oaths in another version which Wright says is a later addition.

¹⁴i.e., communion.

¹⁵i.e., communion.

¹⁶William Wright, The Homilies of Aphraates, The Persian Sage, and Parisot op. cit., - another version gives "deceptress," "seductress."

¹⁷i.e., designate him ruler.

¹⁸Corresponds to Hebrew Shomereth Torah.

¹⁹i.e., his death.

²⁰i.e., Ba'al's temple or shrine.

²¹Jehu's.

²²As opposed to being in their favor. One would think that a fast would at least lighten the sentence, but Aphrahat wants to show here that not only was this not the case, but that fasting made matters worse for them because of its nature.

²³Taga is too much like "toga" for me to ignore. The Hebrew parallel has the word 'adereth which means "cloak." Thus, even though the Syriac, Aramaic, Arabic, and Hebrew dictionaries give the meaning as "crown," I am not convinced that in this context the meaning is so clear.

²⁴Or "evil of their deeds."

²⁵Lit., "their hands."

²⁶Lit., "those who give stones."

²⁷Lit., "who is he."

²⁸Marcion was "a noted and permanently influential heretic of the second century." Wace and Piercy, A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature, p. 693c. Perplexed by evil, he was led to accept the solution prevalent in the East then that evil is mixed up with matter. He interpreted the texts "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit" and "No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old garment" to mean that works in which evil is to be found could not proceed from the good God. Therefore Christian dispensation could have nothing in common with the Jewish. This matter, then, could not be the creation of the Supreme God. This led him to assert that there were two gods, one good and one just, which corresponded to the gods as seemingly described in the so-called "New Testament" and "Old Testament" respectively. Visible creation, then, is the work of the just god while

the good god was neither concerned with nor known by humanity until, taking pity on their miserable plight caused by disobedience to the Creator, he interfered for their redemption. He did not regard matter as a creation of either the good god or the just god. The messiahs of the Jews' prophets were not the Christ for all humanity who had no earthly body and whose salvation affected the soul only since matter was evil, and thus Marcion did not believe in resurrection. A myth associated with him is more Gnostic. It posits three heavens (1) of the good god, (2) of the god of the Law, and (3) of the angels and below these, Hyle. Hyle and the god of the Law made this world and man. However, they became jealous of each other and began competing for man's attention. Their battling introduced idolatry (Hyle) and death (god of the Law) until the good god sent his son down. Marcion only accepted that part of the "New Testament" which was not drawn from the "Old Testament" and tried to show that the latter contradicted not only the former but itself. Marcionism was absorbed by the dualistic Manicheism. Wace and Piercy, op. cit., pp. 693-698. Thus here Aphrahat is attacking Marcion's concept of the creator god being one of evil.

²⁹Though difficult to distinguish Valentinus' original doctrine from the later developments of his disciples, two Gnostic doctrines do appear. One is of the celestial origin of spiritual man (pneumatics), and two is of the demiurge (author of death associated with "Old Testament"). The Primal Being, or Bythos, after ages of silence and contemplation, gave rise to other beings through a process of emanation. The first group was known as aeons and were fifteen pairs in number. Through the weakness and sin of Sophia, one of the lowest aeons, the lower world with its subjugation to matter was brought into existence. Man was composed of hylie as well as psychic elements. Without the hold of Bythos, the Good Father, even the spiritual man could not be cleaned of evil. This cleansing was possible only after the revelation of the Son.

His Christology is somewhat confusing but is docetic. Whether Jesus earned for himself deity through steadfastness and abstinence (hence, the connection with an exposition of abstinence) or whether the Christ used the body of Jesus the man, the result is still that the deity element was not corrupted by matter. One will recognize some neo-Platonic elements in his thought. For example, Bythos appears to be the Unmoved Mover, while the aeons are the movers of the lower spheres. Aphrahat is attacking here his concept of the aeons which he (Aphrahat) takes to be creator gods and the absolute transcendence of Bythos. (Wace and Piercy, op. cit., pp. 998-1004).

³⁰Manes led not so much a sect as a vast, indefinite spiritual and intellectual movement which contained elements from Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. From the latter came a dualism which defined (1) deity as the original good from whom nothing but good can proceed and (2) original evil in opposition (Ahura-Mazda and Angro-Mainyus). To guard his boundaries, the good god produced the aeon mother of life by whom spiritual man was produced together with five elements (wind, light, water, fire, and matter) to carry on the struggle of the powers of darkness which were copied by the prince of darkness. He interpreted "the Fall" as the powers of darkness forbidding the tree of knowledge. Christ, the Spirit of the Sun, took the shape of the serpent in order to foil their plan. Hence Aphrahat attacks Manes' idea of the snake being not the adversary but the savior. Manes rejected the Jewish Bible as a work of evil principle. His conception of Christ was also docetic. (Wace and Piercy, op. cit., pp. 682-686).

