

THE TEN TRIALS OF ABRAHAM
AN ANALYSIS OF CHAPTERS 26-31 OF *PIRKE DE-RABBI*
ELIEZER

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by

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The goal of this thesis is to explore the midrashic approach of *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (PRE) toward the events of Abraham's life. I explore theories of the development of the midrash and the possible socio-historical and theological influences, and comparisons with parallel midrashic treatments, e.g. Book of Jubilees. Additionally, the textual interplay with parallel literary tradition of other cultures is examined.

Toward this end, the thesis contains four chapters with an introduction. The introduction describes my personal approach to this thesis. Chapter One discusses the history and structure of PRE, and its use of the enumeration pattern. Chapter Two, the core of this work, contains an emended Hebrew text of chapters 26-31 of PRE, my translation and commentary, and extensive notes and references. Chapter Three discusses the major themes and messages of the Ten Trials. Chapter Four is comprised of my concluding remarks, including the lessons that PRE has to offer us today and thoughts about the further study of PRE. Finally, a Bibliography is provided for further reference.

It examines at least six versions of PRE, comparing them with a vast array of primary sources from rabbinic literature, Christian literature, and the Muslim Hadith literature. I also make extensive use of a wide range of secondary sources to gain insight into the midrashic technique, historical situation, and general reference.

Abraham used to receive travelers. After they had eaten and drunk, he would suggest, "Say grace." When they asked, "What should we say?" He replied, "Blessed be the Eternal God of the world, of whose bounty we have partaken." If the traveler, having eaten and drunk, accepted the suggestion and said grace, he would be allowed to depart.

But if he refused, Abraham would say, "Pay me what you owe." When the traveler asked, "How much do I owe you?" Abraham would reply. "A jug of wine—so much; a pound of meat—so much; a loaf of bread—so much. Who do you suppose is giving you wine in the wilderness? Meat in the wilderness? Bread in the wilderness?"

The traveler, now aware that he must either pay or thank God by saying grace, would say, "Blessed be the everlasting God of the world, of whose bounty we have partaken." This is the meaning of the description of Abraham as one who 'bestows free bounty and justice' (Genesis 18:19)—first bounty, then justice (Midrash Rabbah 49:4).

Dedicated to those who have taught me when and how to say grace.

My teachers and mentors

My family

My children, Quin and Ani

My wife, Dara

Without your patience and support,

None of this would have been possible.

Introduction

The nearly limitless number of possibilities in the totality of Jewish literature from which to choose creates difficult choices when try to decide about what to study for a Rabbinic Thesis. Part of the decision involved my approach to the work. And in the end, the final results of my labor were much greater than initially anticipated.

Despite the enormous range of possible areas of study from which to choose, I wanted to grapple with traditional texts. Rabbinic literature provides the foundation upon which we are able to shape our own Jewish identities. The rabbis attempted to grapple with questions of logic, with contradictions within the text and between the text and their experience of the world, and with the changing nature of the world around them while simultaneously holding onto, with great love and respect, the traditions which were bequeathed to them by their teachers.

While this work extended to all aspects of Jewish life, the midrashists work seems to be the most similar to the work in which we Reform Jews engage. We are faced with the challenge of integrating our past and our present in a meaningful way that will enlighten our future. We approach our tradition with a creative attitude to see how to make the best match possible between the old and the new, in a way which will capture the minds and souls of our fellow Jews, and especially the generations yet to come. This was the task of the redactors of Midrash, who clung to the old traditions, while integrating their life experience and traditions of other cultures, and using their own Divinely inspired creativity to craft new texts, which enlightened not only their generation, but continue to enrich our lives, hundreds of generations later.

For years, I have been fascinated by how the narrative line seems to be repeated in generation after generation. This was highlighted for me yearly when we read the story

of Abraham's descent into Egypt where he exchanges his wife to ensure his safety,¹ and the repetition of that story upon ascending back to Canaan with *Avimelech* rather than Pharaoh.² This story is repeated a third time, but now with Isaac meeting *Avimelech*.³ This fascination with the cyclical nature of the patriarchal narratives drew me to working with the patriarchs.

I have an interest, as well, with the agendas of the writers. Everything placed in the public eye is done so with intent behind it. The writer is trying to convey a specific message to his constituency. I also wished to learn more about Islam, as we live in a time when knowledge of Islam is becoming increasingly important. We, American Jews, have long dealt with the Christian world, but are now being confronted with growing contact with the Muslim world. How our tradition has dealt with this in the past can help us determine how to act today.

For all these reasons, I was drawn to a ninth century Palestinian text redacted under strong Islamic rule, after a long period of Christian domination, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (PRE). In its commentary primarily upon Genesis and Exodus, the text devotes many chapters to the patriarchs, from which I chose six, which appeared to be a natural unit, "The Ten Trials of Abraham."

Determining the initial step in approaching this thesis was easy, but the challenge grew. The first step was to become familiar with the language and the content of the primary text, chapters 26 through 31 of PRE and, concurrently, the Biblical proof texts it employed. I translated and analyzed the work utilizing primarily the Warsaw edition with R. Luria's comments and Horowitz's unpublished manuscript of a critical edition

¹ Genesis 12:10-20.

² Genesis 20:1-18.

³ Genesis 26:6-17.

based on the Vienna edition, and when puzzled, I checked other editions and manuscripts.

Next, I tracked down references and notes provided in the various editions I had used, as well as running computer searches of key words and phrases, such as names, events, and the contents of lists. I researched the historical period of the Muslim Conquest, the period of the final redaction of PRE and the midrashic genre of the period, including common images and allusions. Finally, I compiled all of the relevant material that I had collected to create a commentary on and an overview of the text.

This thesis resembles a commentary upon the text of PRE, with some manuscript and textual variance analysis similar to a critical edition. Chapter One provides background information about PRE and the selected chapters. Chapter Two, the core of this work, includes an emended Hebrew text that addresses differences between the various versions of PRE and takes into account the other parallel texts, my own translation and commentary, and extensive notes and references. Chapter Three discusses the major themes and messages found in PRE. Chapter Four is comprised of my concluding remarks, including the lessons that PRE has to offer us today and thoughts about the further study of PRE. Finally, a Bibliography is provided for further reference.

Chapter One

History and Structure of the Text

As with many midrashic works, there is some debate concerning the dating, authorship, and literary cohesiveness of *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (PRE). These issues are intricately interwoven, complicating the attempt to find resolution.

A. The Dating of the Text

Much of the work appears to have been redacted in the early 9th century. PRE is quoted by Pirkei ben Baboi, an early 9th century work, limiting the late dating of PRE to a contemporary period. Our text also refers to Arab rule, especially in Chapter 30 with the inclusion of many traditions concerning Ishmael, as in the naming of his wives, Fatima and Aisha,⁴ the names of the wife and daughter of Mohammed,⁵ limiting the earliest possible dating of our text to the early to mid 7th century,⁶ the first period of Arab reign in Jerusalem.⁷ Similarly, remarks concerning the existence of the Dome of the Rock,⁸ erected in 684 CE,⁹ on the Temple Mount site, further limit the early dating to the late 7th century. PRE refers to two brothers who may have been either the sons of Harun al-Rashid (809-813) or perhaps the half brothers, Mu'awiya (caliph from 661) and Ziyad (ruler of eastern provinces from 665).¹⁰ This may limit the early dating of our text to the early 9th century, thus coinciding with our late terminus. Further complicating the issue of dating the text is the possibility of later additions.

⁴ H.L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, translated by Markus Bockmuehl (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1996), p. 329.

⁵ "Ishmael: In the *Aggadah*," *Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

⁶ Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 329.

⁷ Shmuel Safrai, "The Era of the Mishnah and Talmud (70-640)," *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1976), pp. 361-363.

⁸ Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 329.

⁹ *The Great Buildings Collection*, [available online at www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Dome_of_the_Rock.html.] (Artifice, Inc., 2002).

¹⁰ Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 329.

Our current editions of PRE consist of 54 chapters, though the text is thought to be incomplete, as many medieval quotes of PRE are inconsistent with our extant versions.¹¹ Structurally, it appears that the first 2 chapters, which contain biographical material about Rabbi Eliezer, were later additions. The inclusion of these two chapters is believed to date from no later than the 11th century, as fragments from that period are consistent with our extant versions.¹² The appearance of several incomplete enumeration lists, such as eight of God's ten descents to earth, are listed and eight of the prayers of the *Shemonah Esrei* are listed, provides evidence for the apparent incompleteness of our text.¹³ However, our extant text does seem to retain its appearance as a complete and cohesive literary text.

B. The Nature of the Text

PRE is a narrative midrash, which, according to our dating, was redacted under Arab rule and seems to reflect the style of the Arabic Biblical narrative,¹⁴ a creative interpretation of the Biblical story and plot. Excluding the first two chapters, PRE follows the Biblical plot of Genesis and Exodus fairly consistently. Chapters 3-11 are concerned with creation. Chapters 12-23 explicate the stories of Adam to Noah, including God's ten descents to earth and the three pillars upon which the world rests. Chapters 24-25 grapple with sinful humanity and the Tower of Babel. Chapters 26-39 are concerned with the Patriarchs, while chapters 40-48 tell the story of Moses through the giving of the commandments on Mt. Sinai. Chapters 49-50 expound upon Amalek's

¹¹ Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 328.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 329.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

descendents, including remarks on Megillat Esther. In chapters 51 and 52 we see minor deviations from the Biblical plot with discussions of eschatology, seven miracles of God, and chapters 53-54, which discuss Miriam's punishment for speaking against Moses.¹⁵ The similarities to the Arabic style, as well as the utilization of traditional midrashic elements, such as naming of tradents, even pseudoepigraphically, and the inclusion of variant and contradictory traditions, lead scholars to label PRE a narrative Midrash of Palestinian redaction.¹⁶

Due to the close relationship of PRE to the Biblical text, as well as its thematic consistency, about which more will be discussed in 'Chapter 3, Major Themes and Messages,' it is important to view the final redaction of PRE as the work of one author, or a single group, rather than an anthology of loosely connected pieces.¹⁷ The work is replete with thematic and linguistic ties which bind these distinct units together into a cohesive literary unit, which expresses and reinforces several themes to which the individual sections only begin to hint. The work, then, as a whole is able to express ideas and themes that the individual sections, if they were to stand alone, are not able.

C. Enumeration Lists

Independent of the entire work being considered a cohesive literary work or an anthology of distinct pieces, specific passages and sections can certainly be treated as independent units. Such is the case with sharply defined enumeration lists. The appearance of enumerated lists is not a new phenomenon. The first lists in Hebrew

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 329-330.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 329-330.

literature appear in the Bible.¹⁸ The Torah opens with an enumerated list of the seven days of creation. This list, however, does not display the more formulaic structure of later rabbinic enumeration lists. And while there does not seem to be a literary connection between the Biblical and the rabbinic lists,¹⁹ there seems to be an inherent logic and organizational value which leads to utilization of such enumerated lists. These types of lists provide a serviceable tool to systematically record observations about nature, geography, and human actions. These lists are also highly useful as pedagogic and mnemonic devices. It is on this level of functionality that comparisons between enumeration lists are fruitful, even if no organic, literary, or historical links can be found between the Biblical and rabbinical manifestations of these organizational tools.²⁰

While there is not enough evidence to support the discussion of enumeration lists as a distinct and cohesive genre, nor is there evidence of a direct literary, formulaic, or contextual connection between the Biblical pattern and the rabbinic pattern of enumerated lists,²¹ it is possible to begin to classify enumerated lists into functional categories. W.M.W. Roth began the process by distinguishing three categories of lists found in the Tanach. First, 'narrative numerical sayings' assist the larger narrative by systematizing and clarifying elements of the story, such as presenting genealogical information, social groupings, or geographical groupings. Examples of this type of list are the listing of the twelve sons of Jacob (Gen. 35:22-26), Job's three friends (Job 2:11), the five disciples of *Yochanan ben Zakkai* (M. *Avot* 2:8), and the six cities in the

¹⁸ Wayne Sibley Towner, *The Rabbinic "Enumeration of Scriptural Examples": A Study of a Rabbinic Pattern of Discourse with Special Reference to Mekhilta d'R. Ishmael* (E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1973), pp. 11-13.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-13.

²⁰ Ibid., p 4.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 11-13.

wilderness belonging to the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:61). These lists tend to employ verbs in the past tense, are self evident, and inseparable from the context of the list. Second, 'reflective numerical sayings' are reflective or meditative lists dealing with all aspects of human experience. They tend to define the existing hierarchies or orders of the physical or spiritual world. These lists are separable from their contexts, abstract and philosophical in nature, and utilize verbs in the present tense. Examples include the four natural things which are too wonderful to understand (Prov. 30:18-19), the four unbearable types of people (Prov. 30:21-23), the two organs of human perception (Prov. 20:12), God's two qualities of power and loving kindness (Psalms 62:12-13), and the two evils committed by Israel (Jer. 2:4-13). Finally, 'hortative numerical sayings' direct the audience to moral behavior and obedience, and designate the frequency of such actions. These lists include case law, as in the three obligations of an owner to a slave-girl (Ex. 21:7-11), ritual requirements, as in the three annual pilgrimage feasts (Ex. 23:14-16), and covenantal stipulations, as in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17 and Dt. 5:6-21). These lists tend to be formulaic, distinct from their context, and utilize verbs in the future tense and in the imperative in listing desirable or undesirable actions.²² These functional categories provide a foundation for the categorization of rabbinic enumeration lists.²³

D. Rabbinic Enumeration Lists

Tannaitic literature, almost entirely presented in formulaic patterns, extensively utilizes various types of lists. One of the most common aggadic forms is the numerical saying, or the rabbinic enumeration pattern. This pattern is divided into two major types:

²² Ibid., pp. 8-11.

²³ Ibid., pp. 11-13.

proverbial enumeration, dealing with names and ideas, and exegetical enumeration, dealing with Biblical texts. The general form of all rabbinic enumeration patterns is a *clal*, a general rule concerning the area within the list of entities, followed by *peratot*, the specific entities within the list. While the *clal* is not formulaically demarcated, it specifies the exact number of items that will be presented in the subsequent list. The number of *peratot*, similarly not generally formulaically demarcated, agree with the number of list items specified in the *clal*, though more than one proof or interpretation may be brought within each individual list entry. Variation exist within this general pattern, including the aforementioned presence or absence of Biblical texts, the use of correlative examples or graded, hierarchical lists, and the degree to which the lists are presented in a formulaic manner.²⁴

The formulaic nature of enumeration lists has provided an arena for the discussion of the significance and possible meaning of the number of list items. G. Nádor asserted that the number of items contained within a list was of primary import above the form or the specific items within the list. He held that 10 was of significance in conveying information concerned with numerical mysticism because of its relationship with Neoplatonism, the natural value in counting generations, and ethical concerns as it is the number of items in the Decalogue.²⁵ This discussion began the process of sub-categorizing the rabbinic enumeration pattern, but relied too heavily upon the speculative assessments of the inherent interpretive value of the numerals with which it was concerned. Nádor pointed out that the stereo-typical rabbinic enumeration pattern was able to present a wide range of material content with a single pattern, varying only the

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

²⁵ G. Nádor, "Some Numerical Categories in Ancient Rabbinical Literature: The Numbers *Ten*, *Seven*, and *Four*," *Acta Orientalia* (Blackwell Munksgaard, Budapest, 1962) 14, pp. 301-315.

number of items in the list. He also made clear that changes in the form of the list effects the function of the list in conveying organized information. In other words, by varying the number of items in the list, nuanced differences in meaning are possible, making this pattern highly useful as a pedagogic or mnemonic device.²⁶

While we cannot discuss the rabbinic enumeration pattern in terms of genre,²⁷ because there is not definite style, form, or content, we can trace a functional history of the pattern, beginning with Biblical use, passing most likely through oral tradition during the period after the destruction of the Second Temple, becoming more formulaic in the rabbinic period, and finally concretized in writing in the 5th to 7th C.E. centuries. What perhaps had been originally a rather loose form developed into a recognizable pattern with a range of formulaic presentations.²⁸

The significance of this process is that the abundant appearance of enumerated lists in PRE, as discussed earlier, indicates the presence of many concrete cohesive literary units, regardless of the nature of the entire text. The enumerated list of the Ten Trials of Abraham, presented in chapters 26 through 31, should be analyzed as a cohesive unit, replete with thematic agenda and linguistic ties consistent with a cohesive literary piece.

²⁶ Towner, *Rabbinic Enumeration*, pp. 20-21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27.

Chapter Two
Text, Translation, and Commentary

Introduction to Translation and Commentary

The history of PRE includes in a range of versions of the text. Unfortunately, a critical edition of the text has yet to be published, except for a limited edition of facsimile copies of C.M. Horowitz's original manuscript in preparation for a critical edition. He interlaced the folio pages of a personal copy of the Venice edition,²⁹ originally published in 1544,³⁰ with blank pages upon which he drafted his notes.³¹ I rely heavily upon his work in establishing the Hebrew text, upon which the translation is based.

Horowitz's emendations to the text are preferentially treated in comparison to the printed text, as they tend to be more consistent with parallel stories and other texts, in particularly the Warsaw edition with David Luria's commentary and suggested emendations, originally published in 1852 and republished in Jerusalem in 1963.³² The base of the Hebrew text in this thesis is an electronic version³³ of M Higger's *Horev* 8 edition, which is a compilation of three manuscripts from the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome that follows Horowitz' edition.³⁴ The electronic Hebrew text was then emended with annotations noting significant variations. Insertions into the Hebrew text, noted with square brackets, are those insertions which are derived from parallel stories or Biblical sources, rather than those derived through comparison of the different versions of PRE. Round brackets mark phrases and sections which I believe should not be included in the text. An explanation of the rationale for these inclusions and exclusions is provided in

²⁹ C.M. Horowitz, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: A Critical Edition, Codex C.M. Horowitz* (Makor Publishing Ltd., Jerusalem, 1972), preface.

³⁰ Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 330.

³¹ Horowitz, *PRE: A Critical Edition*, preface.

³² Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 330.

³³ "Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer," *Judaic Classics Library* (Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, Davka Corp., Chicago, 2001).

³⁴ Strack & Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 330.

the commentary upon that section.

The translation in this thesis is original. Initially, Luria's text³⁵ was used as the basis for the translation, but this translation was later emended to maintain consistency with the Hebrew text of this thesis. This translation attempts to balance a literal rendering of the text with ease of comprehension. Though idiomatic translations are utilized only sparingly, an attempt is also made to preserve the linguistic beauty of the text. When possible, the same English word or phrase is used in its various parts of speech to translate the same Hebrew root through its various forms. When the Hebrew text offers a variety of different translations, the multiple readings are noted in the commentary, as they may offer a greater understanding of the text. Similarly, suggested inclusions, marked with square brackets, and exclusions, marked with round brackets, are provided in the hope of elucidating the text. Lastly, scriptural quotes are marked with single quotation marks, and dialogue is indicated with double quotation marks. When necessary, these editorial emendations are explained in the commentary.

The commentary is designed to enhance the reader's understanding of the text. It offers socio-historical background, linguistic analysis, and points of clarification and interest pertinent to the text. Significant variations between different versions of PRE and parallel stories are also noted. The rationales behind my emendations of the text as presented are also explained in the commentary. The footnotes are provided as an aid to further study.

³⁵ *Sefer Pirke Rabbi Eliezer im Bei'or HaRadal* (Warsaw, 1852), 60b-72a.

Clal of the Ten Trials of Abraham

Text

- 1 פרק כו
2 עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו ועמד בכולן וצפוי הי' לפניו שעתידין בניו לנסות
3 להקב"ה עשרה נסיונות והקדים רפואה למכתם ונסחו בעשר נסיות.

Translation

Chapter 26

Abraham, our father, was tested with ten trials and he withstood them all. And it was anticipated by him [Abraham] that, in the future, his children would try the Holy One, Blessed be God, with ten trials and [God] foresaw the cure for their trouble, and [God] tried him [Abraham] with ten trials.

Commentary

This short paragraph serves as an introduction to the "Ten Trials of Abraham," a section of PRE comprised of chapters 26 through 31. It functions as the *clal*, the formulaic announcement of the parameters for the enumeration list, defining the number of items in the list as ten *peratot*, particular entry items.³⁶

While some debate exists over the interpretive values of the number of *peratot* in an enumeration list, it seems clear that 'ten' was not selected randomly. While this number may reflect an early, oral tradition in which ten was an effective pedagogic and mnemonic tool, as it served as the base unit for most counting systems, it may have had greater symbolic meaning. Ten is often associated with the Divine, especially in terms of

³⁶ Towner, *Rabbinic Enumeration*, pp. 14-15.

creation, revelation, and ritual observance, as in the ten sayings through which the world was created,³⁷ in the presentations of the Decalogue,³⁸ and in the tithes.³⁹ 'Ten' has also acquired the connotation of completeness and perfection. For example, in its latent form, the ten generations from Adam to Noah mark a complete world, which God destroys, and the ten generations from Noah to Abraham mark the perfection of humanity to the point where God is able enter into a covenant with Abraham.⁴⁰

The concept of ten trials is not original to PRE. *M. Avot* discusses the ten trials as a method of demonstrating to future generations the love of Abraham for God.⁴¹ In *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, we see the ten trials related to the ten plagues, though the *peratot* of the lists differ from those in PRE.⁴² Several other parallels exist from sources both predating and postdating PRE. Parallel stories have also been preserved in texts outside of the Jewish tradition, such as in the Book of Jubilees, in which five trials are listed,⁴³ and the death of Sarah is labeled Abraham's tenth trial.⁴⁴ This tends to indicate that the midrashists were concerned with God's selection of Abraham, highlighting Abraham's unique role in the initiation of our covenant with God.

Line 2 & 3: נִסִּיּוֹת 'tested'—This word is the plural of the word '*nisayon*,' defined as "trial, probation; test, experiment; experience; and temptation."⁴⁵ It is possible that the root of the word, '*n.s.h*' is related to the word '*n.s.*' meaning flag, pennant, or

³⁷ *M. Avot* 5:1.

³⁸ Exodus 20:2-14 and Deuteronomy 5:6-18.

³⁹ Genesis 14:20, Num. 18:21, etc.

⁴⁰ Israel Abrahams, "Numbers, Typical and Important: Symbolic and Rhetorical Use: Ten" *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

⁴¹ *M. Avot* 5:3.

⁴² *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, version A, 33 and 36.

⁴³ Jubilees 17:17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19:8.

⁴⁵ Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew English Dictionary* (Yedioth Ahronot, Chemed Books, Tel-Aviv, 1996), p. 1651.

miracle.⁴⁶ Some scholars hold that the definition of 'trial or test' is derived from 'flag' because a flag is raised up, and a personal 'trial' offers an opportunity to raise up or elevate one's fame or character.⁴⁷ This theory provides a rationale as to why the midrashists discussed the trials of Abraham in terms of praise and perfection. In so doing, they not only create a worthy character for God's selection, but also create a worthy anchor for the chain of authority from which the rabbis, early Church Fathers, and Muslim leaders all claim descent.

While this form of the root '*n.s.h*' does not appear in the *Tanach*, the root itself does appear 36 times in other forms.⁴⁸ The first occurrence of the root is found in Genesis 22:1 introducing the "Binding of Isaac." Not only is the root of the word and the concept of testing connected with God testing the Israelites during the Exodus, as with the bitter waters at *Marah*,⁴⁹ with hunger,⁵⁰ and thirst,⁵¹ but also with the Israelites testing God by questioning God's presence among the Israelites at Horev.⁵² This idea of the Israelites testing God is reiterated in Numbers, "All the men that saw My [God's] glory and My signs that I performed in Egypt and the wilderness, **and have tested me these ten times**, and did not obey my voice."⁵³ Perhaps, *PRE* alludes to this verse from Numbers, referring to the generation of the Exodus, as the future event from the temporal perspective of the Abraham story. This could have resulted in the inclusion of the second half of this *PRE* passage. Yet, the inclusion of a reference to a verse found outside of

⁴⁶ Alcalay, *Hebrew English Dictionary*, p. 1647.

⁴⁷ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Hotzet "Khorev," Jerusalem, 1903) pp. 914-916.

⁴⁸ Abraham Even-Shoshan, *Concordantzia Hadasha: leTorah, Nevi'im, uKetuvim* (Kiryat-Sefer, Ltd., Jerusalem, 1997) p.763.

⁴⁹ Exodus 15:25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16:4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20:17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17:7.

⁵³ Numbers 14:22.

Genesis could be a rational for the omission of this half of the verse in later editions of the text. The Numbers reference has been added in this work because it provides a foundation from within the Torah for the concept of ten trials.

Lines 2-3: 'וַיִּצְפוּ ה' 'and he anticipated'—The remainder of this passage appears in the first editions,⁵⁴ the Vienna, and the Horev editions, but are not found in the Warsaw edition. It reflects a tradition associating the ten plagues of the Exodus narrative with the ten trials.⁵⁵ This association links God's salvation of the Israelites with the merit of Abraham as demonstrated through the passing of these trials.

⁵⁴ *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (Constantinople, 1514), 17b.

⁵⁵ *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* 33 and 34.

Trial One

A Hero's Birth

Text

- 1 הנס הראשון כשנולד אברהם אבינו בקשו כל גדולי מלכות והקוסמים להורגו ונחבא
2 מתחת לארץ י"ג שנה שלא ראט לא שמש ולא ירח. ולאחר י"ג שנה יצא מתחת
3 לארץ מדבר בלשון הקדש מאס אשרים ושקץ את הגלולים ובטח בצל יוצרו ואמר
4 ה' צואת אשרי דם בושח בק.

Translation

The First Trial: When Abraham, our father, was born, all the magnates of the kingdom and magicians sought to murder him, and he hid underground for thirteen years, [during which] he saw neither the sun nor the moon. After thirteen years, he emerged from under the earth, speaking the Holy Language, hating *Asherim* [other gods], and abhorring idols, and trusting in the protection of his Creator. And [Abraham] said, "Lord of Hosts, happy is the man trusting in You" (Psalms 84:14).

Commentary

While this trial is not listed in all of the parallel texts, it is quite significant as the initial trial. This trial presents a birth narrative that is similar to the birth narratives of Moses and Jesus, conforming to a motif of the birth of a hero. Many examples from Greek mythology, including the early years of Oedipus, Hercules, and Romulus and Remus, fit into this model in which a threat to the life of the child necessitates the hiding of the child from the danger. The child later returns to their rightful position and ascends

to greatness. There are examples of this motif found in Near Eastern mythology as well: Sargon of Akkad, the builder of the Mesopotamian Empire, and Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid Persian empire.⁵⁶ The birth narrative of Jesus, as presented in Matthew,⁵⁷ fits this model.

Line 1: גְּדוּלֵי מַלְכוּת 'the magnates of the kingdom'—This phrase translated literally means 'great ones of a kingdom' and I have translated it as 'magnates.' It is replaced with 'Nimrod' in later editions. In Chapter 24 of PRE, Nimrod, the mighty hunter,⁵⁸ becomes the first king of the known world. In this Midrash, Nimrod appointed Terach, Abraham's father, as a minister. Therefore, the close relationship of Nimrod to the Abraham story is consistent within the text of PRE. Similarly, commentary upon the Koran's Abraham narrative includes many references to Nimrod. In Muslim Hadith literature, it is Nimrod who has Abraham thrown into the 'fiery furnace.'⁵⁹ However, this work does not include the reference to Nimrod because such a reference would provide the name of a specific ruler threatening the life of Abraham as a baby, thus weakening the polemical the power derived from a more generic and universal 'birth of a hero' story.

Line 1: קוסמים 'magicians'—This word does not appear in all manuscripts and editions,⁶⁰ but has been included in this work because it is consistent with the 'birth of a hero' motif. By the ninth century, the narrative of the birth of Jesus was widely known. Perhaps in an attempt to create a polemic against the unique quality of the Jesus narrative,

⁵⁶ Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1991) p. 267.

⁵⁷ Matthew 1:18-2:23.

⁵⁸ Genesis 10:9.

⁵⁹ Haim Z'ew Hirschberg, "Nimrod: In Islam," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

⁶⁰ PRE First Edition 17b.

the concept of magicians, who could interpret the future through reading the stars,⁶¹ was incorporated into this seemingly universal motif employed by this midrash. Another possible explanation of the inclusion of the magicians was to usurp the power and authority of the Christian narrative, and employ that same power in promoting the Divine selection of Abraham.

⁶¹ Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great* (Sepher-Hermon Press, New York, 1981), p. 187, n. 4.

Trial Two

The Fiery Furnace

Text

- 1 הנס השני נתנהו בבית האסורים עשר שנים ג' בכותי וו' בקרדי, וי"א ג' בקרדו וו'
2 בכותא לאחד עשרה שנים שלח והביאו אותו ונתנהו בתוך כבשן האש ומלך
3 הכבוד פשט ידימינו והצילו מתוך כבשן האש שנא' ויאמר אליו אני ה' אשר
4 הוצאתיך מאור כשדים.

Translation

The Second Trial: They placed [Abraham] in prison for ten years: three in *Kuta* and seven in *Kardi*; some say three in *Kardi* and seven in *Kuta*. After the ten years, they sent for, and brought him, and placed him in the midst of a fiery furnace, but the Honored King extended His right hand and saved [Abraham] from the midst of the fiery furnace, as it is written, 'Then [God] said to him, "I am The Eternal, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans..."'(Gen. 15:7).

Commentary

While this trial is not listed in some of the parallel stories,⁶² it is consistent with the plot, locations and themes of "The Ten Trials of Abraham" in PRE.

Line 1: כותי and קרדי—Much unresolved debate exists concerning these two place names, *Kuti* and *Kardi*. *Kuti* was replaced by *Kutha* in some editions. This town is

⁶² Jubilees 17:17.

identified with *Kasdim* in *B.T. Baba Batra* 91a.⁶³ *Kasdim* is the Biblical name for the Chaldeans, who ruled an empire including Babyonia and southern Mesopotamia.⁶⁴ *Kardi* may be a variant form of *Kardu* or *Kardun*,⁶⁵ an area of Kurdistan under Assyrian control during the Biblical period.⁶⁶ The retention of the first two trials in PRE seems to indicate a redactorial concern with explaining why Terach, Abraham's father, who was bound for Canaan, settles in Haran,⁶⁷ completing a part of his journey. In protecting Abraham, the family was forced to abandon its original goals. The family may have also been hesitant to continue their journey while Abraham was imprisoned. Therefore, these translations, which are geographically consistent with that concern, have been utilized in this work.

⁶³ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p 188, n. 4.

⁶⁴ Anson Rainey, "Chaldea, Chaldeans," *Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

⁶⁵ Jastrow, *A Dictionary*, p. 1412.

⁶⁶ Edith Gerson-Kiwi, "Kurdistan: History," *Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

⁶⁷ Genesis 11:31.

Trial Three

Lech Lecha

Text

- 1 הנס' הג' טלטלו מבית אביו וממשפחתו והביאו לחרן ושם מת תרח אביו ואמתל'אי
2 אמו. והטלטול קשה לאדם יותר מכל. ומנין טלטלו שנא' לך לך מארצך
3 וממולדתך.

