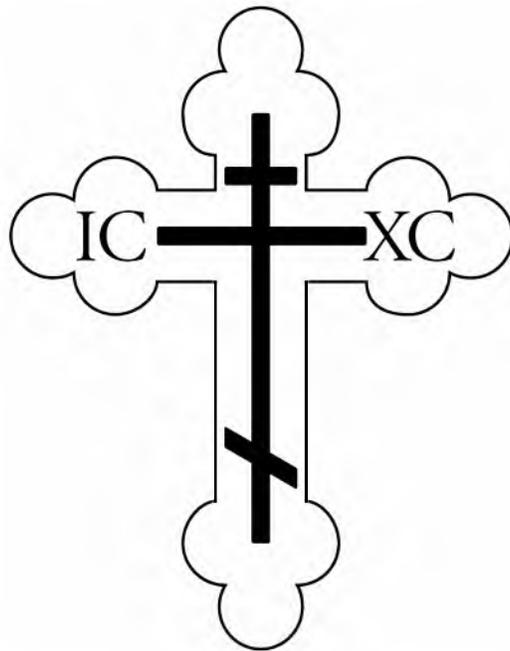


Commentary on Genesis



by our Father among the Saints,
Ephraim the Syrian



The creation of the sun, moon, and stars (“lights in the firmament of the heavens”) on the fourth day of creation (Gen. 1:14). (The plants are shown to have been already created on the third day.) Detail of a fresco at Suchevitsa Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, sixteenth century.

COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

Commentary of Ephrem on the First Book of the Torah

Prologue

IHAD NOT WANTED to write a commentary on the first book of Creation, lest we should now repeat what we had set down in the metrical homilies and hymns. Nevertheless, compelled by the love of friends, we have written briefly of those things of which we wrote at length in the metrical homilies and in the hymns.¹

2. The reason that Moses² wrote [this book] is as follows: the Creator had been manifest to the mind of the first generations, even up until the [generation of] the Tower.³ The fact that creatures were created was also publicly taught. Moreover, from [the generation of] the Tower to [the generation of] Moses, there was no lack of men among the sons of Shem to preach these things. But, when the sons of Abram went astray in Egypt and deserved to become godless along with the entire world, they too became estranged from those noble commandments that are fixed in our nature and they considered substances, which had come into being out of nothing, to be self-existent be-

1. See Kronholm, *Motifs*, for a discussion of Gen 1–11 in the genuine hymns of Ephrem. For the two types of poetry mentioned here, see general introduction above.

2. Here, as in *Hymns on Paradise* 1.1, 4.3, 5.2, etc., Ephrem specifically designates Moses as author of the Pentateuch. On occasion, Ephrem will say “Scripture says.” In most places, however, Ephrem simply writes “he/it says,” leaving the subject to be supplied. In our translation we have supplied Moses as subject even in places where it could just as reasonably be translated “as Scripture says” as does Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, *passim*.

3. That is, the Tower of Babel. See Gen 11.1–9.

ings,⁴ and they called created things that had been made out of something⁵ "gods." Still, God willed to set right once more, through Moses, those things that had become confused in Moses' generation, lest this evil tradition⁶ be transmitted throughout the entire world.

3. Therefore [God] sent Moses to the Egyptians so that where error had arisen he might blunt its edge with the bright rays of true knowledge. [God] wrought through the hand [of Moses] mighty works and miracles lest they be in any doubt about what [Moses] was going to write down. On account of these things He enlightened him and . . .⁷ Moreover, Moses was also anointed with a radiance so that the radiance of his face would manifest the Spirit who spoke with his tongue.⁸

4. After the mighty works [of God that occurred] in Egypt, both in the sea and in the desert, [Moses] wrote about the substances that were created out of nothing so that [the descendants of Abraham] might know that they were falsely called self-existent beings. And [Moses] wrote about the creatures that were made out of something⁹ and were erroneously worshipped as gods. He wrote that God, who had been set up alongside thousands and myriads, is One.¹⁰ He wrote about the mysteries of the Son that were inscribed when creatures were created. He also inscribed the types [of the Son] that were depicted in the just ones who preceded Him as well as the allegorical and symbolic¹¹ meanings that were signified by the works of his

4. I.e., *'ityē*. See note 26, below.

5. Read here *milm* for *qdm*, as Jansma, "Ephraems Beschreibung," 311.

6. Read here *mslmut'* for *mslmut*, as Jansma, "Weitere Beiträge," 122.

7. There is a lacuna in the manuscript at this point.

8. Cf. Exod 34:35.

9. Delete here the negative particle *l'*, as Jansma, "Ephraems Beschreibung," 311.

10. Cf. Dan 7:10.

11. These two words are supplied to fill a lacuna in the text—only the first has been conjectured by Tonneau. Ephrem's use of allegory here is not to be equated with that more highly developed form of allegorical interpretation associated with the School of Alexandria. For Ephrem's use of the term, see Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, 52-57.

staff.¹² He wrote about the true commandments that had become forgotten, while adding those that were necessary for the infantile state of the [Jewish] people.

5. [Moses] then wrote about the work of the six days that were created by means of a Mediator who was of the same nature and equal in skill to the Maker. And after [Moses] said, "This is the book of the generations of heaven and earth,"¹³ he turned back and recounted those things that he had left out and not written about in his first account. He spoke of the origin of the house of Adam and of their dwelling in Paradise, of the coming of the serpent, of his deceit, of their rashness concerning the tree which had been forbidden them, and of their being cast out from there as punishment.

(2) He spoke of the offering that Cain and Abel brought, of the murder of Abel, of the curses that were decreed against Cain, the story of their seven generations reaching unto the words that Lamech, the son of Cain, spoke to his wives.

(3) He spoke of the ten generations from Adam unto Noah.

(4) He spoke of the wickedness that the two tribes cultivated in Noah's generation.¹⁴

(5) He spoke of the construction of the ark and of the preservation of everything that had been created.

(6) After these things [Moses] spoke of their departure from the ark and about Noah's offering and about the bow in the clouds that was granted him for the covenant of peace.¹⁵

(7) After these things [Moses] spoke of the vineyard that Noah planted, how he became drunk, fell asleep and was uncovered, and of the curse of Canaan and the blessings of his brothers.

12. Cf. Exod 4.2ff., 7.9ff., 8.5ff., 10.13, 14.16, 17.5-9.

13. Gen 2.4.

14. That is, the tribe of Cain and the tribe of Seth.

15. This phrase "covenant of peace" is often used in the Bible to designate the covenant between God and Noah. See, for example, Num 25.12, Isa 54.10. Ezek 34.25, 37.26.

(8) After these things [Moses] spoke of the seventy-two sons who were born to the sons of Noah, of the building of the Tower, of the tongues that they received,¹⁶ and how they were scattered from there throughout the entire earth.

(9) After these things [Moses] spoke of the next ten generations from Shem unto Abraham.

(10) After these things [Moses] spoke of Abraham's departure from Ur, of his dwelling at Haran, his settling in the land of Canaan and of Sarah being led to Pharaoh's house and being returned on account of the plagues that came upon Pharaoh's household.

(11) After these things [Moses] spoke of Lot's separation from Abraham, of Lot's being taken captive along with the Sodomites, and of his deliverance by Abraham who was blessed by Melchizedek when he gave him a tenth of all the goods that he had rescued.

(12) After these things [Moses] spoke of [Abraham's] faith in his seed, of his asking to know how his seed would inherit a land that was already full of inhabitants, and of his offering and the covenant of peace that God established with him on that very day.

(13) After these things [Moses] spoke of how Abraham was persuaded by Sarah to enter into Hagar, how after Hagar had conceived, she held her mistress contemptible in her eyes, despised her and fled, how an angel saw her and sent her back to serve her mistress.

(14) After these things [Moses] spoke of the covenant of circumcision that God gave to [Abraham] and of how [Abraham] circumcised Ishmael and all the sons of his household.

(15) After these things [Moses] spoke of the vision that came to [Abraham] while he was sitting in the doorway of his tent, of the coming of the angels who came in the guise of strangers, of how they promised Isaac to Sarah, and how she laughed within herself.

(16) After these things [Moses] spoke of the [angels']

¹⁶. Read here *dqbka* for *dhblw*, as Jansma, "Beirâge," 62.

going to Sodom, of Abraham's intercession for [the Sodomites], of the [angels'] going into Lot's house, of the mob of Sodomites, of the departure of Lot and his daughters, and of the punishment that the Sodomites received for their effrontery.

(17) After these things [Moses] spoke of Lot's daughters who made their father drink wine and sleep with them without knowing it.

(18) After these things [Moses] spoke of Abimelech who took Sarah and how God did not allow him to touch her.

(19) After these things [Moses spoke] of the birth of Isaac, of his circumcision, of his weaning, and of the departure of the handmaid and her son because he had laughed at the son of the free woman.

(20) After these things [Moses] spoke of the covenant that Abimelech established with Abraham.

(21) After these things [Moses] spoke of the testing of Abraham, of how he raised up Isaac upon the altar, of Isaac's deliverance from heaven, and of the ram in the tree that became the sacrifice in Isaac's stead.

(22) After these things [Moses] spoke of the death of Sarah and her burial in the double cave of the sons of Hem.¹⁷

(23) After these things [Moses] spoke of the oath that Abraham made Eliezer swear, of [Eliezer's] journey to Mesopotamia, of the prayer of his servant at the well, and of his bringing Rebekah back to the house of Abraham to become Isaac's wife.

(24) After these things [Moses] spoke of Rebekah's barrenness, of how Isaac prayed and she conceived, of how she inquired of the Lord and it was told to her, "Two nations are in your womb and the elder shall serve the younger."

(25) After these things [Moses] spoke of the birthright of Esau which was sold to Jacob.

(26) After these things [Moses] spoke of the covenant

17. Concerning this cave, Ephrem consistently refers to it as belonging to the sons of Hem and not to the sons of Heth, or the Hittites, as do all the versions.

that the king of the Philistines established with Isaac just as he had done with Abraham.

(27) After these things [Moses] spoke of how Jacob, with the counsel of his mother, seized the blessings of Esau.

(28) After these things [Moses] spoke of Jacob's going down to the house of Laban and of the vision of the ladder that he saw while he slept.

(29) After these things [Moses] spoke of how Jacob became betrothed to the one woman of his desire and ended up marrying three others whom he did not desire.

(30) After these things [Moses] spoke of [Jacob's] return to his father's house, of Laban's coming in anger, of how God restrained him from doing Jacob any harm, and of their covenant of peace on the mountain of Gilead.

(31) After these things [Moses] spoke of the host of angels that met him.

(32) After these things [Moses] spoke of the ambassadors of peace whom [Jacob] sent to Esau, of the offering that he sent ahead to Esau, of Jacob's struggle with the angel, of how the angel touched his hip joint and it became dislocated, and of how Esau, his brother, joyfully received him.

(33) After these things [Moses] spoke of [Jacob's] dwelling in Shechem, of the force [with which Shechem] took their sister, of how [Jacob's sons] destroyed the whole city by fraud, and of how displeasing this was to their father.

(34) After these things [Moses] spoke of the death of Rachel near Ephratha, of Jacob's coming to his father, and of the death and burial of Isaac.

(35) After these things [Moses] spoke of the descendants of Esau and of the kings who reigned in Edom before a king reigned in the house of Israel.

(36) After these things [Moses] spoke of the dreams of Joseph.

(37) After this [Moses] spoke of Tamar's marriage, of the violent death of her husbands, how she beguiled and deceived Judah, how, in his first judgment, Judah condemned her to the fire but, in his final judgment, reversed [his decision], acquitted her and raised her to greater honor than himself.

(38) After these things [Moses] spoke of how Joseph was sent out with his brothers, of how they cast him into a pit, of his being sold to Arabs, of his going down to Egypt, of his flight from his mistress, of his being cast into prison, of how he interpreted dreams for Pharaoh's servants and even for Pharaoh, of the dignity that he attained, of the corn he gathered in the seven years of plenty, and of the great quantity of money he collected during the years of famine.

(39) After these things [Moses] spoke of how Joseph's brothers came to him, of how he was concealed from them and how he tormented them, of how he then revealed himself to them and kissed them.¹⁸

(40) After these things [Moses] spoke of their telling Jacob the good news about Joseph, of the seventy souls who went down with him to Egypt, of Joseph's coming out to meet his father, his bringing Jacob in to Pharaoh, [Jacob's] blessing of Pharaoh, of how Pharaoh settled [Joseph's] brothers in the best part of the land of Egypt, of how Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh with the exception of the lands belonging to the priests.

(41) After these things [Moses] spoke of the illness of Jacob and of the blessings he gave to Joseph's sons, making the younger Ephraim greater than Manasseh, his older brother.

(42) After these things [Moses] spoke of the blessings with which Jacob blessed his own sons, of how, after he had finished his words, he straightened up his feet in the bed and was gathered to his people. [Moses then spoke of] how Joseph took Jacob up and buried him where Abraham and Isaac were buried.

(43) After these things [Moses] spoke of the death of Joseph and of how he made his brothers swear to take up his bones with them to the land of their inheritance.

(44) All these things Moses wrote down in the first book of Creation and to begin his discourse he said:

18. Ephraim here plays on the words *suq*—"torment," and *nsq*—"kiss."

Section I

1. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,*¹⁹ that is, the substance of the heavens and the substance of the earth.²⁰ So let no one think that there is anything allegorical in the works of the six days.²¹ No one can rightly say that the things that pertain to these days were symbolic, nor can one say that they were meaningless names or that other things were symbolized for us by their names. Rather, let us know in just what manner heaven and earth were created in the beginning. They were truly heaven and earth. There was no other thing signified by the names "heaven" and "earth." The rest of the works and things made that followed were not meaningless significations either, for the substances of their natures correspond to what their names signify.²²

19. Gen 1.1.

20. In the Peshitta text of Gen 1.1, the particle *yat*, as it does in the early Targums, precedes both "heaven" and "earth." In the thirteenth century, the Jacobite polymath Bar Hebraeus pointed out that *yat*, preserved only here in the Syriac version of the Old Testament, is the Palestinian Aramaic equivalent to *l(a)* in Syriac, i.e., a marker to designate the direct object, like *'et* in Hebrew [M. Sprengling and W. C. Graham, eds., *Barhebraeus' Scholia on the Old Testament. Part I: Genesis—II Samuel* (Chicago, 1931) 5]. This observation, together with the fact that the rabbis interpreted *'et* of the Hebrew text as indicating "substance," has caused commentators to say that Ephrem is interpreting the particle in similar fashion. Though this interpretation is no doubt philologically correct, it seems more in line with Ephrem's literal reading of the text to understand that he is reading *yāt* as the construct (the genitive construction in Syriac) of the Syriac word *yātā*—"essence, substance," and is simply interpreting this term for his readers. This interpretation subsequently became the standard exegesis of this passage in Nestorian tradition, see T. Jansma, "Investigations into the Early Syriac Fathers on Genesis," in *Studies on the Book of Genesis*, ed. B. Gemser et al., *Oudtestamentische Studien*, no. 12 (New York, 1958) 101.

The word *yātā*, derives from *'at* [for the background of which, see J. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching* (Cambridge, 1908) 212–17], a root which is of fundamental importance for Ephrem's polemics and his whole theological outlook. See Beck, *Die Theologie*, 5–13; and N. El-Khoury, *Der Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer* (Tübingen, 1976) 42–46. Also, see I. 2, below and note *ad loc.*

21. See El-Khoury, *Der Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem*, 49–62; and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 41–43. *Hymns on the Nativity* 26 is a meditation on the work of the six days in their relation to the Incarnation.

22. In the thought of Ephrem, for something to have a name is to have a

2. *In the beginning God created heaven and earth.*²³ At this point these comprised the only things that had been made, for there was nothing else created along with heaven and earth. Even the elements²⁴ that were created on that day had not yet been created. If the elements had been created along with heaven and earth, Moses would have said so. But he did not, lest he give the names of the elements precedence over their substances. Therefore, it is evident that heaven and earth came to be from nothing because neither water nor wind had yet been created, nor had fire, light or darkness been given their natures, for they were younger than²⁵ heaven and earth. These things were created things that came after heaven and earth and they were not self-subsistent beings²⁶ for they did not exist before [heaven and earth].²⁷

quōma, or substance, and that name designates just what that substance is. See *Hymns on Faith* 16.2: "in the names are the substances"; *Hymns against Heresies* 48.2: "the name Creator testifies to God who created everything"; *Sermons on Faith* 2; and El-Khoury, *Der Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem*, 45. See also I.12, below.

23. Gen 1.1.

24. This Syriac word, *kyāne*, is the same word just translated "natures" in the previous paragraph. See the discussion of Beck, *Die Theologie*, 13–15, and idem, *Ephraem Reden über den Glauben. Ihr theologischer Lehagehalt und ihr geschichtlicher Rahmen*, SA, no. 33 (Rome, 1953) 4–8, for the various usages of this word in Ephrem.

25. To designate age is the normal manner in Syriac to express posteriority or priority. These five elements that Ephrem enumerates are those elements that Bardaisan postulated as *ʿiyye*, or self-subsistent beings [see next note]. See Jansma, "Ephraems Beschreibung," 300–305; and Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 96–126.

26. I.e., *ʿiyye*. For Ephrem the term *ʿiyya* (and its derivative *ʿiūtā*), denoting self-subsistent being, can be used only of God. He is the only *ʿiūtā*, or "Being." To give to a created thing the name *ʿiyya* is, to Ephrem, more blasphemous than any idol-worshiping that was committed in the Old Testament. See *Hymns against Heresies* 53, devoted specifically to this subject, especially 11–12: "Moses witnessed to us that he called no other by the name of *ʿiūtā*. They were called gods but not *ʿiyye*. . . [God] revealed to Moses his name. He called himself *ehyeh* (cf. Exod 3.14) for that is the name of *ʿiūtā*." See also *Hymns against Heresies* 16.9; and Beck, *Die Theologie*, 11–13. For the question of Ephrem's treatment of Bardaisan in his hymns, see also Beck, "Bardaisan und Seine Schule," 271–333.

27. Here, as throughout this first section, Ephrem is emphasizing, against the teachings of the Bardaisanites, Marcionites, and Manicheans, that everything that exists was created by God. His argument here centers on the water.

3. After this [Moses] spoke not of the things that were above the firmament, but rather of those things that were between the firmament and the earth which is within [the womb].²⁸ [Moses] wrote about [the things within the firmament] for us, although he did not write about everything for us, for he did not record for us the day on which the spiritual beings were created.²⁹

(2) [Moses] then goes on to write that *the earth was tohu and bohu*,³⁰ that is, void and desolation. This is to show that even the void and desolation were older than³¹ the elements. I am not saying that the void and desolation were something. Rather [I am saying] that the earth, which does exist, was known [to exist] in something which does not exist, for the earth existed alone without any other thing.³²

wind, fire, light, and darkness, Bardaisan's eternal principles [see Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 96–106]; for Ephrem they were the fundamental elements (*kyāne*), which were created by God. Ephrem's arguments that water, wind, fire and light were in fact created elements and that darkness had no real existence of its own (see I.16, below) completely undermine Bardaisan's cosmology.

This position is the focal point of Ephrem's polemic in this commentary; see introduction above. He stresses the same points in his hymns, especially in his *Hymns against Heresies*. "Out of nothing God created everything." *Hymns against Heresies*, 28.8. See also *Hymns against Heresies* 3, which is devoted specifically to the subject of *creatio ex nihilo*, against Bardaisan. See also Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, 76–78; and El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem*, 65–81. 28. See I.17, below.

29. Although according to *Hymns on the Nativity* 26.5, the angels had been created by the second day, it is possible that here Ephrem betrays acquaintance with the Jewish debate over whether the angels were created on the second day or on the fifth day of creation. See *Genesis Rabbah* 1.3. Whether Ephrem was aware of this debate or not, his point is that the angels were also created and they were created after heaven and earth. See W. Cramer, *Die Engeltvorstellungen bei Ephraem dem Syrer*, OCA, no. 173 (Rome, 1965) 112, 170; Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, 67; and El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem*, 64–65.

30. Gen 1.2. The words *tohu* and *bohu* of the Hebrew text are here transliterated in the Peshitta. In the later Nestorian tradition, it is the vocabulary of the Greek tradition, i.e., ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος, that becomes the focal point of the standard exegesis of this passage. See Jansma, "Investigations," 102–3.

31. See above, note 25.

32. Ephrem here asserts that even something that may or may not have any existence in and of itself preceded those elements that Bardaisan calls *'ityē*, or

4. After [Moses] spoke about the creation of heaven and earth and showed that the waste and desolation preceded the elements that were created by the length of that moment that followed [their creation],³⁴ he turned to write about those elements saying, *Darkness was upon the face of the abyss.*³⁵ For the abyss of waters was created at that time. But how was it created on the day on which it was created? Even though it was created on this day and at this moment, Moses does not tell us here how it was created. For now, we should accept the creation of the abyss as it is written, while we wait to learn from Moses how it was created.

(2) As for the darkness that was upon the face of the abyss, some posit that it was a cloud of heaven. Now, if the firmament had been created on the first day they would speak rightly. If the upper heavens were similar to the firmament, then there would have been a thick darkness between the two heavens, for the light had not been created nor affixed there to dissipate the darkness by its rays. But if the place between the two heavens is light as Ezekiel,³⁶ Paul,³⁷ and Stephen³⁸ bear witness, then how could the heavens, which had dissipated the darkness with their lights, spread darkness over the abyss?

5. Because everything that was created was created in those six days,³⁹ whether it was written down that it was creat-

eternal principles. He may, however, also be alluding to still another of Bardaisan's false teachings. Bardaisan placed great importance on the concept of space, a material substance which contained and enclosed everything, including God. Ephrem considers this to be a restriction of the nature of God, see *Prose Refutations* 1:129-33 (text), xciv-xcvi (translation), 2:16 (text) iv-viii (translation), with Burkitt's remarks, 2:ccxiii-ccxiv. See also Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 136.

³⁴ Again Ephrem insists on the creation of everything. There was a length of time between the creation of heaven and earth and the creation of the first elements. See *Hymns on Faith* 26.2, where Ephrem implies that time began when God began the creation, and discussion in Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, 76-78.

³⁴ Gen 1.2.

³⁵ Cf. Ezek 1.1, 22.

³⁶ Cf. Acts 9.3, 22.6; 26.13.

³⁷ Cf. Acts 7.55-56.

³⁸ See *Hymns on the Nativity* 26; and El-Khouy, *Der Interpretation der Welt bei Ephrem*, 39-62.

ed or not, the clouds must also have been created on the first day, just as fire was created along with wind, although Moses did not write about the fire as he did about the wind. Thus, the clouds were created along with the abyss although Moses did not write that the clouds were created along with the abyss, just as he did not record the creation of fire along with that of the wind when he wrote about the creation of the wind.

(2) It was necessary that everything be known to have its beginning in those six days. The clouds were surely created along with the abyss, for how many times were these brought forth from the abyss? Elijah saw a cloud rising up out of the sea.³⁹ Solomon also said, *By his knowledge the depths broke forth and the clouds sprinkled down dew.*⁴⁰ It was not only because of their substance that they should have been created at this point, but they were created on that first night because they also rendered service on that first night. Just as the clouds covered Egypt for three days and three nights,⁴¹ clouds were spread over all of Creation on the first night and on the first day. If the clouds had been dispersed, light would not have been required on the first day because the brightness of the upper heavens would have been sufficient to fill the place of the light that was created on the first day.

6. After one night and one day were completed, the firmament was created on the second evening and henceforth its shadow rendered service for all subsequent nights. Therefore, heaven and earth were created on the evening of the first night. Along with the abyss that was created, there were also created those clouds which, when they were spread out, brought about the requisite night. After their shadow had served for twelve hours, light was created beneath them and the light dispersed their shadow that had been spread over the waters all night.

7. After Moses spoke of the darkness that was spread over the face of the abyss, he then said, *the wind of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*⁴² Because Moses called it *the wind*

39. Cf. 1 Kings 18.44.

41. Cf. Exod 10.22

40. Prov 3.20.

42. Gen 1.2.

of God and said *it was hovering*, some posit that this is the Holy Spirit⁴⁵ and, because of what is written here, associate it with the activity of creation. Nevertheless, the faithful⁴⁴ do not make this connection, for these things cannot be so related. Rather, by those things that are truly said about it, they associate it with that element,⁴⁵ just as, on the basis of the names employed, they cannot posit the Spirit as maker,⁴⁶ for it is said that an evil spirit of God consumed Saul.⁴⁷

43. The Syriac word *rūhā*, as does the Hebrew cognate *ruāh*, can mean either “wind” or “spirit.” For a discussion of this wind/spirit in Ephrem’s hymns, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 43–44.

44. I.e., the orthodox, Nicene Christians, who were probably a small but growing minority at this time. See Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 1–43; and H. J. W. Drijvers, “Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten syrischen Christentum,” in *Symposium Syriacum 1972, OCA*, no. 197 (Rome, 1974) 291–308.

45. I.e., the natural wind. *Targum Onkelos* also interprets this as the natural wind [see M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (Denver, 1982) 21, n. 4]. This interpretation of Ephrem may again be in consideration of Bardaisan’s teaching. According to Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies* 55, Bardaisan taught that the Spirit bore two daughters: “the shame of dry land” and the “image of the waters.” In the same hymn, Ephrem accuses Bardaisan of “dishonoring the beautiful name of the Holy Spirit who is too pure even for a mirror.” See discussion in Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 143–52.

46. See also *Hymns against Heresies* 50.8, where “the wind hovers over the water *kyana’it*—“naturally.” See also the discussion of the history of interpretation of this passage in Syriac tradition in Jansma, “Investigations,” 104–6. In the *Hymns on Epiphany* 8.15, Ephrem seems to maintain the very opposite position, but see Beck’s remarks on the authenticity of these hymns in E. Beck, ed., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 187 (Louvain, 1959) viii–xiii. In any case, it is certain that the Ephrem who wrote this commentary cannot be that “certain Syrian” from whom Basil got his information on the meaning of the Syriac word here. Recently, S. Giet, ed., *Basile de Césarée, Homélie sur l’Hexaéméron*, SC 26bis (Paris, 1968) 169, n. 3, seems to have opted for Ephrem by default. This long-debated question of Basil’s source has finally been resolved in favor of Eusebius of Emesa, through the intermediary of Diodore of Tarsus. See J. Poucher, “Les rapports de Basile de Césarée avec Diodore de Tarse,” *BEF* 87 (1986): 213–72, especially, 260–68; and L. Van Rompay, “L’informateur Syrien de Basile de Césarée. A propos de Genèse 1,2,” *OCP* 58 (1992): 245–51.

47. Cf. 1 Sam 16.14. Here the Peshitta reads *niyib’*—“consume” against the Hebrew or Greek text. This reading does survive in some targumic passages. See, for example, A. Sperber, *The Prophets according to the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae* (Leiden, 1969) 63–64.

(2) It is indeed said that *it was hovering*, but what came forth from the waters on the first day when [the wind] was hovering over the waters? If on the day that it was written that *it was hovering over the waters* nothing came out of the waters, and then on the fifth day when the waters brought forth reptiles and birds, it was not written that the wind *was hovering*, how then can anyone say that this wind took part in the activity of creation? For, although Scripture said *it was hovering*, it did not say that anything came out of the waters on the day that it was hovering.

(3) Just as through the service of the clouds, that is, the shadow of the first night, we infer the creation of the clouds that came to be on the first day, so too through the service of the wind, which is its breeze,⁴⁸ Moses wished to make known to us the creation [of the wind]. For just as clouds do not exist without a shadow, neither does wind exist without a breeze. It is in their service then that we infer those things that are not otherwise made apparent to us. Therefore that wind was blowing because it was created for this purpose. After it blew and manifested its creation through its service on the first night, it once again became calm on the first day just as the clouds were once again dispersed on the first day.

8. After [Moses] spoke of heaven and earth, of the darkness, the abyss and the wind that came to be at the beginning of the first night, he then turned to speak about the light that came to be at dawn of the first day. At the end of the twelve hours of that night, the light was created between the clouds and the waters and it chased away the shadow of the clouds that were overshadowing the waters and making them dark. For Nisan was the first month; in it the number of the hours of day and night were equal.

(2) The light remained a length of twelve hours so that each day might also obtain its [own] hours just as the darkness had obtained a measured length of time. Although the light and the clouds were created in the twinkling of an eye, the day and the night of the first day were each completed in twelve hours.

48. On the breezes as ministers in Paradise, see *Hymns on Paradise*, 9.7-13.

(3) The light then was like a bright mist over the face of the earth. Whether it was like the dawn or like the pillar that gave light to the people in the wilderness,⁴⁹ it is obvious that it would have been unable to chase away the darkness that was spread over the face of everything, unless it had spread out completely over everything, either by its substance or by its brightness. The light was released so that it might spread over everything without being fastened down. It dispersed the darkness that was over everything although it did not move. It was only when [the light] went away and when it came that it moved, for when [the light] went away the rule was given to the night and at [the light's] coming there would be an end to [the night's] rule.

9. After the brightness [of the light] rendered its service for three days,⁵⁰ lest, like nothing, it return to nothing, God bore clear witness that the light *was very good*.⁵¹ Although God did not [actually] say that the works that preceded the light were very good, He did [in fact] say it about them, for although He did not say it of them in the beginning when only these things had come into existence out of nothing, He did say it of them after everything else had come into existence: for [Moses] included all that had been made together with all that was created in six days, when he said on the sixth day: *God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good*.⁵²

(2) Because that first light was indeed created good, it rendered its service by its brightness for three days and it also served, as we say,⁵³ for the conception and the birth of everything that the earth brought forth on the third day. The sun was in the firmament in order to ripen whatever had sprouted under that first light. It is said that from this light, now diffused, and from fire, which were both created on the first day, the sun, which was in the firmament, was

49. Cf. Exod 13.21.

50. See *Hymns on Virginity* 51.2: "For three days the light rendered its service and [then] was hidden."

51. Gen 1.4.

52. Gen 1.31.

53. Read *ʔamryn* for *ʔamryn*, as Jansma, "Weitere Beiträge," 122.

fashioned, while the moon and the stars also came to be from that same first light.

(3) Just as the sun, which rules the day by the fact that *it gives light to the earth*,⁵⁴ actually causes the fruits of the earth to ripen, so too does the moon, which rules the night and tempers the strength of the night by its brightness, also bring forth, according to its first nature, fruits and vegetation. For Moses speaks in his blessings of *the yield which the moon brought forth*,⁵⁵ along with the other things on account of which the light was created, although they say that, for the sake of the things that were to come forth, the light was created on the first day. After the earth brought forth everything during the course of the third day, then [the moon] came to be in the manner of the light on the fourth day, so that through the moon, as well as through the light, all fruit would have its beginning, and then through the sun all vegetation would become ripe.

10. Thus, through light and water the earth brought forth everything. While God is able to bring forth everything from the earth without these things, it was His will to show that there was nothing created on earth that was not created for the purpose of mankind or for his service.⁵⁶

(2) The waters that the earth drank on the first day were not salty.⁵⁷ Even if these waters were like the deep on the surface of the earth, they were not yet seas. For it was in the seas that these waters, which were not salty before being gathered together, became salty. When they were sent throughout the entire earth for the earth to drink they were sweet, but when they were gathered into seas on the third

54. Gen 1.17.

55. Cf. Deut 33.14. The manuscript here reads Jacob where Moses is clearly intended. The text Ephrem cites differs from both the Hebrew and the Greek text.

56. Ephrem is at great pains to emphasize that everything that has been made has been made for the sake of humanity; see *Hymns on Nisibis* 38.9 and *Hymns on Paradise* 6.6. See also discussion of Kronholm, *Motifs*, 67.

57. See *Genesis Rabbah* 5.3, where it is argued that these waters were sweet. The question whether these waters were sweet or salty seems not to have been a concern of Christian exegetes.

day, they became salty, lest they become stagnant due to their being gathered together, and so that they might receive the rivers that enter into them without increasing. For the quantity that a sea requires for nourishment is the measure of the rivers that flow down into it. Rivers flow down into seas lest the heat of the sun dry them up. The saltiness [of the seas] then swallows up [the rivers] lest they increase, rise up, and cover the earth. Thus the rivers turn into nothing, as it were, because the saltiness of the sea swallows them up.⁵⁸

11. The seas had been created when the waters were created and were hidden in those waters, and although the seas became bitter, the waters above them were not bitter. Just as there were seas in the flood, but they were covered over [by those waters], they were not able to change into their bitter nature the sweet waters of the flood which came from above. If these waters had been bitter, how would the olives and all the plants have been preserved in them? How did those of the house of Noah and those with them drink from them?

