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The Biblical Homilies of Ephraem Graecus

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## The Biblical Homilies of Ephraem Graecus

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Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306-373) is one of the most revered figures of Eastern Christianity and one of the few people canonized in both the Eastern and Western Churches. Ephrem's renown spread beyond the boundaries of Syriac-speaking Christendom and attracted the interest of Greek-speaking Christians. Demand for more information about this figure sparked production of texts about and putatively by Ephrem in many languages, including Greek. Ultimately, the number of Greek texts attributed to Ephrem ranks second to only John Chrysostom. These texts, known as the Ephraem Graecus corpus, have gone relatively unstudied as the works are almost certainly inauthentic. Ephrem composed exclusively in Syriac. Nevertheless, the texts have been influential in the history of Christianity, providing some of the foundational texts of Orthodox monasticism and inspiring theologians such as John Wesley.

This study seeks to explore the portion of the corpus on the topic of biblical exegesis. It provides the first ever English translation of many of these homilies. The homilies evince a creative style of exegesis relatively unknown in Western Christianity but which does appear in Syriac. These works imaginatively retell the biblical stories, inventing new dialogue and situations for the familiar characters within their established narratives. This study argues

that the homilies transport the audience into a dramatic re-creation of the biblical stories where they encounter the biblical figures in a new way which emphasizes the humor, pathos, and the humanity of the characters in Scripture. A work on Joseph translated here, e.g., depicts Joseph momentarily freeing himself from his Ishmaelite captors to fall on his mother's grave and cry out to her in Hebrew, an act misinterpreted by the fearful Ishmaelites as necromancy. This episode is known from Jewish and Syriac Christian exegesis on this story, but is not attested by the Greek-speaking Christian tradition. This study argues that the Ephraem Graecus corpus is an important case study for understanding the interconnected, multi-lingual world of Late Antique Christianity. The anonymous author of the Ephraem Graecus corpus created literature for a group of Christians reflecting Syriac concerns, motifs, and interests but in the Greek language.

This dissertation by Trevor Crowell fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Theology approved by Robert D. Miller II, O.F.S., Ph.D. as Director and by Robin Darling Young, Ph.D., and Rev. Christopher Begg, S.T.D., Ph.D., Ph.B. as Readers

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## Chapter 1

### The Many Faces of St. Ephrem the Syrian.

St. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373) is quite possibly the most revered author in the tradition of Syriac-speaking Christianity. He is one of the few theologians canonized in both the Eastern and Western churches, and his fame transcended political and linguistic boundaries both in his lifetime and afterward. Among the Syriac-speaking Christians, his works are foundational, with Eastern and Western Syrian traditions using his hymns even to the present day.<sup>1</sup> While other Syriac authors wrote *mêmrê* and *madrāshê*, his use of these genres popularized them, setting the boundaries within which later Syriac authors would work. Mar Jacob of Serugh chose to use the *mêmrê* form for his encomium of the late Ephrem.<sup>2</sup>

Ephrem's career took place in a turbulent time for Syrian Christianity. Early in his life, Ephrem began working for Jacob, the bishop of Nisibis (d. 338). He continued to work under the next three bishops in the church of Nisibis, until 363 when that city and its territory were surrendered to the Persian Empire following the death of the Roman Emperor Julian (the Apostate) in a disastrous military campaign.<sup>3</sup> Ephrem then moved to Edessa where he worked under the bishops in that city until his death on June 9, 373, according to the

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph P. Amar, *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 47, fasc. 1, no. 209 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, *"Faith Adoring the Mystery": Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian*, The Pere Marquette Lecture in Theology 1997 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), 7.



*Chronicle of Edessa*.<sup>4</sup> Though later Syriac writers would confer upon Ephrem the position of “Interpreter,” i.e. the head of the city’s school of religious education and biblical exegesis, akin to the position that Athanasius held in Alexandria, it appears that Ephrem’s actual position was more humble.<sup>5</sup> Ephrem himself depicted the city’s bishop as the “shepherd” of the “flock” of his congregation. Further extending this familiar Christian metaphor, Ephrem conceived of himself as one of the herdsmen who assisted the chief shepherd.<sup>6</sup> That he lived as a “single person” (*ihîdāyā*) in a community of other “single persons” in a group called the “sons of the covenant” (*bnay qyāmā*), has caused much confusion about whether Ephrem was a monk.<sup>7</sup> These “sons of the covenant,” and Ephrem in particular, were fully involved in the pastoral work of the diocese. Ephrem acted as a teacher, preacher, poet, and choirmaster for his bishops. He wrote his famous *mêmrê* and *madrāshê* with the whole of the Christian community, laypeople and clergy alike, in mind. He worked closely with the church choirs, even arguing for the inclusion of women in them. These choirs were responsible for singing the responses to his *madrāshê*.<sup>8</sup> The genius of Ephrem’s compositions soon became apparent among his contemporaries, and the popular focus of his poems were so appreciated by fellow clergymen that his works began to circulate among the churches of the area.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, “Images of Ephraem: the Syrian Holy Man and his Church,” *Traditio* 45 (1989-1990), 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Griffith, “Faith Adoring the Mystery,” 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Griffith, “Images of Ephraem,” 23.

<sup>7</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, “Asceticism in the Church of Syria: the Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism,” in *Asceticism* eds. Vincent L. Wimbush & Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 235.

<sup>8</sup> Griffith, “Images of Ephraem,” 14.

<sup>9</sup> Griffith, “Faith Adoring the Mystery,” 12.

While in his native land Ephrem developed the reputation of being the foremost theologian/poet, outside of that land and language he became one of a very few Syriac theologians that Western Christian writers knew about. The West's picture of who Ephrem was morphed very quickly into a stereotyped picture of what an Eastern Christian holy person should look like: a monk, a hermit, an ascetic, an anchorite. Palladius, in his *Lausiac History* written some 50 years after Ephrem's death, provides one of the first western portraits of Ephrem. According to Palladius, Ephrem "always practiced the quiet life and edified those he met for many years, but finally he left his cell."<sup>10</sup> Palladius' chapter on Ephrem assumes that its audience will fill in their understanding of Ephrem's situation from what has gone before. Ephrem lives in a "cell," high in the mountains and removed from the life of the city of Edessa below. People go to him, not the other way around. Palladius also informs us that Ephrem left his cell because of a famine in the city. He castigates the rich in the city, for allowing the poor to suffer the ravages of the famine, but the rich reply that they have no one they trust to give their money to; every candidate who puts himself forward for the role tries to make providing care "into a business." Ephrem volunteers himself as the overseer of humanitarian efforts in the city and the rich accept him because of his reputation as a man of God. Ephrem proves himself a capable administrator; the famine is lifted and prosperity follows. With nothing more to do in the city, Ephrem goes back to his cell and dies within the month. Besides locating Ephrem in the vicinity of Edessa and noting that, "he left some writings, too, most of which are worthy of attention,"<sup>11</sup> there is little of the genuine Ephrem in Palladius' depiction. Rather, Palladius' portrait perpetuates the stereotype of

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<sup>10</sup> Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer, Ancient Christian Writers 34 (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 116-17.

<sup>11</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 117.

oriental monastic Christians and firmly locates Ephrem's life in this milieu. Subsequent biographies of Ephrem would continue in this vein, culminating in the *Vita Ephraemi*, a Syriac work that owes much to the *Vita* traditions that flourished among the Graeco-Syrian monastic communities of the fifth and sixth centuries. While a more extensive work than the chapter in Palladius, the *Vita Ephraemi* follows its basic model. Ephrem lives outside the city of Edessa and becomes involved in its affairs only occasionally.<sup>12</sup> This portrait of monastic Ephrem is solidified by the late fourth or early fifth century Greek work *Sermo Asceticus*, attributed to Ephrem and one of the most popular pieces included in the so-called Ephraem Graecus corpus.<sup>13</sup> The piece is a sermon, written pseudonymously and addressed to the monastic community as a whole. The sermon exhorts its listeners to repent and rededicate themselves to their monastic ideals in the face of wars and tribulation. The pseudonymous author weaves passages from Ephrem's genuine works into his own original composition, further complicating the relationship between the Syriac holy man and the Greek monastic hero, both of whom bear the name Ephrem.<sup>14</sup>

As the renown of Ephrem grew and as the portrait of Ephrem the melodist of Nisibis and Edessa became slowly absorbed by Ephrem the exemplar par excellence of monasticism, a number of texts in different languages came to be attributed to Ephrem. Sidney Griffith argues that in Ephrem's later life he began to praise the ascetic movements happening around

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<sup>12</sup> For a more thorough investigation of the depictions of Ephrem by the Greek and Byzantine communities, see Griffith, "Images of Ephraem: the Syrian Holy Man and his Church."

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this work I will use the spelling "Ephrem" when referring to the man who lived from 306-373 and his writings. I will use the Graeco-Roman spelling "Ephraem" and "Ephraem Graecus" when referring to the implied author of the Greek works collected under "Ephrem's" name.

<sup>14</sup> Wonmo Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek Ephrem," (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 235.

Edessa and in the Christian East more generally as a “long-overdue reform of the institutions of the religious life, whose abuses he had himself often decried.”<sup>15</sup> These end-of-career praises may have caught on in the Edessene community, Griffith suggests, and so inspired his successors to create more pro-monastic literature in his name. These works traded on the city and region’s reputation as a place of asceticism and helped to perpetuate the image of Ephrem as monk par excellence.<sup>16</sup>

Though Ephrem was not the monk later Christian tradition made him out to be, the Ephrem monk persona proved to be both enduring and prolific. The *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (CPG) lists 212 Greek works<sup>17</sup> attributed to Ephrem, who only wrote in Syriac.<sup>18</sup> Only John Chrysostom has more Greek works attributed to him. The Ephraem Graecus works were immensely popular in the Byzantine period and the Middle Ages, being themselves translated into Latin, Coptic, Slavic and Arabic. The Ephraem Graecus works are thought to be among the first Christian treatises translated into Arabic after the Islamic conquest.<sup>19</sup> They are cited and reflected upon by John Wesley,<sup>20</sup> the Russian monk Abraham of Smolensk (d. 1221), the Byzantine monk Theodore of Studios (d. 826), and helped to develop the Byzantine hymnographic form of *kontakion*, sung metrical sermons, still used

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<sup>15</sup> Griffith, “Images of Ephraem,” 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Maurice G  rard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vol 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974), 366-468.

<sup>18</sup> Ephrem Lash, “The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian,” in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* eds. A. Louth, D.E. Conomos, K. Ware, and J. Behr (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>19</sup> Griffith, “Images of Ephraem,” 13.

<sup>20</sup> Lash, “The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem,” 90.

today in Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches.<sup>21</sup> Romanos the Melodist (d. 556) is one of the influential authors of *kontakia*, and his work bears similarity to the work of Ephraem Graecus. Both authors wrote for liturgical contexts using isosyllabic meters. Casimir Émureau, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, used the similarity between those two authors to argue that Romanos' isosyllabic sermons bear a greater resemblance to the Syriac *mêmrê* and *madrāshê* than to the Greek poetic tradition.<sup>22</sup> Thus one could draw a direct line of development from Ephrem (and his Semitic Christian milieu) to the Byzantine rite.

Émureau's approach, however, was challenged by scholars later in the twentieth century as the problematic relationship between the Ephraem Graecus corpus and Ephrem's Syriac writings became clearer.<sup>23</sup> "The relationship of the Greek Ephrem, as these works are called, to the Syriac corpus of Ephrem is very dubious ... We cannot determine if the Greek texts are totally inauthentic or genuine, loose paraphrases of genuine works or radically revised translations."<sup>24</sup> Because Émureau relied on pieces in the Ephraem Graecus corpus which do not have extant Syriac *Vorlagen*, William Petersen concluded that Émureau's assertion that the poetic form of the *kontakion* comes directly from the *mêmrê* was

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<sup>21</sup> Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek," 4-7.

<sup>22</sup> Casimir Émureau, *Saint Ephrem le Syrien: son oeuvre littéraire grecque*, Études critiques de littérature et de philologie byzantines (Paris: Maison de la bonne presse, 1918). Émureau's work builds off Wehofer in showing the direct literary dependence of Romanos' work on Ephraem Graecus (Thomas Wehofer, *Untersuchungen zum Lied des Romanos auf die Wiederkunft des Herrn* [Vienna: A. Holder, 1907]).

<sup>23</sup> William L. Petersen, "The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 no. 2 (1985), 171-87; Sebastian Brock, "Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origin," *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985), 77-81. Brock also argues that the Ephraem Graecus pieces cited in the *kontakia* discussions use the LXX rather than the Peshitta as a source, thus placing the *kontakia* at further remove from Ephrem.

<sup>24</sup> Petersen, "The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem," 174.

unsustainable.<sup>25</sup> Because the *kontakia-mêmrê* discussion could not be directly linked to a distinct historical person in Ephrem, its usefulness as an avenue of inquiry dead-ended. Though the Ephraem Graecus corpus was influential throughout history, particularly in Orthodox Christianity,<sup>26</sup> a connection to St. Ephrem proved to be untenable as twentieth century scholarship demonstrated how different the pictures of Ephrem were.

The pre-modern popularity of Ephraem Graecus did not endure into the twentieth century. Before the twentieth century, not much scholarly attention was paid to Ephrem or Syriac Christianity in general, but interest blossomed with Dom Edmund Beck's work in the 1950s and 1960s publishing the genuine corpus of Ephrem.<sup>27</sup> As access to the genuine Ephrem's Syriac writings increased, Ephrem rightly took his place as one of the most important authors for scholars working in the field of Syriac Christianity. With the Syriac works of Ephrem now on ready display and the scholarly community beginning to appreciate its genius, authors also began to take note of the Ephraem Graecus corpus and how little it resembled the Syriac works. Works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus had also been found in other manuscripts under the names of other authors,<sup>28</sup> suggesting that linkages to Ephrem were even more tenuous. Without a tether to an important, named figure, study of the Ephraem Graecus corpus became largely neglected or examined only in light of its influence on subsequent Christian authors.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 174. Petersen later demonstrated that while the *poetic form* of Romanos' *kontakia* does not directly derive from Ephrem's *mêmrê*, much of their content can be directly traced to Ephrem's genuine writings (notably the *Commentary on the Diatesseron*).

<sup>26</sup> Lash, "The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem," 81-3.

<sup>27</sup> See the listing of Beck's publications in the CSCO series in Kees den Biesen, *Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* (Grove: Umbria, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem (les versions). I. Éphrem grec./II. Éphrem latin," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1961), 808-11.

## The Texts of Ephraem Graecus and their Study

The renown that the Ephraem Graecus corpus enjoyed in the pre-modern period should not be ignored because the works were falsely attributed to a great persona, nor should their importance in their own right be neglected. The sheer number of Greek works attributed to Ephrem that have survived testifies to their popularity. Figures such as John Wesley admired the theology expressed in the Ephraem Graecus corpus and those writings proved to be influential for the Orthodox tradition.<sup>29</sup> The works speak to a period of cultural exchange between the Greek and Syriac communities of late antiquity. That they cannot be positively attributed to one particular figure does not diminish their importance as we as scholars seek to better understand the literature and culture of Late Antiquity. Unfortunately, modern scholarship has tended to overlook the Ephraem Graecus corpus in favor of works written by known authors which can more easily be fit into a cultural and historical context. My dissertation shall attempt to delve into one small corner of the Ephraem Graecus corpus to provide a view of what fascinating pieces lie within.

An exploration of the Ephraem Graecus corpus is made difficult by the state of its textual tradition. No critical edition of the entire Ephraem Graecus corpus exists. To date, there have been only four editions of the corpus published, three of which were published before the first half of the eighteenth century. Gerard Vossius published an edition of the Greek texts attributed Ephrem known to him in Cologne in 1616.<sup>30</sup> In 1709, Edward Thwaites of Oxford published a second edition of the writings, followed soon after by Joseph Simeon Assemani's edition (which included the Syriac and Latin works as well), published

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<sup>29</sup> Lash, "The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem," 81-2.

<sup>30</sup> Gerardus Vossius, *S. Ephraemi Syri Opera Omnia*, 3 vols. (Cologne: Apud Arnoldum Quentelium, 1616).

between 1732 and 1746.<sup>31</sup> Assemani relied heavily on Thwaites' edition for the texts they reproduced in common, though his collection also includes works that Thwaites did not have access to. The Ephraem Graecus textual tradition remained in this state for almost 200 years until Silvius Mercati began to produce a critical edition of the corpus, but only published one volume, containing only three homilies.<sup>32</sup> K.G. Phrantzolas published a new, practical edition of the corpus, including works that had been discovered in the intervening period, and provided a Modern Greek translation between the years 1988 and 1998.<sup>33</sup>

The one scholar to do serious work on the Ephraem Graecus corpus itself was Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou (d. 1976). She attempted to move beyond the scholarly consensus which existed both before and after her work which concluded simply that there is little of Ephrem in Ephraem Graecus.<sup>34</sup> Since she is the primary scholar to have worked on these texts, I think it instructive to examine her methods. First and foremost, Hemmerdinger-Iliadou takes a philological approach to the corpus. During her career, the Phrantzolas edition of the corpus had not yet been published, so the most current editions in her time were the eighteenth century ones by Thwaites and Assemani. To rectify this lacuna, she published a

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<sup>31</sup> Edward Thwaites, *Τὰ τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα μεταβλήθεντα* (Oxford: Imprimatur Guil Lancaster, 1709); Joseph S. Assemani, *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri opera Omnia quae exstant Graece, Syriace, Latine, in sex tomos distributa*, 6 vols. (Rome: Ex Typographia Vaticana, 1732-1746).

<sup>32</sup> Silvius Mercati, *S. Ephraem Syri Opera Tomus Primus* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute: 1915).

<sup>33</sup> Κων. Γ. Φραντζοῦ, *Ὅσιου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου, Ἔργα*, 7 vols. (Thessaloniki: To Periboli ths Panagias, 1988-1998).

<sup>34</sup> She writes, "Enfin, l'opinion commune est qu'il n'y a rien d'éphrémien ni dans l'Ephrem grec ni dans l'Ephrem latin. Cette dernière opinion, qui a l'avantage de dispenser de les étudier, a le défaut d'être fausse." (Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Vers une nouvelle édition de l'Éphrem grec," *Studia Patristica* 3 [1961], 72.) The scholarly consensus has, for the most part, continued to take advantage of that same default opinion.



critical edition of two of the texts,<sup>35</sup> and urged fellow scholars to work towards a new edition of the whole corpus.<sup>36</sup> The corpus, she said, exists in perhaps two or three thousand manuscripts, which are further problematized by the fact of their composition in the Middle Ages, when paraphrases and rearrangements were commonplace, thus adding difficulty to the task of making a critical edition.<sup>37</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou operated from the hypothesis that some of Ephrem existed in Ephraem Graecus and works of his that were lost in their Syriac originals could be partially recovered through the Greek. She pointed out that for some Greek works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus, a Syriac *Vorlage* under the name of Ephrem did exist.<sup>38</sup> Other Ephraem Graecus works contain readings from the Diatesseron or the Old Syriac, thus implying that a Syriac original (now lost) lay behind them.<sup>39</sup> She also found quotations from Ephrem's works and substantially similar metaphors used in both that corpus and Ephraem Graecus.<sup>40</sup> Through these links to the genuine Ephrem, she argued, scholars could supplement, on a case-by-case basis, their knowledge of the Syrian through the Greek corpus.

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<sup>35</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Saint Éphrem le Syrien: Sermon sur Jonas (Texte grec inédit)," *Le Muséon* 80 (1967), 47-74; and *idem*, "Sermon grec inédit de S. Éphrem sur le bon larron," *Analecta Bollandiana* 85 (1967), 433-39.

<sup>36</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Vers une nouvelle édition."

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem (les versions)," 802-3.

<sup>39</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Les citations évangéliques de l'Éphrem Grec," *Byzantina* 5 (1973), 315-73.

<sup>40</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "L'authenticité sporadique de l'Éphrem Grec," in *Akten des XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongresses* eds. F. Dölger and H.G.Beck (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1960), 232-36.

While Hemmerdinger-Iliadou was optimistic about the amount of Ephremic material in the Ephraem Graecus corpus, she was also keenly aware of the corpus' difficulties. In the best category were works of Ephraem Graecus that are translations of an extant Syriac work also attributed to Ephrem. Other works in the corpus have Ephremic elements, such as quotations from the Diatesseron<sup>41</sup> or which use similar theological imagery and argumentation, intermixed with purely Greek material. At an even further remove are texts that have "simples reminiscences éphrémiens."<sup>42</sup> Among these pieces are the so-called "Metrical Works." These works preserve some element of metrical style, typically by using sentences of similar (and short) length. Since Ephrem was known to have written in meter, there was much excitement about these works.<sup>43</sup> However, all the Ephraem Graecus manuscripts are written in prose style, which is to say they are not arranged in lines or stitches which would help indicate a meter. Coupled with the fact that there exists no extant Syriac *Vorlage* in meter for many of these texts, this makes the metrical nature of the texts difficult to prove.<sup>44</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou herself did not know Syriac, which prevented her

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<sup>41</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou often makes too much of the presence of a Diatesseron quotation in an Ephraem Graecus piece. In general, she has perhaps too much faith that whoever compiled the manuscripts and attributed such-and-such a work to Ephrem had a good reason for doing so. Moreover, if a Greek text is attributed to Ephrem and contains Diatesseron quotations, she is very confident in the linkage of that piece to Ephrem. She at times seems to completely ignore the possibility that there could be other people who wrote in Syriac and had that work translated into Greek, or that there could be pseudepigraphy among Syriac writers.

<sup>42</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem (les versions)," 801.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Mercati chose the homilies with meter to edit and publish. S.G. Mercati, *S. Ephraem Syri Opera, 1 Sermones in Abraham et Isaac, in Basilium Magnum, in Eliam* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1915).

<sup>44</sup> When looking at "Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites," Hemmerdinger-Iliadou ("Sermon sur Jonas") declines to attempt to reconstruct the Greek metrical form, claiming it has been too badly corrupted by the process of translation. André de Halleux ("A propos du sermon éphrémien sur Jonas et la penitence des Ninivites," in *Lingua Restituta Orientalis: Festgabe für Julius Assfalg*, eds. Regine

from having full access to the works of the genuine Ephrem available at the time and from being able to notice the metrical arrangement of some of the texts.<sup>45</sup>

Hemmerdinger-Iliadou also found works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus whose authenticity was more problematic. In these cases, she used internal criteria to demonstrate that links to Ephrem were doubtful. She noted the prevalence of eschatology in some of the works, which she deemed incongruous with the concerns of genuine Ephremic thought, though she allowed that Syriac scholars of Ephrem might hold a different opinion.<sup>46</sup> Other works in the corpus used sources and theological language that would be anachronistic for Ephrem's time. She noted in several of the works in the collection usage of citations from the Catholic Epistles and Revelation whose canonicity was not settled in the Syriac speaking churches of Ephrem's time. This sort of anachronism also shows itself in the fully-developed monastic formulae present in the works, as well as statements of faith that are distinctly post-Chalcedonian, when Chalcedon was held nearly a century after Ephrem's death.<sup>47</sup>

Further complicating the tapestry of the Ephraem Graecus corpus is the presence of some of its component works in collections of ancient Christian writings that are attributed to other authors. Chief among these is Pseudo-Macarius, a Syrian monastic writer of the fourth century. Doubtlessly the similarities between the backgrounds of Ephrem and Pseudo-Macarius led early editors to confuse the two, especially when there is nothing in the text itself to suggest authorship. Works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus can also be found in

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Schulz and Manfred Görg (Ägypten und Altes Testament 20; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990), 155-60) later argued that the Greek text's meter can indeed be reconstructed and in several places corrects the translation so as to better reflect its isosyllabic structure.

<sup>45</sup> Lash, "The Greek Writings Attributed to Ephrem," 87.

<sup>46</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem (les versions)," 806-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 811-14.

collections of works attributed to Hyperichios, John of Damascus, John Chrysostom, Isaac of Antioch, Isaac of Nineveh, and John the Solitary.<sup>48</sup> The numerous duplicate attributions in the corpus mean that scholars cannot take attribution to Ephrem at face value; Ephremic links must be proven from the texts themselves.

The work that Hemmerdinger-Iliadou did on the corpus was ground-breaking (in the sense that no one before her had even scratched the surface of the corpus), but subsequent scholars did very little to build on her foundation. The takeaway from her studies seems to be that the corpus, “presents almost insurmountable problems, while its theological importance is rather small,”<sup>49</sup> and too many qualifications must be made in order to use a work from the Ephraem Graecus corpus to make a point about Ephrem. That no scholar attempted to solve these “insurmountable” problems is doubtlessly due to the advancement in scholarship on the genuine Ephrem towards the end of Hemmerdinger-Iliadou’s career and after her death in 1976.<sup>50</sup> Scholars now had unprecedented access to Ephrem’s thought<sup>51</sup> and it was easy to see how different the author was from the author(s) of the Ephraem Graecus works. So, not only was the corpus of Ephraem Graecus plagued with problems, as Hemmerdinger-Iliadou noted, it bore very little resemblance to the Ephrem that scholarship was beginning to understand

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 808-10.

<sup>49</sup> Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem’s Art of Symbolic Thought*, Gorgias Dissertations 26 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>50</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou’s works come very much from a period when the portraits of Ephrem were confused. We have already seen her optimism that the ascetical works in Greek could be easily related to Ephrem, an opinion which rests on the idea that Ephrem was primarily an ascetic author. Suh (“From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek,” 8-10) details Hemmerdinger-Iliadou’s uncritical reliance on the works of A. Vööbus which creates the confusion. On Vööbus’ mistaken image of Ephrem as monk, see Griffith, “Images of Ephraem,” 18-20.

<sup>51</sup> “Most of the ground-breaking articles mentioned ... belong to the years 1973-1978 in which it was possible, for the first time ever, to express a global yet well-founded opinion about Ephrem’s theology,” Den Biesen, “Simple and Bold,” 16.

and appreciate. Subsequent studies made reference to Hemmerdinger-Iliadou's work and noted the effect of the Ephraem Graecus corpus on later authors and literature, but they spent little time on the corpus itself.<sup>52</sup>

The only exception to this general rule concerned those writings where a Syriac *Vorlage* corresponded to a work in Ephraem Graecus. Here it seemed further work could be fruitfully done. The fifth century Church historian Sozomen reports that translation of Ephrem's works began during Ephrem's lifetime and continued through Sozomen's.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps these writings could prove a link between the Ephraem Graecus corpus and Ephrem. There are nineteen writings which exist in both Greek and Syriac attributed to Ephrem.<sup>54</sup> Ten of these works have been found to have incomplete or tangential relationships with their Syriac counterpart,<sup>55</sup> while three more are attributed in other manuscripts to other Church Fathers, and one work is only extant in an Arabic translation.<sup>56</sup> The five remaining works are *The Ascetic Sermon* (CPG 3909), *The Life of Abraham of Qidun* (CPG 3937), *The Testament of Ephrem* (CPG 3947), *The Sickness of Tongue* (CPG 3950), and *Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites* (CPG 4082). Dom Edmund Beck, who edited the Syriac versions of these

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<sup>52</sup> Sidney Griffith's footnote about the Greek works attributed to Ephrem in "Faith Adoring the Mystery" is typical in this regard (Griffith, "Faith Adoring the Mystery," n. 6), but see also den Biesen's treatment of the topic ("Simple and Bold," 13-14, esp. n. 23-31).

<sup>53</sup> Sozomen, *Church History* III, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Suh, "From Syriac Ephrem to Greek," 12. Suh identifies the texts as CPG 3909, 3937, 3939, 3944, 3945, 3946, 3947, 3948, 3949, 3950, 3952, 4012, 4025, 4028, 4046, 4054, 4082, 4161.

<sup>55</sup> G  rard ("Clavis Patrum Graecorum," 367-369) expresses doubt about CPG 3944, 3945, 3946, 3948, 3949, 3952, 4012 and 4046, while Suh ("From Syriac Ephrem to Greek," 12) excludes CPG 4054 and 4061.

<sup>56</sup> Suh, "From Syriac Ephrem to Greek," 12. CPG 3939 and 4025 are attributed to John Chrysostom and 4028 is attributed elsewhere to Anastasius of Sinai. CPG 4161 is only extant in Arabic translation.

texts, regarded *The Life of Abraham of Qidun* and *The Testament of Ephrem* as inauthentic pieces of Ephrem's corpus in their original Syriac.<sup>57</sup> The Greek versions of these works have received almost no study as scholars are primarily interested in the text as it exists in its original language, even if they did not come from Ephrem's pen.<sup>58</sup>

The final three of the above works are the focus of Wonmo Suh's Princeton Theological Seminary doctoral dissertation. After Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, Suh is one of the few scholars to work on the Ephraem Graecus corpus itself. Suh, following Beck, believes that only *Sickness of Tongue* is a work of Ephrem, while the authenticity of *Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites* is debatable (though he ultimately rejects it).<sup>59</sup> Starting from the place that so many scholars found themselves in the wake of Hemmerdinger-Iliadou's work, Suh pushes forward and endeavors to study how the Ephremic tradition, be it authentic, pseudepigraphic or pseudonymous, was transferred into the Byzantine Greek cultural milieu.<sup>60</sup> His approach is first through linguistics. He critically reflects on Sebastian Brock's work<sup>61</sup> on Syriac translation technique and applies that approach to the Ephraem Graecus

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<sup>57</sup> Edmund Beck, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen auf Abraham Kidunaya und Julianos Saba* CSCO 322-323, *Scriptores Syri* 140-141 (Louvain: Secretariat du CSCO, 1972); Edmund Beck, *Das Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones IV* CSCO 334-335, *Scriptores Syri* 148-49 (Louvain: Secretariat du CSCO, 1973).

<sup>58</sup> In their translation of the Syriac original, Brock and Harvey note that a Greek version of *The Life of Abraham of Qidun* exists which provides proof that the work was popular and enjoyed a wide readership. They do not refer to the Greek text in their notes or commentary, however. Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 28-29.

<sup>59</sup> Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek," 12-14.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique," in *III Symposium Syriacum 1980: Les contacts du monde Syriaque avec les autres cultures*, ed. René Lavenant, S.J. (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1983), 1-14.

works. Suh builds on Brock's initial work and looks at how the Greek writings attempt to preserve (or not) the meter of Syriac poetry, as well as the isosyllabic form of the Ephraem Graecus works.<sup>62</sup> Suh is also interested in cross-cultural contacts and adaptations. He uses Sidney Griffith's work on the *Ascetic Sermon* to contextualize that sermon as a synecdoche of the process of converting Ephrem the holy man of Nisibis and Edessa into Ephrem the monk par excellence. Instead of viewing the development of the monk Ephrem as some sort of perversion of the man's legacy to fit a stereotype about how holy men in the East act, Suh argues that we should see this as an adaptation reflecting the increasing interactions between the Syriac-speaking Christians and their Greek counterparts. Ephraem Graecus, he argues, emerged as Ephrem's devotees in successive generations attempted to preserve his voice and modify it for their present circumstances.<sup>63</sup> In Suh's mind, the Christians of the late fourth and early fifth centuries so admired Ephrem and his memory that they took measures to insure that he could still speak to them many years after his death. That Ephrem's post-mortem words bear only passing resemblance to the words of the historical author is due to the changing of the times and mores, not to ignorance or neglect of his works.

### Scope of the Study

Hemmerdinger-Iliadou did the initial groundwork and data collection on the Ephraem Graecus corpus, allowing scholars to understand what was there, even as she laid bare the difficulties inherent in the corpus. Suh built up from this foundation, providing a framework in which to understand the corpus and its development. Much work remains to be done on

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<sup>62</sup> Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek," esp. appendix 1, 420-452, where Suh, arguing that the translator attempted to preserve the meter of the Syriac, presents the Greek *Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites* in isosyllabic lines.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

the actual works in the corpus, however, especially on those works which have no immediate links to the Syriac language or to Ephrem himself. The works are gathered together under the name of Ephrem, so that attribution must be tested first. If the name Ephrem proves inappropriate for an individual work's author, as I will argue it does, this does not mean that there is no merit in the work. Some of these works have also been gathered under the names of other patristic authors, which indicate that they were important works for Late Antique Christians and thus important for study, even if the proper author cannot be ascertained.

Since the Ephraem Graecus corpus is so vast, one can only focus on part of the whole. I have chosen to examine the works in the corpus that have biblical exegesis as their primary purpose. I have identified fifteen works in the corpus which fit this classification: *On Abraham* (CPG:4108), Two sermons titled *On Abraham and Isaac* (CPG:3954 and CPG:4109), which I have designated as *On Abraham and Isaac I* and *II*, respectively, *On Cain and the Murder of Abel* (CPG:4112), *On Daniel and the Three Holy Children* (CPG:3955), *On Eli the Priest* (CPG:3978), *On the Holy Elijah, the Prophet* (CPG:4024), *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites* (CPG:4082), *On the All-Beautiful Joseph* (CPG:3938), *On the Arrival of the Wise Men in Jerusalem* (CPG:4107), *On the Preparation and the Thief on the Cross* (CPG:4062), and *On the Good Thief* (CPG:4103). I have provided an annotated translation of these works, the first in English for some of these works, which may be found in Appendix I.

We can rely on the understanding of the genres and types of Christian exegesis that has developed over the past few decades of biblical scholarship, and so these works can be compared through the lens of genre, rather than through that of authorship. This study will



examine these works so as to contribute to the scholarly community's understanding of the question of how ancient Christians read the Bible and made meaning from its stories.

This dissertation consists of three chapters and an appendix which contains the translations of these homilies. Chapter 1, the current chapter, provides an introduction to the corpus of Ephraem Graecus and the studies on it. Chapter 2 begins by interrogating the attribution of these texts to Ephrem. Ultimately, this attribution is found to be mistaken, but nevertheless indicative of a connection of these works to the Syriac exegetical tradition as a whole. Chapter 2 also deals with the phenomenon of pseudepigraphy and suggests a way forward from the conclusion that these texts were not written by Ephrem. Rather, these texts provide evidence of a link between Syriac exegesis and Eastern Christian interpretation written in Greek. Chapter 3 examines the exegetical strategy of the homilies. I take the fact that the homilies retell the biblical stories as a starting point and examine the genre of texts known as rewritten bible. Ultimately the Ephraem Graecus homilies do not fit that generic classification but comparing the two sets of texts illuminates many features of the Ephraem Graecus corpus. I then explore through case studies some of the features of the exegetical activity found in the Ephraem Graecus corpus.

## Chapter 2

### Ephrem's Exegetical Works

The natural place to start a discussion of the relationship of the Ephraem Graecus homilies to Christian exegetical literature of the period is with the figure to which these Greek works were attributed. At some point in these works' history they came to be attached to the famous name of Ephrem. As a result it will be fruitful to compare the Ephraem Graecus works with the genuine Ephrem's oeuvre to get a sense of where this identification came from, at what points the linkage is illuminating and where it is not. Ephrem is one of the first major writers of the Syriac Christian tradition and generally thought to be one of its most skilled, so his approach to biblical exegesis and his works have been well documented by the scholarly community. Additionally, Ephrem is such a foundational figure in Syriac Christianity that subsequent authors are very much writing with reference to what came before them from his pen.<sup>1</sup>

Ephrem's exegetical oeuvre has been divided into two parts. He wrote prose commentaries on Scripture, of which his treatments of Genesis, Exodus and the Diatesseron survive.<sup>2</sup> However, Sidney Griffith argues that the Ephrem's exegetical thought is most principally expressed in the other part of his exegetical works, his *mêmrê* and *madrāshê*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Exegesis, New Testament," in *Gorgias Encyclopedia Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian Brock, A. M. Butts, G.A. Kiraz, and L. Van Rompay (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Edward G. Mathews Jr. & Joseph P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian; Selected Prose Works; Commentary on Genesis, Commentary on Exodus, Homily on our Lord, Letter to Publius*, ed. Kathleen McVey, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 91 (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, "Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis in Saint Ephrem's Teaching Songs *De Paradiso*: The "Types of Paradise" in the "Treasury of Revelations," in *Syriac and Antiochian Exegesis and Biblical*

Ephrem writes in the introduction to his *Commentary on Genesis* that, “I had 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 ‘teaching songs’.”<sup>4</sup> Since these poetic compositions are so crucial in Ephrem’s mind to his exegetical endeavor, I shall examine them first.

### **Ephrem’s *Mêmrê* and *Madrāshê*, The Case of *De Paradiso*.**

Griffith finds Ephrem speaks the most about his exegetical methodology in his *madrāshê* “On Paradise” or *De Paradiso*.<sup>5</sup> For Ephrem, Paradise links the very beginning of human existence in the Garden of Eden with the dwelling place of humanity in the end time, a place that was reopened for the first time by Jesus on the cross.<sup>6</sup> Ephrem uses Lk 23:39-43 as his evidence that the reopening of Paradise has occurred. He begins his eighth hymn,

A statement which delighted me  
Shone forth in my ears  
From the text that was read  
About the story of the robber.  
It gave consolation to my soul,  
Due to the multitude of its faults,  
That the One pitying the robber  
Would lead it  
To the very garden whose name

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*Theology for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium*, ed. Robert D. Miller, *Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies* 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian; Selected Prose Works*, 67.

<sup>5</sup> Griffith, “Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis in Saint Ephrem,” 46.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen De Paradiso und Contra Julianum* (CSCO, vols. 174 & 157; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1957), I:12.

I had heard and was overjoyed.<sup>7</sup>

The story of the “Good Thief” at the crucifixion, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise,” (Lk 23:43) provides the entry point for Ephrem’s extended meditation on the final destiny of believers and the great chasm that separates us from it. The centrality of this passage for Ephrem is reflected in the Ephraem Graecus corpus with the two homilies on the Good Thief. The Good Thief homilies represent that most sustained and developed theological commentary in the Ephraem Graecus corpus. They thus provide a solid basis for comparing the theological insights articulated by the genuine Ephrem and the developments made by the author of the Ephraem Graecus works.

### **Mysteries and Types (*râzê* and *tupsê*) in Ephrem’s Exegesis**

To Ephrem’s mind, the way that God reveals himself to human beings through Scripture is by means of the *râzê* “mystery” or “symbol” (and the related term *tupsê*, from τύπος or “type”). *Râzâ* is a biblical term which appears in the Peshitta of Dan 2:17-9 to describe Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Both the dream and its proper interpretation are *râzê*, and only God can reveal their significance.<sup>8</sup> These terms were first employed in an exegetical context by Aphrahat (270-345 CE), the earliest Syriac writer.<sup>9</sup> It is with Ephrem, though, that they solidify as important technical terms in Syriac exegesis. For Ephrem, the *râzê* are symbols both in the text and in nature which, through God’s grace, reveal to believers the

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<sup>7</sup> Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VIII:1.

<sup>8</sup> Ter Haar Romeny, “Exegesis, New Testament,” 161.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas van Rompay, “The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, The History of its Interpretation*, I, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 620-1.

hidden reality or truth about God himself and the world.<sup>10</sup> “Exegesis, then, for him [Ephrem] consists for the most part in explicating the right reading of the *râzê* God has strewn in both Scripture and nature, most often showing how to read them typologically, always with reference to the incarnate Son.”<sup>11</sup> In Ephrem’s genuine works, *râzê* is often used synonymously with *tupsê* in the familiar sense of typology, with certain events and actions in the Old Testament foreshadowing and drawing additional meaning from the actions and events in the New.<sup>12</sup> Yet it means more than that. Ephrem writes that Christ is “the Lord of the *râzê*, who fulfills all *râzê* in his crucifixion.”<sup>13</sup> The *râzê* “may point forward from Nature and Scripture to Christ, who in turns reveals their true meaning, or they may point back to Christ from the Church’s life and liturgy, whose sacramental words and actions are also called *râzê*.”<sup>14</sup> The term signifies more than just an expanded understanding of typology and is one of the bedrock terms upon which Ephrem’s symbolic theology is built.<sup>15</sup> Ephrem’s symbolic theology is of course much deeper than one symbol,<sup>16</sup> but this is an important one for Ephrem and one that has linguistic linkages with the Ephraem Graecus corpus.

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<sup>10</sup> Griffith, “Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis in Saint Ephrem,” 35-6.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Griffith, “Disclosing the Mystery: The Hermeneutics of Typology in Syriac Exegesis; Jacob of Serugh on Genesis XXII,” Unpublished, 13-4.

<sup>12</sup> Griffith, “Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis in Saint Ephrem,” 36.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen des Syrsers Paschalhymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)* (CSCO, vols. 248 & 249; Louvain: Peeters, 1964), *De Azymis*, III:1, quoted in Griffith, “Disclosing the Mystery,” 14.

<sup>14</sup> Griffith, “Disclosing the Mystery,” 14.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Murray, “The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem’s Theology,” *Parole de l’Orient* 6 & 7 (1975-6), 18-20.

<sup>16</sup> For a fuller treatment, see, Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem’s Art of Symbolic Thought*, Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics 26 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006) and

Given its importance in Ephrem's theological worldview it is surprising to find so little evidence of the term *râzê* in the Ephraem Graecus corpus. *Râzâ* is obviously a Syriac word, but its Greek equivalents, *μυστήριον* "mystery" and *συμβούλιον* "symbol" occur sparingly in the homilies and do not occupy the same central position that they do in Ephrem's genuine works. *Μυστήριον* (and cognates) occurs in four of the Ephraem Graecus works, *Abraham and Isaac I*, *Abraham and Isaac II*, *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, and *Homily on When the Wise Men Came to Jerusalem*. In examining its usage in this corpus, I am looking for points of contact with the Ephremic tradition. I seek to see how Ephraem Graecus uses the term, and to what extent that usage is an adaptation of Ephrem's term, a misunderstanding of it, a departure from it, or something entirely different.

I shall take up the occurrence in *Homily on When the Wise Men Came to Jerusalem* first. The quotation occurs in an exclamation to the audience immediately after the homilist relates the wise men coming to where they child was. "Who, in searching, would find this kind of birth? What word would lay hold of this manner of mystery for itself? [Τίς τὸν τοῦ μυστηρίου τρόπον καταλήψεται λόγος;] Let no human thought attempt to come before the ineffable, for there remains no use there for reason, only for faith."<sup>17</sup> The occurrence of *μυστήριον* is in a question parallel with the question about the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth that occurs directly before it. The use of *μυστήριον* could be nothing more than a poetic restatement of the previous thought, though this time looking at the birth from the perspective of the *λόγος* now born. There is something Ephremic in the phrasing of the *λόγος* taking hold of the mystery for himself in his birth. For Ephrem, Christ is "the painter of his

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Tanios Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de Saint Ephrem le Syrien*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit 16 (Mount Lebanon: Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik Press, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> *Homily on When the Wise Men Came to Jerusalem*, ¶9.

own *râzê*,”<sup>18</sup> which Ephrem envisions as a kind of portrait.<sup>19</sup> Ephrem writes, “Created beings are not capable;/ you alone are capable of painting the portrait./They [the prophets, kings, and priests of the Old Testament] indeed drew the lines of your portrait;/ you at your coming brought it to completion.”<sup>20</sup> So the idea that Christ creates his own *râzê*/μυστήριον and only completes it at his incarnation is an idea found in both Ephrem and Ephraem Graecus. Its usage in Ephraem Graecus is, however, more brief than the fully developed image that we find in Ephrem, and the homily does nothing further with the word. In Ephraem Graecus it is a reminiscence of the concept, perhaps a borrowed term vaguely remembered from one of Ephrem’s genuine writings but lacking the depth that Ephrem put into the metaphor. Of course, the usage of the term μυστήριον in the homily could be a simple reference to the incarnation as a mystery (perhaps with the word’s usage in 1 Timothy 3:16 in mind). But the example in *Homily on When the Wise Men Came to Jerusalem* is both the weakest link of μυστήριον in the Ephraem Graecus corpus to Ephrem’s *râzê* and the most indicative of the overall trend of Ephraem Graecus’ usage of Ephrem’s material: awareness without complete understanding, usage without full exploration.

The other three homilies that use the term μυστήριον all use it in reference to the Genesis 22 story. In *Abraham and Isaac I* and *II* this usage is not surprising, since that is the portion of text that they are examining. As discussed earlier, *râzê* can be a synonym for term

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<sup>18</sup> Beck, *Paschalhymnen, de Crucifixione*, II:5.

<sup>19</sup> For an exploration of this metaphor in Ephrem’s genuine works, see Sidney Griffith, “The Image of the Image Maker in the Poetry of St. Ephraem the Syrian,” in *Studia Patristica* ed. E. A. Livingstone, vol. 25 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 258-269.

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian; Hymns* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 386.

*tupsê*, “type,” and the Genesis 22 story is one in which many typological connections between the story of Isaac and Christ’s sacrifice can be made.

Its presence in *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*<sup>21</sup> is a bit surprising since the subject matter is the eponymous book and Genesis 22 is the only section of Scripture outside of the book of Jonah that is discussed. The reference comes amid the discussion of the children of Nineveh, who ask their parents on which day the destruction of the city will come. The parents, the homilist tells us, are choked up with emotion, not wanting their children to spend their final days in grief. So the parents lie to their children, saying that God will stop the coming wrath. The homilist likens this parental deception to Abraham answering Isaac’s question, “Where is the ram?” and telling the two lads that “Both I and Isaac are going up atop the mountain, then we shall return to you.”<sup>22</sup> Ephraem Graecus writes, “Isaac, the speaking lamb, asked, ‘O Father, where is the sheep for the sacrifice?’ But Abraham did not reveal the mystery (τὸ μυστήριον), lest in any way Isaac might be grieved and his gift soiled.”<sup>23</sup> “The mystery” in this context seems to be nothing more than the information that Isaac is to be the sacrifice. But Ephraem Graecus pushes the point further, in the second and final use of the term *μυστήριον* in the homily. The lie the Ninevites tell their children and Abraham’s comments are unwitting prophecy. Even though it is a deception at the time, the speaker is acting as a “prophet of truth.” The lesson Ephraem Graecus draws from these prophetic utterances is, “The tongue of Abraham knew the fullness of his heart and while his mind remained slow, his tongue prophesied. The mouth has a habit of learning

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<sup>21</sup> *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, ¶18-20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶19-20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶19.



from the heart; it teaches the other the mysteries about to come (τὰ μέλλοντα μυστήρια).”<sup>24</sup> In this passage, which may come from the genuine Ephrem (scholars are divided),<sup>25</sup> *râzê/μυστήριον* is used as a catch-all term for prophecy. It is not specifically the typological relationship between Isaac and Christ that the *Abraham and Isaac* homilies expound. Rather it is used to demonstrate the universal ability of humans, whether an exemplar of faith like Abraham or sinners like the Ninevite adults, to grasp divine truths through their heart, which has a closer relationship to the divine than does the mind. The “mystery” that Abraham thought he was concealing was simply the information about the sacrificial victim’s identity. In speaking though, his heart taught his mouth to utter another “mystery” which is a prophecy. That “mystery” in turn shows the audience of Ephraem Graecus’ homily how the Scriptures can be read, referring at once to one thing but having larger implications.

*Abraham and Isaac I* uses the root twice, the noun once and once in adverbial form (*μυστικῶς*). I shall examine the adverbial usage first, since it occurs first in the homily and is used in conjunction with another symbolic term, *προσημαῖνον*. The immediate context of these words is a discussion about the Sabek Bush, an exegetical puzzle stemming from the LXX’s transliteration rather than translation of a Hebrew word. Ephraem Graecus writes, “The Sabek Bush is interpreted (ἐρμηνεύει) as Remission/Release (for the Lord released the son of the old man from sacrifice).”<sup>26</sup> Ephraem Graecus moves forward typologically, “The

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶19-20.

<sup>25</sup> Suh, *From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek*, 85-8.

<sup>26</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶9. Ephraem Graecus here engages in some Syriac exegesis. The root *ܥܡܡ* means “release, remit, forgive,” but it is linguistically unrelated to the Hebrew word *סבך*, “bush” or the Peshitta’s translation, *ܬܠܚܬܐ*. However, the Greek author proceeds down an avenue of exegesis based on the Syriac root’s homophony with *σαβελ*.

cross is a symbol (προσημαῖνον) of remission for the sins of the world and the new life provided. The ram caught in the Sabek Bush mystically (μυστικῶς) ransomed only Isaac, but the Lamb of God being hung on the cross saved the world from Death and Hades.” The symbolic (προσημαῖνον) language is relatively straightforward here: the concrete object of the cross symbolically stands for the larger theological complex of the crucifixion. The use of the “mystery/mystical” language in the next sentence appears to very much fit the typological sense of *râzê*. The Sabek Bush (and Ram) have a fully-formed and complete role in the Isaac story, yet also prefigure the greater act in salvation history. The “mystery” term here would fit with Ephrem’s conception of *râzê*, but nothing about its usage suggests that we should view it as anything particularly Ephremic rather than simply an example of typological exegesis.

The other incidence of “mystery” language comes at the very end of the homily, when Ephraem Graecus draws his homiletical conclusions from the story. He notes that although God enjoyed the smoke of the fat from the ram sacrifice, living sacrifices are the most pleasing. God’s intent, Ephraem Graecus tells us, is not to have Abraham commit infanticide, but to show that he exceedingly loved God. “Wherefore God showed a mystery, as to Abraham’s love, great and incredible; for through his sacrifice, he became a priest. He made him in the type of a prophet. And God the Most High made it known to him that he was about to give over his own only-begotten son on behalf of the world.”<sup>27</sup> Here we get a multifaceted image more reminiscent of Ephrem’s thought. Abraham performs a sacrifice, and therefore is a priest although no priesthood (aside from that of Melchizedek) exists at this point in biblical history. Abraham also becomes a prophet. Abraham, through his love, came

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶14.

to a place where the divine plan is expressed in types. Without the presence of Abraham to put it into a context where it hints at later parts of the divine economy, the ram caught in the Sabek Bush is simply a trapped animal. So Abraham is a prophet in the sense that he acts out a mystery that shows the course of God's plan, as well as one who is told explicitly by God what is to happen. By acting Abraham helps create the "mystery" which God then expounds to him. The usage here is closer to the genuine Ephrem's conception of *râzê*, perhaps stemming from the pen of a close disciple of Ephrem's, or an astute reader of his.

*Abraham and Isaac II* is one of the more theologically complex pieces in the Ephraem Graecus corpus. Mystery language occurs throughout the homily, with *μυστήριον* and cognates appearing ten times, "symbol" (*σημαίνω*) three times, as well as twelve *τύπος*-derived words. Typological connections between Isaac and Christ is the primary hermeneutic the author of *Abraham and Isaac II* uses to interpret the story. Unlike the other *Abraham and Isaac* homilies, where the command to sacrifice Isaac is met with consternation and trauma for Abraham, in *Abraham and Isaac II*, "neither did he lose faith, nor did he submit to a stumbling block, but he saw Christ typified (*ἐκτυπούμενον*) and he brought together the fulfillment of the plan. He saw in his own son the Son of God and he brought together the power of the mystery (*τοῦ μυστηρίου τὴν δύναμιν*)."<sup>28</sup> In *Abraham and Isaac I*, as we just discussed, Abraham is granted understanding of the mystery after his actions; here he understands the typology and mystery from the very beginning. Additionally, the mystery is something beyond and different from the typology. Abraham sees the typological connection and then responds with an action that enables the mystery. In these two sentences it is not the

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<sup>28</sup> *Abraham and Isaac II*, ¶6.

type that is in parallel with the mystery, but “the power of the mystery” and “the (divine) plan.”

The idea that the mystery is synonymous with the as-yet-unrevealed divine *οἰκονομία* (though this is referred to throughout the homily as “the plan” (ἡ προαίρεσις)) persists strongly throughout the homily. After a lengthy digression exploring whether the thickets and ram appeared out of non-being, Ephraem Graecus returns to the core of his homily, “But finally, returning to the matter at hand, let us speak what was the situation of Isaac, so that we might learn the mystery of God.”<sup>29</sup> That mystery is precisely the complex layering of the biblical story, in which Ephraem Graecus sees so many bits and pieces that also speak about the crucifixion.

