SEMITIC CHRISTIANITY

St. Aphrahat & The Sages of Babylonian Talmud

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Semitic Christianity: St. Aphrahat and The Sages of Babylonian Talmud

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I heard a reproach that greatly distressed me. The unclean say, “This people that has been gathered from the peoples have no God.” And the wicked say, “If they have a God, why does he not seek vengeance for his people?” The gloom thickens around me even more whenever the Jews reproach us and magnify themselves over people.

Aphrahat (Dem. 21.1)

To my parents Igor and Ludmila Lizorkin,
who taught me how to think critically.

To the blessed memory of my grandparents
Ben Tzion and Svetlana Berdichevsky and Samyon and Lilia Gerjel.

To Marina Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, who enables me to be the best man I can be
and to my children Yulia, Ravital, Tomer, Lana, Oren and Moshe – my joy and pride.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Significance of Aphrahat

Many scholars of Syriac Christian and Babylonian Jewish literature agree that the figure of Aphrahat (c. 285-345 CE) has re-emerged as one of the most fascinating representatives of so-called Semitic Christianity.[1] There are a number of reasons for this emerging consensus. First, this Church Father's writings are of great value, since he ministered when and where significant portions of the Babylonian Talmud were put into writing, in the middle of a strong and thriving Jewish community. His self-reported interactions with the Jewish community of his day bring to light some previously unknown information that may lead to new perspectives on that community. From this standpoint, Aphrahat has the potential to help us clarify our picture of Mesopotamian Judaism of the fourth century. Second, Aphrahat's writings afford us a unique look at a Christianity that was largely unaffected by Roman political and religious developments, and may thus in some ways have resembled certain types of early Christianity. Writings from Aphrahat's period are of particular interest because, from the beginning of the following century influences from the west would break through Persia's iron curtain, increasingly infiltrating and affecting that society. Aphrahat's writings encourage us to think freely about what the history of Christianity in general might have been had it gone the way of Aphrahat's community.[2] Third, Aphrahat, having engaged himself in the ancient Jewish-Christian polemic, allows us to transport ourselves back to fourth-century Persia and take a closer look at the foundations of that polemic.[3] Many things have transpired in the history of Jewish-Christian relations throughout the past sixteen centuries, but much of what happened is rooted in the fourth century.[4] This study, however, concentrates on reconstructing a Christian-Jewish conversation in Northern Babylonia, which was home to Aphrahat and his followers, as well as a significant Jewish community. It contributes to the ongoing study of the Christian and Jewish history of Babylonia during this crucial time for the development of both religions.

Aphrahat's person

His name, Aphrahat, is the Syriac version of the Persian name Frahāt (modern Farhād).[5]The Persian Sage was a subject of Shapur II (309-379 CE).[6] All that scholars can say with confidence about Aphrahat is known from his writings.[7] Self-description seems to be intentionally obscured by Aphrahat; he wanted the reader to concentrate on the important things that were the teachings of His Lord, upon which he was expounding in his Demonstrations (Dem. 22.26).[8] Aphrahat resided somewhere in Persian territories, although the exact location is unknown. All the evidence suggests that Aphrahat had a command only of Syriac and cognate languages, as he never gives any indication that he is familiar with either the Greek of the LXX or the Greek New Testament.[9] Aphrahat seems to quote from the Gospel (Diatessaron) and not from four separate Gospels. His arguments seem to be positioned well within an exclusively Semitic world. In his Christological discussions, for example, he shows no knowledge of the council of Nicaea, which took place 10 years before his first Demonstrations were written.[10] Peterson is probably correct when he argues that Aphrahat is rather clear in his "non-orthodox" Christology, suggesting that the fault for consistently placing Aphrahat within the "orthodox" camp lies with the generally biased treatments of Aphrahat by church historians both ancient and modern.[11]

Aphrahat's location

Since many of his concerns presuppose a monastic community we are safe in placing him at one of the proto-monastic centres of Persia. The difficulty arises in the methodology for assigning a more specific location. If we assume that all ancient proto-monasteries survived to our day, or at least that we have reliable information with regard to all of them, then the Mar Mattai monastery in modern-day Iraq can be established as the location. The fourteenth-century document assigns to Aphrahat that geographical locale and much of today's scholarship simply takes this assumption, though only in passing, to be a historically verifiable fact. The monastery was established sometime in the fourth century, and that location is consistent with the few things that scholars know about Aphrahat. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that this location is at best a plausible suggestion not yet substantiated by positive evidence.

Aphrahat's ministry

As was stated above, scholars know very few details about Aphrahat.[12] His proto-monastic orientation is not in dispute, since it is self-evident from the content of his writings (Dem. 6, On Covenanters). What is unclear is how influential his position was. Scholars conclude that Aphrahat may have been a chief monk. He argues against the official spokesman of the church, especially in Dem. 14, which probably means that he was a person of some spiritual influence. In Dem. 14 he uses "we" and "us" often, which speaks to the fact that he represents the whole community (this is explicitly stated in Dem. 22.26). His self-description seems to always underplay the level of his achievement. He calls himself by names like "a disciple of the holy scriptures" (Dem. 22.26) and a "stone-mason" who only supplies the raw material to the "wise-architects" to build up the Church (Dem. 10.9), while in reality the prominent characteristic of

his writing is a colossal memory knowledge of an enormous quantity of biblical citations and allusions that cannot be termed anything but phenomenal.[13]

From Demonstrations it appears that Aphrahat himself belonged to a proto-monastic Christian community called Sons of the Covenant (B'nai Q'yâmâ).[14] These believers devoted themselves to the day-to-day service of their Lord in monastic communities throughout the East.[15] They did so through selfless dedication to God, which was manifested by their surrender of personal property, time and relationships outside of the community for the purposes of devotion to Christ, their King. Aphrahat wrote:

Study what I have written to you: you and the brothers, the covenanters, who love virginity. Be on your guard against mockers, for if anyone mocks or scoffs at his brother, the word that is written in the gospel (when our Lord wanted to warn the greedy and the Pharisees) is fulfilled against him. For it is written: "Because they were lovers of money, they mocked him." Even now, all those who do not agree with this mock in the same way. Read and learn, and be zealous to read and to act. Let this Law of God be your meditation at all times. And when you read this letter, by your life, my friend, rise and pray, and remember my sinfulness in your prayer. (Dem. 6.20)[16]

2. Demonstrations

Historical setting

Aphrahat resided in a place where the Jewish community was strong, vibrant and influential. It was politically safe to be Jewish, which was often not the case in Roman lands. On and off, the Jews enjoyed the status of honoured people, because they often rebelled against Rome – the archenemy of Persia. Hence the old proverb once again proved true: the enemy of your enemy is your friend. At this early date Christians and Jews were not all that distinguishable to the Persian government. They did not have a distinctive appearance and they all spoke Aramaic. As a Jewish sect, Christians were at times persecuted, but their persecutions were part of the persecutions directed at the Jews.

Sometime after the Christianising of the West, the Persian government became increasingly aware that the various Jewish and related movements within Persia were not all the same, predictable and faithful subjects of the Sassanian Empire. Some, mainly the Christians, were co-religionists with their adversary, Rome. By then the Roman Empire completed its Christianisation process and the Roman Emperor became the high protector of all the faithful. Constantine, the new Christian Emperor (c. 324 CE), wrote a letter preserved in Eusebius's Vita Constantini to Shapur II (309-379 CE) in which he asserted his own divine appointment and, among other things, warned Shapur II that God's vengeance would fall on all who persecute Christians.[17] Whether or not it was this letter that provoked the worst of the persecutions of the

Christians we may never know.[18] However, in 337 CE, the year of Constantine's death, Shapur II launched his first military campaign in Mesopotamia, imposed a double tax on Christians and murdered several of the leaders of the Persian Church such as Simeon Bar Sabbae (c. 344 CE), the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

Structure

Judging from the titles, the first portion (Dem. 1-10) seems to concern itself primarily with Christian piety. This section includes such demonstrations as on prayer and love.[19] The second part (Dem. 11-22) seems to change sharply in topical selection, focusing mostly on anti-Jewish argumentation. It includes such demonstrations as on Sabbath and Passover.[20] However, the more pietistic chapters, traditionally held to be the first part of Demonstrations, were also engaging in Jewish-Christian polemic in spite of their non-polemical titles as will be clearly shown in this study. According to Owens, Dem. I-X is commonly called Book I. It covers aspects of Christian faith and life, while Dem. XI-XXII is called Book II, treating questions posted to Christianity by Judaism. Dem. XXIII stands outside of the acrostic of Book I and II and deals with chronological circulations of biblical history. Demonstrations were written in three stages: the work was begun in 336 (Dem. 22.25), continued in 344 (Dem. 14.50), and brought to a conclusion in 345 CE (Dem. 23.69). Twenty-two out of the twenty-three Demonstrations are laid out in alphabetical acrostic and thus, according to this author, constitute Demonstrations: Book I.[21] Demonstrations: Book II (Demonstration 23 in our manuscripts) begins with the first demonstration of a second series that Aphrahat started and was apparently hindered from finishing either by sickness or, quite possibly, by martyrdom:

Book I

Demonstration 1: On Faith

Demonstration 2: On Love

Demonstration 3: On Fasting

Demonstration 4: On Prayer

Demonstration 5: On War

Demonstration 6: On Covenanters

Demonstration 7: On the Penitent

Demonstration 8: On the Dead Coming to Life

Demonstration 9: On Humility

Demonstration 10: On Shepherds

Demonstration 11: On Circumcision

Demonstration 12: On the Passover Sacrifices

Demonstration 13: On Sabbath

Demonstration 14: An Argument in Response to Dissension

Demonstration 15: On the Avoidance of Food

Demonstration 16: On the Peoples in Place of the People

Demonstration 17: On Christ, who is the Son of God

Demonstration 18: Against the Jews, concerning Virginity and Holiness

Demonstration 19: Against the Jews, who say that they will yet be gathered together

Demonstration 20: On the Support of the Poor

Demonstration 21: On Persecution

Demonstration 22: On Death and the End Times

Book II

Demonstration 1: On the Grape Cluster

3. Audience

Aphrahat's Audience

Demonstration's main audience was Christian. This collection of teachings was essentially written to reaffirm the faith of the faithful by defending this faith from the emotional, psychological and spiritual harassment of some representatives of the Jewish community. Simply put, the intended audience of Aphrahat's Demonstrations was Christians and Jews. This statement may sound too simplistic, but as one continues to give a deeper level of description to these two communities of faith, the issue of intent naturally becomes more complex. From the standpoint of explicit declarations of intent found in the Demonstrations, things are clear. These writings are directed to a fellow Christian who allegedly asked Aphrahat for help with the theological-biblical interpretive process that he was engaged in 'A Request for Instruction'

prologue. But are we really justified in saying that Demonstrations is directed only at Christians who need encouragement and Christian education to withstand criticism from Jewish community members? The answer that is proposed in this study is that there are layers of intent, some of which may only have been secondary as Aphrahat wrote his responses.

When we say that Aphrahat's audience was Christian, what we mean is that it consisted of ethnic Jews and Gentiles who recognised Jesus as their Messiah. Majority, probably, had no Jewish background, while others came from the well-established Jewish communities in the region. On the one hand, Aphrahat sought to persuade those Jesus-believing Jews who doubted the Messiahship of Jesus, while also presenting an argument to Gentile Christians that the following of Jesus constitutes the true faith of Ancient Israel.

Aphrahat's Jewish Community

Since, countrary to the popular opinions, we cannot be confident exactly where in the Persian lands Aphrahat resided, we cannot be sure of the exact nature of the Jewish community Aphrahat encountered. But because the conclusions of this study suggest that the Jews encountered by Aphrahat had some kind of connection to the proto-Rabbinic Judaism, the following description of the Jewish community in Babylonia becomes relevant. The Jewish community could call Babylon their old home, for it is from here that their patriarch was called to go to the Promised Land (Gen. 11:31-12:2).[22] The Talmud explains why Babylon was chosen as a place of Israel's exile: "Because He sent them to their mother's house. To what might this be linked? To a man angered at his wife. To where does he send her – to her mother's house!" (bPesahim 87b).[23] The sages encouraged the people to take to heart the prophetic directions of Jeremiah:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:4-7).

This idea was argued further by the rabbis as the issue of Shekhina's presence that allegedly moved from the Land of Israel to the Land of Babylonia (mMegillah 3:3). The special statues of Shaf ve-Yativ in Nehardea are also reconfirmed by the eighth-century tradition preserved in the Epistle of Rav Sherira Gaon (d. 998): "They called that synagogue 'Shaf ve-Yativ in Nehardea,' that is to say that the Temple travelled and rested here."[24] Gafni argues that the Jews were granted a haven in the one territory uniquely qualified to receive them back in the light of their ancient roots there, thereby affording them, even while uprooted, a sense of comfort and familiarity rather than the expected alienation of captivity.[25]

The Jews and the Parthian Empire

Friendship commitment is proven only when a nation engages in military conflict and the friendly side does, after all, come to its aid. In 70 CE this friendship of Jews and Parthians was tested. The Parthians proved to be loyal partners in the political enterprise. When Jerusalem was attacked, the Parthian Empire dispatched a sizable battalion to Jerusalem to fight the Roman onslaught alongside of the Jews. Even though it was Babylonians who exiled the Jews away from their land, history sometime shows that harsh treatment of one nation by another does not necessarily mean that relationships will remain bad forever. It was the King Darius, according to biblical accounts, who provided legal and financial support for the rebuilding of Jerusalem's Temple. The relationship of the Jews and Persians must also be viewed in the context of the relationship between the Persians and the Romans. Everything we know about the relationship of the Jews with the Babylonian authorities tells us that, more often than not, they were strong and steady.[26]

Rome and the Parthian Empire were two strong powers that had reached deadlock in their struggle and continued to exchange hostile rhetoric for years. In the Greco-Roman Empire Hellenization was frequently regarded by many Jews as a direct attempt to destroy the people of Israel. In Persia, however, this was not usually the case. The Jews were honoured as a protected minority and were not under significant and consistent pressure to accept the Persian way of life by converting to their religious culture. In Rome the Jews were considered political enemies to be distrusted and kept at bay, in spite of existence of the Philo-Semiticism throughout the Empire. In the Persian East, however, to be part of the Jewish people meant being regarded as enemies by the Persians' enemies and hence friends of Persia. Possible exceptions to this appear to be the times when Persia's own religious leaders went through the periods of renewed destructive zeal and commitment to their particular form of Zoroastrian faith. Those periods, however, were short, and resurfaced only briefly.

The Jews and the Sassanian Empire

Jewish settlements were chiefly found in Mesopotamia, where the boundaries of the Jewish colonies mainly coincided with the political boundaries of the Sassanian province Babylonia, Asuristan (in Aramaic called Bet Aramaye).[27] The centre was in Babylonia, but Jewish inhabitants were also living in the southern Mesene province, the Sassanian vassal kingdom of Maishan. It is known from a variety of sources that the satrapy of Adiabene was densely settled by the Jews, some whom converted to Judaism, some who were of Jewish background themselves. The official conversion of the royal house of Adiabene[28] must have been an event of great importance for Iranian Jewry.[29] Neusner believes that converts from these Jewish, but non-Rabbinic lands were the Jews in Aphrahat's Demonstrations, since among other reasons Aphrahat does not bring up a critique of the Oral Law.[30]

Perhaps, the fact that such a prominent person as Aphrahat, in the middle of such a strong Jewish community as in Babylonia, does not even mention the idea of the Oral Law (p. 123) by way of critique argues only that Rabbinic Jews were rather insignificant and marginal at that time and

had not yet gained representative powers and standing, at least in the area of Aphrahat's community.[31] It is held by this author that the Jews encountered by Aphrahat should be best called Para-Rabbinic Jews (see 1.4), since they had much in common with later Rabbinic Judaism, but naturally were not in full compliance with all the current and later rulings as a result of the timing of Rabbinic Judaism's development and their non-central location. Additionally, it is difficult to see Neusner's logic, since such critique of Oral Torah is often absent in other Adversus Judaeos writers as well.

As various ancient Iranian dynasties forced each other out of power, the Jews had to learn how to survive in this ever-changing political climate. As we come to the discussion of Jewish history in fourth-century Babylonia, it is important to remember that the Parthian dynasty, which was generally favourably disposed towards the Jewish community, had been fairly recently replaced (226 CE) by the Sassanian dynasty. This dynasty was new in the sense of new management and hence new direction, and old in the sense of the renewal of Zoroastrian religious commitments and the perceived historical ancestry of Achaemenids (648–330 BCE).

According to Newman, after the Sassanid dynasty came to power, the Jews had nothing to gain and everything to lose. However, to a large extent, their fears did not come to pass. In Ctesiphon,[32] for example, Jews continued to be utilized as middle-level government officials, who by now had a long experience in Mesopotamian administrative and financial practice. Simply by means of government appreciation it is clear that the Jews were a privileged minority.[33]

The fall of the Parthian dynasty coincided with the dawn of the Babylonian Rabbinic era.[34] On the one hand, the fear of dire conditions must have provoked them into action; on the other hand, the freedom afforded to them by the Sassanid dynasty in Shapur I's time allowed great progress in the work they undertook. Some rare persecutions may be explained simply by differing domestic policies. The new Sassanian dynasty that succeeded the Arsacids would be characterized by a more centralized political regime, imagining itself as the new coming of the ancient Achaemenids, and even more important, by a new commitment to the old Zoroastrianism.[35] Despite the Jews' fears of being targeted by the new regime, their status did not deteriorate significantly, although the Talmud does allude to pressures at times felt from actions taken by the Zoroastrian clergy.[36] There was a phase of uncertainty and repression under Ardeashir (the first Sassanid king). Jews, having had excellent relations with the Parthians, were suspected of being collaborators with the deposed dynasty and their movements were restricted. Under Shapur I the rabbis and the Jewish representative at the court (exilarch) came to an understanding by which the Jews were granted more freedom of movement, and the Sassanids could count on their compliance with taxing and general legal prescriptions. Shapur's antagonism against the ruler of Palmyra (in Syria), who had destroyed the Jewish centre of Nehardea when he invaded Babylonia, helped the situation and eased the tension between Shapur and his Jewish subjects. In the wars between Rome and Shapur II, the Jews, unlike Christians, were decidedly loyal to the Persian king, with the exception of a few messianic groups. The later massive repression of the Jews under Yazdgird II, Peroz and Kavad was a result of political

actions by such messianic groups, who anticipated the imminent arrival of a new Messiah on the 400th anniversary of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

Aphrahat's Christian Community

The History of Christianity's spread in the East is a matter of much debate. According to Romeney, "The main problem is perhaps not so much the distance in time, but the fact that all sources, are written from a certain perspective."[37] Some things, however, scholars are fairly confident about. Christianity originally came to Ancient Mesopotamia during the Parthian period. In Acts the writer mentions that on the Day of Pentecost there were at Jerusalem "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia" (Acts 2:9).

The Christians and the Parthian Empire

The earliest inscription that confirms the presence of Christian communities is that of Abercius, which shows the significant progress that Christianity had achieved by c. 200 CE. The teachings of the Christian Apostles most likely spread through the caravan trade routes of the ancient Silk Road that connected the West with the East in more ways than just through the exchange of goods.

The discussion is focused on, among other things, which cities were the centres of Early Eastern Christianity and consequently were instrumental in sending the Christian message onward to its other destinations. By the fourth century there begin to appear legendary accounts, such as the Acts of Thomas, that purport to chronicle apostolic missions to the East. Probably the most famous legend of such foundational connection with the early apostolic movement survives in part in Eusebius (HE I.13)[38] and later reappears in an extended version as the Teaching of Addai written sometime in the fifth century.[39] The legend is the story of the correspondence of Abgar Ukkama of Edessa with Jesus and of his subsequent conversion to Christianity through one of Jesus' apostles who was sent to Edessa by Christ himself. By the late sixth century this legend building continues in Acts of Mar Mari,[40] which tells a story of the Apostle Mari, who was commissioned to convert Babylonia to Christianity. Mari reportedly did so through the royal families and aristocrats of Babylonia and his ministry was, at least according to this account, accompanied by miraculous activity. There seems to be little that would connect these later accounts to actual historical events, though some scholars have argued this way.[41] According to Harvey, at least certain threads of thematic continuity tie the later legends of Addai and Mari to the early Syriac texts. One is the interest in royal favour, and the other is the constant stress on healing.[42] The first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, mentions that a king of Adiabene accepted Judaism in about 36 CE. Such a conversion made Arbela, at least hypothetically, a natural centre for Jewish Christian missions at an early date.

While there seems to be agreement about the importance of Edessa in the early Christian expansion, same has not been the case with Arbela. The main issue that continues to cause problems for any significant reconstruction is once again the absence of reliable sources. In

ancient documents we are often faced with the fact that what is presented in the document is not what actually existed, but what was perceived by the author to be the case. So, it is the case that especially late documents speaking of early history oftentimes only testify to the belief that was prevalent at the time of the document's composition, though it still could have been rooted in an actual historical event. Such is probably the case with the Chronicle of Arbela, which according to most, though not all, scholars, is not a reliable historical document. Even if it can be established that this is not a forgery made by Mingana, who is said to have discovered and published this document, it is late in composition. In the final analysis, while it was possible that Arbela had gone through the conversion described in the Chronicle of Arbela, there does not seem to be much positive evidence that we are here not dealing with a response to the later significance of Arbela that – in the mind of the author of the Chronicle – needed to be substantiated by a much, much earlier account.

The second question that seemed to occupy the attention of scholars had to do with seeking to determine whether Christianity in the East travelled largely in Jewish or in Gentile circles. Various theories have been proposed, but there does not seem to be a consensus among scholars on any of those issues. The feeling that scholars sometime get was well summed up by Romeny: "…we have some pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle, but we hardly even know which corner they belong in."[43] Vööbus[44] and Murray[45] expressed the opinion that Christianity spread largely through Jewish communities from Palestine moving to the East along the trade route. The picture that is painted by these scholars is that Syriac Christianity developed in isolation from Hellenism and more or less held to its Semitic ideals. In the same vein, for example, Neusner talks about the spread of Christianity. Neusner states:

Christianity built its base in Edessa, and Tannaitic Judaism at Nisibis… both were represented at the outset at least by men actively engaged in spreading their respective doctrines. Thus what Edessa was to Christianity, Nisibis was to Tannaitic Judaism… it is striking that the two earliest centers of Christianity in the Euphrates valley were Edessa and Arbela, both cities containing Jewish communities but neither under Tannaite influence according to the sources available to us… one must infer therefore that wherever Tannaitic influence was strong among the local Jewish community, as in Nisibis and Nehardea, there Christianity made slight progress, if any, for a very long period of time.[46]

His observation regarding the connection of Tannaitic influence is probably correct, but the matter of fact statements on what constituted Christian centres as well as how Christianity spread are not defensible. This topic is far more complex. Drijvers, for example, puts forward a wholly different opinion. He maintains that the spread of Christianity to the East must mainly be credited to Gentile Christian movements.[47]

Central to this debate is the interpretation of the existence and, especially, origins of the Peshitta – a Syriac translation of the proto-Masoretic text of the OT. Weitzman argued that this translation, which became the Old Testament version used by Syriac Christianity, was translated

sometime in the second century or slightly later by a group of non-Rabbinic Jews.[48] While clearly identifying with Judaism, this group neglected some important sections of rabbinic ritual in favour of personal faith as characterized by a life of personal prayer for example. Weitzman acknowledged that many of the Peshitta's reworkings fit Christian theology, but he rejects the assertion that they are "unequivocally Christian".[49] He suggests that the Jewish community responsible for this translation in time converted to Christianity in large numbers "bringing with it a version of the Hebrew Bible".[50] Romeny essentially agrees with Weitzman's theory that non-Rabbinic Jews may have been responsible for this translation before or even after their alleged conversion to Christianity, but seeks to adjust Weitzman's theory by suggesting that it was translated in Edessa by a group of Jews who accepted a low-Christology form of Christianity.[51] Romeny argued that at this early stage it was not possible to distinguish clearly between Rabbinic and non-Rabbinic Jews, an observation that is crucial for this study's question and conclusion. The question is, however, whether it is at all possible to distinguish such a separate community and the answer must be given in the negative. Scholars should think more in terms of dominant religious trends than of watertight, discrete groups occupying separate contexts. There was a variety of forms that were not mutually exclusive or beyond reciprocal influence. Ideas travelled from one group to the other, even against the will of the leaders of respective communities. Church Fathers were complaining about Christians visiting synagogues and magic texts show that Jewish, Christian, and Gentile ideas could appear in a mixture as late as the fifth and sixth centuries. Those who sought healing went to a magician, who could be a rabbi, a monk, or a Gentile sorcerer.[52] A full discussion of the various theories and the history of the research falls outside of the scope of this study, but it crucial that the lack of consensus be acknowledged and that current research adopt a more cautious approach regarding the history of Christian expansion.

The Christians and the Sassanian Empire

In the Sassanian Empire (226-641 AD) Christianity as well as other religions had to endure persecution.[53] Christianity's chief opponents were the Zoroastrian Magi and priestly schools, as well as some Jews. The Sassanian kings in general championed Zoroastrianism, and though some did not oppose Christianity, national feelings always clung to the ancient creed. Nevertheless, Christianity kept growing steadily, partly as a result of the deportation of several hundred thousand Christian inhabitants of Roman Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia by Shapur I (240-270 AD).[54] The deportees were settled in Mesopotamia, Persis (Pars) and Parthia, a decision that was based on economic and demographic reasons, but unintentionally promoted the spread of the new faith.

This period of peace and prosperity for the Christian community lasted until the reign of Bahram II (276-293 AD). The first persecutions included that of Bahram's Christian concubine, Candida, one of the first Persian Martyrs.[55] The persecutions were supported and even promoted by the powerful high priest Kirdir. Bahram's persecutions remained the exception until the fourth century, when systematic harassment of Christians began. Originally, Christianity had spread

among the Jews and the Syrians. By the beginning of the fourth century, an increasing number of Persians were attracted to Christianity. For such converts, even during peaceful times membership in the church could mean loss of family, property, civil rights and even death.[56]

It is significant that no polemical interaction can be seen between Aphrahat and any form of Zoroastrianism. None of the main trends of Zoroastrianism as described in each introduction to each section seem to be reflected in any way in Aphrahat's writing. That, in and of itself, is very significant. His entire Demonstrations contained nothing resembling a critique of Zoroastrianism, thought it certainly contained critique of the Persian government. (Dem. 5, On Wars)[57] This was so in spite of the fact that representatives of this religion, in particular, were largely responsible for the persecution of Christians in Persia. It may, of course, be suggested that Aphrahat could not argue against his persecutors for the fear of aggravating those persecutions. But this author believes that the answer lays neither in fear on the part of Aphrahat nor in his Christianity's supposed similarity to Babylonian Zoroastrianism, but in the kind of people who constituted Aphrahat's following. That membership was tempted to convert from Christianity, or return, to Judaism not to Zoroastrianism. While this researcher is aware that brief introductions on Zoroastrianism's teaching on each theme discussed may seem unconnected to the discussions in Aphrahat, he holds that the very absence of positive of negative relationship with Zoroastrianism speaks volumes in identifying the nature of Aphrahat's Mesopotamian followers.

4. Terms

The set of definitions presented in this section is not meant to provide exact meanings in all possible contexts; it seeks, rather, to define the terms as used in this study only, with its particular concern with historical investigation. Neither is this collection exhaustive. It seeks only to clarify terms that are most important for the purpose of this study.

Polemic in this study is defined as an actual disagreement whether by omission or confrontation. Polemic presupposes some level of contact between the sides engaged in such a conversation. Polemic may or may not be direct. In most cases it may simply take place on the streets as a part of neighbourly exchange, while its official responses would be recorded only in authorized religious texts.

Disagreement by omission refers to the two groups (Para-Rabbinic and Christian) stating views in opposition to one another without acknowledging that they are doing so. These communities often did so by failing to mention their opponents and/or their views. This type of disagreement may only be established by juxtaposing statements made by both and in so doing reconstruct the polemic that would otherwise remain hidden.

Disagreement by confrontation in this study refers to the two communities (Para-Rabbinic and Christian) disagreeing with each other and expressly acknowledging either the opponents or

more often the views held by these opponents. This type of disagreement is clearer than the disagreement by omission and hence is more valuable for our research; however, given the nature of literature, the analysis of this type of disagreement must be supplemented by analysis of the disagreement by omission.

Anti-Judaism is a ideological school of thought, Christian or otherwise, that seeks to disprove that Ancient Israelite faith as understood and practised by the Para-Rabbinic Jewish movement is able to bring the promised benefits of salvation to both individual and the world at large.

Rabbinic Jews are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as those who joined them through conversion who dealt with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by reinterpreting Israelite history in such a way as to show that there was indeed an unbroken chain of authoritative Rabbinic Jewish interpreters. Their perspective is that the true interpretation of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible is impossible without its foundational document (Mishnah) and ideas propagated through other rabbinic writings following in its overarching tradition.

Para-Rabbinic Jews are the Jews who were influenced by various essential and non-essential Rabbinic interpretations, sometimes because of their geographical location, and always because the timing in Rabbinic Judaism development they did not abide by all Rabbinic rulings. Their practices may at times be viewed as pre-Rabbinic or proto-Rabbinic, but their chief characteristic is that they were not always in full compliance with the contemporary rulings and ideas because of the above-mentioned factors.

Non-Rabbinic Jews are descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as those who joined them through conversion who dealt with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by reinterpreting Israelite history in a way that did not require Mishnah to be the foundational document.

Israelite refers to a person or religious thought that has intrinsic connection with Ancient Israel. In this way, referring to a person as an “Israelite” is a mostly ethnic description, but when referring to an idea it is an acknowledgement of the organic continuity with the religion of Israel’s biblical past.

Christians are Israelites as well as members of other nations of the world who believe that the promises of the Old Testament receive their fulfilment in the person, work and teaching of the crucified and resurrected Christ, and who interpret Israelite history in such a way as to show that true interpretation of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible is impossible without apostolic authority as manifested by an emerging NT collection.

Aphrahat’s community in this study refers to the Christians who either followed Aphrahat’s teachings or whose views Aphrahat expressed in his Demonstrations or both, and whose beliefs he strove to correct, address or strengthen.

Bavli community in this study refers to the Rabbinic circles or academies whose beliefs and/or practices in some way, albeit partial, are reflected in the Bavli who, because of geographical, linguistic and cultural proximity might have been in contact with people in Aphrahat's community and whose beliefs and/or practices are in some way, presumably, are reflected in the Bavli itself.[58]

Chapter 2

ON CIRCUMCISION

1. Circumcision

In today's world both male and female circumcision are still debated topics in such fields of study as religion, medical science, sociology and anthropology. Circumcision is a custom that is invested with different meanings by different cultures, religions and societies. While circumcision was practised by a number of tribes and nations before and after Abraham, in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic parts of the world it remains a symbol of the Covenant that God made with Abraham when he called him to forsake his father's house and to go to the Promised Land.[59] For the Abrahamic faiths, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, circumcision as an idea was variously interpreted.[60] The issue for all of these great world religions is not 'whether or not the covenant was made with their father Abraham', but rather 'who are the true people of God?' and 'how must this covenant be observed by His People in modern times?'

Different cultures looked at circumcisions differently, some with committed admiration and others with utter distaste. For instance, the Greeks held that circumcision, among other things, violated the standard of decency by opening up the corona of the penis and thus implying sexual arousal. For the Talmudic sages, however, circumcision was compared to removing a useless cover that needed to be pulled off to achieve perfection. Circumcision was also practised in Egypt as early as 2400 BC, as indicated by its depiction in a bas-relief from the Egyptian necropolis at Saqqara.[61] Certainly part of its meaning was some form of purification and/or initiation, given Egypt's preoccupation with purity and class. However, since some among both young and old, poor and rich were circumcised and some were not, the exact meaning and function of circumcision remain elusive.

Circumcision in Judaism

Circumcision in Rabbinic Judaism is rooted in the act of God's covenantal choosing of Israel out of all nations of the earth. It is still viewed by many as the foundational mark of the People of

God (Gen. 12, 16). For Israelites and later for Rabbinic Jews circumcision was a visible sign of this eternal relationship between God and Israel. It was a sign of belonging to the God of the Covenant.[62] An Israelite may have been circumcised and be a covenant-breaker at the same time. Only those who kept the covenant with their God in all other respects were considered the faithful remnant. Circumcision of the heart replaces the circumcision of the flesh and only then finds its New Covenant fulfilment in Christian Baptism, but more about that when we look at Aphrahat's arguments regarding circumcision.

Another interesting theme in the Late Second Temple period is the idea of proselyte baptism. Contradictory evidence exists as to whether or not proselyte baptism was practised before the second century. Josephus, the Gospels and the Pauline corpus are strangely silent about proselyte baptism, painting a picture of circumcision alone as the sole conversion ritual of Israel.[63] In Bavli, however, we have Joshua ben Hananiah and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanos disagreeing on what makes a proselyte a proselyte. Rabbi Eliezer thought circumcision was the sign of conversion, while Rabbi Joshua seemed to argue that mikvah was the only requirement for conversion of a Gentile.[64] The dispute was settled by the sages: both were required. We read in bYevamoth 46a:

Our Rabbis taught: If a proselyte was circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution, R. Eliezer said, Behold he is a proper proselyte; for so we find that our forefathers were circumcised and had not performed ritual ablution. If he performed the prescribed ablution but had not been circumcised, R. Joshua said, Behold he is a proper proselyte; for so we find that the mothers had performed ritual ablution but had not been circumcised. The Sages, however, said, whether he had performed ritual ablution (טבל) but had not been circumcised or whether he had been circumcised but had not performed the prescribed ritual ablution, he is not a proper proselyte (גר), unless he has been circumcised and has also performed the prescribed ritual ablution (bYevamoth 46a; bAvoda Zarah 59a).

As early as the mishnaic statement in mNedarim 3.11, we see the supreme status afforded to circumcision:

R. Ishmael said, Great is (the precept) of Circumcision, since thirteen covenants were made thereon. R. Jose said, Circumcision is a great precept, for it overrides (the severity of) the Sabbath. R. Joshua B. Karha said: Great is (the precept of) circumcision, for (neglecting) which Moses did not have (his punishment) suspended even for a single hour. R. Nehemiah said, great is (the precept of) circumcision, since it supersedes the laws of leprosy. Rabbi said, great is circumcision, for (notwithstanding) all the precepts which Abraham fulfilled he was not designated perfect until he circumcised himself, as it is written, walk before me, and be thou perfect. Another explanation: Great is circumcision, since but for that, the Holy One, Blessed be He, would not have created the universe, as it is written, but for my covenant by day and night, I would not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth.

The progressive argument based on the difference of opinion on the matter of circumcision as well as most other topics followed fairly strict orders of rabbinic logic. In the later part of the last centuries BCE, circumcision was considered legitimate by some Jewish authorities, no matter by whom, how and under what circumstances it was administered.[65] R. Yosi was reported to have said: "Where have we seen circumcision that is not for the sake of the covenant?"[66] Others, however, like R. Judah imposed restrictions that were centred on the proper intent of circumcision.[67] While the basic idea of circumcision remained the same, the custom itself went through some significant changes. Until recent times circumcision basically consisted of: 1) circumcision itself, 2) uncovering of the corona, 3) suctioning and 4) placing a bandage.[68] Over time some practices like suctioning by the mohel's mouth of the baby's penis were replaced by other methods more acceptable to modern society. For Hoffman "circumcision has thus remained the sine qua non of Jewish identity throughout time."[69] The success of the leaders of Israel was often measured by whether or not they were successful in implementing the practice of circumcision among the people they governed.[70] Some practices associated with circumcision were invented with the passage of time, while others seem to be very ancient, some being traceable to the earliest periods of its history.[71] For example, naming of the child at the time of the circumcision ceremony is at least 2000 years old, according to Luke 1:59. The ritual as delineated in the Bible is at once the same as, and yet very different from, the ritual as practised and understood by the Jews of Europe in the high Middle Ages. According to medieval commentator Maimonides, there were two essential purposes to circumcision. First was "a decrease in sexual intercourse and a weakening of the organ in question," [72] and second, circumcision functioned as a physical sign of unity between the people of faith.[73] Circumcision's natural ability to unite was acknowledged by the sages of the Talmud. They did imagine unity with Gentiles, albeit only through the Gentiles' conversion to their version of Israelite religion (bSanhedrin 39a).

Circumcision in Christianity

Different Christian traditions today have different understandings of the connection between circumcision and baptism, but this author believes Early Jewish believers in Jesus Christ understood baptism to be organically connected to circumcision as practiced by Israel (Col. 2:10-12). The burden of proof rests on baptistic Christians who believe that the New Testament introduces a change from the normal mode of operation in the OT in which children were included in all of God's convenants. Therefore until that belief can be confirmed from the New Testament collection, we are justified in assuming that references such Acts 16:32-33 (…and their house) do indeed imply that entire families received baptism and not only individuals who professed faith. While for Jesus-believing Jews in the apostolic times baptism was an additional rite to circumcision (Acts 21), [74] with the great influx of Gentiles into the church, baptism gradually replaced circumcision as the rite of initiation (Acts 15). When the Jesus-believing Jews constituted that largest part of the Church, the believers were circumcised and baptized, but when the overwhelming majority of the Church's members became Gentile, only baptism was

practised, since no continual affiliation with the larger Jewish community was thought to be needed. While Christian theology surely saw some obvious differences, such as ‘water’ vs. ‘knife’ and ‘males and females’ vs. ‘males only’, it also historically sought to connect baptism with its ancient predecessor – circumcision. Throughout most of Christian history baptism was understood to be the replacement of circumcision. This connection continued until the emergence of Anabaptist theologies that sought to divorce circumcision from baptism. For example, it was often argued that there was an organic connection between the idea of infant baptism in Christianity and infant circumcision in Judaism. Abraham believed and received the sign of the covenant, while his children received the sign first and only then were called to covenant responsibility. So also the child of a pedobaptist Christian gets baptized first, and then is trained throughout childhood and youth in the faith of the fathers. One example of how circumcision was routinely compared to baptism can be found in the description of this ancient Jewish ritual by essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) in his travel journal. He uses phrases like: “they give infants a godfather and godmother as we do” and “the infant’s cry is like that of ours when they are baptized.”[75

Various Christian movements, of course, define baptism and understand its function differently. For Christians, baptism holds the first place among all the sacraments, precisely because it is the door to the spiritual life. Through baptism people are joined to the Church of Christ. The functions of baptism are described as follows in the above-mentioned Catholic definition:

This sacrament is the door of the Church of Christ and the entrance into a new life. We are reborn from the state of slaves of sin into the freedom of the Sons of God. Baptism incorporates us with Christ’s mystical body and makes us partakers of all the privileges flowing from the redemptive act of the Church’s Divine Founder.[76]

A representative of historic Protestant theology on the matter of baptism is the Westminster Confession of Faith, where we read in Chapter XXVIII, paragraph I:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, or his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in his Church until the end of the world.

Lutheran theologians also saw the connection between circumcision and baptism: “Baptism removes sin, as circumcision removes the flesh of the body, and incorporates the baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection as circumcision incorporated its recipients into the saving community of Israel.”[77]

There are some differences such as the necessity of baptism in Catholic and Orthodox theologies for salvation, while in Protestant theologies the reasons vary but are almost never bound up with salvation. While Western Christianities concentrate on baptism replacing the rite of circumcision

in its functionality, Syriac Christianities have taken a different route. Pauline writings, as well as the writings of early Syriac Church fathers, predominantly feature an idea of circumcision of the heart.[78]

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.[79]

Building on the themes of Deuteronomy 29-30, Jeremiah 7-9 and Ezekiel 36, Paul concludes that salvation for Israel is no longer bound to the physical requirement of the Law and will be brought about via a spiritual restoration. Carrying his argument further, he concludes that since the identification of the people of God is no longer bound to physical circumcision but rather to their spiritual mind-and-heart renewal, the Gentiles are just as capable as the Jews of receiving that status (Rom. 2).[80] A working out of this Pauline theology can be seen, for example, in one of Ephrem's poems on Virginity. It addresses this ancient Syriac view of circumcision of the heart:

He whose body is circumcised but his heart is uncircumcised

Is circumcised outwardly but uncircumcised in secret

But he whose heart is circumcised, but his flesh is uncircumcised

Is Circumcised for the Spirit, but uncircumcised for the eye

In the name of his circumcision the circumcised fornicates

With the cup of his purity he drinks mire

By a circumcised heart the uncircumcised becomes holy.