(2) Although Noah had commanded that all sorts of food be brought for himself and those with him because there would be no food anywhere, he did not allow water to be brought because those who had entered the ark would be able to take from the water outside of the ark to drink. Therefore, just as the waters of the flood were not salty while the seas were hidden within them, neither were the waters that were gathered on the third day bitter even though the seas below them were bitter.

12. Just as the gathering of the waters did not precede that word which said, "*Let the waters be gathered and let the dry land appear;*"⁵⁹ neither did the seas exist until that moment when God called the gathering of water "*seas.*"⁶⁰ When they received their name they were changed.⁶¹ In their [new] place the [waters] attained that saltiness that had not been theirs

58. Cf. Eccles 1.7.

60. Gen 1.10.

59. Gen 1.9.

61. See note 22 above.

[even] outside of their [old] place. For [their place] became deep at that very moment when [God] said, "*Let the waters be gathered into one place.*" Then either the land [under] the sea was brought down below the [level of the] earth to receive within it its own waters along with the waters that were above the entire earth, or the waters swallowed each other so that the place might be sufficient for them, or the place of the sea shook and it became a great depth and the waters quickly hastened into that basin. Although the will of God had gathered these waters when the earth was created, a gate was opened for them to be gathered into one place. Just as in the gathering of the first and second waters there was found no gathering place because there was no place from which they might go out, so now do these waters come down with all the rains and showers and are gathered into seas along paths and roads which had been prepared for them on the first day.

13. The upper waters, because they had been separated on the second day from the lower waters by the firmament set between them, were also sweet like the lower waters. (The upper waters are not those that became salty in the seas on the third day, but are those that were separated from them on the second day.) They were not salty, therefore, because they would not have become stagnant, for they had not been left on the land to become stagnant. The air there does not serve to cause [things] to be born or to swarm, nor do rivers flow into them to keep them from evaporating for there is no sun there to generate heat that would cause them to evaporate. They remain there for the dew of blessing and are kept there for the floodgates of wrath.⁶²

(2) The waters that are above the firmament do not move about because something made does not move about within something that is not made, nor does something move about within nothing. Something that is created within something⁶³ possesses, at its creation, all of that thing; that

62. See Deut 33.28, where the "dew of heaven" is used in context of a blessing (in Gen 27.39, for curse) and Gen 7.11, for the floodgates of wrath.

63. Delete negative particle *l* as Jansma, "Ephraems Beschreibung," 312-13.

is, that thing moves, rises and falls within that thing in which it was created. But nothing surrounded the upper waters. Therefore, the upper waters were unable either to turn or to move about because they had nothing in which they might turn or move about.

14. Heaven, earth, fire, wind, and water were created from nothing as Scripture bears witness, whereas the light, which came to be on the first day along with the rest of the things that came to be afterwards, came to be from something. For when these other things came to be from nothing, [Moses] said, *God created heaven and earth*. Although it is not written that fire, water, and wind were created, neither is it said that they were made.⁶⁴ Therefore, they came to be from nothing just as heaven and earth came to be from nothing.

15. After God began to make [things] from something, Moses wrote, *God said, "Let there be light,"* and so on. Although Moses did say, *God created the great serpents*, nevertheless "*let the waters swarm with swarming things*" had been [said] prior to that. Therefore those five created things were created from nothing and everything else was made from those [five] things that came to be from nothing.

(2) Fire was also created on the first day, although it is not written down that it was created. Since [fire] had no existence in and of itself but existed in something else, it was created together with that thing in which it came to be. It is not possible that a thing which does not exist of itself can precede that thing which is the cause of its existence. That [fire] is in the earth, nature bears witness, but that it was not created together with the earth, Scripture affirms, when it said, *In the beginning God created heaven and earth*.⁶⁵ Fire too then, since it does not exist of itself, will remain in the earth, even if the earth and the waters have been commanded at every moment to bring forth fire from their wombs along with the waters and the wind and the clouds.

64. Ephrem distinguishes (though not with rigid consistency) the term *br*, meaning "to create," i.e., from nothing, from the term *bd* meaning "to make," i.e., out of existing materials.

65. Gen 1:1.

16. Darkness, too, is neither a self-subsistent being⁶⁶ nor a created thing; it is a shadow, as Scripture makes clear. It was created neither before heaven nor after the clouds, for it was with the clouds and was brought forth from the clouds. [Darkness] also exists in another [thing], for it has no substance of its own. When that in which it exists vanishes, the darkness likewise vanishes with it. For whatever comes to an end along with another thing when it vanishes is without its own existence, because that other thing is the cause of its existence.⁶⁷

(2) So, how could darkness, whose existence is due to the clouds and to the firmament and not to the first light or to the sun, exist of itself? It is [a thing] which one thing brings forth by its cover and another destroys by its brightness. If one thing creates it and causes it to become something while another thing turns it back into nothing, how can it be a self-subsistent being? The clouds and the firmament, which were created at the beginning, bring it forth and the light that was created on the first day brings it to an end. If one created thing can create something and another created thing can destroy it—for subsequent to that, one thing can bring it into visibility at any moment—and another, at that very moment that it itself returns to nothing, turns it back into nothing, it is under the compulsion of that [one thing] which causes it to begin and [that other thing] that causes it to go away. If created things cause it to come into existence and also cause it to vanish then it is a created from created things. [The darkness then] is but a shadow of the firmament and it vanishes in the presence of another thing, as it disappears before the sun. Some teachings⁶⁸ posit that

66. I.e., an *'ityā*, as Bardaisan held. In fact, Ephrem will show that it is not even a created thing. In *Prose Refutations* 1:52, Ephrem claims that Bardaisan had said that it was the assault of darkness on the other *'ityē* that introduced disorder into the universe.

67. On the non-existence of darkness, see also *Prose Refutations* 1:98–100 (text) and lxxvii–lxxviii (translation), and *Hymns against Heresies* 11.2, 16.20, 17.1ff., 21.5, 41.7.

68. Or, "sects." Féghali, "Les premiers jours de la création," 22, n. 36, identifies this as the teaching of Mani. See also, Lieu, *Manichaeism*, 12–15; and G.

this [darkness], which is at all times subject to created things, is an adversary of creatures, and they make that thing which has no substance of its own a self-existent being.

17. After [Moses] spoke of those things that came to be on the first day, he began to write about those things that came to be on the second day, saying, *And God said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters and let it separate the waters below the firmament from the waters above the firmament."*⁶⁹ The firmament between the waters was pressed together from the waters.⁷⁰ It was of the same measure as the waters that were spread out over the surface of the earth. Then if, in its origin, [the firmament] was above the earth (for the earth, water, and fire were beneath it, while water, wind, and darkness were above it), how do others posit that this [firmament], which is enveloped like an embryo in the uterus within the womb, is the womb of everything created between everything?

(2) For if the firmament had been created between everything, light, darkness, and wind, which were above the firmament when it was created, would have been confined above the firmament. If the creation [of the firmament] had occurred at night, the darkness and wind would also have remained there together with the waters which remained there. But if the creation [of the firmament] had occurred in the day, the light and the wind also would have remained there along with the waters. And if they had remained there then the [wind, water, and lights] that are here would be different things. When, then, could they have been created? But if they did not remain there, how did those elements that were above [the firmament] when they were created move down below it?

18. The firmament was created on the evening of the sec-

Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism* (Uppsala, 1946) 31-51. It should not, however, be restricted to Maui, as Bardaisan held a similar position.

69. Cf. Gen 1:7-8.

70. That is, the firmament was composed of the solidified water. Cf. Job 38:30. See also *Genesis Rabba* 4:2, Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1:30. See *Hymns on the Nativity* 26:5. This interpretation was also preserved in later Nestorian tradition; see Jansma, "Investigations," 114-16.

ond night, just as the heavens came to be on the evening of the first night. But when the firmament came into existence, the covering of clouds that had served for a night and a day in the place of the firmament dissipated. Because [the firmament] had been created between the light and the darkness, no darkness remained above it, for the shadow of the clouds was dispelled when the clouds themselves were dispelled. Nor did any of this light remain there, for its allotted measure of time had come to an end and so it sank into the waters that were beneath [the firmament].⁷¹

(2) The wind could not have remained there either because it did not even exist there. For, it was on the first night that [Moses] said *it hovered* and not on the second night. If the firmament had been created on the first night when [the wind] was blowing there could then be some debate. But, since it is not written that [the wind] was blowing when the firmament was created, who would say that the wind was there when Scripture does not say so?

19. After the wind hovered on the first day, manifested its service by its blowing and returned to its stillness, then the firmament came to be. It is evident, therefore, that [the wind] neither remained above nor descended below, for how can one seek in any position or place for something whose very substance only exists at the moment of its service and whose service comes to an end when it ceases to blow? The wind underwent three things on the day of its creation: it was created from nothing, it blew in and through something, and it reverted to being hidden in its stillness.

20. After the wind had undergone these three things, the firmament was created on the evening of the second day. There was then nothing that rose along with it, because there was nothing that remained above it. It made a separation between the waters that it was commanded to separate, but not between the light, the wind, or darkness, for this had not been commanded.

71. For the lights sinking into water in Jewish tradition, see L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1939) 1:25.

(2) There was no light, therefore, on the first night. On the night of the second and third day, it sank into the waters beneath the firmament and rose up as we said [above]. But on the fourth day, when the waters were gathered into one place, they say that [the firmament] was formed and that the sun, the moon, and the stars were formed from [the firmament] and from fire, and there were places set apart for the lights. Therefore, the moon would rise in the west of the firmament, the sun in the east, and at that same moment, the stars were dispersed in orderly fashion throughout the entire firmament.

(3) Although God said that the light which came to be on the first day *was very good*, He did not say this about the firmament which came to be on the second day, because the firmament had not yet been finished, neither in its structure nor in its adornment. The Creator delayed until the lights came to be so that when [the firmament] was adorned with the sun and the moon and the stars, and the strength of the darkness that was weakened by the lights that shone from it, He would then say of [the firmament], included with the rest [of creation], that *it was very good*.⁷²

21. After [Moses] spoke of the firmament that came to be on the second day, he then turned to write about the gathering of the waters and about the grass and the trees that the earth brought forth on the third day, saying, *And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear."*⁷³ From the fact that He said, "Let the waters be gathered into one place," it is evident that it is the earth that supports the seas and that the abysses beneath the earth do not stand on nothing. Although the waters, by the word of God, were gathered in the night, the surface of the earth still became dry in the twinkling of an eye.

22. After these two things had occurred, God commanded the earth to bring forth at dawn grass and herbs of every

72. Gen 1:31.

73. Gen 1:9.

kind and all the various fruit-bearing trees.⁷⁴ Although the grasses were only a moment old at their creation, they appeared as if they were months old. Likewise, the trees, although only a day old when they sprouted forth, were nevertheless like [trees] years old as they were fully grown and fruits were already budding on their branches.⁷⁵

(2) The grass that would be required as food for the animals who were to be created two days later was [thus] made ready. And the new corn that would be food for Adam and his descendants, who would be thrown out of Paradise four days later, was [thus] prepared.

23. After [Moses] spoke about the gathering of the waters and about the sprouting of the vegetation on the earth on the third day, he turned to write about the lights that were created in the firmament saying, *And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night,"* that is, "one to rule over the day and the other [to rule] over the night."⁷⁶

(2) That [God] said, "Let them be for signs," [refers to] measures of time, and "let them be for seasons," clearly indicates summer and winter. "Let them be for days," are measured by the rising and setting of the sun, and "let them be for years,"⁷⁷ are comprised of the daily cycles of the sun and the monthly cycles of the moon.⁷⁸

(3) Indeed [Moses] said, *God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and [He made] the stars.*⁷⁹ Although all that was done before the fourth day was begun in the evening, the works on the fourth day were fashioned at dawn. Because the third day had been completed, in that [Moses] said, *It was evening and it was morning; day three,*⁸⁰ God did not create the two lights

74. Cf. Gen 1.11-12.

75. For the trees being created fruit-bearing in Jewish tradition, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:59, 5:107.

76. Gen 1.14, 16.

77. Gen 1.14.

78. Compare *Genesis Rabbah* 6.1.

79. Gen 1.16.

80. Gen 1.13.

in the evening lest night be changed into day and morning be given priority over evening.

24. Because the days followed the same order in which the first day was created, the night of the fourth day, like that of the other days, preceded its day. And if its evening preceded its dawn, the lights were not created in the evening, but rather at dawn. But to say that one of them was created in the evening and the other at dawn cannot be allowed for Moses said, "*Let there be lights,*" and *God made the two great lights.*⁸¹ If they were great when they were created and they were created at dawn, then the sun would have stood in the east and the moon opposite it in the west. The sun would have been set very low because it was created in the place where it set out over the earth, whereas the moon would have been set higher because it was created in the place where it stands on the fifteenth day. Indeed, at the moment the sun appears over the earth, the lights see each other and the moon sinks. From the position of the moon, from its size and from the light it produced, it is clear, then, that it was fifteen days old when it was created.

25. Just as the trees, the vegetation, the animals, the birds, and even mankind were old, so also were they young. They were old according to the appearance of their limbs and their substances, yet they were young because of the hour and moment of their creation. Likewise, the moon was both old and young. It was young, for it was but a moment old, but was also old, for it was full as it is on the fifteenth day.

(2) If the moon had been created a day old or even two, it would have given no light; because of its proximity to the sun, it would not even have been visible. If it had been created about four days old, although it might have been visible, it would still not have given any light. This would have rendered false the verse *God created the two great lights,*⁸² as well as *He said, "Let there be lights in heaven to give light upon the*

81. Gen 1.14, 16.

82. Gen 1.16.

earth."⁸³ Therefore, the moon had to be fifteen days old. The sun, although it was only one day old, was nevertheless four days old, for it is according to the sun that each day is counted and will be reckoned. Accordingly, those eleven days, by which the moon was older than the sun, that were added to the moon at that first moment are also added to it each year, for these [days] are used in the lunar reckoning.

(3) There was nothing lacking in that year for Adam and his descendants, for any deficiency in the measure of the moon had been filled in when the moon was created. Thus, Adam and his descendants learned from this year that, henceforth, eleven days were to be added to every year. Clearly then, it was not the Chaldeans who arranged the seasons and the years; these things had been arranged before [the creation of] Adam.

26. After Moses spoke about the lights that came to be in the firmament, he turned to write about the swarming things, the birds, and the serpents that were created from the waters on the fifth day, saying, *And God said, "Let the waters cause living things to swarm, and let the birds fly above the earth." And God created the great serpents and every living creature with which the waters swarmed according to their kind.*⁸⁴

(2) When the waters were gathered, which had been ordered on the second day, there appeared rivers as well as springs, lakes, and ponds. At the word of God these waters dispersed throughout Creation and brought forth swarming things and fish from within them; the serpents were created in the abysses and the birds soared in flocks out of the waves into the air.⁸⁵

(3) As for the great serpents that were created, although the Prophets said that Leviathan dwelt in the sea,⁸⁶ Job said that the Behemoth dwelt on dry land.⁸⁷ David too, speaking

83. Gen 1.14.

84. Gen 1.20-21.

85. Compare Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:28, where "the birds are fashioned out of marshy ground saturated with water."

86. Cf. Isa 27.1; Ps 74.13-14, 104.26.

87. Cf. Job 40.15.

of this beast, said that *on a thousand mountains is Behemoth's pasture land*,⁸⁸ that is, *his place of repose*. Perhaps it was after they were created that their places were separated so that Leviathan should dwell in the sea and Behemoth on dry land.⁸⁹

27. After [Moses] spoke about the creation of the swarming things and of the birds and the sea serpents on the fifth day, he turned to write about the creeping things and the animals and the beasts that were created on the sixth day, saying, *And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and reptiles and beasts."*⁹⁰ Although the entire earth was swarming with swarming things, nevertheless the cattle and the beasts were set along the border of Paradise so that they might dwell near Adam.⁹¹

(2) Therefore, the entire earth stirred with creeping things as had been commanded. [The earth] also brought forth the beasts of the field as companions to the wild beasts, and it brought forth as many beasts as would be suitable for the service of that one who, on that very day, was to transgress the commandment of his Lord.

28. After [Moses] spoke about the reptiles, the beasts and the cattle that were created on the sixth day, he turned to write about the creation of that man who was fashioned on the sixth day, saying, *"And God said. . . ."*⁹² But to whom was God speaking? Here, as in every place where He creates, it is

88. Cf. Ps 50.10. Jansma, "Beiträge," 60, wants to read 'bry'—"in Hebrew." This version of Ps 50.10 does occur in the Hebrew text, but this emendation would constitute the only time that Ephrem makes a reference to the Hebrew text. See discussion in Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, 71. I find this reading in no extant Targum.

89. It was a widespread Jewish tradition that the great serpents were to be equated with Leviathan and Behemoth, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:26–29, *Genesis Rabbah* 7.4. The Targums also witness to this tradition. At Gen 1.21, *Targum Neofiti* reads, "And the Lord created the *two* great monsters," while *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* reads, "God created the great sea monsters, *Leviathan and his companion*." See also 1 Enoch 60.7–8, and 2 Bar 29.4.

90. Gen 1.24.

91. Cf. *Hymns on Paradise* 3.4

92. Gen 1.26.

clear that He was speaking to His Son.⁹³ The Evangelist said about Him that *everything came to be through Him and without Him not one thing came to be.*⁹⁴ Paul too confirms this when he said, *In Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, all that is visible and all that is invisible.*⁹⁵

29. *And God said, "Let us make man in our image."*⁹⁶ According to what has been the rule until now, namely, if it pleases God He will make it known to us, Moses explains in what way we are the image of God, when he said *"Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds, and over the cattle, and over all the earth."*⁹⁷ It is the dominion that Adam received over the earth and over all that is in it that constitutes the likeness of God who has dominion over the heavenly things and the earthly things.⁹⁸

(2) Then [Moses] said, *male and female He created them,*⁹⁹ to make known that Eve was inside Adam, in the rib that was drawn out from him. Although she was not in his mind she was in his body, and she was not only in his body with him, but she was also in soul and spirit with him, for God added nothing to that rib that He took out except the structure and the adornment. If everything that was suitable for Eve, who came to be from the rib, was complete in and from that rib, it is rightly said that *male and female He created them.*¹⁰⁰

93. For Ephrem, the Son was clearly the intermediary for all creation; see *Hymns on Faith* 6.6–16, *Sermons on Faith* 1.75–77, *Hymns on the Nativity* 26, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* I.6, and also discussion in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 39–43.

94. John 1.3.

95. Col 1.16.

96. Gen 1.26.

97. Gen 1.26.

98. See also II.10, below. Dominion over the earth constituting the divine image was particularly characteristic of Jewish and Antiochene Christian tradition. See, for example, John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 2. 8; Severus of Gabala, *On the Creation of the World*, 5; and Theodoret of Cyr, *Questions on Genesis*, 20. For summary, see M. Alexandre, *Le commencement du livre Genèse I–V* (Paris, 1988) 175–88, especially 184; and J. Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis," *BJRL*, 51 (1968): 11–26.

99. Gen 1.27.

100. Gen 1.27. For Eve being in Adam at his creation, see *Hymns on the Church* 45.2, *Hymns on Nisibis* 48.10, and *Hymns against Heresies* 8.5, and discussion of Kronholm, *Motifs*, 81–83. See also II.12, below.

30. *And God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds and over every animal that crawls upon the earth."*¹⁰¹ They were blessed on this earth, as if this dwelling place had been prepared for them before they sinned. Although they had not yet sinned, [God] knew that they were about to sin.

(2) *Be fruitful and multiply and fill, not Paradise, but the earth, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds and over all the beasts.*¹⁰² But how was Adam to rule over the fish of the sea unless he were to be in proximity to the sea? And how was he to rule over the birds that fly throughout every region unless his descendants were to dwell in every region? And how was Adam to rule over every beast of the earth unless his offspring were to inhabit the entire earth?

31. Although Adam was created and was blessed to rule over the earth and over everything that was created and blessed therein, God had indeed made him to dwell within Paradise! God truly manifested His foreknowledge in His blessing and manifested His grace in the place where He set Adam to dwell. Lest it be said that Paradise was not created for [Adam's] sake, [God] set him there in Paradise to dwell. And lest it be said that God did not know that Adam would sin, He blessed him on this earth. And everything with which God blessed Adam preceded the transgression of the commandment, lest by the transgression of him who had been blessed, the blessings of Him who gave the blessings be withheld and the world be turned back into nothing on account of the folly of that one for whose sake everything had been created.¹⁰³

(2) Therefore, God did not bless Adam in Paradise, because that place and all that is in it is blessed. But God blessed him on the earth first so that by that blessing with which [His] grace blessed beforehand, the curse of the earth, which was about to be cursed by [His] justice, might [thus] be diminished. But even though the blessing was one

101. Gen 1.28.

102. Gen 1.28.

103. See note 56 above.

of promise, in that it was fulfilled after his expulsion from Paradise, His grace, nevertheless, was of actuality, for on that same day, [God] set [Adam] in the garden to dwell, clothed him with glory¹⁰⁴ and made him ruler over all the trees of Paradise.

32. After Moses spoke about the reptiles, the cattle, and the beasts, about mankind and about their blessing on the sixth day, he turned to write about God's rest that took place on the seventh day saying, *Thus heaven and earth were finished, and all their host. And God rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.*¹⁰⁵

(2) From what toil did God rest? For the creatures that came to be on the first day came to be by implication,¹⁰⁶ except for the light which came to be through His word. And the rest of the works which came to be afterwards came to be through His word. What toil is there for us when we speak one word, that there should be toil for God due to the one word a day that He spoke?¹⁰⁷ If Moses, who divided the sea by his word and his rod, did not tire and Joshua, son, of Nun, who restrained the luminaries by his word, did not tire, then what toil could there have been for God when He created the sea and the luminaries by [His] word?

33. It was not because He rested on [that day] that God, who does not weary, blessed and sanctified the seventh day, nor because He was to give it to that people, who did not understand that since they were freed from their servitude, they were to give rest to their servants and maidservants. He gave it to them so that, even if they had to be coerced, they would rest. For it was given to them in order to depict by a temporal rest, which He gave to a temporal people, the mystery of the true rest which will be given to the eternal people in the eternal world.

(2) Also because a full week was required, God exalted by

104. Ps 8.5, Peshitta. See General Introduction above and notes *ad loc.*

105. Gen 2.1-2.

106. In Syriac, *remzâ*. That is, the creation of these creatures is implied and not explicitly stated in the account of creation for the first day.

107. Compare *Genesis Rabbah* 10.9, 12.10.

His word that seventh day which His works had not exalted so that, because of the honor accorded that day, it might be united to its companions, and that the reckoning of the week, which is required for the service of the world, might be completed.

Section II

1. After Moses spoke of the sabbath rest, of how God blessed and sanctified this day, he returned to the account of how the Creation was first fashioned, briefly passing over those things of which he had already spoken, while recounting in detail those things that he had left out. He then began to write about the creation account a second time, saying, *These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were created. In the day that God made heaven and earth, when no tree of the field existed and no vegetation had sprouted—for God had not brought down rain upon the earth and Adam was not there¹⁰⁸ to till the earth; but a spring rose up and watered the whole face of the earth.*¹⁰⁹

2. Understand, O hearer, that although the days of creation were finished and [God] had blessed the Sabbath day which was sanctified and he had completed [his account], Moses still returned to tell the story of the beginning of Creation even after the days of creation had been finished.

(2) *These are the generations of heaven and earth,*¹¹⁰ that is, this is the account of the fashioning of heaven and earth on the day when the Lord made heaven and earth for as yet *no tree of the field existed and no vegetation had sprouted.*¹¹¹ Even if¹¹² these things were not actually created on the first day—for

108. Whereas in Hebrew the word Adam could mean either "man" or "any-one" as well as indicating a proper name [see R. S. Hess, "Splitting the Adam: the Usage of *ʿādām* in Genesis i–v," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplement to *Vetus Testamentum*, no. 41 (Leiden, 1990) 1–15], when one finds it in Syriac it can only be taken as a proper name. Similarly, Adam occurs as a proper name at Gen 2.5 in *Targum Neofiti*.

109. Gen 2.5–6.

110. Gen 2.4.

111. Gen 2.5.

112. Read *ʿp* for *ʿp* with Jansma, "Beiträge," 62.

they had been made on the third day—still [Moses] did not rashly introduce, on the first day, the report of those things that were created on the third day.

3. For [Moses] said, *no trees existed and no vegetation had sprouted—for the Lord had not brought down rain upon the earth; but a spring rose up out of the earth and watered the whole face of the earth.*¹¹³ Because everything that has been born and will be born from the earth [will be] through the conjunction of water and earth, [Moses] undertook to show that no tree nor vegetation had been created along with the earth, because the rain had not yet come down. But after the great spring rose up from the great abyss and watered the whole face of the earth, and after the waters had been gathered together on the third day, then the earth brought forth all the vegetation.

(2) These waters, then, over which the darkness had been spread on the first day are the same ones that rose up from the spring and, in the blink of an eye, covered the entire earth. This was also the [same spring] that was opened in the days of Noah and that covered the surface of all the mountains on the earth. This spring did not rise up from below the earth but out of the earth, for [Moses] said, *the spring rose up not from below the earth but, out of the earth.* The earth itself, which bears these waters in its womb, bears witness that these waters were not prior to the earth.¹¹⁴

(3) *The spring then rose up out of the earth, as Scripture says, and watered the whole face of the earth.* Thus [the earth] produced trees, grasses, and plants. It was not that God was unable to bring forth everything from the earth in any other way. Rather, it was His will that [the earth] should bring forth by means of water. [God] began the creation [of the vegetation] this way right from the beginning so that this procedure would be perpetuated until the end of time.

4. After [Moses] spoke about those things that had been

113. Gen 2.5-6.

114. Ephrem seems to be basing his interpretation here on such biblical passages as Ps 24.2, where the Lord "founded the earth upon the seas."

omitted and that had not been recounted on the first day, he turned to write about how Adam was fashioned saying, *Adam was not there to till the earth*. Obviously, Adam did not exist in the days that preceded the sixth day, since he was created on the sixth day. *Then, on the sixth day the Lord formed Adam from the dust of the earth and blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and Adam became a living being.*¹¹⁵ Even though the beasts, the cattle, and the birds were equal [to Adam] in their ability to procreate and in that they had life, God still gave honor to Adam in many ways: first, in that it was said, *God formed*¹¹⁶ *him with His own hands and breathed life into him;*¹¹⁷ God then set him as ruler over Paradise and over all that is outside of Paradise; God clothed Adam in glory; and God gave him reason and thought so that he might perceive the majesty [of God].¹¹⁸

5. After Moses spoke of how Adam was so gloriously fashioned, he turned to write about Paradise and Adam's entry therein saying, *The Lord had previously planted Paradise in Eden and there He placed Adam whom He had fashioned.*¹¹⁹

(2) Eden is the land of Paradise and [Moses] said *previously*¹²⁰ because God had [already] planted it on the third day. He explains this by saying, *the Lord caused every tree that is*

115. Gen 2.7.

116. The Syriac verb used here, *gbl*, is used of forming something from existing material, such as a sculpture. See *Hymns against Heresies* 48.2.

117. Gen 2.7. This divine breath is what distinguishes humanity from the animals, a theme which Ephrem develops more fully in his hymns; see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 57–67.

118. The special love and care that God took for Adam, evident throughout this section of the *Commentary*, is also prominent in Ephrem's hymns. In *Hymns on Faith* 67.19, Ephrem says that "from the very beginning God opened up the treasury of His Mercy when He formed Adam." For the great importance of God's special love for Adam in Ephrem's hymns, see also discussion in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 57–81.

119. Gen 2.8.

120. The Syriac word *qdm* can also mean "in the East," but Ephrem's comments here clearly militate against this translation. The normal English rendering "of old," would also be unsuitable here. In Jewish tradition, Paradise was also created "previously," on the third day; see *Genesis Rabbah* 15.3, 21.9; and Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:18–20.

*pleasant to the sight and good for food to sprout forth from the earth.*¹²¹ And to show that he was talking about Paradise, [Moses] said, *and the tree of life was in the midst of Paradise, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*¹²²

6. After [Moses] spoke about Paradise and about which day it had been planted, about Adam's entry therein, and about the tree of life and its companion, he turned to write about the river that flowed out from Paradise and which, once outside of it, divided into four distinct sources, saying, *A river flowed out of Eden to water Paradise.*¹²³

(2) Here too Moses calls that delightful land of Paradise *Eden*. If that river had indeed watered Paradise, it would not have divided into the four rivers outside it. I would suggest that it was perhaps due to convention that it is said *to water*, since the spiritual trees of Paradise had no need of water. But if [someone should say that] because they are spiritual, they drink from the blessed and spiritual waters there, I would not quarrel over this.

(3) The four rivers that flowed from that river were not similar in taste to the head spring. For if the waters of our lands vary, all being placed under the sentence of a curse, how much more distinct should the taste of the blessed land of Eden be from the taste of that land which had been placed under the curse of the Just One due to Adam's transgression of the commandment?¹²⁴

(4) The four rivers, then, are these: the Pishon, which is the Danube;¹²⁵ the Gihon, which is the Nile; and then the

121. Gen 2.9.

122. Gen 2.9. In *Hymns on Paradise* 3.2, all the other trees bowed down to the tree of life for it was "the captain of the host and the king of the trees." In 3.3, the tree of knowledge of good and evil was "endowed with awe and hedged with dread so that it may serve as a boundary to the inner edge of Paradise." See also 12.15, and *Hymns on Faith* 6.14.

123. Gen 2.10.

124. Ephrem has a particularly descriptive passage concerning the fragrances of Paradise in his *Hymns on Paradise* 11.9-15.

125. The identification of the Pishon with the Danube is fairly common in Syriac commentaries. It is found, for example, in Severus of Antioch and the commentaries of Mošê bar Kêphâ and of Iso'daci of Merw as well as in Severian

Tigris and the Euphrates, between which we dwell.¹²⁶ Although the places from which they flow are known, the source of the spring is not [known]. Because Paradise is set on a great height,¹²⁷ the rivers are swallowed up again and they go down to the sea as if through a tall water duct¹²⁸ and so they pass through the earth which is under the sea into this land.¹²⁹ The earth then spits out each one of them: the Danube, which is the Pishon, in the west; the Gihon in the south; and the Euphrates and the Tigris in the north.

7. After [Moses] spoke about Paradise and the rivers that were divided outside of it, he turned to speak about Adam's entry into Paradise and about the law that was laid down for him saying, *The Lord God took Adam and put him in the Paradise of Eden to till it and to guard it.*¹³⁰

(2) But with what did Adam till the garden since he had no tools for tilling? How could he have tilled it since he was not capable of tilling it by himself? What did he have to till since there were no thorns or briars there? Moreover, how could he have guarded it as he could not possibly encompass it? And from what did he guard it since there were no thieves

of Gabala. For an overview of various Greek interpretations, see Alexandre, *Le commencement*, 259–60.

126. In his hymns, Ephrem is more inclined to interpret these rivers in more typological fashion: see, for example, *Hymns on Virginity* 4.14, and *Hymns on Faith* 18.10, where the Gospels are compared to these four rivers.

127. Ephrem conceived of Paradise as a mountain higher than all other mountains (see *Hymns on Paradise* 1.4), perhaps deriving his imagery from such passages as Isa 2.2, Ezek 28.13–14, and Ps 15.1, 24.3. See Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 49–57; Sed, "Les hymnes sur le paradis de saint Ephrem," 457–59; and, for the importance of the Near Eastern mytho-religious background of this concept, see G. A. Anderson, "The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity," in *Genesis 1–3 in the History of Exegesis*, ed. G. A. Robbins (Lewiston, 1988) 187–224.

128. This loan word, in Greek, *κάνθαρος*, normally means "a drinking cup," "a beetle," or "a boat." The translation *cantharus* of R. Tonneau, *In Genesis et Exodum*, 21, is, therefore, not satisfactory. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 70, n. 81, suggests *aquaeductus, amalis*, which is closer to the meaning required here.

129. Thus, the earth receives blessing and healing from Paradise; see *Hymns on Paradise* 11.11.

130. Gen 2.15.

to enter it? Indeed, the fence that was erected after the transgression of the commandment bears witness that as long as Adam kept the commandment, no guard was required.