³¹i.e., their individual fasts.

³²Or "name"

³³Cf. Ex 17:14, Deut 25:19, Esther Rabbah VII, 13. In Esther Rabbah, Haman gives as part of his reasoning for seeing the Jews destroyed their treatment of "Amalek my original ancestor," their attack upon Sihon and 'Og, and Saul and Samuel's treatment of "my ancestor Agog," sparing him at first and later dismembering him.

³⁴Or "as queen" thus referring to Esther.

³⁵i.e., Haman.

³⁶The Syriac for the Hebrew Torah is taken from Greek nomos which is law. Christians understood the Jewish Bible and especially the Pentateuch as a collection of legislation, whereas Jews understood it as teaching, instruction in the way.

³⁷Cf. the same root, '-M-R, in Arabic means "to command," and the verse in Hebrew has Moses speaking in the imperative to Joshua.

³⁸This is how Aphrahat understands the passage in Exodus 17 when it says Moses raised his arms.

³⁹Until the time of Saul.

⁴⁰Payne-Smith, op. cit., p. 494b.

⁴¹Though Parisot has the word pointed as a singular noun, the verbs call for a plural rendering.

⁴²i.e., Amalek.

⁴³Parisot, op. cit. - "concubinae"

⁴⁴Lit., "three weeks of days."

⁴⁵Aphrahat knows that the Jews were in Babylonia for seventy years until Cyrus allowed them to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Thus he attributes Daniel with this knowledge and makes his fast one which was to prevent any delay in their exodus. Cf., Daniel 10.

⁴⁶Or "a hearing."

⁴⁷Gabriel, who was in charge of prayers.

⁴⁸Daniel.

⁴⁹Not through the fast alone.

⁵⁰Zachariah.

⁵¹Lit., "this is he."

⁵²Lit., "enemies."

⁵³Lit., "thousand thousand."

⁵⁴i.e., the ruler.

⁵⁵i.e., the Persians.

⁵⁶Lit., "the anointed one."

⁵⁷After the resurrection. Parisot, op. cit., p. 338b.

Chapter V

¹Paragraph 9.

²For a complete and well-written survey of the sources on the concept of fasting consult G. F. Moore's Judaism, Vol. II, pp. 55-69 and pp. 257-266. It is the intention of this paper to deal only with those aspects of fasting which Aphrahat, himself, has outlined.

³Yoma 69b, Sanhedrin 64a. Unless otherwise noted, all of the passages cited from the Babli Talmud will be as translated in Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein (editor), The Babylonian Talmud.

⁴A re'em is a wild ox of enormous height according to the Soncino Midrash.

⁵Genesis Rabbah 31:13. Unless otherwise noted, all of the passages cited from the Rabboth will be as translated in Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (editors), Midrash Rabbah.

⁶Genesis Rabbah 44:12, the others being prayer, righteousness, and repentance.

⁷Genesis Rabbah 44:12; Shabbath 11a; said in the name of R. Hama b. Goria in Rab's name in the latter version and with R. Hama b. Guria in Rab's name in the former. R. Hisda and R. Joseph add the stipulation that the fast begin immediately even on the Sabbath. Also in Ecclesiastes Rabbah 9:10, #1, is a reference to R. Assi who fasted thirty days to behold R. Hiyya Rabbah in a dream but failed to do so.

⁸Sotah 12a

⁹Genesis Rabbah 33:3; Leviticus Rabbah 34:14; Ta'anith 1:4-6, 2:1, 16a. See also Genesis Rabbah 49:11 or Ta'anith 15a for a discussion of the ritual for such a fast.

¹⁰Ta'anith 3:4. Unless otherwise noted, all of the passage cited from the Mishnah will be as translated in Phillip Blackman, Mishnayoth.

¹¹Ta'anith 3:6; R. Jose said that the wolves were seen not that they had devoured any children.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Rosh Hashanah 18b.

¹⁴Tosefta' Ta'anith 2:12; examples given were (1) when a city is attacked by either people or a river, (2) when a boat is being torn by the sea, or (3) when a person was being pursued by non-Jews, highwaymen, or an evil spirit.

¹⁵The latter in R. Judah b. R. Simeon's name; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 10:10, #1-11.

¹⁶'avodah Zarah 34a; Ta'anith 11b.

¹⁷Of a log, a liquid measure; Berachoth 14a.

¹⁸Cf. Ta'anith 14b where R. Simeon b. Gamaliel says that rain fasts are observed only during the rainy season.

¹⁹Ta'anith 10b. See also Tosefta' Ta'anith 3:3-4 and Esther Rabbah 10:6.