In the Bridal chamber of his heart dwells his Creator [81]

Circumcision in Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism as a whole was opposed to any human suffering, be it experienced by male or female, adult or child. As will be seen in the section on fasting, in Zoroastrianism one is

commanded to enjoy and make use of God's creation, and abstaining from any of it is considered a violation of the cosmic order. Circumcision was not the only dissimilarity between Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Upon closer examination, the often cited similarities between Judaism and Zoroastrianism prove to be overstated.[82] The nature of those dissimilarities and the attitudes of Zoroastrian apologists towards Judaism could be sampled, though selectively, in Škand Gumanik Vičar. The author of this document overwhelms the reader with questions that seek to destroy every reason supporting the idea that the Jewish Scriptures deserve even an iota of respect from a man prone to reasoning (Zoroastrian): "Now let us say something about their stories, what is in them of foolishness and erroneous opinions, namely… (VIII: 48)." Additionally, we read:

My desire is that I write some of the mysteries of the mutual contradictions and abundant fallaciousness of this same scripture, which is full of every kind of iniquity and devilishness, and I shall expose briefly one thousandth of it. (XIV: 1-2).

He then uses the strongest language possible about the divinity that Judaism purports to believe in:

Now if there is a God to whom these signs and characteristics apply, then truth is far from him, forgiveness is a stranger to him, knowledge has not been bestowed upon him… whom those defiled by the devil glorify by the name of Adonu, and worship. (XIV: 82-86).[83]

While the detailed study of Zoroastrian-Jewish polemic is outside the scope of this study, it remains evident that Judaism and Zoroastrianism did not see eye to eye, as may seem at first.

2. Aphrahat's Demonstrations

Content of the demonstration

In his chapter on circumcision Aphrahat seeks to show that New Covenant believers have no further need for circumcision of the flesh, but must rather submit to the circumcision of the heart as the first circumcision and to baptism as the second circumcision. Aphrahat's supersessionism comes into full view in this demonstration. He begins his argument by showing Abraham not as the father of one people, but as the father of many peoples (Dem. 11.1). He then seeks to prove that Israel's prophets had called Israel by pagan names, because ethnic Israel had departed from the God of Israel (Dem. 11.1). In the words of Aphrahat: "When people from any of the nations serve [the cause of] justice, they are called the children and heirs of Abraham, their father. But the children of Abraham, when they do an unclean deed of the foreign peoples, they become 'Sodomites' and 'the people of Gomorrah'" (Dem. 11.1) While the Jews say, "We are circumcised and chosen and known from among all the peoples," according to Aphrahat they are "…circumcised and uncircumcised, and chosen and rejected." (Dem. 11.1) For Aphrahat circumcision of the flesh is of no use if it is not accompanied by faith (Dem. 11.2). As is his

normal practice, Aphrahat evokes the names of the great heroes of the Bible. He speaks of Adam, Enoch and Noah as people who were truly faithful to the Lord without circumcision (Dem. 11.3). Moreover, argues Aphrahat, God chose Abraham not because he was circumcised, but because of his faith. In the words of Aphrahat, "if circumcision was given as a way to eternal life, Scripture would make known that 'Abraham was circumcised, and his circumcision was counted as righteousness for him'.But this is what is written: 'Abraham believed in God and his believing was counted as righteousness for him'" (Dem. 11.3).

Abraham was circumcised many years after he was called by God from Ur of the Chaldeans. God commanded Abraham to "circumcise the flesh of his foreskin as a mark and a sign of the covenant, so that when his descendants multiplied they would be distinguished from all the peoples among whom they would live, and not take part in their unclean deeds" (Dem. 11.4) The children of Abraham, says Aphrahat, were circumcised before and after their wilderness experience, because the reason for circumcision (according to Aphrahat) was for the people of Israel to remain a distinct people belonging to the one true God (Dem. 11.4). He continued to challenge the belief that people live (spiritually and physically) through observance of circumcision by pointing out that Ishmael, Lot and Esau were also circumcised, while being at the same time idol worshipers (Dem. 11.5). All of Aphrahat's arguments sought to prove essentially one point – that circumcision was a "mark so that [the Israelites] might be distinguished from unclean peoples" (Dem. 11.6). Aphrahat appeals to Joshua's circumcision of the Israelites, interpreting his circumcision of Israel for the second time to mean that Joshua's generation was already circumcised in heart (Dem. 11.7).

The Egyptians learned the practice of circumcision from Joseph and from the Israelites as they lived in Egypt (Dem. 11.8). Aphrahat then says:

"I have shown all of this to you clearly so that you might know that 'Ishmael lived at the border of all his brothers and was a wild ass of a man.' Abraham gave gifts to the descendants of Keturah and sent them [away] to Ishmael their brother, so that they would not be inheritors together with Isaac, the son of the promise" (Dem. 11.10).

Instead of profit from circumcision of the flesh, Aphrahat proposes that any person (presumably Gentiles) who "circumcises the foreskin of his heart … becomes a child of Abraham" (Dem. 11.10). Aphrahat proceeds to talk about changes in covenants (Dem. 11.11). In his own words:

"He gave the Law to Moses with its observances and statutes, but when they did not keep the Law and its statutes he annulled it. He promised to give a new testament, and said that it was not like the previous [one], though the Giver of both of them was one [and the same]. This is the testament that he promised to give: 'They will all know me, from their youngest to their oldest.' In this testament, there is no circumcision of the flesh or mark of the people" (Dem. 11.11).

He then appeals to the Apostle Paul, who for Aphrahat was the author of the book of Hebrews (Heb. 1.1-2), by saying "In the past, the kingdom of God lived in various forms in various

times." Aphrahat does not say that somehow circumcision of the flesh was impure or improper, but rather that a New Covenant has been inaugurated and the terms of that covenant are different from the one before: "Our God is true, and his covenants are very trustworthy, and each covenant in its time was true and [able to] be trusted. Those who are circumcised in heart live, and they are circumcised a second time at the true Jordan, the baptism of the forgiveness of sins" (Dem. 11.11). The last stroke is a poetic set of comparisons, both parallels and juxtapositions, of "Joshua son of Nun and Joshua (Jesus), our Saviour" (Dem. 11.12).

Outline of the argument

Paragraph 1

1. Abraham – father of the peoples

2. Justification in dispute with the Jews

a. Rejection of the Jews as God's chosen people

i. Various OT proof texts

ii. Peoples that do justice take the place of the People who do injustice

Paragraph 2

1. Circumcision is worthless without faith

2. Circumcision is good when accompanied by obedience to the Law

a. Jeroboam and others were circumcised, though being wicked

b. Rhetorical questions about the uselessness of circumcision without faith

Paragraph 3

1. God gave various covenants

2. Covenants with Adam, Enoch and Noah did not include circumcision

a. God called Abraham to himself because of his faith

b. Argument against circumcision giving life

c. Abraham's justification as a test case

d. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Shem and Japheth pleased God through faith

3. Melchizedek was not circumcised when he blessed Abraham

Paragraph 4

1. Abraham was led out of Ur and was not yet circumcised

a. When the promise of the son was given, Abraham was told to be circumcised

b. Circumcision was a sign of the Covenant with Abraham's descendants

2. All members of Abraham's household were circumcised

a. Isaac was born after Abraham's circumcision

3. Abraham's descendants were circumcised even in Egypt, but not in the wilderness

Paragraph 5

1. Argument against circumcision giving life

2. Circumcision would not save those who do not believe

a. OT reference about uncircumcision of heart

b. Jews, Egyptians, Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites are counted together

3. Circumcision of the flesh without circumcision of the heart is worthless

Paragraph 6

1. Circumcision is a mark of distinction from the unclean peoples

a. Israelites did not circumcise in the wilderness, because they were alone

b. Leaving out the nations in God's election

c. Judgment on the peoples due to their evil deeds (hope for repentance)

d. Non-election is a potential excuse to sin

e. Circumcision was a proof that someone was indeed an Israelite and would have prevented someone from escaping justice

2. Commandment to Joshua to circumcise the Israelites the second time

a. Explanation: First circumcision was circumcision of the heart

Paragraph 7

1 Sin against the Spirit of God during the wonderings in the wilderness

2. Generation born in the wilderness entered Promised Land without being circumcised

3. They were circumcised a "second time" when they were already in the land of Canaan

Paragraph 8

1. All descendants of Abraham practised circumcision

a. Egyptians accepted this practice from Joseph and the Israelites

b. Challenge to thinking that Pharaoh's daughter knew of Moses' ethnicity from his circumcision

c. Additional proof from Jeremiah that Egyptians practise circumcision

d. The ethnic identity of Moses was discovered because of the temporal proximity of the decree to drown all Israelite boys

e. Further logical challenge to Egyptians not practising circumcision

Paragraph 9

1. Proof that descendants of Keturah shared a border with Israelites

2. Ishmaelites also lived in the wilderness

a. Edomites lived in the East of Ishmael

b. Ammonites and Moabites shared North border

c. Edom was not given for Israel's inheritance

d. Edom did not let Israel pass through

e. Bozrah was taken from Edom by Israelites

f. Ammonites and Moabites were banned from Israel to tenth generation

g. Egyptians and Edomites were not banned from the community of Israel.

Paragraph 10

1. Ishmael lived on the border with all his brothers

a. Abraham gave gifts to the descendants of Keturah so that they would join Ishmael

2. There is no profit in circumcision without faith

3. Anyone who circumcises his heart becomes a child of Abraham

4. Promised of God finds fulfilment in Abraham's spiritual seed

Paragraph 11

1. Law and Covenants do change

a. From Adam to Noah

b. From Abraham to Moses

c. From Moses to the New Unchangeable Covenant

2. Covenant with Adam: Not eating from the tree

3. Covenant with Noah: Rainbow

4. Covenant with Abraham: Faith, and later circumcision for offspring

5. Covenant with Moses: Passover sacrifice

a. All of these covenants were different

6. Circumcision of the heart pleases the God of the Covenants

7. One God, different times, different covenants

a. New Covenant has no circumcision of the flesh or sign that marks a people from other peoples

b. Each generation has new laws established for them until the next change

c. Strong statement against circumcision

d. Each covenant was true and appropriate for its own time

8. Life is available through first circumcision (faith) and second circumcision (baptism/mikva)

Paragraph 12

1. Comparison of Joshua son of Nun and Joshua son of Joseph

a. Joshua son of Nun circumcises the Israelites a second time

b. Jesus (Joshua) circumcises people through baptism

c. Joshua brought people to the Promised Land

d. Jesus promised the land to all who were circumcised twice

e. Joshua sets up a witness of stones

f. Jesus establishes Peter as a witness

g. Joshua celebrates Passover in the plain of Jericho (cursed land)

h. Jesus celebrates Passover in Jerusalem (city cursed by him)

i. Joshua condemned greedy Achan

j. Jesus condemned greedy Judas

k. Joshua destroyed unclean peoples

l. Jesus threw down Satan and his army

m. Joshua made sun stand

n. Jesus made sun set

o. Joshua was Saviour of the People

p. Jesus was called Saviour of the peoples

2. Blessed are the uncircumcised in flesh

a. They are co-heirs with Abraham

Circumcision according to Aphrahat

In Dem. 5.20 Aphrahat discusses the prophetic visions of Daniel, relating them to the historical events known to him. He wrote: "At that time 'the horn made war against the holy ones,' but their power prevailed. Antiochus, a wicked man, spoke words against the Most High and changed the times and seasons. He made the covenant of Abraham cease, abolished the Sabbath of rest, and commanded the Jews not to circumcise." The interest here is not to analyze the precise nature of Aphrahat's interpretation with regard to historical figures. What is important is that when Aphrahat describes the evil committed by Antiochus, he includes among those evil deeds abolishing the Sabbath rest and the commandment not to circumcise. This inclusion is important in that it firmly establishes the view that Aphrahat was not against circumcision as such. He considered the forbidding of it a grave sin committed by Antiochus against God. Taking this text into consideration shows that Aphrahat viewed circumcision as a very important commandment of God during the past times ordained by God. His argument against circumcision for the believers during his own lifetime was not based on a principled dislike of the practice but was founded on entirely different reasoning.

In Dem. 12.3 Aphrahat connects the unclean people of the world and the idea of uncircumcision. This again shows Aphrahat's attitude towards circumcision. For him uncircumcision meant uncleanness. He did not view washing in the waters of the true Jordan (baptism) as something new, to be done instead of circumcision; rather he believed that baptism is circumcision that is different in form but appropriate for the new focus of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless: "In our day, [the Israelites] are scattered throughout all peoples and languages, among the unclean and the uncircumcised, and they eat their bread in uncleanness among the peoples." In Dem. 15.9 Aphrahat spelled out the reason for writing his work. This teaching in the mind of Aphrahat was already presented to the Christians, but because of their forgetfulness, they needed to be reminded again and again. His Demonstrations were written for that reason. The themes of boasting by the Jews of their observances of certain rituals over against Gentile Christians who did not observe them resurfaces over and over again in Aphrahat. He writes: "I have written these few reminders to you, my friend, because the people of the Jews exalt themselves and take pride in and boast about [the fact] that they declare unclean and distinguish [certain] foods. It is in these three things, among others, that they take pride: circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and the avoidance of [certain] foods."

3. Comparison of Aphrahat and the Babylonian Talmud

Agreement

First, both Babylonian Talmud (bYevanoth 71b) and Aphrahat (Dem. 11.1) acknowledge the concept of circumcision of the heart. In Babylonian Talmud, however, this acknowledgement is less frequent and has less importance attached to it than in Aphrahat. The Scriptures of both

communities contain the concept of circumcision. For the Rabbinic Jewish community, it has its place in an overall life of obedience to the Torah, while for Aphrahat circumcision of the heart is at the very foundation of their beliefs. Second, both communities (bBerachoth 29a; Dem. 11.11) agree that circumcision of the heart pleases God and should be desired. Neither of the communities rejects the idea, and both seek it from their God in personal prayers. In contrast with the later sections of our study, this section has the fewest points of commonality between the two communities. This disparity is to be expected, since we are moving from the practice of Christian piety to the formation of Christian theology.

Disagreement by omission

Aphrahat

First, for Aphrahat and his community the first and second circumcisions, faith and baptism and mikvah and amad respectively, are life-giving (Dem. 11.12):

When he and his people crossed the Jordan, Joshua son of Nun circumcised the people a second time with a blade of flint. Jesus, our Saviour, circumcised a second time with the circumcision of the heart the peoples who believed in him. They plunged into baptism and were circumcised by the blade of his word, which is sharper than a two-edged sword. Joshua son of Nun brought the people to the land of promise. Jesus, our Saviour, promised the land of life to all who have crossed the true Jordan and who believe and circumcised the foreskin of their hearts.

Aphrahat and his community guarantee belonging to the community of life. The community that will possess the true faith and be washed of their sins will endure until the end. In Babylonian Talmud the same is true, with one crucial difference:

If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith… As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate ablution. Only after he is healed but not before! What is the reason? Because the water might irritate the wound… When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects (bYevamoth 47b).

What is regarded in Christianity as the second circumcision (baptism) has a non-circumcision status in Judaism (mikvah). In Aphrahat's Christianity washing by water (baptism) takes the place of its more important Jewish co-symbol (circumcision), which guaranteed membership in Israel for Rabbinic Judaism. Baptism becomes the primary sign that is placed on Christian believers, not circumcision in the flesh.

Second, Aphrahat emphasizes (Dem. 11.3) the authentic faith of the great pre-circumcision heroes of the Bible such as Adam, Enoch, Noah and even Abraham before circumcision:

He made a covenant with him and with the generations after him, so that they might increase and multiply: the covenant of the rainbow, between God, the earth, and all flesh. Circumcision was not given with one of these covenants. When [God] chose Abraham, it was not because of

circumcision that he called him and chose him and named him to become a father for all peoples, but because of faith.[It was only] after his believing [that God] commanded him to circumcise, for if [people] lived through circumcision, Abraham certainly would have first circumcised and then believed.

These biblical heroes, argues Aphrahat, had a true communion with the God of Israel without being distinguished [84] from the peoples of the world by circumcision in the flesh. The idea is simple: if they managed fine without it, so should the Christians.

Third, according to Aphrahat, circumcision was given to enforce the Laws given to the Israelites (Dem. 11.6):

Be assured, my friend, that circumcision was a mark so that [the Israelites] might be distinguished from unclean peoples. Observe that when [God] brought them out from Egypt and they walked in the wilderness for forty years, they did not circumcise, since they were one people and had not been mixed with other peoples. He did not mark them there since they grazed alone… He did not mark them to make known to himself that they were the seed of Abraham (since even when he had not marked them, he knew them), but [rather] so that they might know one another, in order that they might not [be able to] take refuge in false pretences.

If someone would have said that he was not an Israelite, the opposite fact could be proven by the permanent sign of identity in his flesh. In other words, Aphrahat argues that there was, in the context of theocracy, a need for circumcision in the flesh. The covenant people of God could be held accountable for actions that sought to break the covenant with their Lord. In Aphrahat's day in Babylonia both Jewish and Christian communities knew, however, that they were not in charge of the law of the land of Babylonia. The authority was in the hands of Sassanids.

Fourth, Aphrahat believed that God gave different signs for different covenants. In the case of each covenant Aphrahat believed that "the law and the covenant were changed." The progression described by our author moved from Adam with the tree to Noah with the rainbow, from Noah to Abraham with his great faith, from Abraham to Moses with Passover, from Moses to Christ with his unchangeable covenant (Dem. 11.11).

Babylonian Talmud

First, according to the Babylonian Jewish sages (bYevamoth 46b-47b) the initiation of a Gentile into an Israelite community consisted of two steps: first, faith and study of the Torah; and then a two-fold initiation process (circumcision and baptism/mikvah):

As soon as he is healed [after being circumcised], arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects (bYevamoth 47b).

In other words circumcision in the flesh for Babylonian Talmud was not a sufficient sign of admission into the membership of the people of God; rather it must be accompanied by a water ceremony as well.

Second, circumcision in Babylonian Talmud is presented as something that is more important than the Sabbath (bShabbath 131b-132a), while Aphrahat never makes this comparison:

Circumcision and all its preliminaries supersede the Sabbath: this is R. Eliezer's view. Whence does R. Eliezer learn this? If he learns [it] from all [the others, the objection is] as we stated. Moreover, as for those, [they may supersede the Sabbath] because if their time passes they are annulled! Rather this is R. Eliezer's reason: Because Scripture saith, and in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised, [implying] even on the Sabbath. Then let the Divine Law write it in connection with circumcision, and these [others] can come to be deduced thence? Because one can refute [the analogy]: as for circumcision, that is because thirteen covenants were made in connection therewith. Now, the Rabbis disagree with R. Eliezer only in respect of the preliminaries of circumcision; but as for circumcision itself, all hold that it supersedes the Sabbath: whence do we know it? Said Ulla, It is a traditional law; and thus did R. Isaac say, It is a traditional law.

Third, the Babylonian rabbis insisted that before one may share in the sacred Passover meal he must be circumcised in order to lawfully partake (bPesachim 69b):

… wherever an individual would be relegated [to the second Passover], in the case of the community they keep [it] in uncleanness, and whatever is [obligatory] in the case of a community is [obligatory] in the case of an individual, and whatever is not [obligatory] in the case of a community is not [obligatory] in the case of an individual.[Hence as for the defect of] uncircumcision, where if the whole community are uncircumcised we say to them, Arise, circumcise yourselves, and sacrifice the Passover, then an individual too, we say to him, Arise, circumcise yourself, and sacrifice the Passover, while if he does not circumcise [himself] and [does not] sacrifice, he is punished with kareth.

Aphrahat does not deal with the issue of baptism as a pre-requisite for communion, most probably because this was not an issue in Christian communities. The issue in Christian communities was different: Jesus-believing Jews and Gentile Christians, who would join with non-Christian Jews in celebration of Passover were present in alarming numbers in the Christian Church, especially in the East.

Fourth, the Babylonian Talmud speaks quite frequently of the validity or invalidity of circumcision in the flesh. Discussions and debates usually are centred on the question of who can perform a valid circumcision (bAvoda Zara 26b), and how much of the corona of the male sexual organ is actually uncovered (bYevamoth 71b):

Rabbah b. Isaac stated in the name of Rab: The commandment of uncovering the corona at circumcision was not given to Abraham; for it is said, at that time the Lord said unto Joshua: Make thee knives of flint … To compare the termination of the circumcision with its commencement; as the commencement of the circumcision is essential so is the termination of circumcision essential; for we learned, These are the shreds which render circumcision invalid: Flesh which covers the greater part of the corona; and [a priest whose circumcision was so defective] is not permitted to eat terumah; and Rabina, or it might be said, R. Jeremiah b. Abba, stated in the name of Rab: Flesh which covers the greater part of the height of the corona.

Disagreement by confrontation

First, for Aphrahat the main purpose of circumcision in the flesh was to distinguish Israelites from unclean peoples – non-Israelites. For Babylonian Talmud's sages the reasons were various, connecting circumcision with grand themes such as the creation of the world and the perfection of the covenant participant.

Aphrahat:

When he (Abraham) was ninety-nine years old, however, the Holy One made known to him that when [he had] completed one hundred years, a son would be born to him. Then he circumcised himself, so that when he was one hundred years old, Isaac would be born to him.[The Holy One] commanded him to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin as a mark and a sign of the covenant, so that when his descendants multiplied they would be distinguished from all the peoples among whom they would live, and not take part in their unclean deeds (Dem. 11.4; Parisot 477).

Be assured, my friend, that circumcision was a mark so that [the Israelites] might be distinguished from unclean peoples. Observe that when [God] brought them out from Egypt and they walked in the wilderness for forty years, they did not circumcise, since they were one people and had not been mixed with other peoples (Dem. 11.6; Parisot 481).

Babylonian Talmud:

Rabbi said, great is circumcision, for (notwithstanding) all the precepts which Abraham our father fulfilled he was not designated perfect until he circumcised himself, as it is written, walk before me, and be thou perfect… another explanation: great is circumcision, since but for that, the Holy One, Blessed be He, would not have created the Universe, as it is written, but for my covenant by day and night, I would not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth. (mNedarim 31b and bNedarim 31b)

It was taught: Rabbi said, "Great is circumcision", for none so ardently busied himself with [God's] precepts as our Father Abraham, yet he was called perfect only in virtue of circumcision, as it is written, Walk before me and be thou perfect, and it is written, And I will make my covenant between me and thee. (bNedarim 32a)

The two communities came up with two completely different explanations for circumcision. Aphrahat and most Christians before and after him believed that one of its main goals was to separate Israel from the Gentiles, while the rabbis believed that circumcision was connected with the creation of the world itself. It is hard to think of more opposite points of view. Essentially the two communities were discussing the worth of circumcision. Christians said it is not worth anything at all, while Jews were suggesting that it is so important that it overrides everything else. These texts can be best understood within the context of the communal polemic between the communities in question.

Second, according to Aphrahat, all that the Gentiles needed to do was to believe in Israel's God as manifested by their good deeds. This concept is set in a stark contrast with what sages of the Babylonian Talmud thought Gentiles must do to become true Israelites.

Aphrahat:

For when people from any of the nations serve [the cause of] justice, they are called the children and heirs of Abraham, their father. But the children of Abraham, when they do an unclean deed of the foreign peoples, they become "Sodomites" and "the people of Gomorrah". (Dem. 11.1; Parisot 469)

Blessed are those among the uncircumcised who are circumcised of heart and born of water, a second circumcision. They are inheritors, together with Abraham, the leader of the faithful and the father of all the peoples, whose faith was considered righteousness for him. (Dem. 11.12; Parisot 504)

Babylonian Talmud:

As soon as he is healed [after being circumcised], arrangements are made for his immediate ablution, when two learned men must stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor commandments and with some of the major ones. When he comes up after his ablution he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects (bYevamoth 47b).

Our Rabbis taught: Beloved are Israel, for the Holy One, blessed be He, surrounded them with precepts: tefillin on their heads, tefillin on their arms, zizith on their garments, and mezuzoth on their door-posts; concerning these David said, Seven times a day do I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous ordinances. And as David entered the bath and saw himself standing naked, he exclaimed, "Woe is me that I stand naked without any precepts about me!" But when he reminded himself of the circumcision in his flesh his mind was set at ease… (bMenachoth 43b).

Once again it is clear that Christians, as represented by Aphrahat, and Rabbinic Jews, as represented by Bavli, sought to train their followers to confront the teachers of the other side in their communal interaction. For Aphrahat it is the faith in the God of Abraham and life in accordance with the moral demands of the Law of Moses that qualifies a Gentile to gain

membership to the true people of God. For the Rabbinical Jews, on the other hand, the emphasis is clearly on circumcision and ceremonial cleansing as primary qualifications of entrance into the Covenant with the same God. For them circumcision was a foundational precept upon which all else is built, but not the other way around.

Third, the two communities each struggled to be identified as the true people of God. Aphrahat believed that a new community formed out of all the nations of the earth was established in place of the old Israel of God. The rabbis believed that their version of Judaism was in direct continuity with the old Israel and firmly held that its elective status was unconditional.

Aphrahat:

I have written this brief reminder about the peoples to you, my friend, because the Jews boast, "We are the people of God and the children of Abraham." We, however, will listen to John [the Baptist], who, when they boasted "We are the children of Abraham" said to them, "Do not take pride and say, 'Abraham is our father,' since God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. "Our Saviour said to them, "You are the children of Cain, not the children of Abraham," And the apostle said, "The branches that sinned were cut off, and we were grafted onto their places, and we have become participants in the best part of the olive tree. Let us not boast and sin, or else we too will be cut off. For we certainly have been grafted onto the olive tree." This is a response to the Jews, since they boast "We are the children of Abraham and the people of God." (Dem. 16.8; Parisot 782-784)

Babylonian Talmud:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Hosea, Thy children have sinned, to which he should have replied. They are Thy children, they are the children of Thy favoured ones, they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; extend Thy mercy to them. Not enough that he did not say thus, but he said to Him: Sovereign of the Universe! The whole world is Thine; exchange them for a different nation. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, What shall I do with this old man? I will order him: "Go and marry a harlot and beget thee children of harlotry"; and then I will order him: "Send her away from thy presence." If he will be able to send [her] away, so will I too send Israel away (bPesachim 87a).[85]

Employing Paul's analogy of the Olive Tree, Aphrahat unlike Paul believed that the God of Israel cut off all ties with the unbelieving Jews, as the gardener did with the branches that were not bearing any fruit. In place of them, Aphrahat believes, God had grafted in believing Gentiles.[86] For Rabbinical Jews this idea was impossible; they opposed it with biblical proofs of God's everlasting unconditional covenantal love for Israel as is clearly displayed in the book of Hosea. It is striking that Early Christians such as Aphrahat seemed to concentrate unduly on the cutting off aspect of the branches (the Jews), while ignoring altogether Paul's great hope and resistance to the idea that the God of Israel could reject his people forever (Rom. 11:19-29, esp. vs. 29).

Fourth, even though both communities on the surface recognized that there was such a thing as "second circumcision", or being "circumcised again", they explained it in completely different ways. While Babylonian Talmud concludes that Joshua completes the incomplete circumcision, Aphrahat explains Joshua's second circumcision as circumcision in the flesh, second in both chronology and importance to the circumcision of the heart.

Aphrahat:

When they were crossing the Jordan, however, the Lord commanded Joshua son of Nun, "Circumcise the Israelites again, for a second time." Why did he say to Joshua that he should circumcise them a second time? It was because they were [already] circumcised in their hearts, as it says in the prophet, "Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts, and do not stiffen your necks again!" Joshua circumcised them again and marked them in their flesh a second time. How do you understand the statement "Joshua circumcised the people a second time"? Take note that they were not circumcised in their flesh, since after Joshua circumcised them, Scripture testifies that "Joshua circumcised all those that had been born in the wilderness, for no child born in the wilderness had been circumcised." (Dem. 11.6; Parisot 484-485)

When he and his people crossed the Jordan, Joshua son of Nun circumcised the people a second time with a blade of flint. Jesus, our Saviour, circumcised a second time with the circumcision of the heart the peoples who believed in him. They plunged into baptism and were circumcised by the blade of his word, which is sharper than a two-edged sword.Joshua son of Nun brought the people to the land of promise. Jesus, our Saviour, promised the land of life to all who have crossed the true Jordan and who believe and circumcise the foreskin of their hearts. (Dem. 11.12; Parisot 501)

Babylonian Talmud:

Rabbah b. Isaac stated in the name of Rab: The commandment of uncovering the corona at circumcision was not given to Abraham our father; for it is said, At that time the Lord said unto Joshua: "Make thee knives of flint." But is it not possible [that this applied to] those who were not previously circumcised; for it is written, For all the people that came out were circumcised, but all the people that were born? If so, why the expression. "Again!" Consequently it must apply to the uncovering of the corona. Why, then, the expression, "A second time?" – To compare the termination of the circumcision with its commencement; as the commencement of the circumcision is essential so is the termination of circumcision essential; for we learned, "These are the shreds which render circumcision invalid: Flesh which covers the greater part of the corona…" (bYevamoth 71b)

Neusner argues that the two faiths stood for different people talking about different things to different people. Christianity and Judaism each took over the inherited symbolic structure of Israel's religion. He further clarifies his point by stating: "Each, in fact, did work with the same

categories as the other. But in the hands of each, the available and encompassing classification system found wholly different meaning."[87]

While this author shares much with Neusner's sentiment as described above, especially that of the inherited symbolic structure of Israel's religion and wholly different meanings, he certainly disagrees with Neusner's ideas concerning the fact that Judaism and Christianity spoke to different people. The opposite was the case: Judaism and Christianity often, though obviously not always, spoke to the very same people. Many of these people, especially in the Eastern lands, were Jews who followed Jesus as the Christ and Gentile Christians with an ever-growing affection or so it seemed to Christian leaders for all things Jewish.

4. Conclusion

The thematic analysis in this chapter shows that the two communities had virtually nothing in common with each other's views on circumcision, despite the fact that they shared the same OT Scriptures as their foundational documents at least chronologically. The exception to this rule is the simple agreement that there is such a thing as circumcision (bYevamoth 71b; Dem. 11.1) and God's People must be circumcised (bBerachoth 29a; Dem. 11.1). There is nothing else which Rabbinic and Christian communities had in common when it came to circumcision.

Although both communities viewed water initiation ceremonies as a crucial part of circumcision, they understood them very differently. For the Jews baptism was carried out alongside of the circumcision of the flesh (bYevamoth 46a), while for the Christians baptism was a second circumcision that was carried out alongside the circumcision of the heart, which was done by the Spirit (Dem. 11.12).

Several important texts show us that the groups did indeed engage in polemic with each other. Aphrahat, for example, argued that Abraham was called righteous long before he was circumcised and was given the commandment of circumcision only when he was about to have a child, so that his children could be set apart from unclean Gentiles (Dem. 11.1; 9). In opposition to that idea, the sages of Bavli insisted that Abraham was not called perfect until after circumcision, no matter how righteous he may have been throught previously (mNedarim, 31b; bNedarim 31b). Both groups seemed to have talked past each other, but surely not past their congregants, who doubtless took these teachings to the street and engaged their neighbours and clients on a popular level with the message of their esteemed teachers (Dem. 16.8).

It is important to note not only "disagreement by confrontation" texts, such as the divergent views on uncircumcised Abraham, but also to engage with those texts that constitute powerful examples of a polemic that did not have directly corresponding oppositional texts on the other side of the communal interaction. For example, various texts that speak of the supremacy of circumcision (bShabbath 131b) in the flesh (bNedarim 31b; bMenachoth 43b) must be seen in

the context of a disregard for the circumcision in the flesh by the Christian community as represented by Aphrahat. Another important indication of the same polemic is a constant emphasis on circumcision of the heart by Aphrahat (Dem. 11.6) and circumcision of the flesh by the Bavli's sages (bYevamoth 71b). It is striking that given the sharp dissimilarity between Zoroastrianism and Christianity no anti-Zoroastrian polemic can be traced in the Demonstrations in general and in this demonstration in particular. Most likely, however, the people in Aphrahat's Christian community were not often tempted to convert to Zoroastrianism, or perhaps simply did not have roots in that community. The opposite seemed to have been the case with Judaism.

Chapter 3

ON PRAYER

1. Prayer

Prayer, whether chanted, read or sung with musical accompaniment, constitutes a foundational expression of various world views held by the ancients and post-moderns alike. Prayer is the glue in the religious connection between humans and divinity. While for the peoples of faith prayer is a non-negotiable component, the ways in which prayer is carried out and understood are different in many contexts.

Prayer in Judaism

The history and practice of prayer in Judaism are enormously rich. Naturally the study of prayer starts from the Bible and slowly makes its way through the textual witnesses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha as well as other collections such the Dead Sea Scrolls and Philo. The study of Jewish literature, as with most of the subjects in religious studies, has received far greater attention in the past 150 years than ever before. For example, Zunz traced the development of Jewish prayers in their historical contexts, as well as the central place of Torah study in Jewish worship as a whole.[88] Later work by Elbogen addressed a connection between prayer and poetry.[89] He refined Zunz's original thesis. Goldschmidt,[90] who then began a lively exchange of ideas with Heinemann, also left his mark on the debate.[91] Heinemann's views gradually became dominant, especially in Israel, until they were challenged by Fleischer.[92] In North America Petuchowsky[93] took a similar position to Heinemann, who had insisted on a philological approach, and was instrumental in motivating much of the popular and scholarly writings on Jewish liturgy[94] through his own works and those of his students, such as Sarason[95] and Hoffman.[96] Neusner's students, among many others such as Zahavy, also contributed to this ongoing conversation.[97] Most recently, Reif made a significant[98] and most welcome contribution to the study of Jewish liturgical history.[99]

For this study, it is important to keep in mind that various Jewish rabbis after the destruction of the Temple sought to rebuild what had been destroyed – the worship cult centred on the Jerusalem Temple. The amoraim, especially, sought first and foremost to create fixed patterns for the liturgy and to introduce regulations of universal applicability from which was not to deviate. We read in bMegilla 17b: "R. Johanan said (others report, it was stated in a Baraitha): A hundred and twenty elders, among whom were many prophets, drew up eighteen blessings in a fixed order." In bBerachoth 33a we are told: "It was the Men of the Great Synagogue who instituted

for Israel blessings and prayers, sanctifications and habdalahs," while in bBerachoth 28b we read: "Our Rabbis taught: Simeon ha-Pakuli arranged the eighteen benedictions in order before Rabban Gamaliel in Jabneh."[100]

Babylonian Talmud also gives another possible linking of the Amida and the time long past in assigning to God himself the very duty of covering his head and demonstrating to Moses the precise order of prayer (bRoshHashana 17b). While it is by no means certain who or which group is responsible for the initial compilation of the Amida, it is nevertheless clear that all of the rabbinic texts appeal to the time long past.

According to bBerachoth 32b Rabbi Eliazer is remembered to have said: "From the day on which the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been closed… but though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed…" Fixed prayer and Torah study became the foundational means of restoring Jewish worship, now no longer bound by a locale, priesthood and animal sacrifice.

This transition, however, to fixed prayer as a foundation of Jewish prayer practice did not find early and universal endorsement. In mBerachoth 4.4 we read: "Rabbi Eliezer said: If one makes one's prayer fixed, it is not true supplication" and in mAvot 2.13 we are told that "Rabbi Shimon said: Be careful in reciting the shema and in the amida; and when you pray, do not make your prayer fixed, but rather appeal for mercy and do supplication before the blessed God…"[101] "It was the view that Tefillah was the natural successor of the Temple Avoda that made it possible for so many of the latter's rituals to be given a new attachment to prayer and incorporated into the synagogue service."[102] Absorption of the Temple rituals into the newly remodelled synagogue service was slow and controversial. According to Heinemann, unlike Levitical hymns, prayer was an independent form of worship and was "not a subordinate of, nor an 'accompaniment' to, a more primary ritual or ceremony."[103] Fixed prayer as a primary form of worship was an original Jewish creation, in the sense that in other religions it always played a secondary role to the main ritual practice.[104] While it is not clear who established the fixed order or when it was established, it is clear why it was established. A fixed communal prayer was the response par excellence to the destruction of the Temple. It is beyond dispute that in the mind of most Rabbinic scholars the fixed prayers were instituted in order to replace the sacrificial cult that could not be performed without the Temple. Thus we read in texts like bBerachoth 26b: "R. Joshua b. Levi says: The Tefillahs were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices."[105] This prayer, which functioned as a reconstitution of worship in Israel, was characterized by its communal nature and participation. No longer was it priestly. It was now available and even required for all male Jews. In bBerachoth 53b we read: "Greater is he who answers, 'Amen!' than he who pronounces the benediction."[106] This could most easily be accomplished if all members of the community would participate in communal prayer in the synagogue.[107] According to Langer, it was "the unquestioned assumption that one's physical orientation while reciting the amidah must always be towards the innermost sanctum of the Temple."[108] This attitude was grounded in commemoration of Solomon's words in 1 Kings 8:48 at the

consecration of Jerusalem Temple. When the direction towards the Temple could not be properly identified, rabbis instructed that one should direct one's heart towards the Temple.[109] Hence, Langer is correct in disagreeing with Goldberg,[110] who states that the Rabbinic self-differentiation from the Temple indicates the non-liturgical status and degree of illegitimacy of Rabbinic worship.[111] Even if God's house was destroyed, it is still "the place"[112] of God's choosing and hence is in Langer's words "Israel's spiritual centre and her most reliable locus of contact with the Divine."[113]

It is important to remember that statutory prayers did not in any way replace the extemporaneous prayers of believers, which continued to flourish in addition to the prayers that were now fixed. It is beyond the scope of this brief introduction to survey the full history of prayer in Israel's history. Suffice it to say that the first stage in the development of the liturgy was characterized by diversity and variety – and the task of the rabbis [114] was to systematize and impose order on this multiplicity of forms, patterns and structures.[115]

Prayer in Christianity

Liturgy is what Christians do in their public assemblies. Worship is more and less than liturgy. It is more in that it includes the devotional practices of individuals and households as well as public praise and common prayer; it is less in that liturgy is not only prayer but ritual. Ritual has to do not only with what the community does before God, but also with what the members of the community do in interaction with one another. It is a pattern of behaviour that expresses and forms a way of life consistent with the community's beliefs and values.

Liturgy therefore is an expression of the doctrine held by each community. It seems that the fourth century marked the time for both Jews and Christians when both doctrine and its liturgical expression were being established as authoritative norms of thinking and worship.[116] For the followers of Jesus, just as for the Rabbinic Jews, prayer was foundational. It appears that early on the trend was to practise extemporaneous prayer. Just as in Judaism, daily individual prayers were also practised and the movement towards the development of a fixed liturgical identity for prayer was slowly emerging. Its formulation began with the Yavnean order, but it was not until the late third and early fourth centuries that significant prayer formulations and liturgies developed into a more or less permanent shape.[117]

Prayer services do not emerge spontaneously or arbitrarily in a vacuum. They are the public pronouncements of the central values and concepts of the religious leaders who initially propounded them and are social rituals that often emerge out of intense conflict and hard-fought compromise.[118] It is significant that the beginning of the fourth century marks the period of formulation not only of official doctrines but also of both Jewish and Christian liturgies.

The practice of prayer in Syriac Christianity is, on the one hand, a bridge that links Eastern and Western traditions, and on the other hand, a distinct tradition that possesses some characteristics that appear to be unique and serve to distinguish it from these interrelated, but independent,

Christian movements. Various Christian groups are known for rich traditions of liturgical involvement. No doubt much was inherited from the shared Israelite heritage, whether from the Jews or Jesus-believing Jews.[119] When it comes to distinctions, Syriac Christian writers often emphasized topics such as purity of heart, individual prayer, efficacy of prayer and silence as a true form of prayer. One example of the most important markers of Eastern Christian prayer was that it was almost always directed towards the East. There are different rationales for the custom. They range from Early Jewish prayer towards the Temple to the promise of lightning to come from the East at the second coming, as well as praying towards the direction of the Garden of Eden.[120] So strong was belief in the power of Christian prayer in Sassanian Persia that even Jewish merchants, probably simply for commercial reasons, at times manufactured items described as follows:

The bowl (a curse) is written in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and points to the cultural context of Sassanian Persia: "By the name of I-Am-that-I-Am, the Lord of Hosts, and by the name of Jesus, who conquered the height and the depth by his cross, and by the name of his exalted father, and by the name of the holy spirits forever and in eternity. Amen, amen, selah."[121]

According to Schäfer, this does not imply that the Jewish writer believed in the Trinity, but it certainly means that he knew of the name of Jesus and believed in its magical power.

Prayer in Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrian practice, especially that of the Parsis, developed a perspective on prayer in which the recitation of the sacred words in the powerful holy language generates power (amal) available only through ritual, provided that both moral and physical devotion are preserved in the place of worship.[122] Zoroastrian prayer may be divided into two types: private and public, both mainly liturgical. The duty of prayer (kusti) is required of all Zoroastrians five times a day, after ceremonial cleansing.