O the greatest of mysteries which are hidden in the smallest of types! O divinity, which approaches the mind for the forgiveness of sins! O greatest power which laughs at the rashness of the devil! Isaac was led onto the altar, but the ram was sacrificed; the child spoke, but the ram was silent. The young child contended but the sheep was crowned. Isaac went so that he might find this sort of grace. The ram passed by and brought together this sort of purpose. The sheep appeared and the mystery was hidden from Isaac; the sheep was sacrificed and the young lad lived.

Isaac was loosed and the sheep bound. The ram caught and the lad released.<sup>30</sup>

The “smallest of types” for Ephraem Graecus are the details in the story, all of which point towards the greater act in Christ. As Ephraem Graecus explores the story he sees more and more connections between the Aqedah and the Crucifixion; these are so pervasive that the

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶23.

two narratives become but two different ways of stating the “plan,” which allows the audience to better understand their creator. The sort of ecstatic joy in seeing the “plan” by perceiving the mysteries hidden in types recalls the genuine Ephrem’s approach to Scripture:

In every place, if you look, his symbol is there,  
and wherever you read, you will find his types.  
  
For in him all creatures were created and he  
traced his symbols on his property. When he was  
creating the world, he looked to adorn it  
with icons of himself.<sup>31</sup>

The author of this Ephraem Graecus homily, though writing in Greek prose, has captured something of the symbolic theology with which Ephrem composed his Syriac poetry. However, similarities in style and thought do not indicate common authorship.

### **Nature vs. Piety**

The relationship between Nature and Piety is something that both the Ephraem Graecus homilies and the poetry of Ephrem explore and so can provide another data point with which to examine the link between the two corpora.

The *Homily on Abraham* and *Abraham and Isaac I* both diagnose the same theological issue at the heart of the Binding of Isaac episode, the conflict between “Nature” and, broadly, “the Divine.” Nature represents natural, logical considerations based upon the realities of life. It is mundane thought, but not altogether negative.<sup>32</sup> The love that Abraham

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<sup>31</sup> Beck, *Ephrem des Syrsers, Hymnen de Virginitate*, XX:12.

<sup>32</sup> It is the positive aspect of φύσις that keeps it from being a stand in for the Pauline concept of σάρξ. Abraham (and Sarah) are right to love their child, but in this particular instance that love is a hindrance to carrying out God’s command. For the most part, though, “nature” is a force which acts

has for Isaac, his son, is natural and positive, yet it is this force that Abraham must overcome. In *Abraham*, after Abraham and Isaac arrive at Mt. Moriah, the preacher exclaims about Abraham, “How were nature (φύσις) and piety (εὐσέβεια) contending inside of him?”, and then has φύσις ask him directly, “Would you spare the child (Οὐ φείδῃ παιδός), old man, since you do not have another besides him? Would you become a father by will alone?”<sup>33</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I* makes many of these same points through Sarah’s dialogue, “Spare, spare my natural-born (φείσαι τῆς φύσεως), spare my son... he is both the first and the last in my pangs... Do not cut off the one bunch of grapes which we planted when we finally became fruitful in old age.”<sup>34</sup>

Opposing “Nature” is “Piety.” Ignoring the command of God and saving Isaac so he can produce children is a “natural” consideration for Abraham. “Indeed, these kinds of things nature puts forth as just and proper as it seems, but on the other hand, piety equally opposes the wisdom of nature.”<sup>35</sup> The author of *Abraham and Isaac I* describes how it was through the works or “promise” (ὑπόσχεσις) of God that the “dead” womb of Sarah and the virgin womb of Mary conceived.<sup>36</sup> Naturally speaking, neither of those conceptions could have happened, but by human belief in God and God’s action in response to that faith, miraculous things occurred. While *Abraham and Isaac I* speaks of God’s “promise,” *Abraham* uses “piety,” (εὐσέβεια). These terms serve very similar functions within the homilies (both

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against the divine purpose. The conflict between φύσις and εὐσέβεια in these homilies reads very much like the conflict between σάρξ and πνεῦμα in Romans 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶10.

<sup>34</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶8.

<sup>35</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶11.

<sup>36</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶3.

oppose “Nature”) and only differ in terms of objectivity vs. subjectivity. Piety is an inner attribute of Abraham whereby he reacts favorably to the divine. God’s promise is a force exterior to Abraham, operating in the universe, but to which Abraham can respond.

Just as “nature” spoke through the hypothetical Abraham earlier in *Abraham*, “piety” speaks as the two contend within Abraham as he puzzles over what to do with God’s command. Piety tries to convince Abraham of the centrality of God in the cosmos. “You have nothing that you did not receive from the creator... Do you love your son? If you love your son, you love my command. No one can fully comprehend the mind of the Lord.”<sup>37</sup> Eventually, piety wins out, or as *Abraham and Isaac I* phrases it “Abraham exceeded his own nature and esteemed more the commandment of God than that of nature.”<sup>38</sup> Abraham carries out God’s command and is praised for it.

Nature and its relationship to the divine also appears in the exegetical terminology of the genuine Ephrem. Sidney Griffith identifies Nature and Scripture as “the twin sources of revelation” for Ephrem.<sup>39</sup> Griffith finds the idea best expressed in a *madrāshā De Paradiso*,

Look and see how Nature and Scripture  
are yoked together for the Husbandman:  
Nature abhors adulterers,  
practicers of magic and murderers;  
Scripture abhors them too.

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<sup>37</sup> *Abraham*, ¶11. Piety, or Abraham’s inner thought process as influenced by piety, is speaking here, even though it refers to “my command,” suggesting that the voice comes from God. The very next sentence speaks of God in the third person.

<sup>38</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶11.

<sup>39</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, *“Faith Adoring the Mystery”: Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian*, The Pere Marquette Lecture in Theology 1997 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), 19.

Once Nature and Scripture had cleaned the land

- they sowed in it the new commandments

in the land of the heart so that it might bear fruit,

praise for the Lord of Nature

glory for the Lord of Scripture.<sup>40</sup>

In another place, Ephrem, “likens Nature and the two testaments to three lyres, to the accompaniment of which the Word of God sings; the lyre of Nature testifies that it is Christ himself who sings to the lyre of Moses and the lyre of the Gospel.”<sup>41</sup> The idea of nature working together with the divine (for Ephrem, “Scripture”) is completely foreign to the Ephraem Graecus homilies. These two forces are, in fact, in diametric opposition. It seems hardly possible that the same author who yoked together nature with the Scriptures could also have written, “for the [divine] promise is alien to nature.”<sup>42</sup> The Ephraem Graecus homilies show an antipathy for the natural and mundane that the genuine Ephrem did not share, and which perhaps derives from the Greek milieu in which they were created that tended to devalue the body over the mind.

In conclusion, the Ephraem Graecus homilies appears to be a mixed bag when examined in light of one particular favorite term of Ephrem’s to describe his symbolic theological approach to Scripture. At its very basic level, the usage of *μυστήριον* in Ephraem Graecus can be viewed as synonymous with “type.” In other places there seems to be

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<sup>40</sup> Sebastian Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian; Hymns on Paradise*, (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 191.

<sup>41</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, “Disclosing the Mystery: The Hermeneutics of Typology in Syriac Exegesis; Jacob of Serug on Genesis XXII.” Unpublished, 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶3.



something greater than typology that Ephraem Graecus is trying to hint at. I used the term “reminisces” of the genuine Ephrem’s symbolic theology to characterize the relationship between the two. Then *Abraham and Isaac II* displays something quite close to Ephrem’s approach to Scripture and view of the *râzê*. However, *μυστήριον* appears in only four of the Ephrem Graecus biblical homily corpus. The absence in so many of these texts of so important a concept in Ephrem’s thought and the general lack of a developed symbolic theology akin to that found in his genuine works is to me the strongest piece of internal evidence that the Ephraem Graecus works are inauthentic. The sporadic usage of just this one, admittedly limited, item of Ephrem’s theological lexicon indicates that the author(s) of the Ephraem Graecus corpus are aware of Ephrem’s literary and theological legacy, but do not fully utilize it. Or, perhaps more fairly, the contexts into which they are writing are different and require something theologically different than what Ephrem had produced. Let us not think that it was the goal of the author(s) of Ephraem Graecus to continue to replicate Ephrem’s work *ad infinitum*.

### **The Biblical Exegesis of Ephrem’s Prose Commentaries**

In addition to the numerous *mêmrê* and *madrâshê* Ephrem wrote, also extant are prose commentaries on Genesis, Exodus and the Diatesseron. These works, being in a different genre, evince a different approach to Scripture, one which the Ephraem Graecus corpus very much preserves and develops. Ephrem’s prose commentaries have been characterized as “close to that of ‘rewritten Bible,’”<sup>43</sup> and “much more close to Jewish Haggadah than to the more familiar exegesis of Western Christianity.”<sup>44</sup> Ephrem proceeds through the books of Genesis and Exodus and retells the stories, supplementing their

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<sup>43</sup> Ter Haar Romeny, “Exegesis, Old Testament,” 157.

<sup>44</sup> Mathews & Amar, *Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, 63.

narratives with additional material which fills the Bible's own gaps. To take one brief example from the exegesis of Genesis 22, "But he [Abraham] 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 the sacrifice, just as she had participated in the promise of his son."<sup>45</sup> The Ephraem Graecus homily *Abraham* is rather similar on this point, "But he did not tell the mother of the child about the upcoming slaughter. Understand the thing that would have happened, had he not hid the undertaking. She would bury with tears the one she bore. She would follow her child on a journey to death. She would go together with the one who would not return again."<sup>46</sup> Ephraem Graecus does not aver that Sarah would have participated in the sacrifice, as Ephrem does, but rather argues that she would prefer to die because of the grief. Both authors directly address the audience at this point in their homilies and develop the character of Sarah in a similar fashion. Both authors step inside the biblical figures to give insight into the personalities and temperaments of the different characters, just as they explore the reason Abraham does not tell Sarah about his plan in a parallel style.

Ephrem's exegesis in his Commentaries eschews the heavily symbolic and highly typological approach of his poetry. The Commentaries are interested in the "plain sense" of the text, remaining within the canonical boundaries of the stories.<sup>47</sup> "The term 'historical exegesis' (Ephrem uses the term 'factual', *su 'rānāyā*) is justified, in that the historical framework of the Bible constitutes the starting-point of the interpretation."<sup>48</sup> Ephrem delves

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>46</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶7.

<sup>47</sup> Jeffrey Wickes, "Ephrem's Interpretation of Genesis," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 I (2008), 45-6.

into the individual stories and seeks to inhabit the minds of the characters. In his treatment of the story of Lot's daughters,<sup>49</sup> Ephrem inserts a created speech for the elder daughter, creating a shift from the third person narrator of Scripture to a more personalized, dramatic presentation of the event. Ephrem has sympathy for the plight of the daughters, and expands the narrative to give us insights into their decision making.<sup>50</sup> He quotes Gen 19:32 (italicized) but then seamlessly transitions into dialogue of his own creation, "*Let us make our father drink wine that we may preserve seed from him* and there might descend, even from us, a third world like the second from Noah and the first from Adam and Eve."<sup>51</sup> The daughters of Lot reason from their own situation and what they can observe. Ephrem does not bestow upon them any special knowledge of the divine plan, nor any information that the characters themselves would not possess. He imparts a sense of realism to his characters precisely because he takes their humanity seriously. These are not characters sublimated into an overarching divine narrative, who are important only insofar as they hint at greater truths in the future. They are human beings struggling within their own historical contexts.

### **Connection to Ephrem Unlikely**

I have discussed the ways in which the Ephraem Graecus homilies resemble, to an incomplete degree, the exegesis of the genuine Ephrem. It seems to me far more likely that the homilies are actually developments within the same exegetical tradition to which Ephrem belonged than that they were actually written by him. Ephrem's Commentaries date from late

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<sup>48</sup> van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," 624.

<sup>49</sup> Mathews & Amar, *Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, 162-4.

<sup>50</sup> Wickes, "Ephrem's Interpretation of Genesis," 53.

<sup>51</sup> Mathews & Amar, *Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, 162.

in his career,<sup>52</sup> and in the introduction Ephrem admits that he had even not wanted to write in that genre.<sup>53</sup> And yet this work's type of exegesis was the one whose popularity exploded after Ephrem. The Ephraem Graecus corpus is full of works that take the approach Ephrem demonstrates in his Commentaries but limits the scope to one story and presents the exegesis by way of a homily to a congregation. The homilies contain the "simples reminiscences éphrémiens" that Hemmerdinger-Iliadou found throughout the Ephraem Graecus corpus,<sup>54</sup> but little more. There do not appear to be any flagrant anachronisms in the Ephraem Graecus biblical corpus of the sort which Hemmerdinger-Iliadou finds in some of the ascetical works,<sup>55</sup> but nevertheless these homilies are not by Ephrem. This does not undercut their value as primary sources for Late Antique Christianity; it simply means that they are of practically no use if our interest is in the figure of Ephrem himself.

### **Anonymity and Pseudonymity**

None of the biblical works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus claim, within the text itself, to be written by Ephrem. The attribution comes from the manuscript in which the given piece is preserved. The Ephraem Graecus biblical homilies begin with an anonymous introduction and end with a concluding doxology and nowhere in between claim any name for themselves or locate themselves vis-à-vis a historical event. Some of the other Ephraem Graecus writings do have intratextual attributions, with *Testament* claiming to be the last will

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem (les versions). I. Éphrem grec./II. Éphrem latin," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique, et mystique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1961), 801.

<sup>55</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem (les versions)," 806-14.

and testament of Ephrem and *Sermo Asceticus* Ephrem's definitive statement on asceticism.<sup>56</sup> Within other works in the corpus, attribution depends on the manuscript tradition. Some manuscripts of the sermon *On the Second Coming*, e.g., have the incipit, "How shall I, Ephrem, the most insignificant and a sinner, and filled with offenses..." while others read, "How shall I, sinner and filled with offences..."<sup>57</sup> Both formulations fit the scansion of the rest of the piece, making determination of the proper reading difficult. The issue of attribution is further problematized by the fact that the Ephraem Graecus homilies have also been found among works attributed to other Church Fathers. The list includes, but is not limited to, Pseudo-Macarius, Palladios, Isaac of Nineveh, and John Chrysostom.<sup>58</sup> So not only is Ephrem not the author of these texts, but perhaps we also have the wrong pseudonym. It is possible that Pseudo-Chrysostom is the more proper pseudonym for the texts than the Greek Pseudo-Ephrem, Ephraem Graecus.

The phenomenon of pseudonymity and pseudepigraphy has been well studied within the field of Early Christianity because of the presence in the New Testament of letters of Paul whose authenticity is disputed.<sup>59</sup> Scholars have grappled with the question of determining whether or not a given work is pseudepigraphic, with people on both sides of the authenticity debate for the various deuteropauline epistles.<sup>60</sup> Much work has been done to contextualize

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<sup>56</sup> Wonmo Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek Ephrem," (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 306.

<sup>57</sup> Ephrem Lash, "The Metrical Texts of Greek Ephrem," in *Studia Patristica* vol. XXXV ed. M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 436.

<sup>58</sup> David G.K. Taylor, "St. Ephraim's Influence on the Greeks," *Hugoye* 1.2 (1998), 190.

<sup>59</sup> Foundational for the study of pseudepigraphy in Early Christianity is Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1971).

the phenomenon of pseudepigraphy in the Greco-Roman world as part of rhetorical education. Aspiring students would be tasked with writing in the persona of a famous historical figure to develop their compositional skills. This was such a common school exercise that Early Christians could use their rhetorical training to spot forged literature that one group or another was attempting to pass off as authoritative tradition.<sup>61</sup>

Scholarship on Early Christian pseudepigraphy has been drawn in by the gravitational pull of questions of forgery within the canon and tradition. Words such as “deceit” and “deception” abound in the literature as scholars attempt to characterize the intentions and motivations of the authors of pseudonymous literature.<sup>62</sup> It is an open question whether the author of the Ephraem Graecus works *Testament* and *Sermo Asceticus* is attempting to subvert or co-opt the name of Ephrem for his own theological agenda, or is attempting, out of respect for the Syrian, to update Ephrem’s legacy and make it relevant for a new generation of Christians. Suh, for the most part, dodges questions of the Ephraem Graecus’ intentions and simply indicates that the works translate Ephrem’s legacy to new audiences. Yet in the biblical homilies, there seems to be no attempt at deception or forgery. The traditional categories for understanding pseudonymous literature are inappropriate for understanding the appellation Ephrem on the Ephraem Graecus biblical works.

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<sup>60</sup> Frank W. Hughes, “Pseudonymity as Rhetoric: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Pauline Pseudepigrapha,” in *Rhetorics in the New Millenium* eds. J. D. Hester and J. D. Hester (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 217-8.

<sup>61</sup> Robert M. Grant, *Heresy and Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 89-113.

<sup>62</sup> Terry L. Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament and Deception* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004) sets aside the question of whether or not certain New Testament writings are authentic and deals entirely with the issues surrounding whether there was an intention to deceive readers with misattribution and what it means for modern day reception of the disputed books if they were.

In a recent article, Kristian Heal has examined a number of rewriting techniques found in Syriac manuscripts.<sup>63</sup> His first examined technique, “Attribution and Reattribution,” is particularly illuminating for the Ephraem Graecus works: “Less well studied are the numerous instances of re-attributing marginal *memre* and *madrashē* in order to place them under the protection of the outstretched wings of the great Syriac poets.”<sup>64</sup> Heal traces the manuscript history of a cycle of twelve *memre* on Joseph. These *memre* were attributed to Balai of Qenneshrin (the likely author) in a sixth century manuscript, but are found anonymously in a ninth century manuscript alongside works of Jacob of Serugh and Ephrem. Heal then finds the thirteenth century author Solomon of Basra citing the homily cycle and “holding it in high regard because it had been written ‘by the Blessed Mor Ephrem,’”<sup>65</sup> the attribution which would stay attached to the homily cycle until the late twentieth century. We will likely never know what caused the attribution to Balai to fall out, but Heal thinks it probable that the (false) attribution to Ephrem caused this work to survive. The famous name may have carried more weight than the literary merits of the Joseph cycle of *memre* among the scribes who preserved the documents as they set their priorities for which works to copy. Sebastian Brock laments that the genuine Ephrem’s thought has been obscured by “the misleading medieval tradition where his genuine works have been sadly abbreviated and where many mediocre poems ‘in the metre of Ephrem’ had misleadingly been attributed to him.”<sup>66</sup> I would argue it would be better to praise that misleading medieval tradition for

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<sup>63</sup> Kristian Heal, “Five Kinds of Rewriting: Appropriation, Influence and the Manuscript History of Early Syriac Literature,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 15 (2015).

<sup>64</sup> Heal, “Five Kinds of Rewriting,” 53-4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

preserving works such as those found in the Ephraem Graecus corpus that likely would not have survived without the aegis of Ephrem to protect them.

Despite Brock's characterization of the works 'in the metre of Ephrem' as mediocre, he has done substantial work in publishing and translating these falsely attributed *mémrê* with the caveat that they be treated as anonymous Syriac works.<sup>67</sup> I believe it is best to take this approach with the Ephraem Graecus writings, sever the name "Ephrem" and examine them on their own merits. Treating the attribution of these homilies as a scribal device also resolves any issues arising from the same work appearing under multiple different names in the manuscript traditions. Losing an authorial attribution removes some of the context that could be marshalled for understanding the features of the homilies, but if that attribution was false to begin with, we have lost little. Having a view into the anonymous literature of a period allows for a broader appreciation of influences and connections beyond the single lifetime of an individual.

### **The Dramatic Dialogue Poem Genre**

Many pseudonymous works in the Syriac genre of "dramatic dialogue poems"<sup>68</sup> bear the name Ephrem and have similarities with the Ephraem Graecus works. Sebastian Brock has published many of the pieces<sup>69</sup> in that corpus. Brock traces the development of this Syriac genre through its literary antecedents in ancient Mesopotamian dispute poems.<sup>70</sup> The

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<sup>66</sup> Sebastian Brock, "In Search of St. Ephrem," *Khristianskij Vostok* 6 (2013), 20.

<sup>67</sup> Brock, "In Search of St. Ephrem," 44.

<sup>68</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* eds. H.J.W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg, and G.J. Reinink, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 229 (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1987), 135-147.

<sup>69</sup> Brock, "In Search of St. Ephrem," 20.



genre began with formalized dialogue (the *sogyāthā* sing. *soghīthā*) between disputants, typically in a precedence dispute (e.g., which is more important, the body or the soul?); when it entered Christianity the disputants became two biblical characters. In the *soghīthā*'s purest form, the characters would each speak dialogue using the same syllabic pattern with alternating stanzas of equal length. The *soghīthā* was sung (and thus had a melody or *qālā*) and had an acrostic structure.<sup>71</sup> This form was altered by subsequent authors and Brock classifies these modifications as "Types" of dramatic dialogue poems, with the traditional *soghīthā* as Type I.<sup>72</sup> Type II allows for speeches of different lengths between the characters, while Type III contains more than just two characters and has a bare narrative framework. Type IV marks the point where the narrative framework becomes the primary structural feature of the poem, with the dialogue a secondary feature and not necessarily balanced between the disputants. Type V incorporates moralizing and homiletical commentary on the events, characters, and dialogues.<sup>73</sup>

The homilies in the Ephraem Graecus corpus deviate from this schema first by being in another language. The transition from Syriac into Greek has an effect on the poetic structure of the pieces.<sup>74</sup> Brock believes that his categories can still be usefully applied to

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<sup>70</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Dispute Poems: The Various Types," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East* eds. G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 42 (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 109-19. For the Mesopotamian origin of this genre of literature, see: *idem.*, "The Dispute Poem: From Sumer to Syriac," *Journal of the Canadian Society of Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), 3-10.

<sup>71</sup> Brock, "Syriac Dispute Poems," 109.

<sup>72</sup> Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 135.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 135-8.

<sup>74</sup> Sebastian Brock, "From Ephrem to Romanos," *Studia Patristica XX* (1989), 142-3.

even prose texts in Greek,<sup>75</sup> and I follow his classification schema. I find the content and form with which the Ephraem Graecus homilies present their commentary on the biblical text is similar enough to Brock's dramatic dialogue poem types to warrant the application of his categories to these works. The genre proved to be so influential and popular in Syriac that Greek works were not only translated from Syriac originals,<sup>76</sup> but new pieces were composed in Greek on the same model. The style was adapted from one language into another, and once in Greek evolved further in terms of that language's poetic structure. Some homilies are strictly prose,<sup>77</sup> while others were written in the developing *kontakia* genre<sup>78</sup> or simply kept a remnant of the isosyllabic structure of their Syriac ancestor.<sup>79</sup>

There remains nothing of the precedence dispute type of dramatic dialogue poem in the Ephraem Graecus homilies. Rather than an argument between two characters forming the framework of the piece, the shape of the biblical narrative provides the backbone of the homilies. In terms of Brock's types, the Ephraem Graecus homilies straddle the divide between Brock's Type IV and Type V. Brock is interested in the evolution of the style from the *soghīthā* genre and so creates his categories based on deviations from that form. I choose to focus on the homily's treatment of biblical narrative, rather than the relationship of the works to the dispute poem genre, so I use Brock's categories to locate the distinction between Type IV and V as whether the characters, action, and dialogue or the preacher's homiletical

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<sup>75</sup> Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 138.

<sup>76</sup> For example, the Ephraem Graecus work *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Ephrem le Syrien, sermon sur Jonas (text grec inédit)," *Le Muséon* 30 (1967), 47-74.

<sup>77</sup> E.g., the works of Basil of Seleucia. Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 145.

<sup>78</sup> Brock, "From Ephrem to Romanos," 143.

<sup>79</sup> Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 145.

commentary is more central to the work as a whole.<sup>80</sup> The longer pieces, *On the All-Beautiful Joseph*, *On Cain and the Murder of Abel*, and *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, are Type IV as is *Homily on Abraham*, while the rest are Type V. The distinction between the two categories is admittedly fluid, as the pieces I have labelled as Type IV contain moralizing material, but I judge the emphasis of the piece to be on the biblical narrative rather than the commentary.

An illustration of the distinction between these two Types of dramatic dialogue poem can be seen in the different ways that the author makes the point about the typological similarity between Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and God's of Jesus in the Type IV *Abraham* and the Type V *Abraham and Isaac II*. In *Abraham*, the typological significance of Abraham's actions is explained in God's expanded speech to Abraham telling him to stay his hand:

"In your darkness I hint at the truth of the complete holy marvels which are coming in heaven. For I, too, have an only-begotten, Abraham. You do not go wrong. Since you gave your son, not sparing him, I too will hand over my only-begotten, after a short amount of time. As you gave your son to me, I too, will give mine for you and those of your nature."<sup>81</sup>

Though the dialogue is created by the author, it nevertheless occurs within the framework of the biblical story. The typological point that Ephraem Graecus is making to his audience,

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<sup>80</sup> The division between character actions and dialogue is much greater within the Syriac works, hence this is why Brock makes that the basis for his categorizations. By the time the Syriac Dramatic Dialogue Poem style has reached the Greek language we find in the Ephraem Graecus homilies, there is little distinction between the things the characters say and the things the characters do. Character can be developed as much by things the narrator says as by words the narrator puts into the mouths of the characters.

<sup>81</sup> *Abraham*, ¶14.

though, is placed in the mouth of a character in the Genesis narrative as an extension of his canonical speech. In addition to the divine voice telling Abraham that his fear of the Lord is now known, the divine voice (here identified with God) now goes a step further to make known to Abraham the divine plan regarding the Son. A character in the biblical narrative articulates the exegetical point the homily's author wishes to make.

By way of contrast, the author of *Abraham and Isaac II* expounds the typological point in his own voice.

Did he know the intention of the command? That God would repent, or that it was false, or that he would not raise Isaac from the dead? No. For if he did not believe the way he did, he would not have begun the sacrifice, just as the Apostle said.

6. Therefore, neither did he lose faith, nor did he submit to a stumbling block, but he saw Christ typified, and he brought together the fulfillment of the plan. He saw in his own son the Son of God and he brought together the power of the mystery. He saw in his own test the profit of many.<sup>82</sup>

The preacher of this homily makes Abraham aware of the typological connection between Christ and Isaac from the moment he is given the command to sacrifice his son. Yet the preacher is not just retelling the story. The first three sentences of ¶6 could be construed as an expanded narrative, with the author eschewing the Hebrew Bible's typical focus on events and actions and instead giving the audience a view into Abraham's thoughts. The audience would then be invited to share in his spiritual vision which allows him to perceive Christ and his action in the divine economy. However, the end of ¶5 clearly indicates that we are within the realm of a homily. The preacher's didactic voice poses rhetorical questions for the

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<sup>82</sup> *Abraham and Isaac II*, ¶5-6.

audience, answers them, and then provides the ramifications of that answer. He is teaching the text to the audience and drawing their attention to particular points in it; he is not retelling it.

Both *Abraham* and *Abraham and Isaac II* instruct their audiences about the typological relationship between Christ and Isaac. The chief difference is the way in which the homilies present that information and this difference is what Brock seeks to delineate with his labels of Type IV and Type V Dialogue Poems. The author of *Abraham* (a Type IV poem) places his Christian interpretation of the story into the mouth of an Old Testament character, making its revelation part of the story. In contrast, the author of *Abraham and Isaac II* (a Type V) stops retelling the story to speak the intended typological message directly to his audience.

### **The Ephraem Graecus Homilies and Syriac and Greek Exegetical Literature**

Certain biblical episodes “caught the imagination of early Syriac writers,”<sup>83</sup> particularly the story of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, Mary and the Angel (the Annunciation), Mary and Joseph, the Sinful Woman and the Descent into Sheol. In addition to the substantial overlap these topics have with the subjects of the Ephraem Graecus homilies, many anonymous dialogue poems have been written in Syriac on these stories. By comparing the style of exegesis performed in this genre of Syriac literature, we can observe whether this is an appropriate genre classification for the Ephraem Graecus homilies.

To examine the relationship between the Ephraem Graecus homilies and other exegetical literature of the fourth and fifth century, I shall focus on the dramatic

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<sup>83</sup> Brock, “From Ephrem to Romanos,” 144.

interpretations of the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17) as a test case. In the Syriac dramatic dialogue poem genre, we see the story explored in a fifth century metrical poem attributed to Ephrem by the lone manuscript that preserves it. This attribution is likely false,<sup>84</sup> but as discussed earlier the name Ephrem became attached to many metrical pieces of literature. We pick up the story when Elijah has been sent to the widow after God ceases to feed him through the ravens (1 Kgs 17:8).

He approached and stood there before her,/ he opened his mouth and addressed her,/ “By your life, woman, bring me/ a little water, for I am thirsty;/ I am a foreigner passing by,/ and I am tormented by thirst.”/ She went to fetch him some water,/ and then he turned round and asked her for bread:/ But the woman replied and said/ to Elijah after this:/ “Are you a stranger to the world,/ and have not heard what has happened?/ There is a certain man called Elijah/ who has held back the heaven from giving rain;/ no one sows and no one reaps,/ no one treads and no one stores up./ The royal granaries are bare,/ and you are asking a widow for bread?/ No, by the Lord whom I worship,/ your maidservant does not possess a thing,”<sup>85</sup>

We see a similar exchange in the Ephraem Graecus homily, *On the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, with the chief difference being that Ephraem Graecus’ widow is not ignorant of Elijah’s identity.

Elijah stopped and turned there, and he saw the widow gathering sticks. He knew the final need that was in her, and he was ashamed to speak or talk to her. At the same time, he blushed and was attempting to fulfill the command, and as if he were bold he

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<sup>84</sup> Sebastian Brock, “Syriac Poetry on Biblical Themes. I, The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Sarepta,” *The Harp* 3 no. 1&2 (1990), 77.

<sup>85</sup> Brock, “Syriac Poetry on Biblical Themes. I, The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Sarepta,” 83.

finally said in a small voice, “Woman, give me a sip of water so that I can drink.”

(For this one was the one who prevented the dew upon the earth). And the widow cried to Elijah, “O Zealot! The oath of your tongue locked up the heavens so that they would not give rain, so why do you ask me for water? You check your tongue, you restrain the dry earth, you put all the things on it to death, so from where shall I get this water to give to you?”<sup>86</sup>

These poems share several similarities in the way they expand the biblical narrative. The actual story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17 is a narrative without much detail or developed characters. The motivations of the characters are likewise unclear. At first God provides ravens in the wilderness to feed Elijah as well as water from a nearby wadi (1 Kgs 17:4-6). In the very next verse the narrator relates in a matter-of-fact way that, “After a while the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land.”<sup>87</sup> God then speaks to Elijah, sending him to Zarephath, to the widow for nourishment. Both the anonymous Syriac poem and the Ephraem Graecus homily fill out the details of the story. The wadi dries up because God sees that Elijah’s situation in the desert with his needs attended to has made the prophet complacent and inactive and God wishes to spur him into action.<sup>88</sup> In the biblical narrative the woman immediately complies with Elijah’s request for water and does not acquiesce to his request for bread only because she has just enough for a final meal with her son. Both

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<sup>86</sup> *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, ¶6.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Kgs 17:7.

<sup>88</sup> “Since the merciful one wanted to save the world and change Elijah’s mind, he made the water dry up so that Elijah, thirsty for water and weary might loose the sentence against the stumbling ones with which he had bound them in his zeal.” *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, ¶3, and “And our Lord said in response/ to the words of Elijah,/ ‘You should realize, Elijah, what you have done;/ if just a day or two’s hunger/ causes you such perturbation,/ what should all creation do,/ seeing that its children die from hunger?’” Brock, “Syriac Poetry on Biblical Themes. I, The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Sarepta,” 83.

exegetical treatments of this episode keep these base facts, but add that the widow blames Elijah for her plight. The widow in the anonymous Syriac poem does not know she is speaking to Elijah, but nevertheless notes that it is his hard-heartedness that has put her in such dire straits. Ephraem Graecus' widow castigates Elijah for having the temerity to approach her to ask for the sustenance he is withholding from the land.

Though the anonymous Syriac poem and *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet* make different exegetical decisions as they expand the biblical narrative, they do so in similar ways. They both identify the central exegetical problem in the story as Elijah's overzealousness. This is a development away from the biblical story where the repercussions of Elijah's drought are downplayed vis-à-vis his ability to work the miracles of sealing up the heavens, creating food from the widow's meager supplies, and resurrecting the widow's son. Elijah's zeal is made his primary character attribute, both for good and ill. At the end of the homilies God's mercy prevails over the prophet's zealously in a manner reminiscent of the conflict in Jonah 4.<sup>89</sup> The widow's character is made more dramatic as well, and she provides a foil for Elijah, castigating him for being the root cause of the misfortunes brought on by the famine. All of these exegetical developments on the story come within the framework of an expanded retelling of the biblical story. The preachers do not provide commentary in their own voices about how to understand the story; rather they make their point by adding color and depth to the characters of the canonical narrative and allowing these newly dynamic characters to entertain and instruct their audiences

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<sup>89</sup> In the Syriac poem, when God orders the ravens to no longer bring food to Elijah, Elijah is so grieved as to ask God to take his life. God replies "Have the ravens caused you some trouble and failed to serve you as they were bidden?" Brock, *Syriac Poetry on Biblical Themes. I, The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Sarepta*, 82. The anonymous author here puts the ravens in the place of Jonah's castor bean plant.



## Greek Connections

As mentioned previously the Ephraem Graecus works are preserved in the manuscript traditions of several authors. To take one example from the biblical corpus, *Abraham and Isaac I* is not only found in the *spuria* of John Chrysostom,<sup>90</sup> but its contents are remarkably similar to the final section of Gregory of Nyssa's homily *On the Divinity of the Son and the Spirit*.<sup>91</sup> Mercati, operating from the assumption that the Ephraem Graecus work was a translation of the genuine Ephrem, postulated that Gregory used the Ephraem Graecus work as a source when composing his homily. Since, however that work is inauthentic it need not necessarily predate Gregory, and taking this view, Ephrem Lash argues that the Ephraem Graecus homily is a reworked expansion of that portion of Gregory's sermon.<sup>92</sup> This is but one example drawn from the Ephraem Graecus biblical corpus, but it points to a number of different issues when it comes to contextualizing these works. I have already argued that the name Ephrem should be put aside when analyzing these works, but what does it mean that for *Abraham and Isaac I*, the figure of Gregory of Nyssa might be the most important? I have noted that the Ephrem Graecus homilies bear a striking resemblance to a number of anonymous or pseudonymous Syriac works, and they also can be found among the corpora of

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<sup>90</sup> Jose de Aldama, *Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965), 11.

<sup>91</sup> Silvius Mercati, *S. Ephraem Syri Opera Tomus Primus* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute: 1915), 19-30.

<sup>92</sup> Ephrem Lash, "The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian," in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* eds. A. Louth, D.E. Conomos, K. Ware, and J. Behr (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 92-3.

Pseudo-Macarius and Pseudo-Chrysostom. In studying these texts we are adrift, with only other pseudonymous works and authors as points of reference.

Without figures and names to help trace lines of influence and dependence, one must look at similarities in form and content between different works. The Ephraem Graecus homilies are not lemmatized commentaries, so the similarities that they have with the works of Diodore, and Theodore, for example, are only in the realm of theological sensibilities. The exegesis done on the page looks quite different. The imaginative retelling of biblical stories style of exegesis, found so frequently in Syriac sources is relatively uncommon in Greek exegetical literature. It is found most frequently in the works of Pseudo-Chrysostom<sup>93</sup> and Basil of Seleucia.<sup>94</sup> Both of these “authors” are frequently cited, along with Ephraem Graecus, as sources for Romanos the Melodist.<sup>95</sup> The two “authors” are also thought to be influences on each other, creating the picture of a literary environment where ideas and motifs are shared and appropriated among writers.<sup>96</sup>

The corpora of Pseudochrysostomica is vast and the number of works attributable to Basil of Seleucia, while smaller, is nevertheless too large to completely survey here. I shall examine an excerpt from a homily by each author in which they engage in a dramatic

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<sup>93</sup> Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, vol 2. (Leiden, Brill, 2004), 785-6: “These Pseudochrysostomica, well studied (De Aldama, Carter, Aubineua, Sieben), are often referring to Scripture in sermons for liturgical feasts (4500-5197). They can only be compared with the so-called ‘*Ephraem Graecus*,’ remarkably inventoried in 3900-4175 [in the CPG], which is another collection of anonymous homilies.”

<sup>94</sup> Brock, “Dramatic Dialogue Poems,” 145.

<sup>95</sup> Kannengiesser (*Handbook*, vol. 2, 919) cites Basil’s use of dramatic dialogue as a feature that reappears in Romanos’ *kontakia*, while Ephrem Lash (trans., *On the Life of Christ*, [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995]) notes Pseudo-Chrysostom as an influence.

<sup>96</sup> De Aldama, *Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum*, 165-6.

retelling of the biblical narrative. I have chosen selections from homilies where a biblical character has an expanded dialogue filled with pathos in a similar style to those found in the Ephraem Graecus corpus. I do not argue that these texts used Ephraem Graecus as a source, or even knew of them. Rather, they show literary activity within early fifth century Greek Christianity in which the writers dramatize biblical dialogue and emphasize the dramatic pathos of the scenes.

**Pseudo-Chrysostom's *In Eliam Prophetam. Sermo* and Basil of Seleucia's *In Sanctam Eliam***

The Pseudo-Chrysostom homily on Elijah and the widow of Zarephath is thought to be a source for Basil of Seleucia's homily on the same topic.<sup>97</sup> Both of these authors portray Elijah's needing to be pushed towards care for humanity (φιλανθρωπία) as the central conflict of the story. I shall take an excerpt from each of the homilies that concerns a moment shortly after Elijah has been informed of the widow's son's death and compare the excerpts in question to the Ephraem Graecus homily on this story.

**Pseudo-Chrysostom**

*"Woe is me, Lord, the witness of the widow, with whom I have lived with her!"* What was it that he wanted to say? "From you," he said, "The witness about the woman came to me. You," he said, "said, *I am commanding the woman to nourish you.* Completely I witnessed the woman's inclination towards piety. You sent me to her from those places, and in her you esteemed the testimony I had from you, and now

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<sup>97</sup> De Aldama (*Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum*, 166) argues in favor of a literary connection, while L. William Countryman ("A Sixth-Century Plea Against Religious Violence: Romanos on Elijah," in *Reading Religions in the Ancient World* eds. D.E. Aune, and R. D. Young [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 292 n. 12) argues that, "Efforts to date this work [Ps.-Chrysostom] before both Basil and Romanos are unpersuasive."

you exact vengeance upon her through the death of her son? *Woe is me, Lord, the witness of the widow, with whom I have lived with her! You have killed her son!* It is not” he said, “the result of a natural death: you have contrived with your strategy the thing that has happened to put the necessity of philanthropy to me, so that I might say to you, ‘Lord, have mercy on the perished son of the widow.’ Let him speak again and then you shall say to me, ‘Have mercy on my son Israel.’”<sup>98</sup>

### **Basil of Seleucia**

“Woe is me, Lord, the sight of the widow! *Why have you acted wickedly in putting her son to death?* I know this is your strategy against me. I understand the things from you which now surrounded me. You ask me to turn toward philanthropy so that when I beseech you about the child of the widow, ‘Release, O Creator, the bonds of death from the child,’ you yourself will reply back to me, ‘Also you release my son Israel from the sentence of drought.’ I have become a student of your philanthropy.”<sup>99</sup>

The direction of influence between these two homilies is unclear, but both share sufficient verbal similarities to indicate the author of one used the other quite liberally as a source. At issue in both of these homilies is Elijah’s learning to esteem the *φιλανθρωπία* of God above his own desire for vengeance. Elijah’s speech to God in both of these homilies portrays the prophet identifying the death of the child as a contrivance or strategy (*μηχανή*) used by God to provoke a response from him. Elijah also realizes the consequence of his asking God to save the widow’s son will be God’s reply with the same request but for his son, Israel.

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<sup>98</sup> PG 56:585.

<sup>99</sup> PG. 85:156.

Ephraem Graecus finds different gaps in the story to fill, although his exegetical strategy is, as we have already seen, very similar. In Ephraem Graecus' homily, the widow is a much more important character than Elijah. Earlier in the homily, the widow castigated Elijah for coming to her asking for water when he is the cause of the drought, so it is no surprise that the author makes the widow the emotional center of the scene.

At your arrival, I became bereft of my son, for when you came to me, you killed my son. Being deprived of my beloved son I have fallen into a bitter calamity! What use is the rest of the grain for food when my son is dead? It would be better for me to have died and not been satiated by food than to be deprived of my son. Who shall eat the rest of these things, which you gave? Or what sort of gain do I receive by having food for consumption and being robbed of the glory of the only-begotten son which I had? I am wasting away in laments and groans because of him. Would that I had not seen you, nor had the "fortune" of listening to you, for I wish I had not been bereaved of my beloved child.<sup>100</sup>

The injustice of the situation is the same, although the two authors portray their different characters diagnosing the cause differently. Pseudo-Chrysostom and Basil's Elijah questions the justice of God killing the child of the woman in order to provoke a response from him. Ephraem Graecus' widow places the blame firmly on the shoulders of Elijah and argues it would have been better for her and her son to die in the famine than to have experienced the miracle of the grain and the oil. The widow's confronting Elijah in the Ephraem Graecus homily causes him to seek reconciliation with God. In the biblical narrative, the widow asks Elijah (1 Kgs 17:18), "What have you against me, man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" Both the above homiletical

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<sup>100</sup> *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, ¶7.

treatments eliminate the widow's mention of her sin and treat Elijah's hard-heartedness as the primary issue. Pseudo-Chrysostom portrays Elijah noting the widow's complete piety and while Ephraem Graecus' widow does not make a claim that she is without sin, her speech emphasizes that encountering Elijah has caused her strife. The biblical tradition does not connect the resurrection of the son with the lifting of the famine. The famine is lifted by Elijah in the next chapter, seemingly unconnected to Elijah's appeal to God to resurrect the son. Sitting in the wilderness being cared for by the ravens does not illuminate the plight of the people to Elijah in Pseudo-Chrysostom,<sup>101</sup> nor does the widespread destruction of the land and human misery move him in Ephraem Graecus. The death of the son is the final incident that causes Elijah to recognize in God's injustice his own. The different authors emphasize this point in different ways, but their exegesis is quite similar in developing the widow and Elijah, who barely speak in the biblical narrative, into fully formed characters whose dramatic interaction frames the retelling of this story.

### **Romanos**

The Basil of Seleucia and Pseudo-Chrysostom homilies were used as sources for Romanos the Melodist's *kontakion* on Elijah, the most popular Greek language version of the non-philanthropic and overzealous Elijah tradition.<sup>102</sup> Romanos frames the disagreement between Elijah and God thusly: "When the prophet saw the whole world in impiety and the most high not entirely angry, but rather patient, he was moved to madness and witnessed to the merciful God, 'I am taking authority and I will punish the impiety of the ones provoking

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<sup>101</sup> PG. 56:584.

<sup>102</sup> Paul Maas and C.A. Trypanis, eds., *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 367-80.

you to anger.’”<sup>103</sup> God, Romanos tells his audience, is not angry, but Elijah believes that he should be, that the impiety of the people should be evoking from God the same anger that he himself is feeling. The story plays out with the same contours that we have seen in the anonymous Syriac dramatic dialogue poem, and the Ephraem Graecus, Basil of Seleucia, and Pseudo-Chrysostom homilies. Elijah does not relent from his zeal in the wilderness where he is well cared for, so God sends him to the widow. Elijah’s miracle with the oil and grain insure that his needs are met there as well, leaving the death of the child as the incident which provokes the final confrontation and reckoning between the prophet and God. That conversation shows a high degree of familiarity with the Basil and Pseudo-Chrysostom homilies, ““And altogether you have contrived (μηχανᾶσαι) against me a necessity for mercy, so that when I ask you, ‘Raise the dead son of the widow,’ immediately you will reply to me, ‘Have mercy on my son, Israel, who is afflicted, and all of my people,’ for you are the only one with consideration for humankind (φιλάνθρωπος).”<sup>104</sup> Romanos uses the same root μηχανή and depicts Elijah anticipating God’s response about his son Israel when Elijah seeks a miracle for the widow’s son, as Pseudo-Chrysostom and Basil of Seleucia do.

The Romanos *kontakion* is longer than the three Greek homilies and the Syriac dramatic dialogue poem, which allows the Melodist more space to develop the various episodes in the story. The widow and Elijah’s relationship is given similar dramatic tension in the *kontakion* as in the Ephraem Graecus homily. In Romanos’ work, upon finding her child deceased, the woman caustically turns on Elijah with the same fervor we see in the

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<sup>103</sup> Maas and Trypanis, eds., *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica*, 367.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

Ephraem Graecus homily. She lays hold of him and physically drags him, “as if a murderer into court” and says,

“You have sown the bread in my belly but you destroyed the fruit of my womb and rooted out my budding offspring. You sell me at a high price the food you had as a gift! A soul you have demanded in exchange for oil and flour! I beg you to take back the exchange and to give me back what you took! Are you so unsatisfied by the dead among your people not, that you desire death also come to my house? Free the soul of my son, take my soul in place of his and become some friend of humankind!”<sup>105</sup>

We do not see direct literary parallels with the Ephraem Graecus homily in the same way as we did with Basil and Pseudo-Chrysostom. Instead we see contacts in the exegetical tradition, though the individual authors choose to do different things within the context of the widow’s confrontation with Elijah. For Romanos’ widow, the price of the miraculous food is too great for her whereas Ephraem Graecus’ widow points out its uselessness. Both, however, have extended speeches by the widow in which she castigates the prophet for his actions. The Basil and Pseudo-Chrysostom homilies do not choose to develop the widow’s character as much as Ephraem Graecus and Romanos do.

L. William Countryman, in his discussion of this *kontakion* as a relatively unique critical interpretation of the figure of Elijah in the Greek tradition, points out the similarities with Basil of Seleucia’s writing but does not seem to know of the Ephraem Graecus homily.<sup>106</sup> This lacuna is unfortunate, but perhaps understandable given that the major

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>106</sup> “This kind of treatment of Elijah appears one other place [besides Basil of Seleucia] in Greek, in a sermon ascribed to Chrysostom.” Countryman, “A Sixth-Century Plea Against Religious Violence,” 292.



editions of this text are in a 1915 critical edition and a 1998 practical edition published in Greece with a Modern Greek translation. Before this dissertation, no English translation existed for the work. The Ephraem Graecus homily is an important source of information for the Greek exegetical tradition that Countryman is attempting to explore. Countryman notes examples of Elijah's wrath being critiqued in the Jewish and Syriac traditions,<sup>107</sup> but does not use this piece, a Greek homily written in verse attributed to a Syriac author to connect Romanos' metrical composition to those traditions.

## Conclusion

The scholarly consensus which existed before and continued after Hemmerdinger-Iliadou's work on the Ephraem Graecus corpus that there is little of Ephrem in Ephraem Graecus seems to be correct. The Ephraem Graecus biblical works may take their inspiration from the sort of exegesis that Ephrem performed in his commentaries, but they were almost certainly not written by him. Rather, the works in the corpus bear the greatest similarity to the Syriac dramatic dialogue poem genre. The works in the corpus are best contextualized as Greek language versions of those works. Even though the Ephraem Graecus works do not have a link to Ephrem himself, their genre suggests a link to the broader Syriac tradition. Many of the pieces in the Syriac dramatic dialogue poem are falsely attributed to Ephrem in the same manner as are the Ephraem Graecus writings. This misattribution caused a good deal of confusion about the thought and character of Ephrem and the scope of his oeuvre before the twentieth century, but may have caused these works to be copied and preserved. The Ephraem Graecus homilies are not only found under the name of Ephrem, but appear in the corpora of other pseudonymous authors in the Greek-speaking realm as well. I have

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<sup>107</sup> Countryman, "A Sixth-Century Plea Against Religious Violence," 292.

attempted to demonstrate, using the treatment of the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath as a test case of how the Ephraem Graecus works connect the Syriac exegetical tradition to some Eastern Christian interpretations and can suggest a “missing link” to Romanos’ oeuvre.

### Chapter 3

The Ephraem Graecus corpus of biblical homilies approach their exegetical task by creatively rewriting and reinterpreting the biblical story, giving the familiar characters new dialogue and expanding the biblical narrative. These works comment on Scripture, but do not do so in the manner of a commentary. There is little sense of Ephraem Graecus going through the biblical narratives verse by verse and commenting on each lemma, nor are philological issues the focus of the exegesis. Instead, Ephraem Graecus' exegesis invites its audience to enter into the biblical stories themselves and inhabit the *dramatis personae* of the Bible. His dramatic recreations of the biblical stories bring the characters and situations out from the scriptural page and into a dynamic, entertaining presentation that allows his audience to relate to the stories through the lens of their own human experience.

#### Rewritten Bible

The dramatic expansions found in the Ephraem Graecus homilies calls to mind the genre of texts known as “Rewritten Bible.” Geza Vermes was the first to use this term to designate a genre of texts. What Vermes meant by “Rewritten Bible” was that, “In order to anticipate questions, and to solve problems in advance, the midrashist inserts haggadic development into the biblical narrative—an exegetical process which is probably as ancient as scriptural interpretation itself.<sup>1</sup>”

While most scholars agreed that Vermes identified an important phenomenon in biblical interpretation, confusion resulted as they attempted to determine what works fit into the genre. This trouble was exacerbated as more Qumran scrolls became published and

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<sup>1</sup> Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 95.

understood and scholars began to fully appreciate the fluidity of the biblical text at that time and thus the difficulty of determining what was “Rewritten Bible” and simply “Bible.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars now prefer the terminology “Rewritten Scripture” since during the Second Temple period, “there was no ‘Bible’ in the modern sense of a fixed collection of fixed forms of certain books.”<sup>3</sup> In the current academic landscape, the terminology of “Rewritten Bible/Scripture” has narrowed to a technical one pertaining to Qumran documents, early Targumim/Samaritan Pentateuch, and a select few other documents in the late Second Temple Period.<sup>4</sup> Though scholars have recognized that, “If Rewritten Scripture can only be used as a scholarly term in the context of late Second Temple Jewish texts, I think the notion should be dismissed,”<sup>5</sup> in current scholarship the term has had a difficult time escaping the gravitational pull of that particular period.<sup>6</sup> Since the Ephraem Graecus homilies are late-4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, “‘Rewritten Bible’: A Generic Category that has Outlived its Usefulness?” *Textus* 22 (2005), 169-196.

<sup>3</sup> Molly M. Zahn, *Rethinking Rewritten Scripture*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1 n.2.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Emanuel Tov, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible and Qumran*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 121 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 57-70. Bernstein traces the definitions and redefinitions of the term “Rewritten Bible” since it was proposed and notes (“‘Rewritten Bible,’” 184) that Tov excludes from his definition of the term “rewritten Bible” the very pieces that caused Vermes to first coin the term.

<sup>5</sup> Anders Klostergaard Petersen, “Textual Fidelity, Elaboration, Supersession or Encroachment?” in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms or Techniques?* ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 166 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly illustrative in this regard is Jonathan G. Campbell’s article “Rewritten Bible: A Terminological Reassessment” (in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms or Techniques?* ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 166 [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 49-81). Though attempting to critically reassess the term’s usefulness, Campbell never considers the possible applicability of the term to any other time period, repeatedly making the assumption that Second Temple Judaism is the only context for any work appropriately termed “Rewritten Scripture.”

or fifth century CE, Christian,<sup>7</sup> and written far from Qumran, it seems at first glance that the category can shed little light on our texts.