(3) Adam had nothing to guard then except the law that had been set down for him. Nor was any other "tilling" entrusted to him except to fulfill the commandment that had been commanded him. But if [someone were to say that Adam] had or would have these two things [to perform] along with the commandment, I would not oppose this [interpretation].¹³¹

8. After he spoke about Adam's entry into Paradise and why he had been put there, [Moses] turned to write about the law that was set down for him, saying, *and the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, "You may eat of every tree that is in Paradise; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*¹³²

(2) This commandment was an easy one, for God gave to Adam all of Paradise and withheld from him only one tree. If a single tree were sufficient to provide nourishment for someone and many were withheld, [that single tree] would offer relief from the torment [of hunger] by providing nourishment for one's hunger. But if God gave Adam many trees instead of a single one which would have been sufficient for him, any transgression would be due not to any constraint but to disdain.¹³³

(3) [God] withheld from Adam a single tree and set death around it, so that if Adam would not keep the law out of love for the One who had set down the law, then at least the fear of death that was set around the tree would frighten him away from overstepping the law.

131. The idea that Adam was to "till" the commandment plays on the double meaning of *plh*—"to till, labor; to serve, worship." The word *snr*—"to guard, keep"—more readily lends itself to Ephrem's interpretation. See *Hymns on Paradise* 3.16, 4.1-5. This same interpretation of this verse is also found in Jewish tradition. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:70, 5:92, 2:54, and *Genesis Rabbah* 16.5. For this verse, the texts of *Targum Neofiti* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* specifically state the objects "the law" and "the commandments."

132. Gen 2.16-17.

133. Compare *Hymns against Heresies* 11.7, where Ephrem makes clear that God did all he could for Adam.

9. After he spoke about Adam's entry into Paradise and about the law that had been set down for him, Moses turned to write about the names that [Adam] gave to the animals saying, *the Lord formed out of the ground every beast of the field and every bird of the sky and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them.*¹³⁴

(2) They were not really *formed*,¹³⁵ for the earth brought forth the animals and the water the birds.¹³⁶ When he said, "*He formed,*" [Moses] wished to make known that every animal, reptile, beast, and bird comes into being from the conjunction of earth and water.

(3) That [Moses] said, *He brought them to Adam*, is so that God might make known the wisdom of Adam and the harmony that existed between the animals and Adam before he transgressed the commandment. The animals came to Adam as to a loving shepherd. Without fear they passed before him in orderly fashion, by kinds and by species. They were neither afraid of him nor were they afraid of each other. A species of predatory animals would pass by with a species of animal that is preyed upon following safely right behind.

10. Adam thus began his rule over the earth when he became lord over all on that day according to the blessing he was given.¹³⁷ The word of the Creator came to pass in actuality and His blessing was indeed fulfilled on the same day that he was made ruler over everything, even though he would soon rebel against the Lord of everything. For God gave Adam not only rule over everything, which had been promised to him, but He also allowed him to bestow names [on the animals], which had not been promised to him. If then God did for Adam even more than he had expected, how could God have deprived Adam of these things unless Adam had sinned?

(2) For someone to give a few names to be remembered

134. Gen 2.19.

135. I.e., not in the same sense that Adam was "formed" by God's hands. See above II.4, and note *ad loc.*

136. Cf. Gen 1.20, 24.

137. See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 67–81, for the theme of Adam's lordship.

is not a great thing, but it is too large and too great a thing for any human being to bestow thousands of names in a single moment, without repeating any. It is possible for someone to bestow many names on many kinds of insects, animals, beasts, and birds, but never to name one kind by the name of another belongs either to God or to someone to whom it has been granted by God.¹³⁸

(3) If God did indeed give Adam ruling authority, make him a participant in creation, clothe him with glory, and give him a garden, what else should God have done that Adam heed the commandment but did not do?¹³⁹

11. After he spoke of the formation of the animals and of the names they received, [Moses] turned to write of Adam's sleep and of the rib that was taken from him and made into a woman, saying, *But for Adam there was not found a helper like him.* Moses called Eve *helper* because even though Adam had helpers among the beasts and animals he still required one like him of his own kind. Inside,¹⁴⁰ Eve was very diligent; she was also attentive to the sheep and cattle, the herds, and droves which were in the fields. She would also help Adam with the buildings, pens, and with any other task that Adam was capable of doing. The animals, even though they were subservient, were not able to help him with these things. For this reason God made for Adam a helper who would be solicitous for everything for which he was [solicitous] and who would indeed help him in many things.¹⁴¹

12. *And the Lord cast sleep upon Adam and he slept. God took*

138. The naming of all the animals without a single repetition was the sign of Adam's divine wisdom in Jewish tradition; see *Genesis Rabbah* 17.4, *Numbers Rabbah* 19.3; and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 80, n. 103 for other references. There is also a tradition, found in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:63, whereby it was by his inability to name any creatures that Satan was cast out of the heavenly court.

139. Compare *Hymns against Heresies* 20.8 (read 'hd for 'br), *Armenian Hymns* 42.9-11, *Hymns on Faith* 62.2, and *Hymns on the Church* 48.9, where Ephrem is again amazed at Adam's fall after God did so much to make him happy.

140. I.e., within the gates of Paradise. The contrast here is inside and outside of Paradise as the animals were not permitted inside the gates of Paradise. See *Hymns on Paradise* 3.4.

141. See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 83-84.

one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the Lord fashioned the rib which He had taken from Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam.¹⁴² That man, awake,¹⁴³ anointed with splendor, and who did not yet know sleep, fell on the earth naked and slept. It is likely that Adam saw in his dream what was done to him as if he were awake. After Adam's rib had been taken out in the twinkling of an eye, God closed up the flesh in its place in the blink of an eyelash. After the extracted rib had been fashioned with all sorts of beautiful things to adorn it, God then brought her to Adam, who was both one and two. He was one in that he was Adam and he was two because he had been created male and female.¹⁴⁴

13. After he spoke of Adam's sleep, of the rib that had been taken out, and of the woman who had been fashioned from it and brought to [Adam], [Moses] wrote that Adam said, "This time she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman because she was taken out of man."¹⁴⁵

(2) *This time*—that is, this one who came after the animals was not like them for they were from the earth, but this one *is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*. Adam said this either as a prophecy or because he had seen it and knew it from the vision in his dream, as we just said above.

(3) Just as each animal had received from Adam the name of its species on that day, Adam did not call the rib that was fashioned [into the woman] *Eve*, by her own name, but named her *woman*, the name that was set down for all her kind. Then [Adam] said, *Let the man leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife so that they might be joined and the*

142. Gen 2.21–22.

143. The word used here, *irā*, is also the early Syriac word for "angel, watcher," that is, one who is always wakeful and watchful. For etymology, see R. Murray, "The Origin of Aramaic 'ir,'" *Or* 53 (1984): 303–17.

144. Cf. Gen 1.27. This thought is also amply represented in Jewish tradition; see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 81, n. 106, for references.

145. Gen 2.23. The word-play in Hebrew, *ʾis*—"man" from *ʾišā*—"woman," does not work in Syriac nor in English.

*two might become one*¹⁴⁶ without division as they were from the beginning.

14. After these things Moses said, *The two of them were naked and were not ashamed.*¹⁴⁷ That they were not ashamed does not mean that they did not know what shame was. If they were children, as [the pagans]¹⁴⁸ say, [Moses] would neither have said, *They were naked and were not ashamed*, nor, *Adam and his wife*, if they had not been young adults.¹⁴⁹ The names that Adam bestowed should be sufficient to convince us of [the level of] his wisdom. And the fact that [Moses] said, *he will till it and keep it*, should make known to us Adam's strength. The law that was set for them testifies to their full maturity and their transgression of the commandment should bear witness to their arrogance.

(2) It was because of the glory with which they were clothed that *they were not ashamed*. It was when this glory was stripped from them after they had transgressed the commandment that they were ashamed because they were naked.¹⁵⁰ The two of them then hastened to cover themselves with leaves—not their entire bodies but only their shameful members.

15. After [Moses] spoke of how their nakedness had been adorned with a heavenly garment and was no cause for shame, he turned to write about the cunning of the serpent, saying, *and the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the*

146. Gen 2.24.

147. Gen 2.25.

148. Syriac *brāyē* = Greek οἱ ἔξω "those outside," i.e., "those not of our party." The term could refer to pagans, heretics, Jews, or even Jewish Christians. I have not been able to discern exactly who is meant here.

149. In his hymns, Ephrem uses the same term, in Syriac, *šbr̄y*, as he uses here, but he seems to be referring to the innocence of their minds rather than to their physical ages; see *Hymns on the Nativity* 26.8, *Hymns on Virginity* 12.12, and *Hymns on the Church* 46.7. The Jewish tradition is that Adam and Eve were born 20 years old. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:59, 5:78, n.21.

150. For the importance of the garment of glory in the thought of Ephrem, see Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 11–40; idem, *The Luminous Eye*, 65–76; and idem, *Hymns on Paradise*, 66–72. The vocabulary stems from Ps 8.6, Peshitta.

*field that the Lord had made.*¹⁵¹ Although the serpent was cunning, it was [only] more cunning than the dumb animals that were governed by Adam; it is not true that because [the serpent] surpassed the level of animals in cleverness, it was immediately raised up to the level of mankind. It was [only] more clever than those animals that lack reason and was [only] more crafty than the animals that had no mind. For, it is clear that the serpent, who did not have the mind of man, did not possess the wisdom of mankind. Adam was also greater than the serpent by the way he was formed, by his soul, by his mind, by his glory, and by his place.¹⁵² Therefore, it is evident that in cunning also Adam was infinitely greater than the serpent.¹⁵³

(2) Adam, who was set up as ruler and governor over all the animals, was wiser than all the animals. He who set down names for them all is more clever than any of them. Just as Israel, without a veil, was unable to look upon the face of Moses,¹⁵⁴ neither were the animals able to look upon the splendor of Adam and Eve;¹⁵⁵ when the beasts passed before Adam and they received their names from him, they would cast their eyes downwards, for their eyes could not endure Adam's glory. Although the serpent was more clever than all the animals, before Adam and Eve, who were the rulers over the animals, it was a fool.

16. After he spoke of the cleverness of the serpent, Moses turned to write about how that deceitful one came to Eve, saying, *the serpent said to the woman, "Did God truly say, 'You shall not eat of any of the trees of Paradise'?"*¹⁵⁶ As for the ser-

151. Gen 3.1.

152. I.e., Paradise, outside of which the serpent had to dwell. See note 140, above.

153. Similar emphasis on the serpent's relative lack of intelligence vis-à-vis Adam and Eve is found in *Hymns on the Church* 46.10, 47 *passim*, and 48.1. For the considerable attention that Ephrem gives to the cunning of the serpent in his hymns, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 86–94.

154. Cf. Exod 34.33–35.

155. Literally, "the house of Adam," but, of course, Adam and Eve were the only two human beings alive at this time.

156. Gen 3.1. See also note 75 above.

pent's speech, either Adam understood the serpent's own mode of communication, or Satan spoke through it, or the serpent posed the question in his mind and speech was given to it, or Satan sought from God that speech be given to the serpent for a short time.¹⁵⁷ The words of the tempter would not have caused those two to be tempted to sin if their avarice had not been so helpful to the tempter. Even if the tempter had not come, the tree itself, by its beauty, would have caused them a great struggle due to their avarice. Their avarice then was the reason that they followed the counsel of the serpent. The avarice of Adam and Eve was far more injurious to them than the counsel of the serpent.¹⁵⁸

17. For [Moses] said, *when the woman saw that the tree was good to eat and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to look at, she took of its fruit and she ate.*¹⁵⁹ Indeed, she was overcome by the beauty of the tree and by desire for its fruit. She was not overcome by the counsel that came into her ear; rather, she succumbed to the avarice that came from within herself.

(2) Because a commandment had been set down for those who were to be tempted, it was fitting that the tempter come along soon after. Because God, in his goodness, had given Adam all that was in Paradise and all that was outside of Paradise, demanding nothing of him, either by reason of his being created or because of the glory with which God had clothed him.

(3) God, in His justice, withheld one tree from that one

157. Despite these unresolved choices, at II.19, below, and in his hymns, Ephrem presumes that it was Satan who spoke through the serpent. In *Hymns on Paradise* 15.14, "the serpent is the instrument of the Evil One." In *Hymns against Heresies* 20.1, the serpent is "the harp on which Satan's melodies were played." See also *Hymns on Paradise* 3.4, 15.13; *Hymns on Nisibis* 77.6; *Hymns against Heresies* 11.7, 21.6-11, 43.1-6; and *Prose Refutations* 1:88. See discussion in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 86-95, and Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:95, where Satan persuaded the serpent to be his vessel.

158. The Syriac text is confusing here, but the sense seems to be as translated.

159. Gen 3.6.

to whom He, in His goodness, had given everything in Paradise, on the earth, in the air, and in the seas. For, when God created Adam, He did not make him mortal, nor did He fashion him immortal, so that Adam, by either keeping or transgressing the commandment, might acquire from one of the trees, the [life] that he preferred.¹⁶⁰

(4) God created the tree of life and hid it from Adam and Eve. This was so that the tree would not cause any great struggle with them by its beauty and thus double their agony. In addition, it was not right that they heed a commandment from Him who could not be seen for the sake of a reward that was before their eyes.¹⁶¹

(5) Even though God, in His goodness, had given them everything else, He wanted, in His justice, to give them immortal life that was to be conferred by their eating from the tree of life. Therefore, God set down for them a commandment. It was not a great commandment relative to the great reward that He had prepared for them; He withheld from them one tree, only enough for them to be under a commandment. God gave them all of Paradise so that they would be under no constraint to transgress the law.

18. As I said above, a tempter was required. For this purpose, however, Satan was not permitted to send any of the angels, nor any of the seraphim nor any of the cherubim. Nor was Satan himself permitted to come to Adam in the garden, neither in human appearance nor in a divine vision, as he came to our Lord on the mountain.¹⁶² Neither did Behemoth or Leviathan, the giant beasts of renown, come nor did any of the other beasts nor any of the clean animals come, lest any of these be the reason that Adam and Eve transgressed the commandment. Rather, a serpent was allowed to come to them which, albeit cunning, was utterly despicable and hideous.

160. I.e., a life of mortality or a life of immortality. God created the tree of knowledge of good and evil as Adam's judge; see *Hymns on Paradise* 3.10, 13, 16; 12.15, 17.

161. See *Hymns on Paradise* 3.9, 17; 15.2, for the tree of life being hidden from Adam and Eve.

162. Cf. Matt 4.1-11, and parallels.

(2) And when the serpent came, it performed no signs that could be trusted nor did it fashion some deceitful vision, but it came alone, lowly, eyes cast down because it was unable to look upon the splendor of that one who would be tempted by it. Out of fear it did not go to Adam but went rather to Eve so that it might make her eat more quickly from the tree from which she was commanded not to eat. Prior to this she had tasted nothing from the thousands and millions [of trees] that were permitted her. That she had not yet tasted from them was not because she was fasting, but rather that hunger had not yet exerted any power over her for she had just been created at that very moment.

(3) The serpent was completely unhindered from coming in all haste because even the serpent's haste [worked] against the serpent. For, since Eve had just been created, she did not yet know what hunger was, nor had she yet been engaged in any inner struggle caused by the beauty of the tree. Therefore, because she was neither fasting nor had been engaged in any contest due to the tree, the serpent was completely unhindered from coming to tempt her.

(4) If [Eve] had been victorious in that momentary battle, in that brief contest, the serpent and that one who was in the serpent would [still] have received the punishment that they received, while she, together with her husband, would have eaten of the tree of life and would have lived for ever. Along with this promised life that [Adam and Eve] would have acquired, they would also have had by Justice all that had previously been given to them by Grace.

(5) The tempter, then, came in haste and was not hindered so that because it came, as tempter, at the time the commandment was given, [Adam and Eve] might know that it was the tempter and they might take precautions against his cunning. Then that one who was unable to give himself even the smallest of names offered them great counsel.¹⁶³

19. That one who was in the serpent then spoke to the

163. See II.10, above, for Adam's bestowal of the names of all the animals, and note *ad loc.* for the underlying Jewish tradition of Satan's inability to bestow a single name.

woman, through the serpent, saying, "*Did God truly say, 'You shall not eat of any of the trees of Paradise'?*" We ought to understand here that if they had been commanded [not to eat] from all the trees, as the serpent said, then the commandment would have been great. The fact is, they had been commanded just the opposite; it was hardly a commandment at all, because it was so small, and it had been given to them for only that short time before the tempter departed from them.

(2) Eve responded and *said to the serpent*, "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in Paradise; but [God] said, 'You shall not eat from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of Paradise, neither shall you draw near to it, lest you die.'*"¹⁶⁴ When the serpent and that one who was in the serpent heard that [Adam and Eve] were permitted to eat from any of the trees of Paradise and that only one had been withheld from them, they seemed covered in shame for they saw no opportunity to offer their counsel.

20. The tempter then turned its mind to the commandment of Him who had set down the commandment, that [Adam and Eve] were not only commanded not to eat from one single tree, but they were not even to draw near to it. The serpent then realized that God had forewarned them about even looking at it lest they become entrapped by its beauty.¹⁶⁵ With this in mind, the serpent said, enticing Eve to look upon it, "*You will surely not die. For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*"¹⁶⁶ But Eve failed to discern the import of the words of the serpent, who as tempter, had said the opposite of what God had said. She also failed to respond to

164. Gen 3.2-3. The Syriac word *qrb*, can also mean to touch, as it is normally translated in English texts of this passage. As is clear, however, from Ephrem's ensuing comments, he means they were not even to draw near the tree.

165. The tempter's apprehension of the meaning of this commandment is more fully developed in Ephrem's hymns; see *Hymns on Paradise* 3.5, 12.2-3, and discussion in Kronholm, *Moufs*, 97-98, especially n. 31, for Jewish parallels.

166. Gen 3.4-5.

the serpent by saying, "How can my eyes be opened when they are not closed? How will I, by eating of the fruit, come to know between good and evil when, even before I have eaten, they are here in my presence?"¹⁶⁷ But she neglected these things that she ought to have said to the serpent and, just as the serpent desired, she directed her eyes away from the serpent who was before her and began to look upon the tree to which she had been commanded not to draw near.

(2) The serpent remained silent, for it perceived immediately that Eve was about to succumb. It was not so much the serpent's counsel that entered her ear and provoked her to eat from the tree as it was her gaze, which she directed toward the tree, that lured her to pluck and eat of its fruit. She could have said to the serpent, "If I cannot see, how is it that I see all that is to be seen? And if I do not know between good and evil, how can I discern whether your counsel is good or evil? How will I come to know whether the divinity is good or that having [my] eyes opened is good? And whence am I to discern that death is evil? If I already possess these things, why have you come to me? Your coming unto us is testimony that we have these things. Therefore, by the sight that I possess and by the ability to discern between good and evil that I have, I will examine your counsel. And if I do possess these things that you counsel me, where is all your craftiness that is unable to disguise your deceit?" She, however, said none of these things to the serpent so as to overcome it, but instead fixed her gaze on the tree and thus quickly brought about her own defeat.¹⁶⁸

(3) She then went after that which her eyes desired and, being enticed by the divinity that the serpent had promised her, she stole away from her husband and ate. Afterwards, she gave some to her husband and he ate with her. Because she believed the serpent she ate first, thinking that she would be clothed with divinity in the presence of that one

167. Compare *Hymns on the Church* 47.3: "She did not ask it 'Are you a servant or a freeman? A heavenly being, a beast, or an angel?'" See also 48.3; and *Hymns on Paradise* 3.6.

168. See *Hymns on the Church* 47.3, 48.3; and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 99 ff.

from whom she, as woman, had been separated.¹⁶⁹ She hastened to eat before her husband that she might become head over her head, that she might become the one to give command to that one by whom she was to be commanded and that she might be older in divinity than that one who was older than she in humanity.

21. After she ate, Eve neither grew nor did she shrink, nor were her eyes opened. She neither received the divinity for which she had been looking, nor did she find that the opening of [her] eyes had taken her to Paradise. She then brought the fruit to her husband and made him eat after much entreaty, even if it is not written that she had to persuade him. After Eve ate, she did not surely die, as God had said, nor did she find divinity, as the serpent had said. And, if Eve had been stripped naked Adam would have been afraid and would not have eaten. Although Adam would not have been guilty, since he had not eaten, he would not have been victorious, either, for he would not really have been tempted. It would have been the nakedness of his wife that made him desist from eating and not the love or fear of his Commander. Thus, Adam was to be tested immediately by the seductive pleas of Eve who, having been tested by the counsel of the serpent, had drawn near and eaten, but had not become naked.

22. Then, after [Eve] had enticed Adam into eating, Scripture says, *the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked.*¹⁷⁰ The opening of their eyes was not so that they would become like God as the serpent had said but so that they would see their nakedness as that enemy had expected.

(2) Before, their eyes had been both open and closed: open in that they could see everything, but closed in that they could see neither the tree of life nor their own naked-

¹⁶⁹. That is, on the sixth day when Eve was made from the rib extracted from Adam. See *Hymns on Nisibis* 75.8, where the same verb is used to express the rib being extracted from Adam.

¹⁷⁰. Gen 3.7.

ness.¹⁷¹ The enemy was also jealous because [Adam and Eve] were richer in glory and reason than any other creature on the earth and because they alone had been promised the eternal life that is given by the tree of life.¹⁷² The enemy, jealous of Adam and Eve both for the things that belonged to them and also for the things that they were soon to receive, set its traps, and in a momentary battle took from [Adam and Eve] those things they ought not to have lost even in a great battle.

23. If the serpent had been rejected along with sin, Adam and Eve would have eaten from the tree of life and the tree of knowledge would not have been withheld from them; from the one they would have gained infallible knowledge and from the other they would have received immortal life. They would have acquired divinity with their humanity, and if they had acquired infallible knowledge and immortal life, they would have possessed them in those same bodies. Thus, by its counsel, the serpent brought to nought everything that was soon to have become theirs. The serpent made them think that they would receive these things when they transgressed the commandment so that the transgression would be committed and they would not receive what they would have received if they had kept the commandment.¹⁷³ Thus, the serpent, through the divinity that he promised them, prevented them [from receiving] divinity. The serpent also brought it about that those to whom it had been promised that their eyes would be opened by the tree of knowledge, would not have their eyes opened by the promise of the tree of life.

(2) If Adam and Eve had sought to repent after they had transgressed the commandment, even though they would

171. Compare *Hymns on Paradise* 3.6.

172. As he does in his hymns, Ephrem here maintains that Satan's fall is due to his jealousy at humanity's exalted position in creation; see *Hymns on the Church* 11.1, *Hymns on Faith* 50.5-6, *Hymns on the Nativity* 21.15, and *Hymns on Nicomedia* 10.22, and discussion in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 90-92. See also II.26, 32, below.

173. Compare *Hymns on Paradise* 3.12.

not have regained that which they had possessed before their transgression of the commandment, they would have escaped from the curses that were decreed on the earth and upon them. God tarried in coming down to them for the sole reason that they might admonish each other and so plead for mercy when the judge came to them. The coming of the serpent had not been delayed lest their trial be too great when they looked upon the sight of that beautiful tree, whereas the judge delayed His coming to them so that He might give them an occasion to prepare their entreaty. But the haste of the tempter did not help them, even though its haste was for the purpose of helping them, nor did they benefit by the delay of the Judge, although His delay was for this same reason.

24. *And they heard the sound of the Lord walking in Paradise in the cool of the day and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees in Paradise.*¹⁷⁴ It was not only by the patience He exhibited that God wished to help them, He also wished to benefit them by the sound of His feet. God endowed His silent footsteps with sound so that Adam and Eve might be prepared, at that sound, to make supplication before Him who made the sound. But since they did not come before Him in supplication, neither because of His delay nor because of the sound that was sent before Him, God then made a sound with His lips, just as He had made a sound for His footsteps and said, *"Where are you, Adam?"*¹⁷⁵ But Adam, instead of confessing his folly and asking for mercy before the judgment came upon him, said, *"I heard the sound of your [feet] in Paradise and I was afraid because I saw that I was naked and I hid myself."*¹⁷⁶ Now the sound of feet that went before God, who would soon reveal Himself in the punishment upon the house of Adam, prefigured the voice of John, who was to come before the Son, holding a winnowing fork in his hands in order to clean out His granaries,

174. Gen 3.8.

175. Gen 3.8.

176. Gen 3.10.

burning the straw in fire and purifying the wheat to bring into His granaries.¹⁷⁷

25. "*I heard the sound of your [feet] and I hid myself.*" When did you hear any sound from Him as you did now? For when He formed you, brought you into Paradise, cast sleep on you, took out your rib, formed and brought to you a woman, you did not hear any sound from Him. If you heard a sound from Him now for the first time, understand that the sound of His steps was bestowed for the purpose of a supplication from your lips. Speak to God now, before he asks you about the coming of the serpent and about the transgression that you and Eve committed. Perhaps then, the confession of your lips will absolve you from the sin of [eating] the fruit that your fingers plucked. But Adam and Eve refused to confess that thing which they had done and they related to Him who knows all only what had been done to them.

26. "*Where are you, Adam?*" In the divinity that the serpent promised you? Or in subjection to the death that I decreed for you? Would that you had considered the fruits!¹⁷⁸ Suppose, Adam, that instead of a serpent, the most despicable creature of all, an angel or some other god had come to you? Would you have despised the commandment of Him who gave you all these things, heeding instead the counsel of one who had not yet done you any good? Would you have considered evil the one who formed you from nothing and made you a second god over Creation while considering good the one who gave you only a verbal promise of some good?

(2) If another god were to come to you in power, should you not have rejected his advice? How much more then in the case of a serpent who came to you with no power, with no wonderful deeds but with only the empty word that it

177. Cf. Matt 3.11-12, and parallels.

178. See *Hymns on Heresies* 26:4 where Ephrem says, "The fruit is the goal of the right way that runs from this tree to the Cross." These trees were two crowns in Adam's contest. See *Hymns on Paradise* 3.10, 9.1, 12.17-18; *Hymns on the Church* 19.7; *Hymns on Nisibis* 68.3; *Hymns against Heresies* 21.6; *Sermons on Faith* 3.1-38.

spoke to you? You have been unfaithful to your God and you have believed your betrayer. You have denied Him who has done good things for you, who made you ruler over everything, and you have put your faith in that crafty one who, by its cunning, has taken away your rule completely.¹⁷⁹

(3) If the serpent had been withheld from coming to test Adam, those who complain about its having come would now complain about its being hindered from coming. For they say that it was out of jealousy that the serpent was hindered from coming so that [Adam], after a momentary trial, might acquire eternal life. Those who say that if the serpent had not come Adam would not have erred would now be saying that if the serpent had come, Adam and Eve would not have erred; just as those who say that if the serpent had not come Adam would not have sinned, would now think they are all the more right when they say, "If the serpent had come, Adam and Eve would not have gone astray." For who would have believed, if it had not actually happened, that Adam would listen to Eve¹⁸⁰ or that Eve would be persuaded by a reptile?

27. *"I heard the sound of [your feet] and I was afraid and hid myself."* Because Adam forgot what was required of him and said instead that which was not required—for, instead of confessing what he had done, which would have helped him, he related what had been done to him, which did not help him at all—God said to him, *"Who told you that you were naked? Have you then eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"*¹⁸¹ Did you see that you were naked with the sight bestowed on you by that tree, from which you were promised that glorious divine sight?"

(2) Adam again failed to confess his folly and blamed the woman who was like him, saying, *"The woman whom you set*

179. That Adam and Eve rejected God so quickly and without reflection is also found in *Hymns on the Church* 48.3–9, *Hymns on the Nativity* 5.5, *Hymns on Nisibis* 35.4, and *Hymns against Heresies* 11.7.

180. Read *hw'*—"Eve" for *hw'y'*—"serpent," which would make no sense here, as Jansma, "Beiträge," 63.

181. Gen 3.11.

*with me gave me of the tree and I ate.*¹⁸² I neither drew near to the tree myself nor did I dare to stretch out my hand towards the fruit." It is for this reason the Apostle said, *Adam did not sin but Eve transgressed the commandment.*¹⁸³ If God gave you the woman, O Adam, He gave her to you to help you, not to cause you harm, and as one to be commanded, not one to give command.¹⁸⁴

28. Since Adam did not wish to confess his folly, God came down to question Eve *and said to her, "What is this that you have done?"*¹⁸⁵ Eve too, instead of making supplication with her tears and bearing the fault herself so that mercy might take hold of both her and her husband responded, not by saying, "The serpent counseled or seduced me," but simply said, *"The serpent deceived me and I ate."*¹⁸⁶

29. When the two of them had been questioned and were both found to be wanting in remorse or true contrition, God went down to the serpent, not to make inquiry but to render punishment. For where there is opportunity for repentance, it would be right to inquire, but to one who is a stranger to repentance judgment is fitting. It is so that you might know that the serpent is not capable of repentance, that when *God said to it, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above every beast,"*¹⁸⁷ the serpent did not say, "I did not do it," because it was afraid to lie, nor did it say, "I did it," because it was a stranger to repentance.

(2) *"Cursed are you are above every beast,"* because you deceived those who rule over all the beasts. Instead of being more clever than all the beasts you will be more cursed than all the beasts and *"on your belly shall you go,"*¹⁸⁸ because you brought birth pangs upon the race of women. And *"dust you*

182. Gen 3.12.

183. 1 Tim 2.14.

184. Compare Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:77, where an attempted reversal of roles is depicted as the reason for Eve's taking the fruit.

185. Gen 3.13.

186. Gen 3.13.

187. Gen 3.14.

188. Gen 3.14. Compare *Hymns on Paradise* 3.15; see also Kronholm, *Motifs*, 113, n. 72.

shall eat all the days of your life,"¹⁸⁹ because you deprived Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life. *"I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed,"*¹⁹⁰ for in your pretence of love you have deceived and subjected to death both her and her offspring.

(3) Then [God] made known the enmity that was put between the serpent and the woman and between its seed and her seed when He said, *"He will tread on your head,"* that is, that one who wishes to escape the subjection of her seed [to death], *"and you will strike him,"* not in his ear, but *"in his heel."*¹⁹¹

30. Even though the punishment decreed against the serpent was justly decreed—because to the place where folly begins, the punishment also returns—the entire reason God began with this impious creature was so that, when Justice appeased its anger on this creature, Adam and Eve should grow afraid and repent so that there might be a possibility for Grace to preserve them from the curses of Justice.¹⁹² But when the serpent had been cursed and Adam and Eve had still made no supplication, God came [to them] with punishment. He came to Eve first, because it was through her that the sin was handed on to Adam.

(2) God then rendered his judgment against Eve saying, *"I will greatly multiply your pains and your conceptions. With pangs you shall bring forth children."*¹⁹³ Even though she would have given birth because she had received the blessing of birth along with all the animals, she would not have given birth to many, for those to whom she would have given birth would have remained immortal. She would have been preserved from the pangs of their births, from the ignominy of having to raise them, and from wailing over their deaths. *"You shall turn toward your husband,"* to be counseled and not

189. Gen 3.14.

190. Gen 3.15.

191. Gen 3.15. See also Kronholm, *Motifs*, 112–18.

192. See *Hymns on the Church* 45–88, where "God had compassion on Adam and gave him opportunity for conversion."

193. Gen 3.16.

to give counsel and "*he shall rule over you,*"¹⁹⁴ because you thought that by eating of the fruit you would then rule over him.

31. After God had set down His judgment against Eve and still no repentance had risen up in Adam, He then turned to him, too, with punishment and said, "*Because you listened to the voice of your wife and were deceived into eating of the tree of which I said to you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you.*"¹⁹⁵ Although the earth, which had committed no folly, was struck on account of Adam, [God] still made Adam, who could suffer, suffer by the curse of [the earth], which could not suffer. For it was in that earth, which received the curse, that he, who did not receive the curse, was, in fact, cursed.