There is a series of Avestan prayers that each Zoroastrian is expected to learn by heart: the Yatha Ahu Vairyo (Ahunavar), thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself, as the greatest of all Zoroastrian prayers, which can, when necessary, replace all acts of devotion;[123] Asem Vohu, in praise of truth and righteousness; the Yenhe hatam, in praise of the holy beings, which is recited at the end of litanies; and the Airyema ishyo especially recited at weddings and which will be recited by the saviors at Frasokereti.[124]

Additionally, there are formal Temple liturgies that are divided into "Lower and Outer" and "Inner and Higher" ceremonies. The latter can only be conducted in a pure place by a priest. The former may be performed in any private house and has less rigid requirements regarding the purity laws.

The obvious example of the inner ceremonies is the Yasna, developed in Zoroastrianism as the Yasna Haptaghaiti, the worship of the even sections, the liturgy enshrined within the two blocks

of the Gathas in the Avesta.[125] The yasna, like other acts of worship, is concerned to make present the spiritual forces, notably the Amesa Spentas, whose creations are physically present in the act of worship. In earlier times animal sacrifice was a part of the yasna, but in modern times this has been not simply dropped, but even denied by Parsis, though the practice has continued in Iran, where Islam also practises animal sacrifice. Although laymen can worship in a temple seeking the spiritual benefits that the liturgies offer, they may also achieve the holy life by worshipping before their household fires (Atas) through the prayers and practices of the Sudre/Kusti, and through the duties involved in the feasts (gahambars), and by living up to the high ideals of Zoroastrianism.[126]

2. Aphrahat's Demonstrations

Content of the demonstration

According to Brock, Aphrahat's work has the distinction of being the earliest surviving Christian treatise on prayer which is not primarily concerned with the Lord's Prayer.[127] He wrote that "just as I have expounded clearly to you in my previous demonstration what the characteristics of fasting are, likewise, it is no trouble for me to relate and demonstrate to you what prayer is" (Dem. 4.1).

Aphrahat wrote the Demonstration on prayer with the explicit goal of showing that when it comes to prayer, the purity of the heart is the foundation of communication with God, just as it was with fasting. Aphrahat writes that "Purity of heart is a prayer more excellent than all prayers uttered in a loud voice, and silence, combined with a clear mind, surpasses the loud voice of the person who cries out" (Dem. 4.1). Everything else in this demonstration is in one way or another connected with the above thesis which Aphrahat seeks to demonstrate.

He first sets out to show that for the holy men of Israel, whom Aphrahat considers the righteous fathers of the followers of Christ, prayer was indeed a pure offering acceptable to God, and its potency was indeed great (Dem. 4.1). Indeed, writes Aphrahat, "Its strength is quite considerable, as considerable as the strength of pure fasting" (Dem. 4.1).

Aphrahat raises the question: "How does one discern that an offering is accepted before God?" (Dem. 4.2). His answer is simple: "fire descends from heaven and consumes the offering" (Dem. 4.2). He constructs his meticulous, careful and at the same time poetic argument by spending a rather lengthy amount of time showing that "all acceptable sacrifices were consumed by fire" (Dem. 4.3). He seeks to demonstrate his point by evoking great figures of Israel's past.

Aphrahat continues developing his argument so that the reader will be persuaded "concerning this pure prayer and what powers are displayed in it" (Dem. 4.4). He once again moves through various biblical characters, but then stops and takes a closer look at Jacob's dream (Dem. 4.5).

Aphrahat, who takes the biblical events as historical, believes and practises in his hermeneutic what could be best described as typological interpretation. Assigning varying significance to various "symbols" within the story of Jacob's ladder, he summarizes his convictions in the following way: "See, therefore, my friend, how many symbols were hidden in this vision which Jacob saw: he saw a gate to heaven, which is Christ; he saw a ladder, a symbol of the cross; he anointed the rocks, which is a type of the peoples" (Dem. 4.5). After showing even more of what prayer accomplished in the life of Jacob, he moved on to Moses, whose prayer power was "without limit" (Dem. 4.7).

Surprisingly, only then does he discuss the silent prayer of Hannah, the mother of Samuel (Dem. 4.8). Additionally, Aphrahat also discusses Daniel's prayers. Daniel is a key biblical character for Aphrahat. He is often cited as a key hero of biblical history for accomplishing all kinds of great things for God and His people, in this case, through the medium of prayer (Dem. 4.9). Aphrahat then summarizes all of his examples of effective prayer by saying that "each of our righteous fathers, at the time when tribulation came upon him, put on the armor of prayer, and through it was delivered from tribulation" (Dem. 4.9).

Having established that prayer was foundational in the lives of the righteous fathers of OT, Aphrahat then moves to expound on the teachings of Jesus Christ as he understood them from the Gospel (Dem. 4.10-11).[128] In Dem. 4.11 Aphrahat provides a very interesting but rather strange sounding, at least to a modern ear, interpretation of what Christ must have meant by the statement that "at the place where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst." His seemingly curious interpretation is as follows: "When a person gathers his soul in the name of Christ, Christ lives in him, and God lives in Christ. Thus, he becomes one of three persons: himself, Christ who lives in him, and God who lives in Christ" (Dem. 4.11).

He then proceeds to the next phase of his argument: "I am now going to demonstrate to you, my friend that God was with each of our righteous fathers who prayed" (Dem. 4.12). He gives various examples of God answering the prayers of people in solitude, but then explains why their prayers were answered: "For while they were alone, they were not [really] alone" (Dem. 4.12).

Aphrahat then gives a specific set of instructions to the reader as to how prayer ought to be carried out. In comparison to the extensive rabbinical prescriptions, his instructions are rather minimal. He says when "you pray, direct your heart upward, and your eyes downward, and enter into the midst of your inner person, and pray in secret to your Father in heaven" (Dem. 4.13). This particular description is very interesting regarding what it does not say about direction of prayer. Prayer towards the East, as was mentioned before, is a dominant motive in Syriac Christianity. While Aphrahat might be expected to say something about Eastward prayer, he mentions only a heavenward direction (see 7.2.4). The sages of Babylonian Talmud were very much aware of this dominant motive for Christians in Babylonia: [129]

R. Shesheth also held that the Shechinah is in all places, because [when desiring to pray] he used to say to his attendant: Set me facing any way except the east. And this was not because the Shechinah is not there, but because the Minim prescribe turning to the east. (bBaba Batra 25a; cf. yBerachoth 4.5, 8b)[130]

In Aphrahat we read:

For when you pray, direct your heart upward, and your eyes downward, and enter into the midst of your inner person, and pray in secret to your Father in heaven. (Dem. 4.13)

A remarkable parallel to Aphrahat's view on the direction of prayer is found in Bavli:

Who [is the Tanna here described as the] Sages? It is R. Jose. For R. Hiyya and R. Simeon b. Rabbi once sat together, when one of them began as follows: A man who offers up his prayers must direct his eyes towards [the Temple] below, for it is said, And Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually. And the other said: The eyes of him who offers up prayers shall be directed towards [the heavens] above, for it is said Let us lift up our heart with our hand. In the meanwhile they were joined by R. Ishmael son of R. Jose. On what subject are you engaged? he asked them. On the subject of prayer, they replied. My father, he said to them, ruled thus: A man who offers up his prayers must direct his eyes to the [Sanctuary] below and his heart towards [the heavens] above so that these two Scriptural texts may be complied with (bYebamoth 105b).[131]

After explaining Christ's teaching regarding two or three gathering to pray, Aphrahat then calls attention to the reason for doing so: "…because there are among us people who multiply prayers, prolong supplication, bend themselves over, and spread out their hands, yet the works of prayer are far from them." According to Aphrahat, "they pray the prayer that our Life-Giver taught: 'Forgive us our debts, as we also will forgive our debtors.'" He emphasizes that prayer must be pure, coming out of a heart full of forgiveness, and that people's prayer must be pre-qualified to leave earth and enter heaven (Dem. 4.13).[132] It is unclear whether the Jews or fellow Christians are referred to here. It is possible that the reference is to the Jewish community, since the description that Aphrahat gives (there are among us people who multiply prayers, prolong supplication, bend themselves over, and spread out their hands) may fit the Jewish prayer. Additionally, forgiving others as the worshiper is forgiven by God is now known not to be unique to Christianity and seems to fit the idea of the polemical influence upon one another among the Jews and Christians. Just as Aphrahat gave fasting a wide general definition, in which it seems that almost all good, as well as the avoidance of evil, can be considered fasting. He continues with the same approach when it comes to prayer. For example, the "giving of rest" to those who are weary is considered by Aphrahat to be a prayer (Dem. 4.14), even though no words may have been uttered in the direction of heaven. Again, just as in the demonstration on fasting, Aphrahat judges deeds of mercy to be more important than the act of verbal prayer (Dem. 4.15). In the poetic words of our author:

Prayer is virtuous, and its achievements are excellent. Prayer is accepted when it provides rest, and heard when forgiveness is found in it. Prayer is cherished when it is free from all deceptions, and powerful when it is perfected by the might of God. (Dem. 4.16)

Aphrahat does not discourage verbal prayer; rather he says that there is more to prayer than verbal expression (Dem. 4.16). Indeed, he goes on to encourage the reader to find many occasions for verbal prayer (Dem. 4.17). Aphrahat states that the offerings of the Temple were replaced not by the Lamb of God (Christ) as could be expected of Aphrahat to say, but by the prayers of the believers: "Then they picked up and brought their offerings in order to be pardoned, but their offerings were not rejected, and that prayer has been chosen instead" (Dem. 4.19).

This text is very interesting in that it raises a simple and yet provocative question as to what would make Aphrahat, a Christian apologist, adopt the Rabbinic view of sacrifice having been replaced in the Temple by the prayers of the believers. The answer probably lays in the fact that although Aphrahat's view resembles the Rabbinic view, in fact it is not Rabbinic at all. In Aphrahat's view, it is Christ who ultimately fulfils all the sacrifices of the Temple. In Dem. 2.6 he wrote:

And because they rejected his kingdom, he took the kingdom away from them, for the One to whom the kingdom belongs has come. He ascended as a living sacrifice on our behalf, and brought an end to their sacrifices. And the Israelites remained without sacrifices and altar, without the putting on of the ephod and the burning of incense. He brought an end to the visions and prophets among them because they did not listen to the Great Prophet. The earlier testament was fulfilled by the later one, and the works required by the Law became old and outdated. They were fit for destruction, for from the time that the new was given it brought an end to the old. It was not only at the time of the coming of our Saviour that sacrifices were rejected, but also before that their sacrifices did not please him…

For Aphrahat, it is Christ who is the ultimate sacrifice. Now in addition to that, and this is where the similarity with the Rabbinic concept comes in, the prayers of the believers, only as a secondary function, were chosen to replace the Temple sacrifices. He ends with the following series of short commands: "From now on, love pure prayer, and keep working at petition, and at the beginning of all your prayers, pray the prayer of your Lord. Be eager concerning all that I have written you, and whenever you pray, remember your friend" (Dem. 4.19).

Outline of the argument

Paragraph 1

1. Thesis

2. Righteous fathers

3. Power of prayer

a. In receding of the flood

b. In healing the barren woman

c. In overcoming encampments

d. In unveiling mysteries

e. In dividing the sea

f. In opening the Jordan

h. In holding back the Sun and Moon

i. In cleansing of the impure

j. In bringing down the fire

k. In closing up the sky

l. In bringing people up from the pit

m. In freeing them from fire

n. In delivering them from the sea [133]

4. Strength of prayer and fasting is linked

Paragraph 2

1. Acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of Cain's

a. Statement of the question

b. Answer to the question

i. The fire to come down as a sign of acceptance

ii. The fire did not touch the impure offering of Cain

2. Cain killed from the heart, Abel offered from the heart

Paragraph 3

1. Scriptural examples of consumed by fire sacrifices

a. Manoah

b. Abraham

c. Nadab and Abihu

d. Solomon

e. Elijah

Paragraph 4

1. Examples of power of prayer

a. Abraham

b. Isaac

Paragraph 5-6

1. Power of prayer in the life of Jacob

a. Bethel experience

b. Symbol of the Saviour

c. David's quotations

d. Anointed rocks as the peoples

2. More power of prayer in the life of Jacob

a. Gate is the Christ

b. Ladder is the Cross

c. Rocks are the nations of the world

d. Discussion of that which was hidden in Jacob's loins

e. Jacob's life as foreshadowing Christ first and second coming

Paragraph 7

1. Power of prayer in the life of Moses

a. Delivered from Pharaoh

b. Showed Shekina

c. Inflicted ten plagues

d. Divided the sea

e. Sweetened bitter water

f. Caused manna to come down

g. Caused quails to fly

h. Split the rock

i. Made waters to flow

j. Conquered Amalek

k. Gave strength to Joshua

l. Confused Og and Sihon

m. Made wicked to descent to sheol

n. Turned away God's wrath

o. Grounded up the calf of sin

p. Brought the tablets down

q. Made his face brilliant

2. Power of prayer in the life of Joshua

a. Divided the Jordan

b. Knocked down the walls of Jericho

c. Brought trouble to Achor

d. Held back the Sun

e. Immobilized moon

f. Eliminated kings

g. Subdued countries

h. Caused Israelites to inherit the land

Paragraph 8

1. Silent prayer of Hannah

a. Opened barren womb

b. Made disgrace to go away

c. Gave birth to Nazarite

2. More examples of people praying in solitude

a. Samuel's prayer

b. David's prayer

c. Asa's prayer

d. Hezekiah's prayer

e. Jonah's prayer

i. Penetrated abyss

ii. Conquered waves

iii. Was stronger than the sea

iv. Pierced the clouds

v. Flew on the air

vi. Opened heaven

vii. Approached the throne of Majesty (via Gabriel)

viii. Caused the depth to release of Jonah

f. Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael's prayer

i. Conquered flames

ii. Weakened strength of fire

iii. Changed its hot condition

iv. Curbed the wrath of the king

v. Set the righteous free

Paragraph 9

1. The power of prayer in the life of Daniel

a. Closed the mouths of lions

b. Caused the lions to stretch out their paws to receive Daniel's fall

c. Caused the lions to kiss his feet

d. Caused the stretched out paws to be lifted up (as if praying)

2. Angelic visitation to save Daniel

3. Sleep of Daniel

4. Defeat of the accusers

a. Fell into the pit

b. Were eaten by lions

5. Prayer of Daniel returns captivity from Babylon

Paragraph 10-11

1. Christ's teaching about prayer

a. Discussion about secret prayer

b. Interpretation of Christ's teachings

c. Challenge to the common interpretation

2. More of Christ teaching about prayer

a. Discussion about the “two or three gathered”

b. Challenge to the common interpretation

c. Interpretation of Christ’s teaching

Paragraph 12

1. Purpose statement

2. Examples of God’s presence with people in solitude

a. Moses

b. Elijah

c. Elisha

Paragraph 13

1. Discussion on how to pray

2. The reason for this demonstration

3. Call to pray pure prayers

Paragraph 14

1. Giving rest as non-verbal prayer [134]

2. Killing of God’s enemies as non-verbal prayer (Phineas)

3. Call to verbal prayer

4. Verbal prayer as sin

Paragraph 15

1. Deeds of mercy as non-verbal prayer

2. Judgment for those who do not practise mercy

Paragraph 16

1. Merits of prayer

a. Virtue

b. Achievement

2. Importance of ongoing verbal prayer

Paragraph 17

1. Occasions for legitimate prayer

2. Three types of prayer

3. Prayer as offering (directions for its acceptance)

4. Judgment upon the Jewish people

5. Prayer instead of sacrifices

6. Final encouragement to pray

Prayer according to Aphrahat

For Aphrahat, the angel Gabriel is very important and is in fact responsible for communication with God. Gabriel receives prayers, examines them and only then brings the acceptable ones up to God. He also lets people know that their prayers were actually received by God. Aphrahat gives an example of the response to Daniel's prayer by Gabriel: "Your prayer has been heard before God, and I have come in response to your words." According to him, it was Gabriel who encouraged Daniel during the prayer: "He encouraged him by saying to him, 'Be strong, cherished man!' It was through the prayer of Daniel's fast that Gabriel came near to him." Aphrahat also gives another example, this time in Zechariah's story, of Gabriel's activity as prayer mediator:

It was also Gabriel who presented the prayer of Zechariah before God. For when he announced the birth of John, he said to him, "Your prayer has been heard before God." So also was the case with Mary "The prayer of Mary, also, was presented before God, and Gabriel announced to her the birth of Christ. For he said to her, 'You have found favour before God.'" (Dem. 3.14)

Aphrahat explains the reasoning for additional fasting and prayer by Daniel in the event of the expiration of the sentence against Israel by her God:

Why, my friend, did Daniel fast for those three full weeks and seek God and make supplication, while it is not written that he had fasted previously? Here is what is written: seventy years had passed since the destruction of Jerusalem (as the prophet Jeremiah had said) when Daniel offered his prayer and made supplication before his God, so that they might not remain longer than seventy years in Babylon. Since God had taken away [years] from the generation in the days of Noah, and had added to the [years of the] Israelites in Egypt, and had taken away [years] from the Ephraimites, Daniel thought that because of their sins the people might have to remain in Babylon longer than the seventy years spoken by Jeremiah.

After a period of fasting and praying, "Gabriel helped his people, so that the fruits of their prayers and offerings, which Gabriel presented each day before God, might multiply in the house of the sanctuary" (Dem. 3.15). In Dem. 6.1 Aphrahat launches a series of exhortations, some of which have to do directly with the exercise of prayer. First, he calls people to engage in prayer, "Let us persevere in prayer, in order to pass by the place of fear." Second, he once again clarifies, "Let us pray his prayer in purity, so that it might go before the Lord of majesty."[135] Once again he connects prayer and fasting with offering unto the Lord by saying, "Let us prepare offerings for the king, the desirable fruits [of] fasting and prayer" (Dem. 6.1). Aphrahat compares fasting and prayer with bribes before the heavenly court of justice. Describing believers, he says that "they send their gifts of fasting and prayer as a bribe to him who has the power to inscribe and to blot out" (Dem. 9.4).

Aphrahat constructs something like his own version of a 1 Cor. 13 type of statement on prayer: "The lovers of love are many, and its kindness overflows. Love endures reproach; love suffers abuse; love is patient. Love reconciles enemies and raises up peace among those who are divided. Love suffers wrong. Love delights in silence. It loves the humble. It loves the poor. It loves the wise. Love embraces prayer" (Dem. 14.14). According to Aphrahat, just as prayer was the means for Mordecai to rescue the people of Israel from sure death, so, as the New Covenant leader of God's people, Jesus rescues his people from slavery to Satan through the means of prayer (Dem. 22.20). The last Demonstration on Grape Cluster gives us a curious statement which states that because of the great number of sinners, the power of the prayer has been nullified. This particular statement seems to give some credence to a possibility that Dem. 23 had a different author. The author of Dem. 23 wrote:

At the moment when the measure of sinners overflows, the prayer of the righteous is no longer heard. For the Holy One said to Jeremiah, "At this time, even if Moses and Samuel stood before me, my soul does not take pleasure in this people. I am sending them away from me and they will depart. If they say to you, 'Where are we going?' say to them, 'To destruction and captivity, to famine and pestilence,' [which are] the four plagues that I will send to them." (Dem. 23.5)

Everything Aphrahat said about the power of prayer in his previous demonstrations seems to stand in direct opposition to this statement on prayer, where the potency of individual prayer is limited by something other than the biblical hero's impurity of heart, in this case by the sin of others. Two main possibilities present themselves. Either Aphrahat changed his mind by the time of the writing of the last demonstration or we are presented here with evidence that Demonstration 23 was not authored by Aphrahat, but was rather attributed to him mistakenly at a later time. If the first scenario is correct, then one is given a rare look into the psychological dimension of the struggle of the Christians in Persia as a persecuted minority. In this reading Aphrahat starts out by establishing the almighty power of prayer, but after seeing the persecution that ensued because of the wickedness of his opponents, he no longer believes that the power of prayer cannot be suppressed by the sinful actions of unbelievers. This spiritual struggle may have been accompanied by physical illness or some other physical trial, such as the impending martyrdom that stopped Aphrahat from continuing the second section of his work, of which Demonstration 23 was but a first chapter.

The above provocative observation must, however, at this stage be tentative. It could be an interesting study to test a hypothesis that Dem. 23 may have been authored by someone else. This could be accomplished primarily by a method which would need to be based on the linguistic comparison of style between Dem. 1-22 and Dem. 23. Since nowhere in Dem. 1-22 is Aphrahat actually identified as the author of Demonstrations, the possibility of an early mistaken grouping of manuscripts together by someone else should at the very least be considered as a possibility.

3. Comparison of Aphrahat and the Babylonian Talmud

Agreement

First, both Babylonian Talmud (bBerachoth 26b) and Aphrahat (Dem. 4.18) agree that the sacrifices of the Temple were at least in some way replaced by the prayers of the people. This agreement is interesting precisely because one does not expect Aphrahat to say that Temple sacrifices were replaced by prayers. Instead, one would expect Aphrahat to say that the sacrifices were replaced by the Sacrifice – Jesus Christ, who died on the cross as the one who takes away the sin of the world. Surprisingly, where Aphrahat could be expected to disagree with the traditional Rabbinical Jewish reading, he does not. It is difficult, if it is even possible, to provide a definitive explanation, or even a convincing hypothesis, for this phenomenon. A probable scenario may be argued as follows: NT Christian-Jewish polemic does not contain fully a developed Sacrifice argument simply because most, if not all, of its sections were written while the Jerusalem Temple continued its operations. It is only much later that the Rabbinic movement developed the idea of the replacement of sacrifices by prayer, though the notion is already present in Hosea 14:2. Hypothetically, Aphrahat may have not heard those arguments and hence

did not have to develop an appropriate and indeed necessary response, given his theology of Christ and redemption. This "sleeping at the wheel" on the part of Aphrahat of course argues, although through his silence, that Aphrahat met Jews who were not part of the Rabbinic movement or at the very least the Jews for whom this replacement was not a centrepiece of their liturgical theology as may have been the case for the Para-Rabbinic Jews. One other possibility is that Aphrahat arrived at such a conclusion by simply reading the Peshitta. Weitzman suggested that in treating 2 Chr. 30:18-19 the Peshitta translators departed from MT (May the good Lord atone for all who set his heart to seek God, the Lord, God of his fathers, even if not according to the purity of the sanctuary) by rendering this verse to show that prayer is "not a mere substitute for the Temple service, but had actually superseded it".[136]

In the Torah the sacrifice was prescribed twice daily, while prayer is not prescribed at all. It is likely that Levites in the provinces developed an independent prayer-cult consisting of prayer "evening and morning and noon-day" (Ps. 55:18) Such a prayer-cult would, presumably, have accompanied sacrifice during Josiah's reforms, but after a while became a sole worship practice, especially, in provinces where sacrifices were not offered. As far as the relative status of prayer and sacrifice was concerned, two separate trajectories could be identified: 1) Prayer was a strict replacement of sacrifice for in Qumran prayer was offered morning and evening (1QS 10:1 ff, 1QH 12:4-7, 1QM 14:13-14, Jub. 6:14) and 2) Prayer was not strictly connected to the sacrifice. While the rabbis did originally practice set prayer time bound to the sunrise (bBer. 26a), eventually the sages extended it and transformed it to fit a more flexible schedule: morning prayer was now allowed from morning until afternoon (mBer. 4:1).

For the Pishitta the thrice daily worship was very important and in spite of the triumph of rabbinic views among the Jews, this custom was successfully transmitted into the Christian church. Jews whose practice was confined to such a prayer-cult, could well have come to accept Christianity, argues Weitzman.[137] However, due to the problems with dating the Talmudic witness, we cannot be sure what was there first: Christian or Rabbinic thrice a day prayer? In other words we cannot be sure if Christians borrowed from Jews, or vice versa.

Aphrahat did not make much of the three times per day prayer, but he did note it and praised it in Daniel's life: "The den was illuminated more than an upper room with many windows, since there he multiplied his prayers more than in his upper room, where he only prayed three times a day." (Dem. 4.9) This is especially intriguing in that the Peshitta that was Aphrahat's Old Testament Bible departed from MT reading of 1 Chr. 1 5:21. Though literally it has "to play with harps upon the eight" it targumed the text as "these would utter praise on the harps ever day at the third, sixth and ninth hours." These hours are, continues Weitzman, alien to Rabbinic Judaism "which specified not points but intervals of time… (mBer. 4:1)."[138] Did Aphrahat not say anything about these hours because there was no need to say so since no one doubted its legitimacy or did not mention this due to his apologetic efforts, that is not wishing to concentrate on something that was not crucial? This we may never know.[139]

Second, both communities agree that, when it comes to prayer, Moses should be considered as the prime example (bBerachoth 32b; Dem. 4.7). Here it is also interesting to see Aphrahat viewing Moses as the one whose "prayer is without limit" (Dem. 4.7). Christ obviously receives plenty of attention with regard to his teachings on prayer, but it is the person of Moses who is highlighted as the supreme practitioner of prayer. For him the ancient Israelite heroes are his heroes and the key figures of Israelite history that were used by Israel's God to redeem and deliver God's Ancient People are supreme examples for his theology and therefore for his practice. Aphrahat's hermeneutic displays a unique emphasis on continuity not replacement, even via fulfilment, between OT heroes and Christ. To him and therefore to his followers this emphasis on continuity was nothing new.

Third, both communities consider verbal prayer to be a matter of spiritual discipline that marks the life of obedience before God (bTa'anith 25b; Dem. 1.4). This and the following example are characteristic of a majority of religious traditions and are not the exclusive prerogative of the Judeo-Christian world.

Fourth, in both Aphrahat (Dem. 4.13) and Babylonian Talmud (bSotah 22a), prayer must be heartfelt, emanating from the very centre of one's being in order to be received on high. Both Aphrahat's Demonstrations and the writings of Babylonian Talmud explicitly emphasize this idea.

Fifth, both communities realize that while it is good to pray, not all prayer is the same. Some prayer can be abominable as far as the judgment of God on the quality of these prayers is concerned. Aphrahat and Babylonian Talmud believe that some prayers can be evil; however, they do so in very different ways from each other. While Babylonian Talmud discusses abominable prayers (bBerachoth 23a) usually in relation to their external quality such as prayer while urinating, Aphrahat looks at evil prayer just as he does the case of evil fasting – as injustice done to people (Dem. 4.14). Although the example of forbidding prayer while urinating may seem to be a perfect candidate for ridiculing Talmudic opinions, as was often done by the medieval Christians in their often hateful and unfair anti-Jewish "debates", it does nevertheless provide an example of the kind of real life concerns that Bavli finds important enough to record or at least not to edit out. Categorical differences are not simply internal and external, they are moral and immoral as well as having to do with ritual purity and. ritual impurity.

Sixth, it is also clear that prayer has supernatural power. While Aphrahat emphasizes this, Babylonian Talmud acknowledges it. For Aphrahat, the result of prayer is the reason why one must be encouraged to pray (Dem. 4.1, 7); for Babylonian Talmud it is the duty, not the benefit that prayer brings, which underlies the reason to pray (bAvoda Zara 4b).

Disagreement by omission

Aphrahat

First, Aphrahat and the Babylonian Talmud disagree on whether prayer is mediated by the Archangel Gabriel (Dem. 3.14):

And during his fast of twenty-one days, he was heard before his God, for during those days Gabriel, who receives prayer at all times, arose to help him… You should be aware, my friend, that Gabriel receives prayer before God. For when Daniel prayed, it was Gabriel who came to him and strengthened him, saying, "Your prayer has been heard before God, and I have come in response to your words." He encouraged him by saying to him, "Be strong, cherished man!"

The above appears to be a four-step process. When verbal prayer is uttered on earth it is examined by Gabriel and only then is it brought up to God for approval and benevolent action in response to a petition. Then, and only then, God hears the prayer that was deemed pure enough by Gabriel for God to hear it. The response to prayer also comes through Gabriel. Babylonian Talmud indicates nothing of Gabriel's role as a liaison between humanity and God. It is possible that these texts afford an example of a polemic in which Gabriel is continuing the thematic trajectory of a priestly ministry in the Jerusalem Temple (Aphrahat). The Bavli text may be, although very tentatively, a witness to an anti-Temple sentiment of the Babylonian rabbis. The ministering angels do indeed play a very important role in Rabbinic literature. Some of them, like Gabriel, Rafael and Michael, play the role of protectors for the Jews, while some others, like Metatron and Akhtariel, play the role of Gods' helpers.

Second, according to Aphrahat, Mordecai's deliverance of Israel was accomplished through the means of prayer (Dem. 21.20): "Through his prayer, Mordecai rescued his people from the hands of Haman, and through his prayer, Jesus rescued his people from the hands of Satan." Just as with the deliverance that Jesus brought about, Aphrahat's emphasis is on the role of Christ's prayer rather than the cross.[140]

Third, according to Aphrahat just as good prayer is pure prayer, purity of the heart is also a form of prayer (Dem. 4.1): "Purity of heart is a prayer more excellent than all prayers uttered in a loud voice, and silence, combined with a clear mind, surpasses the loud voice of the person who cries out." The Talmud does not mention anything of the kind. While it affirms that prayer should come from the heart, it nevertheless concentrates on ritual purity during the actual act of verbal prayer.

Fourth, Aphrahat compares pure prayer to the strength of pure fasting (Dem. 4.1):

"Its strength is quite considerable, as considerable as the strength of pure fasting. And just as I have expounded clearly to you in my previous demonstration what the characteristics of fasting are, likewise, it is no trouble for me to relate and demonstrate to you what prayer is."

Fifth, Aphrahat defines prayer as broadly as he defines fasting (Dem. 4.14): "For it is written: 'When Zimri had sexual relations with the Midianite woman, Phineas son of Eliazar saw him and went into the chamber and killed both of them.' [His] killing of them was considered prayer."

For Aphrahat, prayer can be silent and also can be presented to God in the form of a deed of kindness or even the killing of God's enemy.

Sixth, Aphrahat, as does Christ in the Gospel available to Aphrahat, emphasizes private prayer that is really heard and hence rewarded by God (Dem. 4.10):

Our Saviour has also taught about prayer, and said, "Pray in secret to the Hidden One who sees all" For he said. "Enter the inner chamber and pray to your Father in secret, and the Father, who sees what is hidden, will reward you." Why, my friend, did our Saviour teach and say, "Pray to your Father in secret while the door is closed"? I will explain this to you, as far as I understand it. He said, "Pray to your Father in secret while the door is closed." This is what the word of our Saviour shows us: pray in secret in your heart, and close the door. What door did he say to close, if not your mouth? For this is the temple in which Christ dwells, as the Apostle says, "You are the temple of the Lord, so that he might enter into your inner man, this house, and purify it from every impurity, while the door (the mouth) is closed…"

Babylonian Talmud's concern is almost never that prayer not be witnessed by others, but rather that it not be interrupted by them.

Babylonian Talmud

First, Babylonian Talmud argues that all personal prayer must have the same liturgical backbone and then be personalized by each worshiper (bBerachoth 16b):

R. Eleazar said: What is the meaning of the verse, So will I bless Thee as long as I live; in Thy name will I lift up my hands? I will bless Thee as long as I live refers to the Shema; in Thy name I will lift up my hands refers to the tefillah. And if he does this, Scripture says of him, My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness. Nay more, he inherits two worlds, this world and the next, as it says, and my mouth doth praise Thee with joyful lips.

Aphrahat's teaching does not at any point address liturgical concerns in any substantial way. It is of course possible that Aphrahat's silence was part of the argument in the anti-liturgical polemic within the church, but it is far more reasonable to view Aphrahat's silence as unintentional evidence of the different types of concerns that are present in his community.

Second, according to at least some sages, the efficacy of prayer is tied up with the Temple in Jerusalem (bBerachoth 32b), while in Aphrahat, the Jerusalem Temple is not present as a factor in the discussion on prayer:

R. Eleazar also said: From the day on which the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer have been closed, as it says, Yea, when I cry and call for help He shutteth out my prayer. But though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed, as it says, Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; keep not silence at my tears. Raba did not order a fast on a cloudy day because it says, Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass

through… R. Eleazar also said: Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, a wall of iron has intervened between Israel and their Father in Heaven, as it says, And take thou unto thee an iron griddle, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city.

Third, some sages' prayer is more effective than that of the high priest in the times of the Temple (bYoma 53b):

R. Hanina b. Dosa was walking along a road when rain came down upon him. He said: Lord of the Universe! All the world is comfortable and Hanina is afflicted! The rain stopped. As he came home, he said: Lord of the Universe! All the world is afflicted and Hanina is comfortable! The rain came again. R. Joseph said: Of what use is the prayer of the high priest against R. Hanina b. Dosa!

The above seems to indicate that there was a tension between non-Temple Judaism in Babylonia and the views of those Jews who were not comfortable with a prolonged absence of legitimate priesthood. Aphrahat never makes this kind of comparison.

Fourth, according to the Talmud, prayer may be considered efficacious because of the fluency of the one who directs it to God (bBerachoth 34b). Perhaps, unction in prayer is in view here; the feeling of rolling-from-the-tongue prayer is most likely meant. Aphrahat does not have much to say about the existential feeling of the one who prays.

Fifth, prayers can be of various lengths (bBerachoth 34a):

Our Rabbis taught: Once a certain disciple went down before the Ark in the presence of R. Eliezer, and he spun out the prayer to a great length. His disciples said to him: Master, how longwinded this fellow is! He replied to them: Is he drawing it out any more than our Master Moses, of whom it is written: The forty days and the forty nights [that I fell down]? Another time it happened that a certain disciple went down before the Ark in the presence of R. Eliezer, and he cut the prayer very short. His disciples said to him: How concise this fellow is! He replied to them: Is he any more concise than our Master Moses, who prayed, as it is written: Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee?

Prayers, according to these texts, can be short or long, but the ones who witness someone praying should not have a judgmental attitude towards the one who prays. In Babylonian Talmud the sages are concerned that their prayer not be interrupted by those who happen to witness it.

Sixth, recitation of a portion of Shema cannot be carried out without adherence to the ceremonial laws accompanying it as in the Torah (bBerachoth 14b-15a):

Ulla said: If one recites the Shema without tefillin it is as if he bore false witness against himself. R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of R. Johanan: It is as if he offered a burnt-offering without a meal-offering and a sacrifice without drink-offering. R. Johanan also said: If one desires to accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven in the most complete manner, he should

consult nature and wash his hands and put on tefillin and recite the Shema and say the tefillah: this is the complete acknowledgment of the kingdom of heaven. R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of R. Johanan: If one consults nature and washes his hands and puts on tefillin and recites the Shema and says the tefillah, Scripture accounts it to him as if he had built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it, as it is written, I will wash my hands in innocence and I will compass Thine altar, O Lord.

This particular prohibition is no doubt directed either to Jesus-believing Jews who followed Christ but neglected the detailed Jewish observances or, most likely, to the Gentile Christians who, especially in Aramaic-speaking areas, maintained a close connection to Israel's heritage without subscribing to the "entire package of God's will". It is not necessary, however, to argue from this text that the reference here is to Christians under Aphrahat's influence, since the phraseology is general and, furthermore, nowhere in Demonstrations do we hear of Shema being recited.

Disagreement by confrontation

First, while Babylonian Talmud only views prayer as a verbal enterprise, Aphrahat sees it as both verbal and non-verbal; he broadens and emphasizes its definition to include any deed of obedience to God to be the prayer that God desires.

Aphrahat:

For it says in the prophet "This is my rest: give rest to the weary." Therefore, bring about the rest of God, O human, and there will be no need for you [to say] 'Forgive me.' Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, and provide for the poor; this is prayer, I will persuade you: my friend, that whenever a person brings about the rest of God, it is prayer… (Dem. 4.14; Parisot 169)

But listen to what the apostle has said: "If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged." Judge within yourself what I say to you: suppose you happen to go on a long journey and become thirsty in the heat, and [then] encounter one of the brothers and say to him, "Relieve me from the exhaustion of thirst", and he says to you. "It is the time of prayer; I will pray and then I will come to you." But while he is praying and coming to you, you die of thirst. What seems better to you? Should he leave to pray, or relieve your exhaustion? Again, suppose you go on a journey in the winter and rain and snow fall on you, and you become exhausted from the cold. Again, at the time of prayer you happen to meet your friend, and he answers you in the same way, and you die from the cold. What good is his prayer, which did not relieve [your] exhaustion? For our Lord, when he described the time of judgment (when he would divide [people] and make [them] stand on his right and on his left), [said that] he would say to those on his right, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was sick and you visited me. I was a stranger and you invited me in!" He spoke like this to those on his left also, but because they had not done these things, he sent them to torment, and those on his right he sent to the kingdom. (Dem. 4.15; Parisot 172-173)

Babylonian Talmud:

R. Eleazar said: Prayer is more efficacious even than good deeds, for there was no-one greater in good deeds than Moses our Master, and yet he was answered only after prayer… R. Eleazar also said: prayer is more efficacious than offerings… (bBerachoth 32b)

While Bavli's sages certainly considered things like care for the poor to be very important, they considered worship to be of paramount importance. Literally, both statements by R. Eleazar indicate that prayer was greater than good works and sacrifices. On the other hand, while Aphrahat, representing his community, considered verbal prayer to be very important, he considered such things as care for the poor to be of paramount importance. Christian and Jewish communities did not develop in a vacuum, nor did they develop independently of each other. While the authors of the texts cited above probably did not have each other in mind, this researcher holds that they still probably represented general ideas and trends of the developing Christian and Jewish communities that did.[141]

Second, while Babylonian Talmud is concerned with the right way of doing prayer and therefore prescribes all kinds of detailed rules, Aphrahat speaks of it only in generality through minimally prescriptive commands. In "their discussions of sacrifices, the rabbis stress the necessity of absolute precision in the performance of every detail of the ritual," [142] and such precision is transferred to their practice of prayer.

Aphrahat:

For when you pray, direct your heart upward, and your eyes downward,

and enter into the midst of your inner person, and pray in secret to your

Father in heaven. (Dem. 4.13; Parisot 165)

Babylonian Talmud:

Beth Hillel says: He must pray seven [benedictions] beginning with the Sabbath [formula] and ending with the Sabbath [formula], and he makes mention of the holiness of the day in the middle. Rabbi says: He should also conclude it [the benediction] Who sanctifieth the Sabbath, Israel and the Seasons… Our Rabbis taught: If a Sabbath falls on a New Moon or on the intermediate days of a Festival, at the evening, morning and afternoon services he prays seven [benedictions] and makes mention of the nature of the day in the Abodah, and if he did not recite [it], he is made to turn back; R. Eliezer says: [He alludes to the day] in the Thanksgiving [benediction], while in the Additional Services he begins with the Sabbath [formula] and closes with the Sabbath [formula], and makes mention of the holiness of the day in the middle. (bBeitzah 17a)

Aphrahat's prescription on prayer in Dem. 4.13 is a rare instance of this, while the one that is exemplified in bBeitzah 17a is one of a great number of prescriptions in Bavli. This shows the immense concern that Babylonian sages placed on the purity of the verbal prayer ritual. Aphrahat's logic may appear strange, but in reality it is cogent. He first persuades the reader of the enormous power of prayer, and then moves to show that the prayer that touches the heart of God more than anything is not the prayer that the Jews have excelled at, but the one that his Christian community excelled in. This is of course was the non-verbal prayer that Aphrahat calls the service to the poor (Dem. 4.14-15).

Third, while Babylonian Talmud emphasizes the duty of prayer regardless of the result, Aphrahat speaks of the result as the defining factor for prayer. It is possible that we see here an example in which Babylonian Judaism sought to counter the preaching of the Christians that was claimed to have been accompanied by miracles. The argument in Persia for the veracity of Christianity may have been similar to that in the apostolic times.

Aphrahat:

For indeed it is by prayer that offerings have been accepted. Prayer is what caused the flood to recede. It also healed the barren woman, overcame encampments, unveiled mysteries, divided the sea, opened a breach in the Jordan, held back the sun and immobilized the moon, exterminated the impure and caused fire to fall, closed up the sky, brought [people] up from the pit, freed [them] from fire, and delivered [them] from the sea. (Dem. 4.1; Parisot 137)

Babylonian Talmud:

Raba b. Hinena the Elder said further in the name of Rab: If one is in a position to pray on behalf of his fellow and does not do so, he is called a sinner, as it says, Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you. Raba said: If [his fellow] is a scholar, he must pray for him even to the point of making himself ill (bBerachoth 12b).