Before simply abandoning the term, however, I will look briefly at the outlines of the genre as laid out by Philip Alexander<sup>8</sup> and synthesized into a succinct nine-point list by Sidnie White Crawford.<sup>9</sup> Though the four pieces that Alexander examines to arrive at his nine criteria are all from the Second Temple period, he does not restrict the genre to works from that period.<sup>10</sup> The criteria are:

- 1) Rewritten Bible texts are narratives, which follow a sequential chronological order.
- 2) They are... free-standing compositions, which replicate the form of the biblical books on which they are based.
- 3) These texts are not intended to replace, or to supersede the Bible.
- 4) Rewritten Bible texts cover a substantial portion of the Bible.
- 5) Rewritten Bible texts follow the Bible serially, in proper order, but they are highly selective in what they represent.
- 6) The intention of the texts is to produce an interpretative reading of Scripture.

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<sup>7</sup> Though Petersen (“Textual Fidelity, Elaboration, Supersession or Encroachment?” 35-42) argues that the Gospel of Matthew should be seen as Rewritten Mark, and thus provide evidence of a Christian use of the Rewritten Bible genre.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament,” in *It is Written—Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* eds. D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99-121. The pieces Alexander uses for his definition are Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon, the *Liber Antiquitarum Biblicarum*, and Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*.

<sup>9</sup> Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Adelman uses White Crawford’s criteria to determine how the rabbinic *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* is both similar to and different from the earlier forms of scriptural rewriting (Rachel Adelman, “Can we apply the term “Rewritten Bible” to Midrash?” in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms or Techniques?* ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 166 [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 295-317).

- 7) The narrative form of the texts means...that they can impose only a single interpretation on the original.
- 8) The limitations of the narrative form also preclude making clear the exegetical reasoning.
- 9) Rewritten Bible texts make use of non-biblical tradition and draw on non-biblical sources.<sup>11</sup>

The Ephraem Graecus homilies pose problems for the applicability of this schema at the very first point (1). The texts are homilies, works in both prose and poetry which present themselves as oral compositions performed before a congregation. Though they narrate the stories, they are not fully narratives in the way that Alexander envisages. They follow a sequential chronological order, with the exception of the *Abraham and Isaac* and *Good Thief* homilies which make typological reference to other time periods.

On the second point (2), “form of the biblical book,” we are on surer footing. The Ephraem Graecus homilies certainly replicate the form of the biblical stories they are telling. *On the All-Beautiful Joseph* is the best example of this. Though there are a few additional scenes, for the most part the biblical plot forms the backbone around which the homily is constructed. The expansions predominantly take the form of additional speeches put into the characters’ mouths at appropriate moments. For example, in the Genesis account, the narrative simply relates that the brothers laid their hands on Joseph, stripped him of his coat, and threw him into the pit (Gen 37:23-24). The Ephraem Graecus homily at this moment puts a long speech into Joseph’s mouth in which he asks what wrong he has committed, begs for mercy and recounts God’s dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the speech, Joseph is thrown into the pit, as the biblical narrative relates. The form of the plot,

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<sup>11</sup> White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *On the All-Beautiful Joseph*, ¶6.

the sequence of events, is respected, but more material is added to the basic narrative. This is even true for *On Cain and the Murder of Abel*, which adds a substantial number of vignettes and dialogue scenes, but nevertheless follows the bare outline of the Genesis account.

The second part of Alexander's point two is more difficult to parse, "Though they make constant use of the words of Scripture, they integrate these into a smooth, seamless retelling of the biblical story. Unlike rabbinic midrash, the actual words of Scripture do not remain highlighted within the body of the text."<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, Alexander does not expand upon what he means by "constant," nor does he provide a heuristic tool for determining if a given text makes enough use of the words of Scripture to qualify as "constant." The homilies are, indeed, unlike rabbinic midrash in that the words do not remain highlighted. For the most part the Bible is not directly quoted in the homilies. Occasionally, a direct quotation of biblical narrative will be used to move the plot along,<sup>14</sup> or a character will quote God using a verbatim quotation from the Bible,<sup>15</sup> but these exceptions prove the rule. The biblical texts (the "words of Scripture" themselves) are clearly in the mind of the homilist, given how closely he adheres to the stories and their contours, but he does not make a point of echoing this phraseology at all points. This is especially true in the metrical pieces, where the biblical words may be neglected in favor of a word that fits the syllable count of the line. This sort of accommodation of the language to fit a new literary milieu is well known in Rewritten Bible. Josephus, for example, replaces the LXX's parataxis with the hypotaxis which was more in

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<sup>13</sup> Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," 116.

<sup>14</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶9, "And he came to the place which God told him on the third day," (LXX Gen 22:3-4). As in the biblical text, this sparse notice is used to abruptly transition the narrative from what went before to what happens next.

<sup>15</sup> *On the All-Beautiful Joseph*, ¶6.

accord with the cultured literary Greek style of the day.<sup>16</sup> The updating of the biblical style to fit a new literary milieu is part and parcel of the apologetic aims of Josephus' work. So also we see the adaptation of the biblical language to fit the isosyllabic constraints in the Ephraem Graecus corpus.

The issue of the authority of the homilies (3) is wrapped up in the larger question of their relationship with the biblical text. Kristian Heal's comments on *The Syriac History of Joseph* apply equally to the Ephraem Graecus homilies:

Unlike later Syriac retellings, the *Syriac History* does not exhibit a self-conscious relationship to scripture—there is no indication that the auditor is expected to be aware of the biblical text, nor are there explicit indications of the presuppositions of, or allusions to scripture. The *Syriac History* is thus a fluent freestanding composition woven from the biblical narrative, imaginative and interpretative expansions, and other contemporary traditions.<sup>17</sup>

The Ephraem Graecus homilies, like the *Syriac History*, presuppose no knowledge of the scriptural texts whatsoever. The audience that hears these homilies gets a comprehensive treatment of the biblical story chosen.<sup>18</sup> The *Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph* touches on every major plot point in Genesis 37 and 39-47 with the exception of the “Dream of the Sheaves” (Gen 37:5-8) and the contents of the dreams of the two servants and Pharaoh. From

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Begg, “Josephus’ Rewriting of Genesis 24 in Ant. 1.242-255,” in *Rewritten Bible after Fifty Years: Texts, Terms or Techniques?* ed. József Zsengellér, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 166 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 286.

<sup>17</sup> Kristian S. Heal, “The Syriac History of Joseph,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* eds. R. Bauckham, J.R. Davila and A. Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 88-9.

<sup>18</sup> The exception to this are the *Good Thief* homilies, which presuppose knowledge of the Passion Narrative.



a pedagogical standpoint, it is difficult to support that an attentive audience would fail to grasp the meaning, purpose, and plot of the biblical story after hearing the homily. They would do less well at being able to distinguish between biblical material and the interpolations. The author never indicates when he is going off the biblical script to insert either a small addition (such as more dialogue than one finds in the biblical speeches), or a larger interpolation (such as an entire episode). The “authentic” parts of the story are given as much weight as the homilist-created additions, and thus equal authority. Yet there is no hint of supersessionism in the additions. The Ephraem Graecus homilies do not provide an interpretive reading for the stories in the way that, e.g., *The Book of Jubilees* attempts to offer a corrective reading against what it sees as improper understanding of the scriptural calendrical regulations (cf. 6:35-38).<sup>19</sup> The additions to the narrative that the Ephraem Graecus homilies make supplement the story, they do not override it. Joseph’s non-scriptural dialogue and prayers serve to present him as a more memorable character, providing more material for the audience to sink its teeth into. Creating a greater attachment to the narrative and characters of the episode than is provided in the scriptural episode seems the goal of the rewritten material. The Ephraem Graecus homilies do not attempt to replace or supersede the authority of the texts—they supplement them.

The homilies do not cover a substantial portion of the Bible (4). The longest section of text covered is Genesis 37 and 39-47 by *On the All-Beautiful Joseph*. The oral nature of the homily genre necessarily precludes coverage of a substantial portion of the Bible unless

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<sup>19</sup> Petersen, “Textual Fidelity, Elaboration, Supersession or Encroachment?” 34. Petersen argues that while *Jubilees* comes the closest of Rewritten Bible texts to supersessionism, it is not supersessionist because it claims an authoritative *interpretation* of Scripture while not rising to the level of Scripture itself. Within the Ephraem Graecus homilies, such a distinction can be seen in the *Abraham and Isaac* homilies. The homilies do not override the biblical story of the Aqedah, but instead argue that the most complete reading of the episode is done through the lens of Jesus Christ.

the preacher has extraordinary vocal stamina and the audience remarkable patience. However, all of the Ephraem Graecus homilies do cover substantial portions (which is to say “nearly all”) of their chosen pericope. *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, provides an exception to this rule by beginning with Jonah’s being expelled from the fish (Jonah 2:10). That homily continues on past the end of the biblical story, though, to include an episode wherein Jonah leads the citizens of Nineveh to Jerusalem, only to turn back within sight of the city lest the Ninevites see the lawlessness of the Jerusalemites.<sup>20</sup> The *Elijah*, *Good Thief*, and *Abraham and Isaac* homilies choose portions of Scripture that are less than a chapter in length, but the stories they retell all have clear beginnings, middles, and ends. Alexander writes, “The Rewritten Bible texts make use of the legendary material... they clamp the legends firmly to the biblical framework and reintegrate them into the biblical history. The single legendary expansions constitute a separate genre.”<sup>21</sup> The Ephraem Graecus homilies constitute either these “single legendary expansions” that Alexander speaks of, or small collections of them. Even all the homilies taken together as a corpus do not reintegrate themselves into the biblical history. There is no larger sense of story; each individual homily treats its own story and does not look ahead to the next pericope, nor reference an expanded treatment of a story which came before it.

The fifth point (5) dovetails nicely with the fourth. Since the works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus are homilies and not narratives, they cannot and do not follow the Bible serially. Within their chosen story, however, they do follow the narrative in proper order. The rest of Alexander’s definition, “Some passages are reproduced more or less literally, some

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<sup>20</sup> *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, ¶56-63.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander, “Retelling the Old Testament,” 117.

are omitted altogether, some abbreviated, some expanded. There are few omissions which would create serious chronological hiatus, and in the end all the texts contain a reasonably balanced proportion of straightforward retelling and expansion,”<sup>22</sup> is unhelpfully vague. The Ephraem Graecus homilies tend toward the “less literal” side of the equation, as discussed earlier. The literal text is of relatively low importance, but portions of the narrative plot are reproduced, omitted, abbreviated, and expanded. Hiatus is completely avoided so that even when there is an omission from the biblical text, the flow of the homily conceals this. The resulting text contains a mixture of retelling and expansion, with the weight falling more on the retelling side of the ledger. Whether or not the proportion is reasonably balanced or not is a subjective, and open, question.

The Ephraem Graecus homilies do not produce an interpretative reading of Scripture in the way that Alexander envisions in his sixth (6) criteria. He writes,

They offer ‘a fuller, smoother and doctrinally more advanced form of the sacred narrative’ (Vermes in Schürer, 1986, p. 305). They constitute a kind of commentary. The commentary is, however, indirect and its full significance can only be grasped if the original is borne constantly in mind. They carry on an intense, if silent, dialectic with the original.<sup>23</sup>

While the homilies offer a fuller—they fill in many of the “gaps” in the biblical narrative—and smoother—away from the infelicities of the LXX translation—form of the narrative, it is difficult to say that the texts are more doctrinally advanced. If anything, the tone and content of the pieces suggest they are intended for lay audiences with an eye towards making the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

biblical stories more entertaining. Though the pieces are not intended to supersede or replace the biblical narrative, they can stand on their own. Prior knowledge of the biblical text is not required for comprehension of the homily, and certainly the significance of the homily can be grasped without bearing the original in mind.<sup>24</sup> The sort of deep relationship that Alexander envisions, wherein the retelling is intended as the hermeneutical key in narrative form for the original text, does not exist for the Ephraem Graecus homilies.

The seventh and eighth (7 & 8) points of Alexander's criteria are best discussed together. Both presuppose a narrative form of the rewritten text which, as has been discussed earlier, the homilies do not have. The homily genre allows for the voice of the homilist to come through and comment directly on the things he just discussed.<sup>25</sup> A homily is more explicitly an interaction between the preaching homilist and the listening audience who are present in the same place at the same time than a narrative. The homilist can digress, directly address the audience, and also discuss interpretations other than his own. In the Ephraem Graecus corpus, this is nowhere more apparent than in *Abraham and Isaac II* when the homilist discusses the sudden appearance of the ram in the bush, "So, from where did he bring the bush and the ram? Perhaps someone might say from paradise, but I would not say this. For paradise was not given as a type, but as truth."<sup>26</sup> The homilist first presents the exegetical problem to the audience, breaking the "fourth wall" in a way which Alexander's conception of narrative does not allow. The homilist then presents a possible interpretation

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<sup>24</sup> c.f. Kristian S. Heal, "The Syriac History of Joseph," 88-9, and my discussion of Alexander's third point.

<sup>25</sup> To be fair, the narrative genre does not preclude this possibility either, as the voice of the narrator can provide a commentary on the events just narrated. Alexander, though, envisages an objective narrator.

<sup>26</sup> *Abraham and Isaac II*, ¶15.

(“from paradise”), but then goes on to make clear his reasoning for not agreeing with that position. The Ephraem Graecus homilies can both discuss more than a single interpretation of the text and also make clear their own exegetical reasoning,<sup>27</sup> which runs directly opposite to the above points in Alexander’s criteria.

The Ephraem Graecus homilies clearly fulfill the ninth (9) point of Alexander’s list. In the retellings, the homilist draws upon both non-biblical sources and tradition. Paul-Hubert Poirier argues that the *Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph* uses Jewish traditions and sources in its expansion of the Joseph cycle.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Sebastian Brock studies the myriad of Christian Syriac and Greek texts on Genesis 22 and shows the substantial interrelationship and overlap in the material and traditions they use to re-present the biblical story.<sup>29</sup> The homilies are mixtures of scriptural texts, non-biblical traditions, and original material.

With regards to Alexander’s nine-point scheme, the Ephraem Graecus homilies do not fit his definition for “Rewritten Bible.” They are short homilies and not narrative, which by definition violates points 1, 2, 7, and 8. Substantial qualifications need to be made in order for points 4, 5, and 6 to apply. This leaves us with two of the nine points: the texts are not intended to replace or supersede the biblical text, and they draw upon non-biblical sources. That these two points also apply to the basic lemmatized commentary genre does not speak

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., the introduction to the *Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph* and the *Abraham and Isaac* homilies where the author explicitly states that his hermeneutic for discussing these Old Testament stories is typology with Christ.

<sup>28</sup> Paul-Hubert Poirier, “Le sermon pseudo-éphrémien In pulcherrimum Ioseph. Typologie et Midrash,” in *Figures de l’Ancien Testament chez les Pères*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 2 (Strasbourg: Centre d’Analyse et de documentation patristiques, 1989), 107-22.

<sup>29</sup> Sebastian Brock, “Two Syriac verse homilies on the binding of Isaac,” *Le Muséon* 99 (1986), 61-129; and *idem*, “Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition,” in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy* eds. P. Casetti, O. Keel and A. Schenker (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 38; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 1-30,

well for the application of the term “Rewritten Bible” to the Ephraem Graecus homilies. However, the phenomenon that Vermes was initially interested in, the insertion of haggadic midrash into biblical narrative to solve exegetical problems, does apply. James Kugel labelled this phenomenon “Retold Bible.”<sup>30</sup> Campbell prefers the terminology “*revised* Bible.”<sup>31</sup> With this term, Kugel refers to the exegetical activity displayed in certain rabbinic (i.e. not Second Temple period) works, rather than to generic classifications. Moshe Bernstein, even within the context of Second Temple Judaism, thinks, “It is necessary to distinguish between the process ‘rewriting the Bible’ and the genre ‘Rewritten Bible.’”<sup>32</sup> Kugel, Campbell, and Bernstein all indicate that the activity of “rewriting the Bible” is important, but do little to define what they mean by that term. For our purposes, the process of rewriting fits well with the final point of Alexander’s schema, the one that most closely corresponds to the strategies employed by the Ephraem Graecus homilies. The homilies incorporate non-biblical material and traditions into their exegesis. The Ephraem Graecus homilies “rewrite” the scriptural texts by rephrasing the narrative, rearranging the story elements, presenting some innovations, and incorporating older traditions in the retelling. We will now turn to an examination of what Ephraem Graecus’ rewriting looks like in practice.

### **Invented Dialogue**

Perhaps as a legacy from the dramatic dialogue poem genre or because of theatrical potential, the lion’s share of Ephraem Graecus’ creative rewriting comes in dialogue. Old Testament narrative is light on speeches which reveal the inner thoughts and personalities of

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<sup>30</sup> James Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 264.

<sup>31</sup> Campbell, “Rewritten Bible: A Terminological Reassessment,” 55.

<sup>32</sup> Bernstein, “‘Rewritten Bible,’” 195.

the characters. This relative silence creates a gapped text whose obscurities suggest “influence of the unexpressed, ‘background.’”<sup>33</sup> Though there is elegance to this style of literature, it often results in the elimination of characters from the narrative. Sarah is not mentioned at all in Genesis 22. Adam and Eve likewise are absent from the story of their sons’ fatal encounter. The biblical narrator does not inform his audience of these characters’ actions in the stories, or explain anything about what they may be thinking or saying about them. Ephraem Graecus fills in these gaps by virtually inverting the amount of narration and dialogue found in the biblical text. Over half of the homily *Abraham* is speeches or hypothetical speeches, with nearly a third of the homily’s total length dedicated to the speech of the Angel of the Lord/the Lord staying Abraham’s hand.

Nearly three quarters of *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel* is dialogue, a percentage which increases after the primarily narrative episode of the attempted mountain ascent. Extended speeches are a hallmark of the Greek and Syriac<sup>34</sup> exegetical tradition on this story, whereas the biblical episode itself is rather sparse on dialogue. The biblical narrative has an oral proclamation by Eve in Gen 4:1 after Cain and Abel are born. In verse 6b-7 God asks Cain why he is angry, explains that if he does well he will be accepted and that sin is lurking and Cain must master it. Cain does not reply. The next verse shows Cain exhorting his brother to go into the field with him, with no reply from Abel. After Abel’s murder, God asks Cain where Abel is, to which Cain responds with the famous line, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” God then pronounces the sentence of judgment upon him. Abel and

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<sup>33</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Particularly in the Syriac tradition where dialogue poems between the brothers and God and Cain are frequent. C.f., Sebastian Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems on Abel and Cain,” *Le Muséon* 113 (2000), 333-75.

Adam do not speak at all and Eve's only line is a post-birth comment. Cain's dialogue consists of two short sentences. Ephraem Graecus does not expand the initial dialogue of God and, since the declaration of punishment lacks the specificity of the biblical account, God's speaking role is greatly diminished in this homily.

Ephraem Graecus chooses instead to keep the drama focused on his human characters. There are three major speech sections in the homily. The first occurs in ¶9-14 in which Cain, having conceived of the plan to murder Abel in ¶8, persuades Abel to accompany him to a second sacrifice. Cain argues that Abel has a special status with God and his presence will insure that God accepts Cain's second sacrifice (¶9). Abel rejoices that Cain is prepared to seek reconciliation with God and not be estranged from God as their parents were, but suggests that prayer will be sufficient and there is no need to travel anywhere (¶10). Cain responds in ¶11 largely by reiterating his point from ¶9 and stressing that the sacrifice must be completed for God to be propitiated. Abel again (¶12) stresses the power of simple prayer and even provides the exact words for three different prayers that Cain could use. The narrator breaks in at this juncture and says that though Abel is guileless, he could sense Cain's evil. Cain, desperate, can only restate his earlier point, "Be compassionate, my brother, come with me into the field and fall down before God for my sake, so that he may be reconciled to me."<sup>35</sup> This stirs something in Abel (¶14), who embraces the idea that he will be the cause of Cain's reconciliation to God and agrees to accompany him. Eve then begins a speech where she points out at the beginning and end of her speech that it is not the season for sacrifices. She states that she is troubled, and worried that the snake which led her astray might be leading her children astray to sacrifice in the wrong season. Adam nevertheless gives his assent to his children's venture and Ephraem Graecus ends the scene

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<sup>35</sup> *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel*, ¶13.



with Eve declaring, “Behold, I am the mother of both of you, children, and I will reflect on this until the time when you return to me.”<sup>36</sup>

In the *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel*, Ephraem Graecus breathes life into the biblical characters and imbues their relationships and motivations with more detail than can be found in the biblical narrative. The added texture and pathos Ephraem Graecus provides to the characters serves to invest the audience in those characters’ interpersonal conflicts. Ephraem Graecus’ exegetical sensibility seems to be that the more vivid and dramatic a biblical figure is, the greater the impact that character will have on an audience.

The Ephraem Graecus corpus can also engage with the audience directly. In the *Homily on Abraham* the preacher, upon relating God’s commandment to sacrifice Isaac, exclaims to the audience, “How was Abraham not struck down at simply hearing these words?”<sup>37</sup> before transitioning into a hypothetical speech, or *ethopoiia*. In this speech,<sup>38</sup> the preacher imagines what Abraham might have said in reply to God. This hypothetical Abraham moves from bewilderment, asking why God could or would possibly ask such a thing, to raising questions about how the divine promise of descendants through Isaac would be fulfilled with Isaac dead. The hypothetical Abraham then goes onto plead with God not to ask this, because of the stigma he would face from all people as an infanticide. He finally resigns himself to the task, saying that he will die with Isaac for he could not bear to look at Sarah after she discovered what had happened. The overall effect of the speeches is to place

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶14.

<sup>37</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶3.

<sup>38</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶3-6.

the audience in Abraham's position and by doing so highlight the human drama of the situation.

The tactic to make the audience identify with Abraham is made more strongly in *Abraham and Isaac I*. The preacher directly asks the audience, "What would you have suffered, hearing these things? How do you not become dizzy at this tale, those of you who are fathers?"<sup>39</sup> Whereas the author of *Abraham* highlights the predicament of Abraham and instructs the audience to wonder why he did not question the command, the author of *Abraham and Isaac I* positions each member of his audience as personal recipients of the command. The tension of the situation moves from that between the preacher and the Scripture he is exegeting to that between the preacher and his audience. The author of *Abraham* creates tension by loading the hypothetical Abraham's words with great pathos and adding more and more dialogue to impress upon the audience the gravity of that pathos. The author of *Abraham and Isaac I* creates that same tension by putting the speech in the mouths of the audience, "Would one not plead one's case to him, attempting to win over the natural advocate? 'Why would you command these things to be, O Lord?'" As this speech goes on, though, the preacher transfers the identity of the speaker from what he presumes the audience would say in the situation, to a hypothetical Abraham. In the beginning of his speech, he uses general language fitting for any parent to say if confronted by such a command from God. By the end, his speech becomes specific to Abraham, "You command me to kill my most beloved son, whom I expect to bury with Sarah?" The fusion of audience and Abraham is complete.

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<sup>39</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶6.

### Increased Texture for Female Characters

The Old Testament narrative, particularly in the episodes covered by the Ephraem Graecus homilies, has the tendency to give short shrift to the female characters. As previously noted, the text of Genesis 22 says nothing about Sarah, leaving commentators to fill in the gaps about what she knew, what Abraham told her, and how Abraham managed to take Isaac away from her. After the incident in the Garden, Eve's only reported actions in the biblical text are to conceive, bear, and make a naming pronouncement over Cain, Abel, and Seth. Ephraem Graecus' retelling of those stories repositions the women elided by the biblical narrative as dynamic forces in those episodes.

The Syriac tradition in particular was fascinated with Sarah's role in the Binding of Isaac episode.<sup>40</sup> The genuine Ephrem is the first Syriac writer to comment on Sarah's role in the story. Abraham, Ephrem says, did not inform Sarah because he had not been ordered to. However, if he had, "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."<sup>41</sup> Ephrem notes that Abraham's not telling Sarah also precluded a protest by members of his household, the women wailing, and the locals stealing Isaac away in an attempt to protect him. Ephrem's exegesis contains the seed for two different strands of interpretation on this episode: Sarah as willing participant in the sacrifice,<sup>42</sup> and as a person who would hinder the sacrifice if she

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<sup>40</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Sarah and the Aqedah," *Le Muséon* 87 (1974), 66-77.

<sup>41</sup> Ephrem, "Commentary on Genesis," in *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works* trans. E. Mathews and J. Amar (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 168.

<sup>42</sup> Brock traces the development of the "Sarah as Participant" tradition in Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies," 70-74. The two verse homilies he examines are very pro-Sarah, with one including an episode where Sarah instructs Isaac how to behave as a most willing sacrifice, lest Abraham(!) lose his nerve in the act (123). This is a dramatic departure from the traditions that have womanly Sarah protesting the sacrifice.

were informed. In later exegesis Sarah would get lumped in the second category with the other women, who with their wailing create an obstacle for Abraham.<sup>43</sup>

The characterization of Sarah in *Abraham* skews towards the latter, misogynistic interpretation. “I believe firmly in womanly righteousness,” the preacher says, “I have shown her power... but also the intense difficulty of the struggle upon hearing these sorts of things. The suffering is stronger [in women] and I fear lest the old woman fall; misfortune ought not drive out sense.”<sup>44</sup> Yet “misfortune ought not drive out sense” is as close as the author gets to saying that Sarah would have acted to prevent the sacrifice. The “intense difficulty of the struggle upon hearing these sorts of things [i.e. the command]” indicates that the author is aware of the tradition of Sarah acting in opposition to Abraham (or something very close to it), but instead says that Sarah would have gone with Abraham and Isaac to the place of sacrifice. Sarah occupies a middle ground, vis-à-vis her role in the genuine Ephrem’s commentary. She is not an active participant, but she is not a wailing woman preventing Abraham from accomplishing his task. She goes in tears, but to accompany her son who would die.

Brock uses *Abraham and Isaac I* as his paradigmatic work for the “Sarah as womanly hindrance” tradition.<sup>45</sup> The misogynistic interpretation is continued through the Greek homilies on the subject, though Jacob of Serugh also includes it.<sup>46</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I* broaches the topic with, “He [Abraham] communicated nothing, acting most usefully; for

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<sup>43</sup> Brock, “Sarah and the Aqedah,” 70.

<sup>44</sup> *Homily on Abraham*, ¶8.

<sup>45</sup> Brock, “Sarah and the Aqedah,” 69-70.

<sup>46</sup> Brock, “Two Syriac Verse Homilies,” 71.

unworthy and useless to his plan would have been talking to a woman. For nothing profited Adam – and moreover actually harmed him – by hearing the counsel of Eve.”<sup>47</sup> Whereas *Abraham* emphasizes the pathos of Abraham through an extended speech, the author of *Abraham and Isaac I* creates that sort of heightened emotionality (perhaps to the point of melodrama) in the speech of Sarah.<sup>48</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I* creates so much independent material that is unclear if the author is utilizing any of *Abraham*’s relatively meager content on the subject. The similarities in emotional tenor of the speech of Abraham in *Abraham* and the speech of Sarah in *Abraham and Isaac I* is similar enough to indicate that these two works belong to the same interpretive tradition, but literary dependency cannot be decisively established.<sup>49</sup>

In *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel*, Ephraem Graecus is particularly keen to link the fate of Cain and Abel’s generation with that of their parents. The sin of Adam and Eve is omnipresent in the Ephraem Graecus homily. The previous generation is first mentioned by Abel in ¶10 when he is trying to convince Cain to reconcile himself with God. Speaking of his parents, Abel says, “They were not able to be completely called, since they transgressed the command of God, and consented willingly to try their luck outside, and they wail eternally because of that. I, too, plan so that I might approach God, praying without reservation, lest you finish your poverty in these days in the same way our parents will.”<sup>50</sup> The sin of Adam and Eve is an eternal barrier keeping them from God. The situation of

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<sup>47</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶7.

<sup>48</sup> Sarah’s speech articulates the “nature” side of the conflict between “nature” and “plan” that is central to the theme of *Abraham and Isaac I*.

<sup>49</sup> *Abraham and Isaac II* does not mention Sarah at all.

<sup>50</sup> *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel*, ¶10.

Cain's denied sacrifice raises the possibility that he, too, may share in this isolation unless the relationship is repaired. Eve objects to Cain's sacrifice plan because it is not the season for sacrifices and she worries the snake might be deceiving them into sacrificing at the wrong time. Her point about the proper season for sacrificing is not brought up again in the homily and it is unclear if there even is such a thing as a "proper" season. However, the speech serves to introduce Eve's character remarkably in a short amount of dialogue, that will bear fruit during her final speech. We see a woman haunted by her actions in the garden, with sin constantly in her mind. When the possibility of reconciliation between her son and God is raised, she worries about the ritualistic minutia of timing and raises the possibility that there is a sinister force behind the action.

Adam and Eve are points of contention in the disagreement of the brothers in their speeches to each other in the field. Cain argues that they are both sons of Adam, so why does God prefer Abel? Cain accuses Abel of both being and desiring to be more beloved of God than Cain. Abel answers the charge by first appealing to their parents. Rather than refuting the claim of being more beloved by God, Abel addresses the lie that Cain told their parents to get Abel to accompany him and directly links it to their experience in the garden, "You are truly cheating me, brother, with these flattering words in the same way the deceitful snake cheated them in their foolishness."<sup>51</sup> In short order Abel dismisses the idea that he has tried to achieve a special status with God to the exclusion of his brother before returning to their parents. Abel expresses the wish to see them once more before his blood is shed. The consequences of Cain murdering Abel to God is almost downplayed in contrast to the effect it will have on their parents. Abel says, "For if you do this thing, where would you go or

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶16.

where would you hide from the face of God? Or with what sort of eyes would you look upon our parents? And what would you say to them when they asked you about poor Abel? How would you move your tongue to a defense for what you did to the one asking you to have mercy? And how would your heart reckon the unfathomable grief of both of those asking you, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ My brother, do not force Adam to begin searching there for where my body lies.” Though the impossibility of hiding from the face of God is brought up initially, Abel moves quickly to a focus on their parents. In the biblical account Adam and Eve are completely absent and God asks the question “Where is your brother Abel?” and Cain formulates a defense to God; in the Ephraem Graecus homily Abel has their parents asking the question and demanding a defense. The climax of Abel’s speech, just before he calls out to the earth to receive his blood and cry out for him (*cf.* Gen 4:10) equates the effect of the murder on Adam and Eve with their expulsion from the garden, “Just as they took pleasure in Paradise and were naked disobeying God, there again they would see my bitter murder and become grieved. In the same way that they were thrown out of Paradise thus they would become grieved at the newly-murdered dead.”<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the conclusion of the homily is not, as in the Bible, on the Mark of Cain, but on Eve’s reaction to discovering Abel’s body. The speech by Eve is paralleled in the homilies of Isaac and Symmachus as well as the much later Jacob of Serugh.<sup>53</sup> Symmachus’ homily has speaking roles for both Adam and Eve, whereas Adam is completely absent in Ephraem Graecus. The narrator voice in the Ephraem Graecus homily moves from Cain receiving the punishment from God into the family’s house where Eve is waiting for her sons. Something

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶18.

<sup>53</sup> Johannes Bartholdy Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 269-71.

compels her to rush into the field where she sees Abel's body and Cain shaking. She begins a wailing lamentation displaying the full range of Ephraem Graecus' ability to create pathos for his biblical characters. As with the speeches of Sarah (both real and hypothetical) in the *Abraham and Isaac* homilies and the widow in *On the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, Ephraem Graecus displays a keen ability to give depth to the female characters. Eve takes responsibility for the death of Abel, "Woe is me, I have killed!"<sup>54</sup> she proclaims early in her lament. This seems hyperbolic at first, but we soon see that guilt-ridden Eve feels responsible for all the misfortunes that have befallen her family since the garden. "Since this one was born because of the transgression, he visited murder upon Abel," she says.<sup>55</sup> The homily ends with the following pronouncement from Eve.

25. "This has become the cause of my evil, not snake, not tree, but the enemy of the law of God. I gathered enmity and I gathered death. I mourn my children since I have utterly killed my natural son. Since I rejected the Father according to grace, I destroyed paradise and found death. Taking fruit from paradise I ate it and earned bodily pain from death. Paradise hurled me out and death took me in. Since I ate the fruit of the tree, I reaped death."

26. But, thinking on this story, beloved, let us send up glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit now and always and until the end of the ages. Amen.<sup>56</sup>

Eve's heartbreaking groan is followed by the scantest of doxologies such that the horror of the situation remains foremost in the audience's mind.

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<sup>54</sup> *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel*, ¶23.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶23.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶25-6.



Ephraem Graecus' expanded treatment of female characters should not earn the corpus the label feminist or invite a supposition of female authorship. Rather, Ephraem Graecus' presentation of these female characters indicates where gaps can be found in the biblical narrative by authors who are interested in inserting their own literary creativity into the canonical stories. The omission of Sarah from Genesis 22 allows *Abraham and Isaac I* to present a force that would hinder Abraham from fulfilling God's plan, giving voice to the idea that Abraham is fulfilling the command is insane. Eve's silence in Genesis 4 creates the opportunity for Ephraem Graecus to use her as the emotional center of the story and to connect that episode with the expulsion from the Garden. The widow of Zarephath gains a dynamism in the Ephraem Graecus homily to stand up directly to Elijah when no one else will. In other places though, the Ephraem Graecus homilies are relatively silent on female characters. Potiphar's Wife does not receive the same attention or develop into a *femme fatale* in the manner she does in *The Syriac History of Joseph*.<sup>57</sup> No female characters are inserted into the Jonah story, nor does Mary feature in the Good Thief homilies. Ephraem Graecus' exegesis is situational and dependent on which gaps in the biblical story he chooses to fill. Because of the limited role female characters play in some of the more popular biblical narratives, those characters can provide fruitful places for expanded narrative exegesis.

### **Indifference to Typology**

The *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet* contains no mention of Christ or any New Testament character or event, not even in the final doxology. The homily instead

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<sup>57</sup> Kristian S. Heal, "Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature," *BYU Studies* 41 no. 1 (2002),

proceeds along the canonical lines of the story, with expansions that are entirely fitting for the chronological context of the Elijah story. This lack of New Testament referents or an overtly Christian impress on Old Testament stories can also be seen in the Ephraem Graecus homilies *On Cain and the Murder of Abel* and the latter part of *On the All-Beautiful Joseph*. *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites* contains a few mentions of New Testament matters and uses New Testament language,<sup>58</sup> but keeps its exegesis synchronic with the time period of Jonah.

This approach contrasts with Jacob of Serugh's treatment of this episode.<sup>59</sup> In his late fifth/early sixth century homily on the same episode, Jacob is keen to demonstrate how the Old Testament story foreshadows types that are fulfilled in the New. Jacob's first homily on Elijah, the one which concerns the widow of Zarephath episode, is missing the initial section and the extant portion begins with the widow's son already dead. In the 120 dodecasyllabic lines that treat the remainder of the chapter in 1 Kings, Jacob portrays Elijah as a type of Christ, whose resurrection of the son prefigures Christ's harrowing of hell. "Let us now term the widow's house a house of symbols," Jacob preaches, "Full of Resurrection and Plenty and types of the True things."<sup>60</sup> The widow's jar of meal symbolizes the body of the Lord; the vessel of oil symbolizes baptism. The woman is likened to the Church and of her grief Jacob writes that "God depicted all of Creation in that widow."<sup>61</sup> In this later Syriac text the

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<sup>58</sup> *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, ¶43 directly discusses the Trinity. In ¶40, the Ninevites make "boasts" which Jonah cuts off that is reminiscent of the way in which Paul (2 Corinthians 10) uses the term. Similarly ¶39 discusses "circumcision of the heart" an idea which is found in Deut 30:6, but in the EG homily it is used in the Rom 2:29 sense, of a circumcision undergone by gentile believers.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen A. Kaufman, trans., *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Elijah* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Kaufman, *Homilies on Elijah*, 12.

different time periods run together, with actions and events assuming importance in multiple frames of reference.

## Realism

One of the most striking pieces of exegesis in the Ephraem Graecus corpus is the treatment of the drought in the *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*. The biblical narrative only briefly touches on the drought's effect. Elijah proclaims the drought (v. 1) and then God orders him into the wilderness (v. 3). God provides for Elijah's well-being through the ravens (vv. 4 & 6) but the wadi eventually dries up due to the drought (v. 7), precipitating God's sending of Elijah to the widow of Zarephath (vv. 8-9). At the widow's house, the biblical narrative allows the audience to see the effects of the drought—the widow and her son are on their final meal. The appearance of Elijah and his spiritual power assume that the widow's food and oil stores are not exhausted. The illness which claims the son (vv. 17-24) appears to be unconnected to the drought. In the next verse (1 Kgs 18:1) has God commanding Elijah to pronounce the end of the drought to Ahab. The narrative sticks very close to Elijah and the two other people he encounters. The only hint we get of the far-reaching effects of the drought on society is in an aside in 1 Kgs 18:5 from Ahab to Obadiah. Ahab instructs Obadiah to "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the wadis; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive." Within the narrative, this command serves to separate Obadiah and Ahab and bring the former into contact with Elijah rather to make a statement about the state of the land after three years of drought.

The author of the homily identifies the horror of a years-long drought, that the biblical narrative glosses over, as the chief theological issue in this story. He narrates it

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

chillingly, describing Elijah walking through the devastated land on his way to his wilderness refuge.

For he was seeing the elderly languishing in famine, again the young, tall in appearance, <who would usually> set up the trophies and the victories in wars, suddenly fallen on the ground and despoiling the land. Similarly, the infants, suckling at their mothers' breasts were dying, not having any milk for nourishment. One mother was offering her own breasts, which were no longer able to provide milk, because the nipples were dried and cracked from the famine and the flesh wasting away because of the thirst. Taking her infant, she put her breast in its mouth for it to suckle, but it did not find food.<sup>62</sup>

From this heartbreaking image, Ephraem Graecus moves onto another, where a father buries his son, only to return home after the burial to find his daughter dead in the house. The real human cost of a drought, which is barely even in the background in the biblical account, is brought to the foreground. There is a strong realistic element to the recasting of the narrative. The human (and livestock) toll that the drought takes is expressed in some of the most hauntingly evocative poetry in the Ephraem Graecus corpus. Where it might be easy to ignore the dark repercussions of Elijah's first miracle story in the Bible, that is precisely what Ephraem Graecus wishes to make the focus of his story.

Ephraem Graecus forces his audience to react to the full implications of the biblical story and God's action towards the land and the people on it, even recalling the destruction wrought in the time of Noah.<sup>63</sup> Yet the author does not place any blame for the situation on God. Instead, Ephraem Graecus takes his cue from the precise wording of the initial

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<sup>62</sup> *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, ¶4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶4.

proclamation of Elijah, that the drought can only be lifted by Elijah's own word. Thus the dead infants and the other calamities that have befallen the land are all the consequence of Elijah's action, which Ephraem Graecus makes clear to the audience through an apostrophe to Elijah: "O zealous Elijah! Knowing that men sin against the Lord when misled by the Enemy. How did the infants sin? The livestock and beasts and birds, how did they sin? For you handed all of these over to death. If these were guiltless, have mercy and give rain upon the earth."<sup>64</sup> The chief conflict of the story shifts, from Elijah being the unquestioned hero who saves the widow's son, to one where the character of Elijah is almost the antagonist of the story.

This type of exegesis is an interesting extension of the expanded, re-written Bible approach. It does not expand the narrative by adding additional episodes and scenes. Instead, the homilist explores an under-developed portion of the biblical narrative. On the one hand, the exegesis is "literal" in the sense that it derives directly from the text of the Scripture. Its hermeneutical focus lies in the textual detail that Elijah has the power, with a word from his mouth, to end the drought. On the other, the exegesis ends up shifting the focus of the episode from the miraculous actions of Elijah, establishing him as a prophet *par excellence*, to a story where the zeal of the prophet is set in opposition to the mercy of God.

The opposition of prophet's zeal and God's mercy is also the central conflict in the biblical book of Jonah and expanded upon in the Ephraem Graecus homily *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*. The exegesis exhibited in *On Jonah* in many ways resembles the interpretations seen in the Elijah homily. In the book of Jonah, the prophet's clash with God is textual and forms the basis of the conflicts in chapters 1 and 4. *On Jonah and the*

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶5.

*Repentance of the Ninevites* does not treat the first chapter but greatly expands the last, adding more material to the discussion between God and Jonah. In *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, Elijah is dedicated to the divine judgment he has been charged to oversee and loathe to change his mind. In other words, he is cast in the role of Jonah within his own story.

The tension between the godliness of Elijah's command and its repercussions on the people living in the land is first brought to Elijah's attention (the author has already related the devastation to the audience) when he first encounters the widow. He asks her for a sip of water, as he does in Scripture. In the biblical narrative, she silently complies. In the homily, she caustically reproves the prophet, "'O Zealot! The oath of your tongue locked up the heavens so that they would not give rain, so why do you ask me for water? You check your tongue, you restrain the dry earth, you put all the things on it to death, so from where shall I get this water to give to you?'"<sup>65</sup> The widow points out the illogical situation of the prophet asking for precisely what he is denying her and the other people in the land. If the bleak depiction of the tragedies happening because of the drought did not raise concerns for readers that something very wrong was occurring in the land, the widow's speeches bring it home to Elijah. Elijah's powers are able to sustain the widow, her son, and Elijah through the miracle of the oil and wheat. But then immediately, God spurs the prophet into action, "God sent death to the child of the widow, dragging Elijah to command the bonds to be loosed."<sup>66</sup>

Ephraem Graecus sets up the death of the son to closely resemble the situation in Jonah 4 of a prophet deeply invested in divine vengeance and momentarily blinded to mercy. The chief difference lies in who is initially the instigator of the divine wrath. In Jonah, God

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶6.

proclaims the sentence of judgment against Nineveh and the prophet (eventually) delivers it. In *Homily on the Holy Elijah*, Elijah is in charge. And in the beginning God supports Elijah's initiative. Elijah himself sees the people acting lawlessly and going after foreign gods and persuades God to begin the drought that will not be lifted without Elijah's consent.<sup>67</sup> This arrangement is an innovation by Ephraem Graecus. The biblical narrative gives no motivation or occasion for Elijah's initial proclamation to Ahab—it could be either God or Elijah who incites the drought. Regardless, in the homily God carries out the sentence which Elijah pronounces and initially provides for Elijah's care through the ravens. Ephraem Graecus keeps his narration in the human realm, but indicates that God's approval of Elijah's plan is no longer operative. In two places Ephraem Graecus describes God “dragging” (ἐφέλκω) Elijah towards compassion, when he sends Elijah to the widow in the first place and when he sends death to the son.<sup>68</sup> God sees the obstinate prophet and uses human messengers to convince him to change his mind and incline towards mercy and forgiveness.

The homily *On Jonah* follows the biblical story closely, though dramatically expanding the depiction of the Ninevites' repentance. Jonah, as in the biblical account, watches the city from afar, lamenting that the Ninevites have accepted the call to repent. The homily identifies two reasons for his distress: the example of the Ninevites' repentance contrasts dramatically with the Israelites' own idolatry and he himself appears to be a liar (ψεύστης)<sup>69</sup> since the judgment he proclaimed did not occur. The people of Nineveh leave the city to talk to Jonah and to get him to participate in their celebration. First though, they

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶1-2.

<sup>68</sup> Both in ¶6, the first in the second sentence, the second in the last sentence of the paragraph.

<sup>69</sup> *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, ¶50 and 52.

reprove him, “Tell us, Jonah, what would have been your profit if our city had fallen and we had all died? What would you have gained, son of Amath, if we had gone down into Hades?”<sup>70</sup> The reproof functions within the homily to castigate the character of Jonah and also to point out to the audience the misguidedness of Jonah’s position. The didactic approach of having one character interrogate and challenge another allows the homily to comment on and critique the biblical story while still remaining within a rewritten narrative genre. After pointing out the negative implications of the prophet’s chosen behavior, the characters note where things truly stand, with a God-oriented perspective: “You should be glorified on earth in Him. Since God rejoices with the angels in heaven at us. Let your mind exult exceedingly in this, that all people give reverence to God. Console yourself since the whole city with its king prays in joy with you. See the infants saved from death, repent and pray for their lives! Also see the toddlers protected and put your hands on their heads.”<sup>71</sup> The concern for the homilist is demonstrating that the prophet is wrong to adhere so closely to his zeal for judgment. To accomplish this he expands God’s canonical role in which the divine advocates for a merciful approach and creates a role for the king and people of Nineveh to explain their perspective to the obstinate prophet.

The occasion of the Ninevites’ encounter with Jonah is a happy one, since they have been saved from death. The opposite is true in the Elijah homily, since the widow confronts Elijah after her child has died, a death she places directly at the feet of the prophet. The widow’s castigation of Elijah takes up nearly 15% of the homily and is every bit as emotionally gut-wrenching as the description of the people affected by the drought, “Who

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶52.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶52.



shall eat the rest of these things, which you gave? Or what sort of gain do I receive by having food for consumption and being robbed of the glory of the only-begotten son which I had? I am wasting away in laments and groans because of him. Would that I could not see you, nor had the “fortune” of listening to you, for I wish I had not been bereaved of my beloved child.”<sup>72</sup> Though the two “reproof of the prophet” speeches come from very different emotional places, from a content perspective they are very similar. The core assumptions of the protagonists in the two narratives, that the idolatry in the land justifies Elijah’s drought as punishment on the one hand and that it would have been better if Nineveh had fallen on the other are strongly refuted by characters in the homilies. In both cases the zeal for widespread divine punishment for sinful actions is criticized. The criticism of Jonah is part of the canonical story, but it is a layer that Ephraem Graecus adds onto the Elijah story. Both homilies make a point of emphasizing that children and infants are affected when entire cities or nations are threatened. There is clear discomfort on the part of Ephraem Graecus with the indiscriminate nature of the Old Testament punishments. Both homilies make the point of showing the deficiency of a wrath-based theology with the prophet, the exemplar of faith and supposed protagonist of the story, castigated by a widow and a foreign king, respectively. In both instances the prophet admits his fault and sets to putting it right. The Ninevites rejoice with Jonah, proclaiming him a hero even though they have witnessed him defeated in his disputation with God.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, ¶7.

<sup>73</sup> *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, ¶57.

Elijah begs for God to bring the child back to life and God responds by agreeing to do it if Elijah will loose the heavens and allow the rain to return.<sup>74</sup> God points out the extreme ends Elijah is willing to go to in order to bring about a change in the people's behavior and his short-sightedness such that it is only when he is directly confronted with the suffering he caused does he relent, "Look and see the cries of the world, how they lack water and rain down tears! Seeing only one woman crying because of her son you now think to be merciful? The whole world laments in tears but even though you see will you overlook it until everything dies?"<sup>75</sup> This divine speech is quite similar to the one God speaks to Jonah in that Ephraem Graecus homily, where he comments that Jonah is inappropriately grieved over the castor bean plant, "Where is your justice, Jonah? Why do you prefer the gourd plant over the city? You show compassion over a pitiful plant, Jonah, and upon the city great severity. Thus the thing which is given and eaten as food is more magnified in your eyes than the ones who would eat? You prefer the perishable thing over the repenting people and you extol plants over reasoning human beings!"<sup>76</sup> The character of God that Ephraem Graecus creates in his homilies encourages two different prophets to have a much more broad and compassionate view of the world and to eschew their zeal for divine retribution.

### **Ephrem's Meter and Metrical Compositions**

Ephrem's literary output was primarily in the form of metrical poetry. He is justly famous in the history of Christian thought for the way he expressed his symbolic theology

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<sup>74</sup> *Homily on the Holy Elijah, the Prophet*, ¶8.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶8.

<sup>76</sup> *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*, ¶55.

through poetic forms. Ephrem wrote both *madrāshê* and *mêmrê*.<sup>77</sup> Characteristically, Ephrem wrote his *mêmrê* in a 7+7 syllable meter (or fourteen syllables with a caesura) and so this syllabic arrangement became known as the “Meter of Mar Ephrem.”<sup>78</sup> The association of this meter with Ephrem was particularly strong in the scribal communities of the late antique and early medieval periods. Scribes would collect Syriac *mêmrê* written in the 7+7 meter and erroneously attribute them to Ephrem.<sup>79</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume a similar process has occurred with the Ephraem Graecus writings. Compilers and scribes found a collection of texts, some of which are written in 7+7 syllabic meter and address monastic topics and assumed they must have been written by Ephrem.

The first obvious difference between the Syriac *mêmrê* written in the “meter of Ephrem” and the Ephraem Graecus works in heptasyllables is the language in which they are written. Ephrem is not known to have written in Greek,<sup>80</sup> which makes the authenticity of these pieces doubtful, but the different language does not necessarily preclude a Syriac connection. The versification of the Ephraem Graecus metrical texts is based on syllable count, as in Syriac poetry, not by the syllable length characteristic of Ancient Greek poetry or

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<sup>77</sup> *Madrāshê* are sung, stanzaic verse. The melodies (*qālê*) to which the song should be sung are often preserved, though the musical notation has been lost. Each stanza is followed by a refrain. The lines are defined by a syllable count, with 4, 5, 6 or 7 syllables per line depending on the author’s choice. The stanza length is similarly fluid, so that under the umbrella of the term *madrāshê* there is a lot of flexibility in form. Ephrem himself used more than fifty different stanza patterns in his career. *Mêmrê*, or verse homilies are non-stanzaic poems, which were probably recited and not sung. The versification is made up of isosyllabic couplets. 5+5 syllable couplets are traditionally associated with Balai, 7+7 with Ephrem and, 12+12 with Jacob of Serugh. For a fuller introduction to these poetic forms, see Sebastian Brock, *An Introduction to Syriac Studies* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>78</sup> Ephrem Lash, “The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian,” in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* eds. A. Louth, D.E. Conomos, K. Ware, and J. Behr (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 92.

<sup>79</sup> Sebastian Brock, “In Search of St. Ephrem,” *Khristianskij Vostok* 6 (2013), 20.

<sup>80</sup> Lash, “The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem,” 82.

by stress (as seen in Byzantine Greek poetry and the *kontakia*).<sup>81</sup> This form of composition would seem to indicate some type of connection with Syriac literature, either by a Greek author using a Syriac versification scheme in his writing, or by a Greek translator adapting a Syriac work and attempting to keep its isosyllabic structure intact through the process of translation.

The framework for studying how a Syriac verse homily is translated into Greek was constructed by scholars looking at the work *Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*. This piece survives in its original Syriac along with Greek, Latin, Armenian, Ethiopic and Georgian translations.<sup>82</sup> The plethora of versions allows us different ways of viewing the textual tradition and to see how different translators dealt with the same issues. The translations are for the most part faithful to the Syriac wording and depend on the Syriac original. However, they also show abbreviation and omission of lines, which Brock argues is typical of Greek translations of Syriac works.<sup>83</sup> Hemmerdinger-Iliadou argued that the meter had been too badly lost in the process of transmission, so she did not attempt to reconstruct it when she published the full text of the Greek homily.<sup>84</sup> She made this decision in spite of the fact that in 1915, Mercati argued that the translator had attempted to preserve the meter, and published a section (the manuscript used by him did not have the complete text) of the

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<sup>81</sup> Ephrem Lash, "The Metrical Texts of Greek Ephrem," in *Studia Patristica* vol. XXXV ed. M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 435.

<sup>82</sup> Wonmo Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek Ephrem," (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 82.

<sup>83</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Ephrem's verse homily on Jonah and the Repentance of Nineveh: notes on the textual tradition," in *Polyhistor: Miscellanea in honorem C. Laga*, eds. A. Schoors and P. van Deun, *OLA* 60 (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 74-5.

<sup>84</sup> Democratie Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Ephrem le Syrien, sermon sur Jonas (text grec inédit)," *Le Muséon* 30 (1967), 47-74.

homily laid out in octosyllabic lines.<sup>85</sup> The position that the Greek text did preserve the meter of the Syriac original has been decisively argued by Wonmo Suh, who presented the entire homily (according to the Hemmerdinger-Iliadou edition) in isosyllabic lines and argued that preservation of the Syriac syllabic structure was a primary goal of the Greek translator.<sup>86</sup>

Suh examined the first 26 lines of the sermon, comparing the Syriac version to the Greek, Latin and Georgian translations. He argued that the Greek translator took a single Syriac 7+7 syllable couplet and rendered it as two couplets of 7+7 Greek syllables.