Translation

The Third Trial: [God] caused [Abraham] to leave the house of his father and his clan, and [God] brought him to Haran, and there, Terach, his father, died and Amatlai, his mother. Emigration is more difficult for a person than for all [other creatures]. Whence do we know of his emigration? As it is written, 'Surely go forth from your land and from the place of your birth...' (Gen. 12:1).

Commentary

This is the first trial in many of the parallel texts, as has been mentioned, which may display greater consistency with the Biblical narrative. We are first introduced to Abraham in Genesis 12:26 in a genealogical description of Abraham's family and ancestry. However, a close reading of the Biblical text raises several questions, which cannot be answered were this midrash to begin at the point of Abraham leaving his homeland. In the description of his father's journey,⁶⁸ it is clear that Canaan was his ultimate destination, but he stopped his journey in the middle. Our first two trials provide

⁶⁸ Genesis 12:31.

the explanation that he was forced to stop because his son needed to be protected from the threat of death from the rulers of the region due to an oracle. The next Biblical verse tells that Terach died; in the following verse, God gives his command to Abraham. Our first two trials provide the explanation for why Abraham was selected by God. Therefore, it is internally consistent in this unit of PRE and within the entire text of PRE that the first two trials are presented as they are.

Line 1: אַמַּתְלַי 'Amatlai'—This is the name ascribed to the mothers of both Abraham and Haman.⁶⁹ Not all versions of PRE include this naming of Abraham's mother, but the inclusion of the name in this work emphasizes the level of literary detail of PRE. The sentence utilizes a parallel construction, and demonstrates the breadth of knowledge of the redactor of the extant literary traditions.

Line 2: קשה וחסלסול 'Emigration is more difficult...'—Our tradition is rich in parallels to this notion. The Talmud discusses this concept with regard to Isaiah,⁷⁰ "Behold, The Eternal will toss you around like a man's throw; yes, He will wind you around and around."⁷¹ These passages express a fear of the unknown which the redactors do not believe animals, especially those which migrate annually, do not possess. This is an important concept in that it demonstrates the difficulties associated with this trial.

⁶⁹ B.T. *Bava Batra* 91a.

⁷⁰ B. T. *Ketubot* 28a.

⁷¹ Isaiah 22:17.

Trial Four

Famine

Text

- 1 חגס חד' מיום שנבראו שמים וארץ לא הביא רעב בעולם אלא בימי אברהם
2 ולא בכל הארצות אלא בארץ כנען בלבד לנסותו ולחזריו למצרים, שנאמר ויהי
3 רעב בארץ וירד אברם מצרימה.

Translation

The Fourth Trial: From the day that the heaven and the earth were created, [God] did not bring a famine, except [during] the days of Abraham, and not in any [other] lands except for Canaan, in order to test him and to force him to descend to Egypt, as it is written, 'There was a famine in the land and Abram descended to Egypt...' (Gen. 12:10).

Commentary

PRE is in agreement with the Biblical account, "And there was famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham,"⁷² that this was the first famine to befall the earth. However, Genesis Rabbah suggests at least two famines which precede this famine: one to punish Adam and another in the time of Noah's father, Lamech.⁷³ In order to maintain the perfection of Abraham, PRE must provide a compelling reason for his 'lack of faith' in God, resulting in his descent into Egypt. The first famine provides this compelling reason. Not having a historic or cultural memory of an event like this, Abraham does not have a basis for any to assume that the famine will

⁷² Genesis 26:1.

⁷³ Genesis Rabbah 25:3.

end. Therefore, he is forced to search out sustenance. The famine, then, was an instrument to direct Abraham along the path prescribed by God, a mechanism through which God showed Abraham where to travel. Abraham then is in accord with the divine plan, and the famine underscores Abraham's unfaltering success in passing the tests which PRE is enumerating.

Trial Five

Sarah is Taken

Text

- 1 הנס החמשי שנלקחה שרה אשתו לפרעה לאשה וכי יש לך אדם שרואה שאשתו
2 נלקח לאיש אחר ואינו קורע את בגדיו אלא בעצה לקחה שלא קרב אליה
3 [ומניין שנלקחה שרה לפרעה לאשה, שנ' ויראו אתה שרי פרעה ויהללו אתה
4 אל-פרעה ותקח האשה בית פרעה:]

Translation

The Fifth Trial: When Sarah, [Abraham's] wife, was taken to Pharaoh as his wife. Is there a man that, [upon] seeing his wife being taken to another man, would not rend his clothes? Rather, in accordance with [Sarah's] advice [to Pharaoh] when she was taken, [Pharaoh] did not draw close to her.[Whence do we know that Sarah was taken to Pharaoh as a wife? As it is written, 'Then, Pharaoh's princes saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house' (Gen. 12:15)].

Commentary

This trial combines two stories: the experience of Abraham and Sarah with Pharaoh in Egypt⁷⁴ and the experience of the couple with Avimelech in Canaan.⁷⁵ While these two stories are not sequential in the Biblical narrative, the substance of the stories is so similar that they are treated together.

Line 2: אלא בעצה לקחה שלא קרב אליה 'Rather, in accordance with

⁷⁴ Genesis 12:10-20.

⁷⁵ Genesis 20:1-18.

[Sarah's] advice [to Pharaoh] when she was taken, [Pharaoh] did not draw close to her.'—This is a difficult phrase to translate because of the terse language it employs. Another possible translation of this passage is, 'Rather, in accordance with [Sarah's] advice [to Abraham], he did not draw [emotionally] close to her[, even distancing himself and thus did not need to rend his garments].' While this translation is more interpretive, it provides an explanation for Abraham's strange behavior as described in the Midrash. Yet, a third translation is, 'But [he trusted in the Holy One, blessed be He,] that he [Pharaoh] would not approach her.'⁷⁶ This translation also addresses the issue of the lack of Abraham's adherence to the natural behavior of rending one's garments in this situation. Additionally, it seems to maintain the theme of Abraham's faith in God, found throughout PRE. While this may be the better translation, it requires radical emendations of the text.

Lines 3-4: ...שולקחה ומנין 'Whence do we know that Sarah...'—This phrase is presented as an insertion into the text, because it does not appear in the Vienna edition. However, it does appear in the Warsaw and Horev editions. While this phrase is formulaic, introducing a Biblical verse that has served as the closing point of a trial, Trial Five does not end at this point. In fact, this trial begins a series in which each trial is given much greater treatment, such as the inclusion of the opinions of several tradents, each with proof texts of his own. Therefore, the necessity to add this phrase is drawn into question. I present it as an insertion into the text to highlight this issue.

⁷⁶ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer, the Great*, p 189.

Trial Five

Part 1

Text

- 5 רבי טרפון אומר באותו הלילה שנלקחה שרה אמנו היה ליל הפסח הזה והביא
6 הקב"ה על פרעה ועל ביתו נגעים גדולים להודיע שכך הוא עתיד להכות את
7 מצרים בנגעים גדולים שנאמר וינגע ה' את פרעה נגעים גדולים במצרים כתיב עוד
8 נגע אחד אביא על פרעה וכי נגעים היו והלא מכת בכורות מצרים היו והמכות
9 נמשלו לנגעים, לכך נאמר וינגע ה' את פרעה, וגו'.

Translation

Rabbi Tarphon said that same night that Sarah, our mother, was taken, was the very night of *Pesach*, and the Holy One brought great plagues upon Pharaoh and upon his house, to make it known that in the future [God] would strike Egypt with great plagues, as it is written, 'Then the Eternal struck Pharaoh with great plagues' (Gen 12:17). [Concerning the Egyptians, it was written, "I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh (and upon Egypt)."' (Ex. 11:1) And what was [this] plague? Was it not the smiting of the Egyptian first-born? One can compare the slayings to the plagues, therefore, as it is written, 'God plagued Pharaoh, etc.' (Gen. 12:17)].⁷⁷

Commentary

This passage makes many connections between the Abraham narrative and the Exodus narrative, especially the plagues and *Pesach*, central concepts in Jewish tradition, which help to define and characterize our relationship with God. According to the Torah,

⁷⁷ The order of this section and the following five sections varies in the manuscripts and printed editions.

the purpose of the plagues was to inform the Egyptians, and by extension the Israelites, that *Adonai* is God, "Then the Egyptians will know that I am the Eternal, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from their midst."⁷⁸ Thus, a connection to the Plague narrative helps to define the nature of Abraham's, and by extension, all Israel's relationship with God.

One of the primary identifying attachments for the later Temple cult was the attachment to Moses as the progenitor of the law because of the revelation at Sinai, of which the plagues and Exodus narratives are essential facets. However, with the rise of the Pharisaic tradition and its response to Pauline Christianity, a new, more authoritative, progenitor of the covenant and the associated law needed to be established. The attachment to Abraham, with whom the original covenant between God and humanity was made, was adopted as a primary identity.⁷⁹ The connection between Abraham and the Exodus narrative, seen through this light, can be understood as a continuation of this process of incorporating the power and authority of Moses and the chain of tradition stemming from him into the chain of tradition originating with Abraham.

Line 6: נגעים גדולים 'great plagues'—'*Nega*' can be translated 'blow, stroke, punishment, plague, leprosy, pestilence; evil, trouble; or fault.' It is interesting to note that the noun form this root '*n.g.e*' appears only twice in the Torah, referring to plagues. The first occurrence is in the verse in Genesis, upon which PRE is commenting. The second is in Exodus, as an introduction to the tenth plague.⁸⁰ This provides the midrashists a ready bridge to link the two narratives.

⁷⁸ Exodus 7:5.

⁷⁹ Martin A. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths: Introduction to a Typological Approach to Early Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Assumption College, Worcester, MA, 1985), pp. 9-18.

⁸⁰ Exodus 11:1.

Line 7-9: במצרים כתיב... 'Concerning the Egyptians...'—While this passage was omitted from the Horowitz manuscript, it can be found among some of the other printed versions and Horowitz adds the sentence to his manuscript. I have retained it because of the value of the reference to the Exodus text, as discussed above.

Trial Five

Part 2: Introduction

Text

- 10 ר' יהושע בן קרדא אומר מאהבתו אותה כתב לה בשטר כתוב כל ממונו בין
11 בסף בין זהב בין עבדים בין קרקעות. וכתב לה את ארץ גשן לאחוזתה לפיכך ישבו
12 ישראל בארץ גשן שהיא של שרה אמנו. וכתב לה את הגר בתו מפלגשו לשפחה.
13 ומנין שהייתה הגר המצרית שפחה שנ' ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו ולא שפחה
14 מצרית ושמה הגר.

Translation

Rabbi Joshua, son of Korchah, said, "Out of [Pharaoh's] love for [Sarah], Pharaoh wrote for her, in the her Ketubah document, all his wealth, whether silver, gold, slaves, or land. And he deeded to her the land of Goshen for a possession. Accordingly, Israel dwelt in the land of Goshen, which was Sarah's, our mother's. He included [in her Ketubah] Hagar, his daughter from a concubine, for a maidservant. Whence do we know that Hagar, the Egyptian, was [this] maidservant? It is written, 'Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar' (Gen. 16:1).

Commentary

Line 10-11: ...כתב לה בשטר כתוב'... The image of Pharaoh creating a legal marriage contract for Sarah raises a few interesting questions. First, it seems as if the rabbis anachronistically insert the concept of *ketubbah* into the Biblical narrative. Second, would a *ketubbah* drafted concerning a married woman be binding? With these issues exposed, a third question emerges: Why would the midrashists feel the need to try to impose legal strictures upon the relationship between Pharaoh and Sarah, and by extension Abraham and the Israelites? Some of the answers to these questions can be found within this section and within PRE, while others are found in parallel texts.

The redactor assumes that the audience will know that a *ketubbah* is designed to protect the rights of the woman in the case of divorce and that all marriages must have them, even if this is culturally inaccurate. A tradition of a legal document of ownership of property in Egypt by Sarah, the matriarch of the Israelites, may buttress claims to lands inhabited by Jews at a time contemporary to the redactor.

Jews had a long history in Egypt leading to the period of the redaction of PRE. During the Roman empire, the Jewish communities of Egypt flourished, though the Jews were frequently in politically tense situations, caught between the local Hellenic citizens, the Roman legal authorities, and Jewish national influences from the Palestinian Jewish community. The Jewish revolt against Emperor Trajan, 115-117 C.E., was disastrous for the Jews of Egypt, though they seem to have had the support of the Egyptian peasantry.⁸¹ B.T.*Gittin* 57b states that twice as many people died during the final suppression of the

⁸¹ Safrai, "The Era of the Mishnah and Talmud (70-640)," *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1976), pp. 367-372.

revolt by Hadrian, who was referred to as Esau,⁸² than had escaped slavery during the Exodus. Even if we take these numbers to be figurative, this indicates not only the decimation wrought by the war on the Jews of Egypt, but the size of Jewish communities of Egypt prior to the revolt. While the Jewish communities of Egypt grew during the Christian Roman period and continued to grow in the early part of the period of Arab conquest, they never again achieved the power that they had previously had. During the few hundred years preceding the redaction of PRE, Egyptian Jewry provided refuge for Palestinian Jews fleeing Byzantine persecution and ransomed Jews held captive in the Land of Israel.⁸³

After the Arab Conquest, the Jews living within the Islamic world became more urbanized. In addition, the residual influence of the Greco-Roman world was clearly visible upon the host cultures, while the Jewish world tended to retain its attachments to its cultural identity and continuity with its ancient past.⁸⁴ It is these issues that are addressed with references to the legal ownership of Goshen, the best agricultural land in Egypt.⁸⁵ It is conceivable that tensions existed within and external to the Jewish community over its presence as a distinct group with a foreign national identity in Egypt and its growth in population with the influx of a refugee population. Pharaoh's deeding of land to Sarah legitimizes the Jewish presence in the land, to both the Jews and to the Muslim world, because the land was deeded to Sarah and not to Abraham, thereby avoiding the issue of competing claims of inheritance rights between those claiming descent from Ishmael and those claiming descent from Isaac. The argument that

⁸² B.T. *Gittin* 57b.

⁸³ Safrai, "The Era of the Mishnah and Talmud (70-640)," pp. 372-373.

⁸⁴ Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "The Middle Ages," *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1976), pp. 388-389.

⁸⁵ Genesis 47:6.

Abraham has only limited rights over all of the spoils from the events in Egypt is raised in Genesis Rabbah,⁸⁶ providing the foundation upon which the redactor of PRE can build his case.

Line 12: חַגַּר בְּתוּ 'Hagar, his daughter'—As discussed above, this reference to Hagar being the Pharaoh's daughter is found in pre-Islamic rabbinic literature, but the issue is addressed as well in the Hadith literature of Islam.⁸⁷ To gain a clearer picture of the implications of preserving this idea in the manner of PRE, we must understand the possible implications of associating Hagar with Pharaoh from an Islamic perspective. Several versions of this account are found in Islamic literature. These stories laud Sarah's virtue, among which is her obedience to Abraham.⁸⁸

There are disparate opinions presented about Hagar's origins, however. In one story, Hagar is described as a Coptic slave-girl belonging to Pharaoh. It is important to note that in this telling of the story, Pharaoh is presented in a very neutral light.⁸⁹ In another version of the same story, the Pharaoh character is only referred to as 'the tyrant,' certainly not a positive view. Again, the tyrant bestows Hagar upon Sarah, but Hagar's origin is not discussed. That story makes special note that Hagar is the matriarch of the Arabs.⁹⁰ In another story, the Islamic troops are warned to treat the Egyptians well upon conquering them because the Egyptians are their blood relations through Hagar,⁹¹ thereby indicating that there exists a significant level of tension between the Islamic world and

⁸⁶ Genesis Rabbah 45:1.

⁸⁷ William M. Brinner (translator and annotator), *The History of al-Tabari, Volume II: Prophets and Patriarchs* (State University of New York Press, New York, 1987) p. 63 n. 175.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Egypt. On the whole, it may be fair to say that the Islamic tradition presented by al-Tabari holds an ambivalent position regarding Pharaoh and his relationship to Hagar. When the relationship is close, Pharaoh is painted in neutral tones. However, when the relationship is more distant, he is seen as a tyrant.

As preserved in PRE, the tradition is much clearer. Hagar is Pharaoh's daughter and throughout the ages Pharaoh is evil. Accordingly, it may be fair to say that PRE is making subtly disparaging remarks about the Islamic world in which the redactor lives. The necessity for subtlety is a result of the obvious interplay between the two literary traditions.

Trial Five

Part 2, Section 1

Text

- 15 והשכים פרעה בבקר שלא קרב אליה ושלח וקרא לאברהם ואמר לו הרי
16 אשתך לפניך וכל שטר כתובתה עמה קח ולך ואל תעמוד בארץ הזאת שנאמר הנה
17 אשתך קח ולך ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים מעבור אברהם לבוא אל ארץ כנען גר
18 בארץ פלשתים להנפש שם ודלך.

Translation

Pharaoh arose early in the morning and was panic stricken that he had not drawn near to Sarah. He called for Abraham, and said to him, "Here is your wife and all of her gifts stipulated in her *ketubbah* are with her. Take [them all] and go! And do not remain in

this land," as it is written, 'Here is your wife; take her and be gone! And Pharaoh put men in charge[, and they sent him off with his wife and all that he possessed]' (Gen. 12:19-20). And [Pharaoh] had Abraham led into the land of Canaan. He sojourned in the land of the Philistines in order to be refreshed there, then he left.

Commentary

Line 15: ונבהל 'was panic stricken'—The manuscripts, Vienna, and Horev read 'panicked,' however Luria's text reads confused. In either case, the message is clear that Pharaoh did not have sexual relations with Sarah, due to her admonitions, which were discussed earlier. The fear may have been inspired by when Pharaoh connected these words of warning with the plagues he and his house suffered. Therefore, I have chosen to remain consistent with the Vienna edition, and render the phrase, 'was panic-stricken.'

Line 16: שטר כתובתה 'the gifts stipulated in her *ketubbah*'—The reiteration of the existence of a *ketubbah* emphasizes the distinction between this incident with Pharaoh and the next occurrence of the same story with Avimelech. It also emphasizes the limited claim that Abraham has upon the property amassed as a result of this trip to Egypt.

Trial Five

Part 2, Section 2

Text

- 19 וחבל צפוי לפני הקב"ה ושלח אבימלך ויקח את שרה סבור להעמיד ממנה בנים שג'
20 וישלח אבימלך ויקח את שרה ונעשה אבימלך וכל נקבות ביתו עקרות ואפי' (מיכאל

- 21 קדמאי לאבימלך) עד ביצי כינים עקרות שנ' כי עצור עצר ה' וירד מיכאל המלאך
 22 ושלף את חרבו עליו אמר לו אבימלך זה דין אמת ומשפט אמת לחרגני עד שלא
 23 ידעתי חגני גם צדיק תהרוג אבי' לו חשב אשת האיש כי נביא הוא

Translation

All was anticipated prior by the Holy One, Blessed be God. *Avimelech* sent for and took Sarah in order to raise children from her, as it is written, 'And *Avimelech*, the King of *Gerar*, sent for and took Sarah' (Gen. 20:2). *Avimelech* and all the women of his house were infertile, [everything] even (Michael came before *Avimelech*) the gnats were infertile, as it is written, 'For the Eternal surely closed [all the wombs of *Avimelech's* house]' (Gen. 20:18). The angel Michael descended and unsheathed his sword to kill him. *Avimelech* said to him, "Is this true justice and true law: to kill me for that which I did not know? 'You will kill a righteous nation' (Gen. 20:4)" He [Michael] said to him, "'Return the man's wife, because he is a prophet' (Gen. 20:7)."

Commentary

This section varies greatly among the different versions of PRE, not only in word choice, but in the order of phrases and sentences. However, the meaning and images within the section remain consistent.

Lines 20-21: מיכאל קדמאי לאבימלך 'Michael came before *Avimelech*'—This phrase appears in many manuscripts, but seems contextually, grammatically, and literarily out of place. A parallel story, from B.T. *Bava Kamma* 92a indicates that this phrase should be omitted from our text.

Line 21: מיכאל המלאך 'The angel Michael'—The angel Michael is first

mentioned in Daniel 10:13. In the aggadic tradition, Michael has assumed the role of the protector of Israel. As such, the Midrashic tradition reads Michael back into the Biblical narrative.⁹² In "The Ten Trials of Abraham," Michael appears as a manifestation of God's providence and protection of Abraham.

Trial Five

Part 2, Section 3

Text

- 24 ר' יחושע בן קרחא קדמין לר' טרפון פרעה כל מה שנתן לשרה נתן אבימלך כל מה
25 שנתן לאברהם נתן שני' ויקח אבימלך צאן ובקר ויתן לאברהם.

Translation

R. Joshua, son of Korchah, said before R. Tarphon that everything that Pharaoh gave, he gave to Sarah; everything that Avimelech gave, he gave to Abraham, as it is says, 'Avimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves[, and gave them to Abraham]' (Gen. 20:14).

Commentary

While this section may seem out of place, it reinforces the difference between the events with Pharaoh and those with Avimelech. As mentioned earlier, because a *ketubbah* was drafted by Pharaoh, all of the gifts he gave to her constituted a dowry, which was the property of the wife, over which the husband had only limited rights. In

⁹² Aaron Rothkoff, "Michael and Gabriel: In the Aggadah," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

the case of Avimelech, where no legal documents were drawn, the gifts were given to Abraham to elicit his good will and favor. The redactor may have found it important to stress the difference in the relationships in order to make a statement about the difference between the relationships of the Jews living in the Land of Israel with their Islamic neighbors, and the Jews of Egypt and their Islamic neighbors.

Avimelech is regarded as a righteous gentile in the Midrashic literature,⁹³ while the Midrash views Pharaoh negatively, as previously discussed in the commentary upon Hagar being included in Sarah's dowry from Pharaoh. This section emphasizes the distinction between the two foreign rulers. Avimelech is of suitable stature to communicate and deal directly with Abraham, but Pharaoh can only have dealings with Abraham through a female intermediary. To reinforce this polemical argument, Avimelech gives gifts to Abraham without the real force of law, as indicated by the *ketubbah* in the Pharaoh scenario. This may be an attempt by the redactor to curry favor with local Islamic rulers by denigrating Pharaoh, upon whom the Hadith Literature frowns.

Trial Five

Part 2, Conclusion

Text

- 26 ועמד אברהם והיה מתפלל לפני ה' ואמר לפניו רבון של עולם בראת את כל
27 העולם לפריה ורביה אבימלך וכל נקבות ביתו יפרו ויירבו ונעתר לו ה' שנאמר
28 ויתפלל אברהם אל-האלהים וירפא אלהים את אבימלך ואת אשתו ואמחותיו וילד

⁹³ Midrash Psalms 34:1.

Translation

Abraham stood and was praying before The Holy One, saying, "Master of All the Worlds, You created all the world to increase and multiply; may Avimelech and all the women of his house increase and multiply." The Holy One granted his prayer, as it is written, 'Abraham prayed to God, and God healed *Avimelech* and his wife and his slave girls, and they bore children.' (Gen. 20:17).

Commentary

Line 26: **ועמד אברהם והיה מתפלל** 'Abraham stood and was praying'—

Abraham is viewed by the rabbis as a key figure in the development of Jewish prayer. As a model of prayer and compassion for his fellow man, Abraham prays for the healing of Avimelech.⁹⁴ The Midrash takes this act and uses it to establish the institution of morning prayer.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Genesis 20:17.

⁹⁵ B.T. *Berachot* 26b.

Trial Six

The Kidnapping of Lot

Text

- 1 פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק כז
2 הנס הששי באו עליו כל המלכים להרגו ואמרו נתחיל ראשון בבית אחיו ואת כך
3 נתחיל לו ובשביל לוט לקחו את כל רכוש סדום ועמורה שנא' ויקחו את לוט ורכוש
4 סדום ועמורה

Translation

Chapter 27

The Sixth Trial: All the kings came to kill him [Abraham]. They said, "We will begin with the house of his brother, and so we will begin with him." Because of Lot, they took all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah, as it is written, 'They took Lot' (Gen. 14:12) 'and all of the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah' (Gen. 14:11).

Commentary

PRE now returns its sequential attention to the Biblical narrative. Following Abraham's and Sarah's journey to Egypt,⁹⁶ they return to Canaan where Lot strikes off on his own and settled in Sodom,⁹⁷ thereby setting the stage for this trial.

Line 2: כל המלכים 'All the kings'—The Warsaw edition substitutes '*Amraphel* and all his friends' for the 'all the kings.' *Amraphel* is the first named king of the four

⁹⁶ Genesis 12:10-20.

⁹⁷ Genesis 13:1-12.

kings who attack Sodom and Gemorrah.⁹⁸ B.T.*Eruvin* equates Amraphel with Nimrod.⁹⁹ Genesis Rabbah explains that Amraphael is named Nimrod, among other names, because he led the world in revolt, a play on the word '*himrid*' meaning 'to revolt.'¹⁰⁰ The commentary on 'Trial One' describes the Midrashic view of Nimrod, and provides sound argument for the substitution. However, I have chosen to retain the phrase 'all the kings' in accordance with Horowitz's text.

Line 3-4: ועמורה ורכוש סדום ויקחו את לוט 'They took Lot' (Gen. 14:12)

'and all of the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah' (Gen. 14:11)'—This is phrase is an amalgamation of two consecutive Torah verses. As presented in our text, Genesis 14:12 precedes Genesis 14:11. While this runs counter to the tradition as found in Genesis Rabbah, which claims that Lot was taken because he was simply a resident of Sodom,¹⁰¹ this manipulation of Scripture in PRE emphasizes the point of this Midrash, that Lot was the main target in the assault upon the cities.

Trial Six

Part 1

Text

- 5 ובא מיכאל והגיד לאברהם שנאמר ויבא הפליט ויגד לאברהם העברי מיכאל שרו ושל
6 עולם הוא מגיד שנאמר גם במדעך מלך אל תקלל ובעל כנפים יגיד דבר ולמה נקרא
7 שמו פליט אלא בשעה שהוריד הקב"ה סמאל וכת שלו ממקום קדושתן אחו בכנפיו

⁹⁸ Genesis 14:1.

⁹⁹ B.T.*Eruvin* 53a.

¹⁰⁰ Genesis Rabbah 42:4.

¹⁰¹ Genesis Rabbah 42:7.

8 של מיכאל להפיל עמו ופלטו הקב"ה מידו לפיכך נקרא שמו פליט ועליו אמר
9 יחזקאל בא אלי הפליט מירושלם לאמר הוכתה העיר

Translation

Michael came and told Abraham, as it is written, "*Ha-palit*" [the refugee] came and told Abram, the Hebrew' (Gen. 12:13). Michael, Prince of the World, told [Abraham], as it is written, 'Even among your intimates, do not curse a king ...one who has wings may report the word' (Ecc. 10:20). And why was [Michael's] name '*Palit*'? At the time when the Holy One, Blessed be God, caused Samael and his party to fall from their holy place, [Samael] grabbed Michael's wings to cause [Michael] to fall with him, and the Holy One, Blessed be God, delivered '*palat*' [Michael] from [Samael's] hand; accordingly, he is called by the name '*Palit*.' And Ezekiel said about him, "*Ha-palit*" came from Jerusalem to me saying, "The city has fallen" (Ez. 33:21).

Commentary

Line 5: מיכאל 'Michael' PRE is incorporating a tradition that Michael was God's informant about the happenings of the world, which can be found in *Midrash Haggadol*'s commentary upon this Biblical passage. For a description of Michael, see the commentary on Trial 5: Part 2, Section 2.

Line 5: הפליט '*Ha-palit*' Literally translated, '*ha-palit*' means refugee, escapee, fugitive, or runaway. Because the naming of the Angel Michael as '*Ha-palit*' hinges upon the play upon the word, it has been left un-translated.

Line 7: שחוריד הקב"ה סמאל 'the Holy One, Blessed be God, caused Samael...to fall' The 'fall of angels' has a rich history, both within and external to the

Jewish literary tradition. One image is of Samael as a prosecutor before God, the Judge.¹⁰² Another is of Samael, the angel of death,¹⁰³ even serving a positive role in holding the wheels of the Egyptian chariots, playing on the gematrical equivalent of 'Samael' and 'wheel'.¹⁰⁴ The role that he assumes in PRE as the leader of an army of rebellious angels¹⁰⁵ is shared by the Christian tradition that portrays Samael as the 'chief tempter'.¹⁰⁶ And while Samael plays a large role in the commentary of PRE on other Biblical passages, including the Adam and Eve story, and particularly the birth of Cain,¹⁰⁷ the presentation of Samael in this section primarily provides a vehicle for the explanation of the identification of Michael with 'Ha-palit.' The identification of Samael as an oppositional counterpart to Michael is also found in commentary upon the Exodus narrative, in which they play the roles of prosecutor and defender, respectively.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the use of 'Samael' in counter distinction to another name for a fallen angel or Satan, provides linguistic evidence for the redactorial unity of the entirety of PRE.

Trial Six

Part 2—The Pursuit

Text

- 10 השבים אברהם בבקר ולקח את שלשה תלמידיו עמו ענר אשכול וממרא ואת
11 אליעזר עבדו עמו ורדף אחריהם עד דן זו פמיס שנאמר וירדוף עד דן ושם נתעכב

¹⁰² Exodus Rabbah 21:17 and B.T. *Sotah* 10b.

¹⁰³ Targum Jonathan on Genesis 3:6.

¹⁰⁴ *Midrash Yelammedenu* on Exodus 14:25.

¹⁰⁵ PRE chapters 13-14.

¹⁰⁶ Enoch 6:3.

¹⁰⁷ PRE, chapter 22.

¹⁰⁸ Exodus Rabbah 18:5.

- 12 הצדיק ששם נאמר לו אברהם תהי יודע שמבני בניך עתידים לעבוד ע"ז שם
13 שנאמר ויעש שני עגלי זהב וישם את האחד בבית אל ואת האחד בדרן ושם
14 הניח את שלשה תלמידיו ולקח את עבדו אליעזר.

Translation

Abraham rose early in the morning and took his three students with him, *Aner*, *Eskol*, and *Mamre*, and Eliezer, his servant. He pursued them to Dan, which is in *Pameas*, as it is written, '... and he pursued them until Dan' (Gen. 14:14). And there, the righteous one was delayed, because there, it was said to him, "Abraham, know that your descendants in the future will worship idols here," as it is written, 'And [the king] made two calves of gold...and he set the one in Beth-el, and the other, he placed in Dan' (1 Kings 12:28-29). There, [Abraham] left his three disciples, but took Eliezer his servant with him.

Commentary

Line 10: 'שלושה תלמידיו עמו ענר אשכול וממרא' and took his three students with him, *Aner*, *Eskol*, and *Mamre*'—The assertion that Abraham had students can be viewed as an attempt to link the rabbis, from whom PRE is a product, with Abraham, thus casting themselves as being reflections of the model of perfection they are creating in Abraham. Therefore, PRE describes Abraham's allies, presented in Genesis 14:13, as his students.