These are two texts that are, of course, only examples of the kind of things that Aphrahat and the sages of Bavli would say regarding prayer. Recognizing the limitations of arguing in probabilities, it is possible to suggest that such tendencies in Rabbinic Judaism such as its emphasis on the duty of prayer and prescriptive formulas may have developed over time in response to the Christian emphasis on the miracle-working powers accompanying the proclamation of the Gospel. For example, Theodoret of Cyrus, in describing a different Aphrahat who lived later than the Persian Sage, speaks of the miracles that accompanied his ministry.[143] This is but one example of such a tendency to emphasize the healing that Gospel preaching brings along with it, especially among Eastern churches. So, it is conceivable that the Jewish community would feel a need to give a worthy defence, legitimizing their own way of serving the Most High God. This evidence, however, is considered by this researcher to be weak and will only be considered as a small part of the overall picture.

Fourth, while Babylonian Talmud speaks of community as the key factor for the efficacy of prayer, Aphrahat emphasizes prayer in solitude as appropriate and effectual.

Aphrahat:

I am now, therefore, going to demonstrate to you, my friend, that God was with each of our righteous fathers who prayed. For when Moses prayed on the mountain, he was alone, but God was with him. And it was not the case that he was not heard because he was alone. On the contrary, the prayer of Moses was heard all the more, and it calmed the wrath of his God. Elijah was also alone, on Mount Carmel, and his prayer demonstrated amazing power. (Dem. 4.12; Parisot 164)

Babylonian Talmud:

One of the key features for the understanding of Talmudic prayer is set forth in bBerachoth 6a. Here we are clearly told that the efficacy of prayer is bound up with the communal involvement of Israel in the gathering together in a synagogue. The argument states the previous teaching:

It has been taught: Abba Benjamin says: A man's prayer is heard [by God] only in the Synagogue. For it is said: To hearken unto the song and to the prayer. The prayer is to be recited where there is song. Rabin b. R. Adda says in the name of R. Isaac: How do you know that the Holy One, blessed be He, is to be found in the Synagogue? For it is said: God standeth in the congregation of God. Several objections are then brought forth, ably answered by argumentation from the holy scriptures: "And how do you know that if ten people pray together the Divine presence is with them? For it is said: 'God standeth in the congregation of God'. And how do you know that if three are sitting as a court of judges the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: In the midst of the judges He judgeth. And how do you know that if two are sitting and studying the Torah together the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name." (bBerachoth 6a)

Yet another example of the collective nature of efficacious prayer is found in bBerachoth 8a. The question is asked: "What is the meaning of the verse: But as for me, let my prayer be made unto Thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time? When is the time acceptable?" An interesting answer given to this question: "R Nathan says: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not despise the prayer of the many?" (bBerachoth 8a)

R. Johanan says: Whenever the Holy One, blessed be He, comes into a Synagogue and does not find ten persons there, He becomes angry at once. For it is said: Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there no answer? (bBerachoth 6b)

Comparing sections like this is crucial for our research, even though both parties certainly did not acknowledge that they had each other in mind as they presented their arguments. Aphrahat presents a very, very long demonstration arguing seemingly self-evident truth that God hears an individual when that individual offers prayer to that God. But one may ask, why? What possible reason could there be for Aphrahat to devote so much space on such a 'simple' topic? Of course God hears an individual when he or she prays alone, a post-modern mind may conclude, but such was not the case in the mind of the people whom Aphrahat needed to address. What was the challenge that Aphrahat needed to meet?

It is only when we lay out what the sages of Bavli wrote about God's requirements for hearing prayer such as bBerachoth 8a and bBerachoth 6b that we begin to understand the urgent need for Aphrahat to use all the space he has, the passion and the kind of argumentation he employed to persuade his readers that God indeed hears people when they pray alone and not only when their prayers are offered in the midst of their communities (Dem. 4.12). By his argumentation in his demonstration on prayer, Aphrahat was seeking to strengthen his fellow Sons of the Covenant who were under the pressure to abandon their Christian ways and adopt Jewish, perhaps even Para-Rabbinic ways of thinking. This would make sense for those among his followers who were "converts from Judaism". The only way to do so was to meet the problem head on and to persuade them from their Hebrew Scriptures that the God of Israel always heard people when they prayed alone; he wrote: "I am now going to demonstrate to you, my friend, that God was with each of our righteous fathers who prayed" (Dem. 4.12).

4. Conclusion

Examination of the Demonstration on Prayer shows that Bavli and Demonstrations often drew from the same hermeneutical and textual pool. On some occasions, they arrived at the similar conclusions independently, for example, regarding prayers of the people replacing the Temple sacrifices (bBerachoth 26b; Dem. 4.18). On other occasions mutual influence seems probable, as in the case with only heavenward direction of prayer in Aphrahat (Dem. 4.13; bBaba Batra 25a; cf. yBerachoth 4.5, 8b; bYebamoth 105b). At other times, their very practices were determined by the reaction to the opposing group, as in the case with the prayer in solitude vs. prayer in a synagogal menyan setting (Dem. 4.11-12; bBerachoth 6a; bBerachoth 8a-b). Only by reading what Bavli's sages were teaching regarding the necessity of synagogue and communal prayer can one understand the reason for a very long argument in Aphrahat showing that God indeed hears the prayer of individuals.

In answering the question about the fact and the nature of the interaction between Aphrahat and the Para-Rabbinic movement in his locale, the current researcher is faced with three types of evidence. First, some cases in the category of disagreement by omission are not very useful for answering the question that this researcher is seeking to answer. For example, the case of

Aphrahat's view of Gabriel's ministry regarding prayer (Dem. 3.14). Second, other cases are only able to establish plausibility, such as the connections between deliverance of Christians through Jesus' high priestly prayer and the superiority of the prayer of the Babylonian sages over the prayer of the Temple's High priest (Dem. 22.20; bYoma 53b). Third, there are some texts, however, that present the strongest evidence yet for significant interaction, if not between Aphrahat and the rabbis, certainly between the Christian and Jewish communities whom Aphrahat and the rabbis sought to influence with their writings (Dem. 4.11-12; bBerachoth 6a; bBerachoth 8a-b).

The examination of the first two of five thematic selections in this study already has begun to make the case for a Babylonian conversation between Para-Rabbinic Jews and Aphrahat's community. The fourth century has begun the period when the identities of Jewish and Christian communities were effectively delineated and specified by the synagogal and church leaders (bBeitzah 17a; Dem. 4.13). That identification occurred in the context of a conversation that took place in the market place of these ancient societies. As in the previous chapter, which dealt with circumcision, this demonstration also did not reveal any anti-Zoroastrian polemic, despite very significant differences (see 3.1.3) in both the practice and the object of prayer ritual.

Chapter 4

ON AVOIDING OF CERTAIN FOODS

1. Kashrut

Kashrut in Judaism

Kashrut is a system of distinguishing the substances that are fit for consumption [144] by a Jew from those which are not. Its system has to do with more than just what is clean and what is unclean, but also with how the clean foods must be preserved, cooked and eaten.[145] The word kasher comes from the root that means fit or appropriate. The opposite of the kasher is the treif (lit. something torn). Treif meat, for example, is usually understood to be meat from a non-kasher animal or a kasher animal that has not been prepared for consumption properly. However, the term has been applied by extension to all non-kasher food. Although the laws of Kashrut are fairly extensive, all of them derive from the following rules:

1. Certain animals and fish may not be eaten at all. Of the animals that may be eaten, the birds and mammals must be killed appropriately.[146]

2. All blood must be drained from the meat or broiled out of it before it is eaten.[147]

3. Certain parts of permitted animals may not be eaten.

4. Fruits and vegetables are permitted, but must be inspected for bugs.

5. Meat (the flesh of birds and mammals) cannot be eaten with dairy. Fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains can be eaten with either meat or dairy. According to some views, fish may not be eaten with meat.

6. Utensils that have come into contact with meat may not be used with dairy, and vice versa. Utensils that have come into contact with non-kasher food may not be used with kasher food.

7. Grape products made by non-Jews may not be eaten.

Many of the basic laws of Kashrut are derived from the Torah's Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Their details, however, are set down in the Oral Law (Mishnah and Talmudim) and codified by the Shulchan Aruch and later Rabbinic writings. These laws are broad and cover many aspects of Kashrut. In our discussion we will concentrate mostly on that aspect of Kashrut that distinguishes clean foods from unclean, because that is the distinction that Aphrahat himself follows in his Demonstrations.

The dietary laws in Judaism are designed as a general call to holiness. The ability and commitment to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, pure and defiled, the sacred

and the profane are crucial to the genius of Rabbinic Judaism. Imposing rules on what one can and cannot eat ingrains the practice of self-control, requiring Jews to learn to control even their most basic desires. The laws of Kashrut elevate the simple act of eating into a religious ritual. The Jewish dinner table is often compared to the Temple altar in Rabbinic literature. A Jew who observes the laws of Kashrut cannot eat a meal without being reminded of the fact that he belongs to His God.

As Milgrom has astutely stated, there are as many theories of interpretation of the laws of clean and unclean animals as there are theorists or exegetes.[148] Early writers as well as modern scholars spared no effort in commenting on Lev. 11 and Deut. 14 – foundational texts for the distinctions between clean and unclean foods. Mostly the questions that authors asked of these texts had to do with whether or not "the distinction between clean and unclean animals is arbitrary, cultic, symbolic, ethical, hygienic, psychological, anthropological, or theological?"[149] For example, the Letter of Aristeas[150] viewed these laws as allegories of virtues and vices, while the Book of Jubilees[151] considered these laws as the tools of separation between Israel and the nations, and the Fourth Book of Maccabees suggests they are the test of loyalty to God. Aphrahat was persuaded, for example, that these laws were given as a way to help Israel to disassociate itself from the idolatry of its former life in Egypt. Much later the Qur'an states, perhaps deriving its information from a shared tradition also used by Aphrahat: "For the wrong-doing of the Jews, We made unlawful to them certain good foods which had been lawful to them." (Surah 4:160)[152] There have been many interpretations provided by various Jewish authorities, not the least of which was the health reasons. Rashbam was among the first to suggest that health reasons lay behind Kashrut legislation in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Just as there was no consensus among the ancients as to the reasons these laws were given to Israel, this is also the case among modern interpreters.

Kashrut in Christianity

In the New Testament we see several strains of thought regarding Kashrut. On the one hand, it is assumed that both Jesus and his disciples had been distinguishing between clean and unclean foods until the time of the first Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). On the other hand, there is clearly a teaching that seems to abrogate this distinction, at least in the case of the need of the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-16) for this aspect of Torah observance (Acts 21). As is often the case, what is implicit in the Gospels and in Acts becomes more explicit in Paul.[153] For Paul, Christ has destroyed the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, removed the "dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph. 2:14-15). According to Paul, this was the case in part because "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Rom. 14:17-18). For the Apostle "all food is clean," and yet a difference of opinion on this matter must be handled with forbearance, for he wrote that "it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your

brother to fall" (Rom. 14:20-21). Prior to this argument he challenged the Christians of Rome "make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean" (Rom. 14:13-14).

Most Christians in the past and today have not held that the kasher laws, as described in the Bible, continued to be applicable. There have, however, been some throughout church history, including today, who for various reasons continued to observe biblical regulations for clean and unclean foods. Among those are notably some Jewish-Christian movements, Seventh-Days Adventists and some Reformed Theonomic Protestants to name a few.[154]

Kashrut in Zoroastrianism

As was already discussed in the section on fasting, the only two limitations that Zoroastrianism places on eating are prohibitions on gluttony and fasting.[155] No foods were forbidden to a faithful Zoroastrian. Gluttony and fasting were forbidden because they precluded the faithful from enjoyment of God's creation and strengthening of oneself for good works. Zoroastrianism was not concerned with food as such, but with the way of its reception. Perhaps these traits, which reappeared so prominently in Islam, were rooted in the earlier Zoroastrian observances. Jewish dietary laws were shared by Muslims (Qur'an 2:168; 2:173; 5:3; 5:5; 5:90; 6:118; 6:145; 16:115).

2. Aphrahat's Demonstrations

Content of the demonstration

As in many other Demonstrations, Aphrahat starts out with his thesis that deals with the grave condition of foolish Christians who worry about what they may eat: "The minds of childish and ignorant people are greatly troubled by what goes into the mouth, that which cannot defile a person" (Dem. 15.1). He also presents their argument, which deals with God's revelation to Moses with regard to distinguishing between clean and unclean animals (Dem. 15.1). Aphrahat stated his purpose for this demonstration: to show "that [distinctions among] foods are of no benefit to those who observe them, nor are they harmful to those who make use of them" (Dem. 15.1). In the same paragraph he quotes the foundational New Testament reference around which the rest of his arguments are built:

For the Mouth of the Holy One testified, "It is not what goes into a person that defiles him, but what comes out from a person; this is what defiles him." Our Saviour said this to refute the argument of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, since they were boasting about baptism, purity, the washing of their hands, and the avoidance of foods. (Dem. 15.1)

After recalling Christ's interaction with the Pharisees on this matter, Aphrahat states the outcome: "He clearly showed them that their baptisms and purifications were no help to them. He said to them, 'Evil thoughts exist in the heart, and it is these evil thoughts that exist in the heart that defile a person, not foods.'" He continues, "Foods go to the stomach, and from there are expelled as excrement, but a person is not defiled by them" (Dem. 15.1). After discussion on the nature of various foods, Aphrahat adds: "As it happens, pleasant food is changed more [by changing] to sewage than that which is not wholesome or pleasant, but in these things there is neither sin nor righteousness."

Aphrahat often quotes Paul's statements showing the inability of any type of food to establish people as righteous before God. He concludes together with Paul that "All of God's creatures are excellent, and none of them are to be rejected; they are sanctified by the word of God and by prayer." Jewish people in Aphrahat's time and locale were known for avoiding the foods and wines prepared by Gentiles (Dem.15.2). What seems to be a fair critique of the weakness on the part of the Jews (and some Christians) is stated in almost understanding, sympathetic terms: "[This is] because the ungodly peoples sacrifice and call to mind the names of their idols over all that they press out and all that they thresh. For this reason the Israelites do not make use of their foods, and this indicates a weak conscience." [156] In this demonstration, as is clear from the very beginning, Aphrahat used the ideas and arguments of the Apostle Paul more than in any other demonstration considered in this study. This is probably the case because: 1) Paul is considered in the New Testament collection to be the apostle to the Gentiles; and 2) he was explicit in his opposition to the idea that Gentile Christians must observe kashrut. Although most of the things Christian believe can simply be argued or derived from the Old Testament as Aphrahat showed in his Demonstrations, some things cannot. At least some things really were original. They came with Christ and were explained by St. Paul in his sometimes plain and sometimes very difficult to understand and therefore to accept letters.

For Aphrahat, the reasons that the animals were divided up into clean and unclean had nothing to do with righteousness. The act of giving those laws to Israel was an act of discipline from God against Israel's idolatry (Dem. 15.3). Adam and subsequent generations are called to mind in order to show that in the beginning God allowed all wholesome foods as food for humanity. Only the eating of blood was forbidden to Adam and Noah. Every Israelite up to Mosaic times was commanded to eat only clean food, but the distinction was not established until Aphrahat (Dem. 15.3). He writes:

We know, however, that all just and righteous people in previous generations, up to Moses (who distinguished foods for Israel), made use of every food that the soul does not loathe, without sinning.[God] commanded the Israelites and distinguished foods for them because they had turned aside to the religion of the Egyptians and had abandoned the God of their fathers (the Egyptians worshipped oxen and calves).

Aphrahat recalls Joseph's story in order to show that "the Israelites followed the customs of the Egyptians, eating their foods and worshipping their gods" (Dem. 15.3). The entire argument in Dem. 15.4 is dedicated to further developing this theme. A brilliant discussion shows Aphrahat's logical and argumentative abilities at their best, when he seeks to show that each time Israel's heroes were touched by something that was ceremonially impure, they did not become unclean, sanctioned or rebuked. Instead, the opposite is true – they were often rewarded. The implied major thesis that runs through all his minor arguments, such as this one, is that the Christians are the true heirs of biblical heroes, not the Jews, who were insisting on the opposite. Sacrifices are also explained by Aphrahat as something that was used by Israel's God as a therapeutic action against the Israelites' propensity for idol worship. The people of God must destroy or kill the gods that they used to worship in order to break free of the tyranny of the idols:

Know, my friend, that in order for him to cut down their argument (so that they would not worship calves, the idols of the Egyptians), he distinguished foods for them and commanded them to bring offerings of what they had idolized in the land of Egypt. God had no need of sacrifices and offerings. But in order that they might be restrained, through offerings, from worshipping the gods of the peoples… (Dem. 15.6)

This exact idea resurfaces in what is generally considered a much later document, Exodus Rabbah 16:2. The commentary offered there is as follows:

You will find that when Israel was in Egypt, they served idols, which they were reluctant to abandon, for it says: They did not every man cast away the detestable things of their eyes (Ezek. 20:8). God then said to Moses: "As long as Israel worships Egyptian gods, they will not be redeemed; go and tell them to abandon their evil ways and to reject idolatry." This is what is meant by: draw out and take your lambs. That is to say: Draw away your hands from idolatry and take for yourselves lambs, thereby slaying the gods of Egypt and preparing the Passover; only through this will the Lord pass over you.

Aphrahat continues the argument that he summed up in Dem. 15.7: "Be persuaded that God had no need of sacrifices and offerings, or [any] burnt offering or incense, yet through these things [the Israelites] were restrained." After extensive quotations from various prophets, Aphrahat once again addressed his opponent, this time with notably intensified passion:

Be persuaded, O stubborn scribe of the Law, teacher of the people! For the mouth of the Holy One testifies that the commandments and judgments which were given to you are of no benefit and are not good. How is it that you can be so bold, hastening to argue? It was because of your sins that he instructed you to give offerings and distinguished foods for you. (Dem. 15.8)

Aphrahat's view of the law is generally positive (that is, of its moral component), but he seems to distinguish between the case law given to the ancient Israelites and the great principal commandments that are applicable to everyone today: "But the life-giving commandments and judgements, on the other hand, are those which were written from above.[These are] the just and

righteous judgements which he set before them, the ten holy commandments which he inscribed with his hand and gave to Moses so that he might teach them" (Dem. 15.8). According to him, the ceremonial rules of the Mosaic law were only given after the Israelites made the Golden Calf and worshipped it. In paragraph nine our author sums up his purpose for writing this fascinating demonstration:

I have written these few reminders to you, my friend, because the people of the Jews exalt themselves and take pride in and boast about [the fact] that they declare unclean and distinguish [certain] foods. It is in these three things, among others, that they take pride: circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and the avoidance of [certain] foods. (Dem. 15.9)

Outline of the argument

Paragraph 1

1. The situation (confusion about Passover)

2. Argument for "keeping kasher" (Lev. 11.1-47)

3. Foods are not useful nor are they harmful

a. Not what goes into the mouth (Matt. 15:11)

b. Washing the outside of the cup (Matt. 23:25, 27)

c. Heart, not mouth as the epicentre of good and evil (Matt. 15.17-20)

4. Clean and unclean foods are reduced to excrement

a. Clean foods at times stink more

b. There is no righteousness in either kind of food

Paragraph 2

1. Paul was successful in debunking the arguments for Kashrut

a. Food does not justify us before God (1 Cor. 8:8)

b. All foods are sanctified by Word and Prayer (1 Tim. 4:4-5)

c. Basis for weak conscience

d. All foods are sanctified by Word and Prayer (1 Tim. 4:4-5 (Part II))

e. Invitation for supper by a pagan (1 Cor. 10:27)

Paragraph 3

1. Separation of foods given to Israel to help against idolatry and sins of Egypt

2. Adam and Noah were given only requirement of getting rid of the blood (Lev. 17:13-14)

a. Egyptians had a "kasher" code of their own (Gen. 43:32)

b. Israelites until Egypt ate everything, but Egyptians did not eat bulls, sheep and cows

c. Jacob instructed the brothers to say to the Pharaohs that they were shepherds, those who take care of the holy animals, so that Pharaoh would honour them (Gen. 46:34)

d. The Israelites were afraid they would be persecuted when they sacrificed animals that were holy to the Egyptians (Ex. 8:25-26)

e. Judgment fell on Egyptian gods, when the Lord sent hail upon the sheep and bulls (Num. 33:4), which Egyptians revered

f. Egyptians eat plenty of pigs and fish (Num. 11:5)

Paragraph 4

1. In Egypt Israelites served Egyptian gods

a. Calling to choose between the Lord and the gods the Israelites used to serve in Egypt (Jos. 24:15)

b. Part II (Jos. 24:15-22)

c. Israelites choose a calf, because of their familiarity with it (Ex. 32:1-6)

d. Jeroboam also made a calf for strayed Israel (1 Kings 12:28-33)

e. After Israel's persistent idolatry in the wilderness, God gave Moses the law to distinguish foods

f. God permitted Israelites to eat that which they were forbidden to eat in Egypt

g. Sacrifices were established from the animals that they used to worship in Egypt

h. When the foods were distinguished, only sheep and bulls were commanded for sacrifice

2. The pride of Israel in avoidance of certain foods is of no benefit

Paragraph 5

1. Address to the debater of the People about the inconsistency of his thinking

a. Samson took honey from the skeleton of the lion (Jud. 14:8-9)

b. Samson achieved victory by the jawbone of an ass (Jud. 15:15-19)

c. Ravens brought bread for Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-6)

Paragraph 6

1. Restating the reason why kasher laws were given

a. Protection from intermingling

2. Prediction by Moses of Israel's apostasy after his death (Deut. 31:29)

Paragraph 7

1. Sacrifices are not needed by God; they were meant for Israel's restraint

a. No advantage to God in Israel's sacrifices (Isa. 1:11)

b. God hates Israel's feasts (Isa. 1:13-14)

c. God wants a grateful heart, not sacrifice (Ps. 50:13-15)

d. God can't stand the smell of Israel's assemblies (Amos 5:21-22)

e. Children of Israel did not offer sacrifices in the wilderness (Amos 5:25)

f. Another challenge (Zech. 7:6)

g. Killing a lamb is like killing a dog (Is. 66:3)

h. Sheep and oxen of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:14-15, 22)

i. The Lord is not pleased with sacrifices of sinners (Prov. 15:8)

j. Iniquity of the house of Eli will not be absolved by offerings (1 Sam. 3:14)

k. Do justice, seek faith and follow God (Mich. 6:7-8)

l. The Lord seeks good deeds not sacrifices and promise of forgiveness (Is. 1:16-18)

m. The Lord rebukes vain sacrifices (Mal. 1:10)

n. Righteous acts and mercy redeems sins (Dan. 4:27)

o. Israel is rejected silver (Jer. 6:30)

p. God casts Israel away (Jer. 5:1-2)

q. God will not look (Lam. 4:16)

r. God forsook his house (Jer. 12:7)

s. Bill of divorce for Israel (Jer. 3:8)

t. The Lord caused loss of memory in Zion about festivals of Israel (Lam. 2:6)

u. A man will live by God's commandments (Ezek. 20:25-26)

Paragraph 8

1. Rebuke for the scribe of the law, the teacher of the people

a. Commandments and judgements given were not good and not useful

b. What is the foundation then for boasting?

c. Sacrifices and Kashrut were given because of your sins

d. What are the life-giving commandments of Ezekiel? (Ezek. 20:25)

e. Ten Commandments written down by the finger of God

f. All ceremonial commandments could not cleanse

g. By law no one can be justified (Gal. 3:11-12)

h. Jesus' call for the weary and those who carry burdens (Matt. 11:28-30)

i. Acknowledgement of God's mercies in lifting up the difficult yoke and exchange it with the yoke that is light

Paragraph 9

1. Purpose for writing demonstration

a. Against the Jews who are exulting in distinguishing foods

b. Hope expressed to write more as God grants wisdom.

Kasher Laws according to Aphrahat

Aphrahat had very few things to say about avoidance of foods outside of his Demonstration 15. In one of his rich metaphors (Dem. 14.39), Christ is the Table that is covered with all imaginable foods to satisfy the hungry: [157]

And he is the Treasure in the field: when we find it, we rejoice over it and hold on to it. For he is the Fountain of life; we who are thirsty drink from him. He is a Table which is full of rich food and abundance; we who are hungry eat and enjoy ourselves… He is the Wine that brings joy, from which those in mourning drink and forget their pains.

In a rich tradition of Christian Syriac writers who preceded him and the great many who followed, Aphrahat excelled in beautiful imagery to make his polemical points. In another section (on Fasting) Aphrahat wrote that some fast by abstaining from certain foods:

For there is the one who abstains from bread and water to the point of being hungry and thirsty, but there is also the one who abstains in order to be a virgin, and who has hunger but does not eat, and has thirst but does not drink; this fast is better. There is also the one who abstains through holiness, for this too is a fast, and there is the one who abstains from meat, from wine, and from certain foods. (Dem. 3.1).

It cannot be stated with any certainty what the "certain foods" are. The phrase "abstaining from certain foods" most likely does not reflect an earlier tolerant idea, since meat is mentioned earlier and is probably not included here.

3. Comparison of Aphrahat and the Babylonian Talmud

Agreement

While our study has uncovered at least one example of striking similarity between Dem. 15.6 and Exodus Rabbah 16:2 that will be considered later, it is significant that comparison of Aphrahat with the Babylonian Talmud shows no obvious points of agreement.

Disagreement by omission

Aphrahat

First, Aphrahat clearly stated his view that the eating of kasher food has absolutely no spiritual benefit. He plainly states "that [distinctions among] foods are of no benefit to those who observe them, nor are they harmful to those who make use of them" (Dem. 15.1). Judging from this reference, Aphrahat's point is not that it is immoral to distinguish foods, but rather that it is simply useless (Dem. 15.2, 8).

Second, Aphrahat's community seems to have judged their Jewish neighbours as taking pride in the observance of the Kashrut. This assessment, of course, is at best limited and subjective, but at the same time it may reveal the spirit of the polemic and the type of arguments that the Jewish opponents of Aphrahat's Christians encountered at the time. Aphrahat wrote that "the Jews exalt themselves and take pride in and boast about [the fact] that they declare unclean and distinguish [certain] foods. It is in these three things, among others, that they take pride: circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and the avoidance of [certain] foods" (Dem. 15.9).[158]

Third, Aphrahat argues forcefully that Egyptians had a kasher code of their own. In partial connection with Gen. 43:32, Aphrahat stated that "When it was time to recline [at the table], it is written that 'the Egyptians could not eat a meal with the Hebrews, since this was unclean for them.'" He also stated that "from ancient times, until they went to Egypt, the Israelites ate all [kinds of] flesh, but the Egyptians did not eat the flesh of sheep and oxen, which were their gods" (Dem. 15.3).

Fourth, Aphrahat gives powerful significance to the reason why lambs were slain. He portrays the slaying, while still in Egypt, as an outward commitment on behalf of the Israelites to abandon the gods of Egypt, as something that helps to restrain their sinful proclivities. The logic is this: Israelites needed to destroy that which they worshipped. In this way they would witness to the world and to themselves that only YHWH is God and the gods of Egypt have no power. Aphrahat puts it this way: "Know, my friend, that in order for him to cut down their argument (so that they would not worship calves, the idols of the Egyptians), he distinguished foods for them and commanded them to bring offerings of what they had idolized in the land of Egypt…" (Dem. 15.6).

Babylonian Talmud

First, even though the uncleanness that comes into the body of the Gentile through his or her mouth is recognized, the disciples of the rabbis are encouraged not to remind the proselyte who is studying Torah with them of their previous use of unclean foods. We see this attitude, for example, in the following baraita:

Our Rabbis taught: Ye shall not therefore wrong one another; Scripture refers to verbal wrongs. …If a man is a penitent, one must not say to him, "Remember your former deeds." If he is the son of proselytes he must not be taunted with, "Remember the deeds of your ancestors." If he is a

proselyte and comes to study the Torah, one must not say to him, "Shall the mouth that ate unclean and forbidden food, abominable and creeping things, come to study the Torah which was uttered by the mouth of Omnipotence!" (bBaba Metzia 58b)

This example only proves that the Rabbinic enterprise was challenged by the presence of Gentiles who converted to its form of Judaism. It would not be an exaggeration, therefore, to say that accusations and suspicion against the Gentile converts were present to such an extent as to justify passages such as this one, which show that the mainstream of the movement sought to oppose such tendencies on the part of the Rabbinic disciples.

Second, the sages of the Babylonian Talmud also identify a Jew as someone who avoids unclean food, and an alien as someone whose most important outward characteristic is that he or she does not keep kasher. According to the traditions preserved for us in the Babylonian Talmud, eating something unfit was a clear mark of a foreigner. We read:

[Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy. Whether he be] of thy brethren this excludes idolaters; or of thy strangers – this means a righteous proselyte; that are in thy gates i.e. an alien who eats unclean food. (bBaba Metzia 111b)

The assumption that only aliens or idol worshippers violated the Law in this way may simply be wishful thinking on the part of the authors and/or editors, but it nevertheless reveals their definitions with regard to social identities. This text may be a good example of the way that kasher observance continued to function in separating Jews and Judaism from Gentiles and their new popular movement. Since Kashrut was one of the key observances rejected by Christians, this text may highlight the tension that existed between the two groups. It is likely that the authors viewed Jesus-believing Jews as idol worshippers and Christians as aliens who are characterized by eating unclean foods.

Third, the sages of Babylonian Talmud and/or their lay disciples were surely confronted with the claims of the Christians that the God of Israel had abrogated the kasher laws by communicating his new will through Peter's vision (Acts 10). In Peter's vision the God of Israel provides Peter with a sheet full of unclean animals and commends him to eat. Responding to Peter's objection, God says: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). A very interesting text that sounds much like a reference to the Peter's vision is found in bSanhedrin 59b:

A [further] objection is raised: R. Judah b. Tema said: Adam reclined in the Garden of Eden, whilst the ministering angels roasted flesh and strained wine for him. Thereupon the serpent looked in, saw his glory, and became envious of him? The reference there is to flesh that descended from heaven. But does flesh descend from heaven? Yes; as in the story of R. Simeon b. Halafta, who was walking on the road, when lions met him and roared at him. Thereupon he quoted: The young lions roar after their prey; and two lumps of flesh descended [from heaven]. They ate one and left the other. This he brought to the schoolhouse and propounded: Is this clean

[fit for food] or not? They [sc. the scholars] answered: Nothing unclean descends from heaven. R. Zera asked R. Abbahu: What if something in the shape of an ass were to descend? He replied: Thou howling yorod: did they not answer him that no unclean thing descends from heaven? (bSanhedrin 59b)

This text is a clear refutation of Christian-like claims, although not those made about Kashrut by Aphrahat, since this particular argument is altogether absent in Demonstrations. This absence is due to the fact that Aphrahat did not see clean and unclean foods as a means of separation of Israel and Gentiles, but rather as a way for God to help the Israelites with their proclivities for Egyptian idol worship. In any case, this text clearly shows that even the often secluded Rabbinic class was confronted with Christian stories such as Peter's vision (Acts 10) that sought to justify the new approach to holiness, where there was no role for "clean" eating.

Disagreement by confrontation

First, for Aphrahat God's Law was not an absolute unity but a composite. In his mind there were clear distinctions between the "ten commandments," the perfect and eternal law, and all the other commandments, which Aphrahat says are "of no benefit and are not good" (Dem. 15.8). For the rabbis all commandments have one and the same origin and, therefore, one and the same authority.

Aphrahat:

Be persuaded, O stubborn scribe of the Law, teacher of the people! For the mouth of the Holy One testifies that the commandments and judgements which were given to you are of no benefit and are not good. How is it that you can be so bold, hastening to argue? It was because of your sins that he instructed you to give offerings and distinguished foods for you. About which commandments and judgements did Ezekiel say, "Whoever does them will live by them"? And concerning which did he say, "I have given you commandments that are not good and judgements by which [you] will not live"? The life-giving commandments and judgements, on the other hand, are those which were written from above.[These are] the just and righteous judgements which he set before them, the ten holy commandments which he inscribed with his hand and gave to Moses so that he might teach them. But when they made a calf for themselves and turned away from following him, then he gave them commandments and judgements which were not good, [concerning] offerings as well as purification for lepers, discharges, menstruation, and childbirth… (Dem. 15.8; Parisot 753-756)

Babylonian Talmud:

R. Levi b. Hama says further in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish: What is the meaning of the verse: And I will give thee the tables of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written that thou mayest teach them? "Tables of stone": these are the Ten Commandments; "the law": this is the Pentateuch; "the commandment": this is the Mishnah; "which I have written":

these are the Prophets and the Hagiographa; “that thou mayest teach them”: this is the Gemara. It teaches [us] that all these things were given to Moses on Sinai. (bBerachoth 5a)

It is clear that to the sages the big difference in the observance and applicability of Mosaic Law was contingent on the acceptance or rejection of the unity of the Mosaic Law. The logic was as follows: if the law was not unified and can be broken into various parts, good or bad, eternal or temporary then arguments like Aphrahat’s may be valid. If, however, the Law is a unity and cannot be divided up, then the argument of the rabbis may win the debate. At the very least, we can be sure of the fact that the opinions expressed in Babylonian Talmud and Demonstrations were not peculiar to these sources, but represented a host of people who subscribed to each view and its variants as they encountered each other on the streets of ancient Mesopotamia. Aphrahat distinguished the Ten Commandments as the life-giving commandments, while Babylonian Talmud spoke of the whole Law as equally important.

Second, from the Rabbinic perspective, the idea of something that is unfit for consumption being called fit is preposterous. On the other hand, Aphrahat does not perceive himself to be saying this. He is claiming that something which at one time was unclean is now clean. It is likely that this and other discussions like this were brought up by actual challenges of non-Rabbinic Jews, or perhaps even Christians whose views may have been rooted quite deeply in the Pauline idea of all food being clean if it is sanctified by word and prayer (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

Aphrahat:

The blessed apostle also cut down the argument of those who boast about foods. For to those who take pride in this way of thinking, who reject and avoid [certain] foods, he said, “Foods will not establish us before God. If we eat, we do not gain, and if we do not eat, we are not diminished.” But if a person consumes all [kinds of] nourishment and meals and excels in doing what is right, and if he makes use of God’s creation without greed and receives [God’s] gift in faith, there is no sin or wrongdoing in him. But if he eats dust like a snake and is infected with the venom of the snake, there is no benefit or profit for him. All of God’s creatures are excellent, and none of them are to be rejected; they are sanctified by the word of God and by prayer. This [word] that the apostle spoke, my friend, he spoke against those of his [own] people, when he saw that they declared unclean the foods of the peoples. (Dem. 15.2; Parisot 732)

Babylonian Talmud:

The following discussion recalls for the reader a visit of Hananiah, the son of R. Joshua’s brother when he used to go to Diasporic Jewish communities: [159]

Because it says, For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. We can understand that if he declared clean they should declare unclean, because this would be more stringent. But how was it possible that they should declare clean what he declared unclean, seeing that it has been taught: If a Sage has declared unclean, his colleague is not permitted to

declare clean? They thought proper to act thus so that the people should not be drawn after him. (bBerachoth 63b)

Here we read of those who begin in Rabbinic-like attitudes, but end up on the sinful side by declaring unclean things to be clean.[160] At the very least, this reference points to the type of discussions that took place as the rabbis and their disciples discussed various interpretations and applications of the Torah.

Our Rabbis taught: On entering what does a man say? "May it be Thy will, O Lord my God, that no offence may occur through me, and that I may not err in a matter of halachah and that my colleagues may rejoice in me and that I may not call unclean clean or clean unclean, and that my colleagues may not err in a matter of halachah and that I may rejoice in them." On his leaving what does he say? "I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth ha-Midrash and Thou hast not set my portion with those who sit in [street] corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labour and they labour, but I labour and receive a reward and they labour and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction." (bBerachoth 28b).

While bBarachoth 28b in particular may or may not have in mind Christians, as we compare the two sides of the argument, the basic issue emerges: the Christian side claims that laws such as those distinguishing between clean and unclean animals were useless and that there was no substantial difference between the foods, while the Rabbinic side was adamant about the continuous validity of the laws about food. As bBerachoth 28b shows, the author of the prayer contained therein was familiar with the religious life of those who denied this validity. As in most cases, Rabbinic literature exhibits a juxtaposition of those who study the Torah and obey commandments and those who do not do so; therefore it is possible that other types of Jews are referenced here. It is also possible, however, that the Christians or at least Jesus-believing Jews (those who sit on the street corners – as opposed to the Rabbinic circle) were the point of reference as compared to the righteous behaviour of the Rabbinic disciples.

Third, Aphrahat defended the Christian practice of eating everything that is created by God by showing occasions when biblical heroes were not made profane by coming into contact with unclean things. The Sages of Babylonian Talmud, whether they were aware of Aphrahat's particular criticisms or not, often explained such texts in strikingly different ways:

Aphrahat:

Speak to me, O scribe, wise debater of the people! For if Israel is unclean when they offer or make use of anything that the Law declares unclean, why did Samson, the nazirite, the hero of Israel, take honey from an unclean beast, from the skeleton of a lion, eating it and pouring it on his hands? [This] was no wrongdoing, and no censure was [given] to him because of this deed. It is not written that he was made unclean. Furthermore, when he had achieved a victory using the

jawbone of a donkey and piled up a heap of Philistines, he was thirsty and prayed before his God. He said, "Lord God! You have achieved this great victory through the hand of your servant. Will I now die of thirst?" God heard the prayer of Samson and he made water flow from the jawbone of the donkey.[Samson] drank and his thirst was relieved. For now if there was any uncleanness or wrongdoing in the jawbone of a donkey (which was unclean according to the Law), why did he make water flow for his Nazirite to drink from [this] jawbone? If this was unclean, it would have been appropriate for him to make [water] flow for him from a rock, just as he made water come out of a rock for the Israelites in the wilderness, or as he made [water] come out of the earth for Hagar, and Ishmael drank.(Dem. 15.5; Parisot 744-745)

Babylonian Talmud:

But was not Samson a Nazirite [in the ordinary sense]? Surely the verse states, For the child shall be a Nazirite unto God from the womb! – It was the angel who said this. How do we know that [Samson] did defile himself [by contact] with the dead? Shall I say, because it is written, With the jawbone of an ass have I smitten a thousand men, but it is possible that he thrust it at them without touching them? But [we know it] again from the following. And smote thirty men of them and took their spoil. But it is possible that he stripped them first and slew them afterwards? – It says clearly [first]. And he smote, [and then,] and took. But it is still possible that he [merely] wounded them mortally [before stripping them]! – [We must say], therefore, that it was known by tradition [that he did come into contact with them]. (bNazir 4b)

The sages, seeing the problem in the text as stressed by Aphrahat, come up with several possible explanations as to why Samson is praised in the text in spite of his seeming profanation. The text initiates a series of possible explanation as to how Samson may have killed men without being defiled by touching their dead bodies. When none of the possibilities seem to work, the sages agree that there is a problem, but leave it unsolved. The sages did not necessarily encounter the abovementioned problem during actual interactions with Christians such as those who were trained by Aphrahat, though they certainly could have. It may have simply come up in the course of internal Torah study when the students were puzzled by the meaning of the text and, independently of any debate with the Christians, arrived at these conclusions. Examples like this, however, show that communities read the same portions of Scriptures and sought to reconcile their theology with the Scriptures that they claimed as the foundation of those theologies, but given their geographical proximity, language compatibility and shared scriptural tradition, it is possible, if not likely that they also engaged in some kind of conversation at least on the popular level, the remnants of which may be reflected in the texts under our consideration. Another example of the same kind of struggle to reconcile the emerging teachings of Rabbinic Judaism to the Written Torah is well displayed in the story of Elijah:

Aphrahat:

But if there is uncleanness in foods, among all the birds there are none more unclean and impure than the ravens, who carried bread and meat to Elijah, the holy prophet, when he lived by the Wadi Cherith. Where were the ravens carrying the food of Elijah from, if not from Jerusalem? The priests would set the portion that belonged to him to one side, and in faith would give it to the ravens. They would pick it up and take it to Elijah at the command of the Most High, his God. The nourishment of Elijah was pure, even though he received it from the mouths of ravens, from birds that the Law declares unclean. (Dem. 15.5; Parisot 745)

Babylonian Talmud:

Can we say that the following supports his [R. 'Anan's] view? It is written: And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and Rab Judah explained this in the name of Rab that [the ravens brought the flesh] from Ahab's slaughterers! – Being a Divine command it is different. What is meant by "the ravens" [Orebim]? – Rabina said: It means actually ravens.[161] R. Ada b. Manyomi, however, suggested to him: May it not mean two men whose names were Oreb, as we find it written: And they slew Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb? – He replied. Could it have happened that both were named Oreb? But perhaps they were so named after the town in which they lived? Just as it is written: And the Arameans had gone out in bands and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid. Now the difficulty was pointed out; [first] the verse refers to this girl as a maid [na'arah] and then as little [ketannah], and R. Pedath explained this to mean a little girl from the town of Na'aran! – If so, the verse should read Orebiim. (bChullin 5a)

Here we see the same kind of problem encountered by the sages of Babylonian Talmud as stressed by Aphrahat. The sages' solution is creative. Instead of concluding what Aphrahat concluded, they suggest that perhaps it was not ravens that were responsible for bringing food for Elijah, but two men who may have been, as unlikely as it may seem, both called Oreb and hence together could be called Orebiim and translated mistakenly by some as ravens.[162] The first example has a greater possibility of having arisen simply in the context of Torah study, independent of any kind of Christian Jewish polemic, than does this text. The hermeneutical gymnastics engaged in here are more obvious. One gets a picture that in thinking through their interpretive options, when the sages considered interpretations similar to Apharahat's, they simply "could not go there." It appears as if they knew that too much was in jeopardy if indeed Elijah was fed by unclean birds and hence somehow an alternative needed to be found. Aphrahat's argument, which was perhaps representative of arguments brought by other Christians, provides the context for such a perplexing interpretive move on the part of the sages of the Bavli. As is the case with many other texts, Aphrahat and Bavli only make sense when considered side by side.