[7] ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ / [7] ܡܬܥܝܢ ܠܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

ἢ τίς ἐνοπτρίσατο [7]/ πρὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ [7]//τὸν φιλόανθρωπον Θεὸν [7]/ διὰ τῆς μετανοίας; [7]

Or who saw reflected/ before his eyes// the caring God/ because of repentance?<sup>87</sup>

Suh admits that there are deviations from this 7+7 Syriac syllable couplet to two Greek 7+7 syllable couplets paradigm. Sometimes the Greek lines have 6, 8 (most common), or (rarely) 9 syllables in order to convey all the entire content of the original.<sup>88</sup> In other places a Syriac

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<sup>85</sup> Sylvius Mercati, *S. Ephraem Syri Opera*, I, (Rome: Monumenta Biblica et Ecclesiastica, 1915), 91-93.

<sup>86</sup> Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek," Appendix 1, 420-52.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 112. English translation mine.

<sup>88</sup> Suh does not explore the grammar of the resulting Greek sentences, but it seems that the translator sometimes eschews a close adherence to syllable count in favor of grammatical clarity. In the line τὸ στόμα ἔθος ἔχον [7] ἐκ τῆς καρδίας μαρτυρεῖν [8], "The mouth has a habit/ of learning from the heart," the τῆς could be omitted from the second stitch, bringing it down to seven syllables and thus matching the syllable count in the first stitch. The translation with the τῆς intact is smoother Greek since the article highlights the comparison between τῆς καρδίας and τὸ στόμα through grammatical parallelism. It seems that although syllable count matching is a desideratum; it is not the primary guiding principle of the translation technique.

couplet is translated by three hetpa- or octosyllabic Greek lines<sup>89</sup> or the order of the Syriac couplet may be inverted to make better sense in the Greek.<sup>90</sup> Despite the number of qualifiers and exceptions Suh puts on his own thesis, he does convincingly argue that the concern of the translator is to preserve, as much as possible, the metrical form of the Syriac original.

Suh's study of the pieces of the Ephraem Graecus corpus has several advantages over this one. The presence of a Syriac original allows him to see, from the outset, the poetic form of the original. The pieces used in this study (with the exception of *Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*) do not have extant Syriac *Vorlagen*. We do not know if the pieces are translations with lost Syriac originals or original Greek compositions, or a combination of the two. However, we can use the same methodology that Suh uses on our texts to see if they exhibit the same characteristics. Finding similar hetpa- and octosyllabic patterns within the Greek of our texts might suggest that a Syriac *Vorlage* existed at one time. It equally may not. It is presumably easier to compose a Greek text in isosyllabic meter than to translate a Syriac text in isosyllabic meter into a Greek isosyllabic meter, though as Suh shows, it can be done. The absence of such patterns would not necessarily disprove a Syriac *Vorlage*, as the *Vorlage* could have been a prose text rather than a poetic one. There could also have been a Syriac metrical pattern behind a text which became lost in translation when the translator did not have the creativity exhibited by the *Jonah* homily's translator. The question of whether a text is a translation or not is most definitively answered by a manuscript displaying a *Vorlage*. Since such *Vorlagen* do not always exist, it is important to

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<sup>89</sup> Suh, "From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek," 109.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 110.

understand the poetic structure (or lack thereof) of the texts we have at hand as they exist in their Greek form.

The possibility that an Ephraem Graecus text is a Greek composition that uses a Syriac mode of versification is a difficult hypothesis to prove. To begin with, in the manuscripts of Ephraem Graecus that survive, the text is printed in blocks of prose. The isosyllabic lines must be reconstituted from the prosaic paragraph through the trial and error of syllable counting. Ephrem Lash has described the process as well as some of the pitfalls inherent in recovering the metrical form of the texts. The biggest issue is the lack of critical editions for the Ephraem Graecus texts. Without an examination of the manuscript traditions of these works and a determination of what readings are original and which show signs of textual corruption it becomes difficult to determine when irregularities in scansion are original and when they are not.<sup>91</sup> Lash hypothesizes that the Greek scribes who preserved these texts, in a state of ignorance about their metrical nature, often “improved” the Greek by adding definite articles or connecting particles, thereby throwing off the syllable count. These scribes could also make pious additions or glosses to the homily text, or correct a properly scanning paraphrase of the Bible to make it an exact quotation of Scripture which does not scan properly. Finally, “many of the extra syllables can be accounted for by turning disyllables into diphthongs, as often in Modern Greek.”<sup>92</sup> Despite these difficulties, the present form of the texts can tell us much about whether the pieces are prose or poetry, even if we must wait until critical editions are published to explain all of the metrical issues.

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<sup>91</sup> Lash, “Metrical Texts of Greek Ephrem,” 437.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

## Metrical Form of the Ephraem Graecus homilies

The Ephraem Graecus pieces sit on both sides of the poetry and prose divide.

*Abraham and Isaac I* is written in seven-syllable isosyllabic meter starting from the first paragraph. I will use a forward slash to indicate the end of a line and note in brackets if the syllable count of that line is not seven.

Ἀποικίζει ὁ Θεὸς/ τὸν δίκαιον Ἀβραάμ/ ἐκ τῶν συγγενῶν αὐτοῦ/ καὶ πάντων τῶν  
 ἰδίων./ Καὶ ἦν ἐπ' ἀλλοδαπῆς/ ἐγκαρτερῶν τοῖς δεινοῖς,/ τὴν τῆς ὑποσχέσεως/ περιμένων  
 ἐλπίδα./ Βάσανος προσάγεται/ πολλὴ τῷ πατριάρχῃ,/ δι' ἧς ἡ βεβαιότης/ ἡ πρὸς Θεὸν ἐδείχθη./  
 “God sent away/ the just Abraham/ from his community/ and his kin./ And he was in foreign  
 lands/ persevering in dangers,/ the of the promise/ hope awaiting./ He [God] brought forward  
 trials/ many for the patriarch/ through which his steadfastness/ before God was demonstrated.

Each line contains exactly seven syllables and the line breaks do not dramatically interfere with the grammatical flow of the Greek sentences. It is instructive to break down the first sentence in detail. The first seven-syllable hemistich presents the subject of the sentence and the verb. The second contains the entirety of the direct object. Thus in the first 7+7 line the author presents everything he wishes to say about the subject, verb, and object. The next two hemistiches contain a compound prepositional phrase, ἐκ τῶν συγγενῶν αὐτοῦ/ καὶ πάντων τῶν ἰδίων./ “from his community/ and his kin.” The author splits the genitive objects into two six syllable parts and attaches the preposition ἐκ to the first (although it governs both) and the connecting καὶ to the second, perfectly balancing the two halves.

As for Suh’s assertion that two Greek seven-syllable lines equals one Syriac seven syllable line, and thus one Syriac 7+7 line represented by two Greek 7+7 syllable lines, it is difficult to conclusively argue either way. Some Greek 7+7 lines work well with each other



but not with the 7+7 line which precedes or follows them, while others work very well.

Again, referring to the above paragraph, the first twenty-eight syllables<sup>93</sup> break down into,

Ἀποικίζει ὁ Θεὸς/ τὸν δίκαιον Ἀβραάμ/ ἐκ τῶν συγγενῶν αὐτοῦ/ καὶ πάντων τῶν ἰδίων./ “God

sent away/ the just Abraham/ from his community/ and his kin./” A discussion of the poetics

of the line is difficult because the line works fine as prose and in fact is presented as such in

the Phrantzola edition. The Verb-Subject-Object-Modifier word order is a bit odd in Greek

but can easily be explained by the fact that the author is retelling a biblical story and thus is

imitating the LXX’s adaptation of Hebrew word order. Putting the break where Suh would,

“God sent away/ the just Abraham// from his community/ and his kin,//” makes a certain

amount of sense, but it is unclear if that is simply because it groups the Verb-Subject-Object

sequence together and balances it with the Modifier. In the second sentence we can see Suh’s

point more clearly, Καὶ ἦν ἐπ’ ἀλλοδαπῆς/ ἐγκαρτερῶν τοῖς δεινοῖς,/ τὴν τῆς ὑποσχέσεως/

περιμένων ἐλπίδα./ “And he was in foreign lands/ persevering in dangers,/ the of the promise/

hope awaiting./” There is a certain poetic balance between the second hemistich and the

fourth, with “awaiting hope” echoing and answering the “persevering in dangers.” The two

stitches in the second sentence work better together poetically than the two stitches in the

first. This is indicative of the “poetics” of the rest of the piece. Though the heptasyllabic

structure of the lines holds throughout, it is hard to make any definitive statement about the

relationships among the lines.

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<sup>93</sup> Though Phrantzola failed to detect the meter and so did not publish the work in verse, he does punctuate the first paragraph into three sentences, each with 28 syllables and for the last two sentences he places a comma after the 14<sup>th</sup> syllable.

*Abraham and Isaac* breaks from its heptasyllabic structure during Sarah's (hypothetical) plea to Abraham to spare Isaac.<sup>94</sup> Her entire lament is formulated instead in octosyllables. After the conclusion of her dialogue, the homilist reverts back to heptasyllables for the remainder of the homily. We also see this shift in the *Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph* during some of Joseph's emotionally charged speeches. The author of that homily switches between octo- and heptasyllables rather frequently though, and only sometimes when the change corresponds to the shift to dialogue. The entirety of ¶6-¶8 is in octosyllables, although this section contains both speech and narration. The lion's share of the section is devoted to Joseph's pathos-filled lament, so the hypothesis that octosyllables are used for heightened emotions still holds. When the narrative returns to the brothers in ¶9, the poetic form reverts to heptasyllables. This only lasts for eight seven-syllable hemistiches, though and right in the middle of the narration of the brothers' actions, the homily shifts back to octosyllables.<sup>95</sup> The octosyllabic meter persists through ¶10. ¶11 is in heptasyllables, and then ¶12-¶15 are in octosyllables. Paragraphs ¶12-15 contain both speeches and narration, as well as changes of subject (both Joseph and his brothers' actions are treated). From ¶16 to midway through ¶19, when the meter breaks down completely, the text is in heptasyllables. At least in *Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph*, the choice of meter seems rather free, but once the author decides on either octosyllables or heptasyllables, he follows those patterns

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<sup>94</sup> *Abraham and Isaac I*, ¶8, beginning with Φείσαι, φείσαι τῆς φύσεως./[8] φείσαι παιδός, ὦ Ἀβραάμ./[8] "Spare, spare my natural-born/ spare my son, O Abraham!"

<sup>95</sup> Ὡς δὲ οἱ ὠμοὶ ἐνέβαλον/[9] τὸν Ἰωσήφ ἐν τῷ λάκκῳ,/ ἐκάθισαν τοῦ φαγεῖν/ καὶ πιεῖν μετὰ χαρᾶς./ "Ὡς περ ἂν τις νικήσας/ πόλεμον πτερώσῃται,/ οὕτω καὶ οὗτοι μετὰ χαρᾶς τῆς καρδίας ἀνέκειντο. [17 total syllables] Καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν καὶ/[8] πινόντων ἐν χαρμῶσιν,/ ἄφνω ἦραν τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς,/ [8] καὶ βλέπουσιν ἐρχομένους/[8] ἐμπόρους Ἰσμαηλίτας,/ [8] ἀπιόντας εἰς Αἴγυπτον,/ ἔχοντας καὶ καμήλους/[7] βαστάζοντας ἀρώματα./[8]

for a certain stretch of text. Much work remains to be done on the poetics of these works to determine what these shifts in syllable count might indicate.

*Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph, Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites, Abraham and Isaac I and Homily on the Holy Elijah* are in heptasyllabic meter predominantly. *Abraham and Isaac II, Abraham, Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel, On the Preparation and on the Thief and the Cross, On the Thief on the Cross, Defense to a Brother About Eli, the Priest, Homily on Daniel and the Three Holy Youths, Homily on When the Wise Men Came to Jerusalem* show no or only sporadic metrical tendencies. During the sporadic metrical occurrences, it is more likely that the author is writing in prose which just so happens to be in seven syllable segments.

For an example of the non- or sporadically metrical pieces, let us turn to the *Homily on Abraham*, beginning with ¶3.

Πῶς οὐ κατεπλάγη καὶ/ ψιλῇ τῇ τῶν ῥημάτων/ ἀκοῇ ὁ Ἀβραάμ;/ Πῶς νήφων ἔμεινεν  
 ἔτι;/[8] Πῶς οὐ γέγονεν ἄφωνος;/[8] Πῶς αὐτῶν ἄφνω τῶν φρενῶν/[8] οὐκ ἐστερήθη; Πῶς  
 οὐκ/ εἶπε παρενεχθεὶς τὴν/ διάνοιαν· τοῦτό μοι,/ Δέσποτα, τῆς πρὸς σέ/[6] δουλείας τὸ  
 ἄθλον;/[6] Οὗτος ὁ μέγας τῆς/[6] εὐσεβείας καρπός;/[6] Τοῦτό μοι τῆς διὰ σοῦ/ μετοικίας τὸ  
 δῶρον;/ Πρὸς ποίαν διὰ σέ/[6] καρτερίας οὐκ ἐπύκτευσεν/[9] πείραν; Πατρίδος ἐστερήθη/ διὰ  
 σέ καὶ κτημάτων/ καὶ γένους. Σὺ μοι δέδωκας/[8] υἱὸν οὐκ ἐλπίσαντι-/ σύ μοι πολλὰ ὑπ' αὐτῷ/  
 παρέχειν ἀγαθὰ/[6] καθυπέσχου./[4]

How was he not struck down/ by simply these words/ Abraham, at hearing?/ How did he remain sober?/ How did he not become mute?/ How was he not robbed of his senses/ all at once? How did he not/ say, changing his/ thought, “What is this to me,/ Master, a test of my/ service to you?/ Is this the great/ fruit of piety?/ What is this to me,/ the reward that my

travels/ [for you have earned?] For what sort of/ test of perseverance should I not fight/ on behalf of you?/ I was robbed of father/ because of you as well as goods/ and kin. You gave me,/ a son whom I had wished for;/ and now you from me/ all the good things/ provided by him/ withdraw?

The first thing to notice is that the passage does not break up evenly into seven-syllable segments. The seventh syllable frequently occurs within a word, necessitating 6-, 8-, and 9-syllable lines in order to avoid having a line break in the middle of a word. This means the paragraph must be broken up into lines with syllable lengths of 7, 7, 7, 8, 8, 8, 7, 7, 7, 6, 6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 6, 9, 7, 7, 8, 7, 7, 6, 4. Particularly towards the beginning of the paragraph, something like a pattern emerges with a triplet of seven-syllable lines, a triplet of eight-syllable lines, a triplet of seven-syllable lines followed by what looks like a triplet of six-syllable lines, but is in fact a quartet. The arrangement gets more chaotic from there.

Additionally, the line breaks make sense only sporadically. The paragraph is structured with the preacher asking four rhetorical questions of the audience. Each of these questions is some variant of the first, “How was Abraham not struck down at simply hearing these words?”<sup>96</sup> These four questions are followed by a fifth wherein the preacher allows Abraham to give voice to his doubts. The invented dialogue for Abraham poses five questions of God, reacting to the divine command to sacrifice Isaac. The first rhetorical question is twenty-one syllables long, allowing it to be broken up into three 7-syllable lines. The next two questions are eight syllables each. The final question is thirteen syllables long, necessitating an awkward 8/5 break.<sup>97</sup> The final five syllables of this question (the sentence’s

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<sup>96</sup> “These words” refer to the command in Gen 22:2.

<sup>97</sup> A 7/6 break is not possible because it would fall in the middle of φρενῶν, Πῶς αὐτῶν ἄφνω τῶν φρενῶν/[8] οὐκ ἐστερήθη;

verb and the particle of negation) must be coupled with the first two syllables in the introduction of the invented dialogue, Πᾶς οὐκ.

We are forced to conclude that there is no metrical arrangement of this piece. Even taking into account scribal additions of particles and articles, emendations, and corrections, it seems unlikely that a metrical arrangement could be recovered. There is also a possibility that there could be sections of text that have dropped out which, if included, would yield a text with isosyllabic lines. This possibility must remain hypothetical until critical editions exist for this corpus. Attempts to restore the metrical form at this juncture run the risk of being nothing but speculation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored how the Ephraem Graecus homilies interpret the biblical text. I began by examining the apparent similarities between the works and the genre of “rewritten Bible,” but ultimately did not find that parallel to be illuminating. Though the Ephraem Graecus works are invested in retelling the biblical stories to their audience, the authors of the “rewritten Bible” genre are engaged in a different kind of exegesis. I then turned to the texts themselves and examined the features of interpretation contained therein. I looked at the tendency of the homilies to invent expanded dialogue for the characters and fill silences in the text. I noted that whereas some other authors in the Greco-Syriac exegetical tradition are keen to link Old Testament stories typologically to the life of Christ, the Ephraem Graecus homilies are rather reticent about making that connection. The homilies have an either-or approach to typology: either nearly every feature of an Old Testament text has a New Testament referent (as seen in the Abraham and Isaac homilies and in the introduction to *Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph*) or New Testament references are

completely absent. I argued that Ephraem Graecus homilies are interested in getting their audiences fully immersed in the biblical stories and so in addition investing the characters with pathos, can also develop the realistic implications of the biblical stories on everyday people living in those times. Finally, I turned my attention to the sporadically metrical nature of the texts and pointed out that critical editions of this corpus are greatly to be desired for further study on these texts.

## Conclusion

This project has sought to provide, for the first time ever, the translations of homilies on biblical topics in the Ephraem Graecus corpus. I have presented these texts in the hope that they will be taken as important data points to be considered when we discuss how biblical exegesis was performed in the late fourth and early fifth centuries in Syria and the Christian East more broadly. The corpus stands at a point of intersection between Greek and Syriac Christian communities and speaks to greater association and influence between the two spheres of Christianity than has been recognized in traditional reckonings of this period of Christian history.

In Chapter 1, I looked at the different portraits of Ephrem the Syrian and noted how, after his death, the historical figure and author came to be replaced by the ideal of an Eastern Christian ascetic holy man. The figure of the “monk” Ephrem came not only from the *vitae* that were written about him, but also from a number of writings, many of them in Greek but some in Syriac, attributed to him on monastic topics. This monastic Ephrem obscured our view of who Ephrem the Syrian was, how he articulated his theology and how he responded in faith to the upheavals of the fourth century. In the twentieth century, the genuine works of Ephrem came to be published in critical editions and he rightly took his place in the pantheon of early Christian saints. The Greek works which make up the Ephraem Graecus corpus have tended to be dismissed as inauthentic and of little importance.<sup>1</sup> The former assertion is almost certainly true. Many of the Ephraem Graecus works discuss a monasticism that did not exist

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<sup>1</sup> “[The corpus] presents almost insurmountable problems, while its theological importance is rather small,” Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem’s Art of Symbolic Thought*, Gorgias Dissertations 26 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 14.

at Ephrem's time and quote the Christological formulation of the Council of Chalcedon, which took place nearly a century after Ephrem's death.<sup>2</sup>

So while there is little to support its authenticity, the corpus is only "of little importance" if that "importance" is seen in terms of the texts' ability to provide evidence about the life and thought of the genuine Ephrem. If we leave out the necessity of discussing the relationship Ephrem, a rich discussion can be had about the development of late fourth and early fifth century Christianity on the basis of these texts. Two hundred and twelve Greek works are attributed to the name Ephrem, and that large number must reflect a large demand in Greek communities for them.<sup>3</sup> These texts were then further translated into the early Christian languages of Armenian, Latin, Old Slavonic, Coptic, Georgian, Arabic, and Ethiopic.<sup>4</sup> More often than not though, this literary output is viewed in the scholarly narrative as an obfuscation of Ephrem's legacy. I rejected the narrative that these texts are an obfuscation and instead probed into those ones pertaining to my field, i.e. biblical studies, to see what exactly they said and how whoever wrote the texts was interpreting the sacred Scriptures.

My second Chapter investigated first the attribution of the works to Ephrem. A brief examination of Ephrem's poetic works confirmed what previous scholarship had already concluded: that Ephrem's symbolic theology as expressed through his *mêmrê* and *madrāshê* is a masterwork in the Christian poetic tradition and the artistry is unmatched by the Greek and Syriac works which erroneously bear his name. I then turned to examine Ephrem's prose

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<sup>2</sup> Ephrem Lash, "The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian," in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* eds. A. Louth, D.E. Conomos, K. Ware, and J. Behr, (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 92-5.

<sup>3</sup> David G.K. Taylor, "St. Ephraim's Influence on the Greeks," *Hugoye* 1.2 (1998), 187.

<sup>4</sup> Lash, "The Greek Writings Attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian," 89-90.



commentaries, which he himself admits he had not wished to write, wherein Ephrem engages in a much different style of exegesis. He does not use Scripture in the manner it is used in his poetry; as a spring board, through which to ascend to the heights and then dive deeply into the mysteries of the divine. Nor does he engage in a lemma-by-lemma commentary on the Bible, as was popular among Greek-speaking Christian exegetes. Instead Ephrem goes through Genesis and Exodus retelling the biblical story. In certain places he merely rephrases or restates the familiar stories, but in others he dramatically expands the biblical narrative by adding scenes and dialogue. Gaps in the text are filled in a creative, performative way that allows the audience to see into the character's minds and get a sense of their motivations and thoughts, which are often unexpressed in the text of Scripture itself.

This type of exegesis is also found in the Syriac dramatic dialogue poem genre. These poems, often falsely attributed to Ephrem, can take a variety of forms. In a basic sense, the poems reimagine the biblical stories in terms of a debate or dispute between the familiar characters. In other forms of the genre, narrative takes center stage and we see the biblical stories take a shape similar to that seen in Ephrem's commentaries. The dialogue and dramatic potential of the stories are greatly expanded but instead of the biblical plot being ancillary to the dispute, the additional scenes and action are grafted onto the narrative, creating a more robust specimen of storytelling. The Ephraem Graecus corpus demonstrates that this type of exegesis was not restricted to the Syriac language. This Syriac genre of exegesis proved so popular that not only were Syriac works in this genre translated into Greek (e.g., *On Jonah and the Repentance of the Ninevites*), but additional works were composed in Greek on that Syriac model.

Chapter 3 went deeper on how the biblical exegesis of the Ephraem Graecus corpus functions. Here I provide a prolegomenon for how the Ephraem Graecus writings could inform on-going conversations about biblical hermeneutics. The homilies contain a great deal more dialogue than the biblical narrative does. The speeches made by the biblical characters develop their characters and gives the audience a greater sense of what they are thinking and feeling. The characters become three dimensional models of faith (or villainy) to whom the audience can relate to better than the often emotionally blank figures found within the pages of the Bible. This increased focus on dialogue can be viewed as having roots in the Mesopotamian/Syriac tradition of dispute literature, but also has links to the Graeco-Roman rhetorical schools' *ethopoia* exercises. Rather than viewing the tendency to rewrite and expand dialogue as deriving from solely one source, the Ephraem Graecus corpus suggests that there are multiple literary traditions across linguistic boundaries that inform certain types of exegetical activity.

The Ephraem Graecus corpus seeks to make plain the meaning of the biblical texts it examines. In this goal it is no different than any other corpus of exegetical literature written in antiquity or in modern times. The Ephraem Graecus corpus' contribution is notable in its willingness to explore the silences and ramifications of the biblical text. It is not only interested in what Abraham said, but what he might have said, and what he didn't say to Sarah and why. One might say that the Ephraem Graecus homilies are more interested in exploring the biblical world than the biblical text itself. Ephraem Graecus eschews a grammatical exploration of the Cain and Abel text to instead focus on what Eve was thinking during the story, how Cain went about convincing Abel and his parents to allow his brother to go out into the field with him. When the author of the Ephraem Graecus homily *On the*

*Holy Elijah, the Prophet* reads that Elijah caused a famine in the land, he steps away from what actions Elijah takes and portrays the suffering, unmentioned in the biblical text, of the infants and mothers and elderly people in the land because of Elijah's actions. The Bible is real to the author of the Ephraem Graecus corpus not simply as an historical document, but even more as a depiction of a reality in which real people suffered and struggled with their faith.

### **Final Thoughts**

The traditional scholarly narrative about this corpus is that the literature attributed to Ephrem in Greek and other languages and the *vitae* traditions about him are a veil which must be removed and cast aside before the beauty of Ephrem's thought and theology can be viewed.

This study has sought to pick up that veil and examine but a small corner of the veil which is the vast and heterogeneous Ephraem Graecus corpus. I agree with the scholarly impulse to remove the layers of legends, traditions, and anonymous writings as a necessary first step in order to have direct access to the luminaries of early Christian literature.

However, the history of Christianity is not only in the minds and literary outputs of the few figures who have been canonized as saints. It also consists of numerous anonymous people who filled the pews, choirs, and monastic cells week in and week out. Christian literature is full of works that may not have the literary artistry or theological complexity of those of an Ephrem or a John Chrysostom, but nevertheless were written, preserved, and enjoyed by those "ordinary" Christians. Many of these works have gone unpublished, untranslated, and unstudied. This project has translated and studied a portion of one pseudonymous author's work. Much more work remains to be done.

I argue that the Ephraem Graecus corpus should be read as a literary vestige of a largely anonymous Christianity. The name “Ephrem” is both an aid and a hindrance to that approach. A famous name, like Ephrem’s, ascribed to a work by a lesser-known author often helped insure that work was copied and thus survived.<sup>5</sup> So, for as much as the false attribution of texts to Ephrem clouded scholars’ perspective on him, it did preserve many pieces of literature in Greek as well as Syriac which may otherwise have been relegated to the trash heaps. The Syriac works attributed to Ephrem gained that name in the same manner that many of the Ephraem Graecus works did; because they possessed a heptasyllabic meter or because they seemed to be reminiscent of Ephrem’s style.<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 2 I compared the dramatic retelling of the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath performed in a heptasyllabic work in the Ephraem Graecus corpus with a heptasyllabic dramatic dialogue poem written in Syriac and also falsely attributed to Ephrem. Both of these works can be seen as responses to Ephrem’s literary legacy. His literary output did much to popularize the form of dramatic dialogue poems as a method for communicating the biblical message. In his wake, anonymous people sought to accommodate the need for dramatic dialogue poem literature by writing their own such pieces. The name Ephrem, falsely applied in both cases, joins two similar pieces of biblical exegesis across the boundary of language. Absent the name of Ephrem it is possible that the editor of the Greek text would not have examined the text for the presence of heptasyllables. So although the texts tell us little or nothing about the man Ephrem, the attribution positively informs the way we approach them and to what documents they may be profitably compared.

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<sup>5</sup> Kristian Heal, “Five Kinds of Rewriting: Appropriation, Influence and the Manuscript History of Early Syriac Literature,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 15 (2015), 53-4.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Palmer, “The Influence of Ephraim the Syrian,” *Hugoye* 2.1 (1999), 85-6.

The Ephraem Graecus works also bear similarities to works falsely attributed to Greek authors (most notably John Chrysostom but also Macarius) as well as the genuine works of some lesser known Greek authors, such as Basil of Seleucia. When examining the parallels between the Ephraem Graecus corpus and Greek literary comparanda, the name Ephrem obscures more than it illuminates. The presence of the name Ephrem conjures an image of the Syrian holy man (or the image of the Syrian monk par excellence), the Syriac theological milieu, and his mid-to-late fourth century date. The baggage that accompanies attribution to Ephrem can cause the pieces in the Ephraem Graecus corpus to be overlooked in cases where they might be of use.<sup>7</sup> It is a goal of this project to make the content of the Ephraem Graecus corpus more readily available so that these sorts of cross-linguistic connections can be made. As time goes on more and more of the pseudonymous works collected under the famous names and the genuine works of ancient authors who are not so famous are being edited, translated, and published. It is my hope that this endeavor continues and this study contributes to it. I believe an examination of the works in the Ephraem Graecus corpus in particular is important as it contributes to a clearer picture of the interplay between Greek-speaking and Syriac-speaking Christians in Late Antiquity. This rich history of Greek-Syriac interaction has been somewhat neglected in scholarship, even as scholars recognize the fluidity of the linguistic boundaries.<sup>8</sup> And here I have only examined the

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., L. William Countryman, "A Sixth-Century Plea Against Religious Violence: Romanos on Elijah," in *Reading Religions in the Ancient World* eds. D.E. Aune, and R. D. Young (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 289-301, who seems only aware of the Pseudo-Chrysostom and Basil of Seleucia works as Greek comparanda for Romanos' *kontakion* on Elijah.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., William L. Petersen, "The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 no. 2 (1985), 171-87; and Sebastian Brock, "From Ephrem to Romanos," *Studia Patristica XX* (1989), 139-51 argue for connections between the Greek and Syriac worlds in the development of Romanos' work. Kristian Heal ("Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources," [PhD diss., University of Birmingham,

connections between Syriac and Greek literature. The works of Ephrem and Ephraem Graecus were translated into the myriad other languages of Christian Antiquity where they influenced those languages' literatures. The linguistic proficiencies of individual scholars often influences what pieces are studied by them. Making these pseudonymous and otherwise neglected writings available to a wider audience can assist in giving scholarship a broader view of the resources and discourses of Antiquity.

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2008], 72-3) recognizes in the Ephraem Graecus homily on Joseph that the Syriac exegetical traditions have the ability to transcend linguistic boundaries, even though his focus is on the Syriac tradition.

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## Appendix I: Translations

### Homily on Abraham

#### Outline

- ¶ 1 – Introduction
- ¶ 2 – Scriptural Citation (Gen 22:2)
- ¶ 3-6 – Possible Responses of Abraham (Astonishment, Incomprehension, Grief)
- ¶ 7 – Scriptural Citation (Gen 22:3)
- ¶ 7-8 – Digression About Sarah (Abraham does not tell her because she would die with Isaac)
- ¶ 9 – Scriptural Citation (Gen 22:3-4)
- ¶ 10-11 – Abraham’s Thoughts on the Journey (Abraham justifies God’s Command to himself)
- ¶ 12-13 – Scriptural Rewriting (plot elements of Gen 22:7-10 are rewritten)
- ¶ 14 – Speech of the Angel
  - Praise of Abraham for his faith
  - Explanation of the Command
  - Revelation of the Typology “For I, too, have an only-begotten son, Abraham”
  - Summation of the Typology
- ¶ 15-17 – Conclusion, Connection to Jn 8:56, Doxology.

1. I tremble at Abraham, as my tongue scales to the height. As I begin with his memory, again the promise<sup>1</sup> draws me out to sea. I am fearful of the ocean of that one’s virtue. How

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<sup>1</sup> ἐπαγγελία.

would I be strong enough to sail to harbor having once begun a voyage on such a thing? Let us see today if the just man can remain upon his judgment until the end.<sup>2</sup>

2. What was commanded? “Take your son, the beloved, whom you love, Isaac, and offer him up as a holocaust on one of the mountains of which I will show you.”<sup>3</sup>

3. How was Abraham not struck down at simply hearing these words? How did he remain sober? How did he not become mute? How was he not robbed of his senses all at once? How did he not say, changing his thought, “What is this to me, Master, a test of my service to you? Is this the great fruit of piety? What is this to me, the reward that my travels for you have earned? For what sort of test of perseverance should I not fight on behalf of you? I was robbed of father and goods and kin because of you. You gave me, a son whom I had not even hoped to have; and now you withdraw from me all the good things provided by him?

4. “What is this to me, the end of the things promised? I still hold fast to the letter of your promise, ‘In Isaac will your descendants be counted.’ If this one should die, how will the truth of the promise to me live? If you take out the beginning, how will the race run? If you wanted to take away, why then did you grant a beginning? Would that my wife had remained sterile! Would that the suffering not been loosed on childless Sarah. I would that I

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<sup>2</sup> εἰ μέχρι τέλους ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ἔμεινε γνώμης ὁ δίκαιος. Rendering γνώμης is difficult here. The word is polyvalent and there is no shortage of praiseworthy attributes of Abraham. I have chosen “will” rather than the typical “judgment” or “intelligence,” based on what is praised about Abraham in the following paragraphs. It is likely that Ephraem Graecus chose this word because of its multifaceted meaning.

<sup>3</sup> A partial citation of LXX Gen 22:2. The author has left out the Greek clause καὶ πορεύθητι εἰς τὴν γῆν ὑψηλὴν, which is likely due to a recollection error. Syriac authors “often quoted from memory, omitted parts of verses, and, of course, changed verses to fit their homiletic needs” (M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta,” in *Text and Language in Bible and Qumran* [Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Orient, 1960], 197). The LXX’s aorist imperative ἀνένεγκον has been replaced by ἀνένεγκε which uses a present imperative ending with an aorist stem.

had not chanced upon this grace at all! This thing had much consolation, with all the other things I have been robbed of, I resolve to strengthen myself.”

5. Now someone, having named a person Abraham, put him to infanticide. “Not alone will I cut off this life. Let me not become a story for evil men. When you asked, I gave you your things. I confess I did; in return, [you gave me] orders to kill. Do not set it about for the father to be the sacrificer of his child. Let me not become a murderer of that which I have come to sow. For who will have mercy on the one who was killed by his own? Who will take the trembling hand of the one who didn’t spare his son? Who will call the one who warred against his own house friend?

6. “I will die too, and be buried together with my son. Let an interlacing of remains with remains happen with me,<sup>4</sup> as blood of my son is shed into one grave. So we will go together to Hades. While living I was separated from my son. I would dwell together with the one who died. Death would at the same time welcome the old father and the young son who was torn apart by him. With what sort of eyes would I look upon the thrice-unhappy mother?”

7. Someone who was not Abraham would have said these things. But the just one said none of this, nor did he think it. But from his will he presented to God a sacrifice, the slaughter of his son. For Abraham got up, it says, at dawn, and loaded his donkey, taking along with him two lads and Isaac his son, and cut wood for the burnt offering. And he got up and went. But he did not tell the mother<sup>5</sup> of the child about the upcoming slaughter.

Understand the thing that would have happened, had he not hid the undertaking. She would bury with tears the one she bore. She would follow her child on a journey to death. She

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<sup>4</sup> Λείψανον λειψάνῳ περιπλοκή γένηταί μοι.

<sup>5</sup> The Mercati edition reads καὶ εἶπε τῇ μητρὶ. The next sentence, however, includes the contrafactual clause μὴ κλάπη τὸ ἐγχείρημα and the rest of the paragraph describes things that *would have* happened if Abraham had told Sarah. It seems justified, then, to insert a negation in the first clause.



would go together with the one who would not return again. With kisses she enjoyed one last look at the ones who would die.

8. O, the Adamantine soul of the Righteous One! I believe firmly in womanly righteousness, I fear her power, that of the softer nature; and also the intense difficulty of the struggle upon hearing these sorts of things. The suffering is stronger [in women] and I fear lest the old woman fall; misfortune ought not drive out sense. He was about to do a holy thing to Isaac, she would learn philosophically the true motive when the appearance of the loved one was no longer present anymore.

9. And he came to the place which God told him on the third day.<sup>6</sup>

10. O the Time of Retribution! O the Misfortune of Distance! What do you suppose these lonely travelers were thinking when Abraham took this conflict upon himself? How were nature and piety were contending inside him? Would you spare the child, old man, since you do not have another besides him? Would you become a father again by will alone?<sup>7</sup> Do you carry your child in body and baptize him with iron? Know precisely what sort of thing you are pressing on towards by killing your son and ready yourself appropriately. Shall reason be changed into beastliness? Do you fear the one who commanded you? The one who ordered this is benevolent.<sup>8</sup>

11. And indeed these kinds of things nature puts forth as just and proper, as it seems, but on the other hand, piety equally opposes the wisdom of nature. God orders Abraham to be

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<sup>6</sup> A direct citation of LXX Gen 22:3-4.

<sup>7</sup> οὐ γίνῃ καὶ τῇ γνώμῃ πατήρ; Again we see the polyvalence of γνώμη in this homily. I have rendered it as “will,” and opted for a literal translation. The question could be rendered more idiomatically as “Can you will yourself to become a father [again]?”

<sup>8</sup> φιλόανθρωπος ὁ προστάξας.

and beget. “You have nothing that you did not receive from the Creator. One must not prefer the thing given over the giver. One must not love grace more than the one who granted the grace. Do you love your son? If you love your son, you love my command. No one can fully comprehend the mind of the Lord and cannot take from the one who does not consent. Why did you not devote yourself willingly? No one is alone who has dwelt together with the Creator. Do the pangs of compassion consume you? One must not, as a servant, regard natural impulses as above a command from the master. He once gave you an unexpected son, and in another time gives a command about what he wants.” These sorts of thoughts divide the soul!

**12.** As he came to the place he had been shown. Isaac, his son, took the wood of the burnt offering and he set it up. Why did he carry the wood and why was he slaughtered? Perhaps the son was more pious than the father? Why were you weighed down with wood, by which you were about to be covered in short order? The two together took the fire with their hands, and the blade and walked. Isaac, seeing the wood lying there, the fire prepared, the iron sharpened, but the sheep nowhere, asked his father, “Father Abraham, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” and Abraham said, “God himself will see to the sheep for the burnt offering, child.” His answer was prophetic. For truly, the thing had been seen to by God, but the marvel had not yet been shown. Abraham built the altar and bound Isaac and put him on top of the wood. He reached out his hand and he took the knife.

**13.** Isaac did not suffer any of the things about to happen.<sup>9</sup> He was not struck down in a slaughter as had been planned. As if in someone else, he saw the things happening to himself.

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<sup>9</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰσαακ οὐκ ἔπαθ' ἐτι πρὸς τὰ γινόμενα. The wording is rather unequivocal. Compare the *Homily on Abraham and Isaac II* where the author plays with the idea that Isaac was actually sacrificed and then raised from the dead.

He soon rejoiced at being brought to be a sacrifice to God. As the hand with the blade was raised up, death kept its distance from this one, at the same time as the hand [was raised], suddenly a voice from heaven called out, “Abraham, Abraham, Stay your hand! Why are you driving towards this sort of action, you who are dear to me? Stop!”

**14.** See the unbridled assault of the old man rapidly hindered, yet still at its height. Reason shuttered it; zeal held it fast. “The one who ordered the command refuted it. Do not put your hand to your son, nor set fire to my gift. Do you wish to put an end to my commandment? Do you want to confess that you gave whatever I asked? I have grace. I received the gift. You completed the sacrifice. You are childless out of an offering. But you say ‘The child Isaac lays here.’ It has become suitable for me; the burnt offering has been made apparent from your faith. But if there is something else, sacrifice that to me. As I grant this other son to you, he received this second birth. Previously he had been born unexpectedly, today he will live from hope. For I desire character, not sacrifice.<sup>10</sup> I tested you in this way; I was not looking for murder. I do not destroy the possession that I have given to you. I do not cut the tree from which I wait for many righteous humans to grow as fruit. I do not obliterate the root about to, after a short time, bear my fruit according to the flesh, my only begotten. I do not contend, but I make clear my own plans. Do I ask for sacrifice of senseless<sup>11</sup> things, and do I make them become logical? Do I wish for the death of sinners, and was I about to take up just people in slaughter? I think on your sheep for their lack of importance. In your darkness I hint at the truth of the complete holy marvels which are

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<sup>10</sup> *προαιρέσεως γάρ, οὐκ ἀναιρέσεως χρήζω*. While similar in sentiment, the vocabulary is quite different from Hos 6:6 (through Matt 9:13) *ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν*. Ephraem Graecus makes good use of the wordplay between the two *αἰρέω* compounds. *προαίρεσις* most frequently appears in the Ephraem Graecus corpus as a synonym for God’s *οἰκονομία*. Here, however, it seems to be used in the sense of a person’s character or reputation.

<sup>11</sup> *ἀλόγων*.

coming in heaven. For I, too, have an only-begotten, Abraham. You do not go wrong. Since you gave your son, not sparing him, I too will hand over my only-begotten, after a short amount of time. As you gave your son to me, I too, will give mine for you and those of your nature. You gave one of your own race, I will give one homoousios<sup>12</sup> with me. Yours came from a sterile woman, mine will come, after a short time, from a virgin. As a sheep, silent, after a short time, this one will be a suitable lamb. The sacrifice at that time will happen by wood, the wood of the cross. Sabek,<sup>13</sup> “the forgiveness,”<sup>14</sup> is the name of that wood.

Forgiveness similarly will be the name sinners give for the wood of the cross. The forgiveness will come from the bush that bound that one and from the deeds of Christ. A ram was bound up in it; Christ was nailed to it. This one was slain in the place of Isaac, the offered. That one was crucified on behalf of the whole world. Yours remained in the expectation of death for three days, and mine will receive death for an equal number of days for the sake of truth on behalf of all of you. Whereas yours hoped to die, but did not die; mine will be killed but not see corruption. Isaac suffered but yet did not suffer; for he

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<sup>12</sup> ὁμοούσιος. This word, made famous by the Council of Nicea, is not found in the works of Ephrem, who tends to shun Greek theological terminology. See: Sidney H. Griffith, “Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis in Saint Ephrem’s Teaching Songs *De Paradiso*: The ‘Types of Paradise’ in the ‘Treasury of Revelations’ in Robert D. Miller ed. *Syriac and Antiochene Exegesis and Biblical Theology for the 3rd Millenium* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 46.

<sup>13</sup> This discussion is dependent on the LXX reading of Gen. 22:13, καὶ ἰδοὺ κριὸς εἰς κατεχόμενος ἐν φυτῷ σαβεκ τῶν κεράτων. The LXX translator has misunderstood the Hebrew רִבֹּי, seeming to think it is the species name of a plant rather than just, “thicket.” Thus he transliterates the word. The Peshitta translator renders the word ܪܒܐ (bough, branch) and so either understood the Hebrew original, or supplied a Syriac word he knew fit the context. Regardless, the use of the word “Sabek” and the homily’s understanding of it as a proper noun indicates that the LXX was the biblical text for the author and that he was likely ignorant of the Syriac or the Hebrew readings.

<sup>14</sup> The presence of “forgiveness” ἄφεσις here is the result of an inter-linguistic connection. The root ܡܬܬ means “release, remit, forgive” but it is linguistically unrelated to the Hebrew word רִבֹּי, “bush” or the Peshitta’s translation, ܪܒܐ. However, the Greek author proceeds down an avenue of exegesis based on the Syriac root’s homophony with σαβεκ.

suffered what you willed, but he did not suffer the things which I prevented. And whereas my only begotten one suffered for the things which became seen, he did not suffer for the things which the mind believed.”

**15.** And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and lo, there was a ram caught by its horns in a bush.

**16.** Truly, Christ said to the Jews, “Abraham your father rejoiced exceedingly that he might see my day. And he saw and he rejoiced.”

**17.** To him be the glory forever, amen.

## Homily on Abraham and Isaac I

### Outline

¶ 1-2 – Introduction

¶ 3 – Typology of Isaac and Jesus: Births from Unlikely Mothers

¶ 4 – Scriptural Rewriting (plot elements of Gen 22:2 are rewritten with homiletic commentary)

¶ 5-6 – Command Examined (emphasis on audience response, “what would you have suffered?”)

¶ 7-8 – Potential Response of Sarah (overwhelmingly negative)

¶ 9 – Travel to Moriah (similarities to Jesus’ journey to Golgotha developed)

¶ 10-11 – Isaac’s question about the sheep and Abraham’s response

¶ 12-13 – Scriptural Rewriting (pre-sacrifice scene lengthened for dramatics; heavens rejoice)

¶ 14-16 – Explanation of the Typology of Isaac and Jesus

- ¶ 14 – God makes Abraham a Priest and Prophet, reveals He will give over His son.
- ¶ 15 – Ram appears from Rock so that men might not disbelieve Child from Virgin
- ¶ 16 – Isaac on the mountain is a “type” (τύπος) of the Passion

¶ 17 – Conclusion, Doxology.

1. God sent the just Abraham away from his kin and his community. And he was in foreign lands persevering in dangers, awaiting the hope of the promise. God brought forward many trials to the patriarch, through which his steadfastness before God was demonstrated.

2. Much time passed by: His youth finally withered as a flower; old age was on the doorstep. Nature suffers and slays itself to bent old age. Similarly his wife's strength and power for fertility were quenched in old age. The body of the two bent to nature, their youth all spent up. But the hope in God among them was in full bloom. Not only was it ageless, but also unbent. Wherefore, through hope, they bore Isaac, who bore the type of the Lord in all things.

3. It was not a work of nature that a dead womb conceived, and dry breasts offered milk to Isaac. It was not a work of nature that without a man, a virgin, Mary, conceived and without corruption she bore the Savior of all. He made Sarah a mother in her old age and he displayed Mary a virgin with child. An angel in the tent said to the patriarch, "At that time a son will be in Sarah." An angel in Bethlehem said to Mary, "Lo, you bear a son, the Graced one." Sarah laughed, regarding her sterility, seeing the deadness, and not believing a word. "How," she said, "will this be, with Abraham and I done in our productive years?" Even Mary was at a loss, seeing her virginity and its unbroken seal. "How will this be for me since a man has not known me?" For the promise is alien to nature,<sup>1</sup> but the one who gave Isaac to Sarah through hope, he himself was born from the Virgin according to the flesh. Sarah was exceedingly glad (as was Abraham) when Isaac was born, just as God had said. Mary and Joseph were exceedingly glad when Jesus was born, just as Gabriel had said. Abundantly the springs flowed with milk from the one beyond age into the mouth of Isaac. Abundantly the breasts of the virgin gave forth milk to the one who supports the perfection of all things. Who would say to someone, "I am a virgin and after I bore a child, I nursed it," which Mary said? It was not because of Isaac that Sarah laughed, but because of the one born from Mary. And

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<sup>1</sup> φύσις, nature, earthly things, is at odds with God's heavenly plan. This homily contrasts φύσις with God's "promise," ὑπόσχεσις.

just as John, by leaping revealed his joy thus also Sarah laughed and revealed hers. The child was reared and grew up to the age of youth, he was bright and beautiful. He increased the virtues of the soul together with the beauty of the body and he was sweetness to his parents. Whosoever of you have children, imitate this: how the father rejoiced seeing his child playing, how he rejoiced overseeing the progress of his child, and the zeal which he had for learning.

4. But when Abraham saw these things and rejoiced, God brought a difficult test and trial upon him, in order that it might become clear what he considered greater - the crisis of nature or the longing for God. The severity of this trial, beloved, I tell, shaking and amazed. For God again gave a command to Abraham and called him out by name, saying “Take your only-begotten<sup>2</sup> son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him up as a sacrifice for yourself upon one of the mountains which I will show to you.” When he said to him the, “Abraham, Abraham,” he eagerly obeyed, more honestly considering the assistance of grace, wholly expecting what brought marriage together, or fixed the grave, ordered it so that blessing and abundance for his seed might come to perfection, just as was promised.

5. But let us examine well the qualification of the phrase, “Take your only-begotten, your beloved son.” Do you see the sting of the word? How it stung the father and how it rekindled the flame of nature? How he raised the affection of the father to his child, “only begotten” he said, and also “beloved” so that through these sorts of names he might arouse the affection for him and might test his mind? “And offer him up for a holocaust to me upon one of the mountains of which I will show to you.”

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<sup>2</sup> μονογενής. The citation of Genesis 22 is very free here, and this word in particular is chosen to highlight the parallels between Isaac and Christ.



6. What would you have suffered, hearing these things? How do you not become dizzy at this tale, those of you who are fathers? Become taught clearly about the natural love for your sons. For you know, you know how when the father heard this he promised the slaughter of his only son. Who would not be astounded at this sort of utterance? Who would not immediately turn his face around? Who would not immediately at this utterance take death rather than accept this decree? Would one not plead one's case to him, attempting to win over the natural advocate? "Why would you command these things to be, O Lord? Why do you put forth this alien charge? Why did you want a father to commit this? So that you might bring the child-killing to completion all at once?"<sup>3</sup> For this reason you tasted the sweet gifts, so that you might show me as a cautionary tale<sup>4</sup> to all the world? By my own hands I would slay my son and pollute my right hand with the blood of my family, would I become an infanticide? You command these things and then would you take pleasure at this sort of sacrifice? You command me to kill my most beloved son, whom I expect to bury with Sarah? What sort of grave will I put him in, tell me? What sort of mirth will I prepare for marriage? Will I light no torch in the bedchamber for him, nor a light of joyfulness, but a flame in the grave? Am I to be rewarded thus? Shall I set up a bridal bed? Should I strike up the band for them? Will I be a father, as you say, of the nations, I who am not worthy of a single son?"

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<sup>3</sup> διὰ τοῦτο πατέρα ἠθέλησας ποιῆσαι, ἵνα παιδοκτόνον ἄθροον ἀπεργάσῃ; The difficulty is in construing ἄθροον, which means "all together" or "all at once," or "suddenly." The "suddenly" and "all at once" meanings do not seem to work, given that it takes Abraham three days to get to Mt. Moriah. I believe that Ephraem Graecus is alluding to the potential result that the many nations that are to come from Abraham would all be destroyed "together" by the one death of Isaac. Thus all the children will be killed together. This is an elliptical way to refer to such an outcome, especially since the author has not been addressing the promise to Abraham for some time, but it seems the best way to understand this difficult phrase.

<sup>4</sup> μύθος. Clearly Ephraem Graecus is thinking of the Greek tragic myths like those of Prometheus, Sisyphus or Tantalus – human figures whose punishments from the gods were cruel and severe.

7. But nothing of these things did the just one say. He became obedient, kindling his love more vehemently than fire, sharpening his grief sharper than a sword, for in himself he cut the chains of nature. Just as something earth-like, the burden of his emotional condition he set aside and abandoned. Willingly he gave over his whole self and he resolved to slaughter his son, in accordance with the command. But he said nothing to his wife about this. He communicated nothing, acting most usefully; for unworthy and useless to his plan would have been talking to a woman. For nothing profited Adam – and moreover actually harmed him – by hearing the counsel of Eve. Therefore, lest Sarah suffer some womanly thing, or wail (in the way that mothers probably would), with abundant and pure love for God she would weep and cry out to him, and so he was eager to avoid her. For what sort of wailing would Sarah not try, either to her son or to his father? What would she not do, seeing her own son being dragged off with force to be slaughtered?

8. Indeed, how would she not pour out her tears, exceedingly encircling with her arms, and pull her own to her. What sort of words would she have used with Abraham, and with what sort of moaning lamentation would she have cried out to him? “Spare, spare my natural-born, spare my son, O Abraham, spare him, do not commit this act of violence, he is my only son. This one is my first, he is both the first and the last in my pangs – Isaac. Do not cut off the one bunch of grapes which we planted, when finally we became fruitful in old age. Do not harvest the one stalk, which we planted, with a sharpened sickle, the one who grew from us, out of our dead flesh. Do not destroy the staff, upon which we are fixed. Do not break our rod for which we have waited. Do not close the eyes which we both acquired. Do not lift up our memorial to heaven. Do not slaughter the little lamb whom we have as you would a sheep. Do not offer up our joy and make us full of lamentation. At whom will you look at

over the table after this? Who will you call mother? Who will care for you in old age? Who will wrap you in burial clothes after you die? Who will put your body in a tomb? Who will save your memorial if you are left without children? Do you see the beauty of your child, the bloom of his youth, and look upon it as an enemy, would you look upon him with compassion? Thus this fruit of my great prayers has been given away. This, the branch of succession stands abandoned. This remnant of our family, this cane for our old age, this one is the only hope of our hopelessness. If you are about to thrust a knife into the throat of our most-beloved, kill me first. Give me that greatest grace. Let his burial mound be shared and his memorial also shared. Let the same dust cover both of our bodies, let him have a shared death, he who came from a sterile woman. A shared stele set up for both of our sufferings. Let the eyes of Sarah not look any longer at Abraham the child-killer, nor Isaac, the child killed by the hand of the father.”