Line 11: 'דן זו פמיס' 'Dan, which is in *Pameas*'—*Pameas* is a version of the place name *Panias*, a city at the base of Mount Hermon overlooking a grotto dedicated to

the Greek god Pan.. The name *Panias* was transformed into the Arabic, *Banias*.¹⁰⁹

B.T. *Megillah* names this city as a site of study,¹¹⁰ while B.T. *Bechorot* describes the site as one of the headwaters of the Jordan.¹¹¹ The city was also referred to by Jews as 'Dan' or the 'Fort of Dan'.¹¹²

PRE's statement utilizing both names could be an attempt to address a variety of issues. PRE could be making clear the connection between this site of idolatry and the Hellenistic influence that was pervasive throughout the Jewish world as an anti-assimilation polemic. The utilization of this place by the early Christian Church, both in its literature and as a holy site,¹¹³ could also enable PRE to create a more directly anti-Christian polemic by associating a site of Jesus's miracles with idolatry.

Trial Six

Part 3—Victory in Battle

Text

- 15 שמנין אותות שמו שמונה עשר ושלש מאות ויירדוף אחריהם עד משמאל לדמשק
16 שנאמר ויירדפם עד חובה

Translation

The numerical [sum] of the letters of [Eliezer's] name is 318. [Abraham] pursued them

¹⁰⁹ Michael Avi-Yonah, "Banias," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹¹⁰ B.T. *Megillah* 6a.

¹¹¹ B.T. *Bechorot* 55a.

¹¹² Avi-Yonah, "Banias."

¹¹³ Avi-Yonah, "Banias."

as far north as Damascus, as it is written, '...and [he] pursued them to Hobab, [which is to the north of Damasacus]' (Gen. 14:15).

Commentary

Line 15: שְׁמוֹנִין...סָמוּחַ 'The numerical [sum]...318.' א, 1 + ל, 30 + י, 10 + ע, 70 + ז, 7 + כ, 300 = 318 for Eliezer. Genesis 14:14 reports that this is the number of troops with which Abraham pursued Lot's captors. Based upon this *gematria*, Genesis Rabbah,¹¹⁴ Pesikta Rabbati,¹¹⁵ and the Palestinian Targum¹¹⁶ assert that only Eliezer accompanied Abraham to defeat their enemies. In the Epistle of Barnabus, an early second century text, the early Christian fathers assert that the number 318 is employed to prove that it was through the crucifixion of Jesus that Abraham was able to be victorious. In Greek, 318 is written TIH, where I and H, the first two letters of Jesus's name, represent ten and eight respectively, and T, representing the cross, is the equivalent of 300.¹¹⁷ The same rational is utilized in *The Miscellanies* by Clement of Alexandria, a second to third century work, in which Abraham's perfection is tied to the resurrection of Jesus through this numerical analysis.¹¹⁸

The seemingly obtrusive nature of this sentence into the midrashic narrative could be an indication that it is a later addition to the text. However, the prevalent nature of the unique quality of 318 in Jewish and non-Jewish commentaries, argues against that theory. More probably, this sentence is a strong polemic against the Christian arguments. It

¹¹⁴ Genesis Rabbah 43:2.

¹¹⁵ Pesikta Rabbati 18:3.

¹¹⁶ Palestinian Targum to Genesis 14:14.

¹¹⁷ Kirsopp Lake, translator, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Online English Translation* (Peter Kirby, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/barnabas-lake.html>, 2002), 9:6.

¹¹⁸ Roberts-Donaldson, translator, *Clement of Alexandria: Miscellanies* (Peter Kirby, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book6.html>, 2002) Book 6, Chapter 11.

attempts to draw upon an argument about Abraham's perfection which is void of any influence of Jesus. The rabbi's argument reclaims the perfection of Abraham based solely upon the selection and providence of God and the nature of the man. Abraham can be seen as a model counter to Jesus in a similar manner to Isaac as a counter model in the *Akedah*.

Lines 15-16: ...אחריהם וירדף '[Abraham] pursued them...'—This statement is a literary device returning the attention of PRE to the Biblical narrative.

Trial Six

Part 3, Section 1

Text

- 17 שמואל הקטן אומר שם נחלק הלילה שיצאו בני ישראל ממצרים הוא הלילה שהכה
18 בו אברהם את המלאכים ואת מדניהם עמם שנאמר ויחלק עליהם לילה הוא
19 ועבדיו

Translation

Samuel, the Younger, said that there, the night was divided. [The night] that the Children of Israel left Egypt was the night during which Abraham smote the kings and their camps with them, as it is written, "And he divided himself against them by night" (Gen. 14:15).

Commentary

The association between the acts of Abraham and the night of Pesach is again emphasized in this section. Midrash Rabbah explains that because Abraham freed Lot

and the other Sodomite captives and pursued the kings at midnight, thereby aiding God, God freed the captive Israelites and pursued the Egyptians at midnight.¹¹⁹ In some of PRE's versions, another proof text on this theme is provided, "and about [the night] it is written, 'And it came to pass at midnight, [that Adonai smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt...]' (Ex. 12:29)."¹²⁰ The midrashic play, centering around 'night' and 'the middle of the night,' serves to reinforce the connection between Abraham and the Exodus, particularly Moses, thus reinforcing the rabbinic claim that the chain of authority originates with Abraham, not Moses and Aaron. The defeat of Abraham's and God's enemies at night is also symbolic of the overcoming of the suffering, danger, and death associated with the night,¹²¹ and promotes the idea of Abraham as manifesting the ideals compassion and protection for his people.

Trial Six

Part 3, Section 2

Text

- 20 הלל הזקן אומר לקח אברהם את כל רכוש סדום ועמורה ואת כל רכוש לוט בן
21 אחיו וחזר לשלום ולא נעדר לו עד אחד שנא' וישב את הרכוש עם את לוט אחיו

Translation

Hillel, the Elder, said that Abraham recovered all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah and

¹¹⁹ Genesis Rabbah 43:3.

¹²⁰ PRE Warsaw, 1852, p. 63a.

¹²¹ Psalms 91:5-6; and Song of Songs 3:8.

all the wealth of Lot, his brother's son,¹²² and returned in peace, and not even one [of his men] was lost, as it is written, 'And he returned...the wealth, people, [and also] Lot, his brother" (Gen. 14:16).¹²³

Commentary

The theme of Abraham's perfect attention to the instructions is underscored again in this section, as expressed in B.T. *Sanhedrin*,¹²⁴ thereby, maintaining consistency with the midrashic tradition that Abraham restored everything to its rightful place. It thus emphasizes Abraham's perfection. Some of the parallel stories have some minor variations. Midrash Rabbah asserts that, though Abraham returned the wealth, the men, and the women to their appropriate places, he kept the children to teach them righteousness, in counter distinction to the evil environment in which they were being reared.¹²⁵

Trial Six

Part 3, Section 3--Tithes

Text

- 22 ר יהושע אומר אברהם התחיל ראשון לעשר לקח כל מעשר המלכעם ואת כל
23 מעשר רכוש לוט בן אחיז ונתן לשם בן נח' שנ' ויתן לו מעשר מכל

¹²² Friedlander inserts "and all the wealth of Lot, the son of his brother," based upon an interpretation of Isaiah 41:3, Palestinian *Targum* to Genesis 14:16, B.T. *Sanhedrin* 108b, and Genesis Rabbah 43:3.

¹²³ Friedlander's edition ends this passage at this point, but our printed edition and our manuscripts continue.

¹²⁴ B.T. *Sanhedrin* 108b.

¹²⁵ Genesis Rabbah 43:4.

Translation

Rabbi Joshua said that Abraham was the first ever to begin to tithe. He took all of the tithe of the kings and all of the tithe from the wealth of Lot, the son of his brother; and gave [the tithes] to Shem, the son of Noah, as it is written, '[And he blessed God, the Most High, who delivered his enemies into his hands,] and he gave him a tithe from all [the wealth]' (Gen. 14:20).

Commentary

This section, once again, asserts the rightful place of the rabbis in the chain of authority. Leviticus Rabbah not only equates Shem with Melchizedek, but posits that God originally appointed him to be the first priest. After he blesses Abraham before God, this privilege is transferred to Abraham.¹²⁶ This tradition was retained in PRE, Chapter 7, and recalled here. It is also found preserved in Genesis Rabbah.¹²⁷ However, the Book of Jubilees presents only the part of the tradition that Abraham tithed,¹²⁸ demonstrating that there is no consensus on the subject of Abraham's status as the first priest and the different tradition of PRE vis-à-vis Jubilees. Because there is debate among the Rabbinic sources concerning Abraham's status as a priest, the fact that PRE holds that Melchizedek, or Shem, was a priest when Abraham tithed, but was removed from this role because of his actions, becomes a significant statement.

In the New Testament, particularly in the Epistles to the Hebrews, strong arguments are made that Melchizedek was a priest of nearly unparalleled perfection. His priesthood could only be superceded by the perfection of Jesus, the son of God. The

¹²⁶ Leviticus Rabbah 25:6.

¹²⁷ Genesis Rabbah 43:6.

¹²⁸ Jubilees 13:25.

priesthood that descended from Aaron, anointed by Moses, are viewed as usurpers of the chain of authority.¹²⁹ Given this tradition, it seems clear that these references to Abraham as the first priest, inferred from his acceptance of tithe offerings, is an anti-Christian polemic, asserting that the Rabbis' chain of authority extends back to Abraham, a claim made by Pharisaic Judaism. The Pauline school, which emanated from the Pharisaic tradition, also laid claim to Abraham, however it appears that as the tradition developed, the priesthood became attached to Melchizedek, thus diminishing the power and validity of these claims in the eyes of the rabbis.

Trial Six

Part 3, Section 3.1

Text

24 יצא שם בן נח לקראתו וראה את כל המעשים שעשה ואת כל הרכוש שהשיב
25 וחיזה תמזה בלבו התחיל מהלל ומפאר ומשבח לשם עליון ואומר וברוך אל עליון
26 אשר מגן צריך בדין

Translation

Shem, the son of Noah, went out to meet Abraham, and when [Shem] saw all the deeds that [Abraham] did and all the wealth that he had returned, [Shem] was deeply astonished. He began praising, glorifying, and lauding the Name of his Creator, as it is written, 'And he blessed God, the Most High, who delivered his enemies into his hands' (Gen. 14:20).

¹²⁹ Hebrews 7:1-26.

Commentary

Line 25: **ותיה תמה בלבו** '[Shem] was deeply astonished'—Literally translated, '*belibo*' means in 'his heart.' Biblically, the heart was considered the seat of rationality and thought, however the rabbis viewed the heart as the seat of emotions. It may be more literal to render this phrase, 'he was astonished in his heart,' though the current rendering employs a more contemporary idiomatic phrase.

Trial Six

Part 3, Section 3.2

Text

- 27 עמד אברהם והיה מתפלל לפני הקב"ה ואמר רבן כל העולמים לא בכח ידי ולא
28 בכח ימיני עשיתי את כל אלה אלא בכח ימינך שהיית מגן לי בעולם הזה ובעולם
29 הבא' שנאמר ואתה יי מגן בעדי בעולם הזה כבודי ומרים ראשי בעולם הבא וענו
30 העליונים ואמרו ברוך אתא יי מגן אברהם

Translation

Abraham stood and prayed before the Holy One, Blessed be God, saying, "Sovereign of All Worlds, not by the power of my own hand, nor by the power of my right hand, have I done all these [things], but only by the power of Your right hand, for You are my shield in this world and in the world to come;" as it is written, 'You, Adonai, are a shield about me' (Psalms 3:4) in this world; 'my honor, and raiser of my head' (Psalms 3:4), in the

world to come. Then the angels answered saying, "Blessed are You, Shield of Abraham."

Commentary

Thematically, this prayer reinforces the idea of Abraham as the archetype of faith and devotion to God found throughout PRE. Abraham acknowledges that what he receives or accomplishes in this world are a result of God's providence. Not only is this an ideal which the redactor seeks to promote, but also he utilizes this concept to alleviate any blame or criticism that may befall Abraham as a result of his actions, which may be perceived by the less faithful as questionable, like the *Akeidah* or the exchange of Sarah for personal safety.

Line 30: מִן אֲבִרָהָם " בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה " 'Blessed are You, Shield of Abraham.'—

This phrase is the closing of the *Avot*, the first benediction of the *Amidah*. Several chapters of PRE end with the *Chatimot*, the closing phrases, of other prayers found in the *Shemonah Esrei*, thereby demonstrating redactorial consistency and unity throughout PRE. Midrash Rabbah also discusses the issue of God acting as the protector of Abraham.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Genesis Rabbah 44:4.

Trial Seven

God's Revelation and Appearance to Abraham

Text

- 1 פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק כח
2 חנן השביעי אור הדברים האלה היה דבר " אל אברם במחזה לאמר [אל-תירא
3 אברם] לכל הנביאים נגלה להם בחזון ולאברהם נגלה במראה ובחזון

Translation

Chapter 28

The Seventh Trial: [The Torah states,] "After these things, the Eternal spoke to Abram in a prophesy saying, ['Do not fear, Abram' (Gen. 15:1)]. To all the prophets, [God] revealed a prophesy, but to Abraham, [God] revealed a prophesy and a vision.

Commentary

Line 2: אל-תירא אברם 'Do not fear, Abraham'—This proof text does not appear in all of the manuscripts, such as the Warsaw and some of the Horev editions, and Horowitz and Luria recommend its omission. I retain the proof text because it provides clarity to the audience by identifying the exact interaction between God and Abraham.

Line 3: בחזון 'a prophesy'—Some of the early editions, like the first Warsaw edition and the Constantinople manuscript, read 'a dream.' However, I agree with Luria's emendation based upon Leviticus Rabbah¹³¹ and Genesis Rabbah,¹³² which read "To all the prophets, [God] revealed a prophesy, but to Abraham, [God] revealed a prophesy and a vision." The key distinction is between revelation through prophesy in a

¹³¹ Leviticus Rabbah 1:4.

¹³² Genesis Rabbah 44:6.

dream and revelation through a vision during a wakened state, which is thought to display greater clarity and greater connection to the Godhead. A dream required interpretation by the prophet, but the day visions were spontaneous revelations from God requiring no interpretation.¹³³

Trial Seven

Part 1. The Nature of God's Revelation

Text

4

במראה מניין שנ' וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא

Translation

Whence do we know of 'revelation'? As it is written, "The eternal appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre" (Gen. 18:1).

Commentary

Again, variations exist among the various different text witnesses. Earlier editions and manuscripts list the commentary upon 'visions' first and 'prophecies' later. I have accepted the version in Luria's edition of the Warsaw text and Horowitz's edition of the Venice text, the order of which is derived from the statement in Genesis Rabbah,¹³⁴ which asserts the primacy of Abraham's prophetic power as proven by God's 'prophecy,' through words, and 'visions.' The order of the terms serves as the basis for the ordering of PRE's comments.

¹³³ Joseph Dan, "Visions: In Medieval Hebrew Literature," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹³⁴ Genesis Rabbah 44:6.

Trial Seven

Part 1, Section 1

Text

- 5 בדחון מניין שנאמר ארר הדברים האלה היה דבר ה' אל אברם במחזה וגו' אמר לו
6 אברהם אל תירא שימיני מגנת לך בכל מקום שאתה הולך כתריס לפני הפורענות
7 ונתנה לך שכר טוב לך ולבניך בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא שנאמר שכרך הרבה מאד

Translation

Whence do we know about visions? As it is written, 'After these things, God said to Abram in a vision' (Gen. 15:1). [God] said to Abraham, 'Do not fear' (Gen. 15:1 and Isaiah 41:10), My right hand is your shield in all the places that you go, as protection against calamities. It is given to you as a good reward, to you and to your children, in this world and in the world to come, as it is written, 'and your reward will be exceedingly great' (Gen. 15:1).

Commentary

Line 6: ...אל תירא שימיני... 'Do not fear for My right hand...'—While this is not a direct quotation from the Bible, it does reflect the imagery found in Isaiah 41, specifically, the idea of God's right hand being of particular significance as protection is mentioned in Isaiah 41:13.

Line 7: שכרך הרבה מאד 'And your reward will be exceedingly great'—Genesis Rabbah explains that Abraham feared that his victory was his complete reward for leading a righteous life or that he had killed an innocent person, thus eradicating all of

the merit he had amassed through a life of devotion to God. This fear of the loss of his reward is reflected in the use of the word 'your reward,' and is addressed with the addition of 'exceedingly great,' which implies that he has not yet received his full reward.

Trial Seven

Part 2—God's Promise

Text

- 8 רבי אומר הוציא ה' את אברהם החוצה בליל י"ט הפסח אמר לו אברהם יש בך
9 כח לספור כל צבא השמים אמר לפניו רבון כל העולמים וכי יש מספר לגדודיך
10 אמר לו כך לא יספר זרעך מרוב שנאמר ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך

Translation

Rabbi said that the Holy One, Blessed be God, brought Abraham outside, on the night of the Festival of Passover. [God] said to him, "Abraham, is it in your power to count all the host of heavens?" [Abraham] said before [God], "Sovereign of All the Worlds, is there then a finite number to Your army?" [God] said to [Abraham], "So too, your seed will not [be able] to be counted due to [its] enormity;" as it is written, "[And [God] brought [Abraham] outside, and said, "Look now toward heaven and count the stars, [see] if you are able to count them;"] and [God] said to him, "So will your descendents be" (Gen. 15:5).

Commentary

The remainder of this chapter is missing from the Warsaw edition of the text, perhaps due to censorship.¹³⁵ The censorship may have been due to the perception of harsh criticism of Rome and other empires with which the ruling authorities identified. However, the Venice and Horev editions, as well as several of the manuscripts, namely Constantinople and Venice, present the remainder the chapter fairly consistently, thus providing ample evidence for its authenticity within PRE.

Line 8: רבי 'Rabbi'—The Horev and Venice editions, as well as the early Warsaw edition, include in this attribution the name 'Judah.' Rabbi Judah is probably a shortened form of Judah, the Prince, the tradent associated with the compilation of the Mishna. Though 'Rabbi Judah' may refer to Rabbi Judah *ben Baba* a fourth generation Tanna.¹³⁶

Line 8: חג הפסח 'The Festival of Passover'—Many of the events of Abraham's life are associated with Passover in PRE, such as his interactions with Pharaoh, as has previously been discussed, in 'Section 5: The Taking of Sarah'. The association of the rescue of Lot and Passover can also be found in the Palestinian Targum.¹³⁷

Line 9: לגרודיך 'troops'—This wording reflects the imagery utilized in Job,¹³⁸ with reference to the unlimited power and resources available to the Godhead. Citing the

¹³⁵ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p 198, n. 4.

¹³⁶ Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: A Reference Guide*, pp. 33-36.

¹³⁷ Palestinian *Targum* to Genesis 14:13.

¹³⁸ Job 25:3.

verse from Job as a proof text, B.T. *Chagigah*¹³⁹ utilizes the same imagery. This theme and imagery is also utilized in *Sifre* to Numbers,¹⁴⁰ again to express the boundless nature of God.

Trial Seven

Part 3. Covenant Between the Pieces

Text

- 11 רבי אליעזר אומר, הראה הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו בין הבתרים ארבע מלכיות מושלן
12 ואבדן שנאמר ויאמר אליו קחה לי עגלה משולשת ועז משלשת ועיל משלש
13 [ותר וגזל]

Translation

Rabbi Eliezer said that the Holy One, Blessed be God, showed Abraham, our father, [at the scene of the making of the Covenant] Between the Pieces, the four kingdoms, their dominion, and their downfall, as it is written, '[God] said to [Abraham], "Take [as a sacrifice] to me a three year old heifer and a three year old she-goat [and a three year old ram, and a turtle dove and a young pigeon]"' (Gen. 15:9).

Commentary

Line 11: רבי אליעזר 'Rabbi Eliezer'—The Venice edition and the earlier Warsaw editions of PRE attribute this statement to R. Akiva, but the difference is not of great consequence as Akiva is understood to be a disciple of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ B.T. *Chagigah* 13b.

¹⁴⁰ *Sifre* to Numbers, *pisqa* 42.

¹⁴¹ Aryeh Carmell, *Aiding Talmud Study* (Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1998) chart 1, p. 93.

Line 11: **בין חבתיים** 'Between the Pieces'—The interpretation of the symbolic representation of the four kingdoms by the different sacrificial animals may be a tradition unique to Judaism. They symbolize that the four kingdoms, which will conquer the Land of Israel and oppress the People of Israel will fall, while Israel will survive. The covenant with God is thereby created with the sacrificing of Israel's enemies. Naturally then, the ante-Nicene fathers interpret the different sacrifices to be the different appearances of the messiah,¹⁴² because as Rome, they are one of the sacrificed enemies.

Trial Seven

Part 3, Section 1

Text

- 14 עגלה משולשת זו מלכות אדום שהיא בעגלה דשא זו מלכות רביעית שהיא מלכות
15 על אדום שהיא בעגלה דשא

Translation

The 'three year old heifer' is the kingdom of Edom, that was like the grazing heifer. This fourth kingdom, was the Kingdom of Edom, which was like a grazing heifer.

Commentary

Line 14: **אדום** 'Edom' in the Biblical period was located south of the Dead Sea and extended east into modern Jordan. The name is prevalent in many of the cultures of the Ancient Near East, with the earliest reference being in Egypt in the 13th century

¹⁴² Methodius, *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, 5:2.

B.C.E.¹⁴³ The inhabitants of the land, the Edomites, are descendents of Esau according to Genesis 36:1, who had wives from many of the peoples of the region. Reference to Edom appear throughout the Bible, indicating that this was a historical group with which the Israelites had great dealings.¹⁴⁴

The *Aggadic* tradition renders Edom as an oppressive people, who tended to persecute those people most closely related to them.¹⁴⁵ Genesis Rabbah discusses the legal and military interactions among David, the Sanhedrin, and the Edomites, in which Amalek is associated with the Edomites.¹⁴⁶ In the Palestinian Talmud, Edom is associated with Rome through an interpretation of Isaiah 21:11, in which '*Dumah*,' the name of a people, is read '*Roma*,' exchanging the '*d*' for a '*r*.'¹⁴⁷ Though some scholars hold that the connection between Edom and Rome was a result of Herod's ancestry which included Edomite proselytes to Judaism, the late emergence of this association, mid second century C.E., almost a century after Herod's death, argues against this theory. A more probable theory is that the similarities in the involvement of the Edomites, historical or mythical, in the destruction of the First Temple, and the involvement of Rome in the destruction of the Second Temple, led to this identification.¹⁴⁸ By the early Amoraic period, the association was widespread, and Edom eventually became identified with Christian Rome. This identification may have been perpetuated as a method of avoiding

¹⁴³ Moshe David Herr, "Edom: In the Aggadah," *Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Genesis Rabbah 74:15.

¹⁴⁷ P.T. *Taanit* 3a.

¹⁴⁸ Herr, "Edom: In the Aggadah."

Christian censorship in the still later periods, as Edom is consistently portrayed in a negative light.¹⁴⁹

Lines 14-15: **זו מלכות רביעית...** 'This fourth kingdom...'—Much of this phrase is omitted in several of the later editions, Warsaw and Vienna in particular. A large blacked-out portion is apparent in the Constantinople manuscript, a deletion seemingly by a Christian censor, due to the pervasive nature of the deletion throughout the manuscripts and editions. The phrase has been re-incorporated in accordance with the MS. Gaster.¹⁵⁰

Trial Seven

Part 3, Section 2

Text

16 עו מושלשת זו מלכות יין שנאמר וצפיד העוזים הגדיל עד מאד וגו'

Translation

The 'three year old she-goat' is the kingdom of Greece, as it is written, "And the he-goat greatly magnified himself" (Daniel 8:8).

Commentary

Line 16: יין 'Greece'—While goats have been an important agricultural animal to the Jews, they have are associated with transgression and evil. In Leviticus, the priest

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p. 198, n. 7 and Horowitz, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: A Critical Edition*, pp. 92-93.

offers one goat to God and the other, the scapegoat, is released to *Azazel*, which is a place connected with the Divine power where the goat will carry the sins of the Israelites to be cleansed.¹⁵¹ In the Hellenized world, the practice of utilizing a scapegoat to cleanse people of sin involved a human being rather than a goat.¹⁵² The goat has also been portrayed as an 'armed robber' in rabbinic literature, because it jumps fences, eats, and damages plants.¹⁵³ The Mishna even tells of Greek prohibitions against the breeding of goats, a vital domestic animal, in the Land of Israel.¹⁵⁴ The most clear identification of Greece with a goat can be found in Daniel 8:21, "And the buck, the he-goat is the king of Greece."

Trial Seven

Part 3, Section 3

Text

- 17 ואיל משולש זו מלכות מדי ופרס שנ' האיל אשר ראית בעל קרנים מלכי מדי ופרס

Translation

The 'three year old ram' is the kingdoms of Media and Persia, as it is written, "The ram, which you saw that had two horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia." [Daniel 8:20].

¹⁵¹ Leviticus 16:7-10.

¹⁵² Shmuel Ahituv, "Azazel," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹⁵³ B.T. *Baba Kama*, 80a.

¹⁵⁴ M. *Baba Kama* 7:7

Commentary

The identification of Media and Persia with the ram is based upon the aggressive expansion of Media and Persia that Daniel envisions in a dream. Once the horns of the ram were broken, by the goat of Greece, the ram was powerless and destroyed.¹⁵⁵ The explicit identification is provided in the proof text of this section.

Trial Seven

Part 3, Section 4

Text

- 18 וְתוֹר אֱלֹהֵי בְנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל אֵין הַלְשׁוֹן הַזֶּה לְשׁוֹן תּוֹר אֱלֹהֵי אַרְמִיָּת תּוֹר זֶה שׁוֹר
19 אֵין לְאַרְץ כְּשִׁיעָמָד שׁוֹר זָכָר עִם הַנִּקְבָּה יִפְתָּחוּ וְיִסְדְּרוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲמָקִים כְּדִין אָמַר
20 הַזֵּוֹתָא רַבִּיעֵתָא

Translation

And the 'turtle-dove' (Genesis 15:9), these are the Children of Ishmael. ['Tor'] is not [to be read] in this language [*i.e.*, not in Hebrew]. Rather, the language in [which to read] 'tor' is the language of Aramaic, where 'tor' means 'ox'. When a male ox and a female are yoked together, they will not break up and furrow all the valleys, as it is written, 'the fourth beast' (Dan. 7:19).

Commentary

Line 18: בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל 'The Children of Ishmael'—This is probably a reference to the Islamic Dynasties which ruled much of the Near East after the decline of the

¹⁵⁵ Daniel 8:2-8.

Byzantine Empire in the seventh century C.E. As such, it is a clue to the dating of the final redaction of the text to no earlier than the end of Byzantine rule in the Land of Israel in 640 C.E. or the rise of the Ummayyad Dynasty in 660 C.E.¹⁵⁶

Line 19: **יפתחו ויסדרו** 'break up and furrow'—This imagery is found in Isaiah, where the analogy is used of a farmer who plows when necessary to prepare for certain kinds of crops, but does not do so for all types of crops.¹⁵⁷ This may imply that Jews have different responsibilities and require a different type of preparation to uphold their covenant with God than do other people. In this section of PRE, the rabbis may also be saying that God has a different role for Islam, and we humans are not able to fully grasp the Divine plan.

Trial Seven

Part 3, Section 5

Text

- 21 וגזל אלו ישראל שנמשלו בגזל שנאמר יונתי בחגי הסלע כי קולך ערב בתפלה
22 ומראך נאזה במעשים טובים וגזל אלו ישראל שנמשלו בגזל אחת היא יונתי תמתי

Translation

The 'young pigeon,' this is Israel, who is compared to a young pigeon, as it is written, 'Oh my dove [young pigeon], you are in the clefts of the rock' (Song of Songs 2:14).

¹⁵⁶ Peter A. Batke , Jerome W. Clinton , Denise El-Soufi, and Akel I. Kahera. "The Islamic Timeline," *Islamic Timeline* (<http://www.princeton.edu/~batke/itl/scroll/new.html>, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, Spring 1996).

¹⁵⁷ Isaiah 28:23-29.

'For your voice is pleasant' in prayer, 'and your appearance is beautiful' in good deeds. 'The young pigeon,' this is Israel, who is compared to a young pigeon, 'This one is my dove, my pure one; this one is the chosen of her mother who bore her' (Song of Songs 6:9).

Commentary

There are several species of doves indigenous to the Land of Israel. Since they are considered a fit animal for consumption and sacrifice, they were a very important agricultural stock.¹⁵⁸ The importance of the pigeon in daily life is evidenced by the Talmudic discussions prohibiting the theft of pigeons, even by decoy.¹⁵⁹ The abundant nature and regular consumption of pigeons lead to it being considered the most persecuted of animals.¹⁶⁰ This association with persecution and sacrifice may contribute to the identification of Israel with the dove. In the Septuagint translation of Psalm 56, this identification is explicit.¹⁶¹ Therefore, Israel, as a dove, is the most persecuted and oppressed of the peoples of the world, but will lead the world to salvation, as in the Noah narrative.¹⁶²

Trial Seven

Part 3, Section 6

¹⁵⁸ Jehuda Feliks, "Dove," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹⁵⁹ B.T. *Sanhedrin* 25a.

¹⁶⁰ B.T. *Bava Kama* 93a.

¹⁶¹ Nahum M. Sarna, "The Book of Psalms: Technical Terms in the Headings: 'Al Yonat 'Elem Rehoqim' *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹⁶² Genesis 8:11.

Text

- 23 רבי אחא בן יעקב אומר לא נאמר לשון זה משולשת אלא גבורי כח כמה דעת רבי
24 משרשיה אומר משולשים יהיו שלשה פעמים עתידין יהיו למשול בארץ ישראל אמר
25 חזוט המשולש [לא במחירה ינתק] פעם ראשונה כל אחד ואחד בפני עצמו פעם
26 שנייה בשנים פעם שלישית כלם כאחד לחלום על בית דוד שנאמר יתיצבו מלכי ארץ
27 וגו'

Translation

Rabbi Acha, son of Jacob, said that the expression "three years old" only refers to the mighty in power, as it is written, "[And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him;] and a threefold cord [is not quickly broken]" (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Rabbi Mesharshiyah said that the 'three years old' refers to the three times in the future that [they] will rule in the land of Israel. The first time, each and everyone [will rule] themselves. The second time, as a pair, two [will rule]. The third time, all, as one, will fight with the House of David, as it is written, 'The kings of the earth establish themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Eternal and against [God's] anointed.' (Psalms 2:2).

Commentary

Line 23-24: רבי משרשיה 'Rabbi Mesharshiyah'—This attribution is problematic. Perhaps it refers to a fifth generation Babylonian Amora; however, his title should then be 'Rav'.¹⁶³ There are minor variances between the different versions of PRE. Some editions abbreviate the title while others include the whole word, probably

¹⁶³ Adin Seinsaltz, *The Talmud, The Steinsaltz Edition: A Reference Guide* (Random House, NY, 1989), pp. 33 and 35.

due to the confusion. The best reading may be 'Rav.'

Line 26: **לחלחם על בית דוד** 'to fight with the House of David'—This refers to Messianic wars which accompany the appearance of the messiah. Since the proof text includes both 'God and God's anointed' who is understood to be the messiah, it provides further evidence that this is an eschatological allusion. The Talmud mentions another messianic figure who precedes the messiah. This character is killed in these battles with the enemies of the Godhead,¹⁶⁴ thereby, reinforcing the idea that these are messianic wars.