4. Conclusion

The section on Demonstrations 15 (On Avoidance of Foods) dealing with Aphrahat's critique of the Jewish Kashrut system has uncovered, just as in the case with circumcision, virtually nothing in common between Aphrahat's Christianity and the Judaism of the sages of Bavli. There is, however, a difference between the lack of commonality in Bavli and Demonstrations regarding Kashrut and the lack of commonality regarding circumcision (Dem. 11). Circumcision was reinterpreted, invested with new – or, according to Aphrahat, original – meaning, while the category itself was retained. In dealing with Kashrut Aphrahat, while appealing to the Hebrew Scripture, did not seek to reinvest it with the new meaning, but argued that the category itself was outdated and no longer mandated by the God of Israel for obedience by either the People or the Peoples.

Our evaluation regarding disagreement by omission shows the tension that existed between the two communities. For example, Aphrahat stated that Kashrut has absolutely no spiritual benefit (Dem. 15.2, 8), while Bavli's extended discussions presuppose the continuation of the Kashrut as a requirement for keeping the covenant (bBerachoth 19a). In fact some Bavli's sages viewed those who doubted Kashrut's contemporary legitimacy as either covenant breakers or Gentiles (bBerachoth 28b; bBaba Metzia 111b).

It is unclear whether Aphrahat had engaged with other Jewish Rabbinic material, but he certainly arrived at strikingly similar conclusions, for example, regarding the reasoning behind the clean animals and killing of the Passover lambs (Dem. 15.6; Exodus Rabbah 16:2) in relation to destroying the idols of Egypt.

The Rabbinic community was indeed challenged by such Christian interpretation, which was presented or argued along the lines of Peter's vision in Acts 10 (bSanhedrin 59b) and yet, strikingly, none of this kind of argumentation surfaces in Aphrahat. This is yet another example indicating that Aphrahat did not construct his Christian Jewish polemic simply by reading the New Testament and projecting that interaction onto his own Jewish and Christian communities. Rather he described true events, albeit through his own theological and hermeneutical prism.

When it comes to disagreement by confrontation, more is available by the way of general polemic with a striking lack of specific cases in comparisons to other sections. For example, Demonstrations and Bavli present entirely different views of God's Law. For Bavli, the Written Torah was undivided and given along with its Oral Torah components, while for Aphrahat the Law was held in high regard but only for its general moral principles. The rest of the commandments were considered at best "useless" and at worst "not good" (Dem. 15.8; bBerachoth 5a).

Additionally, for Aphrahat (just as for Paul) no food was unclean in and of itself (1 Tim. 4:4-5), but for Bavli it was sinful and detestable to blur the inherent difference between that which was indeed clean and that which was not (Dem. 15.2; bBerachoth 63b). Aphrahat illustrated his argument with examples such as Samson and Elijah, handling that which was forbidden without

defilement. The sages of Bavli struggled with exactly the same texts, often arriving at strikingly different, at times forced, conclusions (Dem. 15.5) requiring in both cases (bNazir 4b; bChullin 5a) some significant hermeneutical imagination.

Concerning Zoroastrianism, we once again witness differences. For example, Zoroastrianism's concern with the purity of food reception. However, nothing studied that can be construed as purposeful polemic against this system of faith. The absence of such an anti-Zoroastrian polemic is once again an indication of the nature of Aphrahat's Christian community.

Chapter 5

ON PASSOVER SACRIFICE

1. Passover

The Passover event is extremely important for the historical theologies that flow from both Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity.[163] In fact, it is the difference in the interpretation of this biblical event that lays a foundation for the overall trajectories and hence the eventual separation in the thought of the rabbis and the Church Fathers. The eventual, though not final, separation resulted in part in the attempt to replace the ritual of the defunct Paschal sacrifice with updated rituals appropriate to new theologies. Both narratives offered a liturgical alternative to the old sacrificial rite, addressing the difficult question of how to celebrate a festival of redemption in an age of foreign domination.[164] The Later Christian and Rabbinic reinterpretations of the early Passover story developed parallel to each other and in many ways defined each other's stories often in opposition to each other's interpretations.

Passover in Judaism

Since the redemption from the bondage of Egypt, Passover was one of the key events of the religious and national identity of the Jewish people. Celebration of Passover, as described in the biblical story (Ex. 12) in the Tosefta and Mishnah, is distinguished from the celebration of Passover by all future generations. The texts of the OT do not support the idea that the Pesah (Jewish Passover) was celebrated throughout the history of Israel; the Bible records several narratives of reinstitution after a long time of neglect (Deut. 16:5-6; Ex. 12:46). When practised during biblical times, the Passover festival and the festival of Unleavened Bread were not yet merged together. The Passover lambs, while eaten outside of the Temple precincts, were sacrificed in the Temple itself. When the Temple was destroyed, various Jewish communities of the period were left with a dilemma: how to remain faithful to YHWH without violating the foundational document of the Israelite cult (Torah). How would they continue to celebrate Passover without the Temple, where the sacrifices were supposed to be slaughtered? Of course there were Jews who did not uphold the idea of one Temple in Jerusalem. Some Jewish communities, notably those in Alexandria, Elephantine, Arad and other locations actually erected local temples modelled after the Jerusalem Temple, where the full or limited range of sacrificial services were performed. Therefore, not all Jews actually had to deal with the catastrophe of the Temple's destruction in the same way. Additionally, sacrifices did not always signify the presence of the Temple. Some Jews continued offering sacrifices even in the ruins of the Temple. This practice was, however, later rejected and a different interpretation chosen that instead equated prayer and righteous deeds as something that replaced the earlier required sacrifices in post-Temple Israel.

In the modern Seder the meat served cannot be fully roasted. Seder is a liturgical re-enactment of the Passover story that is usually celebrated around the family table. Seder means order. Each

item on the table symbolizes something in redemptive history so that the participant, by tasting various items and looking at others, may be able to enter the redemptive experience of the forefathers. Seder came about before Haggadah (the liturgical text accompanying it). In some way Seder was a Rabbinic symposium very much like other symposiums in the Greco-Roman world (people gathering for a meal while setting out to discuss something in particular during that meal). The topic of this Rabbinic meal-based gathering was the story of the Exodus and the ensuing laws.

The view that treats the Seder simply and only as a Rabbinic symposium glosses over the uniqueness of the Seder as a response to the loss of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE It is important to keep in mind that the modern Passover Seder has gone through expansion and editing of its liturgical order, meaning and significance. Bokser argues that in response to the Temple's loss, mishnaic rabbis made the Seder independent of the sacrifice and, by reaching back to biblical accounts that predate the centralization of the cult, turned the celebration into a kinship gathering in the home instead of in the capital city. In this transformed rite the unleavened bread and bitter herbs became central objects and not just appendages to a sacrifice, as was the case in their biblical form.

For our discussion it is important to note that while attempts must have been made to retain some Paschal sacrificial component in the Seder, Rabbinic sages were insistent that there is no substitute for the Temple. For example, Rava, a fourth century amora, ruled that while buying meat for the Passover celebration, one must not say: "This meat is for Passover!" so that it would not be possible to understand one as referring to a Passover sacrifice outside of the Temple.[165] This example, incidentally, is extremely important because it lends credence to Pierre's suggestion that Rava may have been behind training of the Jews encountered by Aphrahat or may even have been the unnamed Jewish sage always arguing with Aphrahat's Christians.[166] Apharahat criticized the Jews for sacrificing Passover lambs outside of the Temple (Dem. 12.2) and it could just be the case that Rava was responding to Aphahrat's criticism by a ruling that was meant to silence Aphrahat's fair criticism. However, the custom of eating roasted meat on Passover in spite of the prohibition of some rabbis survived throughout the centuries all the way to the Gaonic period.[167]

Jonathan Smith's sociological observation is that ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables of ordinary life may be displaced, precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are.[168] It is in this way that a Rabbinic creation (Seder) represents a controlled environment that sought to address the main issue faced by the Jewish people – its survival and restoration. Haggadah or some of its components developed as a response to Christianity, whether persecuting Judaism or thriving in the face of being persecuted. Yuval argues that the decision at Nicaea formalized the long-standing attempt to blur the inherent connection of Easter to its Jewish Passover origins. A similar process of denial is evident in the early components of the Passover Haggadah, which is

not just an attempt to fill the vacuum left by the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the Paschal sacrifice. Yuval further argues that the Haggadah is equally a response to the challenge of a rival Christian interpretation of the festival. He even goes on to say that "The Passover Haggadah is thus a Jewish 'counter-Gospel' – one story opposite another, one Haggadah opposite another."[169] Whether or not Yuval's statement can be fully affirmed, it is clear that both communities impacted each other as they sought to establish their own identities.

Passover in Christianity

In the past hundred years much scholarly effort has been devoted to determining the precise nature of the Passover-Easter relationship.[170] Rouwhorst studied the sources and history of Pascha, especially in its Quartodeciman version.[171] Yuval suggested that Jewish liturgies were significantly influenced by the uneven relationships between Christians and Jews over the centuries.[172] The above works represent only a few examples of the scope of scholarly interest in the relationship between Passover and Easter.

The Passover event remained for both faith communities a vital component of their heritage, history, theology and identity. For Christians, Passover was foundational just as it was for the Jews. Although it may be argued that in Judaism there were other major holidays (e.g. Yom Kippur) that had an equal status, in Christianity Easter (Pascha) was perceived as the cornerstone of the Christian calendar. No less than three-quarters of the entire Christian calendar revolved around Easter.[173]

The reason for this centrality was a firm belief on the part of Christians in the resurrection of the Crucified Messiah. In short, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was viewed in Christianity as the act of second redemption. Christ was a second Moses, as presented in the Gospels. He led his followers from the bondage of sin and death to the freedom of the children of God. This second redemption did not take place only on the Cross when Jesus died; instead its efficacy was linked primarily to Christ's resurrection. As the high priest who ministered in the heavenly Holy of Holies, Christ came out of the tomb alive to signify that his intercession was accepted by God. Leonhard argues that Christians simply redefined it (Passover) in a Christological way.[174] For the Christians Passover continued to be extremely important, if not elevated in importance, though now invested with updated meaning. But this has not always been the case. The festival of Pascha (Easter) became known only over the course of time as the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In the early times, especially in the East, the Pascha festival focused on Jesus' death instead (Dem. 12.8). The emphasis on Christ's work on the cross is clearly seen in Ephrem, one of the best known representatives of Syriac Christianity and the fourth-century church in the East, when he writes:

By his sacrifice he abolished the sacrifices,

And the libations by his incense,

And the (Passover) lambs by his being slaughtered,

The unleavened bread by his bread,

And the bitter herbs by his suffering.[175]

When the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was firmly and finally connected to Easter, the role of Easter became central within the Christian calendar. The theological reasoning was fairly simple, being connected to both Passover and Yom Kippur: just as the Passover sacrifice made it possible for the wrath of God to pass over Israel, so does Jesus – the Lamb of God – make it possible for the wrath of God to pass over the Christian believers. The Resurrection of Christ had to do with assurance of Israel's God that the sacrificed offered had been approved and accepted. Just as the high priest coming out alive from the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement signified acceptance of sacrifice, so Christ coming out alive after ministering in the heavenly tabernacle during his 3-day death signified acceptance of the sacrifice offered by him. The New Creation was accomplished only at the resurrection and hence connection to Easter that they called the Christian Passover. So close was the parallel between Easter and Passover in the minds of the ancients that early Christian liturgies for Easter celebration included singing the psalms where the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea was recalled.

In both Roman and Persian lands, churches were divided among those who believed that the Christian Passover (Pascha) was to be celebrated on the 14th of Nisan, the same as the Jewish Passover, and those who believed that it must take place on the Sunday following the 14th of Nisan. Boyarin argues that for these Christians Easter or Pascha was simply a correct way to observe Pesah.[176] With the passing of time and the reforms in the Roman and hence Christian calendars, the Western Church departed further and further from any affiliation with the Jews. Later many churches in the East also followed suit. Quartodeciman churches were eventually excommunicated for being unwilling to cease from their "Judaizing" tendencies, in spite of the fact that they believed the celebration of Pascha fulfils the celebration of Pesah and usually themselves engaged in polemic with non-Jesus-believing Jews.[177]

Constantine directed the participants in the Council of Nicaea to part with the Jewish date. However, while it is clear that there was much anti-Semitism and/or anti-Judaism in the Christian Empire, affiliation with the synagogue was not the main factor in seeking to move the day away from 14th of Nisan. As Heeren pointed out, the desire to distance themselves from all things Jewish was not the dominant motive, or at least not a decisive one.[178] Other reasons included a desire for unity in Christendom, for the purpose of unified witness to the world; theological understanding of Christian redemption, culminating not with the death but with the resurrection of Jesus Christ; the desire to assume Roman pastoral governance of the entire Church by Victor, Bishop of Rome; as well the practical reason of having a holiday on the day when public worship had already taken place.

It must also be noted that, under the new calendar, the Church did not achieve complete independence since it was still dependent on the dating of the Jewish calendar.[179] While Zerubavel's hypothesis, that the change of the date was based on the decision to separate from the Jews, may be mistaken in one way, it certainly is correct in another. Zerubavel is right when he argues that intra-group uniformity in itself is not sufficient for consolidating the in-group sentiments, and differentiating group members from 'outsiders' is at least as essential.[180] This was indeed the characteristic aspect of the growing Christian movement that utilized, probably subconsciously, the above model for its new identity and ultimate survival and triumph.

2. Aphrahat's Demonstrations

Content of the demonstration

Aphrahat begins this demonstration by recalling the commandment given to Moses with regard to the Passover. After an extended biblical quotation, Aphrahat says that God "warned them to eat it quickly, but not to eat from it while it was raw, or thoroughly boiled in water, but rather when it had been roasted in fire. They were not to take any of it outside the house, or to break any bone in it. The Israelites did these things" (Dem. 12.1). As part of preaching and explaining the mysteries to his friend, Aphrahat challenges the apparent or alleged practice of sacrificing and eating Passover lambs in the Diaspora: "Moses commanded them as follows: 'When you enter the land that the Lord has given you and offer the Passover sacrifice in its time, it is forbidden to slaughter the Passover sacrifice in [any] one of your towns, except in the place that the Lord your God will choose" (Dem. 12.2). Aphrahat's basic objection to the perceived Jewish Passover practices is this:

> In our day, [the Israelites] are scattered throughout all peoples and languages, among the unclean and the uncircumcised, and they eat their bread in uncleanness among the peoples… and if you offer the Passover sacrifice in any of the places where you live, you offer it in transgression of the commandment. Because [of this], a letter of divorce has been written for you. (Dem. 12.3)

In paragraph 4 Aphrahat's most important and underlying theological conviction, supersessionism, is once again utilized to substantiate his critique of Judaism. He quotes Jeremiah, Isaiah and David extensively to prove the point of God's judgment upon Israel through their "dire predictions" (Dem. 12.4). He eloquently concludes this portion of his argument with another address to his friend: "…its mystery was given to the former people, but its truth is heard today among the peoples" (Dem. 12.5). Apparently there was some confusion among Christians, since Aphrahat stated that "the minds of childish and ignorant people are greatly troubled by this great feast day, with respect to how we should understand and observe it" (Dem. 12.5). For Aphrahat Passover observance was still valid. His main concern was the how of the new type of Passover observance: "Our Saviour is the true lamb, one year old and with no blemish in it as the prophet said concerning him, 'There is no iniquity in him, nor can deceit be found in his mouth,

but the Lord wished to humble him and make him suffer'" (Dem. 12.5). Aphrahat portrays Jesus celebrating Passover with his disciples. In Dem. 12.6 Aphrahat concisely sums up the entire Passion Week from start to finish, ending with the resurrection of Christ, in these words: "Christ ate the Passover sacrifice on the fourteenth and offered it to his disciples. When Judas left them, Christ blessed God for the bread and gave it to the apostles. There he instituted communion." From that point on, when he stood up from the table, according to Aphrahat, begins the count of three days as he went to be seized by his enemies. He describes in vivid detail the events surrounding Christ's death: "He was seized on the night of the fourteenth and judged before the sixth hour. At the sixth hour, they condemned him, raised him up, and crucified him."

Aphrahat provides an exact breakdown of Christ's time while dead: "He was among the dead during the night of the dawn of the fifteenth, the night and the whole day of the Sabbath, and three hours on Friday. During the night of the dawn of Sunday, at the [same] time that he had given his body and blood to his disciples, he rose from among the dead" (Dem. 12.6). For Aphrahat the three days and three nights start (Dem. 12.7) when Christ offered his body and blood. One should, therefore, start the count from Thursday night, when Jesus was already considered dead by Aphrahat. Next he adds the first 6 hours after sunrise on Friday (=1 day and 1 night), then the 3-hour mid-day darkness was counted as one more night and, correspondingly, the rest of Friday day-time was one more day (now, 2 nights and 2 days). Next, the night from Friday to Saturday and the whole day of Saturday was added (= 3 days and 3 nights, similar to Jonah). Finally, the night on Sunday was the night of resurrection.

Following this intriguing calculation of the days of Christ's passion, Aphrahat asks: "Now show us, O sage, what these three days and three nights were in which our Saviour was among the dead!" Aphrahat, like Christians before and after him, sought to reconcile the apparent contradiction of the actual time that elapsed between Jesus' death and the resurrection event with the Jonahite "three days" (Jn. 19:31, Jn. 20:1). It is interesting that Aphrahat calls his opponent "sage." From the question it may be concluded that this sage is probably not a Jewish opponent, but may represent an internal Christian debater instead. Aphrahat concludes in Dem. 12.7: "Thus, from the time when he gave his body to be eaten and his blood to be drunk, there were three days and three nights."

Aphrahat then sought to distinguish the Jewish Passover from the Christian one, which in his view is characterized by sufferings that result in joy (Dem. 12.8). Setting up the context of his critique of the Jews, Aphrahat then moves to establish the centrality of the church of God as God's new house. He shows the primacy of the house of God (Church of God), where the Passover Sacrifice can and must be eaten: "with respect to this lamb of the Passover sacrifice, be persuaded, my friend, about the reason that the Holy One commanded that it be eaten in one house and not in many houses. The one house is the Church of God again" (Dem. 12.9). Aphrahat continues with his critique of the Jewish practices of his time as he perceives them: "They (Jews) make the chest and the ark of the testament, though it has not been commanded. …know, my friend, that whoever makes [the ark] transgresses the commandment since he said

that it would not be made again…" (Dem. 12.11). Whoever "the friend"was whom Aphrahat keeps addressing, he must have represented a Christian congregation that had a debate over the timing of the Jewish, and hence the Christian, Passover as we see in Dem. 12.12. The demonstration ends with a summary and concluding remarks (Dem. 12.13).

Outline of the argument

Paragraph 1

1. Commandment to Moses from God to offer the Passover sacrifice

a. Description of the lamb (Ex. 12:3, 5-6)

b. Description of the sacrifice and eating (Ex. 12:7-11)

c. Obedience of the children of Israel

Paragraph 2

1. Eating Passover in one house (Ex. 12:46)

a. Only one place of God's choosing (Deut. 16:5-6)

b. Passover is not for foreigners (Ex. 12:43-45)

Paragraph 3

1. Greatness of the mysteries

2. Only in Jerusalem was Passover to be celebrated

3. Jews celebrate Passover in the Diaspora (Ezek. 4:14)

a. Prophecy of no priestly activity (Hos. 3.4)

b. Prophecy of cessation of feasts of Israel (Hos. 2.11)

i. No "ark of the covenant" (Jer. 3:16)

j. Angering Jews by Gentiles (Deut. 32:21)

4. A challenge to the Debater of the People

Paragraph 4

1. More proof that God divorced Israel (Jer. 12:7-9)

2. The Church as the speckled bird

3. More proof that the Church is the new inheritance of God (Jer. 6:16)

4. From the children of Israel God turns to the Church of the Peoples (Jer. 6:17-18)

a. David (Ps. 74:2)

b. Isaiah (Is. 33:13; 2:2; 33:13-14)

5. Provocation of Jews to jealousy by Gentiles (Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19)

6. Judgment on sinners in Israel and Paganism in the world (Is. 52.1; Jer. 23:15)

Paragraph 5

1. Passover was given to the first people, but its mystery is revealed to all the people

2. The confusion among many peoples about the nature of the Passover feast

3. Christ as the True Lamb of God (Is. 53:9-10)

a. Disciples of Christ must also be like little children (Matt. 18:3)

b. Long life in the coming Kingdom (Is. 65:20)

Paragraph 6

1. Christ ate the Passover in the night watch of the fourteenth (Nisan)

2. Constitution of Passover for Christ's disciples

a. Blessing over the bread

b. Blessing over the cup

c. Christ goes out to be seized

3. Christ gives his body and blood for food and drink for his disciples

4. Death of Christ and count of the days and hours while he was dead

Paragraph 7

1. Challenge to the Sage (presumably the Christian reader)

2. Three days and three nights: From when to when

3. From last supper to resurrection

Paragraph 8

1. Fourteenth for the Jews, Fifteenth for the Christians

2. Bitter herbs and unleavened bread are tasted by Christ on the way to the Cross

3. The Jews remember their sins, Christians remember their Saviour

4. Slavery from Pharaoh and slavery to sin on the day of Crucifixion

a. Jews were delivered by the lamb, Christians are delivered by the Son

b. Moses was Jewish leader, Jesus is our leader

c. Moses divided the sea, Christ divided Sheol

d. Jews had Manna, Christians have Christ's body

e. Moses gave water from the Rock, Christ gave living water

f. Canaan for the Jews, the Land of the Living for the Christians

g. Moses raised the tabernacle, Jesus raised up the fallen tabernacle of David

h. Christ is the Temple, we are tabernacles

Paragraph 9

1. One House teaching of the Passover

a. No foreigners to eat Passover (Ex. 12:45)

b. Foreigners are the followers of the Evil One (his teachings)

c. Passover must be fried on fire, not boiled or raw (Sign of the Church)

d. Eating Passover is connected with engaging in spiritual warfare

e. No bone will be broken (Ex. 12:46 and Jn. 19:36)

f. Slave who is circumcised may partake of Passover (Ex. 12:44)

g. Slave is a sinner who through circumcision of the heart and baptism is qualified to eat Passover

h. Passover must be eaten in haste (Ex. 12:11)

i. In the Church people eat the gift of life standing and in haste

Paragraph 10

1. Israel was baptized on the night of deliverance

2. Christ washed disciples' feet on the night of his arrest

3. Christ waited to show the significance of Baptism until the day he was seized

4. Christians are buried with Christ in Baptism (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12)

5. Baptism of John is for repentance, the Baptism of Christ is for forgiveness

a. Are you baptized with the Holy Spirit? (Act. 19:3-6)

b. John baptized with water, Christ with the Spirit (Act. 1:5)

c. Jesus washes disciples' feet and commands them to do the same (Jn. 13:4-15)

6. Disciples were first washed and then received Passover

7. Israelites first received Passover and only then were baptized in the cloud and sea (1 Cor. 10:1)

Paragraph 11

1. The reason for writing this demonstration

a. Offering and eating Passover in Diaspora

b. Making an ark of the Covenant

c. They do so in violation of prophetic word (Jer. 31:31-32; Isa. 1:10)

Paragraph 12

1. Encouragement to pass on this instruction

2. When should Christian celebrate Passover?

Paragraph 13

1. Requirements of celebration of Passover

a. Fasting in purity

b. Praying constantly

c. Praising diligently

d. Reciting psalms

e. Giving the Sign (of the cross)

f. Baptism according to the Law

g. Holy blessings

h. All other customary things

i. Because Christ died, rose again and will never die

2. Don't be concerned about the date, but about the feast

3. Summary and concluding remarks.

Passover sacrifice according to Aphrahat

Most of Aphrahat's references to the Passover sacrifice are neatly packaged in Demonstration 12. A few references, however, are found in other portions of his work. In the Demonstration on Circumcision, while discussing the signs that are attached by God for each covenant given, Aphrahat writes:

In each case the law and the covenant were changed. First, God changed the covenant of Adam and gave another [one] to Noah. He also gave [one] to Abraham, but he changed that [one] and

gave another [one] to Moses. When [the covenant] of Moses was not kept, he gave another [one] in the final generation, a covenant that will not be changed. For Adam, the covenant involved not eating from the tree. For Noah, it was [represented by] the rainbow.[God] first chose Abraham because of his faith, and later [decreed] circumcision, a seal and a mark for his offspring.[The covenant] of Moses [is represented by] a lamb offered as a Passover sacrifice for the people. Not one of all these covenants is like the next. (Dem. 11.11)

Here Aphrahat establishes something very important to his argument, namely that the offering of the literal Passover lamb was intrinsically connected to the Mosaic Covenant. His idea is simple – not one of these covenants is like the next (Dem. 11.11). This idea presupposes that in the New Covenant, which is named for its characteristic of newness, there will be some kind of change that must be expected and accepted. For Aphrahat Christ is the ultimate Passover Lamb who is sacrificed for all nations of the world (Dem. 12.6).

In the same demonstration Aphrahat compares Joshua son of Nun and Jesus the Saviour. One of his comparisons has to do with the Passover:

Joshua son of Nun celebrated the Passover in the plainof Jericho, in a cursed land, and the people ate the bread of the land. Jesus, our Saviour, celebrated the Passover with his disciples in Jerusalem, a city that he had cursed ("Not [one] stone will be left on [another] stone"), and there he gave the mystery in the bread of life. (Dem. 11.12)

Aphrahat's logic here is difficult to trace, since he argues elsewhere that the Jews must not engage in offering the Passover lambs in the Diaspora – a place of uncleanness and cursing in Demonstrations. However, here "Joshua son of Nun" and "Jesus, our Saviour," which is the same name in Syriac, are both doing what Aphrahat seems to be forbidding to the Jews of Mesopotamia.

3. Comparison of Aphrahat and the Babylonian Talmud

Agreement

First, both communities agreed that the Passover as a festival must be observed and celebrated (Dem. 12.13). The question for Christians and Jews was not whether the Passover was to be eaten and the feast upheld, but how one must do so, in the light of the historical developments that centred for the Jews in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, where Passover sacrifices were offered and for the Christians in the death and resurrection of Jesus, who was, according to them, the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (Dem. 12.2, 5, 6, 13 and bSukkah 55b).

Second, according to Aphrahat and Babylonian Talmud, both communities were united in the opinion that the biblical injunction was to keep the festival for a period of seven days. It goes

without saying that each community invested variant meanings in the same events, believing that they were the legitimate heirs of the ancient Israelite religion (Dem. 12.8 and bPesachim 91b).

Third, Aphrahat and the sages of Babylonian Talmud were both aware that the Passover must be eaten in one house. They differ radically in the identification of that house. The Jewish side claimed that it was the Temple in Jerusalem, while Christians claimed it was the Church of Christ. In other words, once again both communities dealt with the same biblical category and yet understood it in different ways (Dem. 12.2 and bPesachim 84a).

Fourth, in both communities, the Passover sacrifice involved kareth or the cutting off from membership of the people of God. For Aphrahat the incorrect observance by the Jews made God issue them a certificate of divorce. For Babylonian Talmud an improper Passover offering is also a dangerous ordeal in that it can result in being excommunicated from Israel, but under no circumstances constituted a national divorce of Israel from her God. (Dem. 12.3 and bPesachim 69b)

Fifth, the Jewish and Christian communities were both resolute in their commitment to the biblical ordinance that only an Israelite can partake of the holy Passover meal. No foreigners were allowed to partake of Passover, according to both Aphrahat and Babylonian Talmud. The Sages of Bavli find it offensive for foreigners to partake of the Passover-offering; Aphrahat, in turn, views the Jews as the new foreigners to the covenant with God (Dem. 12.9 and bPesachim 3b).

And finally, both communities agreed that there was confusion about non-Jews with regard to their qualification and need to participate in eating of the Passover (Dem. 12.5 and bPesachim 3b).

Disagreement by omission

Aphrahat

First, for Aphrahat the Passover offering is read in the context of Christ as the Lamb of God. He wrote:

Our Saviour is the true lamb, one year old and with no blemish in it. As the prophet said concerning him, “There is no iniquity in him, nor can deceit be found in his mouth, but the Lord wished to humble him and make him suffer.” He was describedas “a year old” because he was a child with respect to sins. (Dem. 12.5)

The above is the most substantial and obvious difference, and even though nothing in Babylonian Talmud seems to criticize precisely this point, time and time again the Passover sacrifice is taken in Babylonian Talmud passages in literal terms. There is, however, a very interesting exception to this rule. Some Rabbinic sources, including Bavli, show that there was a concept that set forth the binding of Isaac in non-literal sacrifice-like terms. The discussion

regarding the method of identifying the place of the altar on the Temple Mount is significant, albeit not representative of the mainline thinking in Bavli:

As for the Temple, it is well, for its outline was distinguishable; but how did they know [the site of] the altar? – Said R' Eleazar: They saw [in a vision] the altar built, and Michael the great prince standing and offering upon it. While R' Isaac Nappaha said: They saw Isaac's ashes lying in that place. R' Samuel ben Nahman said: From [the site of] the whole house they smelt the odor of incense, while from there [the site of the altar] they smelt the odor of limbs. (bZebahim 62a; cf. yTa'an 2.1 [65a], Gen. R. 94.5 (Vilna)).

Even though Isaac was never slaughtered (Gen. 22), it is clear that it is his ashes, reminiscent of burned offering sacrifice, acted as an eternal point of reference for any further appropriate or acceptable sacrifice. The references, however, are rare and the main tendency of Babylonian Talmud is to view the animal sacrifices in literal terms in opposition, whether conscious or not, to one of the key Christian teachings.

Second, according to Aphrahat, even though the scriptural Passover is the 14th of Nisan, the day of great suffering that Christians remember is the 15thof the same month. He wrote: "The Passover of the Jews is on the day of the fourteenth, its night-time and day-time. Our day of great suffering, however, is Friday, the fifteenth day, its night-time and day-time" (Dem. 12.5). Rouwhorst, in his analysis of the 12th Demonstration, argues that Aphrahat observed a feast that was already removed from the 14th of Nisan to the Friday after the 14th as an imperfect adoption of the Nicene norm and still exhibiting traces of a Quartodeciman past. According to Rouwhorst, in the church represented by Aphrahat, the removal of Quartodeciman practice to the Friday after the 14th is an event not yet generally accepted or elaborated explicitly.[181] The limited evidence that exists for the form of the Quartodeciman observance suggests, according to Bradshaw, that the period of fasting which in Jewish tradition preceded the eating of the Passover meal at nightfall of the 14th of Nisan was extended by the Christians into a vigil during the night, so that their celebration of the feast with a Eucharistic meal only began at cockcrow, after the Jewish festivities were over.[182] The Syrian Church order known as Didascalia Apostolorum speaks of this as follows:

Therefore you shall fast in the days of the Pascha from the tenth, which is the second day of the week; and you shall sustain yourselves with bread and salt and water only, at the ninth hour, until the fifth day of the week. But on the Friday and on the Sabbath fast wholly, and taste nothing. You shall come together and watch and keep vigil all the night with prayers and intercessions and with reading of the Prophets, and with the gospel and with psalms, with fear and trembling and with earnest supplication, until the third hour in the night after the Sabbath; and then break your fasts… (Didascalia Apostolorum 5.18-19.1.)

There is an intriguing connection between Aphrahat's ideas regarding Sabbath and Christian festival of Pascha. In Western Christendom that idea of the Christian Sabbath was already well

developed by the time of Aphrahat. Christ by His resurrection ushered in not only new redemption but also new creation and therefore brought about the new type of rest for God's new people. Aphrahat knows nothing about the Christian Sabbath [183] that has now been transferred from the Seventh Day to the First Day via the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Aphrahat concerns about the Sabbath had to do not with the appropriate day for it is unclear which day or days his community held as primary worship days, [184] but with the observance of the true Sabbath vs. a false one. Here, however, there is a connection with the Christian Pascha. As was mentioned before, Aphrahat viewed Christian Pascha not as Easter was viewed in the West (the day of Christ's resurrection), but the day of Christ's death instead. Just as Pascha did not commemorate Christ's resurrection, but rather Christ's death, so it was that Aphrahat's Sabbath did not include, judging from Demonstrations, a change of day from the seventh to the first.[185]

Third, Aphrahat's central point, which differentiates between the Christian and Jewish observances of Passover, states that while the Jews remember their sins, according to Aphrahat, the Christians remember the suffering of their Saviour (Dem. 12.8). This point is interesting because of the reason that Aphrahat gives for the Jewish observance. In later, Rabbinic Judaism, one does not get a sense that Passover is primarily a solemn holiday as is Yom Kippur, when the Jews mourn their sins. Rather, by majority report, Passover is a commemoration of God's deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. In the Exodus story, as narrated by both the OT and Babylonian Talmud, the sins of the Egyptians are underscored instead of those committed by Israelites, whose cry for help is heard by the Lord. Given Aphrahat's knowledge of contemporary Judaism, especially its biblical aspect, it is highly improbable that Aphrahat was so ignorant as to think that the Jews remember their sins on Passover. If this were true, then we can conclude that Aphrahat cannot be trusted in any of his reports about interactions with the Jews, since he simply made up this practice of the Jews and did not really know what Jewish Passover was really all about. It is far more likely, however, that Aphrahat unintentionally confused the two Jewish holidays and dealt with Passover as if it was the Day of Atonement. Blunders having to do with the recollection of things are known to happen to all people. After all, Aphrahat did not have computer programs such as Accordance or BibleWorks at his disposal, reciting most of his text from his phenomenal but still imperfect memory.

Babylonian Talmud

The list of items in terms of which the Babylonian Talmud disagrees with Aphrahat by omission is much longer than could be presented here. As a matter of fact, the Passover references are so extensive as to allow for citing only a few of them in this study. A few representative texts are discussed below.

First, Babylonian Talmud insists that nothing is to be left of the Passover offering until the morning, a prohibition that, strangely enough, is left out in Aphrahat. In bPesachim 84a we read that:

As for leaving over [flesh] of a clean [offering], it is well. For it was taught: And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. Scripture desires to state an affirmative command after a negative command, thus teaching that one is not flagellated for it…

This reference is an example of the things that Babylonian Talmud discusses and which Aphrahat largely ignores. It does not make a strong case for direct confrontation. Rather, it simply highlights more of the difference in emphasis between the two communities.

Secondly, the sages of the Babylonian Talmud insist that a Passover offering could be offered only for one's own household. One, for example, could not offer it on behalf of his neighbour. This particular ruling is the logical outcome of the constant concern over the appropriate intent of the worshipper who offers up the sacrifice. In bNedarim 36a we are presented with the following:

Yet if so, a man should be able to offer the Passover sacrifice for his neighbour, since he brings it for his sons and daughters, who are minors. Why then did R. Eleazar say: If a man sets aside a Passover sacrifice for his neighbor his action is null? – Said R. Zera: [The law, And they shall take to them every man] a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, [a lamb for a house], is not Biblically incumbent [upon minors].

The Passover sacrifices here were prescribed to be given as one per family. One sacrifice does not and cannot represent the fulfilment of the duty of any other person representing a family unit. Although it is possible that this overlaps with, and hints at, the Rabbinic prohibition of the Christian doctrine that Christ as the Lamb covers all the households that place their faith in him, it is unlikely that this particular Rabbinic discussion (bNedarim 36a) had this Christian issue in mind.

Third, according to at least some sages in Babylonian Talmud, out of all the nights of the Passover feast, only the first one must be spent in Jerusalem; the rest of the nights can be spent anywhere. We read in bPesachim 89b:

Our Rabbis taught: The first Passover overrides the Sabbath, [and] the second Passover overrides the Sabbath; the first Passover overrides uncleanness, [and] the second Passover overrides uncleanness; the first Passover requires the spending of the night [in Jerusalem], [and] the second Passover requires the spending of the night [in Jerusalem].[The second Passover] overrides uncleanness. With whom [does this agree]? – With R. Judah. But according to R. Judah, does it require the spending of the night [in Jerusalem]? Surely it was taught, R. Judah said: How do we know that the second Passover does not require the spending of the night [in Jerusalem]? Because it is said, and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents; and it is written, six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread: that which is eaten six [days] requires the spending of the night [in Jerusalem], but that which is not eaten six [days] does not require the spending of the night [in Jerusalem]? There is [a controversy of] two Tannaim as to R. Judah's opinion.

Discussion here shows that Rabbinic Jews dealt with the issue of Galilean participation in the sacrificial activity. Though discussing sacrifice in particular, it is noteworthy that at least one night in Jerusalem was necessary for a true participation in the Passover, even though the rest of the nights might be spent, according to this account, outside of the Holy City.

Fourth, in the Babylonian Talmud we see that, on the part of at least some members of the Christian community, there was a desire to connect with the paschal practice of the Jews.

A certain Syrian [i.e. non-Jew] used to go up and partake of the Passover sacrifices in Jerusalem, boasting: It is written, there shall no alien eat thereof, no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof, yet I eat of the very best. Said R. Judah b. Bathyra to him: Did they supply you with the fat-tail? No, he replied.[Then] when you journey up thither say to them, Supply me with the fat-tail. When he went up he said to them, Supply me with the fat-tail. But the fat-tail belongs to the Most High! They replied. Who told you [to do] this? They inquired. R. Judah b. Bathyra, answered he. What is this [matter] before us? They wondered. They investigated his pedigree, and discovered that he was a Syrian, and killed him. Then they sent [a message] to R. Judah b. Bathyra: "Peace be with thee, R. Judah b. Bathyra, for thou art in Nisibis yet thy net is spread in Jerusalem." (bPesachim 3b)

While this story is almost certainly historically unreliable as a whole, it nevertheless stands as a secondary witness, albeit only preserving a kernel of history, testifying to the type of interactions that at least at times took place. It is clear from the story there were non-Jews who sometimes travelled up to Jerusalem to partake in Passover festivities together with the Jews and they could not easily be told apart from the Jews themselves. While not in Persia but still in the Eastern Syriac location, John Chrysostom spoke of this kind of attitude on behalf of many Christians contemporary to Aphrahat in one of his homilies against the Jews:

What is this disease? The festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us one after the other and in quick succession: the feast of Trumpets, the feast of Tabernacles, the fasts. There are many in our ranks who say they think as we do. Yet some of these are going to watch the festivals and others will join the Jews in keeping their feasts and observing their fasts. I wish to drive this perverse custom from the Church right now. My homilies against the Anomians can be put off to another time, and the postponement would cause no harm. But now that the Jewish festivals are close by and at the very door, if I should fail to cure those who are sick with the Judaizing disease. I am afraid that, because of their ill-suited association and deep ignorance, some Christians may partake in the Jews' transgressions; once they have done so, I fear my homilies on these transgressions will be in vain. For if they hear no word from me today, they will then join the Jews in their fasts; once they have committed this sin it will be useless for me to apply the remedy. (Homily 1.5)[186]

While in above Bavli quotation (bPesachim 3b) no hint is given in the text itself as to the religious propensities of the Aramean (Syrian, non-Jew), it would not be a stretch of the

imagination to suggest that among people who might have an interest in something like these "Judaizing Christians" may be a group that would be good candidates displaying an interest in such activities as going up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with the Jews. Chrysostom's quote does not prove that Gentile Christians travelled to Jerusalem for Passover. According to him, they were simply drawn to the local synagogues, but at the very least it makes some kind of version of Bavli's account conceivable (bPesachim 3b).

Disagreement by confrontation

First, Aphrahat and the rabbis clearly disagree with each other on such issues as continuance of the eating or tasting of the bitter herbs and unleavened bread during the Passover commemoration. While Aphrahat believed that the bitterness of Passover had already been tasted and rejected by his Saviour on the way to the cross, the Babylonian sages did not see any reason for changing the custom instituted in ancient times by Israel's God himself.