(2) Adam did not escape direct punishment by the fact that the earth received this curse. God also decreed against him, saying, "*All the days of your life you shall eat in pain,*"¹⁹⁶ that which, had you kept the commandment, you would have eaten without pain. "*Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you,*"¹⁹⁷ after the sin; had there been no sin, it would not have brought forth these things. "*You shall eat the plants of the field,*"¹⁹⁸ because on account of a trifling enticement on the part of your wife you have rejected the most pleasing fruits of Paradise. "*In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread,*"¹⁹⁹ for you were not pleased to enjoy yourself in the garden without toil. These things will come upon you "*until you return to the earth from which you were taken,*"²⁰⁰ because you have despised the commandment which now could have given you eternal life through the fruit of the tree of life which would have been lawful for you to eat. Because "*you are from the dust,*"²⁰¹ and have forgotten yourself, "*you shall return to your dust,*"²⁰² so that, through your state of humiliation, you shall come to know your true essence.²⁰³

194. Gen 3.16.

196. Gen 3.17.

198. Gen 3.18.

200. Gen 3.19.

202. Gen 3.19.

203. In Syriac, *qnōmut*?. See Beck, *Reden*, 8-14.

195. Gen 3.17.

197. Gen 3.18.

199. Gen 3.19.

201. Gen 3.19.

32. Even Satan, who was created, along with his deep abyss, within those six days, was fair until the sixth day, like Adam and Eve who were fair until they transgressed the commandment. Satan, who secretly became Satan on that sixth day, was, on that same day, secretly judged and condemned. For God did not wish to make known Satan's condemnation in the presence of those who had not even perceived that he was the tempter. Remember, the woman said, "*the serpent,*" and not Satan, "*deceived me.*"²⁰⁴

(2) Therefore, Satan was judged in secret and all his hosts were condemned along with him, because the sin was a great one and to condemn any of them alone would have been too small a punishment. Therefore, just as pangs were decreed against Eve and her daughters, and thorns and death against Adam and his posterity, and just as it [was decreed] against the serpent that he and all his seed were to be trod upon, so it was also decreed against him who was in the serpent that he go to the fire together with all his hosts. For our Lord revealed in the New Testament that which had been hidden in the Old Testament when He said that "*concerning the judgment of the ruler of this world, this one is condemned.*"²⁰⁵

33. After he spoke of the punishments that both the tempter and the tempted received, Moses wrote, *the Lord made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them.*²⁰⁶ Were these garments from the skins of animals or were they created like the thistles and thorns that were created after the other works of creation had been completed? Because it was said that *the Lord made . . . and clothed them,* it seems most likely that when their hands were placed over their leaves they found themselves clothed in garments of skin. Why would beasts have been killed in their presence? Perhaps, it was so that by the animal's flesh Adam and Eve might nourish their own persons, and that with the skins they might cover their nakedness, and also so that by the

204. Gen 3.13.

205. John 16.11.

206. Gen 3.20.

death [of the animals] Adam and Eve might see the death of their own bodies.

34. After he finished these things [God] said, "*Behold, Adam has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.*"²⁰⁷ Even though by saying, "*He has become like one of us,*" he symbolically reveals the Trinity, [the point is] rather that [God] was mocking Adam in that Adam had previously been told, "*You will become like God knowing good and evil.*"²⁰⁸

(2) Now, even though after they ate the fruit Adam and Eve came to know these two things, before [they ate] the fruit they had perceived, in reality, only good and they heard about evil only by hearsay. After they ate, however, a change occurred so that now they would only hear about good by hearsay, whereas in reality they would taste only evil. For the glory with which they had been clothed passed away from them, while pain and disease which had been kept away from them now came to hold sway over them.

35. "*And now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. . .*"²⁰⁹ If Adam had rashly eaten from the one tree he was commanded not to eat, how much faster would he hasten to that one about which he had not been so commanded? But it was now decreed that they should live in toil, in sweat, in pains, and in pangs. Therefore, lest [Adam and Eve], after having eaten of this tree, live forever and remain in eternal lives of suffering, [God] forbade them to eat, while they were clothed with a curse, that which He had been prepared to give them before they incurred the curse and when they were still clothed with glory.

(2) [God did this,] lest this life-giving gift that they would receive through the tree of life become misery, and thus bring worse evil upon them than what they had already obtained from the tree of knowledge. From the latter [tree] they obtained temporal pains, whereas the former [tree] would have made those pains eternal. From the latter they

207. Gen 3.22.

208. Gen 3.5.

209. Gen 3.22.

obtained death which would cast off from them the bonds of their pains. The former [tree], however, would have caused them [to live] as if buried alive, leaving them to be tortured eternally by their pains. [God], therefore, withheld from them the tree of life. It was not right either that a life of delights be allowed in the land of curses or that eternal life be found in a transitory world.

(3) If they had eaten, however, one of two things would have occurred. Either the decree of death would have become a lie, or the life-giving capacity of the tree of life would have been denied. Therefore, lest the decree of death be loosed or the life-giving capacity of the tree of life become false, God took Adam far away from there lest he also incur loss from the tree of life just as he had been harmed by the tree of knowledge. *He sent him then to till the earth from which he was taken,*²¹⁰ so that he who had been harmed in the leisure of the garden might be aided by the toil of the earth.²¹¹

36. Then, after Adam was cast out from Paradise [Moses] wrote, [God] set in the east of the Paradise of Eden a cherub and a sharp sword²¹² to go about in every direction and to guard the way to the tree of life.²¹³ That fence was a living being²¹⁴ who itself marched around to guard the way to the tree of life from any one who dared try to pluck its fruit, for it would kill, with the edge of its sword, any mortal who came to steal immortal life.²¹⁵

210. Gen 3.23.

211. Compare *Hymns on Paradise* 1.10: "In His Grace, God granted Adam the low ground near Paradise, settling him in the valley below the foothills of Paradise." See also 12.15.

212. The Peshitta, *Targum Neofiti*, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* all read "sharp" here instead of "fiery". See M. Alexandre, "L'épée de flamme (Gen 3,24): Textes chrétiens et traditions juives," in *Hellenica et Judaica. Hommage à V. Nikiprowetsky*, ed. A. Caquot et al. (Louvain-Paris, 1986) 403-41. For the importance of this sword in Ephrem's view of salvation history, see R. Murray, "The Lance," 224-34, 491.

213. Gen 3.24.

214. In Syriac, *hayyā*. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:83-84, where angels are distinguished from "the holy Hayyol."

215. See *Hymns on Paradise* 2.1, 4.1-6, 11.3.

Section III

1. After Moses spoke of Adam's expulsion from the garden, of the cherub and of the sharp sword by which Paradise was enclosed, he turned to write about the birth of Cain and Abel and about their offerings, saying *Adam knew Eve, and she bore Cain and she said, "I have gotten a man,"*—not by Adam who knew her, but—*"by the Lord,"*²¹⁶ who had formed him in the womb. *She again gave birth, to Abel, and Abel became a shepherd and Cain a tiller of the earth. And it happened after some time, that is, after they were reared or while they were shepherding or tilling, that Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruits of the earth and Abel brought of the first-born of his flock and of their fat portions.*²¹⁷

2. Abel was very discriminate in his choice of offerings, whereas Cain showed no such discrimination. Abel selected and offered the choicest of his first born and of his fat ones, while Cain either offered young grains or [certain] fruits that are found at the same time as the young grains. Even if his offering had been smaller than that of his brother, it would have been as acceptable as the offering of his brother, had he not brought it with such negligence. They made their offerings alternately; one offered a lamb of his flock, the other the fruits of the earth. But because Cain had taken such little regard for the first offering that he offered, God refused to accept it in order to teach Cain how he was to make an offering. For Cain had bulls and calves and an abundance of animals and birds that he could have offered. But he offered none of these on that day when he offered the first fruits of his land.²¹⁸

(2) What would have been the harm if he had brought ripe grains or if he had chosen the fruits of his best trees? Although this would have been easy, he did not do even

²¹⁶. Gen 4.1.

²¹⁷. Gen 4.2-4.

²¹⁸. For Cain's negligent offering in Jewish tradition, see *Genesis Rabbah* 22.5, Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain*, XIII.52, and Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:107-8. See also V. Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Aguda, den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Leipzig, 1922).

this. It was not that he had other intentions for his best grains or his best fruits; it was that, in the mind of the offerer, there was no love for the One who would receive his offering. Therefore, because Cain brought his offering with negligence, God despised it on that account, lest Cain think either that God did not know of Cain's negligence, or that God preferred the offerings rather than those who were offering them.

3. Thus, God despised Cain's offering not only because of what he had done, but also because of what he was about to do. He was cruel toward his parents and bitter toward his brother and gave no honor to God. Abel's offering was accepted, therefore, because of his discrimination whereas that of Cain was despised because of his negligence.

(2) *Cain was very angry*,²¹⁹ not because his offering had been despised, for he could have satisfied with a choice offering that One whom he angered with his negligent offering; nor was it due to the fact that he had been despised that *his face became gloomy*,²²⁰ for it would have been easy for him to offer a prayer.

(3) Whether the offering that Cain had chosen to bring was accepted or not, Cain had already made known his will, and whether he had been persuaded to offer a prayer or not, God had already seen his true request. Since Cain did not bring a choice offering in the place of his negligent one which was despised, nor did he offer a prayer on account of the contempt that he had shown to God, it became clear that *he was angry*. *He was angry* because the offering of his brother had been accepted. Cain became *angry* on account of the fire that had come down and distinguished between the offerings. *His face became gloomy* because there was laughter in the eyes of his parents and his sisters when his offering was rejected. They had seen that Cain's offering had been placed in the midst of the fire and yet the fire did not touch it.

²¹⁹. Gen 4:5.

²²⁰. Gen 4:5.

4. *God said to [Cain], "Why are you angry and why is your face gloomy?"*²²¹ Instead of being filled with anger you ought to be filled with distress. Instead of your face being gloomy tears ought to be flowing from your eyes. *If you do well, I will accept it.*²²² Notice then, that it was not because of the small size of Cain's offering that it was rejected; it was not accepted because of his spitefulness and his lack of virtue.

(2) *"If you do well, I will accept it, even though I did not accept it before, and it will be accepted along with the chosen offering of your brother even though it was not accepted before. But if you do not do well, sin is couching at the first door."*²²³ Abel will hearken to you through his obedience, for he will go with you to the plain. There you will be ruled over by sin, that is, you shall be completely filled with it.

(3) But, instead of doing well so that the offering which had been rejected might be credited to him as acceptable, Cain then made an offering of murder to that One to whom he had [already] made an offering with negligence.

5. *And Cain said to Abel, "Let us go out to the field."*²²⁴ That he said, *"Let us go out to the field,"* [means] either that they dwelt on a mountain on the outskirts of Paradise²²⁵ and that Cain led Abel down to the field, or that Abel was grazing his flocks on a mountain and [Cain] went up and brought him down to a field, which was more suitable for him because of its standing grain and its soil. For in the standing grains Cain killed Abel and in the earth he easily hid him. For [Moses] said *when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.*²²⁶

(2) After Cain had killed his brother, he persuaded his parents with lies that Abel had entered Paradise because he was pleasing to God, and that his offering was accepted bore witness to his entry; that it was by keeping the commandment that he entered Paradise just as by transgressing the commandment you were cast out from there. Then, just

221. Gen 4.6.

222. Gen 4.7.

223. Gen 4.7.

224. Gen 4.8.

225. See note 127, above, for geography of Paradise.

226. Gen 4.8.

when Cain thought that he had deceived his parents and that there would be no one to seek vengeance for Abel, God appeared to Cain and *said to him, "Where is Abel your brother?"*²²⁷

6. God appeared to Cain with kindness so that if he repented, the sin of murder that his fingers had committed might be effaced by the compunction on his lips. If he did not repent, however, there would be decreed on him a bitter punishment in proportion to his evil folly. But Cain was filled with wrath instead of compunction. To Him who knows all, who asked him about his brother in order to win him back, [Cain] retorted angrily and said, *"I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?"*²²⁸

(2) [God] then spoke to him again, saying, *"What have you done?"*²²⁹ If you do not know where Abel is because you are not his keeper, tell Him who asked you what you have done. Why should He ask someone else concerning what you have done? Confess, therefore, what have you done to Him who would not have asked about what you did unless He knew what you had done. Then, when Cain refused to recount what he had done, his knowledge and his shame were exposed when [God] said, *"Your brother's blood is crying to me from the earth."*²³⁰

7. What then would you say, Cain? Should Justice take vengeance for the blood which cried out to it or not? Did it not delay so that you might repent? Did it not alienate itself from its own knowledge and ask you as if it did not know, so that you might confess? Did what it said to you not please you that you came to that sin to which it had warned you beforehand not to come? *"Cursed are you from all the earth,"*²³¹ because you have grieved Adam and Eve, the parents of all the earth. *"Cursed are you from the face of all the earth,"* because

227. Gen 4.9.

228. Gen 4.9.

229. Gen 4.10.

230. Gen 4.10. While the supplied subject of the Biblical quote is undoubtedly God, the verb is feminine, suggesting that Ephrem had in mind a personified attribute of God, such as Justice. See next section.

231. Gen 4.11.

you opened the gate of Sheol before the entire earth.²³² "When you till the earth, it shall no longer yield to you its strength,"²³³ because you wished that you alone should eat of its strength. "You shall wander about on the earth in fear,"²³⁴ because you have walked on it in arrogance and in haughtiness.

8. At the very moment that these curses [were decreed], the matter of the curses was fulfilled in him who, before the curses, had said in his pride, "Am I my brother's keeper?" After the curses, when his anger had subsided due to the trembling and wandering that had been laid upon him, Cain said, "My offence is greater than I can bear."²³⁵ This was not accepted as repentance, for he said it after it had been sought from him. Now, he said it as if under constraint, as if he said it due to his terror and wandering.

(2) But Cain, instead of seeking God's longsuffering kindness so that he might persuade Justice by his petition, said, either out of fear or of cunning, "You have driven me away from the face of the earth,²³⁶ in that you cursed me from the earth and henceforth from your face I will be hidden."²³⁷ I will no longer be able to stand before you because I spoke impudently before you and said that I am not my brother's keeper. Because I have become *one who is to wander about the earth in fear, it will be that whoever finds me will kill me.*²³⁸

(3) O Cain, are you asking for death or are you afraid of death? How can these things that were decreed against you be fulfilled if you die? If your life is dear to you even among these miseries, how much more dear was it to Abel who was far from these things?

(4) Although some say that Cain begged not to die, still others say that he asked for death, on account of which God said to him, "It will not be as you say concerning the killers who come after you."²³⁹ Although the killers who come after you

²³². In *Hymns on Nisibis* 39.16, Death says, "Through the sword of Cain I was glad for the first time." See also Kronholm, *Motifs*, 142-45.

²³³. Gen 4.12.

²³⁴. Gen 4.12.

²³⁵. Gen 4.13.

²³⁶. Gen 4.14.

²³⁷. Gen 4.14.

²³⁸. Gen 4.14.

²³⁹. Cf. Gen 4.15.

will die the moment they are found, still *Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,*"²⁴⁰ that is, because Cain sought death so that no one would mock his lowly state, seven generations would come and see his lowly state and then he would die.

9. Some say that the seven generations were those of his tribe who died with him. This [interpretation], however, cannot be maintained. For, even if the flood overtook them, it overtook that seventh generation. And if that one generation perished with [Cain], how can they say that seven generations perished with Cain when they cannot even show that the flood occurred in the seventh generation of Cain's descendants?²⁴¹

(2) Scripture says that Cain begot Enoch and Enoch begot Edar²⁴² and Edar begot Mehujael and Mehujael begot Methushael and Methushael begot Lamech and Lamech begot Jabal.²⁴³ *Jabal was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle.*²⁴⁴ Those who dwell in tents and have cattle were not preserving their virginity in their tents. How aptly then does Scripture say, *All flesh had corrupted its path.*²⁴⁵

(3) If then there are found to be nine generations from Cain to the descendants of those who dwell in tents and have cattle and the flood had still not come, how can we assent to [the notion that] seven generations perished with Cain? Rather, it has been determined that there were nine generations that passed away, as we just said, and still the flood had not occurred. Therefore it was rightly stated that the shame of Cain, who had sought from that first day to flee from shame by a death, was spread out over seven generations.

(4) That Cain remained alive until the seventh generation is clear. First, because it had been so decreed concerning him and secondly, the length of the lives of those first

²⁴⁰. Gen 4.15.

²⁴¹. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:163, where Cain is numbered among the victims of the flood. Compare another Jewish tradition about the death of Cain in n. 257, below.

²⁴². RSV, *Irak*. The letters *r* and *d* are easily confused in Syriac.

²⁴³. Cf. Gen 4.17-20.

²⁴⁴. Gen 4.20.

²⁴⁵. Gen 6.12.

generations also testifies to it. For if his father Adam remained alive until the ninth generation, that of Lamech, and was gathered from the world in the fifty-sixth year of Lamech, it is no great thing that Cain should remain until the seventh generation.

10. Because Cain sought to escape from reproach, he did not escape from reproach as he sought and, further, a sign which he had not expected was added to the first punishment. For [Moses] said, *The Lord put a sign on Cain lest anyone who finds him should kill him.*²⁴⁶ Those who would find him were the sons of Seth who were compelled to seek revenge for the blood of Abel, their uncle. They cut themselves off from Cain and did not intermarry with him because of his reproach and because of their fear of him, but they did not dare to kill him because of his sign.

11. After Cain received the punishment and the sign had been added to it (although we spoke of why it was necessary, we will not speak here of what it was, for that is not necessary), [Moses] said that *Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*²⁴⁷ Cain, therefore, separated himself from his parents and his kin because he saw that they would not intermarry with him. The land of Nod is so called because it was the land in which Cain wandered about in fear and trembling.²⁴⁸ But [the land] also received a second curse, when *God said, "When you till the earth it shall no longer yield to you its strength."*²⁴⁹

Section IV

1. *After Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch, he built a city and he named it after his son, Enoch.*²⁵⁰ He did this lest this city, too, be named after his wandering in fear, that is the city of Nod.²⁵¹ And to Enoch was born Edar. And Edar begot Mehujael and Mehujael begot Methushael and

246. Gen 4.15.

247. Gen 4.16.

248. In *Hymns on Paradise* 1.11, the land of Nod is "a place lower still than that of Seth and Enosh."

249. Gen 4.12. The earth had already received a curse in Gen 3.17.

250. Gen 4.17.

251. "Nod" means "wandering."

Methushael begot Lamech. And Lamech took two wives. He begot Jabal through Adah, and Jabal became the father of those who dwell in tents and of those who possess cattle. The name of his brother was Jubal. Jubal became the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe. And Zillah bore Tubal-Cain, an artisan in every craft of bronze and iron, and the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.²⁵²

(2) *And Lamech said to his wives, "Hear my voice because I have slain a man for wounding me and a young man for striking me. Because Cain was avenged sevenfold, Lamech [will be avenged] seventy-seven fold."*²⁵³

2. There are some who say, concerning Lamech's words to his wives, that his wives were daughters of Seth and they were exhorting him to do well, and he said to them, "What have you seen in me that is detestable or similar to my father Cain? For I, like Cain, have killed a man for wounding me. Just as he struck the cheeks of Abel as [one would] a youth and so killed him, so have I also killed a youth for beating me. If I have done as Cain did and Cain was avenged seven times, then I decree that I should be avenged seventy-seven times."

(2) Others, because they think that Cain was avenged for seven generations, say that Lamech was evil, because God had said, "*All flesh has corrupted its path,*"²⁵⁴ and also because the wives [of Lamech] saw that the line of their generation would be cut off. They were giving birth not to males but to females only, for [Moses] said that it was *when men multiplied on the earth and daughters were born to them.*²⁵⁵ When these wives saw the plight of their generation, they became fearful and knew that the judgment decreed against Cain and his seven generations had come upon their generation.

(3) [Lamech] then, in his cleverness, comforted them, saying, "*I have killed a man for wounding me and a youth for striking me.*"²⁵⁶ Just as God caused Cain to remain so that seven

252. Gen 4.17-22.

254. Gen 6.12.

256. Gen 4.23.

253. Gen 4.18-24.

255. Gen 6.1.

generations would perish with him, so [God] will cause me to remain, because I have killed two, so that seventy-seven generations should die with me. Before the seventy-seven generations come, however, we will die, and through the cup of death that we taste we will escape from that punishment which, because of me, will extend to seventy-seven generations."

3. Still others say that Lamech, who was cunning and crafty, saw the plight of his generation: that the Sethites refused to intermingle with them because of the reproach of their father Cain, who was still alive, and that the lands would become uncultivated from the lack of ploughmen and their generation would thus come to an end. Lamech, therefore, moved by zeal, killed Cain together with his one son whom he had begotten and who resembled him lest, through this one son who resembled him, the memory of his shame continue through their generations.²⁵⁷

(2) When he killed Cain, who had been like a wall between the two tribes to keep them from tyrannizing each other, [Lamech] said to his wives as if in secret, "A man and a youth have been killed but take and adorn your daughters for the sons of Seth. Because of the murders that I have committed and because of the adornment and beauty of your daughters, those who refused to be married to us in the past six generations might now consent to marry with us in our generation."

(3) Their daughters then adorned themselves for the sons of Seth, and Jabal enticed them with the choice portions of the flesh of animals and Jubal captivated them with the sweet sounds of his lyres. Then the sons of Seth yielded and, because of these things, they forgot that noble covenant that had been established by their father and they came down from their place, for it was higher than where the descendants of Cain dwelt. Thus, Lamech, by his cunning ploys, intermarried those tribes so that when "God takes pity

²⁵⁷. For a Jewish version of the tradition that it was Lamech who slew Cain, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:116-17.

on the tribe of Seth, who have mixed with us, so that it not perish, God might also have mercy on us so that we might escape from the punishment of murder on account of those who are married to us, for they have committed no murder.”

Section V

1. Then after he had finished writing about the tribes of the descendants of Cain and had completed the story of the words of Lamech to his wives, [Moses] turned to record the generations of the house of Seth, beginning from Adam, saying that *when Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he begot a son in his own likeness according to his image.*²⁵⁸ In Seth, who was like Adam in all things, was depicted the likeness of the Son, who was sealed by the Father his progenitor²⁵⁹ just as was Seth by Adam his begetter.²⁶⁰

(2) After Seth begot Enosh, [Moses] wrote *at that time he began to call on the name of the Lord.*²⁶¹ Because Seth had separated himself from the house of Cain, the Sethites were called by the name of the Lord, that is, the just people of the Lord.²⁶²

2. After Adam begot Seth and Seth Enosh and Enosh Kenan and Kenan Mahalalel and Mahalalel Jared and Jared Enoch,²⁶³ [Moses] wrote about Enoch who was pleasing to God and *was not.*²⁶⁴ Some say that while Adam was looking at him God transported him to Paradise lest [Adam] think that Enoch was killed as was Abel and so be grieved. This

258. Gen 5.8.

259. Cf. John 6.27.

260. In *Hymns against Heresies* 5.11–12, Ephrem says that God restored the image of God, undone by Cain, in Adam's son Seth. This restoration of the divine image is what suggests the parallel between Seth and Christ. See also *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.21, and discussion in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 150–54.

261. Gen 4.26.

262. This curious interpretation, moving from the active “call on” to the passive “called by,” is also found in Eusebius of Emesa and Didymus of Alexandria. See S. D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, no. 30 (Chico, California, 1984).

263. Cf. Gen 5.3–18.

264. Gen 5.24.

was also so that [Adam] might be comforted by this just son of his and that he might know that for all who were like this one, whether before death or after the resurrection, [Paradise] would be their meeting-place.²⁶⁵

(2) Enoch begot Methuselah and Methuselah begot Lamech and Lamech begot Noah and Lamech prophesied about his son and said, "*This one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands and from the earth which the Lord cursed,*²⁶⁶ by his offering which will be pleasing to God who, because of the sin of its inhabitants, will destroy in the waters of wrath the buildings that we have made and the plants over which our hands have toiled."

Section VI

1. After recounting the ten generations from Adam to Noah, [Moses] said, *Noah was five hundred years old and begot Shem and Ham and Japhet.*²⁶⁷ During this entire time Noah was an example to his sons by his virtue, for he had preserved his virginity for five hundred years among those of whom it was said, *All flesh corrupted its path.*²⁶⁸

2. After he spoke of the virtue of Noah, [Moses] turned to speak about the evil desire that was working in the children of his generation saying, *and it came to pass that when men increased and daughters were born to them. . . .*²⁶⁹ For he called those of the house of Cain *men*, and said that daughters were born to them to show that the line of their generation had been cut off as we said above.²⁷⁰

3. *And the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they took to wife such of them as they chose.*²⁷¹ He called the sons of Seth *sons of God*, those who, like the sons of Seth,

265. In *Hymns on the Church* 11.1, Ephrem says that it was because of Enoch's "love for the new life" that he was the first to defeat death. For the prominent place that Enoch plays in Ephrem's hymns, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 154-63.

266. Gen 5.29. "Noah" means "relief" in Hebrew and in Syriac.

267. Gen 5.32.

268. Gen 6.12.

269. Gen 6.1.

270. See IV.2, above.

271. Gen 6.2. See also *Hymns on Paradise* 1.11-12.

had been called "the righteous people of God."²⁷² The beautiful daughters of men whom they saw were the daughters of Cain who adorned themselves and became a snare to the eyes of the sons of Seth. Then Moses said, *they took to wife such of them as they chose*, because when they took them, they acted very haughtily over those whom they chose. A poor one would exalt himself over the wife of a rich man and an old man would sin with one who was young. The ugliest of all would act arrogantly over the most beautiful.

(2) The sons of Cain were interested in neither the wealth nor the appearance of those women; they were seeking ploughmen for their lands that had been left uncultivated. Although this thing began because of the licentious and poor men—the licentious being driven by beauty and the poor being attracted to wealth—the entire tribe of Seth followed suit and was stirred to a frenzy over them.

(3) Because the sons of Seth were going into the daughters of Cain, they turned away from their first wives whom they had previously taken. Then these wives, too, disdained their own continence and now, because of their husbands, quickly began to abandon their modesty which up until that time they had preserved for their husbands' sake. It is because of this wantonness that assailed both the men and the women, that Scripture says, *all flesh corrupted its path.*²⁷³

4. Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."²⁷⁴ This generation will not live nine hundred years like the previous generations, for it is flesh and its days are filled with the deeds of flesh. Therefore, their days will be one

272. See V.1, above. In his hymns, Ephrem argues strongly against the identification of the "sons of God" being angels or heavenly creatures, as commonly held by many other traditions. See *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.48, *Hymns on Faith* 46.9, and *Hymns against Heresies* 19.1–8. The sons of Seth are explicitly called "sons of God" in *Hymns on Nisibis* 1.4, and *Hymns on Paradise* 1.11. For discussion, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 166–68. Compare also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:151–52, where the sons of Seth descend the mountain and act wantonly with the daughters of Cain.

273. Gen 6.12.

274. Gen 6.3.

hundred and twenty years. If they repent during this time they will be saved from the wrath that is about to come upon them. But if they do not repent, by their deeds they will call down [the wrath] upon themselves." Grace granted one hundred and twenty years for repentance to a generation that, according to Justice, was not worthy of repentance.²⁷⁵

5. After these things [Moses] wrote of the offspring produced from the union of the daughters of Cain and the sons of Seth saying, *There were mighty men in those days; and also afterward, because judges went into the daughters of men, they bore the mighty men who were of old, the mighty men of renown.*²⁷⁶ The mighty men who were born were born to the feeble tribe of Cain and not to the mighty tribe of Seth. The house of Cain, because the earth had been cursed so as not to give them its strength, produced small harvests, deprived of its strength, just as it is today that some seeds, fruits, and grasses give strength and some do not. Because, at that time, they were cursed and sons of the cursed and were dwelling in the land of curses, they would gather and eat produce that lacked nutrition, and those who ate these were without strength just like the food that they ate. As for the Sethites, on the other hand, because they were the descendants of the blessed [Seth] and were dwelling in the land along the boundary of the fence of Paradise, their produce was abundant and full of strength. So too were the bodies of those that ate that produce strong and powerful.

(2) Therefore, these mighty sons of Seth went into the daughters of Cain, that fearful wanderer, and they begot for the descendants of Cain *mighty men of renown*. [Moses] adds *of old*, because those thus born to the descendants of Cain were like Seth and Enosh, the first mighty men of renown.

275. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:153, where God, in His mercy, granted this same time for the repentance of the sinners.

276. Gen 6.4, Peshitta. "Judges" here is another reading that occurs in the Peshitta and *Targum Neofiti*—both here and at Exod 22.7. This is also the interpretation found in *Genesis Rabbah* 26.5. For a history of this interpretation, see P. Alexander, "The Targumim and Early Exegesis of 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6," *JJS* 23 (1972): 60-71.

6. After Moses spoke about the mighty men who were born into the tribe of Cain, whose women, even though beautiful, were nevertheless smaller than the sons of Seth, he then said, *the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was always evil,*²⁷⁷ for in the years given to them for repentance they had increased their sins. *The wickedness of mankind was great in the earth*, that is, evil extended and spread throughout both those tribes. *The inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was always evil*, for their sins were not committed only occasionally, but their sins were incessant; night and day they would not desist from their wicked thought.

7. Because of all this evil they committed, *the Lord said, "I will blot out [everything] from man to beast to reptile and bird, for I am sorry that I have made them."*²⁷⁸ God *was sorry* does not mean that God did not know that they would come to this, but rather that He wished to make their great wickedness manifest before the generations to come, that they had committed such wantonness that they even brought to remorse God, who does not feel remorse. In addition, God defended His justice; He did not drown them in the flood without reason. That Nature that does not feel remorse humbled Itself to say, *"I am sorry,"* so that that rebellious generation might hear and quake in fear, and so that remorse might be sown in those whose heart rebelled against remorse.²⁷⁹

(2) If there had been any blemish in the works of God, He would have created a new world and would not have preserved in the ark anything that had caused remorse to Him

277. Gen 6.5.

278. Gen 6.7.

279. God took on this remorse and other "human characteristics due to human weakness." See *Hymns on Faith* 31.1-4, *Hymns against Heresies* 20.1, 30.2, 36.13 (and Beck's note *ad loc.*). It was the Marcionites, "the children of the left hand," who understood these verses anthropomorphically; see *Hymns on Virginity* 29.6. See discussion in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 204-6; and Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, 93-100.

who made it. Notice that by saying, "*I am sorry*," He shows that He was not sorry. If God were sorry on account of the sinners, why would He be sorry concerning the beasts and the reptiles and the birds that had committed no sin? And if He were not sorry concerning them, why did He say, "*I am sorry*," when He was not sorry? This remorse which, on account of the offenders, was extended to those who committed no evil vindicates God who said, "*I am sorry*," for it was out of love for those sinners who were to perish that He said it and not because He was announcing His ignorance. That they should perish in their deeds was a great sorrow to that Grace that had made them, but if they did not perish, future generations would have been corrupted because of them.

8. But when they showed no fear and did not repent, neither when their lives had been shortened nor when He said, "*I am sorry*," [God] then said to Noah, "*Because the end of all flesh is before me, make yourself an ark of gopher wood: three hundred cubits in length, fifty cubits in width and thirty cubits in height and finish it to a cubit above. Make it three stories and daub it with pitch on the outside.*"²⁸⁰ [God] brought that difficult task to this just man in the hope that He would not have to bring the flood upon them.

(2) Where was Noah to get gopher wood? pitch? iron? or rope? With the assistance of what craftsmen would he construct [the ark] and where would he procure laborers to help? Who, in that generation in which *all flesh corrupted its path*, would listen to him? If he and the sons of his household were to make the ark, who of all those who saw it would not mock it? Noah began the ark in the first year that was allowed that generation for repentance and he finished it in one hundred years.

9. Although Noah was an example to that generation by his righteousness and had, in his uprightness, announced to

²⁸⁰ Gen 6.13-16. In general, Ephrem uses the Syriac word *qbūta* for the ark in this *Commentary*, whereas in his hymns he uses the word *kerwēla*. See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 183, for precise references.

them the flood during that one hundred years, they still did not repent.²⁸¹ So Noah said to them, "Some of all flesh will come to be saved with me in the ark." But they mocked him [saying], "How will all the beasts and birds that are scattered throughout every corner of the earth come from all those regions?" *His Lord then said to him, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals and two pairs of the animals that are unclean."*²⁸² He called the gentle animals *clean* and the vicious ones *unclean*, for even in the beginning God had multiplied the clean ones. [Hoping] that something visible might persuade those whom words could not persuade, "*in seven days I will send rain upon the earth for forty days and nights and I will blot out all that I have made.*"²⁸³

(2) On that same day elephants came from the east, apes and peacocks approached from the south, other animals gathered from the west, and still others hastened to come from the north. Lions came from the jungles and wild beasts arrived from their lairs. Deer and wild asses came from their lands and the mountain beasts gathered from their mountains.

(3) When those of that generation gathered [to see] this novel sight, it was not to repent, but rather to amuse themselves. Then, in their very presence, the lions began to enter the ark and the bulls, with no fear, hurried in right on their heels to seek shelter with the lions. The wolves and the lambs entered together and the hawks and the sparrows together with the doves and the eagles.²⁸⁴

10. When those of that generation were still not persuaded, neither by the gathering of all the animals at that time nor by the love that instantly grew between [the animals],

²⁸¹. See *Hymns on Faith* 56.2. In 2 Pet 2.5, Noah is called "the herald of righteousness."

²⁸². Gen 7.2.

²⁸³. Gen 7.4.

²⁸⁴. In Ephrem's hymns, this peace on the ark is sign of a new beginning, of a pre-fall state, and is thus also a type of the Church. See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 186-90, for references.