Trial Seven

Part 4, The Birds

Text

- 28 רבי יחושע אומר לקח אברהם את הרבו וכתר אותם אחד לשנים שנאמר ויקח לו
29 את כל אלה ויבחר אותם וגו' אלו לא בחר אותם לא היה העולם יכול לעמוד אלא
30 הואיל ובחר אותם תשש כחם והקריב כל בחר ובחר לקראת רעהו שנאמר ויתן איש
31 בתרו לקראת רעהו וגומ' וגוזל בן יונה הניח בחיים שנאמר ואת הצפור לא בחר

Translation

Rabbi Joshua said that Abraham took his sword and divided them, one into two, as it is written, 'He took all these [animals] and divided them in the midst, [and the man who divided them placed each half against its mate, but he did not divide the birds]' (Gen. 15:10). If Abraham had not divided [them], the world would not have been able to be

¹⁶⁴ B.T. *Sukkah* 52a.

established; but rather because he divided them, he weakened them and drew each and every piece to its mate, as it is written, 'And the man who divided them placed each half against its mate' (Gen. 15:10). The doves [remained] alive, as it is written, 'But he did not divide the birds' (Gen. 15:10).

Commentary

As mentioned in the commentary upon the introduction to the third part of the seventh trial, 'Part Three—Covenant Between the Pieces,' the sacrificial imagery of this scene is powerful. It evokes the idea that the fulfillment of the covenant between Abraham and God will be born on the backs of the enemies of Israel. This is reinforced by the addition of the layer of imagery presented in the discussion of Abraham dividing the night during the rescue of Lot, in which I asserted that Abraham had cut the danger out of the night through his victory. Similarly, the covenant with God cuts the danger out of Israel's enemies and will, in the end, result in the fulfillment of the messianic dream. This is underscored by the image of the sole remaining live animal is Israel, the dove.

Trial Seven

Part 4, Section 1

Text

- 32 מכאן את למד שלא היה שם גזל אחד אלא בן יונה בלבד ירד עליהם העיט לפזרן
33 ולאבדן ואין העיט אל זה דוד בן ישי שנמשל כעיט שנהעיט צבוע נחלתי לי וגומ'

Translation

Hence, it is learned that there were no other young birds there, outside of the 'dove.' The bird of prey descended upon them to disperse and destroy [them]. The bird of prey is none other than David, son of Jesse, who is compared to 'a bird of prey,' as it is written, "My inheritance is a spotted bird of prey..." (Jer. 12:9)

Commentary

Lines 32: **מִכָּאן אֶת לִפְדֹּר בֶּן יוֹנָה בְּלִבֹּד** 'Hence, it is learned...outside of the 'dove.'—The first Warsaw edition replaces this statement with the statement, 'Hence we learn that *'Tzippor'* in the Torah, means only 'a dove.' I have included the later statement as it is more consistent with the other versions of the text and provides a greater level of detail in the story presented by PRE. The implication of the phrase is that only Israel, the dove, alone will survive at the time of the fulfillment of covenant.

Lines 32-33: **יֵרֵד עֲלֵיהֶם הַעֵיט...** 'The bird of prey descended upon them...'—The Palestinian Targum on Genesis utilizes the imagery of people, swooping like raptors to disrupt the covenantal act. Abraham's merit earned God's providential protection and prevented them from succeeding.¹⁶⁵ In PRE, this imagery is turned on its head with the introduction of the messianic symbolism of David. The nations, as represented by the sacrificed animals, will ultimately be destroyed, not Israel.

Line 32: **לִפְדֹּר** 'to disperse'—Different editions and manuscripts spell this word either '*p.d.r*' or '*p.z.d*' representing an Aramization of the Hebrew, with no significant variation in the meaning. However, the concept of David dispersing the enemies of the

¹⁶⁵ Palestinian Targum on Genesis 15:11.

Israel can be seen as Divine justice for the diasporas of the Jews.

Line 33: דוד בן ישי 'David, son of Jesse'—This phrase is a messianic allusion in keeping with the theme of this section of PRE, which describes a violent upheaval at the time of the arrival of the messiah. It is not surprising that some of the versions of PRE substitute 'the Son of David' for 'David,' but this is of little consequence to the meaning and clarity of the section.

Trial Seven

Part 4, Section 2—Timing

Text

- 34 בצאת השמש מן המזרח היה אברהם יושב ומניף עליהם בסודרו כדי שלא
35 ימשול בהם העיט עד שיבא העורב

Translation

As the sun was about to rise in the east, Abraham was sitting and waving the scarf [of his turban] about him in order to control the bird of prey until the raven came.

Commentary

Line 34: בסודרו 'scarf of a turban'—This word provides some details of realia, which demonstrate inter-cultural influences in the arena of everyday life. The Jews of ninth century Palestine pictured Abraham as wearing the same clothing that they wore, which had profound Arabic influence.

Line 35: שיבא העורב 'the arrival of the raven'—This image is also contained in the Book of Jubilees. In that text, Mastema, the devil, sends the ravens to ravage the land bare.¹⁶⁶ While this can be a sign of Abraham's resignation in defeat, it can also be a sign of the erasure of that which has come before and the recognition of the new covenant that has been created. As the flood was an opportunity for rebirth, so, too, the ravens can work within the same type of model. And though the raven is often associated with messages of evil,¹⁶⁷ it was also ravens that fed Elijah when he was in hiding.¹⁶⁸ Given this imagery, it seems that the redactor is acknowledging the uncertainty of his current socio-historical place and questioning the imminence of the fulfillment of the messianic promise.

Trial Seven

Part 4, Section 2.1

Text

- 36 רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אמר מכאן אתה למד שאין מושלן של ארבע מלכויות הללו
37 אלא יום אחד מיומו של הקב"ה

Translation

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said that hence, you can learn that the rule of these four kingdoms will only last one day, [that is] one of the days of the Holy One, Blessed be God.

¹⁶⁶ Jubilees 11:10-11.

¹⁶⁷ Isaiah 34:11.

¹⁶⁸ 1 Kings 17:2-6.

Commentary

Line 37: **יום אחד מיומו של הקב"ה** 'one day from the days of God'—There has been much discussion about the absolute or relative nature of time in the Bible. Here, a midrashic approach utilizes the ambiguity which propels that discussion. One of God's days has been claimed to be 1000 years. If this period of 1000 years begins with the Greek persecutions under Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BCE, then the ending date would be in the year 832 CE, consistent with the Arab conquest of Palestine. Therefore, evidence is provided for dating the final redaction of PRE to the early to mid ninth century.¹⁶⁹

Trial Seven

Part 4, Section 2.2

Text

- 38 אמ' לו רבי אלעזר בן ערך בודאי בדברך שנ' נתנני שוממה כל היום דחה דרך
39 משתי ידות שעה תדע לך שהוא בן בא וראה כשחמה נוטה לבא במערב שתי שעות
40 תשש כחו ואין נוגה לו וכן עד שלא יבוא הערב יצמח אורן של ישראל שנאמר
41 והיה לעת ערב יהיה אור

Translation

Rabbi Elazar, son of Arach, said to [Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah], "It is truly according to your word, as it is written, 'He made me desolate and faint all the day' (Lam. 1:13),

¹⁶⁹ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p. 200, n. 6.

except for two-thirds of an hour [of God]. You will know that this is true. Come and see when the blazing sun turns to set in the west, for two-thirds of an hour, its power is diminished and it has no light. And [likewise] before the evening has arrived, the light of Israel will grow, as it is written, "[It shall be one particular day which shall be known as *Adonai*'s, neither day nor night;] but it shall come to pass that prior to evening time, there will be light" (Zech. 14:7).

Commentary

Line 39: שתי שעות 'two hours'—The later editions of the Warsaw and Venice read 'two hours,' while the earlier editions, 'two-thirds of an hour.' Since time is quite flexible in PRE, the Hebrew text is shaped in accordance with the later editions' wording, 'two hours,' but the translation has been rendered 'two-thirds' of an hour to maintain consistency with a modern experience of the duration of twilight.

Line 40: יצמח אורן של ישראל 'the light of Israel will grow'—In the first Warsaw edition reads, 'the Son of David will cause the light of Israel to grow.' This provides a more pointed messianic message, and seems consistent with the theme of this section. However, I have not included the phrase because it does not appear in most of the other versions of PRE, and is therefore not reliable.

Trial Seven

Part 5—Prayers for Abraham's Children

Text

- 42 עמד אברהם והיה מתפלל לפני הקב"ה כדי שלא ישתעבדו בניו בארבע מלכויות הללו
43 ונפלה עליו שנת תרדמה וישן לו שנ' ותרדמה נפלה על אברם וכי יש לך אדם
44 שוכב וישן ויוכל להתפלל אלא ללמדך שאברהם שוכב וישן מכח התפלה כדי
45 שיעבדו בניו ארבע מלכויות הללו שנאמר והנה אימה חשכה גדולה נופלת עליו

Translation

Abraham stood and was praying before the Holy One, Blessed be God, in order to prevent the enslavement of his children by these four kingdoms. A deep sleep fell upon him, and he slept, as it is written, "[And as the sun descended,] a deep sleep fell upon Avram [and behold a great darkness fell upon him]" (Gen. 15:12). And, is it possible for [one] to lie down and sleep and [still] be able to pray? [No,] rather it teaches you that Abram was lying down and sleeping [due to exhaustion] from the intensity of his prayer in order that his children might enslave these four kingdoms, as it is written, 'Behold, a horror and great darkness fell upon him' (Gen. 15:12).

Commentary

Line 42: ...מתפלל והיה עמד אברהם 'Abraham stood and was praying...'

PRE has already introduced the image of Abraham as a man of prayer in discussing his interactions with *Avimelech*. Here, Abraham is interceding for his children, his descendants. This certainly is a statement not only that Abraham is the paradigm of

compassion, but also a statement that he is the paradigm of faith. According to the Biblical narrative, Abraham has no children at this time, and yet he prays for their salvation. Abraham accepts as fact that which God has promised.

There is a strong messianic message as well in this passage. At the outset, Abraham prays that his children will not be enslaved by the four kingdoms (line 43), but in the end of this section, his prayer has changed, 'that his children might enslave these four kingdoms.' This is the same message that was discussed in reference to the Covenant between the Pieces; the four kingdoms who conquer and oppress the Jews will in the end be sacrificed, or here enslaved, by the ultimate victor, Israel. As three of the four kingdoms have fallen by the time of the final redaction, it is possible that PRE is expressing a feeling of the increased imminence of the messianic time. These seems to be a subtle increase in the messianic theme in PRE in comparison to the other rabbinic views.

In Genesis Rabbah, the rabbis explain that that God will exile and then gather back all of Abraham's progeny, enslave them and then set them free. This will be done to teach them appropriate behavior.¹⁷⁰ It is, therefore, part of the process of reaching the messianic time. Exodus Rabbah, on the other hand, provides a fairly complete parallel to the text of PRE. Of major concern in that tradition is the revelation to Abraham of all that would befall his descendants in the future, the conquests, the exiles, and the enslavements.¹⁷¹ This text provides a new perspective on the Seventh Trial in PRE. It is meant to test Abraham with the knowledge of the future to see if Abraham possessed the devotion and commitment to God to persevere in his journey in the face of the additional

¹⁷⁰ Genesis Rabbah 44:18.

¹⁷¹ Exodus Rabbah 51:7.

pain and anguish he knew was destined to come. Literarily, only after PRE has built a strong foundation of the messianic promise can this aspect of the trial be discussed. This is evidence of the literary unity of this trial and, by extension, the enumeration list of the Ten Trials of Abraham, and further of the whole work.

Trial Seven

Part 5, Section 1

Text

46 אימה זו מלכות אדום שנ' דחילא ואימתני ותקיפא חשבה זו מלכות יון שהחש יכה
47 עיניהם של ישראל מכל מצות שבתורה גדולה זו מלכות מדי ופרס שגדלה למכור
48 את ישראל חנם נפלת זו מלכות בבל שבידם נפלה עטרת ישראל שנ' נפלה נפלה
49 בבל עליו אלו ישמעאלים שעליהם בן דוד יצמח שנא' אויביו אלביש בושת וג'
50 רבי זעירא אומר לא נבראו המלכויות הללו אלא עצים לגיהנם שנאמר והנה תנור
51 עשן ולפיד אש ואין תנור זה אלא גיהנם שנמשלה כתנור שנאמר אשר אור לו
52 בציון ותנור לו בירושלם.

53

Translation

'Horror,' this is the Kingdom of Edom, as it is written, '...[behold a fourth beast,] dreadful and horrible, and exceedingly strong...' (Dan. 7:7) 'Darkness,' this is the Kingdom of Greece that darkens the eyes of Israel [by preventing her from observing] all the commandments in the Torah. 'Great,' this is the Kingdoms of Media and Persia that

are 'great' [enough] to sell Israel gratuitously. 'Fell,' this is the Kingdom of Babylonia, because into her hand fell the crown of Israel, as it is written, 'Fallen, Fallen is Babylon.' (Is. 21:9) 'Upon him,' these are the Ishmaelites, over whom the Son of David will sprout, as it is written, 'His enemies, I will clothe with shame; but upon him, his crown will shine' (Ps. 133:18). R. Zeira said that these kingdoms were created only as firewood for *Gehinnom*, as it is written, 'Behold, a smoking furnace and a flaming torch [passed between the pieces]' (Gen. 15:17). 'Furnace' can only be *Gehinnom*, which is compared to a furnace, as it is written, '... [thus says the Eternal,] whose light is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem' (Isa. 31:9).

Commentary

Line 46: דַּתְּר 'Edom'—In this section, Edom is identified through the Daniel verse as referring to the 'fourth beast,' connecting this section to the earlier section describing explicitly the four kingdoms.

Line 46-47: חֹשֶׁךְ 'Darkness...'—In a very long midrash, Leviticus Rabbah utilizes much of the same darkness imagery as PRE. While Exodus Rabbah asserts that the future afflictions of the Israelites would be for an educational purpose, Leviticus Rabbah underscores that they will be for a punitive purpose. Leviticus Rabbah also compiles a much more extensive list of kingdoms, afflictions, and transgressions than the other texts. Of major consequence to this thesis is the assertion in Leviticus Rabbah that all of the prophets know of the 'four kingdoms.'¹⁷² PRE has not retained this portion of the tradition because it does not serve to elevate the status of Abraham in comparison to all who follow him. This marked omission by PRE is evidence of redactional design, in

¹⁷² Leviticus Rabbah 13:5.

opposition to theories that PRE may be simply an anthology of older traditions. PRE has not included traditions which do not further its thematic agenda.

Lines 47-48: ...זו גדולה 'Greatness, this is...'—This section has parallels in the book of Esther, in which the king hands the fate of the Jews over to Haman, as if exchanging silver.¹⁷³ This underscores the issue of personal responsibility in bringing the messianic promise to fruition.

Line 48: עטרת 'crown'—This may be a reference to the First Temple in Jerusalem, which was captured and destroyed by the Babylonians.¹⁷⁴

Line 49: ישמעאלים 'Ishmaelites'—As with the early reference to the descendants of Ishmael in this trial, the reference here is probably to the Muslim rulers. This passage also indicates a sense of immediacy in the fulfillment of the messianic promise.

Lines 50-51: עשן תנור 'a smoking furnace'—This image is utilized in Genesis Rabbah,¹⁷⁵ the Palestinian Targum,¹⁷⁶ and in other sources to introduce the idea of *Gehinnom* as the site of divine judgment. The continuation of this section serves to single out *Gehinnom* as the sole site of that judgment.

¹⁷³ Esther 3:11.

¹⁷⁴ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p. 201, n. 8.

¹⁷⁵ Genesis Rabbah 44:21.

¹⁷⁶ Palestinian Targum on Genesis 15:17.

Trial Eight

Circumcision

Text

- 1 פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק כט
- 2 הנס השמיני ויהי אברם בן תשעים שנה ותשע שנים אמר לו הקב"ה עד עכשיו לא
- 3 היית תמים לפני אלא מול את בשר ערלתך מעליך ותהלך לפני ה' תמים
- 4 שהערלה טמאה היא מכל הטמאות שהערלה חרפה היא שנ' כי חרפה הוא לנו
- 5 שהערלה טמאה היא מכל הטמאות שנ' כי לא יוסיף יבא בך עוד ערל וטמא
- 6 שהערלה מום היא מכל המומים מול בשר ערלתך ותהא תמים

Translation

Chapter 29

The Eighth Trial: 'When Abram was ninety-nine years old' (Gen. 17:1), the Holy One, Blessed be God, said to him, "Until now, you have not been perfect before Me; therefore, circumcise the flesh of your foreskin and 'walk before Me and be perfect' (Gen. 17:1). A foreskin is a defilement greater than all other defilements, for the foreskin is a disgrace, as it is written, '...for it is a disgrace to us' (Gen. 34:14). A foreskin is a defilement greater than all other defilements, as it is written, '...for no longer will the uncircumcised and defiled come to you [Jerusalem]' (Isa. 52:1). The foreskin is more of a blemish than all [other] blemishes. Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, become perfect."

Commentary

The practice of ritual circumcision is ancient and was practiced by many

peoples,¹⁷⁷ however this practice has become identified nearly exclusively as a Jewish practice over time, as circumcision in Islam is recommended but not required as will be discussed in the commentary on 'Line 5.' As the proof text from the story of 'The Rape of Dina' illustrates,¹⁷⁸ circumcision was a dramatic and necessary sign of entry into the covenant between God and the Israelites. It was not only a sign of civil involvement with the People of Israel, but a necessary requirement to participate in the cultic rituals of the Jewish people, as the eating of the Passover sacrifice only by those who are circumcised demonstrates.¹⁷⁹

During the course of Jewish history, many foreign rulers have recognized the power and importance of circumcision to the Jewish people, and used legislation concerning circumcision to control the people, including prohibitions and leniencies.¹⁸⁰ During periods of Hellenistic influence, the practice of circumcision waned as Jews wished to participate in the Greek games of the gymnasia, which were in the nude.¹⁸¹ Statements attributed to Paul that circumcision has been superseded by faith in an effort to convert Jews provides further evidence of the significance of circumcision in the identification of Jews.¹⁸²

The rift between the Pauline elimination of circumcision and the rabbinic requirement of circumcision became greater with the ascendancy of Christianity. Therefore the emphasis upon this trial, which speaks of circumcision with such dramatic and extreme language, can be understood as an anti-Christian polemic. It may also be

¹⁷⁷ Leonard V. Snowman, "Circumcision" *Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

¹⁷⁸ Genesis 34.

¹⁷⁹ Exodus 12:44 and 48.

¹⁸⁰ 1 Maccabees 1:48 and 2 Maccabees 6:10.

¹⁸¹ Jubilees 15:33-34.

¹⁸² Romans 3:1-4.

understood as an argument promoting the practice of circumcision to Jews who, living under Islamic rule, may again practice circumcision that may have been waned under pressures of the previous Christian authority.

Line 2: **בן תשעים שנה ותשע שנים** 'ninety-nine years old'—This phrase is followed by the complete quote of the verse¹⁸³ in the first Warsaw edition. However, I have chosen to maintain consistency with the wording in the later editions of Luria, Horowitz, and Friedlander.

Line 5: **כי לא יוסיף יבא בך עוד ערל וסמא** '...for no longer will the uncircumcised and defiled come to you [Jerusalem] (Isa. 52:1)'—As circumcision is a recommended, but not required, practice in Islam,¹⁸⁴ the retention of this proof text can be viewed as being pro-Islamic in comparison to Christianity. The Jews of the Land of Israel were treated more leniently in the period leading up to the final redaction of PRE than they been treated under the prior Christian rule, and the use of this proof text seems to reflect that reality.

Trial Eight

Part 1—The Act of Abraham's Circumcision

Text

- 7 רבן גמליאל אומ' שלח אברהם וקרא לשם בן נח ומל את בשר ערלתו של אבינו
8 אברהם ואת בשר ערלתו של ישמעאל בנו שנאמר בעצם היום הזה נימול אברהם וג'

¹⁸³ Genesis 17:1.

¹⁸⁴ "Islam: The Official Islamic Religion" *Encyclopedia Hebraica/ Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

Translation

Rabban Gamaliel said that Abraham sent for and called Shem, the son of Noah. [Shem] circumcised the flesh of our father, Abraham's foreskin and the flesh of Ishmael, his son's foreskin, as it is written, 'On that very day, Abraham was circumcised and Ishmael, his son' (Gen. 17:26).

Commentary

Line 7: **לשם בן נח** 'Shem, the son of Noah'—As discussed earlier in Trial Five, Shem is equated with Melchizedek, and the priesthood. The consistent repeated use of 'Shem' as the High Priest, is evidence of the editorial unity of the 'Ten Trials of Abram.'

Line 7: **את בשר** 'the flesh'—Genesis Rabbah notes a discrepancy between the use of the word '*et*,' a definite article introducing a direct object, with 'the flesh of Ishmael's foreskin' but not with 'the flesh of Abraham's foreskin. In this midrash, it is explained that Abraham had become overweight through marriage, while Ishmael was still lean, accounting for the variation in the use of the term '*et*.'¹⁸⁵

Line 8: **ובשר ערלתו של ישמעאל בנו** 'and the flesh of Ishmael, his son's foreskin'—This section maintains the theme of presenting the favorable side of the ambivalent relationship the redactor has with Islam, by reinforcing the filial relationship between Ishmael and Abraham, and the Ishmael's observance appropriate rituals.

¹⁸⁵ Genesis Rabbah 47:8.

Trial Eight

Part 1, Section 1--Timing

Text

- 9 בעצם היום הזה בגבורות השמש ובחצי היום אלא בעשור לחדש ביום הכפורים כתיב
10 בכפורים כל מלאכה לא תעשו בעצם היום הזה וכאן הוא אומר בעצם היום הזה
11 גימול אברהם הוי יודע שביום הכפורים גמול אברהם אבינו ובכל שנה ושנה הקב"ה
12 רואה דם מילתו של אברהם אבינו ומכפר על עונותיהם של ישראל שנאמר כי ביום
13 הזה יכפר עליכם

Translation

'On that very day' [means] in the strength of the sun and in the middle of the day. Not only [does it mean noon], but it also [occurred] on the tenth day of the month, on the Day of Atonement. It is written, concerning the [Day of] Atonement, 'You will not do any work on that very day, [for it is a Day of Atonement]' (Lev. 23:28) and here, it is written, 'On that very day, Abraham was circumcised' (Gen. 17:26). Know that on the Day of Atonement, Abraham, our father, was circumcised. Each and every year, the Holy One, Blessed be God, sees the blood of our father, Abraham's circumcision and forgives all the sins of Israel, as it is written, 'For on that very day, [God] will forgive you' (Lev. 16:30).

Commentary

Line 9: **היום הזה** 'On that very day'—On the surface, this passage means that the circumcision took place at the height of the day, consistent with the rabbinic tradition of circumcising only in daylight. This passage alludes to the tradition presented

in Genesis Rabbah, in which the rabbis discuss the grammatical construction of the word 'circumcise.' One argument is that the word is written in the passive, 'Abraham was circumcised,' implying that Abraham examined himself and realized that he had been born circumcised. This is countered by this passage which draws the inference that Abraham was circumcised during the light of the day, so that he would be cognizant of what was happening and experience the pain of circumcision, thereby doubling God's satisfaction with Abraham's fulfillment of this trial.¹⁸⁶

Line 9: ביום הכפורים 'on Yom Kippur'—The association here of Abraham's circumcision with *Yom Kippur* is similar to the timing of this same event as described in *Midrash Aggadah*.¹⁸⁷ However, the Talmud places the timing of Abraham's circumcision on Passover,¹⁸⁸ which is consistent with the timing of many of the events of Abraham's life thus far presented in "The Ten Trials of Abraham." The change of the dating can be explained as a response to the tradition in the Book of Jubilees, which equates Joseph with *Yom Kippur*. Jubilees explains that we afflict ourselves on this date, because Jacob was afflicted with the information that Joseph had been killed on this date.¹⁸⁹ It appears that the emphasis on Abraham's circumcision being the defining event leading to the specification of the date of *Yom Kippur* is an attempt on the part of the redactor to undermine the claim made by Jubilees.

The redactor is faced with two claimants to supercession of our covenant with God: Christianity and Islam. Both of these traditions based their claims upon an attachment to and identification with Abraham, the progenitor of the covenant. Any

¹⁸⁶ Genesis Rabbah 47:9.

¹⁸⁷ *Midrash Aggadah* to Genesis 21:17.

¹⁸⁸ B.T. *Bava Metzia*, 86b.

¹⁸⁹ Jubilees 34:18.

claims made within the Jewish world to a progenitor other than Abraham weakens the claim of Judaism to be the embodiment of the true covenant, at least as expressed in PRE. Therefore, the redactor takes issue with Jubilees, which is outside of the main stream tradition as evidenced by its place in the Pseudepigraphal literature. Hence, when Jubilees asserts that date of Yom Kippur is based upon Joseph's afflictions, PRE counters that it is a result of Abraham's.

Trial Eight

Part 1, Section 2—Location

Text

- 14 ובאותו מקום שנימול אברהם ונשאר דמו שם נבנה המזבח ולבך את כל דמו
15 ישפוך אל יסוד המזבח ואומר לך בדמך חיי

Translation

In the same place that Abraham was circumcised and where his blood remained, there the altar was built. Therefore, '[the priest] will pour all of the blood on the foundation of the altar' (Lev. 4:30), and '[I] said to you through your blood, live' (Ezek. 16:6).

Commentary

Line 14: המזבח 'the altar'—The implication of this statement is that Abraham's circumcision occurred on Mount Moriah, the site of the Temple. This could also be an instance of foreshadowing, as this will be the site of the tenth and final trial, the binding of Isaac itself.

Line 15: 'ואומר לך בדמך חיי' and '[I] said to you through your blood, live'

(Ezek. 16:6)'—While this proof text is omitted in the Oxford Manuscript, I have included it to emphasis the themes that through devotion to God and observance of the *mitzvot*, God will protect and reward you.

Trial Eight

Part 2—Circumcision and Shabbat

Text

- 16 ר' חנינא בן דוסא אומר כל הנמולים ביום השלישי כאב להם שנאמר וידוי ביום
17 השלישי בהיותם כואבים ומרחיצין את הקטן ביום השלישי שחל להיות בשבת וכל
18 צרכי מילה מותר לעשות בשבת

Translation

R. Chanina, son of Dosa, said that all who are circumcised experience pain on the third day, as it is written, 'It occurred on the third day, when they were in pain...' (Gen. 34:25), and they may wash the baby on the third day, even when it falls on *Shabbat*. All the necessities of circumcision are permitted to be done on *Shabbat*.

Commentary

Line 17: '...שחל ביום השלישי שחל...'—This statement is in accordance with the Mishna, which uses the same proof text found in PRE.¹⁹⁰ The Talmud debates this point and decides that, in the case presented, that of a child, 'the

¹⁹⁰ M. *Shabbat* 19:3.

third day' refers to the third day of life.¹⁹¹ This provides room for PRE to employ 'the third day' to mean the third day after circumcision in all cases, as in the situation presented in the proof text, to reinforce the importance of circumcision in Jewish life, as discussed at the outset of this trial. This is also the view of the Talmud in further discussion upon the subject.¹⁹²

Trial Eight

Part 3—Abandoning Circumcision Is Abandoning God

Text

19 וכל ערל לא יאכל בו ולא יגע בקדש והפורש מן המילה כפורש מן הב"ה

Translation

All who are uncircumcised may may not eat [the Passover sacrifice], nor may they touch that which is holy. One who separates from circumcision is as if he separates from the Holy One, Blessed be God.

Commentary

As discussed at the outset of this trial, the continued reinforcement of the necessity of circumcision seems to be a powerful political argument, especially against those who have abandoned the ritual, namely Christians.

Line 20: בקדש 'that which is holy'—This term may also mean 'the sanctuary,'

¹⁹¹ B.T. *Shabbat* 134b.

¹⁹² Ibid., 128a, 132a, 133a, and 134a.

which is called 'the holy of holies.'¹⁹³ It may also refer to the Jewish people, who are called 'a holy people.'¹⁹⁴ The message is clear, failure to observe the practice of circumcision is both a sign and an act of one's exclusion from the Jewish people, thus highlighting the necessity for circumcision, a constant anti-Christian theme.

Trial Eight

Part 4—The Visitors

Text

- 20 רבן גמליאל בנו של ר' יהודה הנשיא אומר כשנמול אברהם אבינו ביום השלישי היה
21 כאב לו מאד לנסותו מה עשה הקב"ה נקב חור אחד מתוך גיהנם והרתיח את היום
22 כיומן של רשעים וינא וישוב לו בפתח האהל לרוח היום שנאמר והוא יושב פתח
23 האהל אמר הקב"ה למלאכי השרת בואו יורד ובקרו את ההולח שמדת ביצור גדולה
24 לפני וירד הוח הוא ומלאכי השרת ובקרו את אברהם אבינו וירא אליו אמר הב"ה
25 למלאכי השרת בואו וראו כחה של מילה עד שלא נימול אברהם היה נופל על פניו
26 ואחר כך הייתי מדבר עמו שנאמר ויפול אברהם על פניו עכשיו שנמול הוא יושב
27 ואני עומד ומנין שהיה הב"ה עומד שנאמר וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו

Translation

Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Rabbi Judah the Prince, said that when Abraham, our father, was circumcised, he was very sore on the third day. In order to test him, what did the Holy One, Blessed be God do? [God] pierced a hole in the middle of *Gehinnom*, and

¹⁹³ Exodus 26:33.

¹⁹⁴ Deuteronomy 7:6.

[God] made the day hot, like the day of the wicked. [Abraham] went out and sat at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day, as it is said, "And he sat at the tent door [in the heat of the day]' (Gen. 18:1). the Holy One, Blessed be God, said to the ministering angels, "Come, let us descend and visit the sick, for the virtue of visiting the sick is great before Me." the Holy One, Blessed be God, and the angels descended to visit our father, Abraham, as it is said, 'And The Eternal appeared to him' (Gen. 18:1). the Holy One, Blessed be God, said to the ministering angels, "Come and see the power of circumcision. Before Abraham was circumcised, he fell on his face [in my presence], and afterward I spoke with him, as it is written, 'And Abraham fell upon his face' (Gen. 17:17). Now that he is circumcised, he sits and I stand. Whence do we know that the Holy One, Blessed be God, was standing? Because it is written, 'And he looked, and lo three men stood over against him' (Gen. 18:2).

Commentary

Line 21: לִנְסוֹתוֹ 'to test him.'—It is possible that this is the heart of 'Trial Eight.' The use of the same root, *n.s.*, provides a direct link to the formulaic introduction of each of the trials and to the statement of the *clal* of our enumeration list. It may be possible to understand this phrase as implying that the pain itself was so severe that it was the test.¹⁹⁵

Line 21: נִקְבַּח חוֹר אֶחָד מִתּוֹךְ גִּיחֹם '[God] pierced a hole in the middle of Gehinnom'—This reflects the tradition presented in and *Yallcut Shimoni*.¹⁹⁶

Line 22: כִּיּוֹם שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים 'like the day of the wicked'—This expresses the

¹⁹⁵ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, n. 2, p.205.