Aphrahat:

For the Passover of the Jews is on the day of the fourteenth, its night-time and day-time. After the Passover, Israel eats unleavened bread for seven days until the twenty-first day of the month, but we observe the [days of] unleavened bread as the festival of our Saviour. They eat unleavened bread with bitter herbs, but Our Saviour rejected that cup of bitterness and removed all the bitterness of the peoples when he tasted but did not wish to drink. The Jews bring their sins to mind from season to season, but we remember the crucifixion and disgrace of our Saviour. (Dem. 12.8; Parisot 521)

Babylonian Talmud:

Rabban Gamliel used to say: Whoever does not make mention of these three things on Passover does not discharge his duty, and these are they: the Passover sacrificial lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. The Passover offering is [sacrificed] because the Omnipresent passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt, as it is said, "then ye shall say: it is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for that he passed over …" The unleavened bread is [eaten] because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt, as it is said, "and they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt." The bitter herb is [eaten] because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt, as it is said, "and they made their lives bitter." (bPesachim 116a-b)

For the sages of Babylonian Talmud the biblical prescription (Ex. 12:8) for bitter herbs was still in force. For Aphrahat significant change had taken place. As far as can be inferred from Demonstrations, the Christians dropped the practice of eating unleavened bread with bitter herbs. According to Aphrahat, Christ "rejected that cup of bitterness and removed all the bitterness of the peoples when he tasted but did not wish to drink" (Dem. 12.8). While discussions regarding the importance of the bitter herbs as well as what constituted scriptural and what Rabbinic prescriptions were certainly conducted in Bavli (bPesachim 120a), the general opinion was that

both unleavened bread and bitter herbs were essential parts of Jewish observance when it came to the Passover celebration (bPesachim 116b-117a). The difference therefore was clear.

Second, the two communities also differed in their commemoration of the Passover by how many prescriptions they set for its practice. Characteristically for this topic Aphrahat's treatment is brief and Babylonian Talmud treatment is very extensive.

Aphrahat:

But for us, this is what is required: to observe the festival in its time from season to season, to fast in purity, to pray continually, to give glory [to God] eagerly, to chant psalms when appropriate, to administer the anointing oil as well as baptism in the proper way, to consecrate the holy things in their time and to fulfil all the customary rituals. (Dem. 12.13; Parisot 537).

Babylonian Talmud:

But [the Mishnah] does not mention the eating of the Passover offering. This would point to a contradiction [with the following Baraitha]: The duty of the recital of the Shema in the evening, and of the Hallel on the night of the Passover, and of the eating of the Passover sacrifice can be performed until the break of the dawn? R. Joseph says: There is no contradiction. One statement [the Mishnah] conforms with the view of R. Eleazar b. Azariah, and the other with the view of R. Akiba. For it has been taught: And they shall eat of the flesh in that night. R. Eleazar b. Azariah says: Here it is said: in that night, and further on it is said: For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night. Just as the latter verse means until midnight, so also here it means until midnight. R. Akiba said to him: But it is also said: Ye shall eat it in haste, which means: until the time of haste? [Until the break of the dawn].[Said R. Eleazar to him,] If that is so, why does it say: in the night? [R. Akiba answered,] Because I might think that it may be eaten in the daytime like the sacrifices; therefore it is said: in the night, indicating that only in the night is it eaten and not in the day. We can understand why according to R. Eleazar b. Azariah, whose opinion is based on the Gezerah shawah, the word that is necessary. But according to R. Akiba what is the purpose of this word that? It is there to exclude another night. For, since the Passover sacrifice is a sacrifice of minor sanctity and peace-offerings are sacrifices of minor sanctity, I might think that just as the peace-offerings are eaten for two days and one night so is also the Passover-offering eaten for two nights instead of the two days, and therefore it might be eaten for two nights and one day! Therefore it is said: in that night; in that night it is eaten, but it is not eaten in another night. And R. Eleazar b. Azariah? He deduces it from the verse: And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning. R. Akiba? If [you deduced it] from there, I could say that morning refers to the second morning. And R. Eleazar? He answers you: Morning generally means the first morning. And [the controversy of] these Tannaim is like [the controversy of] the other Tannaim in the following Baraitha: There thou shalt sacrifice the Passover-offering at evening, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. R. Eliezer says: At even, you sacrifice; at sunset, you eat; and at the season that thou camest out of Egypt, you must burn [the

remainder]. R. Joshua says: At even, you sacrifice; at sunset, you eat; and how long do you continue to eat? Till the season that thou camest out of Egypt.

R. Abba said: All agree that when Israel was redeemed from Egypt they were redeemed in the evening. For it is said: The Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. But they did not actually leave Egypt till the daytime. For it is said: On the morrow after the Passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand. About what do they disagree? About the time of the haste. R. Eleazar b. Azariah says: What is meant by haste? The haste of the Egyptians. And R. Akiba says: It is the haste of Israel. It has also been taught likewise: The Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. But did they leave in the night? Did not they in fact leave only in the morning, as it says: On the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand? But this teaches that the redemption had already begun in the evening. (bBerachoth 9a)

Passover was very important to both communities. Babylonian Talmud, however, dedicates the whole tractate of Mishnah to its practice. For Aphrahat the Passover theme is vital to the Christian Gospel. However, when it comes to requirements for participating in the Passover celebration, the difference between Aphrahat and the sages of Babylonian Talmud is striking. Bavli is very detailed and appears overwhelming with its regulations about how to properly commemorate deliverance from Egypt. Aphrahat is strikingly brief in his description of proper Passover observance.

Third, while there is some discussion about celebrating Passover in Jerusalem, some Babylonian Talmud texts presuppose that Passover can and must be celebrated with the Passover offering included in the commemoration in the Diaspora where the Babylonian Jews lived. Aphrahat, however, is adamant about the impropriety of offering Passover anywhere but in the Jerusalem Temple.

Aphrahat:

But see these mysteries, my friend, that [were expressed] when the Holy One commanded the offering of the Passover sacrifice. He warned them concerning all of its laws and said to them. “You must eat it in one house, and must not take any of it outside the house.” Moses commanded them as follows: “When you enter the land that the Lord has given you and offer the Passover sacrifice in its time, it is forbidden to slaughter the Passover sacrifice in [any] one of you towns, except in the place that the Lord your God will choose. You and your household will rejoice in your festival.” He also commanded them as follows: “No stranger or hired hand should eat of the Passover sacrifice, but a servant who has become yours [by being] bought with money may eat of the Passover sacrifice when you have circumcised the flesh of his foreskin.”

Great and wonderful are these mysteries, my friend! When the Israelites were in their own land, it was forbidden to offer the Passover sacrifice, unless [it was] in Jerusalem. In our day, [the Israelites] are scattered throughout all peoples and languages, among the unclean and the

uncircumcised, and they eat their bread in uncleanness among the peoples. Ezekiel spoke about them, when [God] showed him a sign that he would eat his bread in uncleanness, and he petitioned by saying, “O Lord of lords! My soul has not been defiled, nor Has defiled flesh entered my mouth!” And [God] said to Ezekiel, “This will be the sign; the Israelites will eat their bread in defilement among the peoples where I will scatter them.” For now if, as I said above, it was forbidden, while the Israelites were in their land, to slaughter the Passover sacrifice at any place except before a single altar in Jerusalem, how is it possible [for them] to perform the mystery of the Passover sacrifice in our [own] day, when they are scattered among foreign peoples? They now have no authority [to do so]! (Dem. 12.2-3; Parisot 508-509).

Babylonian Talmud:

And whence do we know it for the Passover-offering itself? It was taught: R. Eliezer said: A Passover-offering was ordained to be brought in Egypt and a Passover-offering was ordained for later generations; as the Passover-offering that was ordained in Egypt could be brought only from what was unconsecrated, so the Passover-offering that was ordained for later generations may be brought only from what is unconsecrated. Said to him R. Akiba, Is it right to infer the possible from the impossible? The other replied, although it was impossible [otherwise]. It is nevertheless a striking argument and we may make an inference from it. Then R. Akiba put forward the following argument [in refutation]: This was so of the Passover-offering ordained in Egypt since it did not require the sprinkling of blood and the offering of the sacrificial portions upon the altar.

Will you say the same of the Passover-offering of later generations which requires the sprinkling of the blood and the offering of the sacrificial portions upon the altar? The other replied. Behold it is written, And thou shalt keep this service in this month, [signifying] that all the services of this month should be like this. (bMenachoth 82a)

Fourth, according to Aphrahat, God divorced Israel, in the context of their Passover-related disobedience, and chose a new people from among the peoples for his special relationship. The Babylonian Talmud, obviously familiar with such a claim, denies it utterly. The following examples are from both collections referring to the same prophetic words dealing with Israel’s divorce from such prophets as Jeremiah and Hosea (Hos.1:1-3).

Aphrahat:

I ask you, O wise debater of the people who does not examine the words of the Law: show me when this word that God would make his people jealous by a people that is not a people was fulfilled? And when did he anger them with a foolish people? But if you are made jealous by the people that are from the peoples, you fulfil the word that is written, which Moses earlier inscribed in the Book. And if you offer the Passover sacrifice in any of the places where you live, you offer it in transgression of the commandment. Because [of this], a letter of divorcehas been written for you. (Dem. 12.3; Parisot 512).

Babylonian Talmud:

The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah: Four prophets prophesied in one age, and the greatest of all of them was Hosea. For it is said, The Lord spoke at first with Hosea: did He then speak first with Hosea; were there not many prophets from Moses until Hosea? Said R. Johanan: He was the first of four prophets who prophesied in that age. And these are they: Hosea, Isaiah, Amos and Micah. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Hosea, "Thy children have sinned," to which he should have replied "They are Thy children, they are the children of Thy favoured ones they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; extend Thy mercy to them." Not enough that he did not say thus, but he said to Him: "Sovereign of the Universe! The whole world is Thine; exchange them for a different nation." Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "What shall I do with this old man? I will order him: 'Go and marry a harlot and beget thee children of harlotry'; and then I will order him: 'Send her away from thy presence.' If he will be able to send [her] away, so will I too send Israel away…" (bPesachim 87a)

The above is an example of the polemic between the two communities. Aphrahat's community interpreted the Scriptures in a way which held that the contemporary Jews were handed a bill of divorce by God. According to Aphrahat, God's patience with Israel has run out and Israel has provoked God to enact the highest level of punishment – eternal separation, with no chance to reconcile and to reunite with their God. Babylonian Sages deemed such an interpretation impossible and repulsive. On the other hand, they claimed that just as Hosea could not and would not send away his harlot wife and children of adultery, so God will not be able to send away Israel and her children – the Jews of Babylonia. Whether or not the sages of Bavli had in mind the words of Aphrahat is impossible to prove or disprove, but what is highly likely is that the teachings set out by Aphrahat in Demonstrations made their rounds on the streets of Northern Babylonia and that these claims were eventually brought to the attention of the Rabbinic circles and academies, which in turn authored or edited the appropriate, albeit internal, response.

Fifth, according to the author of Demonstrations, the house of which the Scriptures spoke is none other than the new people of God, the Church from among the peoples. Although most rabbis also were not in favour of sacrifices outside of Jerusalem, some certainly persisted with the controversial practice.

Aphrahat:

But with respect to this lamb of the Passover sacrifice, be persuaded, my friend, about the reason that the Holy One commanded that it be eaten in one house and not in many houses. The one house is the Church of God. Again, he said, "Hired hands and foreigners must not eat from it." Who are [these] hired hands and foreigners? They are the schools of the Evil One, who are not permitted to eat from the Passover sacrifice, concerning which our Saviour said. "When he sees that a wolf is coming, the hired hand (who does not own the flock) leaves the flock and

flees." [God] said, "You must not eat from it while it is raw or after it has been thoroughly boiled." This is known and explained as that offering which rises up in the Church of God, which is baked in the fire but not thoroughly boiled or offered when raw. He said, "You must eat it in the following way: with your waistbands secure, your sandals on your feet and your staffs in your hands." These mysteries are very great! Therefore, whoever eats of the true Lamb, Christ secures his waistband in faith… (Dem. 12.9; Parisot 525).

Mishna and Tosefta:

The Passover-offering is roasted neither on a [metal] spit nor on a grill. R. Zadok said: Rabban Gamaliel once said to his slave Tabi, "Go and roast the Passover-offering for us on the grill." (mPesachim 7.2)

We also read in tBeitzah 2:15:

Rabbi Yose said, "Todos the Roman instructed the (Jewish) residents of Rome to purchase lambs for Pesah and to roast them". They (the other sages) said to him, "He is close to sacrificing outside of the Temple", since they (the Jews of Rome) call the sacrifice "Pesah."

The first text is a reference to the post-Temple Passover offering of some kind that was not practised universally and later abandoned. The second text probably speaks of the time while the Temple was still standing, since the concern is with someone who would be close to "sacrificing outside of the Temple". Another text comes from Rabbinic commentary on Exodus (Mekilta on Exodus 18.27), "where we are told that when once a Jewish ascetic offered a sacrifice, a mysterious voice from the Holy of Holies declared 'He Who received the sacrifices of Israel in the desert also receives them now.'"[187] Though the Passover sacrifice may not be precisely what is in view here, the general principle still holds: there were Jews who believed that God received sacrifices outside of the Temple.

4. Conclusion

What is clear is that Aphrahat met and interacted with the Jews of his locale and was probably aware, through travel and correspondence, of the problems of other Christian communities in the region. He felt threatened and undertook the writing of his Demonstrations in a desire to strengthen the Christian community against attacks of their Jewish opponents (Dem. 21.1). Most Contra Iudaeos dialogues deal with such topics as the Trinity, Christ's Divinity, Messianic promises, the virgin birth, Christ's suffering, resurrection, exultation, the passing away of some aspects of the Old Testament Law, especially circumcision, acceptance of Gentiles by God and his rejection of the Jews as the people of God. This section of the Demonstrations touches on several of these topics, such as the chosen people and Christ's suffering, that are often addressed in controversies between Jews and Christians. The texts examined in this chapter add to the

growing body of evidence collected in this study so far in making the case that Aphrahat did indeed know and interacted with Para-Rabbinic Jews.

Babylonian Talmud and Aphrahat are committed to celebrating and commemorating Pesach/Pascha as an important observance that is carried over, according to Aphrahat, to the New Covenant era. This is not the case with circumcision, Kashrut and the Sabbath, for example. Perhaps the reason why Aphrahat does not accuse the Jews of taking pride in Passover observance is because Aphrahat's Christians observed it as well, albeit in their own way. Therefore, much of what we gather about their possible interactions is only plausible, but not necessarily the case. Secondly, Rabbinic Judaism at the time of Aphrahat seems to have been in the middle of hammering out its own position on the issue of the continuation of the Passover sacrifice outside of the Temple. This fits the widely accepted idea regarding the gradual maturing of Rabbinic Judaism. By the fourth century it would make sense that Rabbinic precepts would not be carried out, neither fully nor consistently. The diversity of the texts is illustrated by the examples such as the following. The texts discussing the divorce proceedings (Dem. 12.3; bPesachim 87a) of God against Israel and the choosing of a new people by God provide firm grounds for this proposition. This is not the case with other texts, such as the one that speaks about a Syrian Non-Jewish man travelling to Jerusalem to partake of the Passover sacrifice (bPesachim 3b). The final conclusion of the study will need to take the unevenness of such material into consideration as the final results of the study are summarized.

The fact that Aphrahat criticized the Jewish practice of offering sacrifices at Passover time (Dem. 12.2-3) as well as the practice of installing arks of the covenant in Jewish worship facilities may be interpreted differently. It is possible that Aphrahat encountered Para-Rabbinic Jews who were not in full accord with the finalized theological and ritual concerns of Rabbinic Judaism as they are known from later periods. But it is more likely that Aphrahat's interactions with the Jews were real, but limited. Aphrahat himself may have never visited a synagogue and may have simply confused the ark (closet) where the Torah scroll was held with the biblical Ark of the Covenant. Linguistic and conceptual linkage, therefore, was possibly translated in the mind of Aphrahat into something it was really not. Yet another possibility is that Aphrahat knew exactly what went on in synagogues. In this scenario he knew that the Ark of the Covenant was nothing more than an ark to hold the Torah scroll. That is to say that Aphrahat did not think the ark was a reproduction of the Temple Ark. He knew that it was a closet meant to be a repository for the Torah Scroll in between its liturgical use and that the Jews simply called it the Ark, evoking Temple imagery. But that could have been the problem with the synagogues as far as Aphrahat was concerned. The fact that the Jews exchanged the contents of the Ark from one type of symbol of covenantal deliverance (tablets of Law, manna and Aaron's rod) to another (Torah Scroll) and were therefore succeeding in justifying their Torah study-centred form of Jewish worship may have been what Aphrahat considered so wrong. This seems to make most sense when this study takes into consideration that an important part of Aphrahat's community may have been some type of Jesus-believing Jews and those heavily influenced by them, whom the

non-Christian Jews did not hesitate to try and win back to their side, particularly in Persia, and, especially during the time of the government persecutions.

Chapter 6

ON FASTING

1.Asceticism

Because Aphrahat defines fasting as avoidance of all kinds of things and not just food fasting, we also must look, be it ever so briefly, at the phenomenon of asceticism as a whole. The adjective "ascetic" derives from the Greek word for "exercise" or training". Originally associated with any form of disciplined practice, the term ascetic has come to mean anyone who practises a renunciation of various worldly pursuits. Asceticism was and is practised by the majority of world religions. For the most part it has been a tool used to intensify the experience of the divine in the lives of the worshippers.

Asceticism in Judaism

It has been a common opinion that only Christianity has a tendency towards asceticism, while Rabbinic Judaism "takes seriously" the enjoying of God's created order. This fallacy has been ably addressed and convincingly critiqued by Diamond, who argues that "asceticism, in its incidental, instrumental, and essential forms, is part of the fabric of Rabbinic Judaism."[188] There is a difference of opinion with regard to asceticism between Yerushalmi and Bavli. Yerushalmi generally advocates asceticism more strongly in comparison to the sages' opinion in Bavli.[189] There are various types of asceticism that Rabbinic Jews practised and the level of their learning seemed to be determined by location.[190] The overall picture is that of a general tendency in Palestine to favour fasting, while in Babylonia we see either ambivalence or opposition.[191] The same is the case in the area of sexual abstinence, according to the study done by Satlow.[192]

This scholarly recognition of the connection between Rabbinic Judaism and asceticism has been a relatively late development. For example, Hall,[193] Vööbus[194] and Moore[195] denied the ascetic nature of Rabbinic Judaism altogether. Even now when scholars speak of ascetic leanings in Judaism, they are mentioned either in passing or with significant qualifications.[196] According to Diamond, some exceptions to this include works by Lazaroff,[197] Fraade[198] and Sokol.[199] Though some scholars like Baer[200] and Urbach[201] debated these issues, in the words of Fraade,[202] "The question is not, 'Is ancient Judaism ascetic or non-ascetic? But: How is asceticism… manifested and responded to in the ancient varieties of Judaism, including that of the rabbis?'"

Rabbinic Judaism practised several forms of asceticism, of which Torah study as an ascetic discipline was foundational. Everything else followed from this priority of making Torah study

supreme in the daily lives of Rabbinic Jews.[203] This passage is but a sample of the Talmudic attitude to the supremacy of Torah study:

Our Rabbis taught: The poor, the rich, the sensual come before the [heavenly] court. They say to the poor: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he says: I was poor and worried about my sustenance, they would say to him: Were you poorer than Hillel?… To the rich man they said: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he said: I was rich and occupied with my possessions, they would say to him: Were you perchance richer than R. Eleazar? …To the sensual person they would say: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he said: I was beautiful and upset by sensual passion, they would say to him: Were you perchance more beautiful than Joseph? (bYoma 35b).

Already in Avot, Hillel is remembered to have said: "No one who engages in a great deal of commerce becomes wise" (mAboth 2.6), while we are reminded that "R. Meir said: Lessen your involvement with business and busy yourself with Torah" (mAboth 4.10). Additionally, we read that "Resh Lakish said: The words of the Torah can endure only with him who sacrifices himself for it, as it is said, This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent" (bShabbath 83b).[204]

Asceticism in Christianity

In the various Christian movements of antiquity, asceticism was not practised or accepted uniformly either. However, if it is the case with Judaism that ascetic practices were at best tolerated and preached only by some, it is the case in Christianity that rejection of fasting was preached by some, but fasting was recognized as legitimate by the majority.[205] Abandoning all fellowship with others in favour of solitude was considered by some as a means of avoiding sin altogether. For example, Aphrahat speaks of ihidaya (the singles or the single ones) of whom he no doubt was one. However, Hausherr seems too simplistic when he calls Aphrahat's Demonstrations "a manual ordained to practical asceticism."[206]

It is not clear how some of the more extreme examples of asceticism became part of many branches of Christian traditions. It is, however, unlikely that this is something that was inherited by Christianity not from Graeco-Roman culture, as many scholars, including Grimm, believe, but through Christianity's connection with various branches of Palestinian sectarian Judaism movements such as the Qumran. Murray, acknowledging the need to be cautious in making a firm judgment on the origins of Christianity with regard to its connections with the Qumran movement, still affirms the connection. He argued that behind the Syriac Qyāmâ there lay some form of Jewish ascetical movement at least comparable to that known to us from Qumran.[207] Aphrahat doubtless received his early education from these Sons of the Covenant (Bney Qyāmâ).[208]

Diamond, disagreeing with Grimm's conclusion, argues that while Grimm [209] may be correct in her claim that total abstinence from food and drink was a rarity in Graeco-Roman culture, askesis, training and disciplining one's soul and body in a way that often included some form of

self-denial was not. He then sums up his arguments by saying that the Graeco-Roman environment in which the Palestinian rabbis lived was one that valorised asceticism. Although total withdrawal from taking food and drink was not a significant medium of ascetic expression in the Graeco-Roman world, Jews choosing to fast in such a culture would have been viewed sympathetically.[210] The opposite was the case with the rabbis of Babylonia. In fact, according to Vööbus, early Sassanian persecutions of Christians were based on Zoroastrian distaste for asceticism.[211]

Many in the early church believed that exultation of the spiritual faculties can be achieved through lowering of the bodily ones. Beginning from the Early Christian days up until now this exploration has continued in many different ways. There are several major ways in which Syriac Christians engaged in this practice: 1) Virginity, 2) Poverty, 3) Fasting, 4) Sleep, 5) Dress, 6) Movement, 7) Hygiene and other minor ways of mortification are among the major subjects.[212]

Asceticism in Zoroastrianism

When it comes to the Zoroastrian traditions, things are clearly different from the branches of Jewish thought that encourage or tolerate asceticism and from Christianity, which for the most part readily endorses it. According to Zoroastrianism, asceticism is a sin, plain and simple. According to Nigosian, Zoroastrianism is set in opposition to any asceticism, be it Jewish or Christian. He argued that the Zoroastrian religion is in principle a religion of action, energy, growth, increase, prosperity, spiritual and moral progress, and enjoyment of the good things of life. Ascetics, hermits, mendicants, systics, monks, and recluses are totally unacceptable to this faith system.[213] Zaehner puts it into even more striking language: “Any withdrawal from the world is, then, a betrayal of God; for man was created for the work he has to do, not vice versa.”[214] In the Vendîdâd, which was composed either in the Sassanian period or earlier, we read of a conversation between Zoroaster and Ahura Mazda with regard to the places of highest happiness:

It is the place whereon one of the faithful with the priest within, with cattle, with a wife, with children and with good herds within; and wherein afterwards the cattle continue to thrive, virtue to thrive, the wife to thrive, the child to thrive, the fire to thrive, and every blessing of life to thrive.[215]

So we can see that the prosperity of the self, family and country is paramount and thus it is easy to see how popular support could be easily garnered for the persecution of the Christians in Persia as well as how Yerushalmi’s asceticism would not find a sympathetic ear in the land of Babylon. Fasting was not considered undesirable, but sinful. There are several passages in the Vendîdâd that plainly forbid fasting.[216] Perhaps, the comment about “keeping the fast” in avoiding sin had to do with the ascetic leanings of some in pre-Jewish, pre-Christian and even

pre-Zoroastrian times, since asceticism is not unique to Abrahamic faiths, but tends to be a general human way of drawing closer to divinity.

Then let people learn by heart this holy saying: “No one who does not eat has strength to do heavy works of holiness, strength to do works of husbandry, strength to beget children. By eating, every material creature lives, by not eating it dies away.[217]

Two of these very same reasons are also mentioned in Talmudim. There Resh Laqish and R. Sheshet discourage Torah scholars from fasting (yDemai 7.4, 26b. See also bTa’anith 22b).

2. Aphrahat’s Demonstrations

Content of the demonstration

Aphrahat begins his discussion of fasting by stating his thesis: “Pure fasting is highly acceptable before God, and it is kept as a treasure in heaven. It is a weapon against the Evil One, and a shield which receives the arrows of the Adversary” (Dem. 3.1; Parisot 97). He then sets forth his basic argumentation, which is the testimony of the Holy Scriptures: “I do not speak about this by my own judgment, but rather from the holy scriptures.” In this demonstration, as in all others, biblical quotations are present in great number, but whether by symbols, direct text quotations[218] or biblical characters, Aphrahat sets out to show that a) fasting is profitable, and b) only pure fasting is profitable. This sentiment is clearly seen in that, according to Aphrahat, fasting “has always been profitable for those who fast truly.” (Dem. 3.1; Parisot 97) The Ninevites are elevated as an example of pure fasting that was committed and coupled with prayer:

The Ninevites fasted with a pure fast when Jonah preached repentance to them. For as it is written, when they heard the preaching of Jonah, they decreed a permanent fast and unending supplication, while sitting on sackcloth and ashes.

The result of fasting, as always is the case in Aphrahat’s argument, is pointed out and emphasized. From Aphrahat’s standpoint, it is not the fact of a fast, but its quality in being accompanied by real heartfelt repentance that ensured this positive result:

And this is also what is written: “God saw their good deeds that they were turning from their wicked ways. Then he turned his anger away from them and he did not destroy them.” It does not say. “He saw a fast from bread and water, with sackcloth and ashes”, but, “they have turned from their evil ways and from the wickedness of their works.”

We find exactly the same sentiment in the Babylonian Talmud comment on the same biblical passage. In bTa’anith 16a we read:

[And this is what he says], Our brethren, neither sackcloth nor fastings are effective but only penitence and good deeds, for we find that of the men of Nineveh Scripture do not say, And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting, but, God saw their works that they turned from their evil way.

From this example it is clear that both communities, whether through mutual influence or completely independently, arrived at the exact same conclusion arguing in the exact same way about a shared scripture passage. In this demonstration Aphrahat seeks to persuade his reader by tracing the biblical history of fasting, but he does so in a rather unexpected way. He begins by arguing that there are various types of fasting. Those can be broken up into four groups: a) food-related fasting (abstaining from bread, water, meat, wine and certain foods); b) desire-related fasting (abstaining from sex, hate, anger, property and sleep); c) action-related fasting (fasting through holiness, suffering and mourning); and d) abstaining through/from all of the above.[219]

He moves on to show how, directed by the Holy Scriptures, people practised one form of fasting or another. He brings as examples an impressive list of biblical characters (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Jezebel, Jezreelites, Ninevites, Mordecai, Esther, Daniel and Messiah). It is rather difficult to say why he omitted such prominent biblical characters as, for example, Nehemiah (Nem. 8:18-9:2) and David (2 Sam. 12-18), or why he did not bring into the conversation a prophet like Joel (Joel 2:12), while at the same time seeming to spend a disproportionate amount of time and space on Jezebel and the Jezreelites, as well as on Mordecai and Esther.

What is perhaps most striking is how little text space Aphrahat devotes to Christ. While it is natural in Christian theological writings to have one's presentation culminate with Christ in such a way that Christ receives more attention, both in terms of space and emphasis, this argument does not seem to be applicable in Aphrahat. While he spends long sections on characters like Mordecai and Esther (Dem. 3.10-13), he devotes only one short paragraph to the Christ (Dem. 3.16). It is difficult to say with certainty why Aphrahat has approached his argument in this way. However, if the current researcher is correct that it is not only those demonstrations that have an explicit anti-Jewish polemical title which are actually polemical, but also those demonstrations that have previously been considered by researchers to be simply demonstrations of Christian piety, then this kind of argumentation by Aphrahat would fit the polemical profile – one could be expected to speak the language of the opponent to persuade the opponent in the terms of the opponent. This reading has its limitations as well, since it does not explain why such obvious examples such as David, Nehemiah and Joel were omitted. One could, however, argue that since Aphrahat works on the basis of his memory bank without the help of modern Bible software programs, it is unfair to demand of Aphrahat that he fulfil such stringent consistency requirements.

As to his preoccupation with the Esther and Mordecai story, we might once again be witnessing the same kind of dynamic at play. Esther and Mordecai's story was taken up by Jews many times

throughout Jewish history in order to emotionally survive the many perils and dangers. It is interesting that this story features so dominantly in Aphrahat. It is possible that this is an example of Aphrahat's connection to the Jewish community, but it is also possible that Esther's and Mordecai's Babylonian origins were the point of connection for Aphrahat.

Similarly, there are comparatively few quotations and allusions from the New Testament relative to the number from the Old Testament. Lehto states that "as with many… aspects of his thought, the New Testament simply reaffirms or amplifies revelation already given in the Old."[220]

Throughout the demonstration Aphrahat is seeking to show not only the scriptural commands and scriptural precedents, but also the pragmatic reasons for pure fasting. All of these pragmatic reasons fit consistently into the following benefits: a) heavenly reward (treasure in heaven); b) a powerful tool of offensive warfare (a weapon against the Evil One); and c) an essential tool of defensive warfare (a shield, which receives the arrows of the Adversary) (Dem. 2.1).

Essentially each significant discussion of a biblical character's fasting seems to be an effort on the part of Aphrahat to show that fasting has accomplished something either for the individual himself or herself, or for the people of Israel as a whole. Perhaps this results-oriented, practical argument keeps Aphrahat from referring to the fasting in the Psalms (Ps. 35:12-14, 109:22-27), where no deliverance follows fasting, even though the fasting seems to be true and sincere.

Outline of the argument

Paragraph 1

1. Thesis (acceptable, treasure, weapon and shield)

2. Basis (Scripture proves fasting profitable)

3. Fasting as abstaining from something desired

a. Abstaining from food

b. Abstaining from sex

c. Fasting through holiness

d. Abstaining from meat

e. Abstaining from wine

f. Abstaining from certain foods

g. Abstaining from hateful speech

h. Abstaining from anger

i. Abstaining from property

j. Abstaining from sleep

k. Fasting through suffering

l. Fasting through mourning

m. Fasting through all of the above

4. Definition of fasting and breaking of fast

Paragraph 2

1. Scriptural examples of pure fasting (Part I)

a. Abel (offering)

b. Enoch (favour)

c. Noah (integrity)

d. Abraham (faith)

e. Isaac (covenant)

f. Jacob (oath and knowledge)

g. Joseph (compassion and administration)

2. Purity in speech as the chief characteristic

3. Mouth as the gate to the heart

Paragraph 3

1. Scriptural examples of pure fasting (Part II)

a. Moses

b. Elijah

2. Result: Perfection and the good of the people of Israel

Paragraphs 4-6

1. Scriptural examples of impure fasting

a. Jezebel (blood)

b. Jezreelites (blood)

2. Result: Blood spilled

Paragraph 7

1. Scriptural examples of pure fasting (Part III)

a. Ninevites (repentance)

2. Result: Repentance and no blood is spilled

Paragraph 8-9

1. Avoiding of wickedness vs. fasting from food

2. Deceptive schools fast in vain

a. Marcion

b. Valentinus

c. Mani

3. Result: No reward is given

Paragraph 10-13

1. Scriptural examples of pure fasting (Part IV)

2. Fast as the shield of the people

a. Mordecai

b. Esther

3. Result: Haman and Amalekites destroyed, Mordecai and Esther rewarded

Paragraph 14-15

1. Scriptural examples of pure fasting (Part V)

a. Daniel

2. Result: Restoration of people after seventy years

Paragraph 16

1. Scriptural examples of pure fasting (Part VI)

a. Messiah

2. Result: Conquered the Enemy

3. Command: Fast and keep watch (achieve His rest)

Fasting according to Aphrahat

In Dem. 3.1 Aphrahat starts out by saying that:

Pure fasting is highly acceptable before God, and it is kept as a treasure in heaven. It is a weapon against the Evil One, and a shield which receives the arrows of the Adversary.

He then goes on to provide a list of things, the avoiding of which may constitute a legitimate fast:

Indeed my friend, fasting is not only [abstaining] from bread and water, for there are many ways to undertake a fast. For there is the one who abstains from bread and water to the point of being hungry and thirsty, but there is also the one who abstains in order to be a virgin, and who has hunger but does not eat, and has thirst but does not drink; this fast is better. There is also the one who abstains through holiness, for this too is a fast, and there is the one who abstains from meat, from wine, and from certain foods. There is also the one who fasts by building a fence around his mouth, so as to avoid speaking hateful words, and there is the one who abstains from anger, who crushes his desire [to get angry] so that he might not be conquered [by it]. For there is the one who abstains from property, so that he might free himself for his work, and there is the one who abstains from any kind of bed, in order to remain wide awake in prayer. There is the one who, in suffering, keeps himself from the things of this world, so that he will not be harmed by the

Adversary, and there is the one who abstains so that he might remain in mourning, in order to please his Lord in suffering. And [finally], there is the one who brings together all of these practices and makes them one fast.

While Aphrahat does not quote Isaiah 58 in his demonstration on fasting, he seems to take for granted this concept of a pure and acceptable fast unto the Lord. Later on in Dem. 20 (On the Support of the Poor) his familiarity with it becomes obvious. This is evident from Aphrahat's words, at times quoting, at times paraphrasing Isaiah, that the acceptability of the food fast to the Lord is directly connected to the godly actions of the one who fasts, actions directed towards the poor and needy, whether stranger or a family.

This gift is great and excellent: when a nobleman gives to the poor from the work of his hands, and not from the robbery of others, as God said through the prophet: "This is what pleases me: give rest to the weary. This is the way of the one who obeys." Again, this same prophet said, "This is acceptable fasting, which God loves: when you break your bread for the hungry, and bring strangers into your house, and when you see a naked person and you clothe him, and when you do not neglect your children." Whoever does these things "is like a garden that thrives, and like a spring of water whose water does not dry up, and his righteousness goes before him, and he is gathered into the glory of the Lord." (Dem. 20.1)

Judaism in Aphrahat (Dem. 20), according to Becker, is in so many words the spiritual equivalent of a rich man's greed. Conflating two sides of an analogy, Aphrahat rejects the very possibility that the Jews could engage in real charity.[221] This is yet another example of the polemical nature of a demonstration with a non-polemical title.

In this way, in Aphrahat's mind: 1) the quality of the food fast is qualified by the level of purity in treating others; and 2) fasting unto the Lord can have a non-food dimension. Doing good to the needy by avoiding indulgence of your own comfort is a form of fasting indeed, approved and accepted by God. It is interesting that in Tosefta Isaiah 58 is used in the very same way in which Aphrahat uses it to bring out its scriptural concerns. After several self-imposed questions and answers quoting from the Bible, we read:

Now if there was a dead creeping thing in someone's hand, even if he immersed himself in a fountain or in all of the waters of creation, he will never, ever be clean. (But if) he tossed the dead creeping thing from his hand, then he gains the benefit of immersion in (only) forty seahs of water. And so it says, He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (tTa'anith 1.8)

The same critique of hypocrisy is witnessed in the Apocalypse of Asher which is also obviously related to Isaiah's concern for purity of fasting (see also Dem. 2.8).[222]

Commenting on the same text in Isaiah, Chrysostom lashes out against the Jews throughout his lengthy discourse: "You Jews should have fasted then, when drunkenness was doing those

terrible things to you, when your gluttony was giving birth to your ungodliness – not now." Chrysostom seems to discount the whole practice of food fasting that Israel is engaged in during the "New Covenant times," claiming that fasting was required by God in the past, but not now: "Now your fasting is untimely and an abomination. Who said so? Isaiah himself when he called out in a loud voice: "I did not choose this fast, says the Lord. …the pretext is that they are fasting, but they act like men who are drunk…" Failing to see the appropriate way in which the ancient synagogue functioned in many ways as a Jewish cultural centre, he condemns extracurricular synagogue activities: "But these Jews are gathering choruses of effeminates and a great rubbish heap of harlots; they drag into the synagogue the whole theatre, actors and all… many, I know, respect the Jews and think that their present way of life is a venerable one. This is why I hasten to uproot and tear out this deadly opinion."[223]

As is clear from Chrysostom's statement, Judaism even in the East of the Roman Empire, was a real threat to his Christian community, where "many… respect the Jews and think that their present way of life is a venerable one." Aphrahat speaks of the fast in comparison with the power of prayer: "Its strength is quite considerable, as considerable as the strength of pure fasting" (Dem. 4.1). Fasting is a powerful weapon of the believers in the fight with the Devil: "If he comes against them with a desire for food, they, in the image of our Saviour, conquer him with fasting" (Dem. 4.2). Fasts and prayers are considered by Aphrahat as gifts in order to soften the judgment of the Holy Judge. Describing Christians he says:

Their names are written in the Book of Life, and they pray and groan so that they might not be blotted out from it. They send their gifts of fasting and prayer as a bribe to him who has the power to inscribe and to blot out. And on their hearts they write the Law of their Lord, so that they will be inscribed in this eternal book. (Dem. 9.4)

Aphrahat calls believers to live a life of fasting and prayer:

Friends! Our souls will march along with work and weariness, vigils and intercession, fasting and prayer and mournful supplication, lest we are immediately taken from this world and condemned by the righteous judgment of God. For we will not neglect the ministry of the Holy One, lest we are rejected by him… (Dem. 14.17)

Later in the same section Aphrahat links desire for food to the Adamic fall in the Garden of Eden:

Through cravings of various kinds he comes to the children of Adam, and he empties them out like empty vessels, just as he did in the beginning with their primordial father, when there was not one desire of his for him to recognize and flee from, for he has many deceitful tricks. With a desire for food he caused Adam to be expelled from paradise, and through a desire for murder he separated Abel from Cain his brother. (Dem. 14.40)

Aphrahat sees Moses as someone who became ascetic in his lifestyle and especially in his sexuality:

From the time that his Lord spoke with him, the man Moses, great prophet and leader of all Israel, cherished holiness and served the Holy One. He avoided the world and its procreation and remained by himself, in order to please his Lord. (Dem. 18.4)

Aphrahat puts the burden of proof on his Jewish opponents regarding the marital status of Moses. Reading Aphrahat in the twenty-first century sounds strange, but at the time when he wrote it was apparently reasonable for him to say:

But prove to me what you are saying, [you] wise debater of the people: that from the time that God spoke with him, Moses continued to perform the duties of marriage. (Dem. 18.4)

The above argumentation by Aphrahat strongly supports the idea that the demonstrations were written to strengthen Aphrahat's community in their interactions with the Jewish community and as such it is crucial that we remember that the arguments that Aphrahat presents had to make sense first and for most to the Christians, whether or not they made sense to the Jews. Naturally, Aphrahat would love to persuade the Jewish community of the Gospel's validity, but his main concern here is to ground the faith of those who are already part of his community.

3. Comparison of Aphrahat and the Babylonian Talmud

Agreement

Aphrahat and the views represented in the Babylonian Talmud have many things in common. It is also clear that most of the things that are held in common by both Aphrahat's Christian community and the Babylonian Talmud community are characterized by a difference in emphasis.

First, food fasting is an accepted form of fasting for both communities (Dem. 3.1). In Babylonian Talmud (bAvodah Zara 8A) food fasting is the fasting, while in Aphrahat food fasting is taken for granted, but other forms of fasting are also affirmed as legitimate fasts or even elevated to a higher level.

Second, Aphrahat defined some suffering as fasting, while the Babylonian sages at times equated the idea of food fasting with meritorious suffering (bBerachoth 17a). Therefore, we can establish that fasting and suffering were linked in the minds of both communities.

Third, fasting is almost always coupled with prayer and essentially functioned as enhancement of prayer (bTa'anit 27b). The basic desire of both the Rabbinic and Aphrahat's community is for their prayers to be heard on high. Both Aphrahat and Babylonian Talmud view fasting as something that accomplishes that goal, while Aphrahat goes further and talks about the sifting

work of Gabriel in the process of selecting prayer to be presented before God, and how pure fasting contributes to the acceptability of such a prayer to Gabriel and therefore to God Himself (Dem. 4.8, 13).