*the Lord said to Noah, "In seven days, I will blot out everything that I have made."*²⁸⁵

(2) He who granted one hundred years while the ark was being made to that generation, and still they did not repent, who summoned beasts that they had never seen and still they showed no remorse, and who established a state of peace between the predatory animals and those who are preyed upon and still they did not fear, delayed yet seven more days for them, even after Noah and every creature had entered the ark, leaving the gate of the ark open to them. This is a wonderful thing that no lion remembered its jungle and no species of beast or bird visited its customary haunt! Although those of that generation saw all that went on outside and inside the ark, they were still not persuaded to renounce their evil deeds.²⁸⁶

(3) This long-suffering patience of one hundred and twenty years was foremost so that they might repent and that the righteous among them might remain so that by them that generation might be judged, and so that the righteous might complete their lives lest it be said, "Why did He not leave those who did not sin?" Because God had already endured the trial of that generation for one hundred years, He subtracted twenty years. But the seven days which He delayed after the beasts had entered [the ark] were more than the twenty years He subtracted from them because of the signs [done in them].²⁸⁷

11. If they did not repent because of the signs done in those seven days, it was clear that they would not have repented in the twenty years in which there would have been no signs. Therefore God sent off, with many fewer sins, those whose lives He had shortened by twenty years.

(2) For this reason, *at the end of the seven days, in the six*

²⁸⁵. Gen 7.4.

²⁸⁶. See *Hymns on Nicomedia* 5.95-114.

²⁸⁷. The idea that God gave that evil generation more than sufficient time to repent is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:154 (where the extra week is out of regard for the memory of Methuselah), and further references in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 185, 191.

*hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the springs of the great abyss burst forth and the flood gates of heaven were opened. The Lord shut the door before Noah,*²⁸⁸ lest those left behind come at the time of the floods and break down the gate of the ark. The deluge came and God blotted out all flesh. Only Noah was left and those that were with him in the ark.²⁸⁹ The springs of the abyss and the flood gates of heaven were open forty days and forty nights²⁹⁰ and the ark was afloat for one hundred fifty days.²⁹¹

12. *But after one hundred fifty days the waters began to subside and the ark came to rest on Mt. Qardu.*²⁹² In the tenth month the tops of the mountains were seen. In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. In the second month, that is, Iyor, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.²⁹³ Therefore, Noah and those with him had been in the ark three hundred sixty-five days, for from the seventeenth of the second month, that is, Iyor, until the twenty-seventh of the same month the following year, according to the lunar reckoning, there were three hundred sixty-five days.²⁹⁴ Notice then that even the generation of the house of Noah employed this reckoning

288. Gen 7.11, 16.

289. Gen 7.23.

290. Cf. Gen 7.12. See *Hymns on Nicomedia* 5.145-46, where Ephrem also echoes Jewish exegesis that the flood waters came from beneath the earth as well as from the skies. See also A. Levene, *The Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis* (London, 1951) 82-83, 186.

291. Cf. Gen 7.24, 8.3-4.

292. Following the Peshitta, Josephus, *Antiquities* I.3, 5-6, *Genesis Rabbah* 33.4, the Targums on this verse; see *Pseudo-Jonathan* at 2 Kings 19.37 and Isa 37.38, Ephrem locates the resting of the ark not on Ararat but on Mt. Qardu, in northern Iraq. See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 201. For the history of the tradition of the resting place of the ark, see L. R. Bailey, *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1989) 61-82, especially, 65-68; and Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:186, n.48.

For Ephrem, the landing of the ark on Mt. Qardu signaled the final and complete separation of humanity from Paradise. See *Hymns on Paradise* 1.10.

293. Gen 8.3-5, 13-14.

294. Compare the chronology of the various stages of the flood found in Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:163.

of three hundred sixty-five days in a year. Why then should you say that it was the Chaldeans and Egyptians who invented and developed it?²⁹⁵

(2) *Then God said to Noah, "Go out, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives."*²⁹⁶ Those whom he had brought in *one by one* in order to maintain chastity on the ark, he brought out *two by two* so that they might *be fruitful and multiply in creation.*²⁹⁷ Even with respect to the animals that had preserved their chastity in the ark [God] said, "*Bring forth with you every animal that is with you of all flesh that they might breed on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on it.*"²⁹⁸

13. After Noah and all those with him went out, [Noah] took of every clean animal and offered up a whole burnt offering on an altar.²⁹⁹ Now, either every clean bird and beast was completely obedient to Noah after they came out, or on the day that they went out from the ark, [Noah] took from all the clean flesh and offered an acceptable sacrifice to God and so made the flood pass away from the earth.

(2) *The Lord smelled,*³⁰⁰ not the smell of the flesh of animals or the smoke of wood, but He looked out and saw the simplicity of heart with which [Noah] offered the sacrifice from all and on behalf of all. And his Lord spoke to him, as He desired that Noah hear, "*Because of your righteousness, a remnant was preserved and did not perish in that flood that took place. And because of your sacrifice that was from all flesh and on behalf of all flesh, I will never again bring a flood upon the earth.*"³⁰¹ God thus bound Himself beforehand by this promise so that even if mankind were constantly to follow the evil thoughts of their inclination, He would never again bring a flood upon them.

295. Ephrem makes the same point in *Hymns on the Crucifixion* 6.18.

296. Gen 8.16.

297. For the animal's preservation of chastity on the ark, see VI.2, above, the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* II.6, *Hymns on Nisibis* 1.9, *Hymns on the Nativity* 28.1. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:166, for this same celibacy in Jewish tradition. Although Ephrem does not mention it here, Noah also kept chastity on the ark. See *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.22, *Armenian Hymns* 4.13, *Hymns on Nisibis* 1.4.

298. Gen 8.17.

299. Gen 8.20.

300. Gen 8.21.

301. Cf. Gen 9.11-15.

(3) And because there was neither planting nor harvest during that year and the seasonal cycles had been disturbed, God restored to the earth that which had been taken away in His anger and then said, "*All the days of the earth, planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease from the earth.*"³⁰² For throughout the entire forty days of rain it had been night, and throughout the entire year, until the earth dried up, winter, with no summer, had been upon them.

14. [God] also blessed Noah and his sons that they might be fruitful and multiply and that fear of them should fall upon all flesh both in the sea and on dry land.³⁰³ "*Only you shall not eat flesh with its life,*"³⁰⁴ that is, you shall eat no flesh that has not been slaughtered and whose blood, which is its life, has not been drained. God established three covenants with Noah: one, that they should not eat blood; one of retaliation, that God will require the blood of animals; and one that a murderer is to be put to death.³⁰⁵

15. "*I will require your blood from every beast and from the hand of man.*"³⁰⁶ He requires it now and in the future. He requires it now in the case of a death that He decreed for a murderer, and also a stoning with which a goring bull is to be stoned.³⁰⁷ At the end, at the time of the resurrection, God will require that animals return all that they ate from the flesh of man.

(2) God said, "*From the hand of a man and of his brother I will require the life of a man,*"³⁰⁸ just as satisfaction for the blood of Abel was required from Cain, that is, *whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.*³⁰⁹ The phrase *in the image of God He made . . .*,³¹⁰ concerns his authority for, like God, he has the power to grant life and to kill.

(3) After these things God made a covenant with Noah and with all those who came out of the ark with him, saying,

302. Gen 8.22.

304. Gen 9.4.

306. Gen 9.5.

308. Gen 9.5.

310. Gen 9.6.

303. Cf. Gen 9.1-2.

305. Cf. Gen 9.5-7.

307. Cf. Exod 21.28.

309. Gen 9.6.

*"All flesh shall never again perish in the waters of a flood. I will set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the eternal covenant between God and all flesh that is on the earth."*³¹¹

Section VII

1. After these things [Moses] wrote of how Noah *planted a vineyard and drank of its wine, got drunk, fell asleep, and lay uncovered in his tent. Ham saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.*³¹² Noah's drunkenness was not from an excess of wine but because it had been a long time since he had drunk any wine. In the ark he had drunk no wine; although all flesh was going to perish Noah was not permitted to bring any wine onto the ark. During the year after the flood Noah did not drink any wine. In that [first] year after he left the ark, he did not plant a vineyard, for he came out of the ark on the twenty-seventh of Iyor, the time when the fruit should be starting to mature and not the time for planting a vineyard. Therefore, seeing that it was in the third year that he planted the vineyard from the grape stones that he brought with him on the ark, and that it was three or even four years before they would have become a productive vineyard, there were, then, at least six years during which the just one had not tasted any wine.

2. Another indication that it was the long absence of wine that had caused Noah to become so drunk is when Moses said, *Ham went out into the street and told his brothers.*³¹³ How could there be a street there, unless they had built a village for themselves? If they had built a village it would have taken them several years to build. Therefore the building of a village and the laying out of its streets also bear witness that it had been many years, as we said, since the old man had drunk any wine, and that is the reason he became so drunk.³¹⁴

³¹¹. Gen 9.13.

³¹². Gen 9.21-22.

³¹³. Gen 9.22. "Into the street" is the reading in the Peshitta and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*.

³¹⁴. Here, and in *Hymns on Nisibis* 57.5, Ephrem goes to great lengths to ensure that no guilt is impugned to Noah. See, however, *Hymns on Virginity*

(2) The brothers of [Ham], knowing the nobility of their father and that he, like Jacob, was protected by angels both while awake and while asleep, hid his nakedness, trembling all the while; their faces did not see his nakedness.³¹⁵

3. *When Noah awoke and realized everything that his youngest son had done to him*³¹⁶—for Noah had been both sleeping and awake. He was sleeping in that he had not perceived his nakedness, but awake in that he had been aware of everything that his youngest son had done to him. [Noah] cursed Canaan, saying, “*Cursed be Canaan. A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.*”³¹⁷ But what sin could Canaan have committed even if he had been right behind his father when Ham observed the nakedness of Noah?

(2) Some say that because Ham had been blessed along with those who entered the ark and came out of it, Noah did not curse Ham himself, even though his son, who was cursed, grieved him greatly. Others, however, say that from that the fact that Scripture says, *Noah knew everything that his youngest son had done to him*, it is clear that it was not Ham, for Ham was the middle son and not the youngest. For this reason they speak of the youngest son, who was Canaan, and say that Canaan the youngest told of the nakedness of the old man. Then Ham went out into the street and jokingly told his brothers. For this reason then, even though it might be thought that Canaan was cursed unjustly, in that he did what he did in his youth, still he was cursed justly for he was not cursed in the stead of another. For Noah knew that unless Canaan was to deserve the curse in his old age, he would not have been cursed in his youth.

(3) Ham was justly withheld from both the blessing and from the curse. If he had been cursed even because of his laughter, he would have been cursed justly, but had he been

1.10, where “wine exposed and cast down Noah, the head of families.” By impugning no guilt to Noah Ephrem differs from Jewish tradition. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:167–68, and *Genesis Rabbah* 26–32, *passim*.

315. See also *Hymns on Faith* 9.2. For a more typological interpretation, see *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.23.

316. Gen 9.24.

317. Gen 9.25.

cursed, all the sons of Ham who had taken no part in the jesting or the laughing would have been cursed along with Ham. Therefore, Canaan was cursed because of his jesting and Ham was deprived of the blessing because of his laughter.

4. After Ham had been cursed through his one son, [Noah] blessed Shem and Japhet and said, "*May God increase Japhet and may He dwell in the tent of Shem, and let Canaan be their slave.*"³¹⁸ Japhet increased and became powerful in his inheritance in the north and in the west. And God dwelt in the tent of Abraham, the descendant of Shem, and Canaan became their slave when in the days of Joshua bar-Nun, the Israelites destroyed the dwelling-places of [Canaan] and pressed their leaders into bondage.³¹⁹

Section VIII

1. After those things, [Moses] wrote about the nations that came from Noah. From and including Japhet there were fifteen nations. From and including Ham there were thirty nations, apart from the Philistines and the Cappadocians who later came from them. From and including Shem there were twenty-seven nations, a total of seventy-two nations. Each of these nations dwelt in its own distinct place with its own people and [spoke] its own tongue.³²⁰

(2) Concerning Nimrod, [Moses] said, *He was a mighty hunter before the Lord,*³²¹ because, according to the will of the Lord, it was he who fought with each of these nations and chased them out from there so that they would go out and settle in the regions that had been set apart for them by God. *Therefore it is said, like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.*³²² One used to bless a chief or a ruler by saying, "May

318. Gen 9.27.

319. Cf. Josh 17.13.

320. See *Hymns against Heresies* 7.7, and *Sermones* II.2.484ff.

321. Gen 10.9.

322. Gen 10.9. For Ephrem's view of Nimrod in relation to other Christian traditions, see P. W. van der Horst, "Nimrod after the Bible," in idem, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity*, *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus*, no. 14 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1990) 220-32.

you be like Nimrod, a mighty hunter who was victorious in the battles of the Lord." *Nimrod reigned in Erech*, which is now Edessa, *and in Accad*, which is now Nisibis, and *in Calah*, which is now Seleucia-Ctesiphon, *Rehoboth*, which is now Adiabene, *Calah*,³²³ which is now Hatra, and *Resen, the great city* (that is, at that time),³²⁴ which is now Reshaina.

2. Then Moses said, *the whole earth had one language, and they said, "Let us build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered over the face of the earth."*³²⁵ For what purpose would those who had nothing to fear build a fortified city or a tower that reaches to heaven, since they had a firm covenant that there would be no flood? They said, *"Lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth."* But who else was there, apart from themselves, to scatter them? From the fact that they said, *"Let us make a name for ourselves,"* it is clear that their vainglory and their unity, which built both the city and the tower, were brought to nought because of the division that came upon them.

3. *And the Lord came down to see the city,*³²⁶ that is, the Lord saw the work of their mad folly *and said, "Nothing that they propose will be impossible for them,"*³²⁷ that is, they will not escape punishment, for the opposite of that which they said, *"lest we be scattered,"* will befall them. *"Come, let us go down and there confuse their languages."*³²⁸ Here, God was not speaking to one, for this *"Come, let us go down,"* would be superfluous [if only said] to one. He said it both to the Son and to the Spirit so that neither the ancient nor the more recent languages³²⁹ be given without the Son and the Spirit.

(2) *"Let us confuse their tongues, so that they will not understand one another's language."*³³⁰ It is likely that they lost their

323. For the two Calah's, see Jansma, "Investigations," 164. For similar equations, compare *Genesis Rabbah* 37.4.

324. Gen 10.10-12.

325. Gen 11.1, 4.

326. Gen 11.5.

327. Gen 11.6.

328. Gen 11.7.

329. Ephrem perhaps has in mind here the "new tongues" of Mark 16.17, or Acts 2.4.

330. Gen 11.7.

common language when they received these new languages, for if their original language had not perished their first deed would not have come to nought. It was when they lost their original language, which was lost by all the nations, with one exception, that their first building came to nought. In addition, because of their new languages, which made them foreigners to each other and incapable of understanding one another, war broke out among them on account of the divisions that the languages brought among them.

4. Thus, war broke out among those who had been building that fortified city out of fear of others. And all those who had been keeping themselves away from [the city] were scattered throughout the entire earth.

(2) It was Nimrod who scattered them. It was also he who seized Babel and became its first ruler. If Nimrod had not scattered them each to his own place, he would not have been able to take that place where they all [had lived before].

Section IX

1. After these things, [Moses] once again began to enumerate the generations from Noah to Abraham saying that Noah begot Shem and his brothers and Shem begot Arpachshad, and Arpachshad Shelah, and Shelah Eber, and Eber Peleg, and Peleg Reu, and Reu Serug, and Serug Nahor, and Nahor Terah, and Terah Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot and Milcah and Iscah, that is, Sarah, who was called Iscah for her beauty.³³¹ These two [married] their uncles.³³²

2. *And Terah took Abraham his son, Lot his grandson, and Sarah his daughter-in-law out of Ur of the Chaldees and he went and dwelt in Haran.*³³³ *God appeared to Abram*³³⁴ *and said to him,*

331. For the various interpretations of the name Iscah in Syriac tradition, see Jansma, "Investigations," 164-65. This identification of Iscah with Sarah is commonplace in Jewish tradition. Sarah was held to be so beautiful that even the most beautiful women were as apes in comparison. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:60, 203, 222, 287.

332. Cf. Gen 11.10-29.

333. Gen 11.31.

334. Although Ephrem makes nothing of the change in Abraham's name,

"Go out from your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation."³³⁵ So Abraham left his parents who did not wish to go out with him and took Lot who believed the promise made to him. Since [God] had not made [Lot] a joint heir [with Abraham], neither did He allow the descendants of Abraham to enter into the inheritance with the descendants of Lot. Abraham then took Sarah and Lot and went to Canaan.³³⁶

3. And there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt and said to Sarah, "When the Egyptians see you and say to you, 'She is his wife,' say 'I am his sister,' so that my life may be spared because of you."³³⁷ Abraham gave a human reason as human beings do. Nevertheless, because Sarah thought it was Abraham who was sterile, she was taken to the palace: first, so that she might learn that it was she who was barren;³³⁸ secondly, so that her love for her husband might be seen, for she did not exchange [her husband] for a king while she was a sojourner; and [lastly], so that the mystery of her descendants might be depicted in her. Just as she had no love for the kingdom of Egypt, they would not love the idols, the garlic, or the onions of Egypt. Just as the entire house of Pharaoh was struck by Sarah's deliverance, so too would all Egypt be struck down by the deliverance of her descendants.³³⁹

(2) Pharaoh's household was struck down because they honored [Sarah] above [Pharaoh], and because they de-

he preserves the form Abram wherever the Peshitta text does. Therefore, our translation reads Abram on each occasion that Ephrem does.

335. Gen 12.1-2.

336. Cf. Gen 12.5.

337. Gen 12.10-13.

338. Compare *Hymns on Virginity* 1.9: "Sarah was chaste in the bosom of Pharaoh." See also *Hymns on Virginity* 22.16-17. Jewish tradition also held Sarah to have been saved from this impurity; see *Genesis Rabbah* 53.6. A *mémora*, later attributed to Ephrem, develops this idea further. See S. P. Brock and S. Hopkins, "A Verse Homily on Abraham and Sarah in Egypt: Syriac Original with Early Arabic Translation," *LM* 105 (1992): 87-146; and, for a later version of the same *mémora*, A. Caquot, "Une homélie éthiopienne attribuée à saint Mari Ephrem sur le séjour d'Abraham et Sara en Egypte," in *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont* (Geneva, 1988) 173-85.

339. Cf. Exod 14.26-28.

sired [Pharaoh] to marry her. Pharaoh was also struck down because he forced her to become his wife, although she was unwilling. Only to avoid their killing her and her husband would she have yielded in this matter.

Section X

1. *And a quarrel arose between the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot.*³⁴⁰ Justice sent the contentious servants of Lot to the quarrelsome Sodomites to be chastised along with them and so that Lot might be delivered from them. Although the land had been promised to Abraham, he allowed Lot to choose the land of the Jordan, that is, all the land of Sodom, which was watered by the Jordan.

2. *After Lot had departed, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "Rise, walk through the land, its length and its width, for I will give it to you."*³⁴¹ Here the cross is clearly delineated. Thus that land promised to the forefathers through the mystery of the cross, because of the cross, repudiated any other heirs.

Section XI

1. After these things, Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, came with three allied kings to wage war against the king of Sodom and his four allies. The king of Sodom and his allies fled, and those with Chedorlaomer seized all the goods of Sodom as well as Lot and his goods and went off. Then Abraham led his 318 servants along with Aner and two of his companions, who were his allies. Abraham overtook them, routed them, and brought back the spoil and their goods and Lot his nephew and his goods.³⁴² But, because the goods of the Sodomites had been intermingled with those of the kings, Abraham refused [to take] any plunder from the kings.

2. *Melchizedek, the King of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed [Abram] and*

340. Gen 13.7.

341. Gen 13.11, 13-14.

342. Cf. Gen 14.1-2, 10-16.

said, "Blessed is the Lord who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.³⁴³

(2) This Melchizedek is Shem, who became a king due to his greatness; he was the head of fourteen nations.³⁴⁴ In addition, *he was a priest*. He received this from Noah, his father, through the rights of succession. Shem lived not only to the time of Abraham, as Scripture says, but even to [the time of] Jacob and Esau, the grandsons of Abraham. It was to him that Rebekah went to ask and was told, "Two nations are in your womb and the older shall be a servant to the younger."³⁴⁵ Rebekah would not have bypassed her husband, who had been delivered at the *high place*, or her father-in-law, to whom revelations of the divinity came continually, and gone straight to ask Melchizedek unless she had learned of his greatness from Abraham or Abraham's son.

(3) Abraham would not have given him a tenth of everything unless he knew that Melchizedek was infinitely greater than himself. Would Rebekah have asked one of the Canaanites or one of the Sodomites? Would Abraham have given a tenth of his possessions to any one of these? One ought not even entertain such ideas.

(4) Because the length of Melchizedek's life extended to the time of Jacob and Esau, it has been stated, with much probability, that he was Shem. His father Noah was dwelling in the east and Melchizedek was dwelling between two tribes, that is, between the sons of Ham and his own sons. Melchizedek was like a partition between the two, for he was afraid that the sons of Ham would turn his own sons to idolatry.

343. Gen 14.18-20.

344. *Contra* Heb 7.3. Ephrem makes the same identification of Melchizedek with Shem in *Armenian Hymns* 9.11-12 (untranslated by Mariès because he did not realize Ephrem made this equation; see n.125 on p. 249). For Jewish background, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:233, 314 (where he is consulted by Rebekah); s.v. "Shem" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 5:225-26, and discussion in Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, 116-18. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 55.6, claims that it was the Samaritans who made the identification of Shem and Melchizedek.

345. Gen 25.22-23. Jewish tradition also holds that Sarah consulted Melchizedek. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:314, and *Genesis Rabbah* 45.10.

Section XII

1. *After these things, God appeared to Abraham in a vision and said to him, "Your reward will be very great,"*³⁴⁶—because of your righteous action toward the captives whom you rescued. *But Abraham said, "What will you give me, for I continue to be childless and a slave born in my house will become my heir?"* God brought Abraham outside and said to him, *"Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them."* Then God said, *"So shall your descendants be."* Abraham believed and this too was reckoned to him as great righteousness.³⁴⁷ Because he believed in a matter that was so difficult that few would have believed, it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

(2) At that same moment that God praised Abraham for his faith, *God said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess."* But Abraham said, *"How shall I know that I am to possess this land?"*³⁴⁸

2. There are those who say that it was because Abraham doubted this that it was said to him, *"Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs."*³⁴⁹ But let those who say this know that at that same time Abraham believed his descendants would become like the sand.³⁵⁰ If Abraham believed a matter so great as that from one old sterile woman his descendants would become like the sand, would he have any doubts, then, about such a little matter as that of land?

(2) If Abraham, who had not doubted about that great matter, was in doubt [about this small matter], why did [God] say to him, *"Take a three-year old goat, a three-year old ram, a turtledove and a pigeon?"*³⁵¹ Abraham was told these things in the night and then he did them in the day. From dawn to evening Abraham stood before his offering and chased away all the birds that wished to feed on his sacrifice.³⁵² After the fire had come down upon Abraham's acceptable sacrifice

346. Gen 15.1.

347. Cf. Gen 15.2-6; and Rom 4.3, 22.

348. Gen 15.7-8.

349. Gen 15.13.

350. Cf. Gen 13.16.

351. Gen 15.9.

352. Gen 15.11.

that evening, God appeared to him and spoke to him.³⁵³ If God had spoken to Abraham as if to punish him, He would not have accepted his sacrifice, nor would He have established a covenant with him on that day, nor would He have promised him that ten nations would become servants to his descendants, nor would it have been said that he would be buried at a ripe old age.³⁵⁴

(2) If all these good things came to him on that day because *he believed and it was accounted to him as righteousness*, then how can anyone say that on the very same day a man became worthy of great rewards because of his faith, his seed received punishment because of his lack of faith?

3. In that difficult matter, Abraham believed that a world of people would pour forth from the dead womb of Sarah. With respect to the matter of the land, Abraham did not question *if* it would come to pass but asked *how* it would come to pass. Abraham had seen the land of Canaan with its kings and its armies and had seen how populated it was, filled with its inhabitants. He had also heard, at that time, that the land was to be given not to him but rather to his seed. Abraham wished, therefore, since this was not to occur in his days, that God let him know how it would come about that his seed would enter and possess it.

(2) Abraham thought, "Perhaps these kings will destroy each other or other peoples might rise up and destroy them and empty out the land for us. Perhaps my seed will become strong and will go and slay its inhabitants and possess it, or maybe the land will swallow [its inhabitants] because of their deeds. Perhaps, the [inhabitants] might go into exile into another land because of hunger or rumor or some such reason. Abraham sought to know which of these [would happen], but he had no doubts whatsoever.

(3) Then God, who knew what he sought, showed him what he did not seek in addition to what he did seek. For by the offering that Abraham made [when] the birds came down and he chased them away, God clearly showed him

353. Gen 15.17.

354. Gen 15.18—20.15.

that his descendants would sin and be oppressed but would be saved through the prayers of their righteous ones. And by the pot of fire that came down, God made known that even if all their righteous ones should come to an end, deliverance from heaven would come to them. By the three-year old calf and the three-year old ram and the three-year old goat [God showed him] that either they would be delivered after three generations or that kings, priests, and prophets would soon arise from among his descendants. By the limbs of the animals that Abraham cut in two [God] depicted their many tribes, and by the bird that Abraham did not cut in two [God] signified their unity.

4. After He showed him these things [God] said to [Abraham], "You will surely know" what you desired to know, "that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs."³⁵⁵ But they will not go down as if into captivity; they will go down with cattle and oxen that will be sent after them, and "they will become slaves for four hundred years,"³⁵⁶ for they will not be persuaded to go unless they have been enslaved. "But I will bring judgment on the nation who will enslave them and they shall come out with great possessions and, as for yourself, you will be gathered to your fathers at a ripe old age and the fourth generation shall return here."³⁵⁷

(2) The verse *the iniquity of the Amorites is not complete*³⁵⁸ is to show that not until the full measure of their sins would they receive their just punishment by the sword.

5. And [Moses] said, *Sleep fell upon Abram.*³⁵⁹ It was the same deep sleep that fell upon Abimelech. The sleep fell upon Abraham when God appeared to him and established a covenant with him that ten nations would become slaves to his descendants and that God would give his descendants the land from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates River as an inheritance.³⁶⁰

355. Gen 15.13.

357. Gen 15.14-16.

359. Gen 15.12.

356. Gen 15.3.

358. Gen 15.16.

360. Gen 15.18-20.

Section XIII

1. In that same year when Sarah saw that she was barren she said to Abraham, "*Behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my maid that perhaps I may be comforted by her.*"³⁶¹ After Abraham counseled her to be patient and she refused, [Moses] wrote that *Abraham hearkened to the voice of his wife,*³⁶² and she gave him Hagar, the Egyptian, whom Pharaoh had given her along with all the other things he gave her when he had taken her as a wife.

2. *And when Hagar conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress,*³⁶³ for Hagar thought that it would be her seed that would enter and possess the promised land. Although Sarah could have taken her and punished her, she saw that, even though Hagar had been her maid up to the time that Sarah gave her to her husband, she had now become her rival wife. Then, lest she disgrace Abraham by showing contempt to his concubine, *Sarah said to him, "My wrong be upon you;"*³⁶⁴ I did not exchange you for a king, yet now you prefer a maid to me. Hagar, whom I gave to you for the sake of the comfort that might come to me, instead of announcing to me that my prayer had been heard and that she had conceived, has rendered me evil instead of the good that I did to her, for she has made me a bitter reproach in the eyes of all her fellow servants."

3. When Hagar, who trusted in Abraham, saw that he took and handed her over to her mistress, after Sarah had been made an object of reproach, she took fright and fled. An angel found her and said to her, "*Return to your mistress and submit to her, for your descendants will multiply so that they cannot be numbered for their multitude, because the Lord has given heed to your servitude,*" that you have given yourself up to return and serve your mistress. "*You shall bear a son and you shall name him Ishmael. He shall be a wild ass of a man because he will dwell in the wilderness and, like a wild ass, he will not enter inhabited land. His hand will be against every one,*" to do them vi-

361. Gen 16.2.

363. Gen 16.4.

362. Gen 16.2-3.

364. Gen 16.5.

olence *"and everyone's hand will be against him,"* for he will strike at all peoples and all peoples will strike at him. *"He shall dwell along the border of all his kinsmen,"*³⁶⁵ that is, the sons of Sarah and Keturah, for the inheritances have been divided among the sons of Shem.

4. Hagar heard that Abraham was to have many sons, but not from her. Hagar was convinced that Abraham would not again come into her, for she knew that he would only have intercourse with her until it was known that she had conceived. After that he would not touch her again. Abraham went into her to do the will of Sarah, so that Sarah might have a little comfort from Hagar until God should make her joyful with fruit from her own womb.

(2) *Hagar said, "You are a God of seeing,"*³⁶⁶ *who truly condescends to appear to those who worship you.* Then she added, *"I have seen a vision after you saw me,"*³⁶⁷ because, prior to this, an angel had appeared to her in silence so that she would not be afraid. Then after the angel spoke with her there appeared to her a vision within the vision, that is, God in the angel. *Therefore she called the well "the well of the Living One has seen me."*³⁶⁸

5. Then Hagar went and sought her mistress. When Hagar recounted to Abraham and Sarah the vision that she had seen and that the angel had said that her son *would dwell at the boundary of his kinsmen,* the grief that had afflicted Sarah was now blotted out by the good news that she brought to Sarah. *Then Hagar gave birth and Abraham named his son Ishmael as he had been instructed by Hagar.*³⁶⁹

Section XIV

1. *When [Abraham] was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Be blameless in the covenant that I am about to make with you and I will multiply you and will set you up as many nations,"* that is, tribes. But it was also fulfilled concerning the sons of Esau, the sons of Keturah, and Ishmael

365. Gen 16.7-12.

367. Gen 16.13.

369. Gen 16.15.

366. Gen 16.13.

368. Gen 16.14.

who became nations. *“And kings shall come forth from you,”* that is, from the house of Judah and Ephraim and the Edomites. But *“this is my covenant: you shall circumcise every male in the flesh of the foreskin.”*³⁷⁰

2. And God said to Abraham, *“I will give you a son from Sarah, and I will bless him and he will become nations.”* Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, *“Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”* And he said, *“O that Ishmael might live in your sight!”*³⁷¹

(2) Now Abraham was not guilty of any doubt by his laughter, for he showed his love towards Ishmael in what he said. He had clung to this hope for twenty-five years. Abraham had manifested his faith in every vision that had come to him. However great his contest with barrenness became, he manifested the victory of his faith. But when old age was added to the barrenness he laughed in his heart. That his Lord would do these two things for him was a marvel to him. For [God] had said to him, *“Truly, Sarah, your wife, will bear you a son; I would in no wise test you, [to see] whether you would also believe in something that I would not do for you. As for Ishmael, I have heard you, behold, I have blessed him and multiplied him.”*³⁷²

3. For if Abraham had had the smallest doubt, God would not have sworn to him in truth, nor would He have heeded him concerning Ishmael, nor would He have announced to Abraham that in another year a son would be born to him. [God] would have brought censure and reproof upon him. Then [God] said concerning Ishmael, *“He shall become the father of twelve princes,”*³⁷³ for he became twelve Arab tribes, like Jacob who became twelve tribes. Then, on that very day, Abraham circumcised himself and his son Ishmael and all the males of his household.³⁷⁴

(2) Because the Giver had committed himself to give Abraham the gift the following year, Abraham began to re-

370. Gen 17.1-2, 6, 10.

372. Gen 17.19-20.

374. Gen 17.23.

371. Gen 17.16-18.

373. Gen 17.20.

flect on when he would be blessed and when the closed womb of Sarah would be opened. Would this occur in a vision or not? While he was reflecting on this, *the Lord appeared to him while he was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.*³⁷⁵ But, while Abraham was seeking to fill the eyes of his heart with this revelation, God took Himself up from him.

4. Then, while Abraham was considering why God had appeared and then hid Himself without speaking to him, *he looked, and behold, he saw three men standing above him. He forgot his thoughts and ran from the tent door to meet them.*³⁷⁶

Section XV

1. Although Abraham ran from the tent toward them as if toward strangers, he ran to receive those strangers with love. His love for strangers was thus proved by the haste with which he ran to meet those strangers. Therefore, the Lord, who had just appeared to him at the door of the tent, now appeared to Abraham clearly in one of the three.