9. These and other things of that sort Sarah would have said if she knew that her beloved child was about to be sacrificed. But because of this, Abraham said nothing of these things to her lest she hinder the work at hand. He placed the logs of wood upon his son, since the Savior bore his own cross. As Isaac was about to go off to the sacrifice, a donkey followed with two of his lads. And as Christ was about to go to his passion, he mounted a foal so the call would be clear to the gentiles. His disciples followed him, holding wands and singing Hosanna. Isaac bore the wood and he ascended the mountain to be sacrificed, as an unblemished lamb. The Savior bore his cross and ascended to the Place of the Skull to be sacrificed, as a lamb, on behalf of us all. He saw the knife and knew my<sup>5</sup> purpose. He knew

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<sup>5</sup> τὴν μάχαιραν θεωρῶν ἐννόει μοι τὴν λόγχην. The identity of the μοι here and in the next few sentences is hard to determine. The only two options are Abraham and God, yet there is no indication that either of those characters has begun a direct speech. If direct speech were in view, we would expect an imperative verb: “Look at the sword and know my purpose.” Without any indication that he is about to

the altar and he saw the place of the Skull, and seeing the planks of wood he recognized the cross, and seeing the fire he comprehended my task. Look at the sheep, stuck with its two horns in the bush called Sabek.<sup>6</sup> Look to me, and Christ, the Lamb of God, stuck with his two hands to the cross. The Sabek Bush is interpreted as “Remission”<sup>7</sup> (for the Lord released the son of the old man from sacrifice). The cross is a symbol of remission for the sins of the world and the new life provided. The ram caught in the Sabek Bush mystically ransomed only Isaac, but the Lamb of God being hung on the cross saved the world from Death and Hades. Isaac was separated from his lads when he was going to climb up the mountain to death. Christ was separated from his disciples when he was going up to be sacrificed on our behalf. The just Abraham left the lads lest one of them hinder the holy work. And taking Isaac, him and him alone, he went up carrying the fire, knife, and wood.

**10.** But what of Isaac? He called out in the sweetest voice and said, “Tell me,” he said, “Father, I see the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” Again, the voice of the child pricked the compassion of his father, but this was another fearful test for him. Another trial came upon him again, not lesser than the first nor more humane. And how Abraham did not shed tears, fully expecting that he would no longer be a father! He uttered no wailing, nor screamed any lamentation, but with steeled soul and unswerving consideration he answered the pleasant voice of his child and replied giving him these words, “God will see, my child, to the lamb for sacrifice.” Either he was emboldened when he spoke

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do so, the author has taken on the persona of either Abraham or God (with Abraham being more likely, but God cannot be ruled out) and presents a short section of the homily from their point of view. Within a few sentences, Ephraem Graecus switches back to his 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective, leading me to think the *μοι* might be a textual error. However, since it occurs three separate times over the course of four sentences, I have chosen to retain the word.

<sup>6</sup> See p. 125, n. 13.

<sup>7</sup> See p. 125, n. 14.

this to the child or Abraham was speaking prophetically about the things to come. He hastened to the predetermined place and built an altar and prepared the sacrificial materials, he made ready the knife. The fire and wood the father put upon the child. After this the father of the child lit the wood; and nature in no way acted against him as a hindrance. Isaac gave himself over to his father so that he might make use of him in whichever way his father wanted.

**11.** What amazes me first, and what scares me? With what first shall I weave the crown of praise? Is it the putting his hands to his most beloved son because of his love and goodwill for God? Or that Isaac was obedient to the father unto death and accepted from him this heavenly sacrifice? For on the one hand Abraham exceeded his own nature and esteemed more the commandment of God than that of nature, but Isaac on the other hand was obedient to his father unto death and regarded death as lesser than his father's grief.

**12.** Then Abraham, taking his bound child, did not let his hand go numb, nor was he driven out of his mind. "Ten times I saw the likenesses of this child, but I was never able to escape with dry eyes, for visibly the work was brought before my eye so that I might clearly understand the succession of events." Isaac was set close to the altar by his father who was crouched on his knees, having had his hands bound behind him. After Abraham had bound his ankles, he then, grasping the hair of his son's head in one hand, he bent over him and saw the face of Isaac, who was looking up at him with pity and awaiting the blow. Having armed his right hand with the knife, he guided it for the slaughter, grasping the body. Then, when the edge of the knife was at his throat, he thrust the blade, against his compassion. And then a divine voice rose up, the thrust stopped and the work was prevented. "Abraham, Abraham," it said, "Do not put your hand to Isaac nor do this evil thing to your son. For now I know

truly that you fear God and you did not withhold your beloved son from me. And behold, there is a ram caught up in a Sabek Bush, take it and offer it up in place of Isaac,” he said, “so that you might be satisfied since I accepted your sacrifice, the heat already conducted.”

**13.** They were astounded – angels, rulers and authorities, thrones, lords, and all the host. The heavens were amazed, the sun and the moon and the planets at this incredible event. God was well pleased by the choice of the one who was most faithful, Abraham. And he said, “Most assuredly will I bless you and most assuredly shall I increase your seed upon the earth, as the stars in the heavens, since you obeyed my voice eagerly, and were zealous to fulfill my command.

**14.** And God gave a sheep from the rock in place of the child to complete the sacrifice. God takes delight in the sacrifice of dead things through the smoke of the fat that goes up to him.<sup>8</sup> But living sacrifices, holy, most pleasing, the service of speech, he seeks from us, as the Apostle enjoined all, clearly establishing this as most pleasing to God. For God did not want to make Abraham commit infanticide. He told him to offer up his son, but in order to show to all living in the world that he exceedingly loved God. Abraham did not withhold his son Isaac from God, even though he was his only child. Wherefore God showed a mystery, as to Abraham’s love, great and incredible; for through his sacrifice, he became a priest. He made him in the type of a prophet. And God the Most High made it known to him that he was about to give over his own only-begotten son on behalf of the world, so that God might save the human race from sin by becoming man. For this was a sign – that a sheep from the Sabek Bush, became a sacrifice and had been given in place of Isaac.

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<sup>8</sup> Leviticus presents (Lev 1:9, 2:2, 3:5 etc.) the idea of God taking pleasure in the smell of a sacrifice. In early Christianity, the sacrifice of service and worship is emphasized over and above animal sacrifices (see, e.g., Rom 12:1). Ephraem Graecus will note in the following sentence that living sacrifices are preferable, but it is interesting to see that the anthropomorphism is preserved here.

**15.** For since mistrustful men were about to disbelieve the birth from the holy virgin, how she was able to be pregnant with a son without having gone to a conjugal bed, which seems impossible. Because of this, he offered in his place a ram from the rock, so that the incredible thing might be believed and that by the will of his divinity each arranged thing would be substituted.

**16.** Therefore, as the Word substituted there a sheep, thus also in the virgin the Word became flesh; and as a sheep was bound in the bush, thus the Only-Begotten was bound to the cross. Because of this Isaiah cried out saying, “As a lamb led to the slaughter, he said no word.” Again the Lord said to the Jews, “Abraham desired to see my day and he saw and rejoiced” and at the Passion manifested in the type of Isaac on the holy mountain.

**17.** God is blessed, he who presented types to us of all the things about our salvation in the holy Scriptures and he who came and fulfilled the words of the prophets and then ascended in glory to his Father so that in every place we might worship the Father with the Son and the Spirit forever. Amen.

## Abraham and Isaac II

### Outline

¶ 1 – Introduction, the theme of “promise” ἐπαγγελία

¶ 2-4 – Definition of Terms and the Typology of Isaac and Christ

- ¶ 2 – Isaac was born to proclaim the righteousness of Christ
- ¶ 3 – “Nature” φύσις and “Plan” προαίρεσις came together in Isaac.
- ¶ 4 – The typology has three elements, φύσις, πράξις, χάρις.

¶ 5-7 – Abraham’s Response and Foreknowledge

- ¶ 5 – The idea of Abraham doubting or questioning is quickly dismissed
- ¶ 6 – “Abraham saw in his own son the Son of God”
- ¶ 7 – Connection with Jn 8:56. “He chose to sacrifice the τύπος of Christ

¶ 8 – Analogy – Isaac asked about the sheep; Jesus asked for cup to pass. Both assented silently.

¶ 9-11 – Nature and Power of Sacrifice

¶ 12 – Purpose of Analogies, “that they might not be said to diminish the divinity but to amplify”

¶ 13-19 – The issue of the Sabek Bush and the Ram’s origin

- ¶ 13-14 – Problem: Was the bush/ram always there or did it come into existence?
- ¶ 15 – Possible solution: bush/ram came from paradise. Solution dismissed.
- ¶ 16 – Example of Jonah: God commanded the Castor Bean plant to grow.
- ¶ 17 – Critique of those who say there must be a physical cause for everything.
- ¶ 18 – God does not arrange elements, as the Greek say.



- ¶ 19 – Solution: God created the bush/ram out of non-being.
  - ¶ 20 – Resumption of Narrative: Isaac and Christ both kept silent and were being sacrificed.
  - ¶ 21-22 – The ram bound in the bush is a type of Christ on the Cross.
  - ¶ 23 – The Consequence of Christ’s sacrifice
    - Christ was blameless and suffered for humanity
    - Martyrs were blameless and suffered for Christ
  - ¶ 24-26 – Nature and God’s Plan come together.
  - ¶ 27 – The Mysteries of the Cross and the Ransoms
  - ¶ 28-29 – Altar of sacrifice becomes grave, which symbolizes heaven and earth coming together.
  - ¶ 30 – A&I left the two lads behind because at the resurrection there will be two in the mill.
  - ¶ 31-32 – The general resurrection
  - ¶ 33-35 – The mystery of the name Sabek
  - ¶ 36-40 – Conclusion
    - ¶ 36 – The story of Isaac is about forgiveness
    - ¶ 37 – Abraham knew God was discharging Isaac from death; Isaac knew God was pleased with his silence.
    - ¶ 38 – Abraham became a Priest, Isaac became a sacrifice not corrupted.
    - ¶ 39 – Praise of Abraham
    - ¶ 40 - Doxology
1. Isaac grew forth, a fruitful shoot from his desolate mother, and a sprout of people rose up from a sterile woman. For he was conceived from a promise, and he increased the promise

for others. He was given as a favor to Abraham, who guarded him carefully from the nations, for we received the Son of God through him.

2. He was born, the just shoot from the righteous man, so that he might proclaim the righteousness of Christ. Isaac was a forerunner of Christ, 3000 years before, so all generations counts him as father.

3. Well then, nature begat him, so that the plan<sup>1</sup> might be born. Nature birthed the person and the plot begat the righteous man.<sup>2</sup> Both came together and Isaac became perfect in holiness.

4. The righteous child<sup>3</sup> has three types, the nature, the action, the grace.<sup>4</sup> Nature, since he went forth from a sterile woman, as Christ was born from a Virgin. Action, since he was blameless and most gracious to his enemies (as Christ, while he was being crucified, prayed for his enemies). And grace, since though slaughtered he did not die, as also Christ who died and rose from the dead.

5. What, therefore, did Abraham think when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac? And did he consider not fulfilling it? Did he know the intention of the command? That God would repent, or that it was false, or that he would not raise Isaac from the dead?<sup>5</sup> No. For if he did not believe the way he did, he would not have begun the sacrifice, just as the Apostle said.

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<sup>1</sup> προαίρεσις is used to designate the divine economy where we might expect rather οἰκονομία.

<sup>2</sup> ἡ φύσις ἔτεκε τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἡ προαίρεσις ἐγέννησε τὸν δίκαιον. The “Righteous Man” (ὁ δίκαιος as opposed to the impersonal τὸ δίκαιον) appears again here, this time referring to Isaac. ὁ δίκαιος is a bit of a *terminus technicus* for Ephraem Graecus in this homily, and can denote Abraham, Isaac, or Christ, depending on the situation.

<sup>3</sup> Here τὸ δίκαιον, suggesting the abstract “righteousness,” but the rest of a paragraph is very clearly about Isaac, so I take the adjective to be modifying an implied τέκνον.

<sup>4</sup> φύσις, πράξις, χάρις.

6. Therefore, neither did he lose faith, nor did he submit to a stumbling block, but he saw Christ typified, and he brought together the fulfillment of the plan.<sup>6</sup> He saw in his own son the Son of God and he brought together the power of the mystery. He saw in his own test the profit of many. For until today the nations were persuaded by the type of Isaac, and indeed still more and more so about Christ.<sup>7</sup>

7. Therefore, about this day the Lord spoke in the gospels - that Abraham rejoiced to see it.<sup>8</sup> For if he had not seen, he would not have wished to be delivered from aforementioned stumbling blocks. Because of his, he rejoiced all the more, since he was found worthy of a double grace. For that reason he saw God and he chose to sacrifice the type of Christ. He released the hidden thing through the thing manifest. Since he recovered his son unharmed, he showed the cross in the recovery. For it was not a divine nature, since he recovered his son (from his own nature) untouched by sufferings, for divinity in no way experiences the same things as the flesh. For Isaac was bound and did not resist, and divinity was in the Son so he suffered nothing. Because Isaac, also, had been offered up on the altar of sacrifice. The altar

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<sup>5</sup> Ephraem Graecus does not commit firmly to either side of the question of whether Isaac actually died on Mt. Moriah. The biblical text of Genesis is clear that he does not, but the parallelism of the story with Christ leads Ephraem Graecus to explore the possibility that he did die and was raised. In the previous paragraph it was said that “though slaughtered he did not die” (σφαγιαζόμενος οὐκ ἀπέθανεν). Here we have ὅτι ἀναστῆσαι τὸν Ἰσαὰκ ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκ ἡδύνατο. While the sentence is presented as something Abraham might have thought, it further contributes to the ambivalence surrounding the question of Isaac’s fate.

<sup>6</sup> Here οἰκονομία.

<sup>7</sup> καὶ γὰρ ἄχρι τῆς σήμερον ἐν τῷ τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ τύπῳ τὰ ἔθνη πείθονται ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περὶ Χριστοῦ. The first part of the sentence is clear. Abraham saw the profit for many of his test and this sentence confirms that the nations were persuaded by it. The ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περὶ Χριστοῦ clause is a bit more difficult, with Ephraem seemingly wishing to link the acceptance of the Isaac story with the increasing success of the Christian mission. This link seems a bit of an afterthought and the particles used connect it very loosely with what came before.

<sup>8</sup> John 8:56. Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη. This is the crucial verse for Ephraem Graecus’ exegesis of this story. Ephraem wishes to explain the aorist verbs καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη as referring to what happened on Mt. Moriah.

was a type of Golgotha, the wood was an image of the cross of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Abraham was the assent of the father. And the sword was the decision which he made that His Son would suffer.

**8.** Isaac said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, where is the sheep, father?” But also Jesus said, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” The child, knowing the will of the father, was silent. Christ too was silent and said, “Let your will be done, Father.”

**9.** Let us see the cross and let us take notice of the power of the sacrifice. For you know the altar of Isaac is the cross. So that it could become the place of sacrifice, just as God said, from unhewn stones on account of the altar of his own Son, and the law clearly states that cut stones would not be used for altars. For Christ knew that he would be born up onto an altar not made by human hands.

**10.** Why is it that God wanted it thus? In order to show by the sacrifice, that the hands of men ought not to do this; these altars humans make, there the silent sheep are carried. Let God make the altar of Christ, since he brought forth his son on behalf of the human race. God built Jerusalem, and not man, similarly God build the altar of Christ.

**11.** I know that fathers sacrifice to instruct their children, but they do not discuss the mysteries with others. Thus God ordained for his Son to have an altar built not by man, but for them.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ὁ τύπος and ἡ εἰκών, respectively. These are distinctly Greek exegetical terms. St. Ephrem’s preferred term of *lāzā* (often translated as *μυστήριον*) appears in the Ephraem Graecus corpus, but the Greek exegetical terms are the ones most frequently seen in the corpus and drive the exegetical discussions.

<sup>10</sup> οὕτω καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων οἰκοδομαῖς ἀλλ’ οἰκείαις θυσιαστήριον ἔχειν ὥρισεν. The *οἰκοδομαῖς*... *οἰκείαις* play on words works only in Greek.

**12.** Therefore, let the words carry the images, the matters of Christ on behalf of all. The spoken image was received, not so that you would be scandalized but so that you might understand, and so that the analogies might not be said to diminish the divinity but rather to amplify it.

**13.** Therefore listen in light and do not speak dark things. Hear the works of light and not the thoughts of darkness. I found the cross symbolized in a type, which the Holy Scripture calls the Sabek Bush.<sup>11</sup> It calls it a bush since it was not from the earth but rather had been transplanted from the heavens and named it Sabek since it served at worship upon the earth but it was uprooted from the heavens. If there was, in that place, a ram from the beginning, there also was a bush, together from before the ascent. If, suddenly the ram had been displayed there, clearly the bush was not already in existence in the ground.

**14.** Therefore, O the Amazing Shepherd, the Sower of Glory! Since not only is he Shepherd and Sower but also he is Creator and Great Bishop. Therefore, did he truly bear the bush from heaven? Where did he lead the ram from? For why does heaven have earth, so that it can bring up plants? It nourishes animals, so that it can provide sheep? For how is God shepherd and sower of reasoning souls, since for the ones he works within, as much as possible, he is a shepherd, producing for souls the judgments of the law and the prophets and the gifts of the Gospel, guarding them from the violent plans of the demons and from the clear sufferings of the flesh.

**15.** So, from where did he bring the bush and the ram? Perhaps someone might say from paradise, but I would not say this. For paradise was not given as a type, but as truth. They do not pass through into images, but remain as authenticity. That one was the one who said, “let

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<sup>11</sup> See p. 125, n. 13.

the earth give forth fruit-bearing trees and all living souls.” He said it and thus it appeared. For the one who created the myriads of earth-born creatures in the blink of an eye, did not use a sheep there that came from someone else, nor did he make use of a Sabek Bush from some other grower that he then changed and transplanted. But he set down for us an explanation.

**16.** Therefore, learn the truth from the Prophet (Jonah). For God commanded the Castor Bean Tree to grow above his head, and in the desert he told the rock to put forth water. For the commandment of God does not need reason, nor time, nor place.

**17.** Let them learn from these things, the ones who say there is a physical cause for the parts of the world, both forms and races. For God did not separate the matter above Jonah, so that he might make the land dry or the air wet. And the moistness into the finest water, and the dryness, the altogether smallest, he might cast into the fire. And from the moving things and the impulses, the swift become flying, the strong beasts and the other animals, the beasts of the deep and the sluggish swimmers, from the ones unable to move to the ones said to have four parts. Dryness continues into dry fruits, heat and dryness into moist fruits, and the deep and moist into amphibious plants, the swift and moist into lifegiving. And the power of each is the distribution of dryness and moistness, from the form of the plant-eaters and grass-eaters and root-eaters, what sort divides from only the dry from the spotless into salt and the race of bread, the more moist into barley and millet and the distribution of oats, the deepest into the various pulses. Again from the moist and light the heat partially into the leeks, the earthy heat into the cabbages and all the bitter herbs, the lighter wetness into gourds and melons. The matter of these is great, if I should want to explain each of them.

**18.** If, therefore, God expends matter, as the Greeks say, into the parts and the kinds - this both part and kind - from where did he make the tree and the ram? Whence the bramble bush? And in another time a multitude of boundless flying things appeared, with the result that thousands are satiated for a long time. Whence the water from the rock and the stream from the jawbone of an ass?

**19.** So, since he made these things out of non-being, for he did not transfer them from another time, so that someone could say that it was furnished from nature, thus also all things he made from non-being; for matter is not greater than all the commandments of the mind. If the better things are for strength and intellect, in both swiftness and thought, they come from non-being, who would distinguish between the things diminishing and the things flowing through? Even Paul said, “The seen things are extraordinary, but the things unseen are eternal” For he knew how great<sup>12</sup> the difference is from the heavenly existence to the earthly.

**20.** But finally, returning to the matter at hand, let us speak what was the situation of Isaac, so that we might learn the mystery of God. The one judged kept silent, and he was bound, being sacrificed. For it was clear that that one was falsely accused and remained silent, crucified and negotiating with the father on behalf of the ones rebelling against God.

**21.** But the ram was not born from seed, because of the one destined to be born from a virgin. A one-year-old ram was caught up by its horns, since the one destined to be crucified on behalf of the race of men was willingly chained. There was no one who bound that ram except for God. And no man crucified Christ except by the will of God. The ram stood, its horns entwined about its forelegs, so that it might show the cross, and indicate a perfect type.

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<sup>12</sup> ἥδει γάρ που τῆς ἐπουρανίου οὐσίας πολὺ τὸ διάφορον πρὸς τὰ ἐπίγεια. που is typically used as an indefinite adverb of place, though uses of it in the sense of “manner” are attested. που... πολὺ is a rather clunky expression for expressing the “how great” idea.

The horns of the ram are grace,<sup>13</sup> and the forelegs the extension of the hands. For it was through God and virtuous works that the mystery of Christ was completed.

**22.** O the greatest of mysteries which are hidden in the smallest of types! O divinity, which approaches the mind for the forgiveness of sins! O greatest power which laughs at the rashness of the devil! Isaac was led onto the altar, but the ram was sacrificed; the child spoke, but the ram was silent. The young child contended<sup>14</sup> but the sheep was crowned. Isaac went so that he might find this sort of grace. The ram passed by and brought together this sort of purpose. The sheep appeared and the mystery was hidden from Isaac; the sheep was sacrificed and the young lad lived. Isaac was loosed and the sheep bound. The ram caught and the lad released.

**23.** All of these things happened because of the purpose destined to be completed by the witness of the cross. For if he brought him to be offered, quickly would Isaac have suffered as a witness for the unbelievers. And when Christ came, many Isaac-like children were forgiven in exchange for one, so that the mystery of Isaac might be completed. On behalf of Christ many suffered Hades, since they were blameless, because of Christ they suffered willingly.

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<sup>13</sup> τὰ γὰρ κέρατα τοῦ προβάτου ἐστὶν ἡ χάρις. Χάρις is a word with a plethora of meanings in a Christian context, yet none of them work well in the context of a typological linkage of parts of the ram to the events of the crucifixion. The LSJ entry for χάρις notes a possible metaphorical meaning of either the cypress or the myrtle tree. This option is tempting, since in the typological scheme that Ephraem Graecus proposes the horns do stand for the cross. However, the usage of χάρις as a type of tree/wood is not very well attested (and the passage in the *Iliad* cited does not appear to refer to a tree at all) and I do not know of any Christian tradition that holds that the cross was a species of wood known as χάρις. It seems very likely that Christian authors in general and Ephraem Graecus in particular would have made much of the fact that the wood of the cross and “grace” are the same word if this were indeed such a tradition. Since the homily does not develop this idea further, I have chosen to translate the word with the typical “grace,” though that leaves a rather stilted translation.

<sup>14</sup> ἡγωνίζετο. This would be typically translated “fought” or “struggled,” but neither fits the context well at all, since the biblical story makes it clear that Isaac was obedient to Abraham’s commands.



**24.** Seeing this, death was amazed, since the purpose did not witness on behalf of piety, but nature testified to a secret matter.<sup>15</sup> The Creator arranged it so that he put forward ignorant nature to fight on behalf of him, and the Enemy thought that nature came about from some random occurrence. The Creator knew the agreement of nature and accepted the testimony.

**25.** God, the one who said to sacrifice the ignorant Isaac and to complete his burnt offering as a type, also accepted, in the time of Isaac's children, the witness of Christ. Since it is not as God hears, but thus also humans. John, though not yet born, prophesied, jumping with unutterable joy in his mother's womb according to the apostle. The children, by being silent, testified about Christ. Jacob and Esau wrestled exceedingly, making known the organized plan, how the martyrs of Christ, even though they be infants, they would not be defeated on behalf of him. These ones prophesied about themselves and they testified about Christ. Jacob grabbed Esau by the heel and whatsoever nature foretold, that the plan took hold, even among the children. Nature suffered and nature testified. The plan attends to it. For man has the plan against nature, the plan did not give nature to man.

**26.** O, nature, which speaks in silence and encompasses prophecy of the thing to come. For if even children become men, they would witness, since also he showed Jacob working against the plan, which nature made.

**27.** After three days Abraham came to the holy place, the rising of symbols which Isaac knew. It was concerning the knowledge of him, who after dying was raised on the third day. He came first to the place of that holy sacrifice. He saw the mystery hidden in one place, the cross and the resurrection which in a manner happened for Christ. The place of sacrifice was

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<sup>15</sup> In the other two homilies on the binding of Isaac, Ephraem Graecus is particularly fond of contrasting φύσις with God's προαίρεσις. Here they work in concert.

established instead of the grave of Isaac. For there he was put to death. He went down living and he was seen upon the wood of the cross, since the sheep was strung up on it. And the cross ministered to save our race since he ransomed Isaac. Then, perhaps Christ made Isaac live from his grave, since (similarly) he rescued the holy ones from Hades. For many are the mysteries which happened concerning Isaac.

**28.** Oh new Marvel! There became the place of sacrifice and grave, and the grave and sacrificial altar fixed upon Christ. In the resurrection, the grave and the sacrificial place are there, so that the word of Isaiah might be fulfilled, since his grave will be his honor.

**29.** Why speak of these sorts of riddles? Because it was necessary that his grave become an altar, and the altar a grave, symbolizing nothing other than the earth becoming heaven and the heaven becoming earth. The Lord himself exchanged heavenly things for earthly things and on account of this the angels came down from heaven to earth. When did this happen? When the multitude of angels was seen calling from heaven saying “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.” From earth and heaven, when Christ died, the souls of the saints went up into heaven. “For whenever I am lifted up,” he said, “I will draw all things to myself.” Do you know how each of two becomes the other? Earth in the heavens and peace upon earth [as it is in] the heavens?<sup>16</sup>

**30.** Abraham and Isaac went up alone to the place that had been shown. They left the donkey and the lads under the mountain. For at the resurrection there will be two in the mill, the one will be taken and the other will be sent away. The slaves of sin will be sent away

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<sup>16</sup> Ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἡ γῆ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη, οἱ οὐρανοί; The question in the previous sentence makes clear that the context of this sentence is a joining of heavenly and earthly realms. Yet the nominative οἱ οὐρανοί at the end is difficult to render since that clause already contains another nominative, εἰρήνη. There seems to be two options: the first is to combine the two nominatives, “Earth in the heavens and peace *and the heavens* upon earth.” This would seem to require some sort of copula between εἰρήνη and οἱ οὐρανοί which is not present. The other option is to alter the case of οἱ οὐρανοί, perhaps to ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη τῶν οὐρανῶν; “And the peace *of the heavens* on earth?”

upon the earth, receiving judgment, and each empty condition and cheapness of life which the donkey is a type, having escaped with nothing. Together it is destroyed in body. Paul says that we shall be taken up in the clouds.

**31.** Therefore, these ones were taken up to the Place of Isaac.<sup>17</sup> There they will see the cross and the resurrection. I say that this mountain is paradise. For he is the land of the living, which they say the meek shall inherit. And paradise is more exalted than this earth. The Apostle said that he was taken up into paradise. Being seized, he ascended to a height. Wherefore, as it is impossible for men to access it, through rapture God was able to stand him there. And in Genesis it says that four rivers flow out from there. Water is not able to flow from a lower region into another that is higher. But also the Nile goes down through the mountainous region of Thebes up to Egypt. As it is clear that it goes up to Egypt down from higher ground.

**32.** There the saints go, leaving behind the entire fantasy and madness of life. The slaves are the fantasy of the guardian of the cosmos, and the fire and the wood bear up the deeds, the words, the reasonings. Three are that which were brought up because of the faith of the Holy Trinity. Soul and body and spirit will have perfection in the resurrection. I say the three come together again in one. The martyrs bore their sufferings, going away to Christ, for the wood and the fire and the sword of the judges are the corrections. If someone should say the corrections threaten, Paul also says that each will bear his own burden. Again, behold the man and his work. Also the Lord said, fire comes, thrown upon the earth and he says elsewhere that peace will not come but a sword. But the Apostle says both the Holy Spirit and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, will take up.

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<sup>17</sup> ἱσαακιαῖον, indicating some kind of Temple place or sacrificial place.

33. Therefore the one worthy of the Holy Spirit, having their own grace, suffering life with their wood, bearing the cross of Christ in spirit, sojourning the cosmos through perseverance. Saying the things about Isaac, we ought to speak one after each other about the bush. The name of the bush is said to be Sabek. But nothing in the Holy Scripture talks of that tree. Not cedar, not cypress,<sup>18</sup> not pine, not fir, not the black poplar, nor the broad pine nor nothing of any of these things. Well then, where does it come from? Why does it have this foreign name?

34. Let us learn why it is called the Sabek.<sup>19</sup> If, somehow, we are able to find a trace of the interpretation, say the knowledge. Already it has been said, the forgiveness and the power, both follow together. The cross graces us with forgiveness from our sins and releases us from the command of the Enemy.

35. Therefore then, since we believe that it is wood, we seize the foreign tree. Is there not anything that resembles this double wood? For even that wood is double.<sup>20</sup> Indeed the cross is double and it is a trophy. To the ones who believe, they have life, to the ones who do not, death.

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<sup>18</sup> Κυπάρισσον, the typical word for “cypress.” This would seem to indicate that the ἡ χάρις above is not best understood as a reference to a species of wood. Additionally, the following section is ripe for a play on that double sense of ἡ χάρις, and yet the opportunity is not taken up.

<sup>19</sup> As previously stated, the confusion about “sabek” comes from the LXX reading. The author is not familiar with the Hebrew or Syriac traditions on Gen 22:13, and from his exegesis he does not seem to think his audience is either.

<sup>20</sup> τοιγαροῦν ὅτι ξύλον ἐστὶ πιστεύομεν, καὶ ξένον δὲ τὸ δένδρον καταλαμβάνομεν, καὶ μὴ τι ἐκείνου παρόμοιον ἐστὶ τοῦ διπλοῦ ξύλου· καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο διπλοῦν ἐστὶ. The meaning of the double-ness of the wood does not seem to flow from the author’s remarks about the meaning of “sabek.” That the cross has a double meaning – to those who believe it means life, and to those who do not, death – is stated in 1 Cor 1:23-24. The equation of the bush with the cross is clear, but how to render the negative μὴ? There clearly *is* something similar to that double wood, since the parallel with the cross will be made explicit in the next few sentences. Though the punctuation does not indicate a question, I have chosen to render it as one in order to preserve the μὴ in my translation.

**36.** The matter of Isaac is forgiveness for people and power to the saints for fighting against the demons. Again, forgiveness for the believers, power against the faithless, since that power is able to protect on the day of judgment. And the double paradise has power, for the ones having knowledge of good and evil and to the ones having knowledge of God and man.

**37.** Abraham saw the Sabek Bush, for God was showing plainly through it that God discharged Isaac from death. Isaac knew that God was well pleased by his silence and he received the perfect wage for endurance.

**38.** They went down again to the lads and found the donkey with them, for the vision and the oracle spoke to Daniel for a long time, and they turned from the temple, they went to their own house, completing the mystery. Abraham became a priest and Isaac a sacrificial animal. The ram perfects the hand of the priest, so that Isaac, the type, might prophesy about the thing to come, dying and rising, sacrificed but not corrupted, bound, but not remaining in the earth.

**39.** Blessed are you, O Abraham, since Christ was typified in you and in your son. Blessed are you, since you were sent off as a Chaldean man into the land of Canaan so that you might proclaim piety to the ones there. And you became an apostle through obedience, a prophet through grace and a priest through spiritual gifts. You became patriarch through surpassing piety. You became perfected through many trials and were found worthy.

**40.** Let it be for us to receive grace with you when Christ comes in his glory. To him be the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always from the ages to the ages. Amen.

## **Defense, to a brother, about Eli the Priest**

### **Outline**

¶ 1 – Introduction: Question is posed, did Eli chastise his sons?

¶ 2 – Statement of the Answer. Eli did not approve, but was not able to restrain his sons' evil.

¶ 3 – Eli's attempt to restrain his sons.

- Eli chastises them appropriately, but does not take step to insure their compliance.
- Homilist postulates Eli cared more about the scandal among men than from God.

¶ 4 – It is the nature of God to chastise believers, but he does so to provoke repentance.

¶ 5 – God makes his reproof of Eli known through the blameless child Samuel.

- Homilist presents a nearly verbatim retelling of 1 Kingdoms 3.

¶ 6 – Having received the divine reproof from Samuel, Eli does not attempt to chastise his sons.

- Old Testament examples of figures who became full of zeal and corrected wrongdoers.

¶ 7 – Eli's failure to correct his sons is contrasted with Moses' zeal after the Golden Calf

- Moses' brother Aaron attempted to persuade him to withhold his wrath, but Moses was not swayed by his kin. Eli was blinded by his love for his family.

¶ 8 – Concluding Prayer

1. **Question:** The Scripture speaks about Eli the priest: “His sons blasphemed God and he did not chastise them.” But we hear [in another place] that he did indeed summon and chastise them!<sup>1</sup>

2. **Answer:** Guard yourself, lest wasting one’s time your thoughts wander and are crashed by unlawful things. The whole of faith is work. Without faith, the double-minded will find nothing of the things sought. For it says, if you do not believe, you will in no way understand. About Eli, then: He did not approve of what they did, it says, but nevertheless he was not able to easily restrain the evil, as the second<sup>2</sup> statement says. Only what you understood as chastisement was not actually chastisement but negligence of the love of the divine. Inasmuch as the manner of Eli has a limit of condescension, the management of the household falls to him, such that by his own mouth he testifies about the lawlessness of his sons. As it is written: “And Eli was exceedingly old, and he heard what his sons were doing to the children of Israel and he said to them, ‘What are you doing, according to the report that I have heard from the mouth of the people of the Lord? My children, do not do this, since the report I have heard about you is not good, so that the people are not subject to the Lord. If a person sins against another person, they may intercede about him to the Lord. But if a person sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?’”

3. Therefore, given the testimonies of the father, we must examine the excessive lawlessness of those men, for it was not one who alone out shouted the rest, but all of them, from the least to the greatest, as Eli himself testified, saying, “What are you [all] doing,

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<sup>1</sup> Τῆς Γραγῆς λεγούσης περὶ Ἡλὶ τοῦ ἱερέως ὅτι κακαλογοῦντες Θεὸν οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐνουθέτει αὐτούς, καίπερ ἀκούομεν ὅτι παρήγγειλεν αὐτούς καὶ ἐνουθέτει; The clause after the ὅτι is a direct quotation of LXX 1 Kgdms 3:13. The second part alludes to 1 Kgdms 2:22-25.

<sup>2</sup> The word here is καθεξῆς “immediately afterward,” a classical Ionic variant of the more common ἐφεξῆς.

according to the words which I have heard spoken about you from the mouth of the people of the Lord?”<sup>3</sup> They were wronging and scandalizing all people, profaning the holy sacrifices. Not only were they dispersing the people there to sacrifice, but finally the people themselves put themselves to apostasy, amazed at the lawless works which the sons of Eli performed. Hear what Eli says, “The report is not good, that I have heard about you, such that the people are not subject to the Lord.” He says, “Do not do thusly.” Perhaps he feared the wrath of the people, he had proclaimed in his words attempting to soften the ones crying out against his children. If piety towards the divine was a care<sup>4</sup> to him, he would not completely hold back such correctives from his children when they were committing lawless acts. Rather, he would hasten to quickly remove the lawlessness from his own house. The very job of the priests is to uphold the law and these ones were attempting to overturn it! Either he legally chastised the ones obeying, or he cut off the ones disobeying, according to the teaching of the law. Inasmuch as a priest and judge is successful; the whole people pay heed to his mouth. Altogether he was removed from the wrath of God, but by accommodating the evil of his children, justly he experienced the imposed wrath.

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<sup>3</sup> The previous paragraph’s invented speech is typical of speeches by biblical characters in Ephraem Graecus. It is predominantly based on a LXX text (here 1 Kgdms 2:23-25) but with additions and embellishments, creating a biblical pastiche. Here though, after having reproduced the LXX text fairly faithfully in the previous paragraph, the author covers the same material again, becoming even more free with his word choice.

LXX 1 Kingdoms 2:22-4: καὶ Ἦλὶ πρεσβύτης σφόδρα· καὶ ἤκουσεν ἃ ἐποίουν οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, ἵνα τί ποιεῖτε κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο, ὃ ἐγὼ ἀκούω ἐκ στόματος παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ Κυρίου; μή, τέκνα, ὅτι οὐκ ἀγαθὴ ἡ ἀκοή, ἣν ἐγὼ ἀκούω· μὴ ποιεῖτε οὕτως, ὅτι οὐκ ἀγαθαὶ αἱ ἀκοαί, ἃς ἐγὼ ἀκούω, τοῦ μὴ δουλεύειν λαὸν θεῶ.

First Citation: καὶ Ἦλὶ πρεσβύτης σφόδρα· καὶ ἤκουσεν ἃ ἐποίουν οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, ἵνα τί ποιεῖτε κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμα, ὃ ἐγὼ ἀκούω ἐκ στόματος τοῦ λαοῦ Κυρίου; μή, τέκνα, μὴ ποιεῖτε οὕτως, ὅτι οὐκ ἀγαθὴ ἡ ἀκοή, ἣν ἐγὼ ἀκούω περὶ ὑμῶν, τοῦ ποιεῖν τὸν λαὸν μὴ λατρεύειν τῷ Κυρίῳ.

Second Citation: ἵνα τί ποιεῖτε κατὰ τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα, ἃ ἐγὼ ἀκούω λαλούμενα καθ' ὑμῶν ἐκ στόματος τοῦ λαοῦ Κυρίου;

<sup>4</sup> The verb here is ἔμελλεν, “it was about to...” but should be read as ἔμελεν, “it was a care” for contextual reasons.



4. Do not censure the divine, because the Lord our God is upright and straightforward,<sup>5</sup> and there is not injustice in him. His lawful chastisements stand clear from our instruction, as the following citation makes clear. It is said about the just Job, blessed man, whom God examined, “Do not reject the chastisement of the almighty.” For he made him suffer grievously, but restored him again. Just as the Apostle set before our fathers, saying to rear children in the education and chastisement of the Lord. Therefore, justly the Holy Scripture says about him that his sons cursed God, and he did not chastise them, for he did not have the zeal about the divine that the saints have. He preferred the care of his children more than the greater glory. For the sort of sympathy with which the one who bore us through the gospel clothed himself in, all rational people know. He had in himself the compassion of mercies, patience, and kindness. When he heard that someone abroad had sinned, he did not wait, he did not keep silent, but immediately went and would not permit this one from being handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the person’s spirit might be saved in the day of our lord, Jesus Christ. The blessed apostle Peter judged those ones going<sup>6</sup> forward to test the Holy Spirit as being unworthy to live, not authorizing the disdain for the divine. The sons of Israel, when they became apostates to God, their sons and their daughters performed services for the demons. This priest happened to be able to shut this out, he overlooked this sort of lawlessness, not leading his children to temperance by correction, nor with the rod, nor by a harsh word about the profanation of the holy sacrifices. There, those ones sacrificed their children to the demons by their own hands under every shady tree.

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<sup>5</sup> διότι εὐθύς Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία ἐν αὐτῷ. This is a near citation of LXX Ps 91:16 (εὐθὺς Κύριος ὁ Θεός μου, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία ἐν αὐτῷ). Interestingly, Ephraem Graecus has replaced the Septuagintal εὐθύς with the more classical εὐθύς.

<sup>6</sup> Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5.

5. Who is the one judging this irresponsible man of evil, learning the exhibited sentence against him from the God who composes all things? The compassionate God, wanting to save this one through repentance from the impending wrath, made clear to him the things that had already been shown through a guileless child. Lest some suspicion, approaching in secret, establish some bold reckoning, as if some human prediction had been said to him, or through malice or spite against some. An advocate and witness of the things proscribed is established, as the Holy Scripture says:<sup>7</sup> And the child Samuel was serving the Lord before Eli, the priest. And the word of the Lord was in him: in<sup>8</sup> these days there was no distinct vision. And it happened in that day that Eli was lying down in his place, and his eyes began to be heavy and he could not see. And it was before the lamp of God was replenished, and Samuel was lying down in the shrine where the ark of God was, and the Lord called “Samuel! Samuel!” And he said, “Here I am.” And he ran to Eli and he said, “Here I am, why have you called for me?”<sup>9</sup> And he said, “I have not called you; return, lie down, child.”<sup>10</sup> And the Lord still continued to call to Samuel<sup>11</sup> and he called, “Samuel! Samuel!” And he went to Eli the second time and said, “Here I am, why have you called me?” And he said, “I

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<sup>7</sup> What follows is a nearly verbatim quotation of the LXX 1 Kgdms 3:1-18. I have chosen to largely follow the NETS translation of the LXX here, making note of lacunae in Ephraem’s version and his changes from the biblical text.

<sup>8</sup> Ephraem’s text omits the biblical phrase “καὶ ῥῆμα κυρίου ἦν τίμιον” before the ἐν.

<sup>9</sup> Ephraem’s text omits the movable ν at the end of LXX’s form ἔδραμεν, as would be expected before a consonant. The end of the sentence is changed from ὅτι κέκληκάς με “since you have called me” and made into a question with the smoother Greek τί κέκληκάς με, “why have you called for me?”

<sup>10</sup> Ephraem’s text omits καὶ ἀνέστρεψεν καὶ ἐκάθευδεν, “and he returned and lay down,” but adds the vocative τέκνον.

<sup>11</sup> LXX: καὶ προσέθετο κύριος καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Σαμουήλ, Σαμουήλ. Ephraem Graecus: καὶ προσέθετο κύριος ἔτι καλέσαι τὸν Σαμουήλ· καὶ ἐκάλεσε Σαμουήλ, Σαμουήλ. As in the case cited in note 9, the text subtly adapts the biblical text, smoothing out the Greek.

have not called you; return, lie down, child.”<sup>12</sup> And it was before Samuel knew God and before the word of the Lord came to him.<sup>13</sup> And the Lord continued to call to Samuel a third time,<sup>14</sup> and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am, why have you called me?” And Eli learned that the Lord had called the boy, and he said, “I did not call you; return, lie down, child. And it shall be that if the one calling you should call again, you will say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your slave is listening.’” And Samuel went and he lay down in his place.<sup>15</sup> And the Lord came and stood and called him as once and twice before, “Samuel! Samuel!”<sup>16</sup> And Samuel said, “Speak, Lord, for your slave is listening.” And the Lord said to Samuel, “Behold, I carry out my words in Israel so that both ears of everyone who hears will tingle. On that day I will raise up against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house; I will begin and I will finish.<sup>17</sup> I told him that I am about to punish his house forever for the iniquities of his sons - which he knew about<sup>18</sup> - since his sons were reviling God and even so he would not admonish them. I have sworn to the house of Eli, ‘If the iniquity of Eli’s house

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<sup>12</sup> The changes detailed in note 10 that were made to the first exchange between Samuel and Eli are reproduced here as well.

<sup>13</sup> LXX: καὶ Σαμουὴλ πρὶν ἢ γινῶναι θεὸν καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτῷ ῥῆμα κυρίου. EG: καὶ Σαμουὴλ πρὶν ἢ γινῶναι θεὸν καὶ πρὶν ἢ ῥῆμα κυρίου πρὸς αὐτόν.

<sup>14</sup> LXX: ἐν τρίτῳ; EG: ἐκ τρίτου.

<sup>15</sup> Ephraem Graecus adds ὁ καλῶν “the one calling” to the LXX text.

<sup>16</sup> The LXX reads καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτόν, ὡς ἅπαξ καὶ ἅπαξ, rendering the Hebrew מִתְּחִלָּה-מִתְּחִלָּה, “as time on time” or more idiomatically “as before.” As is typical of the LXX translation of Kingdoms, Hebrew word order is preserved even at the expense of idiom: ὡς ἅπαξ καὶ ἅπαξ in Greek is nearly meaningless. Ephraem Graecus attempts to smooth this translation with his καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτόν, ὡς ἅπαξ καὶ δὶς, though at this point God has already spoken to Samuel three times.

<sup>17</sup> This verse is nearly verbatim from the LXX. The only changes Ephraem Graecus makes is to change εἰς τὸν οἶκον to the better Greek ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον and the LXX’s ἐπιτελέσω to συντελέσω.

<sup>18</sup> The ἐν αἷς ἔγνω clause here is not present in the LXX. By inserting this clause into what seems like a rendering of a biblical narrative, Ephraem Graecus strengthens his argument that Eli was culpable for his sons’ actions.

shall be expiated by incense or sacrifice forever...” And Samuel lay there until morning and he arose early in the morning and opened the doors of the house of the Lord, but Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.<sup>19</sup> And Eli said to Samuel “My child.” And he said, “Here I am.” And Eli said, “What is the word of the Lord, which was spoken to you in the night, child? Do not hide from me any of the words spoken in your ears. May God do thus to you and thus add if you should hide anything from me of all the words.”<sup>20</sup> And Samuel told him all the words and he did not hide anything from him. And Eli said, “He is the Lord, he will do what is best<sup>21</sup> before him.”

6. O, the weakness of soul for keeping the commandments of God! O the lawlessness that comes from living with impious children! How did his flesh not shiver at hearing these things! How did his guts not tremble! How did his heart not rise up to keep away the lawlessness of his sons, similar to the zeal of Phineas!<sup>22</sup> How did he not rend his garments and sit outside and weather the coming conviction against him, but rather he kept silent! Achar, the son of Charmi was not this lawless, appropriating for himself part of what was devoted.<sup>23</sup> The sons of Eli were implacable and hostile, being impious to the Maker himself,

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<sup>19</sup> LXX: καὶ Σαμουὴλ ἐφοβήθη ἀπαγγεῖλαι τὴν ὄρασιν τῷ Ἠλί. EG: καὶ ἐφοβήθη ἀπαγγεῖλαι τὴν ὄρασιν Ἠλί Σαμουὴλ. While most of Ephraem Graecus’ slight adaptations make his version smoother, this change makes it more difficult. It is clear from context that Samuel is the subject of the sentence, but by moving his name from just before the verb to the end of the sentence Ephraem Graecus makes this less clear. Additionally, he removes the article from in front of Eli’s name, which is the only way (other than context) to determine the case of the indeclinable name.

<sup>20</sup> The text of this speech is virtually identical to the one in the LXX, though Ephraem Graecus has moved the clauses around a bit. The NETS translation reads, “What was the word that he told you? Do not hide it from me; may God do thus to you and thus add, if you hide anything from me of all the words spoken to you in your ears.”

<sup>21</sup> LXX: τὸ ἀγαθόν. Ephraem Graecus: τὸ ἀρεστόν.

<sup>22</sup> Numbers 25.

<sup>23</sup> Josh 7:1.

the one who said to Moses and Aaron, “Among those who are near me I will be shown holy, and in the congregation I will be glorified.”<sup>24</sup> And again, “Say to Aaron and his sons, and let them give heed because of the sacred things of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to me, and they shall not profane my holy name; I am the Lord. Say to them: Any person from all your offspring throughout your generations who comes near the sacred things, which the sons of Israel dedicate to the Lord, and his uncleanness is upon him – that soul shall be exterminated from my presence.”<sup>25</sup>

7. But Eli did not pay heed to these things. He went away, picking the fruit of death. For he preferred to offend God than to be parted from the affection of his lawless sons. If he had ever proclaimed by a clear word, “Do not do this, O children!” But instead, secretly he was in communion with the evil workings of his children. See the meaning of his answer: he said, “The Lord will do what is best before him,” rather than “I refuse to grieve over my children.” He was not taught by Moses to separate himself from the affection towards his sons. Moses received the tablets, and going down from the mountain he saw the calf they had built. Throwing down the tablets, he shattered them and he did not recognize the face of his own brother, but indeed charged him with the harshest voice, saying, “What did this people do to you that you brought upon them this great sin?”<sup>26</sup> Aaron, seeing his own brother inflamed with zeal for God, defended himself, saying, “Do not be enraged, lord. For you know the impulse of this people.”<sup>27</sup> “Moses stood at the gate of the camp and said, ‘If someone is for

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<sup>24</sup> Lev 10:3.

<sup>25</sup> Lev 22:1-3. Both of the Levitical quotations are verbatim from the LXX.

<sup>26</sup> Exod 32:21.

<sup>27</sup> Exod 32:22.

the Lord, let him come to me.’ And all of the sons of Levi gathered to him. He said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Each one put his sword on his thigh and go through, from gate to gate, and each one kill his neighbor, each one kill his brother, and each one kill the one nearest to him.”’ And the sons of Levi did as Moses said, and there fell from the people on that day about three thousand men. And Moses said to them, ‘You filled your hands today for the Lord, each one by his brother, for a blessing to be bestowed upon you.’”<sup>28</sup> Job cared for the sacrifices of his sons, each day giving an offering on behalf of them, not only on account of their visible misdeeds, but also so that they be clean from the sins of their thoughts.<sup>29</sup> Thus the most righteous desire to present to the Lord blameless fruit from their own breast. The

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<sup>28</sup> Exod 32:26-29. LXX: <sup>26</sup>ἔστη δὲ Μωυσῆς ἐπὶ τῆς πύλης τῆς παρεμβολῆς καὶ εἶπεν Τίς πρὸς Κύριον; ἴτω πρὸς με. συνῆλθον οὖν πρὸς αὐτον πάντες οἱ υἱοὶ Λευί. <sup>27</sup>καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς Τάδε λέγει Κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραήλ, Θέσθε ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ῥομφαίαν ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν καὶ διέλθατε καὶ ἀνακάμψατε ἀπὸ πύλης ἐπὶ πύλην διὰ τῆς παρεμβολῆς καὶ ἀποκτείνετε ἕκαστος τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν ἑγγιστὰ αὐτοῦ. <sup>28</sup>καὶ ἐποίησαν οἱ υἱοὶ Λευὶ καθὰ ἐλάλησαν αὐτοῖς Μωυσῆς, καὶ ἔπεσαν ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ εἰς τρισχιλίους ἄνδρας. <sup>29</sup>καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Μωυσῆς Ἐπληρώσατε τὰς χεῖρας ὑμῶν σήμερον Κυρίῳ, ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ υἱῷ ἢ τῷ ἀδελφῷ δοθῆναι ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς εὐλογίαν.

Ephraem Graecus: <sup>26</sup>στάς δὲ Μωυσῆς ἐπὶ τὴν πύλην τῆς παρεμβολῆς καὶ εἶπεν Εἰ τίς πρὸς Κύριον, ἴτω πρὸς με. καὶ συνήχθησαν πρὸς αὐτον πάντες οἱ υἱοὶ Λευί. <sup>27</sup>καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Τάδε λέγει Κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραήλ, Θέσθε ἕκαστος τὴν ῥομφαίαν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ διέλθετε ἀπὸ πύλης εἰς πύλην, καὶ ἀποκτείνετε ἕκαστος τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν ἑγγιστὰ αὐτοῦ. <sup>28</sup>καὶ ἐποίησαν οἱ υἱοὶ Λευὶ καθὰ ἐλάλησαν Μωυσῆς, καὶ ἔπεσαν ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ ἐν τῇ ἐκείνῃ ἡμέρᾳ ὥσει τρισχιλίους ἄνδρας. <sup>29</sup>καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Μωυσῆς Ἐπληρώσατε τὰς χεῖρας ὑμῶν σήμερον τῷ Κυρίῳ, ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, δοθῆναι ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς εὐλογίαν.

Ephraem Graecus has made some “proofreading” type revisions to the LXX text, keeping the phraseology and vocabulary, but introducing certain grammatical changes. The similarity between the texts indicates that Ephraem Graecus’ text is a revision of the LXX. In verse 28, e.g., Ephraem Graecus removes a pleonastic αὐτοῖς and shifts the article in ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ to its more correct location (ἐν τῇ ἐκείνῃ ἡμέρᾳ). While these changes are very minor, they indicate that Ephraem Graecus is more concerned with creating a readable and grammatically smooth Greek version than preserving all the words in the original (such as the pleonastic αὐτοῖς). The only major change that Ephraem Graecus makes is to remove “by his son” from verse 29, “You filled your hands today for the Lord, each one *by his son* or by his brother, for a blessing to be bestowed upon you.” Given that the topic of this homily is what a father should do when his son is guilty of impiety, the exclusion of the explicit example of the son from the proof text seems to weaken Ephraem Graecus’ argument.