¹⁹⁶ *Yallcut Shimoni*, l. Remez 82.

tradition that there will not be an eternal *Gehinnom*, hell, but rather a day of heat in which the wicked will be judged and punished.¹⁹⁷

Line 25: בואו וראו 'come and see'—The identical expression appears in several places throughout PRE, but particularly in Trial 7, Part 3, Section 3.2. It is a common expression of the redactor of PRE,¹⁹⁸ and as such is evidence of the redactorial unity of the text.

Line 26-27: עכשיו שנקול הוא יושב ואני עומד 'Now that he is circumcised, he sits and I stand.'—The implication of this statement is that Abraham is being rewarded for his observance of the *mitzvah* of circumcision. He is permitted to sit, a posture afforded the superior, while God stands, attending to Abraham. This as well reflects the mode of decorum expected in a Jewish Court, with the litigants standing before the seated judges.¹⁹⁹ This inverts the normal power structure, with Abraham standing before God when he prays, which the Palestinian Targum explains by stating that Abraham was not able to stand, so while sitting, he bowed.²⁰⁰ Whether or not Abraham bowed while in a sitting position of power or not, the message that God approved of Abraham's behavior is clear. The act of circumcision earns merit towards receiving God's providence, underscoring the theme that observing the *mitzvot* is a key to Jewish survival.

¹⁹⁷ B.T. *Bava Metzia* 86b and B.T. *Nedarim* 8b.

¹⁹⁸ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p. 205, n. 7.

¹⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 19:17 and B.T. *Shevuot* 30a.

²⁰⁰ Palestinian Targum to Genesis 17:17.

Trial Eight

Part 5—Orlah

Text

- 28 רבי זעירא אומר חמש ערלות הם ארבע באדם ואחת באילן ארבע באדם מנין ערלת
29 האוזן ערלת שפתים ערלת הלב ערלת הבשר ערלת האוזן מנין שנאמר והנה ערלת
30 אוזנם ערלת שפתים מנין שנאמר ואני ערל שפתים ערלת הלב מנין שנאמר ומלחם
31 את ערלת לבבכם ואומר כי כל הגוים ערלים וכל בית ישראל ערלי לב ערלת בשר
32 מנין שנאמר וערל זכר אשר לא ימול את בשר ערלתו וגו'

Translation

Rabbi Zeira said that there are five kinds of uncircumcised things in the world: four refer to humans and one refers to trees. Whence do we know of the four that apply to man: the uncircumcised ear, the uncircumcised lips, the uncircumcised heart, and the uncircumcised flesh? Whence do we know of the uncircumcised ear? Because it is written, 'Behold, their ear is uncircumcised' (Jer. 6:10). Whence do we know of the uncircumcised lips? Because it is written, 'For I am of uncircumcised lips' (Ex. 6:12). Whence do we know of the uncircumcised heart? Because it is written, 'Circumcise the foreskin of your heart' (Deut. 10:16), and it is written, 'For all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart' (Jer. 9:26). Whence do we know of the uncircumcised flesh? Because it is written, 'And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin...' (Gen 17:14).

Commentary

Line 28: ערלות 'uncircumcised things'—The four 'orlot' to which this section refers are listed in Genesis Rabbah. That midrash connects the idea of Abraham being the High Priest with the instruction to circumcise. It details how the circumcision of his ear, lips, or heart would render him unfit to fulfill the responsibilities of that position, utilizing the same proof texts as are found in this section of PRE. Hence, the only suitable 'orlah' to remove is his foreskin.²⁰¹ This provides a tradition of four 'orlot' applying to humans.

In *Mishna Orlah*, the term 'orlah' refers exclusively to fruit, accounting for the fifth type mentioned in this section. The Mishna refers to the 'orlah' of Leviticus, which specifies that for the first three years of a plant's life, its fruit is forbidden to be eaten. All the fruit produced in the fourth year is to be offered to God, and its produce may be consumed only in the fifth year.²⁰²

Trial Eight

Part 5, Section 1

Text

- 33 וכל הגוים ערלים בארבעתם וכל בית ישראל ערלי לב וערלת הלב אינה מנוחת
34 לישראל לעשות רצון בוראם ולעתידי לבא הקב"ה מסיר את ערלת הלב מישראל
35 ואינם מקשין את ערף עוד לפני בוראן שני' והסירותי את לב האבן ואומר ונמלתם

²⁰¹ Genesis Rabbah 46:5.

²⁰² Leviticus 19:23-25.

Translation

And 'all the nations are uncircumcised' (Jer. 9:26) in all the four cases, and 'all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart' (Jer. 9:26). The uncircumcised heart does not allow Israel to do the will of their Creator. And in the future, the Holy One, Blessed be God, will remove the uncircumcised heart from Israel, and they will not harden their stubborn [hearts] any more before their Creator, as it is written, 'And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh' (Ezek. 36:26). And it is written, 'And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin' (Gen. 17:11).

Commentary

This comment seems to be an abrupt insertion into an enumeration list. However, its placement here is opportune, since in its comments upon the human '*orlot*,' it explains why PRE retains this discussion of '*orlah*.' This comment transforms the function of this enumeration list from defining terms to reinforcing the messianic theme of PRE. The proof text from Ezekiel is taken from a passage outlining the messianic promise, complete with Israel being selected from among all the nations and gathered back to the land of Israel, the world united in the worship of God, and universal cleansing and forgiveness.²⁰³

²⁰³ Ezekiel 36:22-28.

Trial Eight

Part 5, Section 2

Text

- 37 אחת באילן מנין שנאמר וכי תבוא אל הארץ ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל וערלתם ערלתו
38 את פריה תאני רבי זעירא אין העץ האמור כאן אלא זה הגפן אם אינן כורתין את
39 עץ ערלתו כל פירות שהוא עושה עוללות קטופים ולא טובים ונפסל יינו מעל גבי
40 המזבח ובשכורתין עץ ערלתו כל פירות שהוא עושה טובים למראה ונבדד יינם
41 להקריב על גבי המזבח כך אבינו אברהם עד שלא נימול הפירי שעשה לא היה טוב
42 במעשיו ונפסל מעל גבי המזבח ובשנימול הפירי שעשה היה טוב במעשיו ונבדד
43 להקריב על גבי המזבח כיון נסך שנאמר ויין נסך וכו'

Translation

Whence do we know of the one [*orlah*] of uncircumcised trees? Because it is written, 'And when you come into the land and have planted all types of trees for food, then you will count the fruit from them as their *orlah*, [for three years they will be as uncircumcised to you]' (Lev. 19:23). Rabbi Zeira taught that the tree which is mentioned here is none other than the vine. If one does not cut off the '*orlah*' from the tree during the first three years, all the fruit which it yields will be gleanings fit only to be picked and are not good. Its wine will be disqualified for use upon the altar. But when its *orlah* is cut off the tree, all the fruit which it yields will appear good, and its wine will be selected to be brought upon the altar. So, too, with our father, Abraham, until he was circumcised, the fruit which he produced was not good in its deeds, and was disqualified from being placed upon the altar. And after he had been circumcised, the fruit he produced was good

in its deeds and was chosen to be brought and placed upon the altar, like wine as libation, as it is written, 'And wine as libation' (Num. 15:5).

Commentary

Line 37: וערלתם 'their uncircumcised [fruit]'—For a more complete description of *orlah*, see the comment to line 28. In summary, the fruit produced in the first three years of a plant's life is not to be consumed, but to be offered to God. I have chosen not to translate this term in this section because the phrase 'uncircumcised fruit' does not seem appropriate in all of the places the term appears and the untranslated term is, therefore, more descriptive.

Line 38: רבי זעירא 'Rabbi Zeira'—Though born in Babylonia, R. Zeira is considered a third generation Palestinian Amora,²⁰⁴ because he emigrated to the Land of Israel where he was ordained and earned the title Rabbi.²⁰⁵ He shares the name with a lesser known fourth generation Babylonian Amora, Rav Zera.²⁰⁶ The first Warsaw edition attributes this section to Rabbi Zerika, a much lesser known third generation Palestinian Amora.²⁰⁷ While the appropriate attribution is unclear, because no parallel texts provide any information, I have chosen to maintain the attributions of the later editions of the Warsaw and Vienna texts.

Line 41: עד שלא נימול הפירי שעשה לא היה טוב 'until he was circumcised, the fruit which he produced was not good'—The fruit or progeny produced by Abraham before his circumcision refers to Ishmael. The implication that Ishmael was not perfect is

²⁰⁴ Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: A Reference Guide*, p. 36.

²⁰⁵ Zvi Kaplan, "Ze'eira (amora)," *Encyclopedia Hebraica/ Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

²⁰⁶ Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: A Reference Guide*, p. 36.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

necessary to validate the selection of Isaac as the sacrifice. This section is an anti-Islam polemic, arguing against the *Islam's* assertion that Ishmael was the son bound upon the altar, for according to this section, he was impure and forbidden to be placed upon the altar. Thus far in the Ten Trials of Abraham, a fairly positive side of an ambivalent relationship with Islam has been presented, but here we see the development of the polemic against Islam. This phrase also serves to foreshadow Trial Nine and the discussion of Ishmael.

Line 42-43: **וכשנימול גבי המזבח מעל גבי המזבח** '...and was disqualified from being placed upon the altar. And after he had been circumcised...'—This passage, to the end of the section, is not included in the later editions of the Warsaw text, though it does appear in the first edition and in the Vienna editions. Since it completes the analogy of Abraham's children and especially the selection of Isaac as the perfect sacrifice, I have chosen to retain it.

Trial Eight

Part 6—The Circumcision of Isaac

Text

- 44 רבי אומר לא עכב אברהם מכל אשר צוהו שני' ובן שמונת ימים וגומ' וכשנולד
45 יצחק בן שמנה ימי' הגישו למילה שנאמר וימל אברהם את יצחק בנו בן שמונת
46 ימים מכאן את למד שכל שהוא מגיש את בנו למילה כאילו כהן גדול מקריב
47 מנחתו ונסכו על גבי המזבח מכאן אמרו חכמים חייב אדם לעשות שמחה ומשתה

48 באותו היום שזכה להמול את בנו כאברהם שמל את בנו שנאמר וימל אברהם את

49 יצחק בנו וגו'

Translation

Rabbi [Ishmael, son of Elisha] said that Abraham never delayed with respect to anything that God commanded him [to do], as it is written, 'And he who is eight days old shall be circumcised' (Gen 17:12). When Isaac was born at eight days old, [Abraham] brought him to be circumcised, as it is written, 'And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac at eight days old' (Gen. 21:4). Therefore, you learn that everyone who brings his son for circumcision is as if [he were] a High Priest bringing his meal offering and his libation [to be placed] on the altar. Therefore, the sages said that a man is obligated to celebrate and drink on the same day that he is privileged to circumcise his son, like Abraham our father, who circumcised his son, as it is written, 'And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac' (Gen. 21:4).

Commentary

This section appears here in the Warsaw and Horev editions, however in the Vienna edition it appears later, after 'Part 9, Section 1.' I have chosen to include the passage here because it is consistent with the Biblical narrative; the discussion of Abraham's willingness to circumcise his son, thereby precedes the discussion of Abraham's grandchildren participating in the covenant of circumcision found in 'Part 8' of this trial.

Line 44: רבי 'Rabbi'—'Rabbi' usually refers to Judah, the Prince, a sixth

generation Tanna²⁰⁸ of the school of Hillel, who is credited with compiling the Mishna. Here, however, the first Warsaw edition and the Vienna editions mention Rabbi Ishmael as the tradent. I have added the attribution of Ishmael, son of Elisha, as an inclusion in the translation of this section, to be consistent with these latter editions.

Line 44: אברהם לא עכב 'Abraham never delayed'—This idea is reflected in the Talmud where Abraham is used as the model to promote the concept of observing *mitzvot* at the first opportunity.²⁰⁹

Trial Eight

Part 7. Introduction

Text

- 50 רבי יוחנן אומ' כל הגוים הבאים בישראל נימולים בטובתם וברצונם ובידאת שמים
51 הם נמולין ואין מאמינים בגר עד שבעה דורות שלא ישובו המים למוצאיהם אבל
52 עבדים נמולים בטובתם וברצונם ושלא ברצונם ואין אמונה בעבדים כך כל העבדים
53 שנמולו עם אבינו אברהם לא נתקינו לא הם ולא זרעם בישראל שנאמר וכל אנשי
54 ביתו יליד בית

Translation

Rabbi Jochanan said that all non-Jews who come into Israel are circumcised by their own free will and with their consent, and in the fear of Heaven, they are circumcised. We do not have faith in a proselyte until seven generations [have passed], so that the waters

²⁰⁸ Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: A Reference Guide*, p. 35.

²⁰⁹ B.T. *Pesachim* 4a.

should not return to their source. But slaves are circumcised by their free will and with their consent, as well as without their consent, nor is confidence placed in slaves. So it was with all the slaves who were circumcised with our father, Abraham; neither they nor their descendants were fully established in Israel, because it is written, 'All the men of his house, those born in the house, [and those bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him]' (Gen. 17:27).

Commentary

This section expresses a position in the long standing debate in rabbinic literature about the place of the convert in the Jewish world. There were periods of great conversion to Judaism, like during the reign of John Hyrcanus, in the Hasmonean era.²¹⁰ As Pharisaic Judaism became prominent, descendants of converts were not only accepted in society, but proved to be among the great sages. Because Pharisaism tended to be a populist movement, its ascendancy and ability to deal with issues of the time attracted more converts, who were readily accepted into Jewish society.²¹¹ In fact, conversion to Judaism became a major factor in the numerical and geographical expansion of Judaism in the Second Temple period.²¹²

In Christian Rome, Jewish proselytism was outlawed, because it was probably seen as a threat to the nascent Christianity.²¹³ Under their oppressive laws, the Jews no longer expected an immediate fulfillment of the messianic promise. They preferred to live in a more insular world, where they found it easier to observe the *mitzvot* without interference from the ruling authorities. These factors contributed to the decline in

²¹⁰ Ben Sasson, *A History*, p. 218 and 228.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-236.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

Jewish proselytism and the unwillingness to accept converts without suspicion.²¹⁴ By the ninth century, the Jews of Europe had experienced periods of forced conversions and lived under strict Christian rule.²¹⁵ And while the Jews of the Land of Israel enjoyed the status of a 'Protected People' under Islamic rule, they still were a distinct sub-class within Islamic society and, therefore, developed many of the same attitudes towards proselytism and converts as did the Jews of Europe.²¹⁶ As a result, the position of PRE is consistent with our dating of the text. PRE does not advocate proselytism nor does it advocate readily integrating converts into Jewish society.

Line 51: למוצאיהם שלא ישובו המים 'so that the waters should not return to their source'—This imagery of testing the conviction of the converts to the seventh generation reflects the tradition of the Talmud. There, the claim is even made that the test endures to the ninth generation.²¹⁷

Trial Eight

Part 7, Section 1

Text

- 55 ולמה מלך בשביל טהרה שלא יטמאו את ארניהם במאבליהם ובמשתייהם וכל מי
56 שהוא אוכל עם ערל כאילו אוכל בשר שקץ וכל הרוחץ עם הערל כאילו רוחץ
57 עם הנבלה וכל הנוגע בערל כאילו נגע במת שהם בחייהם כמתים

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 364.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 410.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 404-405.

²¹⁷ B.T. *Pesachim* 94a.

Translation

Why did [Abraham] circumcise [all the men of his house, including his slaves]? For the sake of purity, so that they would not defile their masters with their food and with their drink. All who eat with an uncircumcised person are as if they were eating flesh of an abomination. All who bath with the uncircumcised are as if they bathed with carrion. All who touch an uncircumcised person are as if they touched the dead, for in their lives, they are like the dead.

Commentary

Not only does this section continue the theme of wariness of converts, but it serves as a polemic against associating with all non-Jews, a view consistent with the socio-historical perspective of the redactor, resulting in his negative view of Christianity and ambivalence toward Islam.

Line 57: כַּמֵּתִים 'are like the dead'—The perception of the 'the other' as being 'like the dead' is not unique to the rabbinic tradition. After the Sermon on the Mount and the curing of a leper, Jesus told a follower, assumed to be Jewish, to leave his dead father to be buried by the dead,²¹⁸ thereby equating Jews with 'the dead.' This passage of PRE perhaps can be seen as an anti-Christian polemic responding to that specific concept.

²¹⁸ Matthew 8:21-22.

Trial Eight

Part 7: Section 2

Text

- 58 ובמיתתם כגבלת הבהמה ואין תפלתן נכנסת לפני הקב"ה ועליהם הוא אומר לא
59 המתים יהללו יה אבל ישראל שהם נמולים תפלתן נכנסת לפני הקב"ה כריה נידוח
60 שנ' ואנחנו נברך יה מעתה ועד עולם הללו יה

Translation

In their death, [the uncircumcised] are like the corpses of the beasts, and their prayer does not reach the Holy One, Blessed be God, and about them, it is written, 'The dead do not praise the Eternal' (Ps. 115:17). But Israel, who are circumcised, their prayer reaches the Holy One, Blessed be God, like a sweet aroma, as it is written, 'Then we will bless God from this time forth and for evermore. You will praise the Eternal' (Ps. 115:18).

Commentary

The xenophobia expressed in this section, as mentioned earlier, was a universal fear. The association of the 'other' with beasts is a frequent occurrence in Christian texts. Corinthians states that the 'heathen's' sacrifice is made not to God, but to a demon, and though a distinction is drawn between the heathen and the Jew, the passage is quite ambiguous.²¹⁹ The meaning of the text is parallel to the meaning of this section: only 'our' prayer is valid and attended to by God.

Line 59: אבל ישראל שהם נמולים 'But Israel, who are circumcised'—This

²¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 20:18-21.

qualification, introducing the unifying idea of circumcision in this trial to this section, may serve to distinguish Christians from Muslims as the 'living dead.' This would reflect the different views of these groups which are expressed consistently throughout PRE.

Trial Eight

Part 8—Circumcision Through the Generations

Text

- 61 ר' אומ' יצחק מל את יעקב ואת עשו ועשו מאס בברית מילה כשם שמאס בבכורה
62 שנאמר ויבן עשו את הבכורה ויעקב דבק בברית מילה ומל את בניו ואת בני בניו
63 ומנין שהיו בני יעקב נימולים שנאמר אך בואת יאתו לנו האנשים לשבת וכתוב אחר
64 אומר אך בזות נאות לכם אם תהיו כמונו מכאן אתה למד שבני יעקב נמולין היו

Translation

Rabbi said that Isaac circumcised Jacob and Esau. Esau despised the covenant of circumcision just as he despised the birthright, as it is written, 'So Esau despised his birthright' (Gen 25:34). But Jacob clung to the covenant of circumcision, and circumcised his sons and his grandsons. Whence do we know that the sons of Jacob were circumcised? As it is written, 'Only on this condition will the men, [the sons of Jacob] agree with us [the countrymen of Shechem] to live among us [and be one of our kindred, if every male among us becomes circumcised, as they are circumcised]' (Gen. 34:22). Another text says, 'Only on this condition will we [the sons of Jacob] agree with you [Shechem], if you will become like us [in that every male among you is circumcised]'

(Gen. 34:15). From this you can learn that the sons of Jacob were circumcised.

Commentary

Line 61: וְאֶת עֵשָׂו 'and Esau' The inclusion of Esau as an entrant into the covenant as marked by his circumcision is in direct distinction to the book of Jubilees, which declares that Esau, his children, and Ishmael, and his children were not selected by God to be 'drawn near.'²²⁰ In this way, PRE consistently adopts a divergent view from that expressed in Jubilees.

Line 61-62: ...וְעֵשָׂו סָאָס 'Esau despised...'—Though this statement seems to be consistent with the passage from Jubilees referenced above, it expresses the feelings of Esau and not those of God. Though Esau hates the *mitzvot*, God still views him as a participant in the covenant. Esau's emotional attachment to the *mitzvot* also demonstrates his involvement in the covenant, and therefore is consistent with PRE's opposition to Jubilees views.

Line 62-64: ...וַיִּעַקֵּב דִּבְקָה 'But Jacob clung...'—This passage functions not only to demonstrate that Abraham's great-grandsons practiced circumcision, but also to reinforce and recall the idea of circumcision as a primary identifier of inclusion in the clan and the covenant.

²²⁰ Jubilees 15:30.

Trial Eight

Part 9. Circumcision and the Exodus

Text

- 65 בני יעקב מלך את בניהם ואת בני בניהם והנחילום לחק עולם עד שעמד פרעה
66 הרשע וגזר גזירות קשות ומנע מהם ברית מילה וביום שיצאו בני ישראל ממצרים
67 נמולו כל העם מקטן ועד גדול שנאמר כי מולים היו כל העם וגו'

Translation

The sons of Jacob circumcised their sons and their grandsons. They bestowed it to them as an inheritance for an everlasting statute, [which was observed] until Pharaoh, the Wicked, arose and decreed harsh laws concerning them and forbade them from observing the covenant of circumcision. And on the day went the Children of Israel left Egypt, all the people were circumcised, both young and old, as it is written, 'For all the people that came out were circumcised' (Josh. 5:5).

Commentary

Line 65: ...עד עולם לחק 'for an everlasting statute, [which was observed] until...'—There is a variety of opinions expressed in the Midrash about the observance of the *mitzvah* of circumcision in Egypt. In describing how God tested every generation, including references to Ten Trials of Abraham, Numbers Rabbah explains how only the Levites observed circumcision in Egypt.²²¹ Despite the prohibition, the Midrash claims that Moses was born circumcised.²²² Exodus Rabbah parallels our story. When the

²²¹ Numbers Rabbah 15:12.

²²² Exodus Rabbah 1:20.

Israelites learned that the uncircumcised could not eat the Passover lamb, they immediately circumcised all who were uncircumcised, not as a result of piety, however, but due to a desire to partake of the feast.²²³ While there is a variety of opinions, all agree that upon emerging from Egypt, all Israelites were circumcised, which is consistent with the overarching theme of this trial of circumcision as a primary identifier of participation in the covenant.

Lines 65-66: פרעה הרשע 'Pharaoh, the Wicked'—The concept of differentiating the good from the evil or wicked is not unique to PRE. In Ecclesiastes Rabbah, this distinction is made and extended, by saying that the evil are destroyed by plague.²²⁴ Ruth Rabbah further indicts Pharaoh and all the Egyptians, claiming that there was not one Egyptian who possessed any quality meriting exemption from the plagues.²²⁵ It is these notions which lead PRE to retain the epithet of 'Pharaoh, the Wicked.' As mentioned earlier, PRE's labeling of Hagar as Pharaoh's daughter also transforms this statement into a subtle polemic against Islam, further reinforcing the negative side of the ambivalent relationship of the redactor with the Muslim rulers.

Trial Eight

Part 9, Section 1

Text

68 וחיו ישראל לוקחין דם ברית מילה ונותנין על משקוף בתייהם וכשעבר הקב"ה לנגוף

²²³ Exodus Rabbah 14:5.

²²⁴ Ecclesiastes Rabbah 9:14.

²²⁵ Ruth Rabbah 6:1.

- 69 את מצרים ראה על משקוף בתיהם דם הברית מילה ודם הפסח ונתמלא רדמים על
 70 ישראל שנאמר ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך בדמך לא כתיב כאן אלא
 71 בדמיך בשני דמים בדם ברית מילה ודם פסח לכך נאמר ואמר לך בדמיך חיי

Translation

The Israelites took the blood of the covenant of circumcision, and they put it upon the lintel of their houses. When the Holy One, Blessed be God, passed over to plague the Egyptians and saw the blood of the covenant of circumcision and the blood of the Paschal lamb upon the lintel of their houses, [God] was filled with compassion for Israel, as it is written, 'And when I passed over you and saw you rolling in your blood, I said to you, "Through your bloods, live; I said to you through your bloods, live"' (Ezek. 16:6).

'Through your blood' is not written here, rather 'through your bloods,' with two bloods, the blood of the covenant of circumcision and the blood of the Paschal lamb. Therefore, it is written, 'I said to you, "Through your bloods, live"' (Ezek. 16:6).

Commentary

Line 69: ...וקחין דם ברית מילה ונתמלא... 'the blood of the covenant of circumcision, and they put it...'—In the first Warsaw edition, 'and the blood of the Passover lamb,' was added to this phrase, consistent with the Palestinian Targum and the point of the text.²²⁶ Though, a key functional element of the drash is the plural form of 'bloods,' about which more will be explained in the next section, I have chosen to keep the omission of this phrase, in accordance with the Vienna, Horev, and later Warsaw edition. The exclusive mention of 'the blood of circumcision' highlights the thrust of this passage: covenantal blood elicits God's compassion and favor. Numbers Rabbah goes so

²²⁶ Palestinian Targum to Exodus 12:13.

far as to explain that the scent of the blood of circumcision is a sweet incense to God.²²⁷

Again, the binding theme of this trial is emphasized and stressed through allusion to these other texts.

Line 69: **רחמים ותמלא** '[God] was filled with compassion'—As was the case when God visited Abraham as he was recovering from his circumcision, the act of circumcision, as represented by the blood, elicits God's compassion in the same manner as does sacrifice. Whether the sacrifice of the foreskin, the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb, or of any of the other commanded sacrifices, what God provides is a direct result of the observance of God's commandments.

Trial Eight

Part 9, Section 2

Text

- 72 רבי אליעזר אומר מה ראה הכתו' לומר שתי פעמים ואומר לך בדמיון חיי ואומר לך
73 חיי אלא אומר הקב"ה בזכות דם ברית מילה ודם פסח נגאלו ממצרים ובזכות ברית
74 מילה ובזכות פסח אתם עתידים להגאל בסוף מלכות רביעית לכך נאמר ואומר לך
75 בדמיון חיי ואומר ולך בדמיון חיי

Translation

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Why did the text repeat ['through your bloods'] twice, 'I say to you, through your bloods, live; and I say to you through your bloods, live' (Ezek. 16:6)?" the

²²⁷ Numbers Rabbah 14:12.

Holy One, Blessed be God, said that by the merit of the blood of the covenant of circumcision and the blood of the Paschal lamb [the Israelites] were redeemed from Egypt. And by the merit of the covenant of circumcision and by the merit of the covenant of the Passover, in the future, you will be redeemed at the end of the fourth kingdom. Therefore it is written, 'I say to you, through your bloods, live; I say to you through your bloods, live'" (Ezek. 16:6).

Commentary

Line 72 & 73: בַּדָּמַיִךְ 'through your bloods'—In addition to the play upon repetition of the entire phrase which this section discusses, is a subtle grammatical play with the word 'your bloods.' Reflecting a tradition found in the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*,²²⁸ the word 'blood' is written '*bedamayich*,' which has been rendered, 'through your bloods' to emphasize the plural nature of the word. The word was not written in the singular, '*bedamayich*,' 'in your blood.' This allows for the midrashist to speak of the combination of the two types of blood, the blood of the covenant and the blood of the Passover lamb. As mentioned in the last section, it is the observance of all the *mitzvot* that functions as a sacrifice in eliciting God's providence.

²²⁸ *Mekhila de Rabbi Ishmael parshat Bo 5.*

Trial Eight

Part 9, Section 3

Text

- 76 שלשה עינויים הם עינוי הצום ועינוי בית האסורים ועינוי הדרך עינוי הצום מנין
77 ענתי בצום נפשי עינוי בית האסורים מנין ענו בכבל רגלתינוי הדרך מנין ענה
78 בדרך כחי ומעינוי הדרך לא מלו וכשיצאו ממצרים נמולו כל העם מקטן ועד גדול
79 שנ' כי מולים היו

Translation

There are three afflictions: the affliction of the fast, the affliction of the prison, and the affliction of the journey. Whence do we know of the affliction of the fast? 'I afflicted my soul with fasting' (Ps. 35:18). Whence do we know of the affliction of prison? 'They hurt his feet with fetters' (Ps. 105:18). Whence do we know of the affliction of the road? 'He weakened my strength on the way' (Ps. 102:23). Because of the affliction of the road, [the Israelites] did not circumcise [in the wilderness], but when they left Egypt all the people were circumcised, both young and old, as it is written, '[For all the people that came out of Egypt] were circumcised[, but all the people born in the wilderness during the Exodus from Egypt were not circumcised]' (Josh. 5:5).

Commentary

In the Vienna edition, Rabbi Ishmael's comments about Abraham never delaying the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* directly precede this section, as discussed earlier.

Line 76: עינויים 'afflictions'—This word is discussed at length in rabbinic

literature, usually in connection with The Day of Atonement and the other fast days, upon which we are commanded to 'afflict' ourselves. The use of this word here recalls that the timing of Abraham's circumcision set the date for the observance of The Day of Atonement in PRE.

Trial Eight

Part 10—Circumcision and Revelation

Text

- 80 רבי ישמעאל אומר ובי ערלים שמעו קולו של הקב"ה אומר על הר סיני אנכי במולים
81 היו אלא שלא כתקנן והיו כורתים את העורלה ולא היו פורעים את המילה וכל מי
82 שהוא מל ולא פרע את המילה כאילו לא מל לכך אמר הכתוב לא מלו היו ישראל
83 קדמו

Translation

Rabbi Ishmael said, "Did the uncircumcised hear the voice of the Holy One, Blessed be God, saying, on Mount Sinai, 'I am [the Eternal, thy God]' (Ex. 20:2)? They were circumcised, but not as ordained. They had cut off the foreskin, but they had not uncovered the membrane of the corona. Everyone who has been circumcised, but has not had the membrane of the corona uncovered, is as though he had not been circumcised. Therefore, the text says, Israel was not circumcised of old.

Commentary

Lines 82-83: קדמו 'Israel was not circumcised of old'—

This phrase is presented in the manner of a proof text, however, it seems to be a paraphrase of the proof text employed in the last section, 'For all the people that came out of Egypt were circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the Exodus from Egypt were not circumcised' (Josh. 5:5). This text would include Israelites who were either not circumcised at all, or Israelites with improper circumcisions.

Trial Eight

Part 11—Circumcision and Entering the Land of Israel

Text

- 84 וכשבאו ישראל לארץ ישראל אמר הקב"ה ליהושע יהושע אי אתה יודע שאין ישראל
85 נימולין כותקנן חוזר ומל אותם פעם שנית שנאמר בעת ההיא אמר ה' אל יהושע
86 עשה לך חרבות צורים ויעש לו יהושע חרבות צורים וגו' ויעש לו יהושע חרבות
87 צורים וקבץ את כל הערלות עד שעשה אותם כגבעה שנאמר וימל את בני ישראל
88 אל גבעת הערלות

Translation

When they came to the land, the Holy One, Blessed be God, said to Joshua, "Joshua, do you know that the Israelites are not circumcised according to the proper regulation? Circumcise them a second time," as it is written, 'the Eternal said to Joshua, "Make yourself knives of flint, and circumcise again the Children of Israel a second time." And Joshua made himself knives of flint' (Josh. 5:2-3). And he gathered all the foreskins until he had made them into a hill, as it is written, 'And he circumcised the Children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins' (Josh. 5:3).

Commentary

Line 84: **לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל** 'to the Land of Israel'—This phrase is consistent with the, Vienna, Horev, and first Warsaw editions, though later Warsaw editions replace 'Israel' with 'Canaan.' I have chosen to maintain the text's reading of 'Israel,' because the title 'The Land of Israel' carries a variety of connotations and an allusion to the messianic promise and the covenant, allowing for a richer reading of the text, and which maintains consistency with these major themes of PRE.