²⁰Nedarim 10a; Nazir 19a. In Numbers Rabbah 10:15 R. Eliezer makes the inference of gal v'homar, otherwise it parallels the other two texts. There is some confusion among the authorities as to exactly why a vow of nziruth is a sin, however. This can be seen in the above passages as well as in Nazir 2b-3a and 19a wherein the former accounts nazirite as sinful only if he has contracted some ritual impurity during the period of abstention while the latter accounts any nazirite as sinful--both by authority of R. Eleazar haQappar! Other references to this question include Numbers Rabbah 10:7, Ta'anith 11a, in the name of Samuel, and those cited in Moore, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 265.

²¹Gittin 70a.

²²Lamentations Rabbah 1:14, #43.

²³Ta'anith 11b.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Shabbath 33a. It is interesting that Abaye would "practice hunger" after condemning such an act as sinful elsewhere. Others who apparently had a reputation for fasting were Mar Son of Rabina, Pesahim 68b, R. Joseph, and R. Zera, Baba' Mezia 85a.

²⁶Lamentations Rabbah 1:5, #13.

²⁷Moore, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 266.

²⁸Moore, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 263-264.

²⁹Yoma 80b; Yevamoth 46a.

³⁰Kerithoth 7a; Shevu'oth 13a; Sifra' Dvei Rav, p. 101. col. 4 and p. 102, col. 1.

³¹Cf. Leviticus 16:31; 23:27, 29, 32; Numbers 29:7; Isaiah 58:3-7 as cited by Moore, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 55. In addition see Sifra' Dvei Rav, p. 82, col. 4, and p. 83, col. 1, where affliction is defined as hunger.

³²Moore, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 58-59; cf. Leviticus 23:29.

³³Yoma 8:1. In the corresponding gemara' section, Yoma 73b ff., these are discussed in more detail as to how they constitute affliction.

³⁴Ta'anith 30a-b as cited by Moore op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 66-67. Other references to the Ninth of Av fast include Megillah 5a-b; Pesahim 54b; Ta'anith 13a; Tosefta' Ta'anith 2:7. Other references to the Yom Kippur fast include Yoma 74a; Sifra' Dvei Rav, p. 82, col. 4, p. 83, col. 1, which discuss the meaning of affliction in terms of moving from a shady spot to a sunnier one or vice versa for the sake of greater affliction. In all three such a measure was deemed unnecessary. See also Rosh Hashanah 9a and Berachoth 8b which discuss the beginning and ending times of the fast. The latter reference also praises the one who eats heartily the day before Yom Kippur and accounts it to him as if he had fasted.

³⁵Ta'anith 17b.

³⁶Cf. Mo'ed Qatan 23b; Testaments of Reuben 1:10, of Simeon 3:4, of Judah 15:4 as cited by Moore, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 257-258.

³⁷'eruvin 18b. For an overview of Aphrahat's Church's view of chastity, see F. C. Burkitt, Early Eastern Christianity, the St. Margaret's Lectures, 1904, on the Syriac-speaking Church, pp. 128-130, 133, 136-138, 140, 142-143, 150, and J.B. Segal, Edessa, 'The Blessed City', p. 136.

³⁸Ta'anith 1:4-6, 2:1, 16a in addition to references above concerned with the Day of Atonement and the fast of the Ninth of Av, see note 34.

³⁹Moore, op. cit., Vol. I., p. 517.

⁴⁰Sifrei Deuteronomy 31.

⁴¹Lamentations Rabbah 3:40-41, #9.

⁴²Yoma 75b.

⁴³Ta'anith 16a.

⁴⁴Lamentations Rabbah 3:40-41, #1.

⁴⁵Genesis Rabbah 33:3; Leviticus Rabbah 34:14.

⁴⁶Ta'anith 25b.

⁴⁷Kerithoth 6b.

⁴⁸Berachoth 32b.

⁴⁹Berachoth 17a.

⁵⁰Berachoth 6b.

⁵¹Sanhedrin 35a.

⁵²Megillah 27a.

⁵³Ta'anith 8b.

⁵⁴Kethuboth 104a.

⁵⁵Tosefta' Sotah 6:10-11.

⁵⁶22b. Mo'ed Qatan 25a; Baba' Mezi'a 33a; Nazir 52b; Hagigah

⁵⁷Lamentations Rabbah 1:16, #51.

⁵⁸Ta'anith 2:9, 2:10, 11b, 15b, 229a; Tosefta' Ta'anith 2:5-6, 4:6; 'erubin 40b-41a; Berachoth 31b; Rosh Hashanah 18b, 19a; Shabbath 13b, 21b.

⁵⁹F. C. Burkitt, op. cit., p. 125, claims that baptism and hence true membership in the Church is "a privilege reserved for celibates."

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