(2) Abraham then fell down and worshipped Him, seeking from Him in whom majesty dwelt that He vouchsafe to enter his house and bless his dwelling. *"If I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant."*³⁷⁷ God did not oppose him, for *He said, "Do as you have said."* Then Abraham ran to Sarah [telling her] to make three measures of wheat and then he ran to the herd to get a fatted calf.³⁷⁸

2. The bread and meat, which was in abundance, was not to satisfy the angels, but rather so that the blessing might be distributed to all the members of his household. After the angels had washed and sat down beneath a tree, *Abraham brought and set before them what he had prepared; he did not dare recline with them, but like a servant stood apart from them.*³⁷⁹

(2) After they had eaten, *they inquired about Sarah.* She,

375. Gen 18.1.

376. Gen 18.2. *Armenian Hymns* 31-32 are devoted to this pericope. See also *Armenian Hymns* 44.1-14; 45.

377. Gen 18.3.

378. Cf. Gen 18.6-7.

379. Gen 18.8.

who even in her old age had preserved her modesty, came out from inside the tent to the door of the tent.³⁸⁰ From Abraham's haste and from the silence that Abraham imposed on everyone with his gestures, those of his household knew that these who, because of the man of God, allowed their feet to be washed like men were not men.

3. *Then [God] said of Sarah, "At this time I will return to you and Sarah will have a son."* But Sarah, even though Abraham was standing behind her to strengthen her, *laughed to herself and said, "After I have grown old shall I [again] have youthfulness? My husband is also old."*³⁸¹ A sign would have been given her if she had asked to hear or to see and then believe: first, because she was a woman, old and barren; and secondly, because nothing like this had ever been done before. God then gave a sign specifically to her who had not asked for a sign, and said, *"Why did you laugh Sarah, and say, 'Am I, who am old, to bear a child?'"*³⁸² But Sarah, instead of accepting the sign that was given to her, persisted, by this falsehood, in denying the true sign that had been given to her. Even though she had denied it because she was afraid, nevertheless, in order to make her know that a false excuse did not convince Him, God said to her, *"But you did laugh"³⁸³ in your heart: lo, even your heart is denying the foolishness of your tongue."*

Section XVI

1. After the three men promised Sarah fruit, *they arose and they looked toward Sodom.*³⁸⁴ It was not revealed to Sarah that they were going to Sodom lest, on the same day that they had given her joy in the promise that a son was to be hers, she be grieving over her brother on account of that sentence of wrath decreed on Sodom and the nearby villages. They hid this from Sarah lest she never cease weeping, but they revealed it to Abraham³⁸⁵ so that he not cease praying, and so that it be announced to the world that nowhere in

380. Gen 18.9-10.

382. Gen 18.13.

384. Gen 18.16.

381. Gen 18.10-12.

383. Gen 18.15.

385. Gen 18.17-19.

Sodom was there found a single just man for whose sake it might be saved.

(2) *The cry against Sodom and Gomorrah was great and their sins were very grave.*³⁸⁶ (The cry just mentioned is explained by the sins which he recounts below.) Then God said, "*I have come down to see if they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me and if not, I will know.*"³⁸⁷ It was not that God, who had just said, *their sins were very grave*, did not know that they had sinned. This was an example to judges not to prejudge a case, even based on very reliable hearsay. For if He who knows all set aside His knowledge lest He exact vengeance without full knowledge before the trial, how much more should they set aside their ignorance and not effect judgment before the case is heard.

2. Then two angels set out for Sodom and they went directly to the gate where Lot was sitting to receive strangers who came there. Lot rose to meet them as if to meet strangers, but when he drew near to them there appeared in the second angel the same vision that Abraham had seen in the third, and *Lot bowed himself with his face to the ground.*³⁸⁸

(2) Even to the Sodomites they appeared in a favorable aspect, for He said, "*I have come down to see.*" For this "*I have come down to see,*" [means] "*I have come down to test them.*" If they had not run after the vision they saw with such rabid fury, even though their former sins would not have been forgiven, they still would not have received the punishment that they were about to receive.

3. Lot then hastened to bring them inside before the Sodomites gathered and caused them any offence, but [the angels] kept stalling on various pretexts so that the Sodomites would come and be tested by them. In the case of Abraham, they had not tarried because they were not in any way testing him; they had come down to give him a reward for his test. Since they had come down to test Sodom, *they said to Lot, who was pressing them to enter, "No, we will spend the night in the street."*³⁸⁹

386. Gen 18.20.

388. Cf. Gen 19.1.

387. Gen 18.21.

389. Gen 19.2.

4. But Lot urged them more strongly and so they entered and ate, but *before they lay down to sleep, the men of Sodom surrounded the house and said to Lot, "Bring out to us the men who came to you in the night, that we may know them."*³⁹⁰ Notice that the angels had entered during the night, which obscures appearances, and not during the day, in which forms can be clearly seen. They spread a veil, so to speak, over the sight of the Sodomites with the darkness that lay over their appearance. Although they had entered at night so that, by their being invisible, they might make more manageable the test of those who were to be tried, still the Sodomites took no benefit even from this for they had been preparing themselves to do them harm whether it was day or night.

5. After Lot had begged the Sodomites and they still refused, he promised them his two daughters. But the Sodomites would not take them, and they then threatened to do more harm to Lot than to the angels and they drew right up to the door to break it down.³⁹¹ Then the men brought Lot inside with them and the Sodomites outside were afflicted with blindness. But even by this they were not admonished, for after this they wore themselves out groping for the door. Then the men said to Lot, "Take your in-laws, your sons, your daughters, and any one else that belongs to you out of this place for we are about to destroy it."³⁹² Lot's sons-in-law are here called "sons," for Lot was soon to marry them to his daughters.

6. Lot went out and spoke with his sons-in-law and, although the Sodomites were gathered there, they neither saw him leave nor enter. When he returned, having been ridiculed even by his sons-in-law, *the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hands and brought them out.*³⁹³ The Sodomites did not see them, even though they went out as a group among them.

(2) Because the women [of Lot's household] had not been tested in Sodom, they were to be tested by a law set down for them when they left Sodom. Lot begged that Zoar

390. Gen 19.3-5.

392. Cf. Gen 19.10-13.

391. Cf. Gen 19.7-9.

393. Gen 19.16.

be preserved so that he might enter there because it was nearer. [One of the angels] *said to Lot, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of Zoar;*³⁹⁵ *it shall be given to you on account of the dishonor of your two daughters."*

7. When Lot entered Zoar, *the Lord brought down upon Sodom brimstone and fire from before the Lord from heaven,*³⁹⁶ that is, the angel, in whom the Lord had appeared, brought down from before the Lord, who is in heaven, fire, and brimstone upon Sodom.

(2) Lot's wife then disregarded the commandment that had just been given as a test, and she became a pillar of salt.³⁹⁶ Because Lot's wife thus remained behind, she doubled the trial of Lot and of his two daughters. But not even by this did they succumb to lay aside the command of the angel.

8. Because the young women were afraid to dwell in a desolate city on a mountain, and because they thought that all Creation had come to an end in a flood of fire as the generation of Noah did in a flood of water, *the elder said to the younger, "Behold, our father is old and there is not a man on earth to come into us. Let us make our father drink wine that we may preserve seed from him"*³⁹⁷ and there might descend, even from us, a third world like the second from Noah and the first from Adam and Eve."³⁹⁸ Although there was wine for them, because everything in Zoar had been left for their possession, there was not a man in Zoar for at the very moment the angel said to Lot, *"Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city,"*³⁹⁹ Zoar swallowed up its inhabitants. But all its goods were left so that through those who had possessed these [goods] the Just One, whom they had pro-

394. Cf. Gen 19.16-22.

396. Cf. Gen 19.26.

398. See *Hymns on Virginity* 38, where Ephrem excuses Lot for getting drunk as well as the behavior of his two daughters on the grounds that they thought themselves to be the last persons on earth. See also *Hymns on Virginity* 1.11. See also same tradition in *Genesis Rabbah* 51.8.

399. Gen 19.21.

395. Gen 19.24.

397. Gen 19.31-32.

voked by their deeds, might be appeased and through the goods that it left behind, the righteous Lot who had lost all he had in Sodom might be consoled.

9. Then the daughters began to bring forward various pretexts. "We were afraid to sleep because of visions." "Our mother comes and stands before us like a pillar of salt and we see the Sodomites burning with fire." "We hear the voices of women crying out from the midst of the fire and young children writhing in the midst of the conflagration appear to us." "So for the sake of your daughters' comfort do not sleep, but amuse yourself with wine that we might rob the night with a vigil that is free from terror."

(2) After they saw that his mind had been stolen by the wine and that a deep sleep had spread over his limbs, the elder went in and stole seed from the sleeping farmer, without his perceiving anything. Then this elder daughter, who had found success the previous day, enticed her sister also to become a "bride of the moment" and to take on a life in widowhood.

10. When the younger had thus been persuaded she too went in and departed without Lot perceiving her. Then, after the child within the daughters became evident, the younger complained to the elder saying, "It would have been better for us to be barren than to die of disgrace, to remain with our father without children than that our father be alone without daughters. For what excuses can we make to him when he judges us? And what answer shall we give when he is about to kill us [saying,] 'I said that no man knew my daughters in Sodom. Who then is the one who has known them on this mountain?' Should we say that we are bearing a spirit? When we reach the point of childbirth what will we do?"

11. Then, while they were fretting over these things, their father summoned them and said to them, "For days now I have been secretly watching your stomachs and day by day you confirm the suspicion of adultery that I have concerning you. Tell me then, whence has this pregnancy within you come about? When? How? By whom were you raped?"

(2) The elder answered her father and said, "Our betrothed pressed our mother to conceal them from you but to show us to them. Although nature made us their brides, your lack of sons made us their sisters. These, who had come to us in the likeness of brothers, when our mother was compelled to go out for some reason or another, then rose against us and subdued us like tyrants. When our mother returned and saw us, she threw those wanton ones out of her house with the disgrace they deserved. But she consoled us [saying,] "They were your betrothed and not adulterers; you have received the seed of your ploughmen even though you were, in all truth, raped."

12. Their father accepted their explanations since these things they related about the Sodomites were relatively minor things. For it was nothing that those who had assailed both each other and angels from on high would rape and disgrace, before the time of marriage, those to whom they were betrothed.

13. *The elder gave birth and she named him Moab*⁴⁰⁰ and he became a nation because he was a son of Lot. *The younger, too, gave birth and named him Bar-ammi,*⁴⁰¹ that is, he is the race of my father because he is from my father. Because the two daughters had yielded to two disgraces their two sons became two nations; because the two daughters had been offered in the place of the two angels, their two offences were forgiven them. The young women could no longer be with Lot [as wives], because he was their father, nor could they belong to any others, for the husband of their youth was still alive. These two thus condemned themselves and, because they rashly did what was not right, deprived themselves of what they ought to have had. By this last solemn modesty, however, their previous rashness was greatly pardoned.

400. Gen 19.37.

401. Gen 19.38. The Syriac equivalent of the Hebrew "Ben-ammi," literally, "son of my people."

Section XVII

1. After these things Abraham went to the territory of the Philistines and, because he was afraid, said that Sarah *"is my sister."* Abimelech, king of Gadar, summoned Sarah to be brought before him. Because she had been tested by Pharaoh, even more because she had conceived Isaac, and because Abraham was praying very diligently, sleep quickly fell upon Abimelech when he fell into bed, just as it had upon Adam. *Then God said to Abimelech in a dream, "Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife." And Abimelech said, "Will you slay an innocent people? In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." And God said to him, "Because of this I did not let you touch her, lest you sin against me."*⁴⁰²

2. Abimelech rose early, summoned Abraham and reproved him for bringing this sin upon him. *Abraham said, "I was very afraid and called her my sister. But even about this I did not lie, for she is my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother."*⁴⁰³ Sarah was indeed the sister of Abraham: from his father because she was the daughter of his father's brother, but not from his mother, for none of her sisters had been married to Haran the son of Terah. Another woman, a foreigner, was married to Haran. This one, who loved her tribe more than her children, remained with her family and refused to go out and accompany Lot, her son, or Sarah and Milkah, her daughters.

3. *And Abimelech said to Sarah, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver and am returning you to him with a gift, because you have veiled the eyes of all those with me and you have reproved me concerning everything."*⁴⁰⁴ *"You have veiled the eyes of all my people,"* because you brought all of his people to shame with the manifest reproof with which you reproved

402. Cf. Gen 20.1–6.

403. Gen 20.8–9, 12. See also *Hymns on Virginity* 22.16–18, and *Hymns on the Nativity* 20.4.

404. Gen 20.16, Peshitta.

him before them all. Sarah saw, in the deep sleep that He suddenly threw upon [Abimelech], that God was her help. So she said in a loud voice before everyone, "It is not right that you transgress the legal custom concerning your wife by [committing] adultery, not even by the taking of another wife."

(2) Unless Sarah received renewed youth in the seed that she had received, Abimelech would not have desired a woman ninety years old. *Then Abraham prayed and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female slaves so that they bore children,* because from the time [Abimelech] had decided to marry Sarah until he returned her, pangs of childbirth struck all the women in his household; they would kneel down, but they could not give birth.⁴⁰⁵

Section XVIII

1. Then the time came for Isaac to be born and milk flowed in the breasts of the old woman. On the day of the great feast that Abraham prepared when he circumcised and weaned Isaac, Sarah noticed Ishmael snickering.⁴⁰⁶ But Sarah also saw how much Ishmael shared the characteristics of his mother, for just as Sarah was despised in the eyes of Hagar so too did Ishmael snicker at her son, and she thought, "If he acts thus to my son while I am still alive, perhaps [Abraham] will make him coheir with my son when I die and even give him two parts according to [the laws of] the firstborn."⁴⁰⁷

(2) Then Sarah, who showed no envy in any matter that concerned herself, became envious in this matter concerning her son. She was not envious of Hagar whom she had given to her husband. Since it was a matter of God's promise, and the son of the concubine thought that he would be coheir with the son of the freewoman, Sarah said, "*Cast out the slave woman and her son*"⁴⁰⁸ because it is not just

405. Gen 20.17-18.

406. Cf. Gen 21.4-9.

407. Compare Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:263-64, where Sarah exhibits this same concern against Ishmael sharing in Isaac's inheritance.

408. Gen 21.10.

that a son of a handmaid should have any inheritance together with that son of the promise, to whom it was promised by God. It is not right that you be opposed to God and make an heir him whom God has not made an heir."⁴⁰⁹

2. As for Abraham, who had determined to do [what Sarah feared] because he made no distinction between his sons, [Moses] wrote that *the thing was very displeasing in the eyes of Abram on account of his son. Then God said to him, "All that Sarah says to you, heed her voice, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named. I will also make a great nation of the son of the slave woman, because he is your offspring."*⁴¹⁰

3. So Abraham rose early and gave Hagar and the child bread and water and sent them off. [Hagar] went and wandered in the wilderness and *an angel called from heaven to Hagar and said to her, "Behold, God has heard the cry of the child, so hold him fast with your hands; for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water and she filled [her skin] and gave the child a drink.*⁴¹¹

Section XIX

1. After these things, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, for they saw that God was with him and had helped him in the wars of the kings and had also promised him the land of the Canaanites. They also feared that after Abraham destroyed the Canaanites he would also destroy their own land, so they hastened to make a covenant with him and the two of them made a covenant with Abraham.⁴¹²

Section XX

1. *God again tested Abraham and said to him, "Take your son and go to the land of the Amorites and offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."*⁴¹³ But lest it

409. See the fragmentary *Hymns on the Nativity* 20, which is devoted to this theme.

410. Gen 21.11-13.

411. Cf. Gen 21.14, 17-18.

412. Cf. Gen 21.22-24.

413. Gen 22.1-2. For the Aqedah in Syriac tradition, see S. P. Brock,

be said that God had greatly alarmed Abraham, God detained him for three days.

(2) Abraham rose early, cut some wood, and took two of his slave boys and Isaac and went out. But he did not inform Sarah because he had not been commanded to inform her. She would have persuaded him to let her go and participate in his sacrifice just as she had participated in the promise of his son. And he also [did not inform her] lest the inhabitants of his house stand against him and the women wail in mourning in his tent, and lest those who dwelt in that place gather together and snatch the youth from him or make him put off the day of his sacrifice. If he did not inform those two whom he took with him but did not bring up the mountain because he was afraid, how much more would he, who out of fear was unwilling to reveal it to those two, have been afraid [to inform] many?

2. While they were climbing Isaac inquired about the sacrifice. Abraham then made the same prophecy while they were ascending the mountain that he had made to the servants whom he left behind at the base of the mountain. Then, when he had bound Isaac, set him on the altar, and drawn out his knife, the angel of the Lord restrained him.⁴¹⁴

(2) Lest Abraham think that [his sacrifice] was lacking anything and had thus been rejected, *the angel said to Abraham, "Now I know that you fear God, for in this one who is more beloved to you than anything, your love toward the Lord of all is made known."*⁴¹⁵

(3) In two things then was Abraham victorious: that he killed his son although he did not kill him and that he believed that after Isaac died he would be raised up again and would go back down with him. For Abraham was firmly con-

"Sarah and the Aqedab," *LM* 87 (1974): 67-77; idem, "Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition," in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy*, ed. P. Casetti et al., *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, no. 38 (Fribourg-Göttingen, 1981) 2-30; and idem, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," *LM* 99 (1986): 61-129.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Gen 22.7-11.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Gen 22.12.

vinced that He who said to him, *through Isaac shall your descendants be named*,⁴¹⁶ was not lying.

3. *Then Abraham saw a ram in a tree, took it, and offered it upon the altar in place of his son.*⁴¹⁷ The question that Isaac had asked about the lamb attests to the fact that there had been no ram there. The wood that was on Isaac's shoulders proves that there had been no tree there. The mountain spit out the tree and the tree the ram,⁴¹⁸ so that in the ram that hung in the tree and had become the sacrifice in the place of Abraham's son, there might be depicted the day of Him who was to hang upon the wood like a ram and was to taste death for the sake of the whole world.

(2) *Then the angel spoke to him a second time, "By myself I have sworn," says the Lord, "that I will indeed multiply your seed and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in your seed,"*⁴¹⁹ who is Christ.

Section XXI

1. After these things, Sarah died in Hebron, one hundred and twenty-seven years old, and Abraham buried her in the cave that he had bought from the Hittites.⁴²⁰

2. After three years, Abraham said to his eldest servant, *"Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites."*⁴²¹ Abraham made him swear by the covenant of circumcision. Because God saw that the two heads of the world had dishonored this member, He set the sign of the covenant on it so that that member which was the most despised of all the limbs would now be the most honored of all the limbs. The

416. Gen 21.12.

417. Gen 22.13. Ephrem reads "tree" here against the Peshitta, which reads "bush." This reading, "tree," is also found in Targums *Onkelos*, *Neofiti*, and *Pseudo-Jonathan*. See B. Levy, *Targum Neophyti I. A Textual Study* (New York, 1986) 1:164-66.

418. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:282, where the ram "was created in the twilight of Sabbath eve in the week of creation."

419. Cf. Gen 22.15-18.

420. Cf. Gen 23.1-2, 19-20.

421. Gen 24.2-3.

sign of the covenant that was set on it bestowed on it such great honor that those who take oaths now swear by it and all those who administer oaths make them swear by it.

3. The servant swore the oath to his master and went off with many choice gifts. He sat beside a well, prayed, and asked for a sign. Even though he rejoiced in the sign that came to him, he still waited to see whether she was from [Abraham's] tribe. When he learned that she was the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor,⁴²² he praised God and went and stayed in their house.⁴²³

4. When the servant told them about the oath that his master had made him swear and how the prayer that he prayed at the well was in fact fulfilled,⁴²⁴ Bethuel and Laban said to him, "*This matter of yours and of your master has come from the Lord. Behold, Rebekah is before you. Take her and go.*"⁴²⁵

(2) Then they called the young woman to learn from her [whether she would return with him or not]. Because she heard about the oath that Abraham had made him swear, and about the prayer that the servant had prayed at the well and about the sign for which he had asked and which had been granted to him, she feared to say "I will not go," because she knew that it was the will of the Lord that she go. So she went and became Isaac's [wife]. By the joy [which he received] from Rebekah, who came three years later, Isaac was comforted from the mourning of his mother with which he had been shrouded for three years.⁴²⁶

Section XXII

1. Because no law concerning virginity or chastity had been set down, lest desire ever make a stain in the mind of that just man, because it had been told him, "*Kings of nations shall come forth from you,*"⁴²⁷ and because God had said about him, "*I know that Abraham will command his children and his grandchildren to keep my commandments,*"⁴²⁸ Abraham took for

⁴²². Cf. Gen 24.47.

⁴²⁴. Cf. Gen 24.34-49.

⁴²⁶. Cf. Gen 24.57-67.

⁴²⁸. Gen 18.19, Peshitta.

⁴²³. Cf. Gen 24.9-32.

⁴²⁵. Gen 24.50-51.

⁴²⁷. Gen 17.6.

himself a concubine after the death of Sarah, so that through the uprightness of his many sons who were to be scattered in lands throughout the entire earth, knowledge and worship of the one God would be spread. Abraham then had sons from Keturah and he sent them eastward with gifts. Abraham died one hundred and seventy-five years old and was buried next to Sarah, his wife.⁴²⁹

Section XXIII

1. *God blessed Isaac*⁴³⁰ and Isaac prayed for Rebekah who was barren and after twenty years God heard him and she conceived. Her sons struggled together within her womb. She went to inquire of the Lord and it was told her, "*Two nations are in your womb,*" that is, the Edomite and Hebrew nations. As to whom she went to inquire it was to Melchizedek that she went to inquire, as we mentioned above in the genealogy of Melchizedek. She returned quickly because of the pangs that were striking her and she gave birth to Esau and Jacob.⁴³¹

2. Jacob saw that the right of the firstborn was despised by Esau and he contrived to take it from him, trusting in God who had said, "*The elder shall serve the younger.*"⁴³² Jacob boiled some lentils and *Esau came home famished after hunting, and said to Jacob "Let me eat some of that red pottage,"* that is, "Let me eat some of your lentils." *Jacob said to him, "Give me your birthright and you may take all of them."* After Esau swore to him and sold him his birthright, *Jacob then gave Esau [the lentils].*⁴³³ To show that it was not by reason of his hunger that Esau sold his birthright, Scripture says, *After he had eaten he arose and went away and Esau despised his birthright.*⁴³⁴ Therefore, Esau did not sell it because he was hungry but rather, since it had no value to him, he sold it for nothing as if it were nothing.

429. Cf. Gen 25.1-7, 10.

430. Gen 25.11.

431. Gen 25.21-26.

432. Gen 25.23.

433. Gen 25.29-34. Read here *l'esau* for *wal'saw* as Tonneau, *In Genesis et Exodum*, 86, emends; see also Jansma, "Beiträge," 61.

434. Gen 25.34.

Section XXIV

1. *And there was a famine in the land and Isaac sowed and reaped in that same year a hundred measures. Then, because Abimelech the king was afraid of that sojourner, he went to him with Phicol, the commander of his army, and said to him, "We see that the Lord is with you just as he was with your father in that you have reaped a hundred measures, as well as in many other things, so we say, Let us make a covenant between us and you, that you will do us no harm when you increase in number, just as we did not harm you when you were still few." Each swore an oath to the other and they departed in peace.*⁴³⁵

Section XXV

1. *When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim, he said to Esau, "Go hunt some game and make me some stew that I may eat and that I myself may bless you before I die." And Esau went out to hunt some game.*⁴³⁶ *When Rebekah heard this, she went and counseled Jacob lest the birthright of Esau be contrary to the word of God which said that the elder shall serve the younger. Jacob, however, refused for he was afraid that instead of blessings he would receive curses.*⁴³⁷

2. *After Rebekah took upon herself the curses, Jacob did [as she bid] and took [the two kids] and brought them in. And he called to his father and his father said to him, "Who are you?" He said, "I am Esau. I have done as you told me." But Isaac was in doubt about the voice for he was afraid lest the blessings as well as the birthright elude [Esau]. So Isaac said to him, "Come near, that I may feel you." After the true voice had been disguised by reason of the false feel of his hands and he had been blessed and had departed, Esau came back, made [a stew] and called to his father. Isaac was stupefied when he saw how, in the name of Esau, the treasury of his blessings had also been stripped from him.*⁴³⁸

(2) *"Who was it then who hunted game and brought it to me*

435. Gen 26.1, 12, 26-31.

436. Gen 27.1-5.

437. Cf. Gen 27.5-12.

438. Cf. Gen 27.13-14, 18-33.

and I have blessed him?—and indeed he shall be blessed."⁴³⁹ For Isaac was unable to alter his blessings, first, because he knew that the will of the Lord had been accomplished just as it had been told to Rebekah, and secondly, since he had said to Jacob, "*Cursed be those who curse you,*"⁴⁴⁰ he feared to curse [Jacob] lest, by his curses he harm not Jacob, who was blessed, but that the curse of his lips turn back on himself.⁴⁴¹

3. *And Esau cried out and wailed bitterly,*⁴⁴² not because he lost his spiritual blessings but because he was now deprived of the bountiful produce of the blessed earth; not because he was no longer able to be righteous but because he would not be able to make his brother his servant; not because he would not inherit eternal life but because the land of the Canaanites would not be his portion. Since Esau had such spite for his brother that he wished to kill him, Rebekah persuaded Jacob to go to the house of Laban lest they kill each other in their strife, and she be bereft of both of them at the same time.⁴⁴³

Section XXVI

1. Then [Rebekah] spoke to Isaac and [Isaac] blessed Jacob and sent him to Haran for a wife. The day came to an end and he spent the night there [where he was]. In place of the pillows that had always been set out for him in his mother's tent, he set down a rock for his pillow. Full of self-pity, he fell asleep. *He saw in his dream a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven and angels were ascending and descending on it and the Lord was standing above it.*⁴⁴⁴

(2) The ladder that he saw, he saw because of the ascending and descending of the angels. Also, by the angels who were ascending and descending around him while he was sleeping, God clearly showed what great care He took toward Jacob, that he was being watched not only when he was awake, but even in his sleep there were angels who were

439. Gen 27.33.

441. Compare *Genesis Rabbah* 67.3.

443. Cf. Gen 27.41-45.

440. Gen 27.29.

442. Gen 27.34.

444. Cf. Gen 28.1-13.

commanded to ascend and descend around him to protect him. Thus, in the dream of the ladder, God clearly made manifest to Jacob the secret care that [He exerted] on his behalf. When Jacob had gone to sleep, he thought he was sleeping in a place that was very remote from God, but when he awoke and saw what care God was taking toward him in the desert, he said, "I have slept as if in the house of God and have reclined as if before the gate of heaven."⁴⁴⁵

2. To show him that the angels were ascending and descending to protect him, *God said to Jacob, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have said to you."* And Jacob said, "*Surely the Lord is in this place to protect me and I did not know it.*"⁴⁴⁶

(2) As for the oil that Jacob poured upon the pillar,⁴⁴⁷ he either had it with him or he had brought it out of the village. In the oil that he poured upon the stone, he was depicting the mystery of Christ who was hidden inside it.

3. *Jacob named that place Bethel,*⁴⁴⁸ which means *the house of God*, as he had just called it.⁴⁴⁹ He then made a vow on the stone saying, "*If God will be with me, and will give me bread and clothing, this stone shall be God's house and of all that you give me I will give a tenth to you.*"⁴⁵⁰ In the rock the mystery of the church is also represented, for it is to her that the vows and offerings of all the nations were soon to come.⁴⁵¹

Section XXVII

1. Jacob continued on and turned aside to a well where he saw Rachel the shepherd girl who, with her bare feet, her mean clothing, and her face burned from the sun, could not be distinguished from charred brands that come out of the fire. Jacob knew that He who had provided the beautiful Rebekah at the spring now provided Rachel in her mean

445. Cf. Gen 28.17.

447. Cf. Gen 28.18.

449. Cf. Gen 28.17.

451. For the rich image of the rock as Christ and Church in Syriac literature, see Murray, *Symbols*, 205-38.

446. Gen 28.15-16.

448. Gen 28.19.

450. Gen 28.20-22.

clothing at the well. Then he performed a heroic deed in her presence for, through the Son who was hidden in it, he rolled away a stone that even many could raise only with great difficulty.⁴⁵² When he betrothed her to God through this marvelous deed, Jacob then turned and married himself to her with a kiss.⁴⁵³

2. Jacob served seven years for Rachel but when those days came to an end Laban deceived him and brought him Leah instead of Rachel. Laban carried out this cunning scheme [not only] because of the ugliness of Leah, whom in the seven years of Rachel's betrothal, no man had married, but [he did it] even more because he saw how much his flock had been blessed during the seven years that Jacob had tended it. Laban, therefore, contrived that Jacob would work for him as shepherd a second time so that in the next seven years when he worked for Rachel⁴⁵⁴ he would redouble the flock that he had gained in those first seven years.

3. *Laban* then contrived excuses because of the people of that country and said, "It is not so done in our country to give the younger before the elder," and then he put forth his intentions, saying to him, "Complete the wedding feast of this one and I will give you Rachel also for the service you will render me for another seven years,"⁴⁵⁵ and Laban gathered the men of the place around him and thus convinced [Jacob].⁴⁵⁶ Therefore, lest Jacob turn the seed of the Just One to heathenism, while Leah remained in the house of Laban the heathen, and lest he deceive Rachel his wife (for the betrothed of a man is his wife), he took the one lest he deceive her and the other lest he sin against her or his seed. If Laban had not withheld Rachel from Jacob and said to him, "Work for me seven years in exchange for Leah," he would not have been persuaded to

452. Cf. Gen 29.10. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:354, where "with his two arms alone [Jacob] accomplished what usually requires the united forces of a large assemblage of men."

453. Cf. Gen 29.11.

454. The text reads here "Leah."

455. Gen 29.26-27.

456. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:360, where Laban makes all his friends take a pledge not to betray Laban's deceitful plan.

work seven days for her, not because she was ugly but because he hated to be the husband of two wives.

Section XXVIII

1. Leah bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah and then ceased giving birth, whereas Rachel was barren. Because she heard Jacob say that Abraham had prayed over the barren Sarah and was heard, and that Isaac had also prayed for Rebekah and was answered, she thought that it was because Jacob had not prayed for her that her closed womb had not been opened. For this reason, she said in anger and in tears, "*Give me children, or I shall die!*"⁴⁵⁷

(2) Although he was angry with her because she said, "*Give me children,*" instead of saying, "Pray that children be given me," Jacob persuaded Rachel that "even if my fathers were answered, nevertheless Abraham was heard only after one hundred years and Isaac after twenty."⁴⁵⁸ When she learned from him that she, who had become extremely despondent, ought to have great patience, she said to him, "*Then go into my handmaid, she shall bear on my knees and I shall be comforted by her,*"⁴⁵⁹ following [the example] of Abraham, who took Hagar and did the will of Sarah because he loved her. "But you will not be persuaded by me because you hate me." So, lest she nag him, asking him every day for children, Jacob, who was sent from his parents to take a daughter of Laban, agreed to take the foreign woman. But it was also so that the sons of maidservants might become joint heirs with sons of freewomen that Jacob took both maidservants and freewomen. So he took Bilhah and she conceived and bore Dan and Naphtali.⁴⁶⁰

2. *When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she too urged Jacob to go into her maidservant.*⁴⁶¹ When he tried to dissuade her, saying "There is comfort for you; you have chil-

457. Gen 30.1.

458. In *Hymns on the Nativity* 8.14, Ephrem compares this demand of Rachel with the docility of Mary, the mother of Christ.

459. Gen 30.3.

460. Cf. Gen 30.4-9.

461. Gen 30.9.

dren," she said to him, "It is not right that my maidservant should perform the duties of a handmaid for her fellow servant, and you have now made me a rival wife of Rachel's handmaid. Make Rachel also a rival wife to my maidservant." Then, lest he grieve Leah and cause a schism between the sisters, [Jacob] agreed, for the sake of peace in his dwelling, to go into Zilpah also. Zilpah conceived and bore Gad and Asher.⁴⁶²

3. After these things *Reuben found mandrakes in the field and brought them to Leah.*⁴⁶³ Some say that the mandrake is a plant whose fruit resembles apples, which have a scent and are edible. So by means of these mandrakes, with cheerfulness seasoned with faith, Leah made Jacob take her that night.