Trial Eight

Part 11, Section 1

Text

89 וַהֲיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לִקְחִים אֶת הָעֶרְלָה וְאֶת הַדָּם וּמָכְסִין אוֹתָן בְּעֹפֶר הַמִּדְבָּר וּכְשָׂבָא בָלַעַם
90 רָאָה אֶת כָּל הַמִּדְבָּר מִלֵּא מֵעֶרְלוֹתֵיהֶן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמַי מִי יִזְכֵּל לַעֲמֹד בּוֹכּוֹת דָּם
91 בְּרִית מִלָּה זֹאת שֶׁהִיא מְכֻסָּה בְּעֹפֶר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר מִי מִנֵּה עֹפֶר יַעֲקֹב מִכָּאֵן אֲמָרוּ הַתִּקְיָנוּ
92 חֲכָמִים שִׁיחִיו מְכַסִּין אֶת הָעֶרְלָה וְאֶת הַדָּם בְּעֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ שֶׁנִּמְשְׁלוּ לְעֹפֶר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְהָיָה
93 זֶרַעַךְ כְּעֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ

Translation

The Israelites took the foreskin and the blood and covered them with the dust of the wilderness. When Balaam came, he saw all the wilderness filled with the Israelites' foreskins. He said, "Who is able to stand on the merit of this blood of the covenant of circumcision that is covered by the dust? As it is written, 'Who can count the dust of

Jacob?' (Num. 23:10). Therefore, the sages instituted that they should cover the foreskin and the blood with the dust of the earth, because they are compared to the dust of the earth, as it is written, 'And your seed will be as the dust of the earth' (Gen. 28:14).

Commentary

Line 89: וְחָדָם וּמִכְסֵּי '...and the blood and covered [them]'—Jubilees discusses this tradition of burying all blood and other material derived from living creatures as being cathartic for Noah and his children, emphasizing the burial of blood three times..²²⁹ As opposed to Jubilees, PRE associates this tradition with Joshua, and, by extension, to the act of circumcision, which is intimately related to Abraham. In so doing, PRE has attempted to supercede the tradition which appears in Jubilees by attaching the tradition to a more significant Biblical figure, namely Abraham, who stands in the patriarchal line.

Line 89: בַּלְעָם 'Balaam'—In Numbers, Balaam was hired by the king of Maob to curse the Israelites. After begrudgingly accepting the commission, he attempted to curse them, but he uncontrollably blessed and praised the Israelites..²³⁰ Some of the rabbis counted Balaam as one of the seven prophets of the non-Jewish world,²³¹ seeing him as being of equal prophetic prowess to Moses,²³² or perhaps even greater..²³³ Others felt that his prophetic powers were of a low order²³⁴ and that he should be counted among the evil people of the world..²³⁵ He is so evil that he would destroy an entire people

²²⁹ Jubilees 7:30-33.

²³⁰ Numbers 22:2-24:25.

²³¹ B.T. *Bava Batra* 15b-16a.

²³² Numbers Rabbah 20:1.

²³³ *Sifre* to Deuteronomy *piska* 16.

²³⁴ P.T. *Sota* 25b.

²³⁵ M. *Avot* 5:19.

without cause.²³⁶

In some traditions, Balaam is associated with Pharaoh, as the advisor who recommended the killing of Israelite baby boys.²³⁷ This connection to Pharaoh may be based upon to Hagar's relationship with Pharaoh, and may function as an anti-Islamic polemic. However, this connection seems too far removed from the themes of PRE to hold much weight. Some scholars have also tried to associate Balaam with Jesus, the most clear association is by way of comparison: Jesus, the apostate Jew, being compared to Balaam, the non-Jewish, idolatrous prophet.²³⁸ It is, therefore, difficult to infer a socio-political purpose for the inclusion of Balaam, outside of his rich literary history.

Lines 91-93: ...מכאן אמרו. 'Therefore, the sages instituted...'—This passage is evidence of the geographical location of the redaction of PRE. This text reflects the practice of the Jews of the Land of Israel who covered the blood and foreskin, after circumcision, with dirt, in contrast to the Babylonian Jews who used water.²³⁹

Trial Eight

Part 12, Circumcision in the Monarchy

Text

- 94 וכך היו ישראל נחוגין למול עד שנחלקו לשני ממלכות ומלכות אפרים מנעו
95 נתמעה מהם ברית מילה

²³⁶ Numbers Rabbah 20:1.

²³⁷ B.T. *Sanhedrin* 106b.

²³⁸ B.T. *Gittin* 57a.

²³⁹ Frielander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, n. 3, p. 212.

Translation

After that, the Israelites continued [the practice of] circumcision until they were divided into two kingdoms, and the kingdom of Ephraim abstained from the covenant of circumcision.

Commentary

Line 94-95: ...נתסוּעָה אֶפְרַיִם מִנֶּעוּן 'Ephraim abstained'—This section reinforces the converse side of PRE's position that observance of the commandments, particularly circumcision, is rewarded: abandonment of the *mitzvot* is punished. Ephraim will be conquered. A parallel text can be found in Jubilees. This midrashic text asserts that the sons of Beliar, another name for Satan, will lead Israel to abandon the practice,²⁴⁰ thus mitigating the responsibility of Ephraim in the abandonment of the practice. It seems that this idea undermines PRE's argument, thus underscoring the opposition of PRE to Jubilees.

Trial Eight

Part 12, Section 1

Text

- 96 ועמד אליהו ובור לטוב וקנא קנאה גדולה ונשבע על השמים שלא להוריד טל
97 ומטר על הארץ ושמעה איזבל ובקשה להרוג אותו ועמד אליהו והיה מתפלל לפני
98 הקב"ה אמר לו הקב"ה טוב אתה מאבותיך עשו בקש להרוג את יעקב וברח מלפניו.

²⁴⁰ Jubilees 15:33.

her enemy, she operated through instigation and manipulation of her husband, Ahab.²⁴²

PRE is utilizing this rabbinic view of Jezebel, combined with her ongoing conflicts with Elijah in the Bible, to enrich the simple meaning of the text.

Line 98: סוב אתה מאבותיך 'Are you better than your fathers?'—This question, upon which this section is dependant, alludes to Elijah's statement, "It is enough now, Eternal, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."²⁴³ Even the Hebrew of the Biblical verse, while not identical, is strongly echoed by the wording of PRE. It is likely that this type of allusion would be very familiar to PRE's intended audience.

Line 101-102: ... וכתוב אחר... 'another text...'—The second quote from 1 Samuel is not found in the first Warsaw edition, but is present in Luria's edition and the Vienna and Horev editions. I have chosen to keep it to match these later editions and because it more directly addresses the issue of personal responsibility in self-protection, a minor theme in PRE, but a major theme of this passage.

Trial Eight

Part 12, Section 2

Text

- 103 ועמד אליהו זכור לטוב ברח מארץ ישראל והלך לו להר חורב שנאמר ויקם ויאכל
104 וישתה וגו' ושם נגלה לו הקב"ה אמר לו מה לך פה אליהו אמר לו קנא קנאתי
105 אמר לו לעולם אתה מקנא קנאת בשטים על גלוי עריות שנאמר פנחס בן אלעזר בן

²⁴² P.T. *Sanhedrin* 51a.

²⁴³ 1 Kings 19:4.

Translation

Elijah, may he be remembered for good, rose and fled from the land of Israel, and went to Mount Horev, as it is written, 'And he rose, and ate and drank' (1 Kings 19:8). There, the Holy One, Blessed be God, was revealed to him and [God] said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9). He answered God, saying, "I have surely been zealous" (1 Kings 19:10). [God] said to him, "You are always zealous! You were zealous in *Shittim* due to immortality, as it is written, 'Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest[, turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with passion for me among them]' (Num. 25:11). Here, too, you are zealous. By your life! They shall not observe the covenant of circumcision until you see it with your own eyes."

Commentary

Line 104: מה לך פה אליהו "What are you doing here, Elijah?"—This question possesses an almost a humorous quality. It introduces a section which discusses Elijah's love of God and fanatical protection of the *mitzvot*. The residual effect of Elijah's revolutionary role in the Biblical period and the record of his ascent to heaven in the fiery chariot²⁴⁴ led the rabbis to associate Elijah not only with zeal, but with the messianic redemption, as well.

This concept had its origin in the Biblical period. Malachi speaks of Elijah as a herald of the fulfillment of the messianic promise.²⁴⁵ This tradition emerges in the

²⁴⁴ 2 Kings 2:11.

²⁴⁵ Malachi 3:23.

Christian literature as well; Jesus is claimed to have stated the John the Baptist was the reincarnation of Elijah, thus validating claims of Jesus, who followed, as the messiah.²⁴⁶ These Christian claims made Elijah a politically charged character.

By instilling in Elijah, the herald of the messiah, the zealous protection of the *mitzvah* of circumcision, PRE has created a strong anti-Christian polemic. As discussed earlier, one of the first *mitzvot* abandoned by nascent Christianity was the practice of circumcision. By making Elijah responsible for the preservation of the observance of the *mitzvah*, PRE undermines the arguments of Matthew and Mark that John the Baptist was Elijah, in that according to PRE, Elijah would never allow the abandonment of the *mitzvot* in general and circumcision in specific.

Additionally, the proof texts provided are cases in which Elijah was protecting the rituals of the covenant with God, for example 'They have forsaken Your covenant and torn down Your altars.'²⁴⁷ This reinforces the notion of Elijah as the protector of the *mitzvot*, which argues against his endorsing a messiah that promotes the abandonment of the *mitzvot*.

Line 105: פנחס 'Phineas'—PRE identifies *Pinchas*, or Phineas, with Elijah both here and in Chapter 47. As such, he carries many of the same messianic connotations as does Elijah, as he is seen as a precursor to the messiah.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Matthew 11:2-15, 17:9-13, and Mark 9:11-13.

²⁴⁷ 1 Kings 19:10.

²⁴⁸ Malachi 3:1.

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²⁴⁶ Matthew 11:2-15, 17:9-13, and Mark 9:11-13.

²⁴⁷ 1 Kings 19:10.

²⁴⁸ Malachi 3:1.

Trial Eight

Part 12. Conclusion

Text

- 107 מכאן התקינו חכמים להיות עושי מושב כבוד למלאך הברית שנקרא אליהו זכור
108 לטוב שנאמר מלאך הברית אשר אתם הפצים וגו'

Translation

Therefore, the sages instituted [the custom] that one should make a seat of honor for the Messenger of the Covenant, who is called Elijah, may his memory be for good, as it is written, 'And the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, he is coming' (Mal. 3:1).

Commentary

The connection to the presence of Elijah's chair at a *Brit Milah* ceremony further emphasizes the anti-Christian polemic that we are still awaiting Elijah to herald the coming of the messiah, and, again, associates Elijah with the preservation of the ritual of circumcision in the face of the Christian abandonment of this practice in particular.

Trial Nine

Ishmael

Text

- 1 פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק ל
2 הנס התשיעי נולד ישמעאל בקשת ונתרבה בקשת שנאמר ויהי אלהים את הנער
3 ויגדל וגו' ונטל קשת וחצים והיה יורה אור הפנות וראה את יצחק יושב לבדו וירה
4 חץ להרגו וראה שרה והגידה לאברהם ואמרה לו בזה וכוה עשה ישמעאל ליצחק
5 אלא עמוד וכתוב ליצחק כל מה שנשבע הקב"ה ליתן לך ולזרעך שאין בן האמה
6 הוה יורש עם בני עם יצחק שנאמר ותאמר לאברהם גרש וגו'

Translation

Chapter 30

The Ninth Trial: Ishmael was born with a bow and grew up with a bow, as it is written, 'God was with the youth, and he grew[; he lived in the wilderness and became an archer]' (Gen. 21:20). He took a bow and arrows, and shot at the birds. He saw Isaac sitting alone and shot an arrow at him to kill him. Sarah saw [this] and told Abraham. She said to him, "Ishmael did this and that to Isaac, therefore stand up and deed to Isaac all that the Holy One, Blessed be God, promised to give to you and your progeny. Thus, the son of this maidservant will not inherit with my son, with Isaac," as it is written, 'She said to Abraham, "Expel [this maidservant and her son so he will not inherit with my son, with Isaac]" (Gen. 21:10).

Commentary

Line 2: בקשת 'bow'—*Keshet* is also the Hebrew name for zodiac sign of Sagittarius, the archer. It is possible that PRE is making an astrological allusion, because Ishmael's nature is one of an archer or hunter as will be explained next.

Line 2: ונתרבה בקשת 'and he grew with the bow'—This statement argues for the translation of *keshet*, in its first appearance, as 'bow' for consistency. Isaiah associates the bow with war and violence,²⁴⁹ perhaps indicating a violent tendency in Ishmael. Given the patriarchal status of Ishmael in the Islamic world, any value laden remark about Ishmael can be understood as a negative statement about Islam. Given our location and dating of the redaction of PRE, we can expect to see many references to Islam and to Islamic literature.

Line 3: ונטל קשת וחצים 'he took a bow and arrows'—The image of Ishmael as an archer is found in the *Torah*, in the verse brought as a proof text in this section. The Midrash interprets this profession in a negative light. The commentary portrays Ishmael as evil and violent.²⁵⁰

Line 3: חפונות 'the birds'—The word '*ponot*' is a difficult to translate, as it is a quite rare word. It may be a variant form of the word '*suga*,' the name of a species of bird.²⁵¹

Line 3: וירח חץ לברו יושב 'He saw Isaac sitting alone and shot an arrow at him to kill him'—This image is shared by Genesis Rabbah, in which Ishmael is

²⁴⁹ Isaiah 21:15.

²⁵⁰ Genesis Rabbah 53:15.

²⁵¹ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p. 215, n. 4.

described as being exceedingly malicious and evil.²⁵² The more neutral stance of PRE may result from the ambivalent view of Islam presented throughout PRE, or due to a degree of censorship by the redactor as a result of living under Islamic rule. Still, the intentional targeting of Isaac must still be viewed as an evil act of aggression, reflecting the redactor's experience of Islamic persecution, even if they are more tolerant than were the Christian authorities.

Trial Nine

Part 1—The Expulsion

Text

- 7 בן תימא אומר אמרה שרה לאברהם כתוב גט גרושין ושלח את האמה הזאת ואת
8 בנה מעלי ומעל יצחק בני בעולם הזה ומן העולם הבא ומכל הרעות שבאו על
9 אברהם הרע בעיניו הדבר הזה הרבה מאד שנאמר וירע הדור מאד וגו'

Translation

Ben Tema said that Sarah said to Abraham, "Write a bill of divorce and send this maidservant and her son away from me and from Isaac, my son, in this world and in the world to come. More than all other misfortunes that befell Abraham, this thing was extremely distressful, as it is written, 'And this thing was extremely distressful' (Gen. 21:11).

²⁵² *Ibid.* 53:11.

Commentary

Line 7: גט גרושין 'bill of divorce'—While more will be discussed about Hagar's status later in this trial, it is important to note that the Midrash views Hagar as being a 'wife' of Abraham, necessitating a 'bill of divorce' to dissolve the marriage. The status of Hagar is vital to the status of Ishmael and his rights of inheritance, and therefore the claims of Islam of being the authentic descendants of the covenant.

Line 9: חרע בעיני 'was distressful to him'—The Palestinian Targum explains that Abraham was distressed by things that Ishmael would do in the future,²⁵³ not by the prospect of evicting Hagar and Ishmael. This does not seem to be an appropriate reading of PRE, as Abraham will continue to visit Ishmael and maintain a relationship with him. Also, Abraham will remarry Hagar at a later point. These events argue for a reading of the text which has Abraham distressed by the prospect of life without the woman and her son, whom he loved.

Trial Nine

Part 1, Section 1

Text

- 10 רבי יחודה אומר באותה הלילה נגלה עליי הקב"ה אמר לו אבדהם אין אתה יודע
11 שהייתה שרה ראויה לאשה ממעי אמה והיא חברתך ואשת בריתך לא נקראת שרה
12 שפחתך אלא אשתך לא נקראת הגר אשתך אלא שפחתך כל מה שדברה שרה

²⁵³ Palestinian Targum to Genesis 21:11.

Translation

Rabbi Judah said that in the night that the Holy One, Blessed be God, was revealed unto [Abraham], God said to him, "Abraham, do you know that Sarah was appointed to thee for a wife from her mother's womb? She is your companion, and the wife of your covenant. Sarah is not called 'your maidservant,' rather 'your wife.' Neither is Hagar called 'your wife,' rather 'your maidservant. All that Sarah has spoken, she has uttered truthfully. Do not be distressed," as it is written, 'And God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed' (Gen. 21:12).

Commentary

This section argues against the idea that Hagar was a wife of Abraham. This contradicts statements previously presented in PRE and statements yet to come, but it maintains consistency with a major theme of ambivalence about Islam, Ishmael, and Hagar, which runs through PRE.

However, Malachi suggests a reading of the word 'wife,' which may provide an avenue for harmonization: in Malachi, the term 'wife' implies a first wife, a wife of a man's youth.²⁵⁴ This would allow for Sarah to be the wife, *i.e.*, the first wife, and though Hagar may be married to Abraham, she would have to be referred by another.

²⁵⁴ Malachi 2:14.

Trial Nine

Part 1, Section 2

Text

- 14 השכים אברהם וכתב גט גירושין ונתן להגר ושלה אותה ואת בנה מעליו ומעל יצחק
15 בנו מן העולם הזה ומן העולם הבא שנאמר וישכם אברהם בבקר ויקח וגו' וישלחה
16 בגט גירושין ולקח את הרדיד וקשר במתניה כדי שיהא שוטף אחריה לידע שהיא
17 שפחה ולא עוד אלא כשרצה אבינו אברהם לראות את ישמעאל בנו ולראות את
18 הדרך שהלכו בה

Translation

Abraham rose early, and wrote a bill of divorce, and gave it to Hagar, and he sent her and her son away from himself, from Isaac, his son, in this world, and in the world to come, as it is written, 'And Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water' (Gen. 21:14). He sent her away with a bill of divorce, and he took the veil, and bound it around her waist, so that it would drag behind her to disclose that she was a slave. Not only this, but also because Abraham desired to see Ishmael, his son, and to see the way that they traveled.

Commentary

Line 14: גט גירושין 'and he wrote a bill of divorce'—Again, the issue of Hagar's marital status is raised. However, now she is being released with a certain degree of legal protection. It also recalls the scenario with Pharaoh, in which the concept

of *Ketubah* and *Get* were anachronistically inserted into the text.

Line 16-17: לידע שהיא שפחה 'to disclose that she was a slave'—The inclusion of this rationalization is consistent with the commentary of *Genesis Rabbah*, which stresses Hagar's status as a slave and the need to highlight that status as she departs.²⁵⁵

Line 17-18: לראות את הדרך 'to see the path'—This is a clear indication of Abraham's distress at expelling Hagar and Ishmael, consistent with the depiction of this relationship throughout PRE. When combined with the retention of the previous statement and the tradition from which it stems, we are again reminded of the ambivalent relationship of PRE with Hagar, Ishmael, and Islam, in general.

Trial Nine

Part 2—Idolatry

Text

- 19 ובזכות אברהם לא חסרו מים מן החממת וכיון שהגיעה לפתח המדבר התחילה תועה
20 אור ע"ז של בית אביה ומיד חסרו המים מן החממת שנ' ותלך ותתע בן שבע עשרה
21 שנה הלך ישמעאל מבית אביו ויצחק מבן ארבעים שנה ובזכות אבינו אברהם לא
22 חסרו המים מן החממת וכיון שהגיעה לפתח המדבר התחילה תועה אור ע"ז של
23 בית אביה חסרו המים מן החממת ועייפה נפשו של ישמעאל בצמא ותלך ותתע אך

²⁵⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* 53:13.

Translation

By the merit of our father, Abraham, the water did not empty from the bottle. But when [Hagar] reached the entrance to the wilderness, Hagar began to go astray after the idolatry of her father's house; and immediately the water was emptied from the bottle, as it is written, 'And she left and wandered' (Gen 21:14). Ishmael was seventeen years old when he left the house of his father and Isaac, his son, and Isaac was forty. By the merit of our father, Abraham, the water did not empty from the bottle. But when she reached the entrance to the wilderness, she began to go astray after the idolatry of her father's house; the water emptied from the bottle, and the soul of Ishmael was faint with thirst. 'And she left and wandered' (Gen. 21:14). The meaning of 'and she wandered' is only idolatry, as it is written about [this word], 'They are vanity, a work of delusion' (Jer. 10:15).

Commentary

Line 20: וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּטְהַר 'And she left and wandered'—The word 'tetah' provides the hinge upon which this midrash turns. It can be rendered 'wander' in the sense of 'traveling without direction,' or 'wander' in the sense of 'going astray, to err.' While the proof text could well be rendered, 'and she left and meandered,' according to PRE, a better rendering would be, 'she left and [began] to err.' This idea is reinforced by the notion that her attachment to Abraham and his practices afforded her a degree of providence. When she digressed, either physically or spiritually from Abraham's path, she lost her access to this Divine providence.

There is another play on the word '*tetah*' in this Midrash. The root of this word is '*t.e.h.*' which when constructed as '*toah*,' carries the additional meaning of 'wickedness.' Therefore, when Hagar and Ishmael wandered, '*tetah*,' they were engaging in wickedness, '*toah*,' providing another reason for the loss of divine providence.

Line 21-22: עשרה שנה...ארבעים 'seventeen...forty'—The Venice edition lists Ishmael's age as twenty-seven, consistent with Genesis Rabbah.²⁵⁶ This would make Isaac fourteen at the time of Ishmael's departure, rather than four, a reading found in the manuscript tradition.²⁵⁷ The first Warsaw edition reads 'ten' for Isaac's age, while the Vienna edition reads 'forty,' probably the age at which Isaac married and therefore left his father's house.

The inclusion of the sons' ages in this section serves to portray them as adults, who are both knowledgeable and responsible for their behavior. Isaac, therefore, shares the responsibility of the *Akeidah* with Abraham, as the tenth trial will point out. Similarly, the prospect of Abraham expelling an adult Ishmael and his mother is less problematic than expelling a mother and infant, or even an adolescent.

Line 23-24: ותלך ותתע אין... 'And she left and wandered...'—Horowitz recommends omitting this proof text and the next.²⁵⁸ Though the references seem vague and only associatively connected, I have chosen to retain them because they maintain consistency with the printed tradition. They also enrich the meaning of the text by providing the midrashic basis for allegations of Hagar's idolatry and loss of providence in the face of Abraham's merit. They also describe the type of idolatry in which Hagar was

²⁵⁶ Genesis Rabbah 53:13.

²⁵⁷ Constantinople M.

²⁵⁸ Horowitz, *PRE Critical Edition*, p. 101.

engaged in the wilderness.

Trial Nine

Part 3—God Hears Ishmael

Text

- 25 וַחֲלַךְ וַהֲשִׁיךְ אֶת עַצְמוֹ תַּחַת חֲרָלֵי הַמִּדְבָּר לַחֲיוֹת חֲרָשָׁן עָלָיו וַאֲמַר אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרָהָם
26 אֲבִי יֵשׁ לְךָ תוֹצְאוֹת מוֹת קָח אֶת נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי וְאַל אָמוּת בְּעַמָּא וְנִעְרַר לִי, שֵׁנֹאמַר כִּי
27 שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת קוֹל הַנֶּעֱרַר בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא שֵׁם וְשֵׁם נִפְתְּחָה לָהֶם הַבַּּאֵר שֶׁנִּבְרְאָת בֵּין
28 הַשְּׂמֻשׁוֹת וַחֲלָכוּ וְשָׁתוּ וּמָלְאוּ אֶת הַחֲמַת מַיִם שֵׁנֹאמַר וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת עֵינָיו וְשֵׁם
29 הַנִּיחָו אֶת הַבַּּאֵר נִמְשָׁם נִשְׁאֹו רִגְלֵיהֶם וַחֲלָכוּ כָּל הַמִּדְבָּר כָּל עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לַמִּדְבָּר
30 פֶּאֶרֶן וּמִצְאֹו שֵׁם מוֹצְאֵי מַיִם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שֵׁם שֵׁנֹאמַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּמִּדְבָּר פֶּאֶרֶן

Translation

He went and threw himself beneath the brambles of the wilderness, so that the moisture might be upon him, and he said, "O God of Abraham, my father, you can effect death; take my soul from me, so I will not die of thirst." And God acquiesced to him, as it is written, 'For God heard the voice of the youth where his was' (Gen. 21:17). The well, which was opened at twilight [of the sixth day of creation, just prior to Shabbat] was opened for them there, and they went, drank, and filled the bottle with water, as it is written, 'And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water' (Gen. 21:19). And there, they left the well, and then they started on their way and went through the entire

wilderness until they came to the wilderness of Paran, and they found there streams of water, and they dwelt there, as it is written, 'And he settled in the wilderness of Paran' (Gen. 21:21).

Commentary

Line 25: תחת חרולי המדבר 'beneath the brambles of the wilderness'—The wording of this passage hearkens to the language of Job.²⁵⁹ The association of Ishmael with this chapter of Job, which discusses a person's agony due to his ill treatment by his younger brother and abandonment by his father,²⁶⁰ reflects the tradition recalled in the *Yalku Shimoni*.²⁶¹

Trial Nine

Part 4. Ishmael's Wives and Abraham

Text

- 31 שלח ישמעאל ולקח לו אשה מבנות מואב ועישה שמחה לאחר שלש שנים הלך
32 אברהם לראות את ישמעאל בנו ונשבע לשרה שלא ירד מן הגמל במקום שישמעאל
33 שרוי תמן והגיע שם בחצי היום ומצא שם את אשתו של ישמעאל אמר לה היכן
34 הוא ישמעאל אמרה לו הלך הוא ואמו להביא פירות ותמרים מן המדבר אמר לה
35 תני לי מעט לחם ומים כי עיפה נפשי מדרך המדבר אמרה לו אין לי לחם ולא מים
36 אמ' לה כשיבא ישמעאל הגידו לו את הדברים האלה ואמר ישבא זקן אחד מארץ

²⁵⁹ Job 30:7.

²⁶⁰ Job 30.

²⁶¹ *Yalchut Shimoni* I, remez 94.

37 כנען לך לראותך ואמר חלף מפתן הבית שאינה טובה לך וכשבא ישמעאל הגידה לו
 38 את הדברים ובן חכם כחצי חכם והבין ישמעאל ושלחה אמו ולקחה לו אשה מבית
 39 אביה ופטימה היה שמה

Translation

Ishmael sent for and took a wife for himself from among the daughters of Moab, and 'Ayeshah' was her name. After three years, Abraham went to see Ishmael, his son. And he swore to Sarah that he would not dismount from the camel in the place where Ishmael was situated. [Abraham] arrived there at midday and found Ishmael's wife there. He said to her, "Where is Ishmael?" She said to him, "He has gone with his mother to fetch the fruit and dates from the wilderness." He said to her, "Give me a little bread and a little water, for my soul is faint after the journey in the desert." She said to him, "I have neither bread nor water." He said to her, "When Ishmael comes back, tell him this story, and say to him, 'An old man came from the land of Canaan to see you, and he said that the threshold of your house is not good for you.' When Ishmael came back, she told him the story. And a son of a wise man is like half a wise man, and Ishmael understood. His mother sent for and took [another] wife for him from her father's house, and 'Fatimah' was her name.

Commentary

Line 31: **מבנות** 'among the daughters'—The first Warsaw edition reads, 'among the fords.' This is neither consistent with the manuscript traditions nor the other early printed editions and is therefore thought to be a mistake.²⁶²

²⁶² Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, n. 6, p. 218.

Moab was located in the modern country of Jordan. It was the king of Moab who hired Balaam to curse the Israelites when he feared they would conquer his lands.²⁶³ It is to this people that Ishmael now turns for a wife. This establishes a negative relationship between Ishmael's first wife, 'Ayesah' and the Israelites of the Exodus and, by extension, with the redactor's contemporary community. This section is thereby setting the stage for the continuation of the story of Ishmael's wives.

Line 31: וְעִשָּׂה 'Ayesah'—'Ayesah' is the name of one of Mohammed's wives, sometimes referred to as 'the child bride.' Since this name cannot be found within the Bible, it can be surmised that the appearance of this name in PRE is a result of Islamic influence. This not only aids our ability to date the final redaction of the work after the advent of Islam, but also to witness the cross cultural exchange of literary traditions.

Lines 31-39: ...לְאַרְבַּע שָׁנִים 'After three years...'—This section reinforces the ambivalent relationship between the redactor and Islam. On the one hand, Abraham desires to visit and expresses concern for his son Ishmael. On the other hand, Ishmael is married to a woman of Moab, who is identified with the favorite wife of the greatest prophet of Islam, who does not provide any care for Abraham. The display of this ambivalence is more dramatically underscored when this section and the next are combined, and the difference between the wives highlights the two sides of the relationship with Islam.

Line 39: וּפְטִימָה 'and Fatima'—Again the name of a relative of Mohammed is identified with one of Ishmael's wives. She is Mohammed's daughter is used, and is associated with Pharaoh, through PRE's identification of Hagar's origins. Based on the

²⁶³ Numbers 22:2-5.

information presented in PRE thus far about Pharaoh's house, we would expect that this will be an anti-Islam polemic. However, Fatima's behavior is quite admirable and she receives Abraham's praise, thus expressing the veritable conundrum in which the redactor finds himself in regard to his view of Islam.

Trial Nine

Part 4, Section 1

Text

- 40 ועוד לאחר שלש שנים הלך אברהם לראות ישמעאל בנו וגשבע לשרה כפעם
41 ראשונה שאינו יורד מן הגמל במקום שישמעאל שריו שם והגיע לשם בחצי היום
42 ומצא שם את אשתו של ישמעאל ואמ' לה היכן הוא ישמעאל אמרה לו הוא ואמו
43 הלך לדעות את הגמלים במדבר אמר לה תני לי מעט לחם ומים כי עיפה נפשי
44 מדרך המדבר והוציאה ונתנה ונתנה לו עמד אברהם והיה מתפלל לפני הקב"ה על
45 בנו ונתמלא ביתו של ישמעאל מכל טוב ממין הברכות וכשבא ישמעאל הגידה לו
46 את הדבר הזה וידע ישמעאל שעד עכשו רחמי אביו עליו שנאמר ברחם אב על
47 בנים

Translation

Again, after three years, Abraham went to see his son Ishmael. And he swore to Sarah, like the first time, that he would not dismount from the camel in the place where Ishmael was situated. He arrived there at midday, and found Ishmael's wife there. He said to her,

"Where is Ishmael?" She said to him, "He and his mother went to tend the camels in the desert. He said to her, "Give me a little bread and water, for my soul is faint after the journey through the desert." She brought it out and gave it to him. Abraham rose and prayed before the Holy One, Blessed be God, for his son; and Ishmael's house was filled with all good [things] of the various blessings. When Ishmael returned, his wife told him these things, and Ishmael knew that even now his father's compassion was still extended to him, as it is written, 'Like a father who has compassion for his son' (Ps. 103:13).