<sup>29</sup> cf., Job 1:5.

frivolous Eli, neglecting the correction of his children, did not remove himself from the wrath of God, or venerable old age, or the free speech of the aged or the priestly honor.

**8.** Because of this, let us listen to the Holy Scriptures, since the Enemy begins to sow something of his thoughts in our own minds. But let us become perfect in faith and say to him, “Faithful is the Lord in all his words, and devout in all his works.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> LXX Ps 144:13a.

## Homily about Cain and the Murder of Abel

### Outline

1. Homiletical Introduction. ¶1-3.
2. The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel. ¶4.
3. Cain's attempt to interrogate God about his sacrifice. The mountains prohibit him. ¶5-7.
4. Cain plans fratricide. ¶8.
5. Cain persuades his family to let Abel accompany him to sacrifice a second time. ¶9-14.
  - a. Cain suggests Abel accompany him, since his sacrifice was accepted. ¶9.
  - b. Abel approves of Cain's plan to sacrifice again, but suggests he should go alone. ¶10.
  - c. Cain insists Abel accompany him, since Abel is a "Friend of God." ¶11.
  - d. Abel argues he has no special status. God simply requires humility. ¶12.
  - e. Cain begs one last time, appealing to Abel's compassion. ¶13.
  - f. Abel acquiesces. Eve objects, sensing something is amiss. Adam assents. ¶14.
6. Cain and Abel in the field. The murder. ¶15-20.
  - a. Cain and Abel go together. Cain confronts Abel with his grievances with God. ¶15.
  - b. Abel's speech begging Cain not to kill him. ¶16-19.
    - i. Abel proclaims his innocence. Likens Cain to the serpent, acting unjustly. ¶16.



- ii. Abel appeals to the effect the murder will have on Eve, Cain's soul. ¶17-18.
  - iii. Abel calls upon the earth to receive his body and mourn for him. ¶19.
- c. Cain murders Abel, comes up with a lie to tell his parents and God. ¶20.
- 7. God interrogates Cain about Abel's whereabouts. ¶21
- 8. Eve's Lament ¶22-25
  - a. Lament over Abel's body. Eve's suspicions are raised by Cain's bloody clothes. ¶22.
  - b. Eve ponders how she will tell Adam. Links this misfortune to the Garden. ¶23.
  - c. Eve laments life without Abel. ¶24.
  - d. Eve laments her and the double misfortune she has caused. ¶25.
- 9. Conclusion ¶26.

1. I was wishing to draw out accurately, from the holy sayings, from the clear springs, open thoughts about both deeds and words, and through prayer I proceed to know this securely. My mind transports me. I first stretch my eye to the depth of the word, and lo, I have seen two good-looking lads in the field. They were walking gently together in the prime of their youth, and when they got to a certain spot one of them rose up and killed the other.
2. I, being merciful and having seen this, became dizzy at the bitter slaughter which happened unjustly. I wanted to learn by what cause that one killed the other with an untrembling hand. I desired to be lifted up in suspense and in power to learn the definite answer. The victim was lying as a sheep in the field and the slayer stood unafraid and went away unconcerned.

3. At this grace<sup>1</sup> I ran to the Scriptures, brothers and sisters, wanting to learn the truth of what happened between the two of them. The divine exegesis showered me plentifully so that I may know the things about them and form a partial image about the theoria<sup>2</sup> of the killer and the killed. Indeed therefore, brothers, spiritually accept what you hear and incline your ears towards the things that were said. The manner which a shepherd leads the sheep, shepherding them by life-giving water so that his sheep might feed there, thus is the one who speaks words of grace for the hope of humankind.

4. Both of these men, Cain and Abel, who are children of Adam and Eve, were born after the transgression. The first born was living, from the beginning, by his rational mind. Listening to his parents together about the exile from paradise, he recalled it and cried at length at how they had become unworthy of that kind of grace. Seeing these things from them, he set about to be found of good virtue. From their own labors both of them brought forth gifts and sacrifices to God so that they might become worthy of the luxury of paradise. And whereas Cain brought his gifts for God from the earth, not first but second,<sup>3</sup> he honored

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<sup>1</sup> χάρις. The sense of “delight” or “favor” seems inappropriate here, for even though that description could apply to the action of reading the Bible in general, the particular passage Ephraem Graecus has chosen to illuminate is not a “delightful” one. We might expect something along the lines of, “at this sight,” “at this word,” but instead the author uses χάρις. I have chosen to translate it as “grace” to preserve the sense of gratitude at reading the Scriptures, but with less of the overtly positive connotations that “favor” would have.

<sup>2</sup> θεωρία. This term is very important for Antiochene exegesis and so I have chosen to transliterate it. While it is very likely that Ephraem Graecus knew of Antiochene exegetical terminology, his exegesis tends not to use its technical vocabulary. With its use of ἐξηγήσις a line before, the homily has placed itself firmly in the Greek exegetical tradition.

<sup>3</sup> The reason that Cain’s sacrifice is rejected and Abel’s accepted has been a point of speculation since the very beginning of the history of exegesis on this story (see Johannes Bartholdy Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers [4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries]*, [Louvain: Peeters, 1997] 79-89). The Bible itself gives no indication. Ephraem Graecus reveals his interpretation straight away. πρῶτον, ἀλλὰ δεύτερον, he writes. These adjectives are in the masculine accusative singular even though nothing else in the sentence is, suggesting they must be taken adverbially. Thus the issue is one of timing. Though the elder, Cain did not bring his sacrifice first, and this is the issue. “He honored himself above the giver” should be

himself above the giver. Abel, his brother, brought all the most radiant from his flock to God. The foreknowing God knew both of their desires and the gift of Abel was found acceptable and pure rather than Cain's. And God accepted the remainder of the sacrifice of Abel because of the purity of his heart. The sacrifice of Cain he did not accept, wanting him to proceed down the straight path and gain knowledge of him, since God knew he had a greedy heart. For our Lord does not require gifts from us, but a pure heart.

5. Cain, seeing that the gift of Abel his brother was accepted, was greatly troubled and no longer fell down before or had any need for God, but rather went about in wrath and anger. God, though, being compassionate and patient wanted to bring him onto the straight path. He wanted him to gain knowledge of God, since he accepts the gifts of the one who repents. So he said, "Why are you angry? Your very sin is in you, O Cain." Cain, not wanting to incline his heart to compassion, went away from the face of God in anger, saying these sorts of things, "I will go up upon the mountains and I will open the heavens and there I will argue with God the most high, since he has grieved me and honored my brother Abel first and over me. His sacrifice he accepted graciously, and he loved him more than me."

6. God, who sees above the mountains, when Cain was daringly approaching the doors of heaven, became angry at him. And the mountains, seeing the great rashness of Cain, wherever he started to enter into the peaks of those mountains, immediately the places there would be found to be flat. Cain, seeing the mountains hidden in the earth and then going up again, lost heart. The strength of his body became exhausted so he no longer touched the slope of the mountain or went up. God was so unwilling to have him ascend that those

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construed in terms of the improper order of sacrifice, not from a farming vs. shepherding perspective. The "heart" of Cain is the problem, as we will see, not the content of his sacrifice.

mountains obeyed and flat places were found. All of these things happened, by a sign of God, because the things made by the Creator obey him eagerly.

7. Therefore, being exhausted, Cain sat in a certain spot and said to himself, “What will I do, since I am not able to come upon the heavens [unawares], and since I see that the mountains make war against me? For lo, I see a high mountain and heaven above it. If I want to climb up it, it anticipates me and it is found to be a plain. Well then, what will I do? He sits in the heavens, and I am overpowered. All the things obey him. He sits in heaven and sees upon the earth all things and lords over them, and darkness is not able to approach his light. He goes upon the wings of the wind.<sup>4</sup> And how will I grieve him as he has grieved me with not accepting my gift? If I should set fire to the mountains and forests, he would grow them again twofold. If I should slaughter the beasts and herds, they would become greater and they would increase my grief. For I see Abel, he came before the Most High and his gift was accepted. As both of us stood lifting up our sacrifices, his fire came down, and only his gift was accepted; he sent away me as I was offering the sacrifice in my hands. So then, I, too, am aggrieved at him as he at me, since I am not able to go up into heaven, that I might show the things in my heart. I, too, have found that in this way I am vexed at him. I will kill his beloved Abel, and I will fasten grief unto God, as he has to me.”

8. While Cain was thinking these things, he was pushed<sup>5</sup> towards fratricide and he said to himself, “I will go to my family, hiding this plan, and in words of flattery, I shall deceive my brother. I will find an opportunity to lead him away from our parents, and take him up

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<sup>4</sup> Ps 17:11. While the Ephraem Graecus homilies do not engage in much biblical quotation, this does not mean that they are not biblically literate or intertextual. Here the author has Cain (of all people!) allude to a Psalm in the midst of his invented speech.

<sup>5</sup> ἐκινήθη. We might expect a middle here, as the passive voice removes agency from the act. The thrust of the homily is that Cain alone is responsible for the murder.

into the mountains lest they might see him dead and go into mourning over him. But indeed, I will go cheerfully so that I might lead Abel away unsuspectingly from our parents and then I will slaughter him like one of the rams in the field, and I will be set free from my distress.” For the two of them alone offered sacrifices to the Most High from the fruit and the herds. “And lo! I have been made an abomination upon the earth, I and my sacrifice. My brother has become acceptable along with his gifts. With him dead, there will not be another to offer gifts to the Most High and my grief will be turned to joy.”

**9.** As Cain was discussing these things with himself, he got up and went to his family, hiding the evil. Going up to his family he said, “Now I know completely about my brother, that he is beloved by the Most High since he loves God. Therefore, let him hasten to appease God on behalf of me. For what is more acceptable than this, to love God and for his family to serve him? And, indeed, I have not done this thing, because of the fact that my gift was not accepted as Abel’s. So then, let him call upon God with me so that my gifts too may be accepted.” And at the same time as this speech he went forward in sadness and kissed his brother in front of his parents so that he might take him away from them.

**10.** Abel, the unperverted and true servant of God, listened with pleasure, and he rather more urged Cain forward to go up to worship God, saying, “Even you know, Brother, that if you set your ear to hearken to God, and do not say he is dead as you suppose, since you do not have your hopes in the one Creator God. Do you not see as you look at the tears of Adam and Eve, our parents, how they lament at the offense they became when they transgressed the command of the Creator? They were not able to be completely called, since they transgressed the command of God, and consented willingly to try their luck outside, and they wail eternally because of that. I, too, plan so that I might approach God, praying without

reservation, lest you finish your poverty in these days in the same way our parents will.

Watch out, brother, behold I am telling you everything.”

**11.** Cain answered and said, “I, too, know all these things. Therefore, I have stumbled, becoming an offense. But come with me as a brother, for I know that you are a friend of God. Pray for me and come with me without reservation into the field so that we might finish the sacrifice to God. For it is good to act graciously to God.” And saying other things he was flattering his brother and said, “Lo, my brother, I have told you the situation. Do not shrink from coming with me to bear a sacrifice onto the Lord.”

**12.** And Abel said: “Indeed, only you should go and say, ‘Have mercy on me, God, be in harmony with me.’ Go forward then in humility and say, ‘Be compassionate, Lord. I have sinned as my ancestors. I have stumbled as a mortal, I have tripped like one crippled.’ Let your tears flow, let your cry go to the doors of heaven. Put aside all your evil and say, ‘Here I am dying, Lord, before your mercies, until the time you commune with me.’ Thus repent to the humane God and take communion. For this is what our God is like, patient and merciful, and he accepts the ones who repent to him. Finally, I too rejoice at your repentance.”

**13.** For the blameless and guileless Abel knew his evil. Although Abel was thinking these sorts of things about Cain, Cain did not soften the hardness of his heart. Rather he hastened towards the slaughter and he was saying these sorts of things to Abel, “Be compassionate, my brother, come with me into the field and fall down before God for my sake, so that he may be reconciled to me.”

**14.** After he heard these things from Cain, Abel was filled with compassion and said, “Am I to be the cause of your beautiful reconciliation to God? Come, let us walk together.” Eve heard the great agreement between them and when Abel swore to go away, she was

wounded in her heart and said to them, “My dear children, this is not the season for sacrifices. Truly, my children, my heart is very troubled, and I am burned seeing your assembly and your fight. Why this zeal and your noise? Where will you lead Abel, Cain? Why your journey together? Did the snake not deceive us, bearing ill-will. Again he now does this, so that in deceiving you both you might sacrifice before the time? This is not the time for sacrifice.” Adam, seeing the calmness of Abel and the struggle of Cain, became grieved and said, “Go, children, and make a sacrifice and return to us.” Then Eve said to Cain, “Behold, I am the mother of both of you, children, and I will reflect on this until the time when you return to me.”

**15.** Then both of them went up, bearing themselves quietly and reflecting on this alone - how they might bring forward a sacrifice to God. And they came upon a certain place and Cain began to move against Abel. He changed his mind and he made his speech against Abel rough, heaping unjust blame upon him and saying these sorts of things to him, “Come, tell me why and what my guilt is, since I am hated by God but he loves you? Describe it to me clearly. Are we not both children of Adam? How did your gift become acceptable more than mine? Finally, for what reason do you presume to say, ‘God loves me more than my brother. He produces all creation, and is pleased with me, as I want?’ Except, I will prevent you not only from enjoying it, but also I will quickly steal your life away from you. Wherefore you are a thorn around me and are willing to inherit everything, going about greedily.” And he swore against him, like a wild beast, gnashing his teeth, disdaining argument.

**16.** Abel the blameless, seeing Cain thus stirred up against him, backed away from him altogether and began to supplicate him and call upon him with merciful words, and he was saying that he wanted him to turn towards compassion. Seeing that he was bitter and desiring

slaughter, he was saying, “Are these your words, my brother Cain, which you have said to our parents? Did you not speak encouragingly with tears that ‘I wanted to pray blameless before God and with boldness? Therefore I want to take along with me Abel my brother and friend of God, and I desire that he go with me as an affectionate brother and fall before the Most High so that he might intercede for me.’ You are truly cheating me, brother, with these flattering words in the same way the deceitful snake cheated them in their foolishness. You are to me, my brother, a terrible snake in paradise and secretly sending out your own poison. You are to me, my brother, an evil farmer, who, seeing a prolific plant, bears it ill-will and hides it and uproots it. You are to me, my brother, as an inexperienced shepherd, who, seeing a good ram, hates it and kills it. Tell me, what is my fault? Did you hear me say about the earth or its cosmos that I had inherited it? Now tell me, my brother, that all things belong to me. Have these things, I exhort you. Only grant this to me, to see our parents. Know this, that I would never hinder your sacrifice. Did I tell the Most High not to accept your gifts? Why then the wrath towards me? God knows from the beginning the thoughts of each and he knew your heart before you formed the plan what you were going to do. But I appeal to you, my brother, receive my tears and allow me to kiss the grey hair of Adam and the face of Eve. Lo, their eyes are upon the doors, gazing intently throughout the day for when they might see us returning to them. What advantage is it to you, if you shed my blood now?

**17.** I appeal to you, my brother. This will not be good for your soul. A trial is going to befall you and how will you find a defense for this before God? Do you expect to lie to him about me? For what you plan to do is clear before him. He searches hearts and in this way would have already foreseen this. Be warned, I beseech you, with the ardor of the feeling you have against me, be that merciful towards our parents. Have mercy on me, your brother,



who lies before you, and then let us go and worship the humane God, and do not resolve to add grief upon grief and affliction upon affliction. Do not blind the eyes of our father Adam, nor do the same to our mother Eve. For if you do this thing, where would you go or where would you hide from the face of God? Or with what sort of eyes would you look upon our parents? And what would you say to them when they asked you about poor Abel? How would you move your tongue to a defense for what you did to the one asking you to have mercy? And how would your heart reckon the unfathomable grief of both of those asking you, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ My brother, do not force Adam to begin searching there for where my body lies. Upon finding it will he then bend over me, seeing me lying as a lamb slaughtered in a field? Do you want Eve to come and wail and to anoint her hair with the blood of her son? Know, brother, what you are about to do and come to your senses. Cry out to God and do not do this. I say to you, the earth with everything in it is before you, enjoy it. It is enough for me to see your angelic face. I exhort you with tears, but you do not turn your mind to that, being drunk with rage. How will you bow down your eyes and how will you incline your ears, how will your heart be hardened because of not listening to my words and moving to kill me unjustly?

**18.** I beseech you, brother, so that you might tell Adam and Eve how they could come to see this new sight and my bitter murder. And just as they took pleasure in Paradise and were naked disobeying God, there again they would see my bitter murder and become grieved. In the same way that they were thrown out of Paradise thus they would become grieved at the newly-murdered dead. Allow Adam a graceful and final greeting of my poor body.

**19.** Receive, O Earth, my blood and cry strongly unto God, so that I may be swiftly avenged. And guard, O Earth, my body from the wild beasts and the birds, so that it might

not become rent by beasts and so that Adam, who is not present, might see me. O Heavens, hear the pitiable cries of the one unjustly slain and do not keep silent! Cry for me, all the pleasures of the earth. Let the sheep which I shepherded in the fields and mountains cry for me. Let the streams of water cry for me, for I will no longer see them together with my flocks. Let the grass of the field mourn me with their buds, since I will see them no more.”

**20.** These were the things said by Abel, the things unable to soften the stony heart of Cain. Cain stood callous and without pity, his ears were as a hardened shield. Then, as a wild beast, he moved against the just one, and he thought how he would commit the murder. The callous one lifted up his hand and in one moment beat his own brother and the wretched one was rejoicing and saying to himself, “What has happened to you, Abel, and what has become of you acceptable sacrifices? Look, what will you suffer and where will you lay, you who are zealous for offering oblations. For though I live, you die. And then what will be left to the one who won the prize? Finally, I must think how I will defend myself to Adam and Eve about Abel, the sacrificer. For I know that both of them stand before the doors awaiting us, and when they see me returning alone - not knowing what has happened - they will ask me about Abel, ‘What has happened?’ and if they begin to ask me why I have returned alone, I will answer them in a rough voice, ‘Why do you ask me about my brother? Did he not have the authority to go wherever he wanted? Am I his guardian?’ Finally, thus I will speak to them bitterly. They will become afraid to ask me about him any longer. If they are agitated and become irritated about him, they will not be able to kill me, since then they would find themselves alone on the earth, and there will not be found upon the earth another man to prosecute me. The angels do not see me and I will not be afraid about this, but bearing myself proudly I will go on.”

**21.** This is the lie that the conqueror thought to tell to his parents, but then the just judgment of God rose up to avenge Abel, and a fearful divine voice refuted Cain. For as he planned to speak with his parents, then he was answered by the fearful and just God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” and again the divine voice to him, “Why did you kill your brother, quietly hiding his blood which calls out to me from the earth? Why did you do this? How did he wrong you, since in all righteousness he brought forth his offering? But you, from the beginning, have been envious and slanderous. Take the sentence according to the worthiness of your honor, with which you yourself toiled in jealousy, murder, and deceit. You will be moaning and trembling upon the earth since all will know that you shed blood unjustly.”

**22.** Their mother was distressed as she waited at the door for them. Then she ran swiftly into the field and saw Abel laying in the field, slaughtered like a lamb and Cain, moaning and trembling like a leaf on the wind. Stopping, Eve did not know how to interpret this new scene. For her child lay dead, but Eve did not know the manner of his death and she called to her son saying, “Abel, Abel, my child, what happened to you? You lie as in sleep but you do not hear your mother. I see upon you a seemingly strange sleep. For your face is discolored, as a snake, your eyes do not close themselves, your feet have become bent. Are you Abel, who was born from my womb, or have you become something else in his place? Why are you so silent and do not speak to your mother? Have mercy on my streams of tears and on the breasts which you nursed upon, say a word! What is this strange and unendurable sight? You, Abel, are silent and do not speak to your mother. I will return to Adam, singing a dirge. I will cry out and I will sing my dirge, my child, since you have been suddenly snatched away, just as a sparrow from my arms.” Then, turning to Cain, she said, “Why do you moan and tremble and shake as a leaf on the wind? Why are you not standing on your feet and why

are your clothes bloody? Why does your right hand drip with blood? My God, what is this new sight?” And she said to Cain, “Has the devil deceived you and led you to fratricide in the same way that he deceived me? Did he see you and make you into a murderer and butcher of Abel?

**23.** “Woe is me, I have killed! With what sort of eyes do I look upon the old Adam, or what sort of words would I say to him? If I should say what happened, I would not help Abel but I would accuse Cain. How am I to become an accuser from my own compassion? Should I have mercy upon the life of this one and mourn the death of that one? There he stands, moaning and trembling and that one lies there silent, but his blood cries out. And mother is no longer mother but she has become grieved because of the children she used to take pleasure in. What will I do or what will I say? I shall have mercy upon Adam since with a two-pronged fork he tills the earth and his face is sweaty from his labors so that he might have his bread? Thus I will cry out for myself, him whom I gave birth to with pangs has fallen as an unripe fruit blown by the wind. But as we took from the tree of deceit, thus also he was led astray by the tree of deceit. Since he killed this one and his own life he has spoiled. The first one demonstrated death. The first one became the interpreter of the threat of God.<sup>6</sup> Since this one was born because of the transgression, he visited murder upon Abel.

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<sup>6</sup> ὅτι πρῶτος θάνατον ἔδειξε καὶ τῆς ἀπειλῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐρμηνευτὴς πρῶτος ἐγένετο. The idea that the interpretive key to understanding the murder of Abel is ultimately found through the tree in the garden is presented here by the character Eve. It is entirely in accordance with her character, as developed here by Ephraem Graecus, to feel such guilt over her actions in the garden that she interprets every subsequent misfortune she experiences through the lens of that event. This imbues Eve with a tremendous amount of psychological realism, and is one of the most noteworthy treatments of Eve as a character in the Christian exegetical tradition. The piece concludes with only a brief doxology after the end of Eve’s speech. Since the homilist offers no commentary in his own voice, it seems reasonable to conclude that he is using Eve as a mouthpiece for his theological reflections. The use of the technical term ἐρμηνευτής in Eve’s speech is evidence of Eve’s claiming the role of interpreter, as is the content. The trees in paradise are critically important for the Ephraem Graecus homilies’ understanding of the divine order (see the pieces on the Binding of Isaac and the Good Thief). It is noteworthy, then, that he chooses a biblical woman to express his own theological views.

**24.** Woe is me, my child Abel, no longer will you bear a lamb to your father, no longer will you make songs in that wide pasture, no longer will you keep watch at night, guarding your flock. No longer will you stand on the summits of the mountains and be amazed at the games you play with your sheep. No longer will you milk your flocks!

**25.** This has become the cause of my evil, not snake, not tree, but the enemy of the law of God. I gathered enmity and I gathered death. I mourn my children since I have utterly killed my natural son. Since I rejected the Father according to grace, I destroyed paradise and found death. Taking fruit from paradise I ate it and earned bodily pain from death. Paradise hurled me out and death took me in. Since I ate the fruit of the tree, I reaped death.”

**26.** But, thinking on this story, beloved, let us send up glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit now and always and until the end of the ages. Amen.

## Homily on the All-Beautiful Joseph

### Outline of the Homily

Typological Introduction. ¶1-4.

- a. ¶1 – Joseph as Type of Christ
- b. ¶2 – Exhortation to Listen
- c. ¶3-4 – The Typological Parallels
  - i. Joseph went away from his father's house; Jesus descended to Earth.
  - ii. Joseph's brothers spoke against him; the Jews conspired to kill the heir.
  - iii. Descent of Joseph to Egypt; Jesus descends to Sheol.
  - iv. Both are brought out and crowned with glory.
  - v. Joseph lords over his brothers; Jesus reigns over those who rejected him.

10. Joseph's early life and journey to see his brothers. ¶5.

11. Joseph's brothers set upon him, throw him in the pit, and sell him. ¶6-9.

12. Joseph and the Ishmaelites at Rachel's tomb. ¶10-13.

- a. Joseph falls at Rachel's tomb, lamenting his fate and preferring death. ¶10.
- b. Ishmaelites become afraid, suspecting witchcraft. Ask Joseph about his origins.

¶11.

- c. Joseph tells them of his plight. ¶12.
- d. Ishmaelites express sorrow, greet Joseph as kin, promise to take him to Egypt.

¶13.

13. Joseph's brothers bring the coat to Jacob. ¶14-15.

- g. Jacob unconvinced by evidence because the cloak is whole, but bloodstained. ¶15.

14. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife. ¶16-22.

- d. Potiphar's Wife's expanded guile. ¶18-19.
  - e. Joseph's refusal and prayer. ¶20-21.
15. Joseph in Prison and his ascent to Pharaoh's Chariot ¶23-27.
- a. Homiletic apostrophe. ¶26.
16. Potiphar reacts to the ascension, castigates wife, does obeisance to Joseph. ¶28.
17. Joseph's management; The famine; The sons of Jacob go to Egypt. ¶29.
18. Joseph and his Brothers. ¶30-37.
- a. Joseph's request for Benjamin greatly vexes Jacob. ¶30.
  - b. Joseph meets with Benjamin. Expresses his emotions in a prayer to God. ¶31.
  - c. Joseph demonstrates knowledge of their family, frightening the brothers. ¶32.
  - d. Benjamin is found with the cup. ¶33.
  - e. Benjamin laments his fate, linking his predicament with Joseph's. ¶34.
  - f. Benjamin taken before Joseph; Judah offers himself in his place. ¶35-36.
  - g. Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. ¶37.
19. Conclusion. Joseph reveals himself, is reunited with Jacob. Trinitarian Doxology. ¶38-41.

1. The God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, the Blessed God, the one who chose the holy seed from your own who serve and love you. Grant, since you are good, that the stream of grace might bubble up inside of me very abundantly, so that I might be enabled to tell the bright and great story of the all-beautiful Joseph, the one born from the always august foundation, and in the deepest age of the patriarch Jacob. For this one, this child, from

a youthful age describes the two comings of Christ. The first, the one which happened from the Virgin Mary, and [the second] when he comes again speaking aloud all things.

2. Now, beloved, we who are loved by Christ, let us become steadfast, rejoicing in our souls as attentively we listen and see the deeds of the most beautiful child. I, my brothers and sisters, not only speak this, since he was a most comely lad, but also marvelous, a font of self-control, the greatest victor, the amazing trophy. Wherefore he became the best type of that coming of our Lord.

3. Let each person cast out every worldly thought from his or her own soul and let him accept with longing the lyrical songs,<sup>1</sup> for they are the spiritual, gladdening the soul. For just as the Lord was sent for us from the bosom of his father's realm to save us all, thus also the lad Joseph was sent away from his father's house as his brothers reported. And just as the rough brothers of Joseph, when they saw him drawing near began to talk evilly against him, he bore peace to them from the father. Thus also the hard-hearted Jews would always say, when they saw the Savior, "This is the heir, let us kill him and all of it will be ours." And thus the brothers of Joseph were saying, "Let us kill him, and let us be removed from before him." The way the Jews were saying, "Come, let us kill him, and let us acquire his inheritance," the brothers of Joseph were also consumed and sold him, slaughtering for the plot.<sup>2</sup> Thus this way, the blaspheming Jews, eating the Passover, slaughtered the Savior. The

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<sup>1</sup>τὰ μελικά ᾠσματα. There is no Syriac original for this homily. That the author identifies his work this way suggests that he could be framing this homily as a translation of some lyrical work with some sort of meter. Alternatively, this homily could be an originally Greek composition (possessing its own meter) with such a line included to give the impression that it has a Syriac original.

<sup>2</sup>πρόθεσις. Joseph's brothers have a plan to get rid of Joseph, but God also has a plan involving getting Joseph into Egypt. It is revealed later that the plan of the brothers is part of God's plan for Israel as well. πρόθεσις has a public, "out in the open," aspect to it. I have chosen to render it "plot," which is more ominous than "plan," in order to place the emphasis on the outward appearance of the brothers' actions and its parallel with the Jews' initiatives at the crucifixion.



descent of Joseph into Egypt symbolizes the descent of our Savior into the earth. And the manner with which Joseph, within the inner room, trampled the strength of sin and was bestowed with the radiant prizes of victory against his own Egyptian master, thus also our Lord, the savior of our souls, with his own right hand, cast down Hades and there dissolved all the power of the most evil and most horrible tyrant. Since Joseph conquered sin, he was put in prison until the hour of the victory laurel; thus also our Lord, so that he might release the whole world from sin, was put in the tomb. Joseph spent two years' time in the prison, whiling away the time there with all license. Our Lord remained three days in Hades, as he was strong, not submitting to corruption. Joseph was taken out of prison by a gracious command from Pharaoh, as a true type, which can be easily interpreted as a release from the sleep, symbolizing the coming bounty.<sup>3</sup> Our Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by his own power, stripping Hades, bearing up to his father our reconciliation, proclaiming resurrection and life eternal. Joseph sat in Pharaoh's chariot, taking authority over all Egypt. Our Savior, King before the Ages, went up into Heaven on a shimmering cloud, and is seated at the right hand of the Father in Glory, upon the Cherubim, as the Only Begotten Son. In Joseph's reign in Egypt, he took the authority against his enemies; his brothers were led voluntarily before the judgment seat of death by them. They were led to do obeisance with fear and trembling before the one able to sentence them to death, and they did obeisance with fear before Joseph, whom they did not wish to reign over them. Joseph knew his brothers, and he proclaimed them murderers in one word. When they learned of this, they stood before him in great shame, not daring to speak, not having anything at all with which to defend

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<sup>3</sup> τύπος ἀληθινός... σημαίνων. The exegetical vocabulary is dense here, emphasizing the typological relationship between the events. Though the phrasing of the homilies will occasionally slip into out-and-out equating of one thing in the Old Testament to something in the New, passages like this emphasize that the relationship is ultimately a typological one.

themselves, knowing accurately their own sin in that hour, the one in which they sold him.

The one who seemed to have been sold by them into Hades was suddenly found ruling over them.

4. Thus will it be in that fearful day, when Christ shall come in the clouds of the air, sitting on the throne of his kingdom and all the enemies are led as prisoners before His judgment seat by the fearful angels, they will all not wish for him to rule over them. For the lawless Jews will know then that, if he had been crucified, he would have died as a man, since these miserable people were not persuaded that God would come for salvation to save our souls. In the same way, Joseph spoke freely to his brothers, who were fearful and trembling, “I am Joseph, whom you sold into slavery, now I rule over you all, which you did not want.” Thus also the Lord showed the cross in the shining type to the ones who crucified him and they knew his cross and that the Son of God was crucified by them.

5. You all know precisely how Joseph became a true type of his own Master, since his virtue bloomed from a young age for his intelligence. Well then, taking hold of the beginning we shall come to explain and describe the virtues of that holy youth. This blessed one spent 17 years in the house of his father and he advanced each day in the fear of God and a state of beauty and honor surpassing his parents. Seeing the wickedness of his brothers, he told his father quickly something of their many deeds. For truly virtue is not able to grow together with wickedness; and he happened upon foul things. But because of this, those ones hated Joseph, since he began to distance himself from their evil. This child, being virtuous, had dreams in which he saw the things to come which would happen to him, according to the plan of God Most High. Their father Jacob, not knowing the hidden hatred towards Joseph, loved Joseph singularly, because of the bloom of virtue which had always appeared

prominently in the boy since an early age. While his brothers were pasturing the sheep in Shechem, it happened that Joseph was with his father. Their Father Jacob, being an affectionate father, was carefree about them in Shechem, and he said to Joseph, “Go, my son, go to your brothers, and tell me accurately about their health and also their flocks. Then return quickly.” Joseph received the commandment of his father and he went away with joy to his brothers, bearing peace from their father, and the concern which he had about them. While he was going away, he wandered on the road, not finding his brothers with their flocks. He was grieved and anxious on behalf of them, but a man found him and he showed him the way. Joseph saw them, from afar, and he went with joy, desiring above all to greet them. While he was going towards them, they saw him and, as savage beasts, wanted to kill Joseph. Joseph, as a lamb without blemish, kept away from falling into the hands of the bitterest wolves.<sup>4</sup> As he drew close to them, he greeted them kindly, carrying peace from the face of their father. These ones stood up on the spot, as savage beasts, they stripped him of his cloak of many colors, in which he was clad, and each one tore into him and swallowed him alive, they fell upon him with raw hatred. That august and holy youth they fell upon with a fratricidal mania.

6. Joseph saw them in their evil, none of them having any mercy at all, and he finally went away in chains. He was taken forward in tears and groans and he raised his voice up as he was being tied by them, saying “Why are you angry at me? I implore you hold back from

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<sup>4</sup> αὐτὸς δὲ ὡς ἀρνίον ἄκακον ἀπέχετο τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τῶν πικροτάτων λύκων. ἀπέχω in the active typically has the sense of keeping away from or keeping off of. Yet there are difficulties. The author explicitly links Joseph with a lamb without blemish, and while this is useful for a typological linkage with Christ, it is unclear how his blameless status in any way keeps away wolves (not to mention πικροτάτων wolves). Further, the next sentence makes clear that Joseph walks *towards* his brothers, quite the opposite of keeping away. I have kept the translation close to the original, but I suspect something has dropped out: αὐτὸς δὲ ὡς ἀρνίον ἄκακον οὐ δύναται ἀπέχειν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τῶν πικροτάτων λύκων. He, as a lamb without blemish (i.e. full of innocence and naiveté), was not able to keep from falling into the hands of the bitterest wolves.

me for but a moment, so that I may beg you, my brothers. My mother lies dead, and Jacob mourns for her even now, and you all want to add another lamentation to our father? He would remain stuck as previously and would no longer go about. I exhort all of you, hold off from me for a moment, let Jacob not be torn asunder, let him not go down to Hades in his old age with woe. I adjure you all by the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one who called Abraham in the beginning and said, ‘Go you from your land and from your kin and from your father’s house and go into a land which I will show to you and I will bestow it upon you. And I will increase your seed as the stars in the heavens and as the grains of sand on the shore of the sea, they will be uncountable.’ The God Most High, the one who gave endurance to Abraham to offer up his only-begotten son, Isaac, eagerly as a sacrifice, so that the endurance of Abraham might be reckoned for a boast. This is the God who pulled Isaac out of death and gave a ram in place of him for the acceptable sacrifice. The Holy God, who gave the blessing to Jacob from the mouth of Isaac his father. This is the God who went down with Jacob from Haran to Mesopotamia where Abraham went out. This is the God who pulled Jacob from sickness and told him to give him a blessing. Let me not deprive Jacob, as he was deprived of Rachel. Let him not mourn me as he mourns Rachel. Do not again let Jacob’s eyes be darkened as he looks on expecting my return to him. Send me to Jacob, my father, take heed of my tears. Send me forth to him.”

7. After he swore these things concerning the God of their fathers, the wicked ones immediately threw him into the pit, not fearing God, nor shamed by oaths, although he had wrapped himself around their feet, and drenched the feet of his brothers with tears as he cried out and said, “Brothers, have mercy on me.” He was thrown straightaway into the pit by them. As Joseph was thrown into the pit in the desert, in the most bitter tears, and he sung a

lament to the pitiful beasts and himself and his father Jacob, crying and saying in unutterable groans, he said, “Father Jacob, behold the things that have befallen your son, since lo, I have been cast into the pit as though dead. Behold, you who expect me to return to you, father. Now I lie at the bottom of a pit, as though murdered. Father, you yourself told me, ‘Go, find your brothers with their flocks and return with haste,’ and lo, these ones became as the crudest wolves and with rage separated me from you, beautiful father. For you will no longer see me, nor hear the sound of my voice, nor again will your old age be supported by me, nor will I see the holy things of you grey hair, since I am no better than one dead and buried. Father, call to your son, and let your son call to his father, since thus I am separated from your presence. Who will give me a warbling dove who could speak, so that it might go and report to your old head my weeping? Forsake your tears and your groans.” And his voice was exhausted, and he cried out no longer.

8. “O Earth, O Earth, the one who called out to the Holy God about the just Abel, the one who was killed unjustly, as in the teaching of the forefathers. Since then you cried out to God because of the blood of the just, Earth, call out to Jacob my father, let him know all that has befallen me from my brothers.”

9. And after those cruel ones threw Joseph into the pit, they sat down to eat and drink with joy, just as one who has won a victory and put his enemies to flight in battle. So these ones, with joy in their hearts sat themselves down. And while they were eating and drinking in happiness, all of a sudden they lifted up their eyes and they saw some Ishmaelite travelers, going away to Egypt, with camels loaded with spices. They said to each other, “It would be much better for us to give Joseph to these foreign travelers, so that he might go away and die in a foreign land and thus our hand would not have gone against our brother.” So they pulled

their own brother out of the pit, as savage animals, and, after ascertaining a price, sold him to the travelers so that they might not give their father grief and suffering.

**10.** While the travelers were starting to travel down the road in the place of the chariot-road they passed by the tomb of Rachel. For there she had died in the chariot-road as Jacob was going away again from Mesopotamia. When Joseph saw the tomb of Rachel, his mother, he ran to it and fell upon the memorial and lifting up his voice he screamed in tears and he cried out with a bitter soul, saying thus: “Rachel, Rachel, my mother, rise from the dust and see your Joseph, whom you loved and what has happened to him. Lo! Thus he goes away as a prisoner into Egypt in foreign hands, handed over as an evildoer. My brothers sold me naked into slavery and Jacob won’t learn that I have been sold. Open for me, my mother, and receive me into your tomb. Let there be one bed for you and me - your tomb. Receive, Rachel, your son, lest he die violently. Receive, mother, the one that was suddenly taken away from Jacob in the way that I was deprived of you from childhood. Hear, mother, the yearnings of my heart and receive me into your tomb. For no longer do my eyes carry tears to cry with, nor does my soul have the strength to scream in agonies. Rachel, Rachel, do you not hear the voice of your son Joseph? Lo! I am being dragged off by force and do you not want to receive me? I called to Jacob, but my voice he did not hear. Lo, I call the same to you, but you hear nothing from me. Here I die, upon your grave lest I go away into a foreign land as an evildoer.”

**11.** When the Ishmaelites who took Joseph saw him, they were moved with a singular feeling, since he ran and in a blink of an eye fell upon the grave of his mother Rachel, they were saying to each other. “This young lad wants to work witchcraft on us, so that he might be able to run away from us, since we don’t know how he is going to become invisible. Let

us take him away and bind him securely lest he make all of us disappear.”<sup>5</sup> They went up to him and said, deeply moved, “Get up now and stop your witchcraft, so that you do not smite us upon that gravestone and we lose the money we paid for you.” He got up and they all saw him utter from his face a bitter cry, and each of them began asking him gently, “Why are you crying? Clearly you were deeply troubled from the time when you saw that tomb, from the way of the chariot-road. Speak boldly to us and cast out our cowardice, what is your business and why were you sold to us? Those shepherds, when they sold you, thus they said to us, ‘Secure this one so that he doesn’t run away from you on the road.’ We are innocent, so we say now. Therefore, tell us now completely, why have you become a slave, from these shepherds or from some other freedman? Make it known to us, why you fell upon the memorial and began speaking mystically? We own you and we are your masters. Tell us all the things about yourself. And if you should hide something from us about yourself, to whom will you make it known? You happen to be our lad. When these shepherds spoke to us, they said you would want to flee if we neglected you. Repent and tell us completely, what is your situation? For it is clear to us that you are free. We shall not make use of you as a slave but as a brother or as a beloved son. For we see in you great freedom and much wisdom in many matters. You are worthy to be established as king and to be honored with majesty, for this beauty of yours is abundant in appearance as well as in honor. You will stand yourself up in authority in short order and you will be our friend. Let it be known here, that wherever we lead you, you will be joyful. For who would not yearn for such a lad, full of beauty for the eyes, and both well-born and wise?”

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps out of pious reticence, Ephraem Graecus does not get specific about the sort of pagan magic the Ishmaelites are expecting Joseph to perform. He uses the very general terms *γοητεία* and *ἀφανής* for both what Joseph might do to himself *and* what they fear he will do to them.

12. Then Joseph replied and said to them in moans, “I became neither slave, nor witch, nor some other sinner. I was sold into your hands, but I was a beloved son of my father, and similarly my mother - the most beloved son. These shepherds happen to be my brothers, and my father sent me to see them and how they were doing, as an affectionate father is anxious about his own sons’ affairs. These ones had spent a long time in the mountains, and it was for this reason I was sent by my father to see them. They immediately took me and sold into slavery to you, bearing evil zeal in their hearts. They thrust me away from my father, since they did not carry the love with which our father loved me. The one entombed here is my mother. When my father was going up from Haran, from there he passed through this area to go into the place where he now lives, and with my father by her side, my mother died here,<sup>6</sup> and was buried in this tomb, which you now see.”

13. When they heard this, they cried for him, and they said to him, “Don’t be afraid, lad. You will go with great honor into Egypt, for your character is clear from your nobility. Your eagerness will set you free from the envy and hatred of the brothers who sold you to us.”

14. The brothers of Joseph, when they sold him, had a goat with them. They slaughtered it eagerly and stained the holy Joseph’s cloak with its blood, they sent it presently to their father saying, “We found this cast down on the mountain and immediately we knew that this was the garment of our brother and we were all saddened for him. Because of this, father, we

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<sup>6</sup> ὥς γάρ ποτε ἀνήρχετο ὁ πατήρ μου ἐκ τῆς Χαρράν, ἔνθεν διήλθεν ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὸν τόπον, ὃν νῦν οἰκεῖ· καὶ παριόντος τοῦ πατρὸς μου, θνήσκει ὧδε ἡ μήτηρ μου. Verbs of motion are numerous in this section, with three different ἔρχομαι compounds. It is particularly difficult to construe the ἀπο- prefixed infinitive with the prepositional phrase introduced by εἰς. The idea of passing through and then out of an area would be better communicated by means of διέρχομαι as a participle and ἀπέρχομαι as the active verb rather than via an active verb and an infinitive. This difficulty is further compounded by the puzzling presence of the imperfect ἀνήρχετο, which seems to situate the entire sequence within Jacob’s move from Haran, which would be fine if it were not for the ἔνθεν, which provides its own bracket to the situation. The ἔνθεν stops the action of the previous verb by adverbially marking the next verb’s action as happening “from that point,” or “from that place.” The content of Joseph’s speech is abundantly clear: Jacob was travelling through this area and his wife died and was subsequently buried here. The Greek phrasing of this point is seemingly more difficult than it has to be, however.



sent Joseph's cloak of many colors, since we didn't find our brother. You yourself know if it is indeed your son's, but all of us know it belongs to Joseph."

**15.** When Jacob saw the cloak he cried out with most bitter wailing and lamentation saying "This is the garment of my son Joseph. An evil beast slew my son." He screamed and said in his unendurable agony, "Why was I not eaten instead of you? Why did the beast not meet me and take its fill of me and leave you, my son? Why did the beast not slaughter me and make me food to fill it? Oi, Oi, my heart is broken for Joseph. Oi, oi, where were you slaughtered, my son, so that I might depart and pull out my grey hairs over your beautiful corpse. I no longer want to live, now that I cannot see my Joseph. I deserve your death, my child. I am the one who darkened the lights in your eyes. I, child, killed you, when I sent you to see your brothers with their flocks in the desert. I will cry to the last, child, and I will lament every hour until the time when I go down to you in Hades, my son, and in place of a body I will set your cloak before my eyes with unending tears, Joseph. Lo, your cloak sets up for me another great grief, my son. For you were complete, so I think that the wild beast did not slaughter you, O most beloved, but you were stripped by the hands of men and slaughtered. For if, as your brothers say, you were eaten, your garment would be cut into pieces, for it is not possible that a beast would first strip you and then have its mouth full of your flesh. But if you were first stripped and then slaughtered, your cloak would be unspoiled by blood. These tears in your coat were not made by claws, nor the fasteners undone by teeth of a beast. So then where did the blood come from? If, again, the wild beast was the one who ate Joseph alone, how would he have accomplished all the work? This is the grief and lamentation that is greatest to me, that I might mourn Joseph and grieve over the coat. Two griefs, two sorrows, and the most bitter lamentations, of Joseph and his coat! How was he

stripped? I killed Joseph, my light and my foundation. Let your coat now be cast down with you into Hades, for I want not to see it without you, my light, my son Joseph. Let my soul be taken away with your soul, Joseph my son.”

**16.** The Ishmaelites took Joseph in haste and led him into Egypt. They were speaking about his beauty and how much money they might get from some mighty person. While they were going from the middle of the city, behold, Potiphar met with them straight away and seeing Joseph he attempted to learn from him, saying, “Tell me where you travelers found this young man? For he does not dwell with you, since you all are Ishmaelites and this one is very beautiful.” And they answered him, saying, “This lad is most noble and full of wisdom. Give the price to us, as much as others would be eager, to buy Joseph from us. And lead him into your own home, ask to learn his education.” The true shoot of the holy seed of the righteous Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob advanced in virtue and much responsibility in the house of Potiphar, proceeding daily in precision, through the degrees of wisdom by word and glance, unceasingly having the Holy God before his eyes in all things, the God of his fathers, the one who pulled him out of the pit of death and the hatred of his brothers. But his heart was full of continuous grief for his father, the holy Jacob.

**17.** Potiphar, seeing the establishment of the young man, the great knowledge, and conscientiousness – all of the things - which had been given through the hands of Joseph the all-beautiful, as a trueborn son. And he did not know what Joseph did in his affairs, nor even in his words, except only the food which he ate at its time, for he saw that Joseph was altogether trustworthy.<sup>7</sup> He took the trials exceptionally well, and all the affairs were fulfilled

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<sup>7</sup> καὶ παντελῶς οὐκ ἦδει τί ἐποίει Ἰωσήφ ἐν πᾶσι πράγμασιν, οὔτε μέχρι ῥήματος, εἰ μὴ μόνον τὸν ἄρτον ὃν ἤσθιεν ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ· εἶδε γὰρ τὸν Ἰωσήφ πάνυ ὄντα πιστόν. The middle clause is difficult. οὔτε μέχρι ῥήματος must be construed with the prior clause, given the linkage between οὐκ and οὔτε. While the μέχρι + genitive construction does advance the idea of “and what is more *even his speech*,” it awkwardly breaks

in the hand of Joseph and there was great joy among the male and female slaves because of all the good things that happened to them because of him.

**18.** His mistress saw Joseph clothed in beauty and knowledge, and she was pricked by a manic, erotic, satanic impulse and desired exceedingly to sleep with him, and wanted to throw this holy one, this fountain of wisdom, into a pit of licentiousness. She considered and made a myriad of plans and made herself up beautifully and worked lavishly to trick the young lad. Hour by hour, she changed her clothes and batted her eyelashes and put on gold, with satanic gestures and shameful smiles, this wretched woman attempted to entice the holy eyes of the righteous one. This woman eagerly attempted to ensnare by these schemes the soul of the holy one. Joseph though, had walled himself up with the fear of God, and it was not until a sign that he looked at her.

**19.** She saw that the ruses of the many ornaments were not working on the just one. With the fullness of the summer sun she burned and plotted exceedingly, but did not come upon what she should do to him. But at last, shamefully desiring him, she called for him for an unworthy deed, watching closely as a furious soldier, so that she could loose upon him the arrow of licentiousness. With a shameless face said to the holy one, “O Joseph, lie with me, do not be a complete coward. Come into me with power, I will enjoy your beauty until I am full. Also you may enjoy my beauty. You have all authority over everything in the house, no one else would dare walk in on us, nor listen to our deed. If you are fearful and do not want

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the symmetry between the οὐκ and οὕτε clauses; one contains a dative prepositional phrase, the other a genitive one that does not fit well with the verbal phrase οὐκ ἤδει τί ἐποίει. The sentence then shifts from Potiphar being concerned about Joseph’s actions and words to focusing on Potiphar’s own food, the only thing which Potiphar concerns himself in his own house, according to Gen 39:6. However, the inclusion of ὃν ἔσθιεν ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ, “which he ate at the designated time,” seems not to follow from what came before, and ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ is not found in the LXX. If the meal happens regularly, as stated by ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ, then it is hardly something which requires oversight. The intent is to rephrase Gen 39:6, including all relevant pieces of information, but the presentation is slightly stilted.

to because of my man, I will kill him, giving him poison. So then, come into me and fulfill my desire because I completely burn for you.”

**20.** But he was an adamantine stone, and at that moment, in this tempest, he did not lessen in body or soul, but he beat back all the things that were happening because of the fear of God. And while she was pressing toward him and his good countenance, he began filling her with godly words, saying thus to her, “O woman, this is not good, to make such sin with you, my mistress. For I fear God, and behold, my lord gave all things to me for my control in his house and in his fields and there is nothing else which is not under my hand, except for you, my mistress. It is unseemly to set at naught the love of my master, for he loves me very much. How then would I do this sort of sin before God, who made my mind and heart?”

**21.** These sorts of words Joseph said throughout that hour to his mistress, admonishing, exhorting, appealing to honor, demanding, but she would accept none of these godly things, for her ears were as a stuffed shield, and still she burned exceedingly for him, swelled up in her wicked desire. Throughout that hour she watched closely to find an occasion suitable to wound his conscience shamefully. Joseph, seeing that that the woman was as shameless as a beast seeking to corrupt him, he raised up his eyes to the God of his fathers and called upon the Most High, saying thus, “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the great and fearful.

Release me from this beast, look and see yourself, Master, the mania of this woman how she seeks in secret to kill me with unholy deeds so that I will be dead in sin and completely separated with her from Jacob my father. You released me from death, Lord, from my lawless brothers, release me again here from this mad beast lest I become, by my works, estranged from my fathers and the ones who love me exceedingly piously, Lord.” And crying out from the depths of his heart he called again to Jacob saying, “Pray, father, on behalf of

your son Joseph, since a large battle has been set up against me, a battle able to separate me from God, and this is more dangerous than the death which my brothers wanted to give me. Those ones would have killed my body; she would separate my soul from God. I, my father, understand that my prayers go up to the Holy God for my sake; and it was because of this that I was taken up from the pit of death. And now again, be entreated, Most High, so that I might be rescued from this beast, the one who wants to corrupt your son, not able to be shamed in her eyes, nor with fear of God in her heart. Pray, father, lest I be separated from your bodily bosom and I acquire a foreign soul. I went away to my brothers and they became as beasts, as fiercest wolves, and separated me from you, good father, and I was brought down into Egypt by the hands of foreigners, and lo! another beast has come upon me. My brothers wanted to kill me in the desert, but this one would have me rent in pieces. Pray, father, lest I die before God and my fathers.”

**22.** Finally, he did not wish to heed the entreaties of his mistress, which she was trotting out against him hourly, as an unbreachable shield. So she looked to find an opportunity against him in the inner room, and thus complete her sin. When she found him in his bed, as she wanted, she came up with a shameless conscience. She forced him, dragging him to herself to accomplish the lawlessness. But he, seeing the abounding shamelessness of the woman, leapt out into the street with haste, and in the same way as an eagle, when it sees its prey, raises up its wings in the heavens, thus also Joseph ran out from the doors so that he not be caught up in her snares, in either words or deeds. But in her hands he had left behind his own cloak when he fled the trap of the Devil. The woman, seeing that he fled thus, she was overcome by a great wrath, and she took it into her heart to strike down the just one with most shameful words, wanting to accuse him before her husband, so that her husband might

hear her and, inflamed with jealous emotions, kill Joseph. “This I take into my own heart, that there is nothing better for me than that Joseph be killed, and that I would get some release. For I would not carry on, hour by hour, in my own house wanting to look upon that kind of beauty he has, but I not finding an opportunity to take his beauty and great intelligence either openly or in secret.” Calling to her male and female slaves, she said to them, “You know what the Hebrew lad did to me, whom my husband established over his house? He wanted to be with me shamefully. The authority over my house was not sufficient for him, but he wanted to get between me and my husband.” She took the cloak of Joseph and showed it to her husband, she cried out and said, “Look, you let in the Hebrew lad to mock me and shame me, your wife. Did you not know, my lord, that I am of sound mind and because of this announce it to you?”