(2) Then [Moses] wrote that *God heard Leah and she conceived and bore Issachar. Leah said, "God has given me my wage because I gave my maid to my husband."*⁴⁶⁴ Unless it had been by the will of God that Jacob took Zilpah, no wage would have been rendered to Leah on behalf of Zilpah. Leah conceived and bore Issachar and Zebulun and Dinah their sister.⁴⁶⁵

(2) *Then God remembered Rachel also and she bore Joseph and she said, "I have learned that the Lord, and not my husband, will increase me."*⁴⁶⁶

Section XXIX

1. *After Joseph was born, Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you and let me go." Then Laban, who loved not Jacob but himself, said, "I know from experience that the Lord has blessed me because of you, so separate your wage from mine and I will grant it."*⁴⁶⁷ Jacob consented because he had not yet received permission from God to depart. God, who saw that Laban had cheated from his wages that one to whom He had promised, "I will go down with you and I will raise you up from there," made Jacob

462. Gen 30.10-13.

464. Gen 30.17-18.

466. Cf. Gen 30.22-24.

463. Gen 30.14.

465. Cf. Gen 30.18-21.

467. Gen 30.25-28.

rich from Laban's own flock without doing any harm to Laban.

2. It was to test Laban that the hornless and spotted lambs increased in his flock, so that he might know that God was with Jacob and cease doing evil to him. But then the sons of Laban also defrauded Jacob just as Laban had, and they said concerning that one who had also made them rich, *"From what is our father's he has become rich."*⁴⁶⁸ And that one who had said, *"I know from experience that the Lord has blessed me because of you,"* changed both in heart and countenance toward [Jacob].

(2) God then appeared to Jacob and told him to return to the house of his father.⁴⁶⁹ *Jacob called to Rachel and Leah and said to them, "Your father whom I have served with all my strength has changed my wage ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me, in that all his cunning wiles have been turned against him. If he agreed that the hornless lambs were mine, because he thought the flock would not bear any hornless, many of the lambs became hornless; but if he agreed that the spotted lambs [would be mine], because he thought that few spotted ones would be born to him, the whole flock bore spotted ones."*⁴⁷⁰

3. *And Rachel and Leah said to him, "There is no portion for us in our father's house, for he gives all that he has to his sons. He has sold us and has consumed our money, just as he has consumed your strength for the fourteen years that you served him on our behalf. Now, do whatever God has said to you, for we are ready to go with you whenever He sends you."*⁴⁷¹

4. Jacob stole the heart of Laban and Rachel his gods and they went to the mountain of Gilead. But Laban pursued and overtook him. *The Lord appeared to Laban in a dream and said to him, "Take heed that you do not speak to Jacob, either great or small."*⁴⁷² But Laban was unable to suppress his stubbornness and said, *"It is in my power to do you evil but last night the*

468. Gen 31.1.

469. Cf. Gen 31.2-3.

470. Gen 31.4-8.

471. Gen 31.14-16.

472. Gen 31.24. Ephrem reads here "great or small" versus the Peshitta and Hebrew which read "good or bad."

*God of your fathers forbade me. But why did you steal my gods together with my daughters and flee?"*⁴⁷³

(2) Jacob loved Rachel very much for she loved his God and despised the idols of her father. She despised them as being useless things, not only by the fact that she stole them, but also in that, when they were being sought, she was using them as a seat while she was menstruating.⁴⁷⁴

(3) But this did not satisfy Laban, for he had risen early and sought his gods at dawn after the God of truth had appeared to him in the evening. He also retracted his statement, "You have made me rich because the Lord has blessed me on account of you," when he said, "*The flocks are my flocks and all that you see here is mine. Come now, let us make a covenant, and let it be a witness between us.*"⁴⁷⁵

5. Because they had been blaming each other, *Jacob saying, "God saw that you have cheated my toil and the labor of my hands and He appeared to you last night,"*⁴⁷⁶ and *Laban saying, "The flocks are my flocks and all that you see is mine,"*⁴⁷⁷ they then said that all these things that preceded this covenant would be forgotten.

(2) So *Jacob took up a stone and set it up as a pillar* and each man brought a stone *and they made a great heap*⁴⁷⁸ [saying,] "This heap, made up of many [stones], will bear witness, as if from the mouth of many, against anyone who would change one thing from the covenant that we are establishing before many. Behold, this heap testifies, to the same degree that those who made this heap are witnesses, that neither you nor I shall change one thing from the covenant that we have established by amassing this heap.

6. In order to make it known that the heap was built solely as a witness that from that time on neither of them should turn against the other, [Moses] said, *Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac, and Laban said, "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us."*⁴⁷⁹

473. Gen 31.19-30.

475. Gen 31.43-44.

477. Gen 31.43.

479. Gen 31.53.

474. Cf. Gen 31.34-35.

476. Gen 31.42.

478. Gen 31.45-46.

Section XXX

1. After Jacob and Laban had parted from each other, *angels of God met Jacob*⁴⁸⁰ to make known to him that if Laban did not obey God, who had appeared to him in the evening, he and those with him would be destroyed at dawn at the hands of those angels who protect him. Just as God had shown Jacob the angels that accompanied him when he went down, He also showed him angels when he was going up to make him know that the word was true which God had spoken to him: "*I will go down with you and I will bring you up from there.*"⁴⁸¹ The army of angels⁴⁸² that God had shown Jacob was so that he would not fear Esau, for there were many more [angels] with Jacob than were with Esau.

2. After these things [Jacob] sent messengers to his brother Esau, apologizing for his delay. When he heard that [Esau] was coming to meet him with four hundred men, [Jacob] became afraid. While he prayed to God to remember the covenant He made with him when he was going down, [Jacob] still sent his brother an offering of good will so that [Esau] would not remember the offense that he committed against him on the day he stole his blessings.⁴⁸³

3. That night an angel appeared to [Jacob] and wrestled with him.⁴⁸⁴ He both overcame the angel and was overcome by the angel so that [Jacob] learned both how weak he was and how strong he was. He was weak when the angel touched the hollow of his thigh and it became dislocated,⁴⁸⁵ but he was strong, for *the angel said to him, "Let me go."* It was to show how long they had been contending with each other that [the angel] said, "*Behold, the dawn is rising.*"⁴⁸⁶ Then Jacob sought to be blessed in order to make known that it was in love that they had laid hold of each other.

480. Gen 32.1.

481. This verse actually occurs at Gen 46.4. Ephrem is perhaps confusing Jacob's later trip to Egypt with this earlier one to find a wife. Cf. Gen 28.15, where God also promised Jacob to be with him always.

482. Cf. Gen 32.2.

483. Cf. Gen 32.3-21.

484. Cf. Gen 32.22-24.

485. Cf. Gen 32.25.

486. Gen 32.26.

Then the angel blessed him to show that he was not angry that an earthly being had prevailed over him.⁴⁸⁷

4. God did all that He had promised Jacob. He made him rich as He had told him. He went down with him and brought him up as He had promised him. He also rescued him from Laban, and delivered him from his brother. But instead of performing the promised vow, which he had vowed to God when he went down,⁴⁸⁸ Jacob elected, out of fear, to send [an offering] to Esau. Therefore, because he had gone back on his word, his hip joint was displaced. So he, who at one moment was equal in strength to a fiery angel, was now standing before Esau lame, but without pain.

Section XXXI

1. After these things Jacob went and dwelt in Shechem. When Shechem, the son of Hamor, saw Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, he seized her and disgraced her. The sons of Shechem persuaded the sons of Jacob to give her to them as a wife. But the sons of Jacob deceived the sons of Shechem into being circumcised before they would give her to them. Then, when the pain [of the sons of Shechem] was at its height, the sons of Jacob fell upon them, without their father [knowing], and slew all the males, captured their women, and plundered their wealth.⁴⁸⁹

Section XXXII

1. After those things *God said to Jacob, "Rise, go up to Bethel, and make an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from before your brother."* And Jacob said to his sons, *"Put away those foreign gods that you have taken as plunder from Shechem,"* and they brought him the molten idols and the rings of gold that were set in the ears of their idols and they buried them beneath the oak lest they be a stumbling block for Jacob's descendants. And *Jacob went to Isaac, his father, at He-*

487. Cf. Gen 32.26-29.

488. Cf. Gen 28.20-22.

489. Cf. Gen 33.18, 34.1-29.

bron and after twenty-three years *Isaac died, a hundred and eighty years old. His sons, Jacob and Esau, buried him.*⁴⁹⁰

Section XXXIII

1. Joseph was shepherding the flock with the sons of his father's concubines and brought an ill report of them to their father. Because Joseph had exposed them in their deed they hated him.⁴⁹¹

(2) Joseph dreamed dreams: the first of sheaves; and the second of the sun, the moon and eleven stars, bowing down to him. His brothers hated him all the more because of his dreams. They ridiculed his dreams and said, "How will Rachel, who is dead, come and bow down to him?" Because it is said, "A man and his wife are one flesh," Jacob, symbolized by the sun, bowed down on the head of his staff, and with him, Rachel, symbolized by the moon, bowed down, although she did not [in fact] bow down.⁴⁹²

2. Then Jacob sent Joseph to the flock that he might bring back to him a report on his brothers.⁴⁹³ But the brothers, by means of the cloak that was bespattered with blood, sent Jacob a report on Joseph.⁴⁹⁴ With no mercy they cast him into a pit in the desert⁴⁹⁵ but they wept over him with tears in the house. They sold him naked to the Arabs⁴⁹⁶ but wept over him and wailed in the presence of the Canaanites. They put irons on his hands and feet and sent him on his way but composed lamentations over him in the village. Joseph went down to Egypt and was sold; within a few days he had changed owners twice.⁴⁹⁷

Section XXXIV

1. After these things, Judah took a wife and by her begot Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er, his firstborn, took Tamar as a wife. But because he was evil before the Lord, that is, because he

490. Cf. Gen 35.1-5, 27-29.

492. Cf. Gen 37.5-11.

494. Cf. Gen 37.32-33.

496. Cf. Gen 37.28.

491. Cf. Gen 37.1-4.

493. Cf. Gen 37.13-14.

495. Cf. Gen 37.24.

497. Cf. Gen 37.36.

was wicked before the Lord, the Lord slew him.⁴⁹⁸ Even though his brother took Tamar out of love for her, because of his hatred towards his brother, Onan did not wish to raise up offspring for his brother. When God also slew the second son because of the cruel stratagem that he had contrived, it was thought that it was due to the sins of Tamar that her two husbands had died. Judah then sent her to her father's house and assured her that when Shelah grew up she would be given to him.⁴⁹⁹

2. When Shelah had become a young man and Judah did not wish to bring her back to his house,⁵⁰⁰ Tamar thought, "How can I make the Hebrews realize that it is not marriage for which I am hungering, but rather that I am yearning for the blessing that is hidden in them? Although I am able to have relations with Shelah, I would not be able to make my faith victorious through Shelah. I ought then to have relations with Judah so that by the treasure I receive, I might enrich my poverty, and in the widowhood I preserve, I might make it clear that I did not desire marriage."

3. Because Tamar was afraid lest Judah find out and kill her in vengeance for his two sons of whose deaths she was accused, she, like Eliezer,⁵⁰¹ asked for a sign saying, "Let Your knowledge not condemn me for this act of desire, for You know that it is for what is hidden in the Hebrews that I thirst. I do not know whether this thing is pleasing to you or not. Grant that I may appear to him in another guise lest he kill me. [Grant] also that an invitation to lie with him⁵⁰² might be found in his mouth, so that I may know that it is acceptable to you that the treasure, which is hidden in the circumcised, might be transmitted even through a daughter of the uncircumcised. May it be that, when he sees me, he will say to me, '*Come, let me come into you.*'"⁵⁰³

498. Cf. Gen 38.1-7.

499. Cf. Gen 38.8-11, and Jubilees 41.6.

500. Cf. Gen 38.14.

501. Cf. Gen 24.12-14.

502. Literally, "a word of fornication."

503. Gen 38.16.

4. While Tamar was making supplication to God for these things, behold, Judah came out and saw her. The prayer of Tamar inclined him, contrary to his usual habit, [to go] to a harlot.⁵⁰⁴ When she saw him she was veiled for she was afraid. After the word of the sign for which she had asked had been spoken, she knew that God was pleased with what she was doing. Afterwards, she revealed her face without fear and even demanded remuneration from the lord of the treasure.⁵⁰⁵

5. After she stripped the man of his staff, his signet ring, and his cord and took for herself these three witnesses that they might testify to the third [person] that was to be generated from her, she had intercourse with him and returned to her father's house.⁵⁰⁶ After three months it was reported to Judah that Tamar had committed harlotry and, as a result of her harlotry, had conceived. When he summoned her and learned that she had no defense, he commanded that she be burned.⁵⁰⁷

(2) When the inhabitants of Hebron assembled to follow her who was going out to be burned, she brought out her witnesses and, through some of her relatives, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "*By the man to whom these belong, I have conceived.*"⁵⁰⁸ When Judah saw his pledges, he marvelled at the faith of that woman. As he extended his hand to take them back, he reflected on the time that he had given them to her.

6. He then said, "*She is more innocent than I,*" that is, "She is more righteous than I. What great sinners my sons were. *Because of this, I did not give her to my son Shelah.*"⁵⁰⁹ She is innocent of that evil suspicion that I held against her and [for which] I withheld my son Shelah from her." She who had

504. Compare *Genesis Rabbah* 85.

505. The righteous "deceit" of Tamar due to her trust in God is a favorite theme of Ephrem. See *Hymns on Virginity* 22.19-20, and *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.12, 9.8.

506. Cf. Gen 38.16-19.

507. Cf. Gen 38.24.

508. Gen 38.25.

509. Cf. Gen 38.26, *Jubilees* 41.19.

been cheated out of marriage was justified in her fornication, and he who sent her out on account of his first two sons brought her back for the sake of his last two sons. *He did not lie with her again*⁵¹⁰ because she had been the wife of his first two sons, nor did he take another wife for she was the mother of his last two sons.⁵¹¹

Section XXXV

1. After Joseph had been sold to Potiphar⁵¹² and this one had become rich because of Joseph, just as Laban had because of Joseph's father, Potiphar's mistress fell in love with Joseph and said, "*Lie with me.*"⁵¹³ But when he would not submit to her and she tired of trying to catch him by guile, she cleverly maneuvered him into the bedchamber in an effort to subdue him. But after she had caught him by his clothing, he left it in her hand and fled outside. Because she thought she would become a laughingstock in the eyes of her servants, she cried out in a loud voice and those of her household assembled to be her witnesses, not to that which she wanted to do, but to that which she had prepared to say.⁵¹⁴

2. But Joseph, who could have fled and, by doing so, have gone to his father's house, detested this flight which would have spared him from shame. He rather persevered until he saw how the dreams that he had seen would turn out.

3. Joseph's master came home and heard the words of his mistress and of the witnesses who corroborated what she said. Potiphar saw that Joseph's garment also [bore witness] against Joseph and so he threw Joseph into prison⁵¹⁵ without his garment just as [his brothers] had cast him into the pit in the desert without his cloak.

(2) That peace that had come to his master's servants while Joseph was in his master's house now came to the prisoners while he was confined in prison.⁵¹⁶ He also interpreted

510. Gen 38.26.

512. Cf. Gen 39.1.

514. Cf. Gen 39.11-18.

516. Cf. Gen 39.21-23.

511. Cf. Gen 38.27-30.

513. Gen 39.7.

515. Cf. Gen 39.19-20.

there two dreams for two of Pharaoh's servants; one was hung as Joseph told him and the other "placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand" as Joseph had interpreted for him. Joseph then sought from the chief butler to be remembered before Pharaoh but that "remember me," that Joseph had told him made him forget for two years.⁵¹⁷

4. Pharaoh then saw twin dreams, one of ears of grain and one of cows. Although they are easily interpreted by every one, for the sake of Joseph they were hidden even from the wise men of Pharaoh. Then, after two years the chief butler remembered Joseph before Pharaoh and Pharaoh summoned him to be brought to him; the hair that had grown in his grief, joy then cut, and the filthy garments with which sorrow had clothed him, cheerfulness stripped from him.⁵¹⁸

5. When Joseph came and heard the dreams of Pharaoh and saw what calamity was about to come upon the Egyptians, he told them the true interpretation and, in addition, gave them some beneficial counsel. *"Let Pharaoh select a wise man and set him in authority over all of Egypt to gather the grain of the good years to reserve a supply for the seven bad years so that no one in Egypt perish in the famine."*⁵¹⁹

(2) When Joseph said, *"Let Pharaoh select a man,"* he spoke about himself. He, out of modesty, did not say it openly in his own name, but he would not give it to another, for he knew that no one else would be able to make suitable provision for the great scourge that was coming upon them. Joseph became great in the eyes of Pharaoh through his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams but even more through the beneficial counsel that his mind had devised.⁵²⁰

6. Pharaoh then gave Joseph authority over all his territory and even added the signet ring with which the treasuries of his kingdom were sealed. This ring, which had never been placed on the hand of a non-Egyptian, was taken from the hand of Pharaoh and, with special honor, set on the fin-

517. Cf. Gen 40.1-23.

519. Cf. Gen 41.15-36.

518. Cf. Gen 41.1-14.

520. Cf. Gen 41.37-45.

ger of Joseph. With the ring that he was given, [Joseph] was given rule over everything.⁵²¹

(2) *"I, Pharaoh, command that without you[r consent], no one shall lift up a hand or a foot in all the land of Egypt."*⁵²² Included among those who were to be subservient to him were all the army commanders and the princes of the king.

7. Joseph's [former] master was there when the dreams of Pharaoh were being interpreted. When [Potiphar] saw that only in respect to the throne was [Joseph] less than Pharaoh, he returned quickly to his house. In his haste to go to tell his wife of [Joseph's] greatness, he closely resembled his wife when she had come out to meet him to accuse Joseph. Potiphar said to [his wife], "Joseph, our servant, has become our master. He whom we sent to prison without clothing, Pharaoh has now clothed with a garment of fine white linen. He whom we cast prostrate into prison now sits upon the chariot of Pharaoh. He whom we had bound in irons now has a gold necklace set on his neck . . . How then can I look again upon him whom my eyes are unable to look upon?"

8. Then she said to him, "Do not fear Joseph to whom you did no evil, for he knows that the disgrace that came upon him in our domicile, whether justly or not, came upon him from my own hands. Go, then, without fear with the princes and army commanders who follow behind his chariot lest he think that the royal dignity he has received is an affliction to us. To show you that he is not evil, I will now speak the truth which is contrary to my previous lie. I was enamored of Joseph when I falsely accused him. I made assault on his clothing because I was overcome by his beauty. If he is just, it is I whom he will bring to grief and not you. And if he is [truly] just he will not bring me to grief, either, because if he had not been wronged he would not have been imprisoned. If he had not been imprisoned he would not have interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh and he would

521. Cf. Gen 41.37-42.

522. Gen 41.44.

not have come to this royal dignity of which you just informed me. Although we did not actually exalt him, it is as if we did exalt him, for it was due to our afflicting him that he has been accorded such honor and has become second to the king."

9. Then Joseph's [former] master went and, with those who were higher in rank than he, followed Joseph's chariot through the streets of Egypt. But Joseph did him no evil because he knew that it was God who had permitted his brothers to throw him into the pit in the desert, and [who had delivered him] from the pit, in order to send him in irons to Egypt, and who had permitted his master to send him to prison so that from that humble seat He might set him upon the chariot of Pharaoh.

Section XXXVI

1. Joseph went out to gather in the grain, and he laid it up in every city in which there was enough to store up in that year.⁵²³ Then at the end of the good years, when those of famine came, Joseph took special care of the orphans, widows, and every needy person in Egypt so that there was no anxiety in Egypt.⁵²⁴

2. If this famine had been only in Egypt, Egypt would have had no fear, because of the grain Joseph [had stored up]. However, there was famine throughout the entire world and because the entire earth stood in need of [the grain in] Egypt, the grain supply quickly dwindled and became expensive even for the Egyptians. The Egyptians would have consumed the grain at little expense, because of its abundance, if the entire earth had not come down to buy grain there. To make known that the entire earth hungered, [Moses] said, *The entire world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe over all the earth.*⁵²⁵

3. When the famine prevailed even over the house of Jacob, *Jacob said to his sons, "Do not fear. Behold, I have heard*

523. Cf. Gen 41:48-49.

524. Cf. Gen 41:53-57.

525. Gen 41:57.

that there is grain in the land of Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us, that we may live and not die."⁵²⁶ When Jacob said, "Do not fear," he made known how much they did fear and [when he said,] "I have heard that there is grain," that the grain was being consumed throughout the earth and [when he said,] "buy grain for us that we may live and not die," that they had resigned themselves to perishing from the famine along with the entire land of Canaan.

4. Then the brothers of Joseph came and bowed down before him with their faces on the ground, and [Joseph] recognized them.⁵²⁷ Prior to this he had been apprehensive about when they would come down to procure some grain, for he knew that they, along with all of Canaan, were afflicted with torment. When he saw them, however, he acted deceitfully while doing business with them and said, "You are spies."⁵²⁸

(2) They answered and said, "We do not even know the Egyptian language so that, by speaking Egyptian, we might escape notice and deceive the Egyptians. That we dwell in the land of Canaan you can learn from our offering. Moreover, there are twelve of us and it is impossible that we should all have the same evil purpose of spying. We have come of our own will to stand before you. That we are completely ignorant of the Egyptian language and do not wear the garb of Egyptians also testifies to our truthfulness. It is clear that we are not spies, for we are twelve. We are recognized everywhere because of our race and our number. Behold, one of our brothers is with our father and another is no more."⁵²⁹

5. But Joseph, who saw that his dreams had not yet been fulfilled, for he had seen eleven stars bowing down to him but here were [only] ten,⁵³⁰ kept himself hidden from them lest, by revealing himself, he be the one to render his

526. Gen 42.2.

527. Gen 42.6-7.

528. Gen 42.9.

529. Gen 42.13.

530. The fact that the sons of Jacob had just confessed to be "twelve" may be a scribal "correction" due to the traditional number of Jacob's sons. As the text stands, the "ten" here and the "twelve," above, cannot be reconciled.

dreams false. And *he said*, "By this you shall be tested whether you are truly brothers, if you send for your youngest brother and bring him back to me." Then he threw them in prison for three days so that they might have a taste of the suffering of him who had been imprisoned there for several years.⁵³¹

6. Then, after [Joseph] carefully considered his dreams in which he had seen [his brothers] bow down to him twice, in the sheaves and in the stars, he knew that, after the second, he ought to reveal himself to them. So *he took and bound Simeon before their eyes*,⁵³² to learn from him how they had convinced their father about [the death of] Joseph. [Joseph] also knew that Simeon's sons and wife would urge Jacob to send Benjamin to him as quickly as possible.

(2) Perhaps, Simeon had been particularly malicious toward Joseph when they bound and sold him. But Joseph was not seeking vengeance from them, for when he was revealed to them he kissed them. When that one was bound who, more than any of them, had urged that Joseph be bound, they would know that it was a just restitution. *They even admitted*, "In truth we deserve to endure these things, for we have looked upon the suffering of our brother when he beseeched us but we did not heed him."⁵³³

(3) When Reuben⁵³⁴ had spoken of those things, both those that had been carried out in Joseph's presence and [those things that had transpired] without him after they had thrown him into the pit, Joseph remembered *and wept*,⁵³⁵ not because of what his brothers did to him but because God had raised him from that place to his present position.⁵³⁶

531. Cf. Gen 42.15-17.

532. Gen 42.24.

533. Gen 42.21.

534. Ephrem, following the Peshitta, consistently reads "Reubel" for "Reuben."

535. Gen 42.24.

536. Literally, "from where to where."

Section XXXVII

1. After they had loaded their supplies, the [brothers] went up and related to their father the evils that they had endured on this trip and how they had become objects of ridicule in Egypt, having been falsely accused of spying in Egypt, and that they would not have escaped this suffering had it not been for Benjamin. While some of them were recounting these things to their father, the others were emptying their sacks and behold, each one found his money in the opening of his sack.⁵³⁷

2. Jacob was full of grief because of all that had happened to them, but even more because of Simeon who was imprisoned. Although the brothers implored him daily to send Benjamin with them, Jacob would not assent because of his fear due to [what had happened to] Joseph.⁵³⁸ Then, when their grain had run out and all the children of his household were languishing from hunger, all his sons drew near and said to Jacob, "Spare Simeon for the sake of his children and be without your youngest son for a few days lest Simeon's wife be widowed of Simeon."

3. Then Jacob was constrained by the famine, whether he was willing or not, to send Benjamin with them. So he gave them supplies and sent them off with blessings and said, "Just as I was bereaved of Rachel so am I now bereaved of Rachel's children."⁵³⁹ Judah comforted his father and said, "*If I do not bring back Benjamin and set him before you then let me bear the blame forever.*"⁵⁴⁰ Then they took some of the choice fruits of the land: gum, pistachio nuts, which are berries, and so forth. They then went down and stood before Joseph. Joseph commanded his steward to give them lodging in his house.⁵⁴¹

4. But when the [brothers] saw Joseph's servants hurrying to unburden their beasts and to bring in their baggage, they said to themselves, grieving, "We have bereaved our fa-

537. Cf. Gen 42.29-35.

539. Cf. Gen 43.14.

541. Cf. Gen 43.15-16.

538. Cf. Gen 42.36-38.

540. Gen 43.9.

ther of Benjamin and we shall never again see the face of our father. It was with treachery that our money was put into the openings of our packs, so that if we escape [the charge of] spying they might seize us and make us slaves [on the charge] of theft. Let us confess to the steward about the money before he begins to accuse us so that our brother Benjamin might free us from [the charge of] spying and the confession of our lips from [the charge of] theft."⁵⁴²

5. Then the [brothers] approached Joseph's steward and said to him, "When we returned the first time we opened our sacks and behold, there was each one's money in the opening of his sack. We are now returning it to you because it is not right that we take the money for the grain together with the grain."⁵⁴³ But when the steward saw how terrified they were, he consoled them and said, "Rest assured, do not be afraid. It is not because of the money, which I received, that we are bringing you into this house."⁵⁴⁴ We have eagerly awaited you because of the truth that is found among you. You are not going to be condemned for something that you did not take. You have been summoned to recline and be seated before our master, for he is just and by the honor that he has reserved for you this second time, he wishes to make you forget the disgrace that you endured the first time."

6. When Joseph entered the house, his brothers brought him an offering and bowed down to him trembling. He inquired about their welfare and they took heart. He asked if their father was alive and they were put at ease. He asked whether that one was their brother and he blessed him and said, "God be gracious to you, my son," and all fear was taken from their mind.⁵⁴⁵ It was in the Egyptian language that Joseph blessed Benjamin and it was through an interpreter that they heard these initial [exchanges].

7. Joseph's affection for his brothers began to show and he went out to give them a respite, and wept within his

542. Cf. Gen 43.18.

544. Cf. Gen 43.23.

543. Cf. Gen 43.20-22.

545. Cf. Gen 43.26-29.

chamber. [Joseph] sat off by himself to eat and he made the Egyptians sit down. He began to make his brothers sit down as if around his [divining] cup;⁵⁴⁶ the elder according to his status as elder and the youngest according to his youth.⁵⁴⁷ It is amazing that his brothers did not recognize him: not by the money in their provisions when they went home the first time, not when Joseph had Simeon bound, not when he asked about his old father when they brought Benjamin back, not when they were accused of cheating, not from the fact that he made them stay in his house and blessed Benjamin, not even from the fact that he knew the names of all of them. This was all the more [amazing] since even his appearance was so similar. Even if his majesty had deluded them his dreams should have jarred their memory. Although they did not recognize Joseph because of his majesty, his rank, and his angry tongue, it was, nevertheless, because of the Lord that he remained hidden from them until his dreams should be fulfilled in them who had sold him in order to render them false.

Section XXXVIII

1. After the [brothers] ate, drank, and became inebriated, they rose early and departed, with a cup having been placed in Benjamin's sack and, again, with each one's money in his sack. Joseph's steward went out and overtook them and he poured into their ears the threats that he had been commanded by his master to say.⁵⁴⁸

2. *The [brothers], confident in their own trustworthiness, said, "With whomever the cup is found, let him die, and let all of us become slaves."*⁵⁴⁹ These men then hastened to take down

⁵⁴⁶. The word that Ephrem uses here, a transliterated form of the Greek σκούφος, is found in the Peshitta only at Gen 44:5. A divining cup, in Aramaic *kasah*, and other divining paraphernalia are used in conjunction with the sons' seating arrangement in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* here at Gen 43:33. For a discussion of the purpose of this cup, see C. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1986) 132.

⁵⁴⁷. Cf. Gen 43:30-34.

⁵⁴⁸. Cf. Gen 44:1-5.

⁵⁴⁹. Gen 44:9.

their sacks and the steward began by searching through Reuben's sack. When the steward did not find the cup in the sacks of the elder sons, he was saddened with grief because [he knew] the situation would not remain thus for long.⁵⁵⁰

(2) Then the brothers of Joseph comforted him and said, "Search, too, the sack of the youngest, then return quickly because there in the house you will find the cup of your master." But the steward, as if to do the will of these men, stuck his hand into a sack without the cup, wishing to avoid the sack that it was in. But when Benjamin bade him also to search in his sack, he thrust his hand in aimlessly and the cup came out firmly in his hand.⁵⁵¹

3. The brothers did not know what to say; they found it impossible not to put the blame on Benjamin because the cup had come out from his sack, but the money that had twice come out from their own sacks did not permit them to put the blame on him. Then the brothers, confounded by the things that had befallen them, rent their garments and went back weeping to that house from which they had just departed rejoicing.⁵⁵²

(2) Joseph, with the anger of Egyptians, shouted accusations at them and said, "*What is this that you have done? You said that you were just men. At the great meal that we prepared for you we proclaimed your righteousness among the Egyptians. But today you have become objects of scorn in the eyes of the Egyptians because you stole the cup with which I divine for all the Egyptians. Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine?*"⁵⁵³ Where would they have learned this except from [that occasion] when it had been filled in their presence and Joseph struck it and made them sit down one after the other?⁵⁵⁴

550. The Syriac is literally, "He would not be able to stay much longer in that place." The precise meaning is unclear, but the sense seems to be that the steward's grief was due to his knowledge of exactly where the cup was to be found and his unwillingness to discover it.

551. Cf. Gen 44.11-12.

552. Cf. Gen 44.13.

553. Gen 44.15.

554. That is, in order by age. See XXXVII.7, above, and note *ad loc.*

4. Then Judah said, "*Before God the sins of your servants have been discovered*"—not this one [of the cup], but the one for which we have been requited with these things. "*Therefore, not only he in whose sack the cup was found but we also will become slaves to our master.*"⁵⁵⁵ And Joseph said, "*Far be it from the just Egyptians to do this!*"⁵⁵⁶ These men, because of their great virtue, do not even eat bread with Hebrews lest they become unclean by them. How then can we do what is foreign to our conduct? The justice that hinders us from sinning against one who has not sinned against us compels us to be avenged on that one who has caused us offence. *The one in whose hand the cup was found shall remain and be a slave.* This will be better for him than freedom, for this later servitude which will free him from theft will be better for him than that first freedom that enslaved him to theft."⁵⁵⁷

Section XXXIX

1. Judah then spoke to Joseph with loud cries of lament until Joseph was overcome⁵⁵⁸—not to give them their brother as they hoped, but to reveal to his brothers something that they were not expecting. Joseph then commanded that every one else go out from his presence.⁵⁵⁹ While he had shown everyone the false judgment against them, he would show no one the judgment of their guilt.

2. After every one had gone out in dismay from his presence, Joseph changed his language and his tone. In the Hebrew tongue, without a translator, he said, "*I am your brother, Joseph.*"⁵⁶⁰ But they were unable to respond for fear that, after he had made known their offences, he would kill them. Because they were still in doubt and because the Egyptians, listening outside the door, might hear him say, "I am he whom you sold as a slave," and despise them, he said to them, "*Come near to me.*" When they drew near he said to them in a low voice, "*I am Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt.*"⁵⁶¹

555. Cf. Gen 44.16.

557. Cf. Gen 44.17.

559. Cf. Gen 45.1.

561. Gen 45.4.

556. Gen 44.17.

558. Cf. Gen 44.18–34.

560. Gen 45.3.

When he saw that they were gloomy and unable to look at him because of their shame, *he comforted them*, "Do not be distressed that you sold me, for God sent me before you for the sake of providing for the entire earth. The famine will last for five more years and there will be no sowing or reaping for I have been tested in the seven good years that have already passed."⁵⁶²

3. "So go up quickly to my father and tell him that God has made me lord not only over my brothers, as my dreams had prophesied, but even over all of Egypt, which they had not promised me. Tell him of my honor in Egypt that he might give praise on my behalf because of all that has happened to me in Egypt."⁵⁶³ Then he kissed Benjamin and the two of them wept on each other's neck and Joseph turned and kissed the rest of his brothers. When they came to believe what he told them they opened their mouths and spoke with him.⁵⁶⁴

Section XL

1. When the things that needed to be said between them were finished, the doors of that judgment room were opened. The princes entered rejoicing and the army commanders full of gladness. This news was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants for they had believed that he who had become like a father to Pharaoh and ruler over the freemen and princes of Egypt was no slave but was a son of a freeman from the blessed race of the house of Abraham.⁵⁶⁵

2. Then [Joseph] sent them off with garments, wagons, and all sorts of valuable Egyptian goods to bring to their father.⁵⁶⁶ He commanded them not to quarrel on the way.⁵⁶⁷ The quarrel which he forbade them was that one say to another, "It was you who counseled us to throw him into the pit," while another contend with his brother, saying, "It was you who urged us to sell him naked and in chains to the Arabs." "As I have forgiven all of you, you forgive each other lest by all your complaining and your arguing with each

562. Gen 45.5-6.

564. Cf. Gen 45.14-15.

566. Cf. Gen 45.21-23.

563. Gen 45.9, 13.

565. Cf. Gen 45.16.

567. Cf. Gen 45.24.

other, your joyful trip home, because of your squabbles, turn into one of grief.”