Commentary

The positive role of *Fatima* in this anecdote can perhaps be seen as reaching out to the Islamic world by the compiler of PRE. For our purposes, this section adds fuel to the fire of the redactor's ambivalence towards Islam. This is further highlighted by Abraham's blessing of Ishmael. Abraham brings blessings to Ishmael's house, and Ishmael, therefore, knows his father loves him. This statement may also serve as an instruction to the redactor's contemporary audience to praise their Islamic rulers.

Trial Nine

Part 5—Abraham Remarries

Text

- 48 לאחר מיתתה של שרה חזר אברהם ולקח את גרושתו שנאמר ויוסף אברהם [ויקח]
49 אשה] ולמה ויוסף אלא שפעם ראשונה היתה אשתו ועוד הוסיף לבא אליה ושמה
50 קטורה שהיתה מקוטרת מכל מיני בשמים ד"א קטורה שהיו מעשיה נאים בקטרת

51 ילדה לו ששה בנים וכלם נקראו על שמו של ישמעאל שנאמר ותלד לו את זמור
 52 וגו' ובאשה שהיא מתגרשת מן בעלה כך עמד אברהם ושלחן מעל יצחק בנו מן
 53 העולם הזה ומן העולם הבא שנאמר ולבני הפלגשים אשר לאברהם וגו' וישלחם
 54 בנט גירושין

Translation

After the death of Sarah, Abraham again took [for a wife] his divorced [wife, Hagar,] as it is written, 'And Abraham again [took a wife, and her name was *Keturah*]' (Gen. 25:1). Why [does the Torah] say, 'and he again?' Because, on the first occasion she was his wife, and he 'again' betrothed himself to her. Her name was *Keturah*, because she was perfumed, '*mikuteret*,' with all kind of scents. Another explanation of *Keturah* is that because her actions were beautiful like incense, '*ketoret*.' And she bore [Abraham] six sons, and they were all called according to the name of Ishmael, as it is written, 'And she bore him *Zimran*' (Gen 25:2). Like a woman sent away from her husband, similarly Abraham rose and sent them, [his six sons from *Keturah*,] away from Isaac, his son, in this world and in the world to come. As it is written, 'But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from Isaac, his son' (Gen. 25:6) by a bill of divorce.

Commentary

Line 50: קטורה '*Keturah*'—The first explanation of this name, that she smelled like spices, provides further evidence for the argument presented in this section that *Keturah* is another name for Hagar. The Ishmaelites were associated with spice

traders,²⁶⁴ and so a woman of that tribe would naturally be associated with spice.

However, it was an Ishmaelite caravan on this same spice route that sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt.²⁶⁵ This name and concept of spice merchants coming from the wilderness also alludes to images of King Solomon's litter being carried by elite troops out of the wilderness.²⁶⁶ While this name adds a wealth of literary depth to the story, it presents as well the various sides of the ambivalent and perhaps conflicted feeling of the redactor toward Ishmael and Islam.

Line 50: מעשה נאים 'pleasant deeds'—In this second explanation of the name *Keturah*, a positive spin is placed upon the identification of Hagar.

Line 51: נקראו על שמו של ישמעאל 'they were called by the name of Ishmael'—Neither the simple meaning of this passage, nor the implications are clear. This statement may mean that the names of Ishmael's brothers utilize his name in some fashion, such as an acrostic spelling Ishmael. While five of the six names fit this model, 'Zimran' is omitted from this explanation. It is also possible that this statement refers to a tradition that is no longer extant.

²⁶⁴ Genesis 37:25.

²⁶⁵ Genesis 37:28.

²⁶⁶ Song of Songs 3:6.

Trial Nine

Part 6—Ishmael's Children

Text

- 55 על שם בנו של ישמעאל קדר נקרא בני קדר שני' לקדר ולממל כות חצור וגו' על
56 שם בנו של ישמעאל קדר נקרא בני קדם על שם שישבו בארצות קין נקרא בני
57 בני קין שני' וחבר הקיני נפרד וחלא כל בני קין נברתו בימי המבול אלא על שם
58 שישבו בארצות בני קין נקרא בניו בני קין שנאמר אם יהיה לבער קין וגו' אם יהיה
59 לבער אש מזורעו של ישמעאל הם ישביתו מלכות אשור

Translation

Corresponding to the name of Ishmael's son, '*Kedar*,' (Gen 25:13) the 'Children of *Kedar*' are named, as it is written, 'Of *Kedar*, and of the kingdoms of *Hazor*' (Jer. 49:28). Corresponding to the name of Ishmael's son, '*Kedemah*' (Gen. 25:15), the 'Children of *Kedem*' (Jer. 49:28) are named. Because they lived in the territory belonging to Cain, [*Kedem*'s] children were [also] call the 'Children of Cain,' as it is written, 'Now Heber, the *Kenite*, had separated himself from Cain' (Ju. 4:11). Were not all the sons of Cain destroyed by the waters of the Flood? Rather, concerning [their] name, it is because they lived in the territory of the children of Cain that [Ishmael's] children were called 'sons of Cain,' as it is written, 'Nevertheless, Cain shall be destroyed' (Num. 24:22). 'Nevertheless [Cain] shall be destroyed' (Num. 24:22) by fire, through the seed of Ishmael, who will put an end to the kingdom of Assyria.

Commentary

The names of Ishmael's children reflect the names of regional groups of people mentioned in the Bible. This establishes the basis for a relationship between the patriarchs and these peoples, which will be discussed later in PRE. The operative function of the naming process in PRE is clearly the location of the people, as the Kedemites are identified as the 'Children of Cain' because of where they reside, not because of their ancestry. This is the same operative methodology utilized by the Bible to derive the same names, as clearly demonstrated in the proof texts provided in PRE.

Line 57: **הקניזי** 'the *Kenite*'—This appears to be the descendant of Cain, who is protected by a special sign.²⁶⁷ The root of the word, 'q.y.n,' is associated with metal working as was this nomadic group.²⁶⁸

Line 59: **מלכות אשור** 'Kingdom of Assyria'—The Kingdom of Assyria in rabbinic literature is often used as a reference to Rome. Targum Jonathan renders Isaiah's statement, 'Fallen, Fallen is Babylon,'²⁶⁹ as 'Fallen is Babylon, and she will fall again in the future,'²⁷⁰ an allusion to the anticipated fall of Rome.²⁷¹ Lamentations Rabbah claims that the 'king of the Chaldeans' will destroy Vespasian's palace.²⁷² Therefore, this reference could refer to the Muslim conquest of Christian controlled Palestine and Babylon.

²⁶⁷ Genesis 4:15.

²⁶⁸ Genesis 4:22.

²⁶⁹ Isaiah 21:9.

²⁷⁰ Targum Jonathan to Isaiah 21:9.

²⁷¹ Moses Aberbach, "Mesopotamia: In the Aggadah," *Encyclopedia Hebraica/ Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

²⁷² Lamentations Rabbah, proem 12.

Commentary

The names of Ishmael's children reflect the names of regional groups of people mentioned in the Bible. This establishes the basis for a relationship between the patriarchs and these peoples, which will be discussed later in PRE. The operative function of the naming process in PRE is clearly the location of the people, as the Kedemites are identified as the 'Children of Cain' because of where they reside, not because of their ancestry. This is the same operative methodology utilized by the Bible to derive the same names, as clearly demonstrated in the proof texts provided in PRE.

Line 57: **הַקֵּינִי** 'the *Kenite*'—This appears to be the descendant of Cain, who is protected by a special sign.²⁶⁷ The root of the word, 'q.y.n,' is associated with metal working as was this nomadic group.²⁶⁸

Line 59: **מְלֻכַּת אַשּׁוּר** 'Kingdom of Assyria'—The Kingdom of Assyria in rabbinic literature is often used as a reference to Rome. Targum Jonathan renders Isaiah's statement, 'Fallen, Fallen is Babylon,'²⁶⁹ as 'Fallen is Babylon, and she will fall again in the future,'²⁷⁰ an allusion to the anticipated fall of Rome.²⁷¹ Lamentations Rabbah claims that the 'king of the Chaldeans' will destroy Vespasian's palace.²⁷² Therefore, this reference could refer to the Muslim conquest of Christian controlled Palestine and Babylon.

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²⁷¹ Moses Aberbach, "Mesopotamia: In the Aggadah," *Encyclopedia Hebraica/ Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

²⁷² Lamentations Rabbah, proem 12.

Trial Nine

Part 7—God Selects Israel

Text

- 60 אמר בלעם משבעים לשונות שברא הקב"ה בעולמו לא שמו לאחד מהם אלא
61 לישראל הואיל ודשוה הקב"ה שמו של ישמעאל לשמו של ישראל אי מי יחיה
62 בימיו שנאמר אי מי יחיה משומו אל

Translation

Balaam said that from the seventy nations that the Holy One, Blessed be God, created in the world, God did not consent to the Divine name [being used] with any one of them except with Israel. Since, the Holy One, Blessed be God, likened the name of Ishmael to the name of Israel, woe to the one who will live in his days, as it is written, 'Woe, who shall live when God designates him' (Num. 24:23).

Commentary

Line 61: **ישמעאל** 'Ishmael'—The first Warsaw editions omit the direct reference to Ishmael, but it is present in the Vienna and Horev editions. I have chosen to retain the reference as it provides the link between this section and of trial nine as a whole.

Line 62: **משומו** 'designates'—This word is the key to this midrashic play. The word links with concept of assigning with the process of selection, as the root '*sh.m.*' as a noun can be rendered 'name,' and as a verb to 'select' or 'designate.' I have rendered the

verse according to this reading, however, the usual reading of Biblical text is, 'Woe, who shall live when God does this,' where the word is read '*misumo*,' the gerund form of '*asah*' with a variant suffix, meaning, 'to make' or 'do.'

Since the statement of doubt about the ability of a people or a person to survive God's selection with its strict commandments, including circumcision, which was the last reference to Balaam in PRE, is made by Balaam, the enemy prophet, it can be understood to express a complete lack of understanding of the covenant. Balaam blessed Israel, when he attempted to curse Israel. All that Balaam says and does can be understood as an inversion of the appropriate order of the world. Therefore, this statement means that you can only live through God's providence as expressed by the bestowal of the Divine name upon you.

Trial Nine

Part 8—Deeds of The Children of Ishmael

Text

- 63 ר' ישמעאל אומר חמשה עשר דברים עתידים בני ישמעאל לעשות בארץ באחרית
64 הימים ואלו הם ימדדו את הארץ בתבלים ויעשו בית הקברות למרבץ צאן אשפתות
65 וימדדו מהם ובהם על ראש ההרים וירבה השקר ותגזי האמת וירחק חק מישראל
66 ותרבה עונות בישראל שני תולעת כצמר ויקמל הניר והקולמוס ויפסל סלע מלכות
67 ויבנו הערים החרבות ויפנו הדרכים ויטעו גנות ופרדסים ויגדרו פרצות חומות בית
68 המקדש ויבנו בנין בהיכל ושני אחים יעמדו עליהם גשיאים בסוף ובימיהן

Translation

Rabbi Ishmael said that the Children of Ishmael would do fifteen future things in the Land [of Israel] in the later days. And they are: [1] they will measure the land with ropes, [2] they will change a cemetery into a resting-place for sheep, [making it] a dunghill, [3] they will measure with them and from them upon the tops of the mountains, [4] falsehood will multiply and truth will be hidden, [5] the statutes will be removed from Israel, [6] sins will be multiplied in Israel, [7] scarlet worms will be in the wool, [8] paper and pen will fade, [9] he will hew down the rock of the kingdom, [10] and they will rebuild the desolated cities and sweep the ways, [11] and they will plant gardens and parks, [12] and fence in the broken walls of the Temple, [13] and they will build a building in the Holy Place, [14] and two brothers will arise over them [who are] princes at the end, [15] and in their days, the Branch, the Son of David, will arise, as it is written, 'And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed' (Dan. 2:44).

Commentary

While a few of these fifteen events are historically based, the majority reflect the redactor's historical memory of persecution and oppression. For example, desecrating graveyards is a universal sign of contempt and domination. Laws forbidding the practice of native religions were instituted by almost every empire at some point in their history. Surveying the land is a universal sign of conquest, both for military reasons and for purposes of governance. Moral decline is a universal complaint of one group against an

enemy. It should be noted that some of these events have a fairly positive air, like the rebuilding of cities and planting of gardens, reflective of the redactor's ambivalence about the Islamic world.

Line 64: **יִגְדְּרוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ** 'they will measure the land'—They will measure the land to get an exact dimension, the value of which is debated in the Talmud.²⁷³

Line 67-68: **וַיִּבְנוּ בֵּיתָהּ מִקֹּדֶשׁ** '[13] and they will build a building in the Holy Place'—This is probably a reference to the construction of the Mosque of Omar, better known as the Dome of the Rock in 684 CE²⁷⁴ on the Temple Mount site.

Line 68: **וְשְׁנֵי אֶחָיו** 'and two brothers'—These two brothers are identified as the Caliphs Mohammed al-Amin and Abdallah al-Ma'mun,²⁷⁵ who ruled from 809 to 813 C.E. and 813 to 833 C.E, respectively. Competing with each other in a civil war, they reduced the power of the Exhilararch and created more stringent legislation over the Jews.²⁷⁶ This reference allows for the establishment of a date of the earliest possible final redaction of PRE during or after the reign of al-Ma'mun. If the final redaction is contemporary with al-Ma'mun's rule, then the changing nature of the ruling attitude toward the Jewish population could account for the development of the ambivalence toward Islam that is presented in PRE.

²⁷³ B.T. *Bava Batra* 103b.

²⁷⁴ www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Dome_of_the_Rock.html.

²⁷⁵ Peter A. Batke, Jerome W. Clinton, Denise El-Soufi, and Akel I. Kahera. "Abbasids:750-1517," *Islamic Timeline* (<http://www.princeton.edu/~batke/itl/scroll/new.html>, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, Spring 1996) p.1.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Trial Nine

Part 9—Wars with the Children of Ishmael

Text

- 70 ועוד היה רבי ישמעאל אומר שלש מלחמות של מהומה עתידים בני ישמעאל לעשו
71 בארץ באחדית הימים שנאמר כי מפני חרבות נדדו וגו' ואין חרבות אלא מלחמות
72 אחת ביער בערב מפני חרב נטושה ואחת בים מפני קשת דרוכה ואחת בדרך גדול
73 שברומי שהוא כבד משניהם שנאמר מפני כבוד מלחמה ומשם בן דוד יצמח ויראה
74 באבן של אלו ואלו ומשם יבא לארץ ישראל שנאמר מי זה בא מאדום וגו'

Translation

Rabbi Ishmael also said that the Children of Ishmael will wage three future wars of upheaval on earth in the later days, as it is written, 'For they fled away from the swords' (Isa. 21:15). 'Swords' signify only wars; one in the forest of Arabia, from 'From the drawn sword' (Isa. 21:15); another on the sea, from 'from the bent bow' (Isa. 21:15); and one in the great city which is in Rome, which will be more serious than the other two, as it is written, 'and from the seriousness of the war' (Isa. 21:15). From there the Son of David will flourish and see the destruction of these and those, and from there he will come to the Land of Israel, as it is written, 'Who is this that comes from *Edom*, [with crimsoned garments from *Bozrah*, this one who is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength?] (Isa. 63:1).

Commentary

Line 73: **אחת ביער בערב** 'one in the forest of Arabia'—This may refer to the battles leading to Mohammed's conquest of Mecca in around 630 C.E.²⁷⁷

Line 73: **באדמת ים** 'and one on the sea'—This may refer to the Muslim conquests of the Greek Isles and Crete in 827 C.E.²⁷⁸

Line 74: **שברומי** 'that is Rome'—This reference is paralleled in early Christian Literature in *The Book of the Bee*. In this work, dated in the thirteenth century, the descendants of Ishmael are gathered to destroy the kingdom of the Greeks, who had destroyed the Jewish and Persian kingdoms. The rationalization is that though this empire is Christian, these Christians have grievously sinned.²⁷⁹ It is interesting to note how the same story acquires the theology of the group who preserves and presents it.

In addition, the direct naming of Rome provides further evidence supporting the assertions made in the comments on line 59 of this trial that Assyria is a reference to Rome. In that section, the Children of Ishmael, referred to as the Children of Cain, destroy the Assyrian Empire in the future. In this section, the Children of Ishmael destroy Rome, thereby fulfilling the foreshadowed event. In fact, this reference may be to the Muslim sacking of Rome in 846 C.E.,²⁸⁰ which may provide us with evidence to date the final redaction of PRE in the mid-ninth century.

²⁷⁷ "History," in *Arab Culture and Civilization* (The National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education, 2001), available online at <http://www.nitle.org/arabworld/>.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Earnest A. Wallis Budge, ed. and trans., *The Book of the Bee*, (The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1886), ch. 53, p. 124.

²⁸⁰ "History," *Arab Culture and Civilization*.

Trial Ten

The Binding of Isaac

Text

- 1 פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק לא
2 חנן העשירי ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה את אברהם והיה מנסה את
3 אברהם בכל פעם ופעם לידע את לבו אם יכול לעמוד ולשמור את כל מצותיה של
4 תורה ואם לא שנא עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי

Translation

Chapter 31

The Tenth Trial: 'And it came to pass after these things, that God tried Abraham' (Gen. 22:1). Abraham was tried each and every time in order to know his heart, if he would be able to withstand and keep all the commandments of the Torah or not. [While the Torah had not yet been given, Abraham kept all the precepts of the Torah,] as it is written, 'Because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my *Torah*]' (Gen. 26:5).

Commentary

Line 2: נסה 'tested'—The Biblical use of this word provides the glue with which this enumeration list is bound. For a discussion of the term itself, refer to the commentary on the *Clal* of the Ten Trials of Abraham, lines 2-3 in particular. The unity of the list is evidenced by the formulaic use of this term throughout the 'Ten Trials.'

Line 4: תורה 'Torah'—While the word 'torah' can be simply translated as 'teaching,' it is also the name given to the first five books of the canonized Jewish Bible. In this rendering, I have chosen this latter interpretation, and thus capitalized the spelling of 'Torah.' This spelling is in keeping with the midrashic tradition that Abraham observed all of the *mitzvot* which the rabbis held were revealed to Moses at Sinai, whether through the Written Torah or through the Oral Torah, which was later codified in the *Mishna* and *Gemara*. Jubilees specifies Abraham's observance of many *mitzvot*, necessarily prior to the Revelation at Sinai,²⁸¹ several of which have been commented upon in PRE's Ten Trials of Abraham.

This tradition motivated my retention of the inclusion in the translation of the sentence which follows 'Torah,' "While the Torah had not yet been given, Abraham kept all the precepts of the Torah." This phrase is not found in the printed tradition, but the manuscript tradition does preserve the phrase.²⁸² This phrase makes clear the rabbinic view that Abraham observed all the *mitzvot* prior to their revelation, therefore the sentence was included in the translation, but due to respect for the printed tradition, it has not been included in the Hebrew text.

The consistent image of Abraham observing the commandments can be seen as a strong anti-Christian polemic. Since Christianity views Abraham as the progenitor of their relationship with God, which is based on faith, deviation from his method of practice is a significant. PRE's claim that Abraham observed the *mitzvot* of the Torah would then demand of Christianity an adherence to Torah law. Paul claimed that while the Torah had been a good and necessary tool for life, the resurrected messiah obviated

²⁸¹ Jubilees 13:25-29, 15:1-2, 16:20-31, 21:7-17, 22:20, 25:5, and 39:6.

²⁸² *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, HUC ms.75, 44b.

the continued need of Torah and the observance of its *mitzvot*.²⁸³ Thus, the repeated emphasis on Abraham, who pre-existed the Torah, observing the *mitzvot* is an argument against this Christian doctrine.

Trial Ten

Part 1—Abraham Argues with God

Text

- 5 יצא ישמעאל מן המדבר לראות את אברהם אביו רבי יהודה אומ' באותה הלילה
6 נגלה עליו הקב"ה אמר לו אברהם קח נא את בנך

Translation

And Ishmael went repeatedly from the wilderness to see Abraham, his father. Rabbi Judah said that very same night the Holy One, Blessed be God, was revealed to [Abraham], God said to him, "Abraham! 'Now take your son' (Gen 22:2)."

Commentary

Line 6: **את בנך** 'your son'—In the Warsaw and Vienna editions, the quote ends here. In the Horev edition the Biblical verse is continued. I have chosen to maintain the reading of the Warsaw and Vienna editions, because the shorter Biblical quote functions better to introduce the dialogue between God and Abraham which follows.

²⁸³ Romans 7:12-13 and Galatians 2:15-21.

Trial Ten

Part 1 Section 1

Text

- 7 ואברהם חס על יצחק אמר לפניו רבון כל העולמים לאי זה בן אתה גוזר אלי לבן
8 הערל או לבן המילה אמר לו את יחידך אמר לו זה יחיד לאמו וזה יחיד לאמו אמר
9 לו אשר אהבת אמר לו שניהם אני אהב אמר לו את יצחק

Translation

And Abraham, having pity on Isaac, said before [God], "Sovereign of all Worlds, about which son does this decree apply? Does it apply to the son of un-circumcision, or the son born of circumcision?" God answered him, "'Your only son' (Gen 22:2)." Abraham responded, "This one is the only [son] of his mother, and that one is the only [son] of his mother." God answered him, "'The one whom you love' (Gen 22:2)." Abraham said to God, "I love both of them." God said to him, "'Isaac' (Gen 22:2)."

Commentary

This dialogue between God and Abraham displays the depth of the relationship between Abraham and his son. In so doing, PRE maintains its agenda of removing all possible criticism from Abraham. Abraham tried to avoid the sacrifice of Isaac, but God would not allow it. There is also a reinforcement of the PRE's ambivalent agenda with regard to Ishmael and Islam; while Abraham loves both his sons, God indicates that Isaac is favored over Ishmael.

Line 7: חס על יצחק 'having pity on Isaac'—The ideal of Abraham having pity is not shared in all of the literature of the Biblical period. For example, the Wisdom of Solomon asserts that Abraham was to be admired for his piety and strength in resisting pity for Isaac.²⁸⁴ As PRE has tended to reject the assertions presented by Jubilees, it is possible that there is also a tendency to counter all the traditions of the Apocrypha, which would include the Wisdom of Solomon.

Luria suggests yet another reading of the text, in which God has mercy upon Abraham and Isaac and agrees to substitute Ishmael for Isaac.²⁸⁵ While this reading integrates the Islamic notion of Ishmael being the sacrifice and presents it in a pejorative manner, *i.e.*, Ishmael is a second, and less appropriate choice for the sacrifice as exemplified by his eliciting of less compassion from both his father and God, it is not consistent with the plot of either PRE or of the Biblical narrative.

Line 7-8: לבן הערל 'the son of un-circumcision'—Ishmael was thirteen years old when Abraham was commanded to circumcise. Therefore, he can be referred to as the son of un-circumcision, for he was conceived and born prior to Abraham's circumcision, prior to Abraham's perfecting himself, and, by extension, those conceived and born after his circumcision, *i.e.*, Isaac, the son of circumcision.

²⁸⁴ Wisdom of Solomon 10:5.

²⁸⁵ *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852), 69b.

Trial Ten

Part 1, Section 2

Text

- 10 והעלהו שם לעולה אל רבון כל העולמים לאי זה הר אמרת לי אמר לו בכל
11 מקום שאתה רואה את כבדי עומד וממתין לך שם ואומר זהו הר המוריה שני'
12 על אחד ההרים אשר אמר אליך

Translation

'And offer [Isaac] there for a burnt offering' (Gen 22:2). Abraham spoke to God,
"Sovereign of all Worlds, on which mountain did you tell me [to offer Isaac]?" [God]
answered him, "In every place where you will see My glory abiding and waiting there for
you, and saying to you, "This is Mount Moriah,"" as it is written, 'Upon one of the
mountains of which I will show you (Gen 22:2).

Commentary

The dialogue discussed in the last section is continued with a new tack taken in
the argument. Rather than discussing the child, Abraham tries to avoid being given a
location, giving the appearance that he is trying to avoid the inevitable. In addition, the
idea that Abraham does not know where he is going, not only recalls the trial of *Lech*
Lecha, but reinforces the image of Abraham as the paradigm of faith, devotion, and
observance.

Line 11: **הַר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ** 'Mount Moriah'—The first edition reads 'the altar.'²⁸⁶

This reading reflects the tradition that this is the site of Cain and Abel's altar and Noah's altar, about which more will be discussed later in 'Part 3, Section 1.'

Trial Ten

Part 2—The Journey

Text

13 השכים אברהם בבקר ולקח את שמעאל ואת אליעזר ואת יצחק בנו עמו וחבש
14 את החמור הוא החמור בן האתון שנבראת בק השמשות שנאמר וישכם אברהם
15 בבקר הוא החמור שרכב עליו משה בבאו למצרים שנאמר ויקח משה את אשתו ואת
16 בניו וירכיבם על החמור הוא החמור שעתידי בן דוד לרכוב עליו שנאמר עני ורוכב
17 על החמור

Translation

Abraham rose early in the morning. He took with him Ishmael, Eliezer, and Isaac, his son, and he saddled his ass. This ass was the son of the she-ass that was created during the twilight [of the sixth day of creation, just before the first Shabbat], as it is written, 'And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass' (Gen. 22:3). Moses came to Egypt on [the same ass], as it is written, 'And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon the ass' (Ex. 4:20). In the future, the Son of David will ride on this same

²⁸⁶ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p. 224, n. 7.

ass, as it is written, '[Behold, your kings comes to you; he is just and saved.] lowly and riding upon an ass[, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass]' (Zech. 9:9).

Commentary

Line 13: חשכים אברהם בבקר 'Abraham rose early in the morning'—This reflects a tradition in which Abraham is portrayed as reacting outside of the natural order. One would expect Abraham to order a slave to perform this menial task, but his emotional turmoil causes him to avoid the most expedient process.²⁸⁷ One could also understand that faced with the journey and the task ahead, Abraham would be upset and unable to sleep. Again, these arguments mitigate criticism of Abraham and militate for compassion upon the tormented father.

Line 13: ולקח את ישמעאל ואת אליעזר ואת יצחק בנו עמו 'He took with him Ishmael, Eliezer, and Isaac, his son'—These three people are the main male figures in Abraham's life. As discussed with regard to the rescue of Lot, Eliezer is associated with protection. Ishmael, who maintains a relationship with his father, can be seen as emotional support for Abraham. Isaac was the sacrifice.

Line 14: ...האתן בן החסור 'This ass was the son of the she-ass...'—In this section we see some of the major themes concerning the relationship between God and Abraham, and his descendants. The idea of God as ultimate creator is linked to the covenant, redemption, and ultimate salvation through the messianic process, yielding a clear line of progression from creation to redemption. It is interesting to note that the one ass which is missing from this list is that of Balaam. However, that ass, while a

²⁸⁷ Genesis Rabbah 55:8.

messenger of God perhaps, does not embody the relationship that the redactor envisions between God and the Jewish people.

Trial Ten

Part 2, Section 1

Text

18 בן שבע ושלשים שנה היה יצחק בלכתו אל הר המוריה וישמעאל בן חמשים שנה
19 נבנס תחרות בין אליעזר וישמעאל אמר ישמעאל לאליעזר עכשו אברהם הקריב את
20 יצחק בנו לעולה מוקדה על המזבח ואני בכורו יורש את אברהם א"ל אליעזר כבר
21 גרשך באשה שהיא מגורשת מבעלה ושלחך למדבר אבל אני עבדו משרת אותו ביום
22 ובלילה ואני הוא היורש את אברהם ורוח הקדש משיבה אותם ואמרת להם לא זה
23 יורש ולא זה יורש

Translation

Isaac was thirty-seven years old when he went to Mount Moriah, and Ishmael was fifty years old. An argument arose between Eliezer and Ishmael. Ishmael said to Eliezer, "Now that Abraham will offer Isaac, his son, for a burnt offering upon the altar, and I am his first born son, I will inherit [the estate of] Abraham." Eliezer said to him, saying, "[Abraham] has already driven you out like a woman divorced from her husband, and he has sent you away to the wilderness, but I am his servant, serving him by day and by night, and I shall be the Abraham's heir." The Holy Spirit answered them, saying to them, 'Neither this one will inherit nor will that one inherit.'

Commentary

This section serves to inform not only the audience, but the actors within the drama of the *Akeidah* that Isaac will be spared and survive. With the explanation that neither Ishmael nor Eliezer will inherit, both of whom have varied reputations in PRE, as has been discussed, it seems easy to infer that Isaac will be spared. This theme of the foreknowledge of Isaac's survival is persistent throughout this chapter and trial as presented in PRE.

The fight between Ishmael and Eliezer over the inheritance from Abraham can be seen as a metaphor for the struggle between Islam and Christianity over who will supercede Judaism. The statement then that neither is to inherit can be understood as a polemic against both Christianity and Islam, and for the authentic nature of Judaism as the embodiment of the true and legitimate covenant between God and humanity.

Line 18: **שנה ושלשים בן שבע** 'thirty-seven years old'—As discussed earlier, the portrayal of Isaac as an adult aids PRE in reducing the level of negative qualities attributed to Abraham. Isaac as an adult can assume responsibility for his participation, and, as will be seen, his instigation of the events as they unfold.

PRE has utilized a rich tradition in which the age of Isaac has been portrayed. The Talmud,²⁸⁸ Exodus Rabbah²⁸⁹ and even the last chapter of PRE all present relatively similar ages for Isaac and Ishmael. Differences between these traditions are primarily in the portrayal of Ishmael: PRE demonstrates the most positive view of Ishmael, due in

²⁸⁸ B.T. *Yevamot* 61b.

²⁸⁹ Exodus Rabbah 1:1.

part to a more positive attitude toward Islam, as opposed to Christianity and the pressure upon the redactor to avoid the wrath of the Islamic regime under whose rule he lived.

Trial Ten

Part 2, Section 2

Text

- 24 ביום השלישי הגיעו לצופים וכיון שהגיעו לצופים ראה כבוד השכינה עומד על גבי
25 ההר שנאמר ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום ומה ראה
26 עומד של אש עומד מן הארץ ועד השמים והבין אברהם כי נרצה הנער לעולה
27 אמר לישמעאל ולאליעזר רואים אתם מאומה באחד מן ההרים הללו אמרו לו לא
28 וחשב אותם כחמור אמי הואיל ואין אתם רואים מאומה שבו לכם פה עם החמור
29 עם הדומים לחמור

Translation

On the third day, they reached *Zofim*, and when they reached *Zofim*, they saw the glory of the *Shechinah*, resting upon the top of the mountain, as it is written, 'On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes, and saw the place at a distance' (Gen. 22:4). What did he see? A pillar of fire stretching from the earth to the heavens. Abraham understood that the youth was acceptable for the burnt offering. He said to Ishmael and Eliezer, "Do you see anything upon one of those mountains?" They said to him, "No." He considered them [as perceptive] as an ass. He told them, "Since you do not see anything, 'wait here with

the ass' (Gen. 22:5), [as should be done] with ones who are similar to the ass."

Commentary

Line 24: **ביום השלישי** 'On the third day'—Hosea discusses that the resurrection of the dead will occur on the third day.²⁹⁰ The Midrash, using the Hosea text as proof, explains that all redemption occurs on the third day of an event.²⁹¹ The origin of this timing is found in the Biblical narrative and retained in PRE, though despite the rich tradition of this timing in rabbinic literature, PRE does not expand upon the Biblical narrative. It is possible that this is a reaction to the Christian use of the three days between the Crucifixion and the resurrection. This issue is addressed in PRE and will be discussed in the next few sections.