Fourth, fasting is considered by both communities as a form of sacrifice that is offered to God to predispose him towards mercy. In Babylonian Talmud more so than in Aphrahat fasting is considered meritorious (bBerachoth 17a). It not only accompanies prayer or sacrifice, but sometimes functions as sacrifice itself. Aphrahat states, though only in passing, that fasts and prayers are bribes that worshippers send up to the heavenly court of justice in the hope for mercy.

Fifth, fasting as abstaining from certain foods can be affirmed as accepted, in principle, by both communities. This proposition, however, needs to be treated carefully because one simply does not know what Aphrahat means by "certain foods," since he uses the phrase only once in his Demonstrations (Dem. 3.1), while the idea of abstaining from certain foods is abundant in Babylonian Talmud.

Sixth, both communities affirm in some cases the avoidance of wine. Aphrahat's Christian community affirms it as part of an ascetic lifestyle, while the Rabbinic Jewish community affirms it, albeit only at times, as part of the biblical Nazirite practice as well as a legitimate response to a national crisis (bBaba Bathra 60b).

Seventh, Babylonian Talmud often and Aphrahat always view fasting as successful and profitable. In Babylonian Talmud fasting often helps to achieve some desirable outcome, while in Aphrahat this is the case at all times. According to Aphrahat, believers ought to fast, because the true fast "has always been profitable" (Dem. 3.1).

Eighth, while in Aphrahat fasting is a part of regular life, it is an encouraged and exalted practice. In Babylonian Talmud we are faced with a combination of a positive outlook on fasting alongside of its radically negative critique.

Disagreement by omission

While there are issues on which Aphrahat and Babylonian Talmud are in agreement, there are at least as many areas of disagreement. The disagreements can be divided for the sake of argument into two groups: 1) Babylonian Talmud and Aphrahat disagree by one stating something that the other fails to address; and 2) Babylonian Talmud and Aphrahat disagree by clearly taking up different positions on issues addressed by both.

The two main sources tend to largely ignore each other either consciously or sub-consciously. Therefore, it is hard to evaluate these omitted statements, since one never knows whether a theme was ignored because "it never crossed their mind" or whether it was ignored purposely.

We need to proceed with caution and avoid drawing conclusions until all available data are evaluated.

Aphrahat

First, in Aphrahat abstaining from hateful speech as well as anger appears to be one of the main aspects of true fasting (Dem. 3.1). Aphrahat states that "There is also the one who fasts by building a fence, around his mouth, so as to avoid speaking hateful words, and there is the one who abstains from anger, who crushes his desire [to get angry] so that he might not be conquered [by it]" (Dem. 3.1). The mouth as the gate of the heart seems to be present as a main concern (Dem. 3.2). In Babylonian Talmud pure speech and avoidance of anger are certainly important (bShabbath 105b), but nevertheless this is not linked with fasting.

Second, among several metaphors that various sages within the Babylonian Talmud use for fasting, it is never referred to as either a treasure or shield. While it can be argued that people who fasted effectively discovered heavenly treasures (Babylonian Talmud) and were protected or ended up protecting others through their fast, this notion is not explicit in the text itself. In contrast, for Aphrahat fasting is so precious that it "is kept as a treasure in heaven… a shield which receives the arrows of the Adversary" (Dem. 3.1). In the case of Mordecai and Esther, it was fasting that served as "a shield of salvation for all of their people" (Dem. 3.10).

Babylonian Talmud

In contrast to Aphrahat, the sages of Babylonian Talmud conceive of fasting within fewer categories and mostly within the parameters of food fasting.

First, Babylonian Talmud's positive examples of fasting are linked to commitment to God and Torah study. The views of the sages in Babylonian Talmud can be grouped into positive and negative categories. The group that treats fasting positively often links it to the idea of commitment. "R. Johanan said: I shall remain fasting until I have finished my (allotted) study of Mishnah or Scripture" (bMakkoth 24a) and "He said: I crave your pardon, bones of Beth Shammai. If your unexplained teachings are so [excellent], how much more so the explained teachings. It is said that all his days his teeth were black by reason of his fasts" (bChagigah 22b).

In contrast, even though Aphrahat never argues that fasting has nothing to do with commitment, the positive connection is not mentioned explicitly.

Second, in Babylonian Talmud the question is not whether or not there should be fasting on the Day of Atonement, but rather when is it appropriate to fast. Bavli concentrates on discussing Yom Kippur-related fasting in extensive detail in tractate bYoma as well as in bTa'anith, which largely discusses on which occasions the fasts are inappropriate. It is in this context that the importance of gradual degrees of fasting, especially for mothers and their children, is recommended: "R. Nahman said: At the age of nine and ten one trains them by hours, at the age

of eleven and twelve they must fast to the end of the day by Rabbinic ordinance, at the age of thirteen they must fast to the end of the day by Biblical law, [all this] referring to boys" (bYoma 82a).

By saying nothing about fasting on Yom Kippur as a very special fast, Aphrahat's position can be inferred. In Aphrahat silence on such an important issue speaks louder than words. For him there is no longer a need for annual fasting on Yom Kippur, since God's forgiveness has already been proclaimed to the New People of God through the resurrection of their Lord.

Third, only for Babylonian Talmud is fasting a significant component of the sacrificial act. Those who fast are crucial for the acceptability of sacrifice by God:

Our Rabbis have taught: The men of the Mishmar prayed over the sacrifice of their brethren that it may be favourably accepted, whilst the men of the Ma'amad assembled in their synagogues and observed four fasts, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of that week. (bTa'anit 27b)

The crucial role of the fasting accompanying sacrifice is reiterated and underscored by R. Ya'aqob b. Aha, who said "in the name of R. Assi: If not for the ma'amadot heaven and earth could not continue to exist" (bMegillah 31b).

On the other hand, there does not seem to be anything in Aphrahat's writing that links fasting to sacrifice in the Temple for the obvious reason that sacrifices in the Temple have already been fulfilled by the sacrifice of the "fatten calf," as Syriac Christians often called Christ (Dem. 2.6; Dem. 6.6).

In summary, all disagreements by omission (commitment to Torah, sacrifice and accompaniment to sacrifice) in Babylonian Talmud constitute the sages' interpretive reaction in readjusting Babylonian Jewry to remaining in exile and to the reality of life after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

Disagreement by confrontation

First, while in Aphrahat "abstaining from everything" is appropriate and desirable (presumably for the most advanced people engaged in a life of fasting), in Babylonian Talmud we see the condemnation of such acts especially in the context of lifestyle.

Aphrahat:

For indeed my friend, fasting is not only [abstaining] from bread and water, for there are many ways to undertake a fast. For there is the one who abstains from bread and water to the point of being hungry and thirsty, but there is also the one who abstains in order to be a virgin, and who has hunger but does not eat, and has thirst but does not drink; this fast is better… And [finally],

there is the one who brings together all of these practices and makes them one fast. (Dem. 3.1; Parisot 97-100)

Babylonian Talmud:

Abaye said: Simeon the Just, R. Simeon, and R. Eleazar haKappar, are all of the same opinion, viz., that a nazir is a sinner. Simeon the Just and R. Simeon, as we have stated. R. Eleazar ha-Kappar Berabbi, as it was taught: R. Eleazar ha-Kappar Berabbi says: And he shall make atonement for him, for that he sinned against a soul. Against which soul then has he sinned? But it is because he afflicted himself through abstention from wine. Now, does not this afford an argument from the minor to the major? If one, who afflicted himself only in respect of wine, is called a sinner: how much more so one who ascetically refrains from everything. Hence, everyone who fasts is called a sinner. (bNedarim 10a; compare to bTa'anith 11a)

Second, while in Aphrahat food fasting, alongside of all other types of fasts, is a good practice, if conducted in purity, in Babylonian Talmud there is much that seems to condemn the idea as a whole, even to the point of calling it sinful and describing it as something that brought unnecessary suffering to the sages who practised it.

Aphrahat:

Pure fasting is highly acceptable before God, and it is kept as a treasure in heaven. It is a weapon against the Evil One, and a shield which receives the arrows of the Adversary. I do not speak about this by my own judgment, but rather from the Holy Scriptures, which have already shown us that fasting has always been profitable for those who fast truly. For indeed my friend, fasting is not only [abstaining] from bread and water, for there are many ways to undertake a fast. (Dem. 3.1; Parisot 97)

For, my friend, when one fasts, fasting from wickedness is always more excellent than fasting from bread and water. It is also better than humbling oneself, and better than bending one's neck like a hook or covering oneself with sackcloth and ashes, as Isaiah said, for indeed, when a person abstains from bread, water, and all nourishment and when he covers himself with sackcloth and ashes and when he mourns, he is lovely, virtuous, and beautiful. (Dem. 3.8; Parisot 113)

Babylonian Talmud:

Our Rabbis taught: There are three kinds of dropsy: that [which is a punishment] of sin is thick; that caused by hunger is swollen; and what is caused by magic is thin. Samuel the Little suffered through it. Sovereign of the Universe! he cried out, who will cast lots? [Thereupon] he recovered. Abaye suffered from it. Said Raba, I know of Nahmani that he practises hunger. Raba suffered from it. But was it not Raba himself who said, More numerous are those slain by

delayed calls of nature than the victims of starvation? Raba was different, because the scholars compelled him [to practise restraint] at the set times [for lectures] (bShabbath 33a).

Resh Lakish says: He is termed, Pious, as it is said, The Pious man weans his own soul but he that is cruel etc. R. Shesheth, said: The young scholar who would afflict himself by fasting let a dog devour his meal. R. Jeremiah b. Abba said: There are no public fasts in Babylonia except [the Fast of] the Ninth of Ab. R. Jeremiah b. Abba further said in the name of Resh Lakish: A scholar may not afflict himself by fasting because he lessens thereby his heavenly work. (bTa'anith 11b)

This set of references from Aphrahat and Babylonian Talmud is difficult to evaluate, mainly because Babylonian Talmud's references seem to be highly charged with inter- Babylonian Talmud polemic against asceticism and do not seem to be addressing those outside of its community. Christians impacted the Jews with their practices, which were growing in popularity, while the Jews were impacting Christians with theirs.

Third, sexual abstinence seems to be one of the dominant concerns in the asceticism of Aphrahat's community.[224] On the other hand, in Babylonian Talmud sexual abstinence is rejected for the most part and even when it is given some credence in extraordinary situations that are usually connected with persecutions, the more powerful argumentation is presented for engaging in marital sex and procreation.

Aphrahat:

For there is the one who abstains from bread and water to the point of being hungry and thirsty, but there is also the one who abstains in order to be a virgin, and who has hunger but does not eat, and has thirst but does not drink; this fast is better. (Dem. 3.1; Parisot 97)

For this reason, my brothers, [if there is] any man who is a covenanter or a holy one who loves singleness yet wants a female covenanter ([who is] like him) to live with him, it would be better for him to take a wife openly and not become wild with lust. Likewise for the woman: if she does not wish to be separated from a single one, she should be [united] to the man openly. It is good for a woman to live with a woman, and a man ought to live with a man. Furthermore, if a man wishes to remain in holiness, his wife should not live with him, so that he will not return to his former state and be considered an adulterer. This counsel that I give myself is good and proper and beautiful, as it is also for you, my friends, [who are] single ones (who do not take wives) and female virgins (who do not belong to husbands) and those who love holiness: even if a person encounters difficulty, it is proper and right and good that he [or she] should live alone (Dem. 6.4; Parisot 260-261).

Babylonian Talmud:

Yaltha once said to R. Nahman: Observe, for everything that the Merciful One has forbidden us he has permitted us an equivalent: he has forbidden us blood but has permitted us liver; [he has forbidden us intercourse during] menstruation – [but has permitted us] the blood of purification; [he has forbidden us] the fat of cattle – [but has permitted us] the fat of wild beasts; [he has forbidden us] swine's flesh – [but has permitted us] the brain of the shibbuta; [he has forbidden us] the girutha – [but has permitted us] the tongue of fish; [he has forbidden us] the married woman – [but has permitted us] the divorcee during the lifetime of her former husband; [he has forbidden us] the brother's wife – [but has permitted us] the levirate marriage; [he has forbidden us] the Samaritan woman – [but has permitted us] the beautiful woman [taken in war] (bHullin 109b).

Our Rabbis taught: And when it rested, he said: 'Return O Lord unto the ten thousands and thousands of Israel' (Num. 10:36), teaches that the Divine Presence does not rest on less than two thousand and two myriads of Israelites. Should the number of Israelites happen to be two thousand and two myriads less one, and any particular person has not engaged in the propagation of the race, does he not thereby cause the Divine Presence to depart from Israel! Abba Hanan said in the name of R. Eliezer: He deserves the penalty of death … (bYevamoth 63b-64a)

These particular texts present much stronger evidence that there was indeed a polemical conversation going on between the community represented by Babylonian Talmud and the voice we hear in the writings of Aphrahat. This is the matter of a sharp disagreement that is also witnessed to by Aphrahat himself in Demonstration 17 entitled "Against the Jews, concerning Virginity and Holiness", where the Jews, according to Aphrahat, accuse Christians, saying: "You have prohibited procreation, the blessing of the righteous. You do not take wives, and women are not married to men. You hate procreation, a blessing given from God" (Dem. 18.1). The Jews that threatened Aphrahat's community see a direct correlation in the difficulties that Christians are experiencing during the Sassanian rule and their rejection of God's commandment and therefore his blessing. The Jews connected procreation with holiness, and holiness with blessing, while for Aphrahat holiness largely pertains to being fully dedicated to God oftentimes starting from sexual abstinence (Dem. 6.4-5). Aphrahat writes: "There is also the one who abstains through holiness, for this too is a fast" (Dem. 3.1).

According to the Book of the Laws of Countries, one of the oldest monuments of original Syriac prose and a product of the school of Bardaisan (third century CE), the practice of self-emasculation was practised even before the arrival of Christianity and was reportedly prevented by tough action of the Christian King Abgar. It is not clear how much in the story is historical and how much is fictional, but what is clear is that traditions of extreme asceticism were prevalent in the Syrian orient in even pre-Christian times and they may have been tempered a bit by the arrival of the new Judaic religion (Christianity) from the South East.[225]

Fourth, in Aphrahat abstaining from property is considered a legitimate part of fasting.

Aphrahat:

There is the one who abstains from property, so that he might free himself for his work, and there is the one who abstains from any kind of bed, in order to remain wide awake in prayer. (Dem. 3.1; Parisot 100)

Babylonian Talmud:

There was someone who wished to distribute (more than one fifth) but his colleague did not allow him to do so. And who was the colleague? R. Yeshebab. Others say: R. Yeshebab (was the one who wished to distribute more than one fifth of his wealth). And his colleague did not allow him to do so. And who was his colleague? R. Aqiba (bKethoboth 50a).

Our Rabbis taught: There are four signs: Dropsy is a sign of sin; jaundice is a sign of causeless hatred; poverty is a sign of conceit; croup is a sign of slander. (bShabbath 33a)

The Babylonian Talmud did by no means hold that only rich people can be righteous and be qualified as good rabbis; however, it did generally view poverty, especially self-inflicted poverty, negatively. This position is in sharp contrast to that of Aphrahat. For him poverty, especially self-imposed poverty, is a sign of great spirituality. Once again Babylonian Talmud quotations as well as those from Aphrahat do not necessitate the conclusion that Aphrahat and Para-Rabbinic Jews themselves engaged in a polemic with each other through their writings. Rather, they may indicate that on the street level the followers of both Aphrahat and those of the Rabbis did engage in conversation with each other. If such reconstructions are correct, then Babylonian Talmud sages and Aphrahat had to set forth their arguments for internal consumption to help their followers answer arguments of the opposing group.

4. Conclusion

Despite the adoption of different exegetical practices and often different hermeneutical stances to the text of the Bible, Rabbinic/Para-Rabbinic Judaism and the Early Syriac Church, as represented in this study by Aphrahat, found themselves joint heirs to a host of shared sources and traditions. The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament was the foundational text of this shared tradition as evidenced by the constant interactions with it by both communities. Both Aphrahat and the rabbis breathed the same scriptural, exegetical and often hermeneutical air, arriving sometimes at strikingly similar conclusions, [226] while at other times disagreeing either by omission (Dem. 3.1; bMakkoth 24a) [227] or by confrontation (Dem. 3.1 and bNedarim 10a).[228] As was mentioned before, whether or not the rabbis mentioned in bNedarim 10a had in mind Aphrahat's statement in Dem. 3.1 is impossible to know. What is highly likely, however, is that Aphrahat's statement in Dem. 3.1 was representative of the opinions of many other Babylonian Christians and was known to represent the Christian community at large. The

Talmudic reference clearly is a rebuttal to someone who either makes a claim that such ascetic commitment is appropriate, at least in the case of others, or actually engaged in it himself. The interaction of ideas between the Para-Rabbinic Jewish and Christian communities as represented by Aphrahat, considering the accumulative evidence, can, therefore, be established.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

1. Primary conclusions

This study set out to answer two questions. 1) Did Aphrahat encounter actual Jews during his own lifetime or did he simply project them into his Demonstrations from reading the Scriptures? 2) If it could be established that Aphrahat encountered real Jews in his locale, were the Jews that he encountered of a Rabbinic persuasionor not? This study found that the answers to both of these questions can be given in the affirmative.

First, Aphrahat did not imagine or project the Jews depicted in his Demonstrations from his reading of the Scriptures, but he and his community encountered the Jews personally. Second, Aphrahat and his community, sometimes only via his community, indeed interacted with Rabbinic-related, Para-Rabbinic Jews, whose opinions and practices manifested themselves in one way or another in Talmud Bavli.

This study organized itself around the general theme of ritual as addressed by Aphrahat. It compared the treatments of circumcision, prayer, Kashrut, Passover and fasting in the Demonstrations of Aphrahat with the treatment of the same themes in the Babylonian Talmud. The same pattern was followed in each chapter of the study as it compared the texts under consideration. The first section of each chapter reviewed and compared each theme where Demonstrations and Bavli were in general agreement. The second section surveyed and analyzed the texts at the points where they disagreed with each other without explicitly debunking or even acknowledging the arguments on the other side. The last section reviewed and analyzed materials in Demonstrations and Bavli that seemed to have explicitly responded to each other's points of view.

This final chapter will first present a summary and a final analysis of the research. The presentation of this summary is similar to the process followed to reach the earlier conclusions: first it deals with the agreement, then presents findings of disagreement by omission and then summarizes conclusions regarding disagreement by confrontation. Additionally, it will state a set of secondary conclusions and observations that emerged from this study.

Agreement

Some themes, such as fasting, prayer and Passover, turned out to be areas with much in common. The theme of circumcision had relatively few points of similarity, while the section on Kashrut produced no obvious agreements whatsoever. The level of agreement over all four categories of agreement (fasting, prayer, circumcision and Passover) can be well characterized as uneven.

At times the agreement seems to be precise. That is, Demonstrations and Bavli sometimes use the same vocabulary and agree not only on categories and their terms, but also on the meaning of these categories. For example, Aphrahat, though not in the same way, considered prayer as something that chosen by God as a legitimate replacement of sacrifice after the destruction of the Temple (Dem. 4.18), as the sages of Bavli also affirmed on a great many occasions (bBerachoth 26b). While Bavli does not set up Moses as the supreme prayer practioner, it is intriguing that Aphrahat seems to hold precisely such a view (Dem. 4.7). Another example of a similar kind of agreement could be found in Aphrahat's views of fasting as a means of prayer enhancement (Dem. 4.4, 8; bTa'anit 27b).

More often the agreement between Aphrahat and the Bavli sages was characterized by differences in emphasis. For example, both communities acknowledged the importance of a spiritually circumcised heart. However, while Bavli treated it as a largely peripheral subject (bYevamoth 71b), Aphrahat placed it at the very centre of his belief and argumentation (Dem. 11.1). Another example of a similar difference in emphasis can be seen in Aphrahat's take on food fasting. Both communities believed in keeping fasts. However, for Bavli (bAvodah Zara 8a), food fasting was the fasting, while for Aphrahat, though it was important, it was held to be only one of many types of fasting (Dem. 3.1). Additionally, while for Aphrahat fasts were an expression of commitment to God (Dem. 3.1), for some of the Bavli sages, though certainly not for all, fasting as an ongoing practice was considered sinful (bNedarim 10a).

Yet another category falls under the area of agreement: agreement in category and terms, but not in meaning. For example, both communities held that not all prayer was pleasing to God. While Bavli concentrated on the proper way to pray (bBerachoth 23a), for example, condemning praying while urinating, Demonstrations held that prayer was evil if there was injustice done to people (Dem. 4.14). Another example of such difference in invested meaning can be found in the observance of the Passover feast by both communities. Both held it in high esteem; both, however, approached the meaning of the Passover in an entirely different way (Dem. 12.2; bSukkah 55b). Among other things, they differed on the meaning of the "one house" (for example, Global Church vs. Jerusalem Temple) [229] where the Passover sacrifice had to be commemorated (Dem. 12.2; bPesachim 84a), as well as the object of the Passover sacrifice (Christ vs. animal).

Disagreement by omission

This category of comparison worked to identify texts in which the two communities may have disagreed without directly acknowledging the other party. This type of disagreement may be considered in three separate groupings.

First, some texts make statements to which the opposite side seems to offer no counter-argument. This type of text can be understood without hypothesizing a reference to any contrary views or practices. For example, Aphrahat calls true fasting "treasure in heaven" and "a shield which

received the arrows of the Enemy" (Dem. 3.1), while the sages of Bavli held in high regard a synagogal practice of prayer and fasting (Ma'amad), which was believed to have enhanced the efficacy of sacrifices offered in the Jerusalem Temple (bTa'anit 27b; bMegillah 31b). Another example of Bavli's difference with Aphrahat can be seen in the "how" of Passover observance. Bavli is very detailed in its prescriptions for Passover observance. Aphrahat is strikingly brief about how Passover/Pascha ought to be celebrated. For him appreciating the true meaning of Passover is paramount (bBerachoth 9a; Dem. 12.2-3).

Second, other texts make statements which may also be understood without reference to the opposing side, but contradict those texts on the level of general ideas. For example, Aphrahat's insistence that Gabriel sifts through the prayers of the people and only then brings them up to God (Dem. 3.14) may reflect a post-Temple priestly trajectory; on the other hand, Gabriel's high priestly role is unknown to Bavli, which may reflect anti-Temple sentiments with the endorsements of sages not priests, synagogues not the Jerusalem Temple similar to the attitudes expressed in bBerachoth 53b. A crucial example of a similar disagreement by omission can been seen in Aphrahat's praise for silent and non-verbal prayer (Dem. 4.1) in comparison to the conventional way to pray, which may be seen in the context of the highly developed and elaborate verbal prayer cycle of the Rabbinic Jews.

Third, these texts make statements, still not acknowledging the other side, which can only be understood in the context of the statements made by the other side. For example, Bavli's extensive treatment of fasting on Yom Kippur (bYoma 82a) is offset by the deafening silence of Aphrahat regarding the subject. Another example of the same is Bavli's overall tendency to standardize the prayer life of the Jewish community (bBerachoth 15a-17a), while Aphrahat gives suspiciously brief instructions regarding the way verbal prayer ought to be done (Dem. 4.13). Additionally, Bavli also criticizes the Christian community, probably Jewish Christian or marginally Christian, for using portions of the Shemah (bBerachoth 14b-15a) without observing the rest of God's commandments such as circumcision. Aphrahat, on the other hand, stressed that the great men like Adam, Enoch and Noah were counted among the righteous biblical heroes without undergoing circumcision of the flesh (Dem. 11.3; bPesachim 3b). He argued that they were only circumcised with the circumcision of the heart.

Disagreement by confrontation

This section reviews texts that are best described as disagreement by confrontation. They fall into two major categories. First, the texts that discuss the same themes or biblical texts, which can be explained without concluding that Aphrahat's Christians and the sages of Bavli interacted with each other. One such example of the texts that say different things but may not have in mind the opposing side is found in Dem. 4.1 and bBerachoth 12b, where Aphrahat emphasizes the power and efficacy of prayer, but Bavli underscores the duty of a believer to pray regardless of its miracle-working power.

Second, and more important for this study, is the category which consists of the texts that had in mind the ideas propagated by the opposite side as they sought to argue against them in the Mesopotamian marketplace of ideas. Aphrahat praises the one who fasts through abstaining from bread and water, in addition to engaging in other types of fasts. He argues that some people have developed their spirituality to the extent that they are able to carry out all various fasts as one fast (Dem. 3.1). Meanwhile, Bavli acknowledges that there are people who do just that, but condemns them instead of praising them (bNedarim 10a; bTa'anit 11a). Also, on the theme of fasting, Aphrahat praises the one who commits himself or herself to the life of celibacy by abstaining from all sexual contact (Dem. 3.1; 6.4), while the sages of Bavli condemned to death those who do not engage in procreation (bYevamoth 63b-64a).[230] Important to this study is the example which shows that Aphrahat devotes a disproportionately long part of his argument to persuading the reader that God really does hear people when they pray alone (Dem. 4.12). Aphrahat's lengthy discussion of the matter only makes senseif it is juxtaposed with Bavli's insistence that God hears not an individual Jew, but the Jewish community in prayer (bBerachoth 6a; bBerachoth 8a-8b). Aphrahat spoke of believing Gentiles grafted onto the Olive Tree instead of the Jews who were cut off (Dem. 16.8) from the Olive Tree (Rom. 11). To be explicit, Aphrahat believed that God divorced Israel because of its transgression of the commandments (Dem. 12.3). Bavli emphatically denied that such exchange of the People (Jews) to the Peoples (All Nations) is possible, given God's utmost commitment to Israel (bPesachim 87a). While the above example may have been referring to an earlier polemic, it also certainly fits in the context of Aphrahat's own conversation with the Jews of Mesopotamia. Aphrahat's take on Ezekiel 20:25 that deals with 'good' and 'not good' commandments, is crucial in understanding the nature of Christian-Jewish polemic in fourth-century Mesopotamia. The Persian Sage believed that the ten commandments were the good laws that continue to be in force for everyone, while all other commandments, largely in what are often labelled today as judicial and ceremonial categories, were also given to Israel by God but were essentially "not good" (Dem. 15.8). The sages of Bavli counter that the whole Law was good and must not be divided into good and bad laws, since all of the revelation of God was given to Moses on Sinai and thus essentially constitutes a united revelation (bBerachoth 5a). While most of these examples taken one by one could be hypothetically explained in different ways other than direct polemic with contemporary Jews, it is important that our study considers their accumulative effect.

While many other examples can be provided, one which is certainly worth discussing is how both communities dealt with 1 Kings 17, where unclean birds (ravens) brought food to Elijah when he was at Kerith Brook and why this text was important enough for them to deal with in such a detail. Aphrahat declares that, in spite of the uncleanness of the ravens according to the Law, Elijah was not defiled by receiving food from the birds (Dem. 15.5). The sages, struggling with how to explain this seeming inconsistency, suggested that the solution lays in recognizing the following possibility: the text should read not Orebim – ravens, but Orebiim – Orebs. In other words, there may have been, some sages speculated, two men assisting Elijah, both named Oreb. Hence it was not the ravens, but people of whose food Elijah partook in his place of hiding

(bChullin 5a). However unlikely this explanation may be, it seems that the sages of Bavli dealt with this text out of the necessity to confront the arguments that Christians, perhaps trained by Aphrahat, were bringing up in their conversations in the public square. This issue is clearly not among a common selection of themes of anti-Jewish Christian writings. Another obvious example of a similar dynamic is the treatment of the story of Samson drinking from the jawbone of the donkey with which he also killed the Philistines (Jud. 14:1-15:20). For Aphrahat the lesson was clear that even in the Older Covenant Samson was not defiled after coming into a direct contact with a ceremonially unclean item (Dem. 15.5). For the sages of Bavli this text presented a real problem as well, and they also were forced to think of some very creative solutions (bNazir 4b). Both examples with Elijah and Samson show at least that Jewish and Christian communities struggled with the same texts and were forced to think "out of the box" and, because of their cultural, scriptural and linguistic proximity, were very likely exchanging these ideas with each other through their interactions. The last example that must be mentioned is the treatment by both communities of the biblical idea of the "second circumcision", or being "circumcised again." They understood this in completely different ways. While Babylonian Talmud concludes that Joshua completed the incomplete circumcision (bYevamoth 71b), where the pieces of skin still covered the corona of the reproductive organ, Aphrahat explains Joshua's second circumcision (Josh. 5:2) as a circumcision of the flesh, second in both chronology and importance to the circumcision of the heart (Dem. 11.6; 11.12). In addition, while the two following examples do not, according to our definitions (see the terms), constitute disagreement by confrontation, they nevertheless add weight to the case for such interaction. One case has to do with Aphrahat's criticism (Dem. 12.2) of Passover sacrifices outside of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Jews in his locale as it is confirmed by Rava's who was contemporary to Aphraha Amora's ruling that is stated in agreement with Aphrahat's criticism not to call the Passover lamb – Passover, because it makes it sound like the Jews violating the commandment not to sacrifice outside of the Temple. The other case has to do with Aphrahat indicating that the Jews in his locale did not use the food or wine made by Gentiles (Dem.15.2). This fact is also confirmed by Meshnaic ruling that the Jews ought not to eat food or drink wine made by Gentiles (mAvodat Zarah 2:4, 6).

Neusner in his Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth Century Iran argued convincingly that Aphrahat did not depend on Rabbinic training in his biblical and theological reasoning. He showed ably and clearly that there could be other explanations that would account for the similarities between the Rabbinic and Aphrahatian readings of the shared texts. For example, he highlights how the number of parallels cited by Funk, Ginzberg and Gavin [231] does not in the end prove the case for dependence.[232] Additionally Neusner cites other "parallels" that they do not mention. He notes reasons such as misconceptions about Ancient Judaism that led these researchers to draw unnecessary conclusions. This author is in full agreement with Neusner on this point, but he experiences problems with the way Neusner addresses the issue of the potential polemic between the Rabbis and Aphrahat. Neusner

concludes that the two never had any contact or any kind of communication – "the echoes of that conversation" are not even heard in their biblical exegesis (pg.168).

First, Neusner seems to fall into the same methodological trap that snared the scholars he has criticised, but differently. He correctly argued that previous scholars had viewed Judaism as a monolith and hence for them if Aphrahat met the Jews, then the Jews he met must have been Rabbinic in their orientation (pg.155). Unfortunately, and surprisingly, Neusner himself, judging from the arguments in his work, did not take his idea far enough. The only two interpretive options that he presented were: 1) Rabbinic Judaism and 2) Non-Rabbinic Judaism. Therefore not only did his argument fail to account for the various stages of Rabbinical Judaism's development and hence its penetration and control of Jewish society, but it also failed to acknowledge a phenomena that could be called a Para-Rabbinic or Rabbinic-related Judaism (see terms).

Since Neusner only recognized these two possibilities it becomes easier to see how he could have missed so much relevant material that would have argued that the more complex Christian-Jewish and Aphrahatian-Rabbinic interaction actually did take place. In other words Neusner's understanding of what was possible guided his search. The present author is mindful of his own failings and inconsistencies and recognizes that his own research could be missing things and no doubt does as well. But it is also true that the methodological options chosen by the current research have a greater potential to encompass a variety of scenarios that were unavailable to Neusner given his methodology.

Second, Neusner failed to take into the account: 1) what may be termed as "hidden polemics" or "disagreement by omission" (see terms) and 2) the likelihood that the interaction was not direct, where Aphrahat and the Rabbis had personal and more or less formal debates, but rather that it was their disciples who debated each other and therefore the level of the discussion reflected in the official ecclesiastical texts on both sides cannot be held to the same verification standards that would have been appropriate in the case of more direct interaction. In other words one of the reasons that Neusner was not seeing the interaction, though Neusner did note that the "rabbinical literature is notoriously silent about things the rabbis did not like" (pg. 145), was because did not considere the possibility of such hidden polemics.

Third, while acknowledging throughout his work a fair number of points that argue against his position, Neusner surprisingly seems to dismiss them altogether in the end. For example, when he talks about Aphrahat's treatment of Deut.32:21 on pg.169. He mentions these kinds of insights as he goes through his material, but does so without affording them a proper place as texts that may cast doubt on his theory. Neusner even states that: "Still, it is curious that among the few items more or less pertinent to Aphrahat's interpretation, several were attributed to his contemporaries and near-contemporaries, e.g. Rava… R. Joseph… Rabbah…" (pg. 169) or "Here the rabbis and Aphrahat part company, for while the latter insisted that commandments had no salvific value… the rabbis held that the commandments…" reconciled Israel to God,

increased the merit of Israel, and in time to come would help Israel to merit salvation (pg.181). Insights like this among many others should have encouraged Neusner to look for possible interactions more deeply and more broadly than he did in his research, but instead in the final analysis he concluded that the Demonstrations contain "not the slightest overt hint of such an encounter". One other example is a rabbinic ruling regarding avoidance of food and wine prepared by gentiles (mAvodat Zarah 2:4, 6). Weitzman, responding to Neusner's claim that the Jews encountered by Aphrahat had based their Judaism on the Bible only, argues that "it is difficult to accept Neusner's view… Aphrahat's references to dietary laws show rather that the Jews who had not joined the church by the fourth century were precisely those who accepted rabbinic halachah" [233] (pg. 145 in Neusner and Dem.15.2 in Aphrahat). This researcher, while agreeing with Weitzman's critique of Neusner on this issue, wishes to adjust Weitzman's statement to read: Aphrahat's references to dietary laws show rather that the Jews whom Aphrahat met were precisely those who accepted in some cases rabbinic halachah and were therefore in one way or another in contact with the Rabbinic Judaism proper.

At times Neusner seems to argue backward from his conclusions. For example, he calls Aphrahat's argumentation regarding Christology "disingenuous" and after asking if it was possible that Aphrahat honestly represented Mesopotamian Christian Christology, Neusner passes what now appears to be a mistaken verdict – "I doubt it." (pg.130-131) Such conclusions are at best unnecessary as Petersen showed regarding the case of low Christology in Aphrahat.[234]

Current author believes that Neusner is largely correct when he summarizes his survey of the comparison of Aphrahat and the rabbis when he writes: "…rabbis simply did not interest themselves in the Scriptures that most interested Aphrahat…" Where I differ with Neusner is in his "black and white" nature of these assessments. The current researcher argues that while the rabbis certainly were not preoccupied with answering Aphrahat or the Christians associated with him, it is undeniable that at times they answered, usually by opposing, at least some of these arguments. They did so sometimes by omission, and sometimes by confrontation, refuting views that were too similar to those of Aphrahat for the present author to deny any connection between them at all.

Neusner acknowledged in a later work, when discussing various portions of Leviticus Rabbah in relation to Aphrahat's claims, that: "If Aphrahat had demanded a direct answer, he could not have received a more explicit one. He claims Israel does nothing right. Sages counter, speaking in their own settings of course, that they do everything right. Sages then turn the tables on the position of Aphrahat – again addressing it head-on. While the nations may do everything Israel does, they do it wrong."[235] The position of this thesis differs from Neusner's later (1991) work in that: 1) while Neusner speaks of the interaction as hypothetical, the present researcher suggests that the evidence at hand justifies calling the interaction real and concrete; and 2) the Jews that Aphrahat encountered were indeed connected with Rabbinic Judaism, but they would be best described as Para-Rabbinic (see section 1.4).

Finally, Neusner must be praised for bringing before contemporary scholarship Aphrahat's writings and placing Aphrahat on the map of current research. He also must be given a credit for this statement on pg. 195 when he wrote: "I do not suggest the work is done. The task of careful and detailed comparison of Aphrahat and rabbinical writings is not yet begun. My purpose has been to show prevailing impressions to be imprecise and their implications exaggerated, falsely interpreted, or, at the very least, open to question." In spite of the fact that the current researcher ended up in disagreement with Neusner on the nature of Christian-Jewish polemic, he certainly knows just as Neusner did that the work on Aphrahat has by no means been completed and at best has moved forward to be followed by a future and one hopes brighter and more disciplined generation of scholars who would also fall in love with much of the content and the spirit of Aphrahat's Demonstrations.

2. Secondary conclusions

The polemical nature of both sections

It has been customary to talk about the first part of Aphrahat's work as Book I (Dem. 1-11). It was claimed that in these chapters Aphrahat dealt with the issues of Christian piety. It is only when we get to the second part, so goes the traditional theory, of the Demonstrations (Dem. 11-22, 23), customarily called Book II, that we were supposedly encountering anti-Jewish polemical writing. This study offers two corrections to this view. First, the so-called pietistic demonstrations, such as on Fasting and on Prayer, were shown in this study to be just as polemical as those which have the Jewish thematic titles. Second, the nature of authorial intent is clearly spelled out in Aphrahat in his acrostic structure. Book I of Demonstrations should then include Dem. 1-22 and Book II, if one must assign to it any number at all, would consist only of Dem. 23. This demonstration seems to have been the beginning of a new series that Aphrahat may have envisioned, but was prevented from completing. Dem. 23 once again begins with the Syriac letter ܩ that in Aphrahat's acrostic use signifies beginning of something new.

The Jewish Mission to the Christians

As far as the ongoing nature of the debate regarding whether or not Judaism was ever a missionary religion, this study offers no decisive new information, but it adds to the discussion of the nature under which it would be possible if not probable to conceive of the Jewish community in its Rabbinic, Para-Rabbinic or non-Rabbinic versions as engaged in some kind of missionary activity. This study suggests that the Jewish community encountered by Aphrahat did indeed engage in missionary activity, whether organized or not organized is impossible to know, towards Christians, but with one very important condition. The condition was that the Christians pursued for conversion by the Jewish community, or at least some of its representatives, were originally Jewish themselves, either by birth or through previous conversion to Judaism or simply belonging to an equivalent of the New Testament God-fearers.

This perspective may be able to reconcile some argumentation that has been presented over the years by both sides of the debate. The thesis, then, in this researcher's rendering, states that the Jews did engaged in activity where they sought to persuade Christians to leave that faith and to convert to Judaism, but that they did so – probably almost exclusively – in relation to those in the Ancient Christian Church who originated from, or were in some way connected with, some form of Judaism. It would make sense, then, for Aphrahat to argue most of his case from the OT scriptural collection and only relatively rarely bringing the New Covenant scriptures into his argument. This concern may help to understand why Aphrahat often ignored the obvious examples of the faithful, while spending a disproportionate amount of time on the "traditional" heroes of Israel as was the case with Ester and Mordecai (Dem. 3.10-13). Whether or not these Para-Rabbinic Jews were organized in their mission to "return that which was lost" or simply that the circumstances were such that Para-Rabbinic Judaism presented an option that was far more attractive, is impossible to know.

The direction of prayer

One example of the most important markers of Eastern Christian prayer was that it was directed to the East. There are different rationales for the custom. They range from the promise of Jesus that his second coming would come from the East (Matt. 24:27) to praying towards the direction of the Garden of Eden. It is striking that this idea and practice are altogether absent from Aphrahat's commentary. One possibility is that Aprhahat's location would have required him to turn literally 180 degrees from the Jerusalem Temple direction, if he were to pray towards the East, because for him the Temple in Jerusalem would have been in the West. It is reasonable to suppose that for Aphrahat turning to the East in prayer may have meant literally turning his back on Jerusalem – a position that would not have been understood by his Jewish Christian, and those among Gentile Christians who were influenced by them, followers, who still had a high regard for the place of God's own choosing. Praying towards the East may have been fine, but turning your back on the place of God's ancient and covenantal residence may have been "too much" for Aphrahat's people to handle. We may never know with certainty the reason for Aphrahat's silence, but some possible explanations such as those mentioned above can pass the test of plausibility.[236]

Three nights and three days

Aphrahat sets forth an intriguing counting schema that may help to reconcile what seem to be contradictory statements regarding the length of Jesus' death or at least shed light on how some Eastern Christian communities understood Jesus' prophecy and viewed its subsequent fulfilment. In the mind of Aphrahat the three days and three nights start (Dem. 12.7) when Christ offers his body and his blood to his disciples. Aphrahat concludes in Dem. 12.7: "Thus, from the time when he gave his body to be eaten and his blood to be drunk, there were three days and three nights." One should, therefore, start the counting from Thursday night, when Jesus was already considered dead by Aphrahat. Next he adds the first 6 hours after sunrise on Friday (=1 day and

1 night), then the 3-hour mid-day darkness was counted as one more night and, correspondingly, the rest of Friday day-time was one more day (now, 2 nights and 2 days). Next, the night from Friday to Saturday and the whole day of Saturday was added (= 3 days and 3 nights, similar to Jonah). Finally, the night on Sunday was the night of the resurrection. This sequence may or may not be the solution for the problem in counting of the days in question, but it certainly shows the type and level of complexity of the argument that some Syriac Christians were employing.