3. After the brothers departed, even though they were pleased that they had found Joseph, they were still grieving for they had no excuse [to give] to their father. They arrived and told their father the good news. When Jacob saw the wagons and gifts he was convinced that they were telling the truth. His spirit revived and he said, “As great as all these things are, that Joseph, my son, is alive is even greater than all these things.”⁵⁶⁸

4. When they told Jacob about the honor of Joseph, about the wisdom with which he administered his affairs, and about how their last judgment was more bitter than the first, their father asked them and said, “Did you not ask Joseph how or why he went down to Egypt?” Then, when they all looked at each other and did not know what to say, Judah opened his mouth and said to his father, “We are recalling our crime today before our father.” Because of the dreams of Joseph, Joseph’s brothers thought, in their simplicity, that you and they would soon render him servitude. They also imagined, in their foolishness, that “it was better that he alone should be the servant than that we and our father should serve him as slaves.” They did this because they took pity on you and on Benjamin and not because you loved Joseph. “You also loved Benjamin but because he did not say that we would become servants to him, all of us love him. Forgive us then for having humiliated Joseph, for it is on account of our humiliating him that he has come to this exalted state.” Their father then accepted their apology and said to them, “Because of the good news about Joseph by which you have brought me joy, this offence, which caused me great suffering when I heard it, is forgiven you.”

5. Jacob and his entire household packed up to go down to Egypt. Because he was afraid that Egypt’s sorcery might harm his sons, *God* appeared to him and said, “*Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt.*”⁵⁶⁹ Because Jacob thought that per-

⁵⁶⁸. Cf. Gen 45.27–28.

⁵⁶⁹. Gen 45.3.

haps, because of the good things that would be set out for them, they would remain in Egypt and thus bring the promise to nought, [God] said to [Jacob], "*I will bring you down and I will bring you back up from there.*"⁵⁷⁰ Because Jacob also feared that Joseph might die, [God] said to him, "*Joseph, your son, will set his hands on your eyes.*"⁵⁷¹ After these things, Jacob rose up and, full of joy, went down with seventy persons—this included the two sons of Joseph.⁵⁷²

6. Joseph went out to meet his father with chariots and with many people. [Joseph] got down [from his horse], and bowed down to his father and they wept on each other's neck. Then Joseph commanded his brothers to say to Pharaoh, "*We and our fathers are keepers of cattle,*" so that they might dwell in Goshen and thus keep their distance from those who worship sheep and bulls.⁵⁷³

Section XLI

1. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "*Settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land.*" And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from before him.⁵⁷⁴ Then Joseph sold the grain to the Egyptians for money and when their money had run out he sold it for cattle. In the end he bought the lands of the Egyptians so that he might provide them with food, with the exception of the land for the priests which he did not buy, because they receive an allowance that is allotted to them by Pharaoh. Joseph gave them seed in the seventh year and set it down as law that they should give one-fifth to Pharaoh.⁵⁷⁵

2. And when the days drew near for Jacob to die, he said to Joseph, "*Put your hand beneath my loins as Abraham [said] to Eliezer when he made him swear by the covenant of circumcision.*"⁵⁷⁶ Then Joseph swore to him that he would take him up and bury him with his fathers, and Jacob bowed down to him on the head of his staff.⁵⁷⁷

570. Gen 46.4.

572. Cf. Gen 46.5-7. For the total of seventy, cf. Gen 46.8-27.

573. Cf. Gen 46.33-34.

575. Cf. Gen 47.13-26.

577. Cf. Gen 47.29-31, Peshitta.

571. Gen 46.4.

574. Gen 47.7, 10.

576. Cf. Gen 24.2-3.

3. When Joseph heard that his father was ill, he went and brought in his two sons that they might be blessed by Jacob before he died. *And Jacob said, "El Shaddai appeared to me in Luz while I was sleeping and a rock was set as my pillow and He blessed me and said to me, 'I will make of you nations—that is, tribes.' And now Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine as Reuben and Simeon are. Any more that are born to you shall be called sons of the tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh."*⁵⁷⁸

4. *Jacob said, "Bring your sons near to me that I may bless them."*⁵⁷⁹ *Israel crossed his hands because Manasseh was the firstborn and he put his right hand on the head of Ephraim the younger.*⁵⁸⁰ Here too the cross is clearly symbolized to depict that mystery with which Israel the firstborn departed, just as Manasseh the firstborn, and the peoples increase in the manner of Ephraim the younger.⁵⁸¹

5. Then, while blessing the youths, *[Jacob] said, "Let my name and the name of my fathers be perpetuated in them,"* that is, let them be called sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁵⁸² Joseph was struggling to set the right hand of his father on Manasseh, but Jacob refused and said to him, "I am not depriving Manasseh of the blessing, for he will also increase, but his younger brother will increase more than he."⁵⁸³ And to show that from then on the younger would take precedence over the elder, *he said, "By you shall Israel give its blessing, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'*"⁵⁸⁴

6. *[Jacob] said to Joseph, "I have given to you rather than to your brothers that which I took with my sword and with my bow,"*⁵⁸⁵ because what had been sold to him for one hundred ewes, he had acquired by the strength of his arms.⁵⁸⁶ While the son of

578. Cf. Gen 48.1–6.

579. Gen 48.9.

580. Gen 48.14.

581. See also *Hymns on Virginity* 20.7, 21.11.

582. Cf. Gen 48.16.

583. Cf. Gen 48.17–19.

584. Gen 48.20.

585. Gen 48.22.

586. Cf. Gen 33.19, and Josh 24.32.

Rachel was being blessed, Jacob brought back to their minds, with lamentation, the death of Rachel which had occurred by reason of her son.⁵⁸⁷

Section XLII

*The Blessings of Jacob*⁵⁸⁸

1. *Then Jacob called his sons and said to them, "Gather yourselves together that I may tell you what shall befall you at the end of days."*⁵⁸⁹ Even though they were not gathered in the house they came in from their various activities outside the house and presented themselves on that day, because Joseph had come and because their father was suffering greatly. After Joseph sat down and his brothers sat around him—they were not expecting either to be blessed or cursed but to find out what would happen to them at the end—, Jacob opened his mouth and to Reuben his firstborn he said:

2. *"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first fruits of my strength,"*⁵⁹⁰ to make known that until he took Leah he had persevered eighty-four years in virginity. *"The result of might and the result of strength,"*⁵⁹¹ [means] either that "you are the son of my youth and your other brothers are from the remainder of the might and strength of my youth," or "if you had been similar [to me], the greater part would have been yours because of your birthright." *"You wander about like water,"*⁵⁹² which runs out of its channel and waters another land.

(2) Because [Jacob] said that *"you wander about like water"* it is likely that Reuben had a wife but forsook her and,

⁵⁸⁷. Here in Gen 48.7, Jacob is recalling how Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin in Gen 35.16–21.

⁵⁸⁸. Following the Peshitta, Ephrem puts a heading on this section. For a similar heading, see *Commentary on Exodus XV*, below. Throughout these blessings, the Peshitta differs from the Hebrew text. For a study of the blessings in the targumic traditions which includes some comparison with the Peshitta, see A. Levene, "The Blessings of Jacob in Syriac Exegesis," in *SP* (Kalamazoo/Leuven, 1966) 7:524–30; and, more generally, R. Syrén, *The Blessings in the Targums: A Study on the Targumic Interpretations of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33*, Acta Academiae Aboensis, Ser. A. vol. 64, no. 1 (Abo, 1986).

⁵⁸⁹. Gen 49.1.

⁵⁹⁰. Gen 49.3.

⁵⁹¹. Gen 49.3.

⁵⁹². Gen 49.4.

though not compelled by thirst, went to drink from stolen waters. "*You wander about like water, you shall not remain,*" that is, in the reckoning of the tribes. This is the reason why when Moses blessed him he said, "*Let Reuben live and not die and let him be in the reckoning of his brothers.*"⁵⁹³ "*You went up to your father's bed*"⁵⁹⁴ also indicates that he went into Bilhah while she was sleeping and, therefore, she was not cursed with him. "*Truly you defiled my bed,*"⁵⁹⁵ either by the evil act that he committed on the bed, or Jacob called that woman a bed.

3. After he finished [blessing] Reuben, Jacob turned toward Reuben's brothers and said thus, "*Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of wrath by their nature.*"⁵⁹⁶ "*In their secret [council]*"⁵⁹⁷ means "*I was not aware that they were plotting to circumcise the Shechemites and slay them.*" "*In their company,*"⁵⁹⁸ that is, when they went in to slay the men. "*I will not be deprived of my honor,*"⁵⁹⁹ for God instilled fear of them in the surrounding nations yet preserved me from disgrace. "I was not⁶⁰⁰ summoned with them to the slaughter. *They slew men in their anger,*"⁶⁰¹ not in their justice. Because he had disgraced their sister, Shechem deserved to be put to death, but not the entire city. By their [stubborn] will "*they razed the wall,*"⁶⁰² that is, the wall [that protects] the houses of that city. "*Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,*" against the inhabitants of Shechem "*and their wrath, for it is cruel,*"⁶⁰³ in that they waited for days until they had won over and had gained the confidence of [the Shechemites], and until [the Shechemites] had been circumcised and their pain was at its greatest. Throughout those days their anger did not subside.⁶⁰⁴

(2) "*I will divide them in Jacob,*"⁶⁰⁵ that is, one against the

593. Cf. Deut 33.6, Peshitta.

595. Gen 49.4.

597. Cf. Gen 49.6, Peshitta.

599. Cf. Gen 49.6, Peshitta.

601. Gen 49.6.

603. Gen 49.7.

604. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:397-400, for the roles that Simeon and Levi played in destroying and plundering Shechem.

605. Gen 49.7.

594. Gen 49.4.

596. Gen 49.5.

598. Gen 49.6.

600. Read *P* for *li*.

602. Gen 49.6, Peshitta.

other. For they did not possess, after the curse, the unity that they had had before the curse. They had been united to such a degree that they did not even inform their [other] brothers when they went in to be avenged for the shame committed against Dinah. "*I will divide them in Jacob,*" that is, among the descendants of Jacob, "*and I will scatter them in Israel,*"⁶⁰⁶ that is, among the offspring of Israel.

4. They became divided from their descendants: Zimri from the tribe of Simeon and Phineas from the tribe of Levi. Because Levi had enlisted Simeon as an accomplice to kill many because of a woman, after the curse, Phineas, because of a woman, killed the son of Simeon together with that woman.⁶⁰⁷

(2) Although [Jacob] divided them in his mind one against the other because the former unity had been of no avail, he still scattered those two tribes among the [other] tribes. He disseminated Levi so that he might receive his inheritance from among all the tribes for, unlike his brothers, no portion had been given to him. Simeon, because his portion was the smallest, spread himself out and took as his inheritance the best part from the inheritance of all his brothers.

5. "*Judah, your brothers shall praise you,*"⁶⁰⁸ for you restrained them from the blood of Joseph their brother. For it is on account of you that Joseph became [the head] of two tribes. If not for your counsel to let him live, all the tribes would have perished in the famine. Therefore, because you restrained them from the sin of murder and from death by famine, "*your brothers shall praise you,*" on account of these two things, for it was by your hands that they were rescued from both those things. "*Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies.*"⁶⁰⁹ This [verse refers to] the victory that God promised to the kingdom of David which would spring up from Judah. It is that submission to which David subjugated

606. Gen 49.7.

607. Cf. Num 25.6-9.

609. Gen 49.8.

608. Gen 49.8.

all the nations from the [Mediterranean] Sea to the Euphrates River.

(2) "From murder, my son, you have gone up,"⁶¹⁰ [means] either "you were guiltless in the murder of Tamar and her two sons" or that he took no part in the murder of Joseph. "He stooped down and couched" on his property not like an old lion but "like a lion's whelp,"⁶¹¹ that is, like a young lion who is afraid of nothing. Although "he couched as a lion" is to be understood as dealing with his inheritance which no one can wrest from him, it also refers to the kingdom. Despite the fact that they were tested and overcome, still no one was able to take the kingdom from them because the kingdom, with all its tribes, is protected by the Lord of the Kingdom. To make known that he was speaking about the crown that is handed down from Judah and not about the tribe, [Moses] wrote, "The scepter shall not depart," that is, the king, "nor the staff," that is, a prophet who announces the things to come, "until He comes,"⁶¹² not David whom the kingdom raised to honor, but Jesus, the son of David, who is the Lord of the Kingdom.⁶¹³ Neither the king nor the prophet "will depart from the house of Judah until He comes to whom the kingdom belongs."⁶¹⁴

(3) O, let them show me whether there were kings before David who descended from Judah and preserved the crown for David. Since there was no king before David, it is evident that it was by David and by the sons of David that the kingdom was handed down and preserved for the Son and Lord of David who is the Lord of the Kingdom. From [the verse] "Judah, your brothers shall praise you" to "the sceptre shall not depart nor the staff" is to be understood about Judah, about the kingdom of David and about the sons of David who are from

610. Gen 49.9, Peshitta.

611. Gen 49.9.

612. Gen 49.10.

613. See *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.7. See also L. Leloir, "Ephrem et l'ascendance davidique du Christ," in *SP* (Kalamazoo/Leuven, 1957) 1:389-95.

614. Gen 49.10. On this verse, see T. Jansma, "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX,10. An Inquiry into the Syriac Text Forms as Presented in His Commentary on Genesis," *PdO* 4 (1973): 247-56; and Murray, *Symbols*, 282-84.

Judah. [The verse] "*until he comes to whom it belongs,*" along with what follows, however, is to be understood, in its truest sense, about the Son of God and not about David or the sons of David, who are from Judah. Even when [Moses] said, "*He comes to whom it belongs,*" he clearly showed that all predecessors were but guardians of the post, that is, they were successors to a crown that did not belong to them.

(4) "*And for Him the nations shall wait,*"⁶¹⁵ that is, the church of the Gentiles.⁶¹⁶ "*He will bind his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine.*"⁶¹⁷ He calls the synagogue "*the vine,*" as David also did.⁶¹⁸ That "*He will bind his foal to the vine*" is because his kingdom is bound up with and handed down through the synagogue, that is, "*the scepter will not depart from Judah until He comes to whom the kingdom belongs.*"

6. When our Lord came, He also bound his foal to the true vine. Just as all symbols are fulfilled by Him, He would fulfill in truth even this that was handed down to them in likeness. Either there was a vine in Jerusalem outside of the sanctuary to which He bound his foal when He entered the temple, or in that city from which the foal came it had been bound to a vine. He said, "If they say to you, 'Why are you untying that foal?' say to them, 'The master requires it.'"⁶¹⁹

(2) "*He washes his garments in wine,*" that is, His flesh will be bathed in His blood, "*and His vesture in the blood of grapes,*"⁶²⁰ because in His own blood He will bathe His body, which is the vesture of His divinity. "*His eyes shall be red with wine,*" for the truth of His thought is clearer than pure wine, "*and his teeth white with milk,*"⁶²¹ because the teaching of His lips is pure and beautiful.

7. "*Issachar is a strong warrior crouching along the pathways.*"⁶²² This refers to Gideon who sent letters [with pleas] to come and destroy the Midianites and who, with three

615. Gen 49.10, Peshitta.

616. For the "church of the gentiles," see Murray, *Symbols*, 41-68.

617. Gen 49.11.

618. Cf. Ps 80.8, 14.

619. Luke 19.31.

620. Gen 49.11.

621. Gen 49.12.

622. Gen 49.14.

hundred men, prevailed over a great camp of thousands and tens of thousands.⁶²³ *“He saw that his resting place was good,”* that is, the inheritance that came to him, *“and that his land was pleasant,”*⁶²⁴ for it was flowing with milk and honey. Although his inheritance was no better than that of his companion tribes, his praise was greater than theirs. *“He bowed his shoulder to servitude,”* not to the nations but to God *“and he became a slave at forced labor,”*⁶²⁵ that is, he became one who paid tithes from his flocks and from his produce to the sons of Levi.

8. *“Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea,”*⁶²⁶ that is, near the harbors of the sea, *“and in port areas,”*⁶²⁷ because the commerce of all those who dwell by the sea is from the income of ships. *“And his border shall reach to Sidon,”*⁶²⁸ which is also situated on the sea coast.

9. *“Dan shall judge his people,”* that is Samson, who judged Israel for twenty years, *“as one of the tribes of Israel,”*⁶²⁹ that is, like one of their brothers, sons of freewomen, descended from Jacob. *“Dan shall be a serpent upon the earth.”* These [serpents] are found along the surface of the ground, like those in the desert of Sinai whose heads peer out from the dust. *“And a viper on the paths.”*⁶³⁰ Just as those who travel about in the pathless desert tremble at serpents on the ground, and those who travel on the pathways are also terrified of vipers that hide on the paths, so were the Philistines, who travelled on paths and in the pathless desert, terrified of Samson. *“To bite the horse’s heels and throw its rider backward.”*⁶³¹ It was during the great famine that God brought upon the Philistines that Samson burned their crops by means of foxes, for fire was carried on their bodies like a rider on its horse.⁶³² Then

623. Cf. Judg 6.33–7.25.

624. Gen 49.15.

625. Gen 49.15.

626. Zebulun should precede Issachar here as in Gen 49. In XLIII.4–5, below, Ephrem follows the correct biblical order.

627. Gen 49.13, Peshitta. Literally, “along coasts of ships.”

628. Gen 49.13.

629. Gen 49.16.

630. Gen 49.17.

631. Gen 49.17.

632. Cf. Judg 15.1–8.

the Philistines keeled over from lack of bread and then fell backwards from lack of nourishment.

(2) *"For your salvation I wait, O Lord."*⁶³³ This is either that the Philistines looked for [salvation] at that time as in the days when they took captive the ark, the salvation of the Lord,⁶³⁴ or it was thus spoken through the mouth of Jacob in respect to the sons of Dan or to all Israel, to show that all the saviors who rose up for them depicted the symbol of that great salvation which was about to come to all nations through Jesus, who is the true Savior.

10. *"God will go out with a band of robbers,"*⁶³⁵ that is, those forty thousand who, girded for battle, went out before six hundred thousand who followed them with their children, their wives and their belongings.⁶³⁶ *"And he shall lead the heel,"*⁶³⁷ [means] he shall go out at the head, girded and confident, and his company, following him like a heel, shall be strengthened by him.

11. *"The land of Asher shall be good."*⁶³⁸ As Moses said, *"Let him dip his foot in oil."*⁶³⁹ It is likely that this is the land of Apamea. *"And he shall provide nourishment for kings,"*⁶⁴⁰ with pure oil and wines of various flavors that make up his inheritance.

12. *"Naphtali is a swift messenger,"* not who brings rumors, but *"who gives favorable reports."*⁶⁴¹ This is Barak, who sent glad tidings to all those who escaped from before the strength and might of Sisera.⁶⁴²

13. *"Joseph is a son of growth,"*⁶⁴³ for from his youth he has grown up strong. *"Rise up, O spring, O building supported,"* for he found his support in God, with great trust in God. He is also supported by his birthright, by the kingdom and by his brothers. He is also supported like arches by his two sons; one on his right and one on his left. Then *"he went up on the*

633. Gen 49.18.

635. Gen 49.19, Peshitta.

637. Gen 49.19.

639. Deut 33.24.

641. Gen 49.21, Peshitta.

643. Gen 49.22, Peshitta.

634. Cf. 1 Sam 4.11.

636. Cf. Josh 4.12-13.

638. Gen 49.20, Peshitta.

640. Gen 49.20.

642. Cf. Judg 4.4-22.

wall,"⁶⁴⁴ because he was perfected and crowned with the best things. "Leaders of troops quarrelled with him and looked on him with malice,"⁶⁴⁵ that is, the heads of the tribes. If "heads of divisions" were written,⁶⁴⁶ it would mean exactly the same thing, for his brothers are the sons of his division,⁶⁴⁷ and they looked on him with malice and sold him to Egypt.

(2) "His bow returned with strength,"⁶⁴⁸ for he became ruler and lord over them, but "the power of his arms grew slack,"⁶⁴⁹ because, even though the bow is strong, if there is no power in the arms the strength of the bow is of no use. So it was with Joseph. Although, like a bow, he had the authority to kill his brothers, yet he had no anger, which can be likened to power, toward his brothers. For "the power of his arms grew slack" from love. "From the mighty hand of Jacob," that is, because of the strong God who was with Jacob, and "because of the name of the shepherd,"⁶⁵⁰ who would soon lead [his flock] into the barren desert to the "rock" that gave life to all Israel when they drank from it.⁶⁵¹

14. "The God of your father will help you" when you fight against your enemies because you refrained from taking revenge on the sons of your father, "and God Almighty will bless you with blessings of heaven above,"⁶⁵² that is, with abundant and continual dew and with good and delightful things which flow from there on the annual crops that they might be blessed.

(2) "The blessing of the deep that couches beneath."⁶⁵³ Although everything came to be from nothing, nevertheless we may say that the clouds receive [their water] from the

644. Gen 49.22, Peshitta.

645. Gen 49.23, Peshitta.

646. This is also the reading of this verse in *Targum Onkelos*.

647. That is, "coheirs."

648. Gen 49.24, Peshitta.

649. Literally, "the arms of his hands became scattered."

650. Gen 49.24, Peshitta.

651. Cf. Exod 17.6; Num 20.11; 1 Cor 10.4. See also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 3:52, 6:21.

652. Gen 49.25.

653. Gen 49.25.

deep. Just as the wisdom of God changed [the waters] to be salty lest they become stagnant when they are gathered together, so too did it make [the waters] in the clouds sweet and pleasant so that mankind, animals, herbs, and plants could drink of them. *"The blessing of heaven"* then, [refers to] rain and dew, while *"the blessing of the deep"* [refers to] rivers and springs that provide the water for his inheritance.

(3) *"The blessing of the breasts and the womb,"*⁶⁵⁴ is the blessing of love with which a mother blesses her child when the milk of her breasts flows abundantly and that blessing of dear ones by which parents bless their loved ones with their affections. *"The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my progenitors,"*⁶⁵⁵ for the blessings with which I have blessed you are greater than those by which I have been blessed. For you have been blessed in faith by a father who sees, but I, in the name of another, received them in faith. As for my father, he made my brother a servant to me with the authority that he was to give to my brother on that day. Therefore my blessings are greater than those of my father, not in power but in love.

(4) *"Unto the hope of the everlasting hills,"*⁶⁵⁶ [refers to] those blessings with which you were blessed by Isaac who was blessed on the mountain and on that high place whereon he was offered up. *"May they be on the head of Joseph,"*⁶⁵⁷ that is, just as today he is the honor and boast of his brothers among the Egyptians, so also may he be their crown and may he rule over his brothers in his inheritance at the end of days.

15. *"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf"* who lies in wait for prey in his inheritance, *"in the morning devouring his prey,"*⁶⁵⁸ that is, when they are delivered from the Indians, from Sennacherib, and from the house of Gog. *"And in the evening he will divide what he seizes,"*⁶⁵⁹ for in Jerusalem he will divide his spoil peacefully with those of the house of Judah who dwell

654. Gen 49.25.

656. Gen 49.26, Peshitta.

658. Gen 49.27.

655. Gen 49.26, Peshitta.

657. Gen 49.26.

659. Gen 49.27.

with him, and he will bring those things we just mentioned out from the soldiers' camps.

Section XLIII

1. Now that we have spoken of the literal meaning of the blessings of Jacob, let us go back and speak of their spiritual meaning as well. We did not fittingly speak of their literal meaning nor will we write of their spiritual meaning as we ought, for we spoke too sparingly of their literal meaning and we will write of their spiritual meaning much too briefly.

2. "*Reuben, my might and the first fruits of my strength . . . you wander about like water, you shall not remain. . . .*"⁶⁶⁰ Just as the justice of Jacob cursed his firstborn because of his evil deed, and this curse of Reuben was blotted out by Moses who was the descendant of Jacob, so too was death decreed by God against Adam when he transgressed the commandment, but the Son of God came and, with the promise of the resurrection that He promised, brought to nought the judgment that accompanied Adam out of Paradise.

3. "*Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of wrath.*"⁶⁶¹ These too are figures for Satan and death. For just as Simeon and Levi, in their anger, destroyed a city and, through their greed, plundered its possessions, so also Satan, in his envy, killed the world secretly as Simeon and Levi had killed the sons of Shechem openly, and death fell suddenly upon all flesh as Simeon and Levi did on the possessions of the inhabitants of Shechem. The Gospel of our Lord raised up those whom sin had slain in secret, and the blessed promise of the Son raised up the dead upon whom the tyrant Death suddenly fell.⁶⁶²

4. "*Zebulun who dwells at the shore of the sea*"⁶⁶³ is a type of the nations who dwell at the side of the prophets. And his

660. Gen 49:3-4.

661. Gen 49:5.

662. Ephrem devotes three hymns, *Hymns on Virginity* 17-19, to the theme of Shechem as the type of the church of the Gentiles.

663. Gen 49:13.

border, which shall reach to Sidon,⁶⁶⁴ is just like the [nation's] border which shall reach to sin, signified by Sidon. "*What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon?*"⁶⁶⁵

5. "*Issachar is a strong warrior, crouching along the pathways*"⁶⁶⁶ of righteousness, for he hunts for life⁶⁶⁷ the one who transgresses and repents. "*He saw that his resting place was good and that his land was pleasant,*"⁶⁶⁸ that is, [Christ] saw that His church was good and that His dwelling was holy. "*He bowed his shoulder*"⁶⁶⁹ to the cross and became the one who paid off the debt.

6. "*Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes.*"⁶⁷⁰ If one from Dan judges His people, how much more will that one from Judah, to whom the kingdom belongs, judge all the nations? For our Lord became a serpent to that first serpent and a viper to Satan, just like the serpent of bronze that countered the snakes.⁶⁷¹ Because, however great salvation from a human being might be, it is [in fact] small, Jacob says in Spirit concerning the salvation of all, "*for your salvation, I wait, O Lord.*"⁶⁷²

7. "*Gad will go out with a band of robbers,*"⁶⁷³ forty thousand armed for battle. But the truth is that they are the twelve Apostles who went out with a band of robbers before all the nations to fall on the robber and wrest from him the nations who were taken by him as booty.

8. "*The land of Asher shall be good and [from it] he shall give nourishment for kings.*"⁶⁷⁴ It is the church who gives healing with the medicine of life⁶⁷⁵—not to kings alone but to all soldiers who accompany kings.

9. "*Naphtali is a swift messenger who gives favorable reports,*"⁶⁷⁶

664. Gen 49.13.

665. Joel 3.4.

666. Gen 49.14.

667. Or, "salvation." Syriac *hayyâ* is often used to translate σωτηρία in the New Testament and Patristic literature.

668. Gen 49.15.

669. Gen 49.15.

670. Gen 49.16.

671. Cf. Num 21.4-9

672. Gen 49.18.

673. Gen 49.19, Peshitta.

674. Gen 49.20, Peshitta.

675. Ephrem's favorite term for the Eucharist.

676. Gen 49.21, Peshitta.

for after our Lord taught in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, those who heard him went out, made it known abroad, and repeated "*the favorable reports,*" that *this is the one for whom we have been waiting.*⁶⁷⁷

10. "*Joseph is a son of growth.*"⁶⁷⁸ Just as Jacob depended on Joseph instead of Reuben, the firstborn, so also instead of Adam, the firstborn and rebellious one, the world had one Son of old age, in the latter days of the world, so that the whole world might stand and lean on Him as if on a pillar. "*Rise up, O spring, O building supported*" by brothers and sons. Through the power of our Lord the world is supported on the prophets and on the Apostles.⁶⁷⁹ Joseph became a wall of plenty to his brothers in the time of famine and our Lord became the wall of knowledge to the world in the time of error.

(2) The heads of the tribes looked with malice on Joseph, and the heads of the [Jewish] people on our Lord. "*His bow returned with strength,*"⁶⁸⁰ for the two of them held sway over their enemies and "*the power of his arms grew slack,*"⁶⁸¹ for they were unable to shoot arrows at their own brothers. "*From the hand of the Mighty One . . . ,*"⁶⁸² [is] because of the very name of the Son who was called by the Apostle "the Rock who walked with Israel in the desert."⁶⁸³

11. "*Benjamin is a ravenous wolf*"⁶⁸⁴ [refers to] Paul, who was a wolf to the wolves and snatched all souls away from the evil one, and "*in the evening he will divide what he seizes,*"⁶⁸⁵ that is, at the end of the world he will also rest with a reward greater than his labors.

677. Cf. Matt 4.13-16, citing Isa 9.1-2.

678. Gen 49.22, Peshitta.

679. The Prophets and the Apostles were inns and milestones on the path, see Beck, "Das Bild vom Weg," 1-39.

680. Gen 49.24, Peshitta.

681. Gen 49.24, Peshitta.

682. Ephrem alters the text here from "the mighty hand of Jacob," as in XI.II.13, above.

683. Cf. 1 Cor 10.4.

684. Gen 49.27.

685. Gen 49.27.

Section XLIV

1. Then after he blessed his sons, Jacob died, one hundred and forty-seven years old. Joseph went up with the elders of Egypt and the entire household of his father and buried Jacob with his fathers. Then Joseph and all those with him returned to Egypt.⁶⁸⁶

2. The brothers of Joseph were afraid and said to him, "*Your father gave this command before his death: 'I beseech you forgive the transgression of your brothers, the sins and the evil things they have done to you.'*" Joseph wept and said, "Do not be afraid of me for although your father has died, the God of your father, on account of whom I will never strike you, is still alive. Because He turned the evil that you did to me to my good, and He placed many people in my hands, God forbid that I do any evil to those who thus became the cause of life for many. But, just as I did not kill you in Egypt, do not leave my bones in Egypt." He made them swear to this and said, "God will indeed remember you and will bring you up to the land which He swore to Abraham. Bring my bones up to there so that even if I do not inherit the land with you, I may be raised up with you from that land." *And Joseph died, one hundred and ten years old, and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.*⁶⁸⁷

3. To God who, through his Son, created all creatures from nothing⁶⁸⁸—although they were not written down in the beginning because they were revealed to the understanding of Adam, and every generation handed down to the next [generation], just what it had learned from the previous [generation]. Because all went astray from God and all had forgotten that God was Creator, God had Moses write all this down for the Hebrew people, after He changed nature to bear witness to the creation of the elements. In the desert Moses wrote down those things that had been manifested in Adam's mind while he was in Paradise, [and they were handed down] through the ancient peoples who knew these things without their being written down,

686. Cf. Gen 49.33-50.14.

687. Cf. Gen 50.15-26.

688. Cf. John 1.3.

through the intermediate peoples who through the Scripture heard and believed them, and through the last peoples who added on to the books of the middle ones, and even through those who stubbornly remained in their resistance and were not convinced—and to His Christ and to His Holy Spirit be glory and honor, now and always, forever and ever. Amen. Amen.

THE END OF THE COMMENTARY ON GENESIS, THE
FIRST BOOK OF TORAH.



The Troparion and Kontakion to Saint Ephraim the Syrian

Troparion in Tone 8

By a flood of tears you made the desert fertile,
and your longing for God brought forth fruits in abundance.
By the radiance of miracles you illumined the whole universe!
Our Father Ephraim, pray to Christ God to save our souls!

Kontakion in Tone 2

Ever anticipating the hour of Judgment,
you lamented bitterly, venerable Ephraim.
Through your deeds you were a teacher by example;
therefore, universal Father, you rouse the slothful to repentance.

The End

Glory to God for all things!