**23.** When her husband heard these things, immediately he believed the words of his wife. Since it was thus, he immediately commanded that Joseph be given into the prison with much security and force. Without scrutiny or inquiry, straight away he took as evidence the false statement saying, “I command Joseph be thrown into prison and have no chance of release.” But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was with him, the one who tests all hearts, and he granted that Joseph have mercy from the eyes of the prison guard. The prison guard allowed him indulgences, for God ransoms all those who fear him with their own heart.

**24.** After these things, two of Pharaoh’s eunuchs sinned: the Chief Cup Bearer and the Chief Baker, and the king commanded that they be thrown into prison. Joseph was serving them. Each of them spent two years’ time in the prison, and after some days each of them saw vision in a dream, and Joseph was about to be brought to them in short order. The holy Joseph was a servant to them, since they were honored, according to their station, and he

went to them to serve them and he found them in a great grief. They were both distressed and anxious about the dream. Joseph wanted to learn the cause of their affliction, so he asked both of them. “We had a dream and we are sorrowful about it, since there is no one who is able to explain our dreams and what we saw.” He said to them, “This is under God’s control, to enlighten the ones who fear him. Tell me your dreams, so that my God might enlighten you through me.” They heard these things, both the Chief Cup-Bearer and the Chief Baker. They told him their dreams, each what he had seen. Joseph made clear to them, in only a few words, all the things that would happen to them from the king and the manner in which it would happen accurately. To the Chief Cup-Bearer, he gave the foremost honor, to the Chief Baker, death.

**25.** Joseph knew that the honor to come would be the Chief Cup-Bearer’s, so he exhorted him saying, “Remember me before Pharaoh and make my situation known to him quickly, so that I might be brought out from here. For I have not sinned, nor done anything evil to have been thrown into prison.”

**26.** The elected and blessed seed, how you search mortals! People might abandon God, but you encourage them. And how you are tried in the defense of God in these sorts of straits, when you guard your untouched cloak of consideration! For what tiny souls, blessed one, God prepared for the kingdom and the glory when he wishes! When the noble ones reside in temptation, you weave a greater wreath of victory for them!

**27.** In order that the solution to each of their dreams might be fulfilled as Joseph said, after three days Pharaoh had a party for his high officials and remembered his Chief Cup-Bearer and Chief Baker. And while he called his Chief Cup-Bearer to his place, he gave the other one over to death. The Chief Cup-Bearer, though, forgot about Joseph. After two years,

according to the providence of God, Pharaoh dreamed a great dream and summoned all the wise people and mediums in Egypt. And Pharaoh sent after all the wise and announced his dream, but no one was able to tell him what it meant. The king became greatly distraught and then the Chief Cup-Bearer remembered and told the king all the things about Joseph and his skill. When Pharaoh heard about him, he was gladdened with a great joy, and he sent for him with haste. Joseph was taken out of the prison and Pharaoh spoke to him before his high officials, "I heard that you are a man of wisdom, able to judge the deep things in dreams." Joseph answered Pharaoh, "The ability to explain dreams belongs to the one who gave wisdom." And Pharaoh told his dreams before Joseph and all his high officials. And immediately he heard the explanation of the dreams from the mouth of Joseph as from the mouth of God. Pharaoh was astounded at this lad and his greatness of his advice. He advised him, saying thus, "Let the king look upon one man, wise and intelligent, and you will establish him to collect all the grain in Egypt because a great famine is about to come. Many living things will be in a time of great affliction." And the King said, "I will establish you today over all of Egypt since he has given this advice. Let the justice of Egypt and my house be upon your mouth." Then Joseph got up into Pharaoh's own chariot, and all the high officials made a circle around Joseph.

**28.** Potiphar, the one who threw Joseph in prison in the first place, saw this incredible marvel that had happened - that Joseph sat upon Pharaoh's chariot - and was greatly afraid. He quietly slipped away from the midst of the high officials and he went with haste to his own house and with great fear spoke to his wife. "You see, wife, the incredible marvel and great terror have come upon us. For that Joseph, our lad - Our lord put him over all Egypt, and look, he is seated with glory in the chariot of Pharaoh since the king has honored him



above all. I was able to avoid being seen by him and slipped away quickly.” When Potiphar’s wife heard these things, she emboldened him, saying, “I will tell you my sin, I did this and I loved the all-beautiful Joseph, his wisdom, and hour after hour in many flatteries I plotted in safety how I might be after to lie with him and enjoy his beauty. But I was unable to achieve my goal, and he did not think my words worthy. I seized him violently, and he backed away a little and fled outside when I showed you his cloak. I was a patron of our kingdom and its magnificent glory. And if I was not thus enthralled by Joseph he would not have been thrown into prison, and so the reason of his glory is actually due to me.” Joseph the just and holy, since he had been informed on, did not inform against anyone. “Therefore get up and go with joy,” he said. And they did obeisance to him with the high officials. Potiphar got up and went away, doing obeisance with reverence to Joseph.

**29.** Then all the years of great plenty were completed and a great famine seized the whole land of Canaan, and Jacob was despondent with his sons. Jacob heard that in Egypt produce was in great abundance and said to his sons, “Come, let us go down and buy produce for ourselves in Egypt as I have heard they have some, lest we all die of famine.” Taking the command, the ten sons of Jacob all went down to buy food. But they did not know that their brother still lived. When Joseph saw his brothers, he knew them all and said, rebuking them, “These ten men are evil spies and for this reason they came to Egypt. Get them and bind them securely, for they have come to spy and to invade our land.” They began trembling and with fear answered him saying, “It is not so, Lord! We are all brothers, sons of one righteous father, and once we were twelve in number but one was killed by a wretched beast, he who was most beautiful and beloved of our father and our father mourns him until this very day. Our other brother is with our father in the land of Canaan consoling him.” With emotion

Joseph answered them saying, “Since I fear the holy God and worship him, I will grant this to you. Take the bread and go quickly to your father. If you speak truly, bring back your brother, the one whom your father loves, to me and then I will believe you.”

**30.** And taking the bread, they went away into the land of Canaan to their father greatly grieved and they told him of the evil request and the anger of the man. And their father was filled with grief and these words and he said in groans, “Why did you do this? Why did you tell the Lord of Egypt that you had another brother here?” They answered him, “He asked about us and our kin with great precision.” Jacob said to them, “I would rather die than to have you take Benjamin from my bosom.” But with the famine pressing down, Jacob said to his sons, “If I am bereaved of my only child from Rachel, and I am to be robbed of my most beloved sons as you say, get up and take gifts in your hands and go with your brother.”

**31.** And they did just as Jacob commanded them and they went into Egypt in a great fear, and they all did obeisance before Joseph. When Joseph saw Benjamin, his own brother, he was beside himself with fear and cowardice. His stomach turned. And he wanted to hug and kiss him, but he asked, “Does your father live?” Benjamin with great fear said, “Your servant, our father, lives.” He spoke to him again, “Does he have Joseph in his heart?” And he said, “Yes, he has him completely in his heart and he burns for him. He is not able to hug him or ask him to come to his bosom, and he cries bitterly.” In that hour, when he saw his brother, immediately he remembered his good old man Jacob, and he said in tears to his father, “Blessed are the ones who see the holy character of your old age, good father. I suppose my whole kingdom and glory is worth as much as your old age, good father. And I want to be persuaded by the mouth of Benjamin if you have me in your heart and yearn for me as I for you. It was because of this that I compelled my brothers in deceit to bring my

brother Benjamin with them. I did not believe what they said to me about you, that our father had the littlest brother. For I thought that in deceit they carried off and killed the most beloved son, the smallest, Benjamin and they cast you into Hades in pain in the same way they proposed to kill me. Because they hated the two of us since we are of the same mother, both I and Benjamin. I know, father, that you are exceedingly concerned about us and now you suffer exceedingly in your old age on account of my brother Benjamin. And I, too, look and suffer exceedingly knowing your affliction since no one of us stands beside you in your old age. My first grief did not suffice, but had another upon another added to you, father. I am the cause of your tears and your cries, for I made it so Benjamin was severely taken away from you. But the need to hear about you made me do this, wanting to learn if you truly lived, my father. Who will allow me to see your holy presence again and enjoy your angelic face?”

**32.** Then he cried bitterly on his bed, washing his face with tears, and went out happy. He commanded that they all be led to his house so he might eat with them. “Listen, my brothers, how Joseph is going to deal with you because of your cowardice,” [he said to himself]. He commanded each one of them to recline at table according to their good names and the order of their birth. He prophesied and proclaimed to each the matter of the drinking vessel. The cup was silver, which he held in his hand. He put the drinking vessel down and struck it with the finger of his right hand and the vessel, and the cup, so struck, sent out a great sound in the hearing of all who were present in the house. “Since there was one strike,” he said, “The first is Reuben, let him recline first, according to honor.” He struck it again and indicated the second person, saying, “This is Simeon, the second, let him recline according to his birth.” Striking it a third time, he said, “Let Levi recline and be honored.” And thusly he sat all of

them according to their good names and in order. He made them astonished about this and the greater fear with the result that they thought that he knew everything, but not yet knowing from where. And they had a greater fear because of the vessel, and they considered among themselves, each saying “We said first, lying, that Joseph had been killed by an evil beast.” And they were grievously distressed about him. So that he might get the true meaning from them, he gave to them from the portion of his own table, but more to his own brother. To Benjamin he gave ten times more than the others. Why in the world did he do this to his brothers and point out each of their names from the vessel? So that he might make a greater charge against them.

**33.** Then he ordered each steward, to give them bread to fill them up without cost and so that he might secretly put the vessel in Benjamin’s bag, and he sent them away with joy. And when they were going away joyfully from the city, Joseph’s assistant caught up with them on foot and said these weighty words to them and upbraided them with threats, calling them thieves and of being unworthy of honor. They answered the assistant that, “We previously only had gold in our bags, and we carried it to our lord, and now [you say] we stole our lord’s cup? No way!”<sup>8</sup> And he said to them, “Open up your bags, so that I might see for certain.” They hastened to do so and took their bags off their animals. The cup was found in Benjamin’s bag. When they saw this they rent their garments and they began to blame and abuse Rachel with much ardor, and at the same time Joseph with his mother and brother saying, “You have become a stumbling block to our father, you and Joseph, the children of Rachel. Joseph wants to rule over us and you are his brother, in shame and calumny you sold

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<sup>8</sup> μή γένοιτο, an idiomatic Greek phrase used by Paul (Rom 6:2), among others. Its presence here lends weight to the idea that this homily was composed in Greek, though it could be argued that the translator shows himself particularly adept at providing an idiomatic Greek translation of a Syriac original.

us out. Are you not the children of Rachel, the thief who stole the idols of her father and yet said that she did not steal them?”

**34.** And Benjamin raised up his voice with wailing and lamentation and began to try to satisfy each one of them, saying, “Look, the God of our fathers himself, knows, the one who took Rachel just as he wanted, the one who knew the death of the all-beautiful Joseph, who watched over Jacob and gave him heart when he was separated from Joseph. Now unseen he calls him, just as he saw, the one who sees all our affairs and tests hearts and minds, he knows this cup, as you say, and that I did not steal it, nor did I have any other sort of ill will about him. Thus I see the holy grey hairs of Jacob, how he loved his offspring with joy. I did not steal this cup. Oi, Oi, Rachel, What has happened to your sons! Joseph the all-beautiful just as you they said, was killed by beasts! I see, mother, that all of a sudden I have become a thief but I do not know how. I was taken into a foreign land to slavery. Joseph was eaten up in the desert by a wild beast. He called out so that he might find rescue, but did not find it. Now I see, good mother, I will satisfy my brothers and there is no one who hears or believes me, your son.”

**35.** And they took him and returned to the city to Joseph, not having a defense against this matter. Joseph received them with wrath and said, “This is my repayment for my generosity? Was it because I honored you that you stole the cup from which I drank? I will not speak with you, since you are not peaceful people but spies! Because of the fear of God, I shall make the thief of my cup my slave, but you all may go in my clemency.”

**36.** And one from among them, Judah by name, got on his knee and exhorted him, saying, “Do not be angry, lord, that you should speak so. You yourself asked us, your servants, ‘do you have a father or brother’ and we said that, ‘our father is your servant, and

he has two most beloved children - more beloved than any of us - and the one was slaughtered by a beast on the mountains and our father grieves for him every hour in lamentation and woe even now, and I suppose that the earth itself mourns at the sound of his voice. The other he keeps by his side for consolation over the first child.' Now you commanded that we bring our brother and we, your servants, were found guilty of a cruel injustice. I approach you as a suppliant, that I might be your house-slave in place of this child. Only let him go away with his brothers to his father, since I am less important to my father. I am not able to depart without him to my father, unless I want to see my father suffer a most bitter death."

**37.** Hearing these merciful words, and seeing all of them standing there in shame, seeing Benjamin with rent garments and fallen on his knees in tears, believing that these would suffer evil on behalf of him, Joseph approached him and went down with his brothers, and was exceedingly distressed, moved by their pity for him and with haste commanded the ones standing there to withdraw. When they went away, Joseph lifted up his voice and with a great cry he said to them, speaking freely in the Hebrew language, "I am Joseph, your brother, I was not eaten by a beast as you said, I am the one who was thrown down by you into the pit, naked. I am the one who was sold by the Ishmaelites, the one surrounded by all of you on your hands and knees. And at that time none of you showed mercy to me in my affliction, but you raised your hands to me like the beasts of the fields. Except, my brothers, none of you be cowardly nor fearful, but rather now rejoice with me that I reign. And in the same way that you all spoke to our father before, saying that I was killed in the mountain by beasts, go away again to Jacob and announce to him saying, 'Joseph your son lives and behold, he is seated in the chariot of the king of Egypt.'"

**38.** At the sound of Joseph speaking to his brothers, they seized up, as though dead, from fear and cowardice. And Joseph went to them, the offspring of Jacob and kissed each one of them with longing, forgetting what happened to him and gladdened them with gifts and great joy. And he sent all of them back up to Jacob saying thus, “Do not quarrel on the road but rather go with haste to our father and tell him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, “God has put me over the whole kingdom of Egypt. Come, father, with a gladdened heart so that I might see your angelic face in your old age.”’”

**39.** And they went away with haste and they told Jacob the words of Joseph, just as he had commanded them. When Jacob heard the name of Joseph he groaned bitterly and in tears said to them, “Why do you trouble my spirit, making me remember the figure of the all-beautiful Joseph? Do you want to raise up in my heart the unquenchable grief that I have?” And Benjamin approached and kissed his knees and beard and said, “These words are true, good father” and he showed him all the things sent from Joseph. Then he believed the words of Benjamin and with his whole household got up and with haste and great joy down into Egypt to Joseph his son.

**40.** And Joseph heard that Jacob his father had come and he got up with great joy and went outside the city with the high officials of Pharaoh and there he met him with much pomp. When Jacob saw Joseph his son, he fell upon his neck and with great passion said, “Now I can die, after seeing your face, sweetest son! For truly you still live!” And they both glorified God.

**41.** For all of these things, let us send up glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom be the glory and the power, honor and worship, now and forever in all the ages. Amen.

## Homily on the Holy Elijah, The Prophet

### Outline

1. Introduction. Elijah is full of zeal against idolatry, seals the heavens with an oath ¶1-2.
2. The Drought. ¶3-5.
  - a. God seals the heavens, the earth withers. God sends Elijah to the widow ¶3.
  - b. The terror of the drought. ¶4.
  - c. Apostrophe to Elijah. ¶5.
3. Elijah and the widow. ¶6-8.
  - a. Elijah asks for food, widow provides reluctantly. Death claims the child. ¶6.
  - b. Widow rebukes Elijah. ¶7.
  - c. Elijah relents. He looses the heavens and repents of his zeal. ¶8.
4. Conclusion. ¶9-13.
  - a. Child returns to life. Canonical “Man of God” ending ¶9.
  - b. Elijah goes to Ahab. Proclaims end of drought, slaughters Baal worshippers. ¶10-11.
  - c. Elijah taken into Fiery Chariot. ¶12.
  - d. Doxology. ¶13.

1. Keep silent for me, incline your ears to the recounting of the narrative of the holy and esteemed Elijah, who exhibited the heat of his zeal, always desiring that all people worship the only God. When he saw the people performing many unlawful acts, turning their head from God to worship idols, he became full of wrath and zeal. Lifting his eyes, he charged



heaven with his tongue, with a word he overtook heaven. Seeing the people thus led astray by demons, he attempted to exhort them to tear themselves away from their wanderings.

2. Elijah saw the abased people filling themselves up with idols, and all the prophets being murdered because of lawlessness. He was filled with zeal and much wrath and he pronounced an oath against the lawless people and he bound the heavens. The clouds he sealed so that they would not give forth rain, and he persuaded the merciful God to carry out the command of his servant. He wanted to show the stumbling ones the strength of the Good Master, and by him he swore to them, “For as the Lord lives, before whom I stand, there will not be rain or dew upon the earth save through my mouth, by the words of my tongue.”<sup>1</sup>

3. A startling paradox happened through him! For the merciful God immediately heard the word of his zealous servant, sworn by him. Immediately he fulfilled the proclamation that Elijah had made against those people with divine zeal. He locked the heavens and sealed the clouds and everything dried up on the face of the earth. Vines withered, grain did not grow, and each fruit-bearing tree hid its fruits. The earth did not give forth fruit, shoots did not appear on the earth, and absolutely everywhere each verdant place was hidden from the earth, and the trees in them did not appear, for the water locked up by the sentence of Elijah. With the heavens bound to not give forth rain, the merciful one fulfilled the sentence of Elijah. The Master did not want to show his oath-making servant as a perjurer, so he fulfilled his oath. However, he was trying to turn his servant around from wrath to compassion. God sent Elijah to dwell in the wadi and he provided food through the ravens. Since the merciful one wanted to save the world and change Elijah’s mind, he made the water dry up, so that Elijah, thirsty

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<sup>1</sup> A slight adaptation of 3 Kgdms 17:1 to preserve the heptasyllabic meter. 3 Kgdms 17:1, ζῆ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, ὃ παρέστην ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, εἰ ἔσται τὰ ἔτη ταῦτα δρόσος καὶ ὑετὸς ὅτι εἰ μὴ διὰ στόματος λόγου μου. EG: ζῆ γάρ, φησί, Κύριος,/ οὗ ἐνώπιόν εἰμι,/ οὐ μὴ ἔλθῃ ὑετὸς/ ἢ δρόσος ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν,/ εἰ μὴ διὰ στόματος/ λόγων ἐμῶν χειλέων./

for water and weary might loose the sentence against the stumbling ones with which he bound them in his zeal. The hot-headed zealot was not inclined to loose what he had bound, so he remained unbent. The Lord, since he saw Elijah standing by his oath and being unyielding, brought forth another occasion for the righteous man, “Go,” he said, “to the city of Zarephath. For behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you in your need.”<sup>2</sup>

4. O Merciful God! He commanded the just man to walk a great road, so that by travelling he might see the ruin of the inhabited land and the things in it, and thus loose the heavens. For he was seeing the elderly languishing in famine, and also the young, tall in appearance, [who would usually] set up trophies and victories in war, suddenly fallen on the ground and giving up on life. Similarly, the infants, suckling at their mothers’ breasts were dying, not having any milk for nourishment. One mother was offering her own breasts, which were no longer able to provide milk, because the nipples were dried and cracked from the famine and her flesh was wasting away because of the thirst. Taking her infant, she put her breast in its mouth for it to suckle, but it did not find food. Though her breast was in the infant’s mouth many times, the baby died. He went together with his mother to a tomb. Immense misfortunes befell all. Bride and bridegroom died in the bridal chamber and in the place of joy, they lifted up exceeding sufferings. Sons died in the sight of their fathers; the one who bore the other carried him to the tomb. When [the father] returned to his house, he found his daughter expired from the famine. Thinking he would find rest in his house, he found a double misfortune, his other child dead. At this sight he brought forth a great sound and placed his child in the earth, just as he did the first. While he was in the doors of grave, he proclaimed his own piteousness, since brother and sister had died. There was someone

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<sup>2</sup> LXX 3 Kgdms 17:9, ἰδοὺ ἐντέταλμαι ἐκεῖ γυναικὶ χήρᾳ τοῦ διατρέφειν σε. EG: ἀπελθε, φησὶν, εἰς/ [6] Σαραφθίαν τὴν πόλιν./ Ἴδοὺ γὰρ ἐντέλλομαι/ <ἐκεῖ> χήρᾳ γυναικὶ/ ὥστε διαθρέψαι σε/ ἐν τῷ ταύτῃ ἀνάγκῃ./

there, either from his neighbors or his kin. That one heard but did not bear the affliction of grief and gave up the ghost there because of the famine. That place became a grave and sepulcher: for there the one who did the burying was found buried. It happened many times that the one who dug the grave would have his own dug by another on the next day. For just as the waves of the ocean come together and mix, one after another, moved by the winds, thus at that time did the misfortunes come upon men out of the anguish of the famine and the great thirst. There was to be seen a horrible sight and an exceedingly horrible wreckage upon the earth, as in the days of Noah. Not only men died, but also the livestock and the beasts and the birds of the sky.

5. O zealous Elijah! You know that men sin against the Lord when misled by the Enemy. How did the infants sin? The livestock and beasts and birds, how did they sin? For you handed all of these over to death. If these were guiltless, have mercy and give rain upon the earth!

6. None of these things were a care to the wrath of Elijah. The ones rich in possessions were destroyed in the famine, likewise in their thirst since rain did not appear. But the Master of All always desires to be merciful to the race of men, so he altogether contrived to drag Elijah along and show him compassion. Since he did not persuade him to change his wrath, at that time he was sent to beg from a widow, from her mercy and from her tremendous grief. Elijah stopped and turned there, and he saw the widow gathering sticks. He knew the final need that was in her, and he was ashamed to speak or talk to her. At the same time, he blushed and was attempting to fulfill the command, and as if he were bold he finally said in a small voice, "Woman, give me a sip of water so that I can drink." (For this one was the one who prevented the dew upon the earth). And the widow cried to Elijah, "O Zealot! The oath

of your tongue locked up the heavens so that they would not give rain, so why do you ask me for water? You check your tongue, you restrain the dry earth, you put all the things on it to death, so from where shall I get this water to give to you?” Immediately he was struck at the word of the widow and compassion panged inside him just a little. The widow heard the voice of the prophet and supplied the water which he asked for. As she was about to depart, Elijah said to her, “Give to me from your hand a bit of bread, so I may eat.” She instantly cried to Elijah, “As the Lord God lives if I have something hidden, but there is only a handful of wheat in my jar and a small amount of oil in a jug. Therefore I have gathered these sticks so that I could make something for me and my child. After we eat it, we shall die.” As he heard these things he was squeezed by agony. He thought to himself about going and loosing the bonds, for he heard the pitiful words of the woman and immediately he uttered a word to her, full of compassion. “Go and first make me a cake and then afterward make one for yourself and your son. Thus says the Lord: ‘The jar of wheat will not be emptied, nor the oil in the jug, until the Lord sends rain upon the earth and it grows as before and provides food to all those in it.’” But he did not want to write a ransom for the chains of heaven. For the suffering of grief compelled him to do this thing himself. Immediately she entered [the house] and desired to complete the thing which he had spoken to her, knowing in the spirit that he was the prophet Elijah, the one who bound heaven with a word from his tongue. At the same time, she believed the just one would accomplish all the things he said to her. Finally, Elijah stayed with the widow and ate his fill and abided in the first oath. But God sent death to the child of the widow, dragging Elijah to command the bonds to be loosed.

7. When the widow saw the death of her son, she approached the prophet’s feet in tears and said to him, “Woe is me, Prophet of God, zealot on behalf of all things, why have you

brought this pain to my soul and this distressing lamentation to me? Why do I, a wretched mother, live on this earth while the child which I bore, you handed over to death. I know that he died because of you. Before you came here, my son was strong and healthy. In the harsh famine and incomparable thirst, which you brought upon the earth, we were surviving and living. But now you come to me, appearing as a bringer of food but actually bringing death for my son, the only one I had. Thinking I had relief from the famine, I abandoned my laments; thinking I had aid, what I had was a traitor! I took you in as a boarder and I was stripped of my son. You nourished us in the famine, but you handed us over to death. You nourished with death the only son I had. The hope I had you robbed me of. Whatever light was in my eyes, you quenched with death. I destroyed my consolation when you came. At your arrival, I became bereft of my son, for when you came to me, you killed my son. Being deprived of my beloved son I have fallen into a bitter calamity! What use is the rest of the grain and oil for satiating food when my son is dead? It would be better for me to have died and not been satiated by food than to be deprived of my son. Who shall eat the rest of these things, which you gave? Or what sort of gain do I receive by having food for consumption and being robbed of the glory of the only-begotten son which I had? I am wasting away in laments and groans because of him. Would that I had not seen you, nor had the “fortune” of listening to you, for I wish I had not been bereaved of my beloved child.”

**8.** There was that widow laying on the ground in groans and tears at the feet of Elijah. When the zealot Elijah heard these things, he was wroth in his soul and began to pray. He stood and called upon God and said, “Release, Master, the chains of death from the son of the widow and raise him from the dead.” The merciful God heard and said to him, “You release the heavens, which you bound with your tongue, and then I shall loose the chains of death

which I brought on because of you. Look and see, Elijah, what sort of multitude was destroyed: both old and young, children and mothers. Look and see the cries of the world, how they lack water and rain down tears! Seeing only one woman crying because of her son now you think to be merciful? The whole world laments in tears but even though you see will you overlook it until everything dies? I know that you are zealous to bring on chastisement. I understand, Elijah, that it is not the same for you.” Then Elijah said to his Master, “Give life to the child and I will release the heavens. Entirely deliver me from the groans of the widow, lest she oppress me with a multitude of tears.”

**9.** The child came back to life and Elijah took him and gave him to his mother. The widow took her own son with great joy and said to Elijah, “Now I know truly that you are a man of God and the word is true in your mouth.”

**10.** Then God said to Elijah, “Go and say to Ahab that I have given rain upon the earth.”

**11.** Elijah went to Ahab and said to him that the Lord was about to give rain upon his earth and, gathering the whole people of Israel, he slaughtered the priests who sacrificed to Baal.

**12.** Having converted all the people to believe in the living God, Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot in a great whirlwind, into heaven and he left his mantle upon Elisha.

**13.** To our God be glory forever and ever, Amen.

## Homily on the Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths

1. Come now, and let us examine the matters of the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths. Those holy ones were living in the days in which the Lord had handed over Jerusalem, because of the sins of the people, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. They steadfastly devoted themselves to God from an early age. Wherefore, in these sorts of diverse trials and afflictions, they showed themselves trustworthy. What sort of toils did these God-loving children bear easily<sup>1</sup> in the tumult that occurred during that imprisonment, first seeing the elect people ravaged mercilessly by the Assyrians? Jeremiah said, “They did not show honor to the priest, nor have mercy on the elder. The rulers were hung by their hands and the young stagger under loads of wood.”<sup>2</sup> And other things.<sup>3</sup> They saw the holy city stripped bare by lawlessness and the Temple of God ravaged by fire, the holy implements handled by lawless hands and dedicated to idols, and the prophets bound in iron manacles, but their hearts did not desert them for backwards things, nor did they speak against God, nor did they doubt. As someone said somewhere, “This evil is from the Lord, why should I hope in the Lord any longer?”<sup>4</sup> Then they are led at last into imprisonment and in the journey immeasurable toil overtakes them. They remain maltreated, naked, and

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<sup>1</sup> The verb here is ἀπαντλέω, which means “to draw off from, lighten, lessen or shed.” These meanings do not fit the object (toils during the exile) very well, as contextually there was nothing the people could do to prevent or lessen the tragedies of that period. I chose to render the verb as “bear easily” to communicate the sense that they endured the same trials as the rest of the people of Judah but because of their faith were able to “draw off” some of the suffering and trauma of the events and so did not fare as poorly as some.

<sup>2</sup> A pastiche of quotations from Lamentations. Lam 4:16 is almost quoted in full, but in the LXX the reference to the priests and elders is in the plural. The next sentence is from Lam 5:12a and 13b.

<sup>3</sup> καὶ τὰ ἑξῆς, the Greek equivalent of *et cetera*.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kgs 6:33.

hungry because they would not be polluted by the unlawful ones. Then they were led into Babylon and another struggle overtakes them. According to the Scripture, when a selection of youths occurred, in that number were Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael.

2. The hater of good, saw that in the siege of the holy city he was unable to get them to commit apostasy against the Lord and that along the road he did not persuade them to eat abominable meats. It entered to the heart of the lawless king, and persuaded him to enroll<sup>5</sup> them to eat the things from his daily table and to drink his wine. He fed them for three years so that he might persuade them through displays of power to partake of the unlawful things. But see the malice of the Dragon!<sup>6</sup> For it was not in one day, or after a month of days had passed, but after he had stretched this contest out for three years that out of fear he threw the lovers of piety into prison for life. But these men did not act cowardly in this trial, nor did they shame the patrimonial law. Rather, they secretly asked the chief eunuch to give them seeds so as not to be polluted by the table of the king. They did not fear the danger of disobedience or opposition. Then, while the eunuch was being disobedient with the management of the seeds, they did not apostatize from the watcher of piety. The Lord, the one who glorifies and magnifies the ones glorifying him, wanted to protect them who were in this magnificent contest. He provided Amelsad, whom the chief eunuch appointed over them, to give them what they asked for.

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<sup>5</sup> ἐκτάσσω, which typically means to draw out in battle order or to muster. The meaning of the sentence is clear, and I have attempted to preserve the choice of verb with “enroll,” because of its relationship with the “mustering” idea. However, this is an odd verb choice, as many other words would work better here (e.g., even the uncompounded τάσσω) to communicate the enrollment idea. It is not clear if there is some developed usage of ἐκτάσσω in later Greek that the author is using, or if there is something in a Syriac original that he is attempting to preserve.

<sup>6</sup> καὶ ὅρα κακοτεχνίαν τοῦ Δράκοντος. This homily opens with a 1<sup>st</sup> plural subjunctive invitation to examine the Scriptures, which is very characteristic of the Ephraem Graecus corpus. Here though (and in the first sentence of the next paragraph), we find 2<sup>nd</sup> singular verbs used to refer to the audience. This is the only homily which addresses its hearers/readers in the singular. In all other cases 2<sup>nd</sup> plural verbs are used.



3. So that you may know that the work of God is accomplished, of the ones eating at the king's table these men were found to be more magnificent in scholarly wisdom and in outward form. If they had been some cowardly or duplicitous people, they would have used these words,<sup>7</sup> "What shall we do, brothers? Necessity seizes us. The kingly boast is of death. What shall we use to protect ourselves from disobedience? God was thus pleased. For he himself saw the violence which we suffered. Therefore he agrees with us about those who transgressed the law because of necessity. We are in exile, we were dragged off into slavery and we went away from our own land. Even if he agrees with us about the moral weakness through hard trials then who will be the inspector or the overseer? There is no father or mother or brothers or race in existence that is able to see us in our affliction. For all are lost and in other lands, having been carried off into slavery. We see no one of them enjoying their days cheerfully, only the ones in the community of the king's table. And so we would die and not be worthy of a grave. Indeed our bodies will be thrown to the dogs." But the servants of God did not think any of these things. While they were very eager for food that was not seeds, that was the lifestyle they chose, for they were fighting, eagerly suffering on behalf of the truth.

4. Therefore, you decide for me the glory of the ones partaking of the kingly table and the fragrant wine, and the ones not wanting to labor for the sake of the truth, vis-à-vis the ones shaking off the sweetness of life, and remaining under hard labor for the sake of the truth. The Lord is with them and let him deem us worthy to have a portion with all his saints. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> This invented speech is introduced by a contrary-to-fact condition in past time, εἰ δὲ ᾤσαν δειλάνδροι ἢ δίσυχοι, τούτοις ἂν ἐχρήσαντο τοῖς λόγοις, "if they had been cowardly or duplicitous (but they weren't), they would have said... (but they didn't).

## **Homily on When the Wise Men came into Jerusalem**

1. When a traveler happens to be in certain good company, he happily greets the labor of the long journey and is kept safe by the association. For as he is propped up by a staff so is he also by a clean word of tongue. He seems to go with dusted feet but a dust-less mouth, with the lips he divides the labor of his knees and makes light the well-trodden path.

2. For thus also, when Christ was born, the wise men, who saw the star and took this journey together, were wearied by the question of the long-travelled matter they chose: where is the king? As thieves they were seeking out from the Hebrews the one just born.

3. The Jews likely said to the ones asking, “What indeed, foreigners are you daring to do? What are you saying, men? Why do you bring forward this dangerous question? Why are you heralding a new King to rule over the city? Why do you stumble blindly into an untimely end? Why do you cut the throats of the citizens? Why will you lead yourselves into the grave with your mouths, standing against yourselves? You will sleep the sleep of death! Is Persia so at a loss of memory that while Herod the King still lives you ask for another? After hearing you out, will he will give you much gratitude and exchange great gifts with you?”

4. But in answer to these words from the Wise Men they said succinctly, “We have seen the star of him in the east and we came to do obeisance to him.” But it was not enough for them to simply ask but also to talk about obeisance: through this speech they dared to say the one born is God.

5. As the report of these people came to Herod, he went up to the Wise Men. He called to the elders of the Jews and said, “Where is the Christ to be born?” They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea.”

6. O marvel! They knew the place and the birth, and they were loathed. They called out Bethlehem, but kept silent about the plan. They indicated Judea, but its ruler they denied. If it was thus written, why did you not put it together? If you read it, why did you not believe it? If he will be born in Bethlehem, why will he not be shown worship by you?

7. When Herod heard that the Wise Men came and were not simply asking, he called them in secret to find out from them the accurate time of the star's appearance, saying, "Tell me the direction you said you arrived from, and the road which you followed. Do not push us aside. Say to me boldly the reason for your arrival. Who persuaded you to worship a foreigner? What sort of profit is accorded to you from this sort of hardship? If a person was not the one who invited you, you must have had an angel shining like a star. Tell me precisely about his rising! I would learn the time and season in which the stars have learned to serve the just born baby so that even I may go and worship him."

8. Having told Herod of the time of the star's appearance, they went out, planning not to return to him. The star, their fellow-traveler, appeared again to them, coming to where the child happened to be. It had stretched out, calling to these men that very place. "This is the king," it said, "to whom I led you as a signal. This one sent me to you, lighting me as torch for your journey."

9. Who, in searching, would find this kind of birth? What word would lay hold of this manner of mystery for itself? Let no human thought attempt to come before the ineffable, for there remains no use there for reason, only for faith.

10. Seek to pause, O man, and be taught to worship with the magi. First, by the rays of the sun see clearly and then look blamelessly upon the virginal offspring. Brimstone is a

consuming fire: If you want to feel the flames, you will discover nothing other than your hands burnt.

**11.** For who, being born, throws the heavens into a tumult by the choirs of angels? Who raises up a star and shows only the astrologers as theologians? Who is greeted from his womb by angels as Lord? Who negotiates this sort of name before birth? Who is ever worshipped by a kicking infant in the belly? Who, while in his mother's womb shows the piety of others in their mother's wombs? Who dragged the magi from Persia for the purpose of worship?

**12.** Truly it is good to marvel at the faith of these men, since they saw much poverty and nights in caves and they did not doubt. They learned in the Spirit that, for our sake he became poor, though he was rich. He was grasping everything, even though he was born in a cave.<sup>1</sup> He clothed the firmament with clouds and though nobly born it was his custom to wear rags. He rested in the bosom of the Father, even though bodily he lay in a manger. He had the Throne of the Father even though he was held in the arms of his mother.

**13.** But as for us, let us glorify the child of the Lord, from a Virgin, according to the flesh, and the worship from all of creation, being led in a chorus by all life, in Christ himself. To whom be the glory forever and ever, Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> ὅτι τοῦ παντός περιδράττεται καὶ ἐν σπηλαίῳ γεγέννηται. As the homily clearly knows the biblical tradition of Jesus' birth in a manger, this "cave" is perhaps a reference to Plato's cave in *The Republic*.

## Homily on the Prophet Jonah and on the Repentance of the Ninevites<sup>1</sup>

1. Jonah the Hebrew came up from the sea, and preached in Nineveh to the uncircumcised. The prophet went into the violent city and he threw it into confusion with a fearful voice. The gentile city, upon hearing it, cowered at the proclamation of the son of Amath. Also the sea was altogether shaken because of his voice coming up from the depths. Going down into the sea he shook it up, and when he came out onto dry land he immediately caused a tempest there too.
2. The sea was shaken because of his escape and the earth trembled when he preached. The sea paused at his prayer and the earth stopped at the great compassion of God. In the belly of the great sea monster he was praying. In this way so too did the Ninevites pray in the great city. The prayer pulled Jonah out of the sea monster and the entreaty pulled Nineveh away from ruin.
3. Jonah ran away from the face of God, as the Ninevites did from goodness and righteous. Judgment locked the two of them in prison, as if they were debtors. But the two brought out repentance, in order that they might have redemption from both of their own personal failings - the heavenly judgment and retribution. God commanded the sea monster to guard Jonah while he was off dry land.
4. For the Prophet himself teaches that it is just for the repentant to live. Grace gives a type in itself. Jonah, having repented, went up out of the sea so that he might lead the sunken

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike the other works of Ephraem Graecus, this homily has an extant Syriac *Vorlage* from Ephrem (André de Halleux, "A propos du sermon éphrémien sur Jonas et la pénitence des Ninivites," in *Lingua Restituta Orientalis: Festgabe für Julius Assfalg*, eds. Regine Schulz and Manfred Görg [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990], 157). The texts are somewhat different, with the Greek translation having expansions in some sections and lacunae in others. For the purposes of these footnotes, I have chosen to look at the Greek text exclusively and comment on it as a Greek document vis-à-vis its *Vorlage*.

city. The city was stirred up, just like the sea, through the voice of Jonah coming up from the depths. The just Jonah opened his mouth and Nineveh heard it and was immediately put into an uproar.

5. The Jew's preaching cowed the city, apportioning death to his hearers. The healer was a herald, standing between giants as if they were children, cowed in fear of him. His voice broke the hearts of kings, his voice turned their city against them. By one voice he cut them off from all hope. He drank the cup against them full of wrath and rage.

6. The kings heard and were troubled, and even more than that they were humbled. They threw down their crowns and yearned for repentance. The magistrates heard and made an uproar and instead of radiant garments they put on sackcloth. The elders heard, the ones worthy of much honor, and they covered their heads in dirt. The rich heard and immediately they opened their treasuries in front of the poor. The money-lenders heard and immediately ripped up the account sheets they had. The debtors heard and began discussing a just way to repay the money that they owed. For each began to be troubled about his own salvation and were put to shame by God. There was not a man there who wanted to be caught up in evil, all were felled by one just purpose: how one might gain one's own soul.

7. The thieves, upon hearing the voice of Jonah, in haste returned the goods to their owners. The foolish ones, who happened upon stolen goods, took nothing, but for the sake of themselves forsook those things. For each justly examined themselves and began to be philanthropic towards their neighbor. The murderers, upon hearing it, confessed, thinking little of their fear of the judges. The judges heard it and came together, since this judge was not in a fearful wrath. Each was eager to sow philanthropy so that he might reap something from the forgiveness. The sinners heard the voice of Jonah and confessed their deeds. The

slaves heard and their esteem for their masters abounded. At the voice of Jonah the rich and the violent and the lofty humbled themselves.

**8.** Our repentance is the Ninevites' repentance just as a dream is an afternoon shadow. The Ninevites gave many alms, shall we not cease from our arrogance? The Ninevites freed their slaves with honor, let us not enslave free men unjustly.

**9.** When Jonah the prophet was sent into the city of Nineveh, full of debt, righteous judgment equipped him, not with armor and spear but with a smaller proclamation. A doctor is sent to lance their wounds and to cure the diseases with the application of astringent medications. After opening the door, he shows his own drugs, although they are exceedingly frightening, severe, and astringent. For grace sent Jonah to the city, not so he might overturn it, but so that he might convert it.

**10.** Jonah did not tell them to repent, showing that the one who is sick goes to the doctor. He shut the door of hope on them, so that you might be shown how they cried out, fearing his sentence.

**11.** Nineveh heard the sound of his sentence and with fasts and prayers it released itself, so that you might be shown what sort of thing the consolation of God is able to do. For it released itself from the sentence of God. They were made sick by their sins. Just as with a sword, it cowered at his awful word, these ones. Not so that he might cut off these ones, but rather so that the ones seeing him might stop the sicknesses born of evil deeds.

**12.** The doctor is the one who comes upon the sick and makes them to be cured. Practicing, he shows his blade to the sick. The city saw him and immediately was cowering, for he stood outside the city, gripping the sword of wrath. From their beds the sick ran to

repentance out of fear. The voice of Jonah cut, just as a sword does, old lesions and terrible wounds. For the doctor begins to heal the sick with a rod of threats.

**13.** In suggesting drugs for their sick patients, doctors make use of flattery. Jonah [used] a harsh and very threatening voice. The sick person flees from his bed, for he sees the rod full of wrath and anger, which heals those sick from the disease of desire as finally each and every person is healed from their fear.

**14.** The feast of the kings ceased, and the meal of the princes came to an end. Why do I say these things? If they even made infants not nurse, who among them could eat in the end? If the beasts were prevented in haste from drinking water, who among them would then drink wine? And if the king would clothe himself in sackcloth, who would then put on his robe? And if they looked at the self-control of prostitutes, who would begin marriage or giving someone in marriage? If the happy were made to tremble, who then among them would ever laugh? If they all cried and mourned, to whom would jesting appear amusing? If thieves became just, who would steal? And if the city fell, who could protect his own house? Gold is cast upon the earth, and there was no one who picked it up. They opened their treasure rooms and no one looted them. The profligate closed their eyes, so that they might not look licentiously upon the ornaments of women. The women hastened to cast aside their ornaments so that the ones who look upon them might not be scandalized. For each of them was concerned about their neighbor, that each might heal and at the same time be healed so that all would be saved.

**15.** Each urged his neighbor to prayer, supplication, and confession. The city became as one body, for each took care lest another among them should fall. No one prayed there that they alone should be saved, but rather as each one of the members [of the body] prays about



the salvation of all. For the whole city, as one man, was summoned to be given into destruction and corruption. The just were praying on behalf of the sinners, so that each of them might be saved with the others. Conversely the sinners were crying out to God, so that he might pay heed to the voice of the just.

**16.** Present these things to your mind, beloved, and pay close attention. Look how all these people at the same time went about in excessive mourning. For the cry of the infants was exceedingly pitiably and it made the whole city cry and wail. The cry of the children went up through tears into the hearts of the parents and their compassion was stirred. The old men, in lamentations, plucked out their grey hair and cast it onto the earth. And again the young ones looked on their elders in anguish and lifted up their own voices even more and both cried out pitiably. Wherefore, with one accord, at a single moment, they would die and all be buried together. The children ruled over their mothers and each of them drew from the other, so that they might all be saved from death. The infants and the toddlers, at that fearful noise, drew back from their mothers' breasts with tears.

**17.** They reckoned the evenings and the mornings of the days which Jonah the Hebrew proclaimed, so that they might see how many remained. And when the day came again, they cried out in tears, since only a short time remained. Sons asked their fathers, "Fathers, tell your most beloved children how many days have gone by and how many remain from when the son of Amath, the Hebrew, began proclaiming and what the hour he showed to us was, so that we all living might go down together into Hades. When is the pleasant city about to be obliterated, or what sort of day it is when the report of our destruction goes out to all creation and those who pass by see the bitter sight?"

**18.** When the parents heard these things from their children, they were seized up and dragged down in bitter tears. And altogether they were not able to give an answer to them, since grief had stopped their mouths, lest they multiply the grieving of their children and they die before the appointed time. They bound together their compassion and they stopped their tears so that they might assure their beloved children. The parents were afraid to speak the truth for the day that the prophet spoke of was near. And just as Abraham, wanting to assure his son Isaac, unwillingly he prophesied, thus also the Ninevites unwillingly prophesied in their wanting to assure their own children.

**19.** Isaac, the speaking lamb, asked, “O Father, where is the sheep for the sacrifice?” But Abraham did not reveal the mystery, lest in any way Isaac might be grieved and his gift soiled. For Abraham was anxious how he might convince his son. And as he moved away from the unseen things, he prophesied about the unseen things. He did not want to speak to him and tell him the truth, fearing to say to him, “You are,” when indeed he spoke prophetically about another. For the tongue of Abraham knew the fullness of his heart and while his mind remained slow, his tongue prophesied.

**20.** The mouth has a habit of learning from the heart; it teaches the other the mysteries about to come. Abraham said to his lads, “Both I and Isaac are going up atop the mountain, then we shall return to you.” For though Abraham wanted to lie, he actually prophesied. It was not a lie, but rather the truth at the same time. Thus also the Ninevites spoke the truth while lying, for though they seemed to lie, they were prophets of the truth. Crying, they told their children, “Do not be afraid, O most beloved, but rather take heart, for the Lord has an exceptional care towards humans, and he does not simply do away with those in his own image. If a painter desires to protect with all security and attention his painting of a soulless

image, how much more so would the Lord guard his own image from evil, that ensouled and reasoning image? Our city would not be overturned and obliterated, but rather he calls people through threats to repentance. You all have many times been chastised by us, most beloved, and do you know the threats were made to help you? You have become wise and heirs through the discipline, and the grief of the whippings has become joy for you. Therefore, understand the care of God. For as a father disciplines his children again with mercy; he raises his staff to provoke fear and instruction. He disciplines them so they may not die, but rather turn towards correction. For if we fathers disciplined our own compassion by the threat of thrashings, wanting for you to gain from it, how much more so the Lord? If he disciplines as a father, by his grace he might save us. By the rod of his threats, he would make clear his love and open to all of us his storehouse of mercy. We are not able to love you in this way, as much as God loves the children of men in his compassion. Take heart, children, and stop your tears: for our city will not fall, but the wrath will pass by.”

**21.** These things the Ninevites said to their children, encouraging them and unwittingly prophesying. For they were truly prophets; their repentance made them so. They did not cease speaking these sorts of things, or crying. For even as they were consoling, they were still mourning in groans. The fear of the threat urged them into fasting, and they desired to dissolve the sentence with prayers.

**22.** The king went out and he displayed himself and the city was moved when it saw him in sackcloth. The king saw the city in mourning at the sight of him, and was filled with tears. The city cried over the king, seeing dirt and ash upon his head. The king cried over the whole city, seeing it mourning and wearing sackcloth. All mourned at the same time and all wailed and they made the stones themselves weep for them.

**23.** Who ever prayed like this? Who ever beseeched in this way? Or who ever humbled themselves like this before God? Who again suddenly cast off his schemes, both the secret and the manifest? Who from a simple sound hastened to break their heart upon their sins? Who, hearing a word, was shattered in mind? Who, at a feeble voice was seized by fear of death? Or who saw reflected before his eyes the caring God, because of repentance? Who saw the Just One unsheathing his sword, or a whole city crying out and moaning?

**24.** Who would not be moved by the sound of the wailing of both the young and the old, infants at the same time as their mothers? All, at the same time, mourning, for all heard that the days were fulfilled, and they were all about to, in a single day, go down to Hades, the city was overturned as it was impossible for there to be people to bury and at the same time be buried, because the sentence was about to fall over all. The young men, who were about to be joined in marriage, all of a sudden received invitations to their own deaths. Who could bear the wailing of the brides, as they were sitting in their bridal chambers, who, instead of joy burst into tears and fell, with their bridegrooms, into death? Who is able to hold back their tears, seeing the king crying, because all of a sudden instead of dwelling in his kingdom and living amongst the esteemed citizens, was sentenced to death among them, and sat in ashes? Instead of sitting in his chariot, with much honor, he heard that his city was about to fall. Instead of being furnished with food and clothing, he heard that he was going to drink death. The whole city, which was living, was called to fall into the abyss.

**25.** The king called to his dignitaries and he wept for them, and they for him. He began to speak in tears before them. "I became a victor among rivers and wars, how many times were you as well were glorified, contending so nobly in battle? But now this is not a battle we are accustomed to, that we might go out and conquer as we always have. We have triumphed

over many nations and peoples, but we are defeated by one Hebrew. Only one voice struck down our king, and this voice of this pitiful one has shaken all of us. We have completely ravaged cities, and now in our own city a foreigner is superior to us. Our city Nineveh, the mother of giants, is afraid and alarmed by the voice of the least man. The fearsome lioness in her own den has been exceedingly shaken by the Hebrew. Nineveh howls over the whole of creation but the voice of Jonah roars over it! How thus the seed of Nimrod, the progenitor of noble giants has been brought low!”

**26.** The king gave the best advice to his dignitaries, advising thus: “Let us now not be slack, nor let us be destroyed as some miserable people. For when someone bears a trial courageously and they do not fall, they gain a double reward. If they should live, they would be glorified and if they should die they would be spoken well of, just as a noble and courageous athlete. Therefore, let us be strong and nobly courageous and let us equip ourselves for the contest. For if we do not win, but die nobly, we will at least leave our good name for all. It is heard by us that our righteousness and humanity has come to the attention of God. The righteous judge keeps away the evildoers and God saves since he is good and humane. Let us fear his righteous judgment and let us attempt to increase his compassion. For if the judgment goes unfortunately, the majority of his pity is with us.<sup>2</sup> For now we find ourselves between goodness and judgment and we have armed ourselves anew for the new battle which is coming at us. Let us not look down on Jonah, for it is simply necessary to hold fast to his proclamation. I fell from his voice onto great care and grief, which he proclaimed. His appearance was pitiable and small, but his voice was great and very terrible.

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<sup>2</sup> The pagan king appears familiar with the Jewish notion of God’s competing attributes of justice and mercy. He hopes that even if the overall decision should go against Nineveh that the citizens would still move God’s merciful, compassionate side as much as possible.

**27.** “I consulted him before all of you, so that as in a crucible, his words might be tested. He himself is not afraid before us, nor scared, nor shaken. Nor indeed is he terrified or disturbed by the words which he said. But altogether he did not alter the words, since they were bound up in the truth.

**28.** “I flattered him, but I did not persuade him. I became fearful of him, but I did not soften him. I showed him riches and he laughed at me. I showed him the sword and he mocked it. He was a stranger to the sword and was an enemy of bribes. By none of these was that one in the least bit swayed. There are ones who are swayed when offered gifts, and others who see a sword and tremble. We placed this Hebrew between flattery and threats, and we found him to be courageous and triumph over both of them. He saw the sword and he mocked it. Similarly also he conquered the love of money and considered it worthless. A small word went out from his mouth for his sharpness and he cut off all our words.

**29.** “He did not completely frighten away my austerity, nor indeed did he disrespect my honor. But all of my wealth this one considered as fodder. Did not this one make his face bronze coming to us from Jerusalem? His word became for us a mirror, and we saw in it God who dwells among us and is angry at our evil deeds. In it we see the righteous judgment, which is enraged by our wicked trespasses. Through it the sentence which comes out against us from the mouth of God goes against our city.

**30.** “If the one who came proclaimed peace and victory, we would have suspected him as someone looking for gain, indeed one who prophesied good things to us so that he might gain profit from us in return for his speech.

**31.** “A true doctor comes and proclaims the truth to the sick one and that is necessary for him to operate. He prescribes for him a fiery, sharp caustic remedy. He does not have

cowardice when he announces a tooth extraction. He does not fear to tell the king about the pains and if he should have to drink some harsh medicine.