Line 24: **לצופים** 'Zofim'—I have left this untranslated because in addition to being a place name, there is an interesting *drash* on this word. 'Zofim' was a place on the boundary of Jerusalem, from which the Temple could be viewed.²⁹² The Roman translation of the Greek transliteration of this name is 'Scopus'.²⁹³ The name comes from the root 's.p.h,' meaning 'to see.' In the other texts cited, it was a place from which Jerusalem could be seen, but in PRE the rationale is reversed. 'Zofim' is the place where Abraham 'sees' God.

Line 28: **אתם כחמור** 'as an ass'—The denigration of Eliezer and Ishmael plays strongly into the pro-Isaac theme, which runs parallel to the ambivalent themes concerning Ishmael. Isaac and Abraham perceive what is transpiring, while Ishmael and

²⁹⁰ Hosea 6:2.

²⁹¹ Genesis Rabbah 56:1.

²⁹² Lamentations Rabbah 5:18.

²⁹³ Michael Avi-Yonah, "Zofim," *Encyclopedia Judaica – CD-Rom Edition Version 1.0* (Keter Publishing House and Judaica Multimedia, Israel, 1997).

Eliezer do not.²⁹⁴ Given PRE's association of Ishmael with Islam and Eliezer with Christianity, the denigration of the pair is simultaneously a

Trial Ten

Part 3—The Ascent

Text

- 30 נטל את העצים ונתן על גבי יצחק בנו ולקח את האש ואת המאכלת בידו והיו
31 מחלכין שניהם יחדיו אמר יצחק לאביו אבא הרי העצים והאש היכן הוא הכבש
32 לעולה א"ל בני אתה הכבש לעולה שנ' ויאמר אברהם אלהים יראה לו השם

Translation

He took the wood and placed it on the shoulders of his son Isaac, and he took the firebrand and the knife in his hand, and they went, both of them, together. Isaac said to his father, "Father, here is the firebrand and the wood; where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" He replied to him, "My son; you are the lamb for the burnt offering," as it is written, 'And Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb"' (Gen. 22:8).

Commentary

Since Isaac is an adult, it can be assumed that his question to his father is not simply a question about the lack of a lamb for a sacrifice, but given the conversation between God and the other two travelers, Isaac must know that he is the intended

²⁹⁴ Genesis Rabbah 56:2.

sacrifice. This further reduces Abraham's responsibility and simultaneously elevates the status of Isaac as being devoted to God and righteous.

Trial Ten

Part 3, Section 1

Text

- 33 ר' שמעון אומר באצבע הראה הב"ה לאברהם אבינו המזבח ואמר לו זהו המזבח
34 והוא היה המזבח שהקריבו בו קין ותבל והוא המזבח שהקריבו בו נח ובניו שנאמר
35 ויבן שם אברהם את המזבח ויבן שם אברהם המזבח אין כתיו כאן אלא ויבן שם
36 אורחם את המזבח הוא המזבח שהקריבו בו הראשונים

Translation

Rabbi Simeon said that the Holy One, Blessed be God, pointed out the altar with a finger to Abraham, our father, and said to him, "This is the altar." This was the altar upon which Cain and Abel sacrificed. And this was the altar upon which Noah and his sons sacrificed, as it is written, 'And Abraham built the altar there' (Gen. 5:9). 'And Abraham built an altar there' is not written here, rather 'And Abraham built the altar there.' That was the altar upon which the first ones sacrificed.

Commentary

Line 33: **המזבח** 'the altar'—As this midrash explains, the key element is the definite article 'h' attached to 'altar.' The effect of this midrash is to link major events in the relationship between God and man, in much the same way that the midrash concerning the ass functioned. Creation, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham are directly

connected. The Islamic tradition holds that this is the site as well of Mohammed's ascension to heaven to receive prophecy. Missing from these traditions is a tie to Jesus. It may have been from this rabbinic tradition that Islam drew its tradition about Mohammed.

Trial Ten

Part 3, Section 2

Text

37 אבי יצחק לאביו אבא קשור לי שתי ידי ושתי רגלי שלא אותך כגון דבור היוצא
38 מן הפה על שום אונס פחד מיתה ונמצאתי מחלל כבוד וקשר שתי ידי ושתי רגלי
39 ועקדו על גבי המזבח ואומץ את שתי זרועותי ואת שתי ארכובותי עליו וערך את
40 האש ואת העצים ושלה ידו עליו ולקח את המאכלת ובכחן גדול הגיש את מנחתו
41 ואת נסכו והקב"ה יושב ורואה האב מעקיד בכל לב והבן נעקד בכל לב ומלאבי
42 השרת צועקים ובוכים שנאמר הן אראלם צעקו וגו' אמרו מלאבי השרת לפני ה'ה'
43 רבון כל העולמים נקראת רחום וחנון מי שרחמני על כל מעשיו רחם על יצחק
44 שהוא אדם ובן אדם ונעקד לפניך בבחמה אדם ובהמה ושיע יי שנאמר צדקתך
45 בחררי אל וגו'

Translation

Isaac said to his father, "Father, bind my two hands and my two feet for me, so that I do not curse you; for instance, a word may emerge from the mouth because of the violence

and fear of death, and I shall be found to have transgressed [the precept], 'Honor [your father]' (Ex. 20:12). [Abraham] bound [Isaac's] two hands and his two feet, and bound him upon of the altar, and [Abraham] braced his two arms and his two knees on [Isaac], and arranged the firebrand and wood, and [Abraham] stretched forth his hand 'and took the knife' (Gen. 22:10). Like a High Priest, [Abraham] brought near his meal offering and his drink offering; and the Holy One, Blessed be God, sat and watched the father binding with all [his] heart and the son being bound with all [his] heart. And the ministering angels cried out and wept, as it is written, 'Behold, [God's] angels cry out' (Isa. 33:7). The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be God, "Sovereign of all the worlds! You are called The Merciful and Compassionate One, whose mercy is upon all God's works; have mercy upon Isaac, for he is a human being, and the son of a human being, and is bound before You like an animal. The Eternal saves man and beast, as it is written, 'Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; Your judgments are like a great deep. Oh Eternal, You preserve man and beast'" (Ps. 36:6).

Commentary

In keeping with the theme of Isaac's sharing the responsibility with Abraham for the *Akeidah*, this section portrays Isaac, not only as a willing participant, but also as a driving force behind the event. The question asked earlier of his father must have informed him of the divine plan of his sacrifice, because here he insists on being bound without any prompting.

Pesikta Rabbati retains a parallel story in which Isaac is portrayed as worrying that he might flinch and cause an accidental blemish, thus invalidating him as a perfect

sacrifice.²⁹⁵ Thus, the theme of foreknowledge of the *mitzvot* is extended to Isaac as well, setting the stage for him to assume a leadership role as patriarch after the passing of Abraham.

Line 40: גדול עליו וככה 'Like a High Priest'—As Abraham's circumcision was associated with *Yom Kippur*, so, too, is the *Akeidah*.²⁹⁶ This may be an attempt to undermine the tradition of Jubilees, which associates *Yom Kippur* with Joseph, which is similar to what occurs vis-à-vis the timing of Abraham's circumcision. This timing of the *Akeidah* also draws upon the traditions of Abraham as a High Priest, perhaps replacing Shem and Melchizedek, as discussed with regard to Abraham's tithing after rescuing Lot. In this section, PRE describes Abraham assuming a posture similar to the posture the High Priest would assume during a sacrifice.

Lines 41-42: וסלאכי חשרת 'and the ministering angels'—In the Biblical narrative, the angel, or messenger of God, calls to Abraham to stop. In PRE, the angels cry out to God to halt the proceedings. In a first person narrative from God's perspective, Jubilees asserts that the purpose of the *Akeidah* was to prove to prince Mastema, a fallen angel, even a devil archetype, that Abraham was completely devoted.²⁹⁷ Here, in PRE, the 'angel' stands idle while God watches the events unfolding and intercedes directly. As opposed to the tradition in Jubilees, in our section the angels advocate for Abraham and Isaac, and God intercedes directly. The only mention of a satanic figure is with respect to the ram in the section to come. This formulation of the events demonstrates the absolute control of God over the situation; one could infer that if the angels were to

²⁹⁵ Pesikta Rabbati *pisqa* 40.

²⁹⁶ Leviticus Rabbah 29:9.

²⁹⁷ Jubilees 18:9.

speak to Abraham, without God's consent, Abraham would continue with the act. The responsibility of the *Akeidah* has thus been shifted from Abraham to God and Isaac, which answers the ever present question, "How could a parent do this?"

Trial Ten

Part 3. Section 3

Text

- 46 רבי יהודה אומר כיון שהגיע החרב וצואר פרוצה ויצאה נפשו של יצחק וכיון
47 שהשמיע את קולו מבין שני הכרובים א"ל אל תשלח ירך וגו' חזרה נפשו לגופו
48 והתירו ועמד יצחק על רגליו וידע יצחק שכך המתים עתידים מחדות ופתח ואמר
49 בא"י מחדה המתים

Translation

Rabbi Judah said that when the blade touched [Isaac's] neck, his soul flew and departed. When [God's] voice was heard from between the two Cherubim saying to [Abraham], "Do not lay your hand upon the youth' (Gen. 22:12)," [Isaac's] soul returned to his body, and [Abraham] set him free, and Isaac stood upon his feet. And Isaac knew that in this manner the dead, in the future, will be revived. [Isaac] opened [his mouth], and said, "Blessed are You, Eternal who revives the dead."

Commentary

Through Abraham's acts of devotion and our continued relationship with God, as expressed through circumcision and atonement as well as the whole compendium of

*mitzvo*t, we, too, will earn the merit of our father Abraham. PRE teaches, then, that through devotion and observance, we can have faith that we and our children will be deserving of God's providence. Though this does not reflect a theology consistent with our modern experience, it reflects a theology consistent with the views of the redactor's socio-historical context.

Line 48: ...וידע 'צחק. 'And Isaac knew...—While the first edition contains a seemingly later insertion at this point, 'And Isaac knew of the resurrection of the dead from the Torah,'²⁹⁸ it is consistent with the major themes of PRE. This passage seems to undermine the Christian notion of resurrection; the pharisaic and then rabbinic idea, that Isaac is resurrected, runs counter to the exclusivity of Jesus' model of resurrection. This may be an anti-Christian polemic.

Line 49: כחיה חמתים בא' 'Blessed are You, Eternal who revives the dead'—This is the closing of the second prayer of the *Amidah*. As has been noted at the end of the sixth trial, the kidnapping of Lot, the prayers of the *Amidah* are explained in various places in PRE, helping to create the literary unity of the text.

Trial Ten

Part 4—The Ram

Text

- 50 רבי זכריה אומר אותו האיל שנברא בין השמשות היה רץ ובא להקריב תחת יצחק
51 וזיה סמאל עומד ומשטינו כדי לבטל קרבנו של אברהם אבינו ונאחו בשתי קרנותיו

²⁹⁸ PRE Constantinople, First edition 22a.

Translation

Rabbi Zechariah said that that ram, which was created during the twilight [of the sixth day of creation, before the first Shabbat], ran and came to be offered instead of Isaac, but *Sammael* was standing [there] and distracted it, in order to annul the offering of Abraham, our father. And it was caught by its two horns in the trees, as it is written, 'And Abraham lifted his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind him a ram [caught in the thicket by its horns]' (Gen. 22:13).

Commentary

Line 52: סמאל '*Sammael*'—*Sammael* is a fallen angel, a devil figure in rabbinic literature. In this response to Jubilees' empowerment of the devil as a motivational force in the proceedings of the *Akeidah*,²⁹⁹ PRE portrays the devil as having little influence even over the ram.

Trial Ten**Part 4. Section 1****Text**

- 53 מה עשה אותו האיל פשט את ידו ואוחז בטליתו של אברהם אבינו והביט אברהם
54 וראה האיל והלך והתירו והקריבו תחת יצחק בנו שנ' וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל
55 וגו'

²⁹⁹ Jubilees 18:9.

Translation

What did the ram do? It put forth its hoof and grabbed the coat of Abraham, our father, and Abraham looked and saw the ram, and he went and untangled it. He offered it up instead of Isaac, his son, as it is written, 'And Abraham went and took the ram[, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son]' (Gen. 22:13).

Commentary

Line 54: בִּסְלִיתוֹ 'his coat' Though Friedlander renders this word, 'coat',³⁰⁰ though it is possible to translate it as 'prayer shawl' to emphasize the ritualistic nature of the event as portrayed in PRE. If Abraham is acting as a High Priest, he would be adorned in the vestments of the priest. Anachronistically, a *tallit* could be substitute for those particular clothes, as it marks the leader of public ritual in the redactor's time period, as well as ours. The ram must draw Abraham's attention because, the tradition holds that the ram is behind Abraham, playing on the words '*ayil akhar*,' which could be rendered 'another ram,' 'a late ram,' or 'a ram behind.'

The theme of portraying Abraham as the agent of all the other characters zeal and devotion to God is reinforced in this story. Even the ram is an active participant in his own sacrifice, as he reaches and grabs Abraham's attention. In a very subtle manner, this is the ultimate portrayal of Abraham as the High Priest, as an agent of others' devotion, but not an actor himself. In the Akeidah, he is mostly a holy vessel, but not the motivator or source of intention.

³⁰⁰ Friedlander, *The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*, p.229.

Trial Ten

Part 4, Section 2

Text

- 56 רבי ברכיה אומ' עולה ריח ניחוח לפני ה' בא לוריה ניחוח של יצחק ונשבע
57 לברכו בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא שנא' בי נשבעתי נאם ה' כי יען וגו' ואמר כי ברך
58 אברכך וחרבה ארבה את זרעך וגו' כי ברך בעולם הזה אברכך בעולם הבא וחרבה
59 ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים לעתיד לבא

Translation

Rabbi Berachiah said that the sweet aroma [of the ram] ascended before the Holy One, Blessed be God, as though it were the sweet aroma of Isaac. And [God] swore to bless him in this world and in the world to come, as it is written, 'By Myself, I have sworn, declared the Eternal, because he complied' [with My command] (Gen 22:16), and it is written, 'For in blessing, I will bless you, and in multiplying, I will multiply your seed, as the stars of the heaven' (Gen 22:17). 'That in blessing' [refers] to this world; 'I will bless you' [refers to] in the world to come; and 'I will greatly multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven' [refers to] the world to come.

Commentary

This section marks the culmination of the Ten Trials. God is pleased and rewards Abraham for passing all of the tests by reiterating and expanding upon the promises that God has made to Abraham previously.

Line 57: לברכו 'to bless him'—Often Midrash explains and clarifies issues with expanded illustrations in order to make its point. In this case, however, the midrash has intentionally left the phrase ambiguous to further its agenda. When 'God swore to bless him,' the natural assumption is that the objective pronoun refers to Abraham, *i.e.*, 'God swore to bless Abraham.' However, the last name mentioned is Isaac, making Isaac the antecedent of the pronoun; the phrase can then be rendered, 'God swore to bless Isaac.' While the overall effect of the blessing is the same because it is only through Isaac that Abraham's seed will be multiplied, the implications are different. This latter reading emphasizes the idea that Abraham is not the most important party, but his actions were the result of Isaac's zeal and passion.

Trial Ten

Part 4, Section 3

Text

- 60 רבי חנניא בן דוסא אומר אותו האיל שוברא בין השמשות לא יצא ממנו דבר
 61 לבטלה אפרו של איל הוא יסוד שעל גבי המזבח הפנימי גידי של איל אלו עשרה
 62 גבלים של כטר שהיה דוד מנגן בהם עורו של איל הוא אזור מתניו של אליהו זכור
 63 לטוב איש בעל שער וגו' קרנו של איל של שמאל שתקע בו בחר סיני שנאמר ויהי
 64 במשוך בקרן ושל ימין שהיא גדולה משמאל שהם ועתידה לתקוע בה לעתיד לבא
 65 שנ' והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול ואומר והיה יי למלך על כל הארץ וגו'

Translation

Rabbi Chanina, son of Dosa, said of that ram, which was created during the twilight [of the sixth day of creation, before the first Shabbat], that nothing came from it that was insignificant. The ashes of the ram were the foundation upon which the inner altar [was built]. The sinews of the ram were the ten strings of the harp on which David played. The ram's skin was the girdle [around] Elijah's loins, may he be remembered for good, [as it is written] 'he was a hairy man[, and belted with a girdle of leather about his loins]' (2 Kings 1:8). The horn of the ram of the left side [was] sounded upon Mount Sinai, as it is written, 'And it will come to pass, that when the ram's horn sounds long' (Josh. 6:5). The horn of the right side is larger than the left, and it will be sounded in the future to come, as it is written, 'And it shall come to pass on that day, that a great trumpet shall be sounded' (Isa. 27:13), and it is written, 'And the Eternal will reign over all the earth' (Zech. 14:9).

Commentary

If we list the items that are products of the sacrifice of the ram, or, by analogy, Isaac, we see a list of redemption vehicles: 1. the altar representing the observance of *mitzvot*, 2. David, the progenitor of the messianic genealogical line, 3. Elijah, the harbinger of the messiah, and 4. the *shofar* that will announce the messiah's arrival. The sacrifice of Isaac is, therefore, the initial step in the fulfillment of the messianic promise according to PRE.

Line 62: ...אפרו של איל 'The ashes of the ram...'—Again, the association of Mt. Moriah with the site of the *Akeidah* echos the traditions discussed earlier of the other

sacrifices which were offered upon this same altar. Perhaps this is a subtle anti-Islam polemic, because it identifies Mount Moriah as the appropriate place for sacrifice, but does not mention the revelation or reception of prophecy upon or associated with the location. This then raises doubt as to the legitimacy of Mohammed's ascension to heaven from this place, because it is a site of sacrifice, not prophecy.

Trial Ten

Part 5—Worship

Text

- 66 רבי יצחק אומר הכל לא נברא אלא בזכות השתחויות אברהם לא שב מחר המוריה
67 אלא בזכות השתחויה שנ' ונשתחוה ונשובה אליכם בית המקדש לא נברא אלא בזכות
68 השתחויה שנאמר רוממו "אלהינו והשתחונו להדום רגליו

Translation

Rabbi Isaac said that nothing has been created except by the merit of worship. Abraham returned from Mount Moriah only through the merit of worship, as it is written, 'We will worship, and come again to you' (Gen. 22:5). The Temple was fashioned only through the merit of worship, as it is written, 'You will exalt the Eternal, our God, and worship' (Ps. 99:5).

Commentary

As a closing to the Ten Trials of Abraham, the redactor attempts to draw a

contemporary message, 'nothing has been created except by the merit of worship.' After the depictions of Abraham as High Priest of the sacrificial cult, an audience of the ninth century, long after the destruction of the temple, may feel that PRE is a Midrash which contains nothing valuable and applicable for their daily lives. The redactor now cites a component of the Biblical narrative, that he had chosen to skip—Abraham's statement that he and Isaac would worship and then return.³⁰¹

This verse could have been used to promote the idea that Abraham and Isaac knew that God would spare them, which would have placed the Biblical verse in a chronological order. Therefore, it must be assumed that the redactor of PRE was very conscious of this verse and brought it here to transform the trials into a personally enlightening parable. If we worship God, with the same attention and perseverance as Abraham, we, too, can withstand the trials which we face in our lives.

³⁰¹ Genesis 22:5.

Chapter 3

Major Themes and Messages

As is the case with much of literature, PRE is thematically dense. It has much to say and uses as few words as possible to say it. As a result, many of the images, arguments, and scenes in PRE embody more than one idea at a time, resulting in a very rich text. In analyzing the text as a cohesive unit then, we have to attempt to discern its organizing principles. We find that PRE has much to say about life in two major areas: ritual life and political life. Themes related to ritual life include all the issues discussed that are related to a person's relationship with God, without making any claims concerning dogma or the necessity of any personal theological position. In the general category of political life, PRE comments upon the interactions and relationships of different groups and communities. To utilize the image of *Yom Kippur* raised throughout PRE, the two areas of discussion are the same areas of concern presented in the Mishna, relationships between a human being and God, and those of a human being and his or her fellow human being.³⁰²

A. Ritual Life

A precursor to the discussion of ritual observance is the motivation for engaging in ritual behavior. PRE makes clear that God's providence is directly tied to human behavior. When human's behavior is in accordance with God's commandments, they are rewarded, either in this world or in the world to come. We see this attitude after Abraham frees Lot in Trial Six and through the actions of Hagar in the wilderness in Trial Eight, for example. After Lot had been freed, Abraham expressed concern that his victory in battle was the total reward that he had earned throughout his life, and he had

³⁰² M. *Yoma* 8.9.

yet to have a child. God assured him that he merited more than just a military victory in this life, and that reward would be lavished upon him even after his death. Similarly, Abraham's merit was rewarded through the protection of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness, until she strayed from the Divine path. The punishment she then experienced convinced her to behave appropriately, thereby demonstrating the motivational power of the system of Divine reward and punishment.

One earns reward in this system through perfecting one's body, one's ritual observance, and one's behavior. While these areas are intimately related and intertwined, we can see how PRE treats each one of them.

In the opening of the discussion of Trial Eight, Circumcision, the idea of physical perfection is explicitly spelled out. For Abraham to attain perfection, he must excise his physical blemish. In the ensuing discussion about his role as High Priest, it is underscored that if he were to circumcise any other part of his body than his foreskin, he would not attain perfection and, therefore, invalidate himself from performing the ritual acts. This idea of physical perfection is not limited to Abraham. Isaac and Ishmael are distinguished on the basis physical perfection; Isaac is chosen because he is born of perfection, circumcision, while Ishmael is not. A contributing factor in the denigration of Ishmael is that he was conceived of an uncircumcised man. Even farther removed from Abraham, one of Isaac's arguments for being bound upon the altar is so that he will not flinch, causing an accidental injury, thereby marring himself. If he is not physically perfect, he will not be a suitable a sacrifice.

While it is possible that the issue of perfection arises from God's selection of Abraham, necessitating his perfection in all aspects of life, as we need to be perfect in our

observance of the *mitzvot*, it is also possible that this desire for physical perfection arises from real issues in the redactor's world. First, a 'perfect' animal is less likely to transmit diseases to those who consume it, therefore a perfect person is less likely to contaminate the community in which he or she lives. The second issue is related to this last rational. In the ninth century, life was more physically strenuous and demanding than in the modern period. Physical imperfections were potentially life threatening. For example, the risk of death from an infection caused by a small wound was quite real before the discovery of sulfa drugs and antibiotics. Congenital defects also were viewed as a sign of God's displeasure. And while this idea is not unique to PRE, as we see in the rabbinic categorization of the deaf, the mentally ill, and minors, who are all seen as being physically imperfect, the level of physical perfection and the emphasis placed upon it in our text is striking.

Physical perfection allowed Abraham to participate in ritual. PRE goes to great lengths to portray Abraham as observing all of the *mitzvot*, despite the temporal issue of the Revelation at Sinai significantly post dating Abraham. This issue is raised in relationship to the rituals of marriage in interactions with Pharaoh and Avimelech, to the tithing after the rescue of Lot, the observance of circumcision, to the rituals of divorce and inheritance raised in relationship to Hagar, and in the rituals of sacrifice as seen in the 'Covenant between the Pieces' and the *Akeidah*. It is only through the perfect observance of the *mitzvot* that God's promises to Abraham will be fulfilled and the Jewish people, his seed, will survive and flourish. This idea makes the motif of Abraham's adherence to the commandments a strong anti-Christian polemic, as will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. Additionally, God's providence is afforded

to individuals who display appropriate behavior.

As our prophets stressed that morality and appropriate behavior are more important than mere ritual acts, so, too, does PRE stress the importance of the perfection of behavior. Even after his circumcision, Abraham welcomed the stranger. Ishmael was expelled because he misbehaved with regard to Isaac and was later forced to take a second wife because of the imperfect behavior of his first wife.

Thus, through the perfection of his body, his ritual observance, and his moral behavior, Abraham received the reward of God's promise and the covenant. Even in situations where the Bible portrays Abraham in a negative light, like fleeing a famine and leaving the land that God had showed him, only to exchange Sarah for self protection, PRE portrays Abraham as being perfect. It is through creative interpretations of the Biblical text and retention and organization of existing traditions that PRE underscores this message of faith, observance, and morality leading to ultimate redemption. This is an important message for either the ninth century or the twenty-first century.

B. Political Life

Utilizing the same methodology of creative interpretation of the Biblical text and the aggadic traditions, PRE comments upon the socio-historical context in which the redactor lives. Living in the Land of Israel during the Abbasid dynasty about a century and a half after the fall of the Byzantine empire in the region, the redactor is faced with the greater tolerance of Jews under Islam than under Christianity. However, in the early to middle part of the ninth century, the Islamic regime in the Land of Israel began to

weaken and it became more restrictive of the Jews.

Another contributing factor to the redactor's political views is his apparent attachment to the 'chain of authority,' Jewish tradition as expressed by the recognized historical power structure. The chain began with Abraham when he forged the covenant with God, of which Isaac and Jacob were the rightful heirs. Moses is included in the chain which leads to the rabbis of the Mishna, the *Tannaim* through the Pharisaic tradition. The *Amoriam* of the Talmud are next in the line of succession in which the redactor finds himself. Any variation from this direct line of descent is viewed by PRE in a negative light, because both Islam and Christianity lay claim to Abraham's covenant.

The differences of traditions found in PRE as compared to those in the Book of Jubilees is a manifestation of this perspective. This book, contained in the Pseudepigrapha, dates from the middle of the Second Temple period, but is omitted from the canon, the *Tanach*. While PRE does not discuss the Book of Jubilees directly, it includes traditions which are directly antithetical to those in Jubilees, because it is located outside of the main stream of Jewish authority. For example, PRE actively associates the events of Abraham's life with dates and times that Jubilees associates with other figures, thereby discrediting the claims of Jubilees. Another example is the portrayal of Abraham and Shem as High Priests, where Jubilees asserts that Melchizedek filled that role, though Shem is often identified with Melchizedek. Since this text, which is found within the greater Jewish tradition as is PRE, is undermined by PRE because it is outside the chain of authority, how much more are groups that have split from or attempt to supercede this chain of authority.

Probably as result of the intense persecution experienced by the Jews under

Christianity and the active threat posed by the Christian world against the Jews, material preserved in PRE is clearly anti-Christian. From the First Trial, issue is taken with the Christian story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The 'birth of a hero motif' is utilized to usurp the unique nature of Jesus' birth. In the story of Lot's kidnapping, Jesus' miracles are attributed to the practice of idolatry. The identification of Melchizedek as the progenitor of the priesthood in the early Christian literature enables PRE, which lays claim to Abraham as the progenitor of the priesthood, to respond simultaneously to Christianity and Jubilees. This identification may fuel the redactor's anti-Jubilees position. In the material on circumcision, the anti-Christian arguments are barely veiled, for not only does the early Christian rejection of the necessity of circumcision fly in the face of the ideal of perfection, as discussed above, but it seems to be a great threat to the Jewish survival. Throughout the ages, circumcision has been one of the most widely observed of the *mitzvot*, but also one of the most widely discussed. It is also one of the most public signs of a Jew's identity. For that reason, the redactor may fear that the lack of requiring circumcision is motivated by the desires of Christianity to proselytize. These are only a few of the issues that PRE emphasizes as it responds to Christianity.

As sure as he is in his position against Christianity, the redactor seems as intensely ambivalent about Islam. While it is clear that PRE does not like claims of supersession, the Islamic rulers are not as repressive as were the Christians. However, it may be more difficult to be as outspoken against the current ruling authority, than Christianity, under which the redactor does not live. As a result, both sides of the coin are expressed throughout PRE. Islam is praised for conquering the Byzantines in the

discussion of Ishmael's children, while Ishmael and Islam are portrayed as descendants of Pharaoh, about whom our tradition takes a fairly negative view. One of the most beautiful examples of this ambivalence is that while Abraham expels Ishmael, he still provides for and looks after him. And though loved by Abraham, Ishmael is not selected as the heir to the covenant. This love and hate relationship both between Abraham and Ishmael, and the redactor and Islam, is expressed throughout PRE.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Despite the presentation and analysis of PRE in individual segments in this thesis, PRE is a work of literary and thematic unity. As discussed, the major themes and issue found within 'The Ten Trials of Abraham' are the proof for this unity, at least within this six chapter segment. Though I broke the text into small systematic units for ease of discussion, the language of the text is beautiful and flows seamlessly from one story to the next. The use of foreshadowing and allusion throughout the text are signs of a the redactor's editorial hand. The designation of the site of Abraham's circumcision as the sight of the altar foreshadows the sacrifice of Isaac upon the place. The references to Ishmael as the fruit of '*orlah*,' foreshadows Ishmael's expulsion and then his rejection as not being a worthy sacrifice. The use of similar language to Numbers allows for the entire motif of the Ten Trials. PRE also uses symbolic language to allude to inter-cultural referents: Edom is Rome, and Ishmael and Eliezer fighting represents the conflict between the Christian and Islamic worlds. Word plays, such as interpreting 'bloods' to be the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Passover lamb, and 'wander' being read as 'wicked, and repeated images, like Abraham standing and praying, images of blood and sacrifices, and motifs, including Abraham's pursuit of perfection and his absolute devotion, and finally the use of formulaic patterns, such as an introduction to every trial, all demonstrate the high quality of PRE as a literary work. As such, it has preserved a message for us today, over a millennia after its final redaction.

In addition to enlightening our reading of the Biblical narrative, and providing us with new avenues of interpretation into the *Torah*, PRE teaches us about the timeless struggles among human beings and communities, and in particular the struggle of Jews in the world. Though we live in a time in which we again possess the Land of Israel and we

American Jews enjoy total freedom and tolerance of religion, we still face many of the issues that confronted the redactor of PRE. With the rise of Islam, the ambivalence which is expressed in PRE resonates with our own experience. The internal Jewish struggles between different factions within the People of Israel, which PRE expresses with regard to the traditions preserved in the Book of Jubilees, is a daily concern for Jews of the twenty-first century. The challenges to the Jews from the Christian world are likely to rise as international conflicts increase and Christianity fears the threat of supercession by Islam. All of this was experienced by the redactor of PRE. PRE does not give us solutions to these challenges and issues, but he does provide us with tools for grappling with them.

Through the creative interpretation and reinterpretation of our texts, traditions, and our knowledge of the world around us, we can create new texts which can help us to express our place in the world and our relationship with God, and to find strategies for the survival and flourishing of Judaism. In order to do that, further study of PRE would be both beneficial and essential. One avenue of further study that arises naturally from this thesis and for this purpose, is to examine the whole of PRE and trace parallels to it throughout the history of rabbinic literature. A second avenue to pursue might be the study of parallel texts and traditions found in Hadith literature of Islam and in the Christian commentaries. We might ask: How were the 'Ten Trials of Abraham' interpreted in Renaissance Spain or Medieval France? Did the communities of North Africa or Italy embrace, transform, or reject the text? How is PRE used in the many different periods of history? How do other traditions view Abraham's trials? In so doing,

we will develop a greater appreciation of the power and potential of the Midrashic Process.

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