Christian Pascha and Christian Sabbath

There is a connection that can be observed between Aphrahat's ideas regarding the Christian festival of Pascha and the Christian Sabbath. In Western Christendom that idea of the Christian Sabbath was already developed by the time of Aphrahat. In 321 CE, in an effort to unify the church as well as to make attending Christian worship services easier, Constantine decreed an Empire-wide weekly day of rest. This day was to be Sunday instead of Saturday. The Christian Sabbath in the mind of many ancient Christians was a New Covenant alternative to, or rightful replacement of, the Jewish Sabbath. Christ by His resurrection ushered in not only new redemption but also new creation and therefore brought about the new rest for God's people – the church. Aphrahat knows nothing about the Christian Sabbath that was 'transferred from the Seventh Day to the First Day' to commemorate on a weekly basis the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At least nothing like this can be seen anywhere in Demonstrations. For Aphrahat Sabbath concerns had to do not with the appropriate day, [237] but with the true observance of the Sabbath vs. a false one.

His Sabbath views connect with his ideas about Christian Pascha. As was mentioned before, Aphrahat viewed the Christian Pascha not as Easter was viewed in the West (the Day of Christ's Resurrection), but as the day of Christ's death instead. Therefore, the meaning of Pascha and the 'Sabbath to Lord's Day' transfer are related. Just as Pascha did not commemorate Christ's resurrection, but rather Christ's death, so it was that Aphrahat's Sabbath did not include a change of day from the seventh to the first.

END NOTES

[1] See Beggiani, C.S. 1984. Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality: The Syriac Tradition. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 13-28; McVey, K. 1989. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns. New York: Paulist Press, 3-57.

[2] See Brock, S.P. 1979. Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources. Journal of Jewish Studies 30: 223-225; Drijvers, H.J.W. 1982. Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-speaking Christianity. In Second Century 2:157-175.

[3] Koltun-Fromm 1996, 45-63.

[4] Though Rosemary Radford's reference to the fourth century as the first century of Christianity and Judaism as discrete faiths is almost certainly mistaken, it is also true that in the fourth century significant decisions were made to further differentiate partition between the Jews and Christians (Ruether, R.R. 1972. Judaism and Christianity: Two Fourth-Century Religions. In Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion 2: 1-10).

[5] See Муравьев, А.В. 2002. Афраат. Православная энциклопедия, т. IV. М., 184-185.

[6] See Cook, J.M. 1983. The Persian Empire. London: Dent & Son.; Dandamaev, M.A. & Lukonin, V.G. 1989. The culture and social institutions of ancient Iran. New York: Cambridge University Press; Dandamaev, M.A. & Vogelsang, W.J. 1989. A political history of the Achaemenid Empire. Leiden: E.J. Brill; Fischer, W.B. (ed.) 1991. The Cambridge history of Iran. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Frye, R.N. 1984. The history of Iran. München: Beck; Vogelsang, W.J. 1992. The rise and organization of the Achaemenid Empire: The eastern Iranian evidence. Leiden: E.J. Brill; Wiesehofer, J. 1996. Ancient Persia. London: Tauris.

[7] Aphrahat ministered, at least part of the time, in the context of persecution by the Persians and what seems to have been a period of intimidation of Christians by the Jews. As far as the Gentile and Jesus-believing Jews were concerned, during this period of persecution they were faced with a clear choice between two faiths both rooted in the history of Ancient Israel – one that was persecuted and abused (Christianity), and the other that was tolerated and legitimised (Judaism).

[8] For an excellent intoduction to Aphrahat's life see Bruns 1991, 35-73; See also Bruns, 1990.

[9] Many scholars have pointed out that Aphrahat's reading of Biblical texts has little in common with the Greek Patristic tradition (Ortiz de Urbina 1947, 87-106); also Taylor 1998, 312-331.

[10] Of course, it is possible that Aphrahat intentionally avoided Nicaean definitions. He may have been expressing disagreement simply by ignoring them and stating things within the matrix

of apostolic phraseology. This is possible, but unlikely, because Aphrahat never seems to shy away from being explicit about his personal judgments and disagreements.

[11]Petersen 1992, 241-244.

[12] Practically all we can say with confidence about Aphrahat comes to us from the Demonstrations itself.

[13] Koster's view is that Aphrahat had unquestionable view of the Old Testament from where he drew all of his teachings (Koster 2006, 131-141).

[14] See Griffith, S.H. 1993. "Monks", "Singles", and the "Sons of the Covenant": Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology. In EYLOGHMA: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S.J. E. Carr, S. Parenti, A.-A. Thiermeyer and E. Velkovska (eds.). (Studia Anselmiana 110, Analecta Liturgica 17). Roma: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 141-160.

[15] See Vööbus, A. 1951. Celibacy: A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church. Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 1; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile; Murray, R. 1974-1975. The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syrian Church. New Testament Studies 21: 59-80.

[16] See Aphrahat's Demonstrations, 3. The majority of Syriac translations in this dissertation come from Lehto's work, with some minor corrections and adjustments.

[17] See Barnes, T.D. 1985. Constantine and the Christians of Persia. Journal of Roman Studies 75: 126-136.

[18] Snaith calls this letter that Constantine sent "his famous but unwise letter," (p.235) since he believes it is clear that this letter contributed to persecution of Christians at a latter time (Snaith 1982, 235-250).

[19] Aphrahat stated: "I wrote the first ten in the six hundred and forty-eighth year of the kingdom of Alexander, son of Philip the Macedonian…" (Dem. 22:25).

[20] Aphrahat further stated: "I have written these last twelve in the six hundred and fifty-fifth year of the kingdom of the Greeks and the Romans (which is the kingdom of Alexander), and in the thirty-fifth year of the king of Persia" (Dem. 22:25).

[21] Owens 1983, 3.

[22] See Gafni, I. 2002. Babylonian Rabbinic Culture. In Cultures of the Jews: A New History. Ed.: D. Biale. Danvers: Schocken, 223-265.

[23] See also bBerakhot 57b.

[24] See Fine, S. 1996. From Meetings House to Sacred Realm: Holiness and the Ancient Synagogue. In Sacred Realm: The Emergence of the Synagogue in the Ancient World. Ed.: S. Fine. Oxford: Oxford University Press and New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 46-47.

[25] See Gafni, 223.

[26] Neither Pliny nor Strabo mentions the existence of a Jewish community in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, which most likely indicates that from the standpoint of the ethnography of the region as whole, the Jews were not a dominant group. While there were some fully Jewish towns (such as Nehardea, Huzal, Nehar Pekod), the Jews were fairly equally distributed in all the major cities of the Empire (Neusner 1965-1970,Vol. I, 11, 15); Neusner, J. 1978. There We Sat Down. New York: Ktav, 26-43.

[27] See Widengren, G. 1961. The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire. In Iranica Antiqua I: 117.

[28] According to Neusner, the territory of the satrapy of Adiabene was roughly the place where the ten Northern Israel tribes were deposited by the Assyrians. While their descendents were not the main population, they most likely continued to survive (Neusner 1965-1970, Vol. I, 13-14).

[29] See Widengren, 118.

[30] Building on Neusner's supposition, Ouellette concluded that Aphrahat must have known Mesopotamian Jews who themselves had little contact with rabbis, supporting Neusner's proposition that there was "absolutely no contact" between the parties (Ouellette 1977, 194).

[31] See Schwartz, S. 2004. Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 BCE to 640 CE. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 103-128.

[32] "…few cities were inhabited by a single ethnic or religious group" (Neusner 1965-1970, Vol. I, 3.)

[33] Ibid., 124.

[34] See Gafni, 227; Goodblatt, D. 1975. Rabbinic Instruction in Sassanian Babylonia. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 44-59, 263-285.

[35] See Gafni, 234.

[36] Ibid., 236.

[37] Romeny 2005, 13.

[38] Eusebius claims that he translated this correspondence from Syriac to Greek (HE I.13.6-10).

[39] See Griffith, S. 2003. The Doctrina Addai as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century. Hugoye 6(2): §§ 1-46.

[40] See Harrak, A. (ed) 2005. The Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle. Writings from the Greco-Roman World II. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1-83; See also Jullien, C. and F. 2001. Les Actes de Mar Mari. L'apôtre de la Mésopotamie. (Apocryphes 11). Turnhout: Brepols.

[41] See Ramelli, I. 2006. Possible Historical Traces in the Doctrina Addai? Hugoye 9(1): §§ 1-23; Additionally, according to several Russian scholars (Bongard-Levin, Gaibov and Koshelenko), the fact that the church in Dura-Europos that was discovered along with the more famous synagogue was not mentioned in any Syriac literature may point to the fact that the legends may not have exaggerated, but instead underestimated, the level of Christian presence in the East by the fourth and fifth centuries. While these scholars certainly do not perceive these legends to be fully historically reliable, they do maintain that these traditions may be authentic in some way (Бонгард-Левин, Г.М., Гаибов, В.А., и Кошеленко, Г.А. 2005. Распространение христианства на Востоке: В свете исследований памятников Дура-Европос. Вестник древней истории 3: 58-73).

[42] See Harvey, S.A. 2006. Syria and Mesopotamia. In The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 1: Origins to Constantine. Ed.: M.M. Mitchell and F.M. Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 365.

[43] See Romeny 2005, 14.

[44] See Vööbus 1958, 4.

[45] See Murray, R. 1975. The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity. In East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period. Ed.: N.G. Garsoian, T.F. Mathews and R.W. Thomson, 3-16. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 3-16.

[46] See Neusner 1965-1970, Vol. I, 166.

[47] See Drijvers, H. 1992. Syrian Christianity and Judaism. In The Jews among Pagans and Christians. Eds.: J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak. London/New York: Routledge, 159-177.

[48] See Weitzman 1999, 206-262; Owens 1985, 1-48.

[49] Ibid., 243.

[50] Ibid., 245.

[51] Romeny 2005, 28-32.

[52] Ibid., 27.

[53] See McCullough W.S. 1982. A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam. Chico: Scholars Press, 3-36; 37-92.

[54] See Mullen, R.L. 2004. The Expansion of Christianity: A Gazetteer of Its First Three Centuries. (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 69). Leiden/Boston: Brill, 21-139, 263-332.

[55] See Brown, D.W. 2009. The New Introduction to Islam. Oxford: Blackwell, 26.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Aphrahat probably composed the fifth Demonstration at a time of increasing tension between the Roman and the Sassanian Empires. In anticipation of the Christian Emperor's military campaign against Shapur II, the Persian Sage found in the bellicose language of the Book of Daniel a reassuring message for fourth-century Christians living under Sassanian rule (Morrison 2004, §1-33).

[58] It is important to acknowledge that while we can speak of Aphrahat's community, it is only in terms of our current definition that we can speak of Bavli community, since the development of Bavli is far more complex that the development of Demonstrations.

[59] See Goldberg, H.E. 2003. Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life. Berkeley: University of California Press, 33-34.

[60] See Walter, J. and Zemer, M. (eds.). 1994. Conversion to Judaism in Jewish Law. Tel Aviv: Freehof Institute of Progressive Halakhah, 1-215; Kister, M.J. 1994. '… And He was Born Circumcised…': Some Notes on Circumcision in Hadith. Oriens 34: 10-30.

[61] See Gollaher, D.L. 2000. Circumcision: A History of the World's most Controversial Surgery. New York: Basic Books, 2; Sasson, J.M. 1966. Circumcision in the Ancient Near East. Journal of Biblical Literature 85: 473-476; Kennedy, J.G. 1970. Circumcision and Excision in Egyptian Nubia. Man 5: 175-191.

[62] See McEleney, N.J. 1974. Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law. New Testament Studies 20: 319-341; Levenson, J. 1993. The New Enemies of Circumcision. Commentary 109: 29-36; Schäfer, P. 1999. The Bar-Kokhba Revolt and Circumcision. In Jüdische Geschichte in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit. Ed.: Aharon Oppenheimer. (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien 44). Munich: Oldenbourg, 119-132; Hall, R.G. 1992. Epispasm: Circumcision in Reverse. Bible Review 8.4: 52-57; Hall, R.G. 1988. Epispasm and the Dating of Ancient Jewish Writings. Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha 2: 71-86; Archer, L. 1990. Bound by Blood: Circumcision and Menstrual Taboo. In After Eve: Women, Theology, and the Christian Tradition. Ed.: J.M. Soskice. London: Marshall Pickering, 38-61; Fox, M.V. 1974. The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Light of the Priestly 'OT Etiologies. Revue Biblique 81: 557-596.

[63] See Abraham, A.T. 1973. The Baptismal Initiation of the Qumran Community. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Princeton Theological Seminary, 281.

[64] Ibid., 286.

[65] Jewish Antiquities 20.46

[66] tAvodah Zarah 3:13; bAvodah Zarah 27a; also yYevamoth 9:1 9a.

[67] tAvodah Zarah 3:12.

[68] According to Cohen, the meaning of circumcision gradually changed from purity to sanctity, from an emphasis on foreskin to blood, from protection to salvation, and from covenant to sacrament (see Cohen, S.J.D. 2003. A Brief History of Jewish Circumcision Blood. In The Covenant of Circumcision. Ed.: Elizabeth Wyner Mark. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 30-42.

[69] See Hoffman, L. 1996. Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 11.

[70] Ibid., 27.

[71] See Marcus, J. 1989. The Circumcision and Uncircumcision in Rome. New Testament Studies 35: 67-81.

[72] See Maimonides, M. 1963. Guide to the Perplexed. Trans.: by Shlomo Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.III: 49, 609

[73] See Collins, J.J. 1985. A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century. In To See Ourselves as Others See us. Ed.: J. Neusner and E. Freirichs. Chico: Scholar's Press. 163-186.

[74] bYevamoth 47b.

[75] See Montaigne, M. 1946. Journal de voyage. Ed.: C. Dédéyan. Paris: Boivin, 213-216.

[76] Catechism of the Catholic Church. 1994. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

[77] See Scaer, D.P. 1999. Baptism. St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 32.

[78] See Skira, J.Z. 'Circumcise Thy Heart': Aphrahat's Theology of Baptism. Diakonia 31:2 (1998):115-128.

[79] Romans 2:25-29.

[80] See Berkley, T.W. 2000. From Broken Covenant to Circumcision of the Heart: Pauline Intertextual Exegesis in Romans 2:17-29. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 114-116;

Campbell, W.S. 1978. Salvation for Jews and Gentiles: Krister Stendahl and Paul's Letter to the Romans. In Studia Biblica, Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors: Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies. Ed.: E. Livingstone. (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement 3). Sheffield: JSOT, 65-72.

[81] Virginity Hymn 44.17-20 (See McVey, K.E. (ed). 1989. Ephrem the Syrian: The Hymns. New York: Paulist Press, 444-445).

[82] See Maynard, J. 1925. Judaism and Mazdayasna: A Study in Dissimilarities. Journal of Biblical Literature, 44(1-2): 163-170.

[83] See Neusner, J. 1963. Skand Gumanik Vicar A Zoroastrian Critique of Judaism (Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen). A New Translation and Exposition. Journal of the American Oriental Society 83(3): 283-294.

[84] Chrysostom writes:

There was pain and trouble in practice of that, and no other advantage accruing from the circumcision, than this only; that by this sign they were known and distinguished from other nations. But our circumcision, I mean the grace of baptism, gives cure without pain, and procures to us a thousand benefits, and fills us with the grace of the Spirit and it has no determinate time, as that had; but one that is in the very beginning of his age, or one that is in the middle of it, or one that is in his old age, may receive this circumcision made without hands. In which there is no trouble to be undergone, but to throw off the load of sins, and receive pardon for all foregoing offences (John Chrysostom, Hom. 40. in Genesis, par. 4. in Wall, W. 1851. The History of Infant Baptism. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 39-40; see also 228, 231).

[85] Additionally, Israelites in Bavli are not referred to exclusively as children of Abraham, but as children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (bBaba Kama 86a; bBaba Metzia 49a; bBaba Metzia 83a).

[86] "The Syrian dialogues did not so much exalt Christianity over Judaism as the Gentiles over the Jews." (See Olster, D.M. 1994. Roman Defeat, Christian Response and the Literary Construction of the Jew. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 121.)

[87] See Neusner 1991, 1, 5, 14, 119.

[88] See the entire work in Zunz, L. 1859. Die Ritus des synagogalen Gottesdienstes geschichtlich entwickelt. Berlin: J. Springer.

[89] See the entire work in Elbogen, I. 1931. Der jüdische Gottensdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung. Frankfurt-am-Main: J. Kaufmann.

[90] See Goldschmidt, E.D. 1957. Studies on Jewish Liturgy by German-Jewish Scholars. Leo Baeck Institute Year Book. London: Leo Baeck Institute Press,2.

[91] See Heinemann, J. 1964. Prayer in the Period of the Tanna'im and the Amora'im: Its Nature and its Patterns (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Magnes. Prayer in Talmud is the updated English version of the 1964 work. See also Heinemann, J. 1960. Prayer of the Beth Midrash Origin. Journal of Jewish Studies 5: 264-280; Heinemann, J. 1960. The Formula Melekh Ha-'Olam. Journal of Jewish Studies 11: 177-179.

[92] See Fleischer, E. 1990. On the Beginnings of Obligatory Jewish Prayer. Tarbiz 59: 397-441. For a response to Fleischer see Reif. S.C. 1991. On the Earliest Development of Jewish Prayer. Tarbiz 60: 677-681.

[93] See Petuchowski, J.J. 1983. The Liturgy of the Synagogue: History, Structure and Contents. In Approaches to Ancient Judaism IV. Ed.: W.S. Green. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-64.

[94] Naphtali Wieder used to refer in his Jews' College lectures to the importance of understanding that Judaism always had an excellent digestive system, and that its liturgy was capable of absorbing all manner of content at different periods (Reif 1993, 19).

[95] See Sarason, R. 1982. Recent Developments in the Study of Jewish Liturgy. In The Study of Ancient Judaism I: Mishna, Midrash, Siddur. Ed.: J. Neusner. New York: Ktav, 180-187.

[96] See Hoffman, L.A. 1987. Beyond the Text. A Holistic Approach to Liturgy. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1-20, 172-182.

[97] See Zahavy, T. 1989. Three Stages in the Development of Early Rabbinic Prayer. In From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest for Understanding. Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox. Vol. 1.Ed.: J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs and N.M. Sarna. Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 233-265; Zahavy, T. 1991. Ten Principles for Interpreting Early Christian Liturgical Evidence. In The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship. Ed.: P.F. Bradshaw and L.A. Hoffman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 3-21.

[98] See Reif 1993, 53-152.

[99] For discussion of the parallels between Rabbinic and the Church Fathers' writings on the liturgy see Gavin, F. 1929. Rabbinic Parallels in Early Church Orders. In Contributions to the Scientific Study of Jewish Liturgy. Ed.: J.J. Petuchowski. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 305-317. Neusner is correct in his critique of Gavin's work. It tends to cite the parallels that are not the result of influence or dependence, but rather of a common scriptural source. See also Petuchowski, J.J. 1964. Halakhah in the Church Fathers. Ed.: W. Jacob. Essays in Honor of Solomon B. Freehof. Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 264-268.

[100] See Bokser, B.M. 1981. Ma'al and Blessings over Food: Rabbinic Transformation of Cultic Terminology and Alternative Modes of Piety. Journal of Biblical Literature 100(4): 557.

[101] Quoted in Langer 1998, 110.

[102] See Reif 1993, 99.

[103] See Heinemann 1977, 14.

[104] Heinemann 1977, 14-15.

[105] Also see yBerachoth 4.1, 7b. It states that "they derived the prayers from the daily sacrifices." Also in yBerachoth 7a we are told that the sacrifice of the heart is prayer (Langer 1998, 6). Langer lists helpful principles with regard to the communal nature of prayer, the structural framework of Rabbinic blessings and the application of those principles (20-36).

[106] In bShabbath 119b we read a similar text: "The gates of Paradise are opened for anyone who answers, 'Amen' with all his might."

[107] See Elbogen, I. 1993. Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 205.

[108] Langer 1998, 7.

[109] See mBerachoth 4.5-6; tBerachoth 3.16, 18; bBerachot 30a; pBerachoth 4.5, 8b.

[110] See Goldberg, A. 1981. Service of the Heart: Liturgical Aspects of Synagogue Worship. In Standing before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Traditions with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterricher. Ed.: A. Finkel and L. Frizzell. New York: Ktav, 195-211.

[111] Langer 1998, 10, fn. 35.

[112] המקום is frequently used as a metonymy for God.

[113] Langer 1998, 8.

[114] Abaye and Rava are frequently mentioned in connection with questions about the order of prayer. Cf. bBerachoth 27b; 29a, bPesachim 117b, bYoma87b and bSotha 40a. (See Elbogen, I. 1993. Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 209 (205-213)).

[115] Heinemann 1977, 37.

[116] See Bradshaw, P.F. 2002. The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, x.

[117] See Kimmelman, R. 1997. The Shema and the Amidah: Rabbinic Prayer. In Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology. Ed.: M. Kiley et al. London: Routledge, 115.

[118] See Bradshaw, P.F. 1991. Ten Principles for Interpreting Early Christian Liturgical Evidence. In The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship. Ed.: P. F. Bradshaw and L. A. Hoffman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 48.

[119] See Di Sante, C. 1985. Jewish Prayer: The Origins of the Christian Liturgy. New York: Paulist Press, 87.

[120] See Brock 1987; Murray, R. 1975. The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity. In East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period. Ed.: N.G. Garsoian, T.F. Mathews and R.W. Thomson. Washington, D.C: Catholic University Press, 3-16; Brock, S.P. 1982. Prayer of the Heart in the Syriac Tradition. Sobornost 4(2): 131-142; Knohl, I. 1996. Between Voice and Silence: The Relationship between Prayer and Temple Cult. Journal of Biblical Literature 115: 17-30; Lang, U.M. 2004. Turning towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 35-88; Gather, J. 2009. Teachings on the Prayer of the Heart in the Greek and Syrian Fathers. (Gorgias Dissertations in Early Christian Studies 47). Piscataway: Gorgias.

[121] See Schäfer, P. 2007. Jesus in the Talmud. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 38.

[122] See Frye, R. 1984. The History of Ancient Iran. Munich: C.H. Beck; Gnoli, G. 2000. Zoroaster in History. New York: Eisenbrauns; Rose, J. 2000. The Image of Zoroaster: The Persian Mage through European Eyes. (Persian Studies Series 21). New York: Eisenbrauns; Skjærvø, P.O. 1996. The Literature of the Most Ancient Iranians. In Proceedings of the Second North American Gatha Conference. Ed.:S.J.H. Manekshaw and P.R. Ichaporia. The Journal of the Research and Historical Preservation Committee 2: 221-235; Skjærvø, P.O. 2005. The Achaemenids and the Avesta. In Birth of the Persian Empire. Ed.:V.S. Curtis and S. Stewart. London and New York: Routledge, 52-84; Malandra, W.W. 1983. An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings from the Avesta and the Achaemenid Inscriptions. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press; Boyce, M. 1984. Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[123] See Shaked, S. 1979. The Wisdom of the Sassanian Sages (Translation) (Dˇnkard VI). Boulder: Westview Press; See Skjærvø, P.O. 1994. Hymnic Composition in the Avesta. Die Sprache 36(2): 199-243.

[124] See Bowker 1997, 763-764.

[125] See Skjærvø, P.O. 1995. The Avesta as Source for the Early History of the Iranians. In The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia. Ed.: G. Erdosy. Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 155-176; Henninger, J. 1987. Sacrifice. In The Encyclopedia of Religion. Ed.: M. Eliade. Vol. 12. London: Routledge, 544-557; Kotwal, F.M. and Boyd, J.W. 1991. A Persian Offering. The Yasna: A Zoroastrian High Liturgy, Paris: Association pour l'avancement des etudes iraniennes.

[126] Bowker, The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions, 763-764.

[127] See Brock 1987, 3.

[128] Baarda 1975.

[129] Janse argued that Aphrahat in Demonstration 23.53-59 displays at least seven analogies with the Jewish prayer Amidah. Textual analysis suggests that there are more instances of Jewish influence in this prayer. In this study it is considered plausible that Jewish prayers from the period after 70 AD or 135 AD have found a way into the Christian liturgy of Syriac-speaking Persia through Jewish proselytes (Janse 2005, 41-59).

[130] See Landsberger, F. 1957. Sacred Direction in Synagogue and Church. Hebrew Union College Annual 28: 193-194.

[131] See Brock 1987, 27-28.

[132] Throughout the homily Aphrahat shows himself to be an early witness to the rich eastern tradition of the spirituality of the heart, anticipating various themes and ideas which were later to become dominant. Aphrahat exerted a continual influence on Syriac Christianity, especially during the sixth to eighth centuries, for his homilies are tacitly quoted by a number of writers (Brock 1987, 3-4).

[133] Ephrem's description of the power of prayer in his Hymns of Faith is strikingly similar to Aphrahat's. Additionally, Ephrem seems to rely even more than Aphrahat does on pre-Rabbinic midrashic material (Kronholm, T. 1978. Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian. Lund: CWK Gleerup, 222-224).

[134] There are many of non-verbal elements of prayer in the Talmud, but not in the sense meant by Aphrahat. For an authoritative study on the subject see Ehrlich, U. 2004. The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

[135] Kimmelman pointed out that in this theological universe the particularistic covenantal theology of the Bible and Qumran gave way before the universalistic coronation theology of the rabbis. What covenant was for biblical theology, the acceptance of the divine sovereignty became for Rabbinic theology. (See Kimmelman, R. 2005. Blessing Formulae and Divine Sovereignty in Rabbinic Liturgy. In Liturgy in the Life of the Synagogue: Studies in the History of Jewish Prayer. Ed.: R. Langer and S. Fine. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 39.)

[136] See Weitzman 1999,213. (The text that was available to Aphrahat indicated to him instead of MT's version the following: "May the good God atone for all the people of Israel. Because we have set our hearts to pray to the Lord, God of our fathers, the sanctuary is no purer than we are.")

[137] Weitzman 1999, 258-259.

[138] Ibid., 213.

[139] Ibid., 261.

[140] Aphrahat does not deny the redemptive nature of Christ's death on the Cross. Rather, he emphasizes that even Christ's redemptive death was carried out by the means of prayer.

[141] In mAvot 1.2 we read that "the world stands upon Torah, upon Worship and upon deeds of kindness." This reference certainly highlights the difficulty of interpreting the connection between such emphasis in Aphrahat and in Bavli.

[142] Langer 1998, 9.

[143] See Price, A History of the Monks, 72-80.

[144] Consumption of unclean food was like going to Gehenna. In fact, consumption of the unclean was not a minor offence, its practice was a link to the flames of worthlessness as symbolized by Gehenna (bKiddushin 40a).

[145] For some examples of research on the theme of kashrut see Budd, P.J. 1989. Holiness and Cult. In The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives. Ed.: R.E. Clements. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 275-298; Lewittes, M. 1994. Jewish Law: An Introduction. Northvale: Jason Aronson; Barak-Erez, D. 2007. Outlawed Pigs: Law, Religion, and Culture in Israel. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; Fabre-Vassas, C. 1997. The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig. New York: Columbia University Press.

[146] bChullin 85a.

[147] See Grintz, G.M. 1972. Do Not Eat of the Blood. Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute 8: 78-105.

[148] See Milgrom, J. 1990. Ethics and Ritual: The Foundations of the Biblical Dietary Laws. In Religions and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives. Ed.: E. Firmage, B. Weiss and J. Welch. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 159.

[149] See Moskala, J. 1998. The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study). Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Andrews University, 4.

[150] See Shutt, R.J.H. 1985. Letter of Aristeas. In The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2: 22-23.

[151] Jubilees 22:16; Tobit 1:10-11.

[152] See Cook, M. 1986. Early Islamic Dietary Laws. Journal of the Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. 7:217-277.

[153] See Kilgallen, J.J. 1981. All Food is Clean. The Bible Today 19: 259-263; Neufeld, D.F. 1972. Every Creature of God is Good. Review and Herald 14: 14-15; Brunt, J. 1978. Paul's Attitude and Treatment of Problems Involving Dietary Practice: A Case Study in Pauline Ethics. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Emory University; Newton, M. 1985. The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Neilsen, B. E. 1994. Jewish Purity Practices through the eyes of the Christian Fathers. In Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies. Jerusalem, June 22-29, 1993. Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies.

[154] See Damsteegt, P.G. 1978. Foundations of the Seventh-Day Adventist Message and Mission. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Fletcher-Watts, V.J. 1982. A Study of Deuteronomic Legislation with Particular Reference to Clean and Unclean Foods. Unpublished master's thesis. Andrews University; Berry, M.G. 1949. Unclean Meats and the Cross. Ministry. April: 31-33; Rushdoony, R.J. 1973. The Institutes of Biblical Law. Vol. 2. Nutley: Graig Press, 297-302; Banson, G. 1996. The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel. In Five Views on Law and Gospel. Ed.: S.N. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 93-143.

[155] See the introduction for the section on fasting in Zoroastrianism.

[156] Lieberman, in the now both outdated and at the same time still relevant Martyrs of Caesarea, shows that there was a similar attitude among the Jews when they witnessed the martyrdoms of the Christians because of their commitment to avoiding idols (Lieberman, S. 1939. The Martyrs of Caesarea. Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'histoire orientale et slave 7: 395-446).

[157] Martikainen 2008, 13-17.

[158] Observance of Passover is not listed here among the three pride-related factors. This may indicate that Aphrahat's Christians were a group that itself observed Passover, albeit invested with updated meaning.

[159] This discussion illustrates the conclusion that unclean food spreads its unclean qualities into the person that partakes of it: "Who is meant by my colleagues? It is Rabbah b. Bar Hana. For Rabbah b. Bar Hana said in the name of R. Johanan. On what lines did the discussion between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua run? Thus: R. Eliezer said to R. Joshua. 'We find [in one instance] that the eater is more unclean than the unclean food [he has eaten], for the carcass of a clean bird does not defile by ordinary contact and yet whilst in the gullet it renders the clothes unclean'" (bChullin 34a).

[160] In later Rabbinic thought we see that at the arrival of the Messiah at least some commentators picture a new world where there would be no more distinctions between kasher and non-kasher animals (See Chayoun, Y. 1994. When Moshiach Comes: Halachic and Aggadic Perspectives. Southfield: Targum Press, 93-100).

[161] “Our Rabbis taught: Three love each other, viz.: proselytes, slaves, and ravens…” (bPesachim 56b).

[162] See Bulmer, R. 1989. The Uncleanness of the Bird of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Man: Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute 24: 304-321.

[163] See Prosic, T. 2005. The Development and Symbolism of Passover until 70 CE London: T & T Clark; Gaster, T.H. 1958. Passover: Its History and Traditions. London: Abelard-Schuman; May, H.G. 1935. The Relation of the Passover to the Festival of Unleavened Cakes. Journal of Biblical Literature 4: 65; Nakanose, S. 1993. Josiah’s Passover: Sociology and the Liberating Bible. New York: Orbis Books; Thompson, T.L. 1994. Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources. Leiden: E.J. Brill; Bergant, D. 1995. An Anthropological Approach to Biblical Interpretation: The Passover Supper in Exodus 12:1-20 as a Case of Study. In Transformations, Passages, and Processes: Ritual Approaches to Biblical Texts. Ed.: M. McVann. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 43-63.

[164] See Yuval, I. 1999. Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue. In Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times. Ed.: P.F. Bradshaw and L.A. Hoffman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 98 (For a comparison of Jewish Haggadah and Christian “Haggadahs” see 98-116).

[165] See Hoffman, L.A. 1999. The Passover Meal in Jewish Tradition. In Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times. Ed.: P.F. Bradshaw and L.A. Hoffman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 71 (Esp. 15-19).

[166] Pierre, 2008, 115-128; 1988, 127-128.

[167] See Abrahams, I. 1898. Some Egyptian Fragments of the Passover Haggadah. Jewish Quarterly Review 10: 46.

[168] See Smith, J.Z. 1987. To Take Place. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 109-110.

[169] Yuval, 115. See also Schwartz, J. 1990. Ben Stada and Peter in Lydda. Journal for the Study of Judaism 21: 1-18.

[170] For an in-depth study on the relationship of Christian communion/Eucharist to the Jewish Passover, Passover Seder and other Jewish customs see Rouwhorst, G.R. 1995. Bread and Cup in Early Christian Eucharist Celebrations. In Bread of Heaven: Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion: Essays in the History of Liturgy and Culture. Ed.: C. Caspers, G. Lukken and G. Rouwhorst. Tilburg: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 11-40.

[171] Rouwhorst 1996, 152-173; Gerlach, K. 1998. The Antenicene Pascha. A Rhetorical History. Louvain: Peeters, 3-52.

[172] Yuval, 98-124.

[173] See Gibson, G.M. 1945. The Story of the Christian Year. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 80.

[174] See Leonhard, C. 2006. The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter: Open Questions in the Current Research. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1-2.

[175] Virg. 8.9-11a. Ephrem is one of the most outspoken of the Early Christian anti-Judaism writers. Ironically, his writings abound with allusions to Jewish traditions (mostly Haggadic traditions) – see Van Rompay, L. 1996. The Christian Syriac Interpretation. In Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300). Ed.: M. Saebo. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 622-628.

[176] See Boyarin, D. 1999. Dying for God. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 13 and 144, fn. 57.

[177] In some communions, notably among Armenian churches, the animal sacrifices especially during Passover were carried out long after the events of the Christ's death and resurrection. See Conybeare, F.C. 1903. The Survival of Animal Sacrifice inside the Christian Church. The American Journal of Theology 7(1): 62-90; Brightman, F.E. 1924. The Quartodeciman Question. The Journal of Theological Studies 25: 254-270; Talley, T.J. 1973. History and Eschatology in the Primitive Pascha. Worship 47: 212-221.

[178] See Heeren, J. 1984. Another View of Easter and Passover. American Sociological Review 4: 581-582.

[179] Zerubavel, E. 1982. Easter and Passover: On Calendars and Group Identity. American Sociological Review 47(2): 287.

[180] Ibid., 286.

[181] Rouwhorst 1982, 1374-1380.

[182] See Bradshaw, P. 1999. The Origins of Easter. In Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times. Ed.: P.F. Bradshaw and L.A. Hoffman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 85.

[183] It is also possible that he disagrees with Western practices and purposefully ignores them in his treatment. This is, however, less likely given his commitment to catholicity and the geographical and linguistic isolation from the Western churches.

[184] Although the main day of worship may have been the seventh day (or the seventh and the first together), Aphrahat's community was clearly not a Sabbath-keeping Christian community, since the Jews are said to take pride in the Sabbath (they obviously could not do so if Aphrahat's community also kept the Sabbath) (Dem. 22.25).

[185] The Circumcision, Passover and the Sabbath are linked together in Aphrahat's presentation; the Jews, according to Aphrahat, only take pride in circumcision and the Sabbath. This is probably the case because, while the circumcision and the Sabbath were not physically observed by Christians (and thus could not function as badges of distinction and pride), the Passover was observed (albeit in a different way and invested with a new meaning). In the Demonstration on Death and End Times, Aphrahat recounts all the Demonstrations that he had written up to that point: "After pastors, I wrote about circumcision, which the people of the Jews boast about. After circumcision, I wrote about the Passover and the fourteenth day. After the Passover, I wrote about the Sabbath, in which the Jews take pride" (Dem.22.25).

[186] For an English translation of the infamous sermons against the Jews see Maxwell, C.M. (tr). 1966. Chrysostom's Homilies Against the Jews: An English Translation. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

[187] See Brown, J.R. 1963. Temple and Sacrifice in Rabbinic Judaism. Evanston: Nashotah House, 22.

[188] See Diamond 2004, 133.

[189] Ibid., 121-133.

[190] While most of the scholars assume that the majority of rabbis were also craftsman, Rabbinic sources themselves, with some exceptions, give us little information about the social status of rabbis and the sources of their income (Diamond 2004,29). See also Fraade 1988, 253-288.

[191] Diamond 2004, 126.

[192] See Satlow, M.L. 1995. Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetoric of Sexuality. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 223-262, 315-332.

[193] See Hall, T.C. 1910. Asceticism (Introduction). In Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 66.

[194] See Vööbus 1958, 14.

[195] See Moore, G.F. 1927. Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 263-266.

[196] See, for example, Halivni, D. 1967. On the Supposed Anti-Asceticism or Anti-Naziritism of Simon the Just. Jewish Quarterly Review 58: 244.

[197] See Lazaroff, A. 1970. Bahya's Asceticism against Its Rabbinic and Islamic Background. In Journal of Jewish Studies 21: 1-38, esp. 1-20.

[198] Fraade 1988, 257.

[199] See Sokol, M. 1992. Attitudes toward Pleasure in Jewish Thought: A Typological Proposal. In Reverence, Righteousness and Rahamanut. Ed.: J.J. Schacter. Northvale: Jason Aaronson, 293-314.

[200] See Baer, Y. 1955. Yisrael ba-Amim. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 38-57.

[201] See Urbach, E. E. 1979. The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs. Trans.: I. Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magness Press, 443-448.

[202] Fraade 1988, 257.

[203] Diamond 2004,4-21.

[204] This metaphor probably refers to one's dying while studying the Torah.

[205] For example, in Second Clement 16.4 fasting is considered to be better than prayer in the list of approved practices,while Similitudes of Hermas 5.1, 3 pictures a contrast between false and true fasting, and the Epistle of Barnabas 5 rejects food fasting, citing Isaiah 58. This is also the case with the writings of St. John Chrysostom.

[206] Hausherr 1937, cols. 746-747.

[207] Murray 2006, 17.

[208] Ibid., 22.

[209] See Grimm, V. 1996. From Feasting to Fasting. The Evolution of a Sin: Attitudes to Food in Late Antiquity. London: Routledge, 1-12, 32-56, 180-185.

[210] Diamond 2004,130.

[211] Vööbus 1958, 256.

[212] See Vööbus 1958, 17: 256-278. According to H.J.W. Drijvers, Syriac thought describes Christ as embodying the divine thought and will. Virginity signifies not a hatred of the body but an imitation of Christ who was an ihidaya, that is, only-begotten. (See Drijvers, H.J.W. 1981. Hellenistic and Oriental Origins. In The Byzantine Saint. Ed.: S. Hackel. (Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 5). London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 31-33).

[213] See Nigosian, S.A. 1999. Zoroastrian Perception of Ascetic Culture. In Ascetic Culture: Renunciation and Worldly Engagement. Ed.: K. Ishwaran. Leiden: Brill Publishing, 4-18.

[214] See Zaehner, R.C. The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism. Phoenix: Phoenix Press, 283.

[215] See Vendîdâd, Fargard III, 2, 3, (Trans.: Darmesteter 3:23).

[216] Diamond 2004, 132.

[217] See Vendîdâd, Fargard III, 33 and IV, 48 (Trans.: Darmesteter, 3:31 and 3:47).

[218] According to Owens Aphrahat's text falls into the Peshitta tradition (Owens 1983, 247).

[219] See Crislip, A. 2006. "I Have Chosen Sickness": The Controversial Function of Sickness in Early Christian Ascetic Practice. In Asceticism and Its Critics. Ed.: O. Freiberger. Oxford: Oxford Press, 179-205.

[220] Aphrahat's Demonstration, 144.

[221] Becker, 2002, 305.

[222] The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 1: 817.

[223] See Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians. Trans.: P.W. Harkins. 1999. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 8-10.

[224] Koltun-Fromm 1997, 57-71.

[225] See Bauer, W. 1971. Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity. Trans.: Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins team. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 5.

[226] See the section on "Agreement."

[227] See the section on "Disagreement by omission"

[228] See the section on "Disagreement by confrontation"

[229] Jarkins 2005.

[230] See Dem. 18.1 for the accusation by the Jews against Aphrahat's Christians.

[231] Neusner 1971, 155-156; Neusner 1970, 282-298.

[232] Gavin 1923, 95-166. A similar position was advocated by Funk (Funk 1891) and Ginzberg (Ginzberg 1901, 663-665).

[233] See Weitzman 1999, 261.

[234] Petersen 1992, 241-244.

[235] Neusner 1991, 78-79.

[236] This same kind of concern may have been behind Aphrahat's statement in Dem. 4.18 that instead of Temple sacrifices God chose the prayers of the believers. In short, Aphrahat may have considered the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple something tragic that God allowed, not something that God did against the people of Israel by the way of judgment (See also in 4.2.3 discussion on Aphrahat's attitude towards circumcision and Sabbath rest in ancient times).

[237] Although the main day of worship may have been Saturday, Aphrahat's community was clearly not a Sabbath-keeping Christian community, since the Jews are said to take pride in the Sabbath (they obviously could not do so if Aphrahat's community also kept the Sabbath) (Dem. 22.25).