**32.** “Who would call a liar the prophet who proclaims wrath? If he were a liar, he would likely slacken his proclamation, but he sets him above, as I see, as a doctor of all. For he does not simply want to steal our bread. Indeed if Jonah, being just, fasts, how much more so should we dedicate ourselves to fasting, since we have sinned? If he, being holy, beseeches and prays, let us adorn ourselves with sackcloth and ashes. The just one fasts and prays, that he might not appear to people as a liar. Perhaps he strives to overturn our city. Because he wants the proclamation he proclaimed among us to be believed. Let us fight him with fasting and prayer. For a prophet does not sin, but our sins cling to us.

**33.** “Indeed, the Hebrew is not overturning our city, but our wickedness is taking it down. We have another unseen enemy, friends, against whom we must contend courageously. We have heard about the prizes of Job, the just. His courage is known and his story and his trial have proclaimed, as from a trumpet, his victory against the Enemy to all the world. If, therefore, the Enemy contends thus against the just one, what will he do among us sinners? He is the one who came out in the symposium to overturn the house upon the children of Job, mixing wine and blood and shatters unsparingly their bones with their cups.

**34.** “We have conquered kings in battle, now hasten to conquer Satan with prayer. Our formations finally go out and let us join the mighty battle against him. Throw off your breastplates and put on sackcloth, tear open the quivers and take refuge in prayer. Abandon the sword and search for faith, break the missiles and take up fasting. The victory which we have won previously against the enemies and kings of the earth is for nothing. If we should

win this, the greater of the victories and the contests which now stands before us, and as I arrayed myself in the first rank in those battles, now I will stand in the front in this battle.”

**35.** And the king stood up with haste and cast off his purple and put on sackcloth. The Ninevites all rent their garments and put on sackcloth and, with the king, the Ninevites who had always been shining and bright lamented, appeared as Indians at the coming evil.<sup>3</sup>

**36.** The king took his dignitaries and went out to see the whole city. He sent heralds to proclaim everywhere so that everyone might as one repent. “Let each one put off his own evil,” said the king, “lest he be wounded or destroyed in the battle. Let the robber give back and the hopeless show wisdom, the angry be meek, the glutton fast. Let no one bear malice, let no one snarl at another, let no one oppress another, nor abuse them. If we should get rid of our errors against our fellow servants, God will release us from our errors against him. This will be the way we array ourselves, and we will achieve victory and our city will be saved.”

**37.** These sorts of things the heralds of the king cried out in the great city and to fast with their flocks. The king stood, just as a doctor, curing the sickness. He ordered a fast for his camp. He provided his armor, fully of glory and through it the door of redemption. He hastened to herald in the camp a bow of meekness, whose arrows would reach heaven and, having been loosed, would conquer. He went forward and drew forth these things - love, faith, hope. He kept back the sword and furnished joy. After the king armed his camp in this way, with fasting and prayer, the multitude finally began to be inspected, both men and women, all people together, and he said to them, “Let us all fight for our salvation, honorably

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<sup>3</sup> ὡς Ἰνδοὶ ἐφαίνοντο ἐκ τῶν μελλόντων κακῶν. The comment seems to be about skin tone: the bright, shining faces of the Ninevites are contrasted with the dark skin of the Indians. While in English the idiom is that one's face gets pale with fear or dread, it appears that the Syriac idiom envisages the reverse.



and courageously!” He provided in himself a model for them, clad in sackcloth, so that the whole city might be outfitted in the same way.

**38.** The son of Nimrod, the noble giant, left off slaying the beasts and instead slew the passions. Instead of beasts, he slaughtered the shame sin. He left alone the beasts outside the walls and instead destroyed the evil within. Instead of taking up arms of glory with the city he urged all of them to go towards repentance. The king shut down the streets so that they could be washed from the filth of sin. He walked humbly, and became still in the midst of the trembling city, so that it would not fall down.

**39.** Jonah saw these things and was exceedingly astounded. He began to be amazed at the children of the foreigners. He saw the successes and the virtues of the Ninevites and in tears mourned for the seed of Abraham. He saw the seed of Canaan set aright in faith and the seed of Jacob fornicating themselves away from God. He saw the uncircumcised circumcise their hearts and the circumcised remaining in their hard-heartedness. The king of Nineveh knew the cause of the promised wrath—their sins. Wherefore he cut out the cause and he drove away the evil things. He is truly a physician, he saw securely the sickness of the city. With the medicine of fasting he healed the city. With sackcloth and ashes he drove sin from them. Jonah, as a judge, demanded correction from them and the fasting forgave their sins.

**40.** The Ninevites came together so that they could show the Lord their shame and flee death. They conceived a mighty fast to stop the sentence of death and provide life for them. Jonah feared this fast, that they might be saved through it and he be revealed as a liar. But the repentance rendered the sentence of Jonah null and void. Wherefore the Ninevites, as wise people, knew that God has compassion and mercy and he inclines compassionately towards the ones who repent whole-heartedly. They saw the hardened prophet and the humane God.

Being forgiven they fled the hardness to the compassionate one. Jonah cut off hope of their boasts, but fasting magnified the hope and proclaimed life. Earlier the sky looked down darkly upon them, now the sky shined brightly upon their repentance and much humility. The city was shaken, but it was solidified in its alms-giving. Infants watched in the arms of their mothers, since even they were taught at that time to fast.

**41.** The elders bellowed in sackcloth and ashes and life was added to them, just as to Ezekiel. The young cried out in contrition. God guarded his own crowns for them. The brides adorned themselves with gloominess, now turned back into their bridal chambers with joy. The beasts cried out because they had not drank any water, and the voice of them all was awful, both the men and the animals. But Justice heard their call, and grace immediately saved the city from the day which Jonah threatened them. For the city continually fasted and unceasingly beseeched. Their eyes did not dry from the tears of repentance, their tongue did not cease asking for mercy. Their ears did not hear another plan. For everywhere laments, cries and moans were heard in the city. There was nowhere to be seen anyone smiling or laughing or playing, since all of that was cut off. For the strange tears were borne unceasingly asking for mercies. They acquired by repentance a fast with purity. At the same time, men acquired unhindered self-control in regards to women.

**42.** The grace of God saw these things, and was moved compassionately and shed its life and compassion upon them like dew. For it did not want the death of sinners when they turned around their lives. But the humane, good, merciful and benevolent one is always desiring repentance and salvation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**43.** Among the wrathful people, reconciliation and peace was shown. For the elders made peace, the young practiced self-control and the virgins were purified. The bold became meek.

There was one appearance for all, and one arrangement: the king and the slave both went barefoot. There was the same humble bread for both the rich and the poor and there was one equal drink for masters and slaves. For they all walked under one yoke of repentance, so that they might receive the mercies of God. They worked on one homogenous project, so that they might be treated with one remittance from God.

**44.** The city was as a reed blown by the wind, and like a sparrow sitting on a thorn. At dawn they did not consider that the end of the day would appear to them. The whole city stood at the mouth of death, and its cry shook the gates of Hades. Jonah was numbering the days and nights and the Ninevites numbered their own sins, Jonah was sitting in his hut praying in truth and the Ninevites were begging that they not die. Jonah saw their tears and became afraid when he saw the coming together in the city. He had the gourd plant, which he did not plant, but he was protected from the heat of the day. The hut of Jonah dried up from below, while the right hand of the Most High shaded the Ninevites.

**45.** He saw them, trembling as water before God. He saw infants fasting while calling out loud. He saw toddlers crying and oxen and sheep braying. He saw the compassion of mothers rent asunder, supplicating the Most High. He saw elders crying aloud and fleeing to God while the elders of Israel were always apostasizing. Again he saw Nineveh repenting exceedingly and Zion going furiously towards idolatry. Nineveh, in repentance saw how the sentence was increasing against the altogether seditious Jerusalem. Jonah saw the self-controlled prostitutes of Nineveh and the wildly fornicating daughters of Jacob. He saw the liars in Nineveh speaking the truth and he saw the false prophets in Zion always full of deceit.

**46.** In Nineveh they cast down, publically, the idols while in Jerusalem they secretly worshipped them. Jonah took a worthy trial from the nations, since the priest of idols welcomed Moses, and the widow did as well to Elijah, and the heathens did for David when Saul, the King of Israel, was pursuing him. He saw the assembly of Nineveh come together and he was anxious that his proclamation might prove to be false. The Temple of God in Jerusalem was made by the Jews into a den of robbers, while the King of Nineveh worshipped the Lord! The living bewailed the dead and the Ninevites bewailed the living. All of them were cut off from their children and from their families, a great and terrible mourning took hold there and all the living ones thought they would soon descend into the earth. For as their days became numbered fewer and fewer, their tears abounded more and more since soon they would be no more.

**47.** The day was arriving when the city should have been overthrown if they did not repent and the city was full of wailing. The dust of the earth was soaked as the tumult of tears became a torrent from all the people crying bitterly. Fathers stood up their children so that they could also cry out bitterly about their death. They bemoaned the brides and bridegrooms in their midst. Fathers looked on the beauty of their children as the darkness of much evil fell upon them. At the end they thought the earth was shaking and they lifted up their voices in screams to the heavens. Old men and women went out amongst the graves wailing since the ones who would bury and the ones who would be buried were not among them. Each saw before their eyes bitter death and let out a groan, knowing the sort of death that awaited them.

**48.** They rent their hearts, hearing that the earth was freezing. They were utterly stopped as they thought of what kind of end they were about to receive. The images of all of their faces were struck, knowing that the earth was about to crack open under them. The king wore

sackcloth and stood in tears as he considered that there was no tomorrow. All grabbed the dust and prayed to God. In their prayers their mouths were full of ash, all called to their friends so that they might see them and be full of their presence before they went down into Hades.

**49.** With the days all filled up, they stood in one heart on the threshold of death. They grasped one another's hands and wept bitterly for each other. The last night was upon them and they thought about in which hour the voice of destruction was going to come. They considered that in the evening the city would fall, but the evening came and altogether nothing had happened. Again they thought that during the night it would be swallowed up and destroyed. But then night came and they were not given over into destruction. In the darkness they thought they had been handed over for the end, but the darkness passed away and they had suffered nothing. In the dawn they thought the city would have been overthrown, but the dawn came and magnified their hopes. In the hour in which they thought that they would not exist, in that hour their joy was fulfilled. They rejoiced together with their friends and neighbors and they glorified God who had had mercy on them.

**50.** Jonah stood far off, watching and fearing that he might be shown a liar. And in the hour in which he hoped the city would fall, it was ransomed from death. For the benevolent God saw their tears and was moved by them. For although they did not die, they had anticipated dying because of the promise of an evil death. So it was as if they had died, but although dead had not been buried. The fear of the terrible things passed away from the living. The threat of terrible things hoped to lay waste to them since they were going about as a shadow.

**51.** But these things Jonah did not take to heart and seeing all the things about himself he wanted to die. God had mercy on them since they were melted by fear and the dead city was brought back to life. Then all, at the same time, were rejoicing that they had the best hopes, since they saw wrath transformed into mercy. They bent their knees in prayer and spread out their hands, giving thanks to God who saved them from the sentence of death and who granted them life in his mercy.

**52.** Jonah saw that he appeared to be a liar with the Ninevites saved and he became exceedingly bitter. The men of Nineveh began to call and flatter him, saying “Do not be sad, O Jonah, but rejoice, since we have found new life through you! For through you we now know the God of everything. Do not fear, you did not lie, for all of our evil was overturned and our faith lifted up. In your hand we found the supplies for repentance which we received from the storehouses of God. Tell us, Jonah, what would have been your profit if our city had fallen and we had all died? What would you have gained, son of Amath, if we had gone down into Hades? Why are you sad, after having cured us of our wickedness? The multitude gives thanks to you even more as a doer of good! Why then do you moan since you have succeeded in turning our city not over into corruption, but into the knowledge of God? Why also do you mourn over those who were saved through repentance? Rather, be crowned! Let this thing that has happened gladden you! For you gladden angels in the highest! You should be glorified on earth in him, since God rejoices with the angels in heaven at us. Let your mind exult exceedingly in this, that all people give reverence to God. Console yourself since the whole city with its king prays in joy with you. See the infants saved from death, repent and pray for their lives! Also see the toddlers protected and put your hands on their heads.

Praise the city which was saved against all hope so that your memory be magnified in it.

Drive away your mourning and stop your fasting and rejoice with us, O Prophet of God!”

**53.** These things, and things greater than these, the Ninevites spoke to him so that he might stop his untimely sadness. For this one was sitting outside of the city and the whole city went out to him and they saw an awful sight: Jonah standing, speaking, and replying with his own mouth. They heard Jonah, how he was judged by God and how he was answered by the face of God. For the Holy Spirit, which had answered by his mouth was also speaking through it. It seemed in him that there were two faces, one of God and one of the Prophet, speaking at the same time. The whole multitude heard him conducting a lawsuit in himself over the gourd plant, and also over himself and the Lord and the city. For his tongue was saying two things - he spoke to God and God answered through him. O horrible court! O how his tongue advocated for two things, for God and himself!

**54.** The group stood and listened how Jonah appealed to God in his own speech, arguing these things: “O Lord, why have you altogether afflicted me thus and why do you give me up and show me a liar? For a while I had a small gourd plant to shield me from the heat, but now this has dried up and now you are roasting me with the heat. Therefore I ask for death. Take my soul, for I am exceedingly grieved with regret over the gourd plant.

**55.** Immediately, the All-Holy Spirit answered from his mouth and condemned him with his own tongue. It fought with him and his mouth dishonored the judgment of God. The multitude of the city heard from the mouth of Jonah how God spoke on behalf of the city in reply to him. “You,” he said, “are grieved over the gourd plant, for which you did no labor, nor indeed did you make it grow, which grew up in one day and in the same time withered. How much more should I have mercy over my own city? I now give to you a type of the

whole living city in the gourd plant which withered. The gourd plant now will become a teacher for you, and learn from it wisdom and consideration. In the pitiful gourd plant learn how much greater is the compassion of God. You would spare the gourd plant, and I the city. You seek a pitiful shelter and would laugh at the city. Where is your justice, Jonah? Why do you prefer the gourd plant over the city? You show compassion over a pitiful plant, Jonah, and upon the city great severity. Thus the thing which is given and eaten as food is more magnified in your eyes than the ones who would eat? You prefer the perishable thing over the repenting people and you extol plants over reasoning human beings!”

**56.** The Ninevites heard all of these things and, as from one mouth, gave glory to God since he was pleading on behalf of them, the maker for the made, the creator for the creation, the master for the slave against the tongue of Jonah, the one that had been given to them to judge them towards justice. Unwillingly Jonah had glorified them and pushed them to achieve victory. In justice the Just One judged rightly.

**57.** God chose, through his many mercies, to call out the threat in his own voice so that the city might be saved. And Jonah passionately contended with God so that he might convert the city and he himself not be proven a liar.<sup>4</sup> The whole multitude rejoiced in hearing these things and seeing Jonah overcome by God. They knew how God encouraged him and they wanted to magnify his honor. So they seized him by his arms and just as the king enters into a city he entered and was seated. All the ones who had repented gathered to him and

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<sup>4</sup> καὶ Ἰωνᾶς ἄκρως θεῷ συνεκρίνατο, ἵνα στρέψῃ τὴν πόλιν καὶ αὐτὸς ψεύστης μὴ γένηται. This is a difficult sentence with two polyvalent words, ἄκρως and συνεκρίνατο. ἄκρως can refer to distance, i.e. “furthest” which fits the position of Jonah vis-à-vis God frequently in the Book of Jonah. It can also refer to time (“until the end”), degree (“passionately”) or “utterly, completely.” Some of these possible meanings are extremely positive, others are extremely negative. Συνεκρίνατο’s root meaning is to bring into combination, which does not fit well here. Idiomatically it can mean “compare, interpret or contend.” I chose the “passionately” option for the adverb, thereby attempting to capture the ups and downs of God and Jonah’s relationship and “contend” to highlight the dialogical nature of the book.



paid him homage, bearing gifts to him and their tithes and brought him whatever they had promised in their afflictions. The king opened to him his storehouses and bore to him gifts of all glorious things.

**58.** At last Jonah was glorified by the mouth of all and he went up and sat in the kingly chariot. A sea monster had borne Jonah in the sea, but upon earth, in the city of Nineveh, the king and the whole people glorified him. Fish in the sea encircled him, and during his return to Jerusalem the king of Nineveh sent out ambassadors so that they could prepare for him completely the road. God sent fish to prepare the road where he would go, and the king showed the road to the prophet. He went up in glory with the king as his escort. The ones who met him cowered from fear of the prophet and the whole city esteemed him. The ones who met him were afraid, knowing the things that happened in Nineveh, how he did not destroy them.

**59.** When he drew near to the mountains of Jerusalem, he told the ones with him that they should return. For he was ashamed lest they enter there and see the Hellenism and great impiety and the pious ones who had repented to God learn from the Jerusalemites how to service idols again. He was afraid lest again the wound that he had closed up and healed for them come to the surface. Jonah again returned thanks to the ones who came with him and he saluted them with emotion and blessed them. He gave them a signal that they should return, but they did not hear what he said. They said to him these sort of things and greater, “Do not send us away from you, O Prophet, and go with yourself alone to enter into the land of Israel. We would learn from it their virtues and standards, their good deeds and their uprightness, their examples, their words and their manners. Let us go in and see the land in which Hellenism has not completely taken hold, but faith and correctness are still there. Allow us to

see the good root from which you grew. We exhort you, O Prophet, instead of the wage which you would have paid us for conveying you, you allow us to go up with you.”

**60.** While they were saying these things, Jonah laid his head on the earth, knowing what scheme could get them to return. He was exceedingly ashamed of the sons of Israel because they were evil and impious. This was worse to him than the matter of the gourd plant, so that his soul asked for death. The prophet began to make excuses and said to the people contrivances that were not true. “Now there is a great feast in our land and foreigners are not allowed to enter. For although you are faithful you are not able to go to the feast of God because you are uncircumcised. Therefore, return in joy and peace into your fatherland to the one who sent you and when the feast of God has passed, return here again.”

**61.** And at these words they became very grieved and all of them cried out and embraced him. Finally they turned back with much sadness after hearing the word of Jonah the prophet. After they left the prophet Jonah, while they were still in the area, they saw an extremely high mountain and they thought on this. They ascended it so that they could see the Promised Land from the top. When they came to the summit of the mountain they saw the whole land and immediately were very astounded seeing the people sacrificing offerings to demons and giving drink-offerings in groves and carving altars and idols in front of the doors. The one entering and exiting these places gave homage and did obeisance before the images. Another sacrificed a bull, another brought wine for a demon. And what more is there to say? For there they saw the whole maniacal work of Satan.

**62.** So they began to say, “Are we not seeing a dream? Do we look on the land of Israel as Sodom? Is this the seed of Abraham, or perhaps demons are making the image for us? Is the great impiety which was done in our fatherland now encamped here? There we tore down

the idols with zeal, here are they restored? Not only these things but everywhere in this place are idols the likes of which not even we made! In our fatherland there is not worship of the snake, yet these ones worship the snake as if they were serpents themselves! In our fatherland we sacrifice animals, these ones slaughter their sons and their daughters. But as when they received the law of God through Moses, as Jonah told us, they made and traded graven images. Let us get up and flee from this evil people, lest we become caught up in their deeds. For instead of Nineveh, which was not overthrown, soon the land of Israel is about to be overthrown itself.” As they said these things they were greatly afraid and returned to their fatherland, glorifying God.

**63.** Now let us ourselves glorify God, who gives us a type and pledge through the Ninevites. As he saved them through Jonah, now he saves forever his people through his only begotten son. And he made the people useless, as when he spoke to the fruitless fig tree, the one which prevented the Gentiles from being saved by the fruit of repentance.<sup>5</sup> In Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be the glory and the strength, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always, forever and ever, Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> καὶ καταργεῖ τὸν λαόν, τὴν συκὴν λέγω τὴν ἄκαρπον, τὴν κωλύουσιν τὰ ἔθνη ἐκ καρπῶν μετάνοιας σῶζεσθαι. This is clearly an allusion to Matt 21:18-19, but the intended analogy is unclear. While λέγω can have the sense of “speak against,” it is hardly the strongest verb for castigation. Secondly, the fig tree which does not bear fruit is traditionally understood as Israel. It does not bear fruit for itself, but in no way hinders the Gentiles from being saved. The stumbling block in both the biblical story of the fig tree and in this homily is placed by the Jews and causes them to stumble, even while Gentiles rise to the heights of piety.

## On the Preparation and on the Thief and the Cross

### Outline

1. Funeral of Rebecca introduction. ¶1.
2. Litany on the Cross. ¶2.
3. The Harrowing of Hades. ¶3-7.
  - a. Transition from Litany on the Cross into the Harrowing of Hades. ¶3.
  - b. Christ sees the OT heroes of faith in Hades. ¶4-7
    1. Pentateuch Heroes: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Job, Phineas, Moses *et al.* ¶4.
    2. Judges and Monarchic Heroes: Joshua, Samuel, David, Elisha. ¶5.
    3. Prophetic Heroes: Isaiah, Jonah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Maccabees, John. ¶6.
    4. Female Heroines: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Mother of Seven. ¶7.
4. Pilate's Expanded Speech ¶8-9.
  - a. Pilate tries to exonerate himself of guilt. Pilate's job is to punish, Christ's to heal. ¶8.
  - b. Pilate asks the Jews how Christ can die when he brought Lazarus back to life. ¶9.
5. Retelling of the Passion Narrative. ¶10-11.
  - a. Jews reject Pilate's speech. The Heavens darken and the Earth shakes, as Mt 27:51-53, but at the condemnation of Christ rather than post-mortem. ¶10.
  - b. Mocking worship and the introduction of the Good Thief. ¶11.
6. Praise for the Good Thief. ¶12.
7. Conclusion, Apostrophe to the Thief. ¶13-14.

1. Earlier I spoke on the nuptials of Rebecca, today I am pleased to speak on the funeral of Rebecca. Today we celebrate the feast of the entombing of the Lord which becomes the sarcophagus of life. Today we celebrate the kingly tomb, the stone being rolled for the door of the crypt. Today we give song to the coffin. Three days, it was clear, the corpse was hidden from death. We dance around the casket, the myrrh-case of the world...

2. Today the cross is brought on and creation is glorified. This is the cross of those wandering on the road, the cross which is the hope of Christians. The cross is the yoke of the rich, the cross is the trophy against the demons, help for the hopeless, the hope of the sea-swept, the vanguard of widows, the release of the afflicted, the perfection of elders, the cross is the armament of the ages, the wisdom of the uneducated, the proclamation of the apostles, the prudence of virgins, the cross is the security of the world. The cross is the destruction of idols, the power of the powerless, freedom for the paralytics, clothes for the naked, the cross is the resurrection of the dead, a cane for the lame, the demolition of the arrogant, victory against the devil, the cross is the hope of the ones waiting, the bulwark of the ones fighting, a judge of the unjust, a guard for the infants. The cross is the light for those seated in darkness, philosophy for the barbarians, law for the lawless, a boast for the martyr, the joy of priests, the demolition of temples, a scandal for the Jews, a service for the initiated. The cross is bread for the hungry, a guide for the blind, consolation for the poor, repentance for the undisciplined. The cross is the teacher of the young, the steersman of the many, the father of orphans. The cross is the symbol of the righteous, the head of human-kind, the magnificence of the kingdom, the freedom of slaves, the preaching of prophets. The cross is the practice of the monastics, the foundation of the Church, the overturner of pagan altars, the fountain of the thirsty.

3. Today the cross is brought on and the subterranean realm rent asunder. Today Jesus's hands are nailed and the chains of death were loosed. Today the Christ-killer undertook his deed and the ones walking in death were entrusted to him. Today the blood flowed into the opened graves and the ones dwelling in Hades came up. Today, all day long, as Jesus was dragged to that place, each hour blessing the ones dwelling there suffering. He was brought before the judge Pilate, going up to the Praetorium. There the Jews dared to mock him, before he was given over in the 6th hour. Then after three hours undergoing the pain of the nails, his suffering was stopped by death. There he remained, until the 12th hour, when he was thrown to the ones seated around him, who were like lions.

4. Now he went down into Hades, wanting to see the just ones enduring their torments, over which he ensured that each would prevail. Just like a King reviewing his troops at midday, he saw and found them asleep. He saw Adam mixed up in much weeping, he saw Abel purple with blood,<sup>1</sup> he saw Noah with the long hair of righteousness. He saw Shem and Japheth clothed in the respect of their father, he saw Abraham completely enshrouded by virtues, he saw Lot concerned with the treatment of strangers, he saw Isaac, thriving in perseverance, he saw Jacob holding fast with endurance, he saw Job truly struggling, he saw Phineas whipped with a scourge, he saw Moses having been initiated by the fingers of the divine.

5. Then he came to the son of Nun and he was surrounded by armies. He stood beside Samuel and equipped him with lightning shooting from his kingly hands. He came to David who had been buried together with his harp, he moved on to Elisha, wrapped up in wool.

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<sup>1</sup> εἶδε τὸν Ἀδὰμ πολλοῖς ἐμπεφυρμένον κλαυθμοῖς, εἶδε τὸν Ἀβελ αἵματι πορφυρίζοντα. Both of the sentence's verbs have *φυρ* roots. While neither is related to "fire," the play on words works well with the "fiery" setting of Hades. This wordplay works only in Greek, suggesting this is an original composition and not a translation. For the purple color of Abel, see the description of Abel's face in "On Cain and the Murder of Abel," which is bruised and purple with blood as a result of Cain's violence.

6. Isaiah was laying, proud of his shorn hair, Jonah made beautiful by the salvation of Nineveh. Jeremiah was smeared with the filth of the pit, the eyes of Ezekiel were shown and saw clearly the rough visions. The kisses of the lions brightened the feet of Daniel. The bodies from the fiery furnace gleamed with shining skin, the phalanx of Maccabees was surrounded by instruments of torture, the head of the Baptist was bright, though it was beheaded.

7. He saw the holy women, none abandoning their men. He saw Sarah, shining in the faith of Abraham. He saw Rebecca, flowering in the beneficence of rain, he saw Rachel shining in the wisdom of her husband. He saw the tyrannicidal mother, who was walled up by the seven in a tower. He saw all the just ones, he acknowledged each of the prophets. He proclaimed, “I am come” and God awoke the army, for it was not until these things that the Kingdom was said to completely come.

8. Come now, at last, let us go back to the sentence of Pilate, for that is the beginning of these things. The Jews had maniacally arrested Christ and they handed him over for the imperial tortures. For they could do nothing of the sort, nor could they put him away as a criminal, nor bring any accusation according to the law, not saying the cause nor charge, nor showing any other grounds. But how? The citizenry was abundant and the crowds of people in the square were numerous since all the people had come from the surrounding villages and were crying out, “Crucify him, Crucify him.” But Pilate, having no other cause, but seeing that the emotion of the crowd was stirred up because of envy, wanted to bring a charge of lesser penalty. This way he would not be put to death, as they wished. As he did this, he washed his hands and said, “This one is clean of any guilt.” He turned himself away from the bloodthirsty words. By Roman law this one should be turned over to them. Doing this, he

said, “O Jews, should I unjustly crucify Jesus? I would be considered a murderer. This one would empty graves. I have been sent from Caesar as a judge of wrong-doers. Who does not see this one as being above mistakes? I chastise the one blinding the ones who can see. This one enlightens the blind. I exact vengeance on the one who cuts off the feet of others. This one makes the lame walk. I cast the vote for the sentence of death. If someone robs a mother of her child, this one gives her back her son, raising him from the dead. For me, the law is to cut off the right hand of the one who cuts off another’s. This one makes the hand whole. I penalize with damages if someone should rob someone else of money. This one overflows the desert with rivers of bread. It is my work to thrash with blows the ones causing wounds in others through blows. This one commanded a paralytic, borne about on a cot, to walk. I chasten the one who despoils the vineyard of another. This one, having the vineyard of the word, cleanses it for marriage. I take justice, if someone should dare to commit burglary, this one stops the flow of hidden blood.<sup>2</sup> I surround with troubles the ones who throw sailors into the sea. This one walked to Peter along the waves.

**9.** “And yet you call upon me to prosecute this one? Let this mania not be! There is not a sword I would use to slaughter this man. Shall I put Jesus to death, after seeing Lazarus living? Shall I send this man who causes graves to be overturned to his own grave? How will he be dead willingly, since there is not in Hades another one who has as much power over death? How, after being killed, will he not resurrect himself and again bring these things of woe upon you all?”

**10.** Although he said these sorts of things, he saw that they were not persuaded, so he went out of the Praetorium and he allowed them to go away and do whatever they wanted.

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<sup>2</sup> ἐγὼ λαμβάνω δίκην, εἴ τις τοιχωρυχίαν τολμᾷ, οὗτος δὲ διαρραγεῖσαν κρυπτῶν αἱμάτων ἐνέφραξεν. The parallelism which is so evident in the other contrasts in this paragraph is seemingly absent in this instance.



But with all these were troubling things happening, yet Wisdom itself stood silent. The Word was not speaking any words. But the ones outside who rejected him were violently seeking to crucify him. And immediately everything shook. Each of the elements shook violently, the day fled, the heaven was blackened, the foundations of heaven were shaken. The earth, upon hearing the ones calling for crucifixion, shook with a violent earthquake, tombs were opened, just as the ones raging on the bar of the cross. The rocks called out harshly while they snapped, the temple was sundered, not daring to look away. The sun turned back on the ones who did dare, and it was darkened. Night took possession and creation was silent.

**11.** The ones who saw this shuddered. They could say nothing of their grief, except the ones who wanted to punish him – they ignorantly exulted. By attempting to dishonor him, they actually confirmed the honor upon him. In the form of mocking, they gave the trappings of lordship to him. They mock-worshipped him, but in mocking him they proved themselves the objects of ridicule. They confessed their own slavery. They fitted him with a mantle while scoffing, but in doing so with their own hands they clothed him as King. They crowned him with thorns as from an arid garden. Sour wine they offered him from an unworthy vine, they carried him bile as an ill-tempered people. They gave him a sponge, as to a healer of souls.<sup>3</sup> They bore a reed, which they cast aside, as written. They crucified thieves with him, but he found the doorkeeper of paradise among the ones they crucified for violence. “Lord,” he said, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

**12.** Look at the one pierced as a slave. Look at the humility of this beggar’s humanity. He did not dare ask for anything. He did not say, “Give to me the keys, which you gave to Peter” nor for one of the thrones which the mother of the sons of Zebedee wanted to take. And is it really necessary to say any more on this topic? But he remembered nothing of the toll, “Have

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<sup>3</sup> σπόγγον ἐπέδωκαν ὡς ψυχῶν ἰατρῶν.

mercy on me, a sinner,” he said. Nor did he ask for leniency for his sins, for he saw there were many upon him. Therefore he only asked for remembrance in the kingdom. To the consideration of the King it was given to decide what must be granted and how the slave might be shown mercy. “I, Lord, have the courage to ask for nothing. But let only this begin for me, that when you come into your kingdom, when you send out your angelic army, when the clouds of the righteous move, when the handful reap the furrows of the graves of the dead, when the books of the deeds of each are opened, then remember me, saying, ‘When the Hebrew people crucified me, and all denied my rulership, when the crows of the cock came out, all the ones most familiar with me denied me. No one allowed themselves to be hanged with me, but those whom I fed with my body. From far away those ones looked upon me being slaughtered. The first of my disciples was the first of the ones to flee from me. Peter swore oaths that he was estranged from me. Andrew ran away, unmanned, Andrew, who is Peter’s brother. He was the brother of Peter, the denial was familial. Philip was a special friend to me. The sons of Zebedee were tossed about in a storm of unfaithfulness, and they went about unstably. John, whom I warmed on my breast, did not draw his spear when my lungs were pierced. Thomas was not present. Matthew was absent. The Twelve scattered as dust. Nor did they raise a voice on behalf of me, the ones on whom my soul was set. Nor any others of the many who did great works, none were my ally. Lazarus did not appear then, whom I had called back from the dead. The blind man did not cry for me, he whom I had granted light. The lame did not run to me. One, bound thief confessed to me his unworthiness while he was being crucified.’” And<sup>4</sup> bleeding he called upon the King of the Jews, “When

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<sup>4</sup> The punctuation of the Thessaloniki edition is odd here, and so I depart from it. “παρ' ἐμοὶ σταυρωθεὶς· καὶ παρέκνιζεν Ἰουδαίους βασιλέα καλῶν. “Ὅταν μου τότε μνησθῇς” The colon after σταυρωθεὶς must be taken as a hard stop or period, and as the end of the thief’s imagined speech of Jesus. The clause καὶ παρέκνιζεν Ἰουδαίους βασιλέα καλῶν is the preacher describing the action as a narrator before launching

you remember, throw a portion of your clemency to me, to the one standing by you. I do not dare to ask what you will give me. I am not ambitious for kingly honor. I do not warrant the riches of benevolence. I do not merit the sea of compassion.”

**13.** Do you see the supplication of the thief? Look at the Kingly gift! “Amen, Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. You ask that I remember you then, but I now give to you the promise.”

**14.** O Thief! O Pirate of Paradise! O Sapper of the God-Planted Wall! O Robber Whose Trespasses are Forgiven! O Maker of Kingly Garb! O Steward of the Unlocked Doors! O Overseer of the Locks of Infinity, O First Fruit of the Cross! O First-Fruit from the Trees of Golgotha! O Wage of the Nails of Salvation! O Fishhook of Repentance! O Bait of Christ for Life! To him be the glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

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into the end of the thief's invented speech. The Thessaloniki edition takes it all as part of the thief's invented speech, such that the thief begins by speaking his own words, then quotes an imagined response from Jesus and then has Jesus quote words the thief has not spoken yet!

## On the Thief Upon the Cross

### Outline

5. The Two Thieves – The First is Adam. ¶1-5.
  - a. Adam was placed in the Garden and stole the fruit from the tree. ¶1-2.
  - b. Double Trees, Double Knowledge. ¶3-4.
  - c. Summary. Adam stole forbidden things and bound himself. God gave the garden to another and provided a garden for Adam to drag about his greed. ¶5.
6. God's response to the theft. ¶6-8.
  - d. Adam and God know of his sin. God allows him to admit it, which he does not. ¶6.
  - e. Apostrophe praising God. ¶7.
  - f. Adam transgressed the commandment, and when confronted, blamed Eve. ¶8.
7. The Typology of the First Thief and the Jews. ¶9-10.
  - d. Jews transgressed the Law, and when confronted by Christ, condemned him. ¶9.
  - e. Flesh condemned Adam and the Jews to death. Christ gives hope for new life. ¶10.
8. The Second Thief. ¶11-12.
  - e. Adam stole death from the tree, the Good Thief stole life. ¶11.
  - f. Adam's defense has no humility. The Good Thief accepts he has sinned. ¶12.
9. Implications for Believers. ¶13-16.
  - a. Believers have the same option, be prideful (Adam) or humble (Good Thief). ¶13.
  - b. Typology of the Trees, Cross, and Life in Christ explained. ¶14-16.
10. The Second Thief is the Second People from the Nations. ¶17-18.

- a. The Good Thief was the first one to take up the cross and follow Christ. ¶17.
  - b. The Thieves censure each other, as Jews and Christians do even now. ¶18.
11. The Good Thief stands in the long line of Exemplars of Faith. ¶19-21.
- a. The Thief became equal in wage to the OT characters who worked all day. ¶19.
  - b. The Thief surpasses the OT heroes, because they had confirmation of faith. ¶20-21.
12. The Thief had no proof of God's power, only faith. He just saw a man crucified. ¶22-24.
- a. Catalog of the OT miracles that helped the OT characters to believe. ¶22.
  - b. The Thief did not see Christ enthroned, he saw him hanging on a cross. ¶23.
  - c. Despite the disgraceful appearance of Christ, the Thief had faith. ¶24.
13. Conclusion. ¶25.

1. The Holy Scripture makes mention of two thieves. Let us examine well the deeds of these two and enjoy the profit from them. The first is Adam the first-formed of creation. This one stole the fruit of the tree two-fold. The owner, God, judged that farmer guilty of evil and, having overseen the deed, he removed Adam from grace. He handed him over to death, as one guilty, and he filled him with a greed<sup>1</sup> for vain labors. He saw the inclination and he hindered the deed. He took away his authority and he threw him into toil. He saw the disobedience and he did not feel confident about the Tree of Life. He ceased being unconcerned about the garden and marked out the boundaries by portioning. He judged the one better than the lesser, and from the one tree he showed that he did not esteem Adam worthy of the tree of life.

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<sup>1</sup> ἀπλῆστια, which for Ephraem Graecus is the locus for the sin of Adam.

2. He gave him enjoyment of all things in the beginning. On one of the trees in the garden he wanted to see knowledge.<sup>2</sup> So he urged him, by a command, to show himself worthy, so that he might grant eternal life to Adam because of his virtue. He transgressed the covenants and he removed the fruit. So the foreseeing creator God contrived that he would not test Adam himself, but he would do it through ones speaking contrary, appealing to choice. For it is not possible for God to jest. Therefore he did not relent, he did not give the commandment in the tree of life. So then why did God not give the double trees to Adam with their produce? He saw what was to come and showed the power of evil. He reproved the nature of corruption which is greed. He showed greed's weakness, since it devoted itself to no good and, when ceasing from labors, was never satisfied. He knew what was to come and through wisdom showed the result. He knew what would happen and was not injured by evil. For if the Tree of Life had been partaken of, Sin would have been made immortal and Adam would have been unable to be condemned to death.

3. There was not a tree of double nature as some say wrongly. Nor, as is said, did Adam partake of the fruit of death.<sup>3</sup> For God never made anything bad. So, making Adam naked, God furnished a double knowledge of the understanding<sup>4</sup> at the proper time and he left it to be proclaimed. The double trees made clear the understanding on account of the commandment. The understanding became a sword for many, since through it they experienced evil. It knew the power of good and the work of evil. But Adam was not yet able

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<sup>2</sup> *ἐννοια*, indicating the cognitive faculty.

<sup>3</sup> As is typical for Ephraem Graecus, opposing interpretations are rarely mentioned and his exegetical opponents are never named.

<sup>4</sup> *φρόνησις*, typically meaning "the faculty of planning" (BDAG), is frequently used in Ephraem Graecus where we might expect *οἰκονομία* in reference to God's plan for Salvation History.

to receive the understanding, having by nature only the simple mind to preserve the commandment. But in the end through innocent progress he took part of it, at the time when the creator knew the worthy mind was working toward completion.

4. So that he would not die to eternal death, the creator did not command him to lay hold of the double knowledge. He separated the chosen freedom and the threat with the transgression of the commandment. If it was the tree of life, it was also of understanding. If it was the fruit of life, it was also the fruit of understanding. If it was temporary enjoyment, it is also eternal.<sup>5</sup> The soul of these people took a taste, and through it also the body. Just as the soul eats the temporary things through the body, thus the eternal things [are taken up by the body] through the soul. The faculty of speech is the windpipe of the soul, and choice comes from its mouth through which it receives the things given. Wherefore, when she untimely ate of the double food she corrupted the body as when a baby shares in the food taken by its mother. And so altogether the creator drew him away from the death of the soul and changed the body, lest someone break it apart.

5. Thus, therefore, the first man indicates the thief. For in the garden he was found to steal the forbidden things. He took into his possession the things that bind, and he bound himself on the things which the owner did not set out for his garden. Wherefore he took a share of judgment, conquered him, and judged him as a thief. And he gave the garden to another. Lest Adam be destroyed, he gave him a garden where he would have to drag about

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<sup>5</sup> This section is a difficult one. Ephraem Graecus begins by noting that God did not command Adam to lay hold of the fruit from the two trees and that he separated the freedom and the threat by means of the commandment. So far so good. The next section is structured with parallel clauses, εἰ ἔστι noun + genitive adjective... ἔστι καὶ + genitive adjective. The parallelism is clear in the first two sentences, but breaks down in the final sentence even though the structural markers of the first two sentences are clearly marked: καὶ εἰ ἔστι πρόσκαιρος ἀπόλαυσις, ἔστι καὶ αἰώνιος. Whereas “life” and “understanding” can be equated, πρόσκαιρος and αἰώνιος are nearly antonyms.

his greed. And he established him as the boss of the thorns, so that he might learn the evil of his plan and the gifts of goodness he had given up.

6. So it seems that Adam had condemned himself. He thought he had hidden himself, after he ate the forbidden things, and he stole himself away so as not to be found. But he had knowledge of his natural state of nakedness which God had given him when he created him, and he was disgraced at what he saw. He was not able to deny it, since he had shame at the natural thing. His nakedness testified to his transgression, and with God being silent, he showed that Adam was his own guilty verdict. He said, “Adam, where are you?” Even though God knew that he knew where Adam was and that Adam did not think he was visible. Hence, decreeing and conquering, he was shown to be a righteous judge. He gave the verdict, as was proper, and he allowed Adam an means of escaping the punishment. For the one who is good does not suffer being overcome by meanness.<sup>6</sup>

7. O his Divine Power! O the Incomparable Wisdom! O the Majesty of his Uprightness! What things he laid for a foundation for man from the beginning! For not yet had he received the grace of the creator, but immediately received judgment with his household servant.<sup>7</sup> For he had not yet tasted of the final fruits of the garden, and he had not yet combined all the

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<sup>6</sup> Οὐ γὰρ ἀνέσχετο ἀγαθὸς ὢν πλεονεκτηθῆναι ὑπὸ τῆς φαυλότητος. Contextually, the sentence must be a praise of God as a righteous and merciful judge. To get there, though, each verb is stretched to its semantic limits. ἀνέχω in the middle voice typically means “to bear” “to be content with” or “to suffer;” πλεονεκτέω in the passive means “to be overcome.” Perhaps a better translation would be “For the one who is good does not suffer to be overcome by the meanness (i.e. of Adam or the serpent).” This translation does better justice to πλεονεκτέω and φαυλότητος, but the immediate context is about God’s attributes as judge, not about Adam/Adam’s deed/the serpent. The thrust of the argument is that “God is a merciful and good judge, therefore he does not give in to poor or base impulses,” but the Greek of this sentence is a very clumsy way of phrasing that idea.

<sup>7</sup> Presumably Eve. Ephraem Graecus speaks of her here using the phrases “household servant” (τοῦ οἰκείου δούλου), “neighbor” (παροίκου) and “servant,” without the household modifier. While the servant language could make sense given the dictum in Gen 2:16 that Adam will rule (κυριεύω) over her, it is very odd to have her described as both “of the house” (οἴκειος) and as someone “outside the house” (παροίκος).



things from the garden. The owner was dragged by his neighbor onto the earth to discuss with the snake, and the ruler was torn into pieces by the snake because of the servant.

**8.** God did not take the grace of paradise away from Adam and then immediately have reconciliation with his servant. Adam did not keep the commandment and thus was turned over for accusation. He rejected faith and did not keep the commandment, and moreover he put forth this sort of defense, saying, “The woman gave it to me.” And immediately the transgression became compounded with carelessness for him. By employing this stratagem he showed he was not ashamed of the theft. For he also did not keep the woman from touching it, nor did he withdraw himself from the food.

**9.** This one, this one became the type upon the Jews, since they enjoyed the healing they received from Christ, but after receiving much they exchanged it for the sentence of death. They despoiled the law and condemned the law-giver. To the ones who had actually transgressed the law, they let go easily. They accused the law-giver, though, who was putting forth his doctrines of perfection. But they had an accusation against themselves, since the expanse of the temple curtain was rent asunder and thus became naked. So in the likeness of the one who disgraced Adam upon the theft, he demonstrated the Jews as transgressors.

**10.** Flesh condemned that one to death because of the sin, it punished these ones’ souls for eternity. It alienated that one from paradise and those from the Temple. It turned that one away from the Tree of Life, and it set those apart from the divine law. We give thanks to you, Christ, since you gave us the hope of resurrection, because the Enemy wanted to seize both of us together, dead. He put on Adam, dead flesh, and he introduced into the Jews the soul for disbelief. But the Word of God came to change both. He cancelled the issue of flesh through the passion and the issue of the soul through faith since he preached repentance for

the impious. Therefore let us now come to the end of the first thief. Let us see, in order, what happened with the second.

**11.** This one is the one upon the cross, the one who stole the two-fold matter. He stole life in death and disbelief in faith. Adam stole death from the tree. Through a tree this one stole life. The fruit of the tree supplies a double meaning here, and in the cross a double course, life and death. That one ate and died, and this one fasted and lived. That one spoke and deceived, this one kept silent and obtained.

**12.** Adam fell because of disobedience to God, the thief simply believed and was saved. Adam's defense had not the beginnings of humility, for he did not say, "Know that I have sinned." The confession of the thief conquered the Devil with humility. Because of this, the one who was living died, and the thief who was dying lived again. This one went into paradise because of his faith, while Adam because of his deception was cast out from there. There the knowledge was of good and evil, life and death, but on the cross death was for the Jews, eternal life for the believers. For Adam the fruit of knowledge hung upon the tree, and for the thief the fruit of life was on the cross, which is clearly Christ. That one ate and was corrupted, this one was only nailed and was saved from corruption.

**13.** O the Double Purpose! O the double deeds of the two thieves! Of the two, one deed had the opposite result. The first lost his reputation for evil-doing by his action. Each person may be found present beside these two trees, among these two thieves. Adam could have had the Tree of Life if he had kept the commandment. The thief had the double tree and if he wanted to proceed by transgression against God, he could have. But he suffered his own evil-doing and he proceeded straightaway to Christ.

**14.** The Cross is the Tree and the Life in it is Christ. And in Paradise it is not the nature of trees to provide life truly, but incorruptibility is brought in from elsewhere by God.

**15.** Adam paid no regard to the hidden God looking down upon him and failed. The thief was carefully brought to the house and to Christ. Adam had Eve to suggest his food, and the thief similarly had the other thief being shameful. But he conquered deceit through faith for he was not judged about the thing seen, but he instead looked at the activity of the unseen powers.

**16.** These things are faith and judgment, the deceit and insurrection of Adam. These stolen things were enjoyed by each. The one violated life, and it happened, just as it is written; the one who wasted labors upon it fell with it, just as it was foretold. Therefore, let us see the prophetic mind of the one who loved Christ, and let us marvel at the power of the Holy Scripture.

**17.** This is the second thief, the second people, from the nations, the ones who wandered for much time and are saved in the end, the ones who were buffeted on all sides by many evils but through confession were ransomed by God, the ones who go through fleshly life in wickedness but acquire life from the house of death. For it was said to this thief more specifically,<sup>8</sup> “Take up your cross and follow me.” For truly the thief followed Christ from the cross into Paradise. So, too, the ones who believe in Christ through their deaths will receive life.

**18.** This thief censured the other thief, for the things about to come signal the fate of the two peoples, since the ones belonging to Christ will censure the Jews as unbelievers. The

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<sup>8</sup> εἰδικώτερον, the rare comparative of εἰδικός. Grammatically, the adjective could apply to either the thief (τοῦτον τὸν ληστήν) or be used adverbially. Neither is a perfect fit, as εἰδικός has a more common adverbial form (εἰδικῶς) and while this thief distinguishes himself from the other in many ways, none of them seem to fit well with the known meaning of εἰδικός.

Jews, up until today, wickedly carry on in regard to Christ, but the Life,<sup>9</sup> Christ, will overturn them when he comes again. Just as the thief was condemned because of disbelief, thus the Jews will die as God-haters. The new temple supplants the old, which was corrupted by evil thoughts.

**19.** This is the most pious thief. Working, but not yet receiving the gifts from God, since faith requires not time, but dedication. This is the thief, the one who received on that day the perfection of the eleven. For the people from the nations follow Christ to the vineyard at the evening of the world. The vineyard is the paradise of God, the ones working in it are saints, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, the ones plucking in toil during the heat of the day. The thief became equal in wage to the ones who had truly worked until evening.

**20.** Let us examine the grace of Christ, in which he mixes the stuff of righteousness, since there is nothing unjust or crooked in him.

**21.** Noah believed in God, but through a divine revelation. Abraham believed, but because God spoke to him from heaven. Joseph believed, but he was convinced by dreams of power. And Jacob believed, fixing himself on good deeds done by hand. And if someone should carry Moses into the middle, he would find the faith of this thief is taught to be much more amazing in God's eyes. And if Joshua the son of Nun, the Judges and Samuel, David and all the good kings and private citizens, the faith of these is seen through the many perfected deeds they did for God.

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<sup>9</sup>Ἰουδαῖοι ἕως τοῦ νῦν τῷ Χριστῷ μοχθηρῶς προσφέρονται, καὶ αὐτοὺς ἡ ζωὴ, ὁ Χριστός, ἕως τοῦ δεῦρο ἀποστρέφεται. The middle clause of this sentence sticks out as awkward. The nominative, ἡ ζωὴ, can only be read in apposition to Christ, as he is clearly the subject of the second verb and ἡ ζωὴ does not agree in number with the first verb and thus cannot be its subject. Col 3:4 says Christ is "our life" (that is, the life of believers), but Ephraem Graecus seems to be saying something slightly different with the idea of "our life" than does the author of Colossians. Alternatively, it may be a clumsy reference to that passage.

**22.** What does this thief have? For he believed in God, not by some cry from heaven, not because of some law given at Sinai, not by the killings in Egypt, not at the parting of the sea, not because of bread given from heaven, not because of the people chastised, not because of the possession of Canaan, not because of the walls of Jericho falling, not because of the trophies won in the battles against the foreigners, not even because of the sight of the Temple in the clouds, not because his sacrifice was received in fire, not because of the various prophetic demonstrations performed for Israel, but in shame, in dishonor, upon his own cross upon which he was nailed.

**23.** He did not see him fixed in heaven, but rather nailed to the Cross. He did not see him seated upon a throne of glory but rather naked, ugly, and nailed. He did not see angels bearing spears in a host, but a prisoner cast alongside him into death. He did not see the hymns of the archangels, but the abuse of the Jews. He did not see the distinguishing power, but only one who had been scourged by Pilate. He did not witness him seated on the clouds in glory, but hailed mockingly by soldiers. He did not see him wearing a kingly crown, but crowned with thorns upon his head. He did not see the scepter of kingship, but a beggar's reed clutched in his hand. His purple robe was not shining with brightness, but cut up and besmirched with blood. There was no sound worthy of a king, but a chorus of Jews mocking. He did not see him entering into his glory, but condemned and naked. Others were beating him, others were thrashing him, some were making fun of him and some were fixing him to his own cross by his arms.

**24.** But he did not hesitate at any of these things, nor did he incline his mind to impiety, but in a shining voice he said to him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." O Amazing Thief who Stole the Kingdom of Heaven! O Holy Voice that Inherited Paradise! O

the Incomparable Faith outshining all the Demons of Deceit! What did you see, O Thief, to have been answered thus? Christ appeared as a man, and as a man condemned with you to be hung upon a tree. You saw him subjected to the same penalty, he was condemned similar to you and you saw him receive it with your own eyes. Where this declaration of choice come from? From where was this faith uncovered? You conquered the Jews and their designs, you shamed the lawyers in their arguments, you knew piety, having been taught it by nature, you condemned the impiety of those learned in the law.

**25.** Hear and understand the divine explanation<sup>10</sup> of this thief. He rebuked the other thief who was insulting Jesus. He said to him, “Why do you contend against God having come to the end of your life? Why do you fall back into impiety, going on in foolishness? Know the crime and tell your sin. Make known our deed and entreat him for forgiveness. For we are being crucified justly, having done evil our whole lives. This one is completely innocent of that which he is accused. There is not ill-will without virtue, the lawless do not seek out ones like them,” he said. They gave him over, he who was unworthy of death, and the Jews did not remember the things the law giver of God gave to them in convicting this man of these transgressions.

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<sup>10</sup> ἐπίλυσις, which according to the LSJ refers to a legal exemption or release, or a discharge of a debt, is found in 1 Pet 1:20 with the meaning “explanation/interpretation.” Ephraem Graecus seems to be using the term in this sense as he proceeds to unpack (and expand!) the proclamation of the thief, allowing him to act as his own exegete.