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Ephrem – a 'Jewish' Sage:

A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions

Elena Narinskaya

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

University of Durham

January 2007

- 5 JUN 2007

Abstract

Ephrem – a 'Jewish' Sage:
A Comparison of the
Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions

Elena Narinskaya

Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the University of Durham, January 2007

This thesis seeks to reconsider the commonly held view that some of Ephrem's writings are anti-Semitic, and that his relationship with Judaism is polemical and controversial. The outcome of the research highlights several key issues. First, it indicates that the whole emphasis of Ephrem's critical remarks about Jews and Judaism is directed towards *Christian* conduct, and not towards Jews; and second, it considers Ephrem's negative remarks towards Jews strictly within the context of his awareness of the need for a more clearly defined identity for the Syriac Church.

Furthermore, this thesis examines discernible parallels between Ephrem's commentaries on Scripture and Jewish sources. Such an exercise contributes to a general portrait of Ephrem within the context of his Semitic background. And in addition, the thesis offers an alternative reading of Ephrem's exegetical writings, suggesting that Ephrem was aiming to include Jews together with Christians among his target audience. Further analysis of Ephrem's biblical commentaries suggests that his exegetical style resembles in many respects approaches to Scripture familiar to us from the writings of Jewish scholars.

A comparison of Ephrem's writings with Jewish sources represents a legitimate exercise, considering ideas that Ephrem emphasises, exegetical techniques that he uses, and his great appreciation of 'the People'– the Jews as a chosen nation and the people of God – an appreciation which becomes apparent from Ephrem's presentation of them. The process of reading Ephrem's exegetical writings in parallel with Jewish sources strongly identifies him as an heir of Jewish exegetical tradition who is comfortably and thoroughly grounded in it. This reading identifies Ephrem on a theological, exegetical and methodological level as a Christian writer demonstrating the qualities and features of a Jewish sage.

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Ephrem – a 'Jewish' Sage:

A Comparison of the

Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions

Elena Narinskaya

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

University of Durham

January 2007

Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or any other university for a degree.

Elena Narinskaya

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Signed

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Date

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Abbreviations

Critical additions of Ephrem's writings[1]

H	**Hymns**
Azym	Hymns on Unleavened Bread in *Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 248/249, Syr. 108/109 (1964)
Crucif	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 248/249, Syr. 108/109 (1964)
Eccl	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ecclesia*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 198/199, Syr.84/85 (1960)
Fast	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ieiunio*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 246/247, Syr. 106/107 (1955)
HdF/de fide	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 154/155, Syr. 73/74 (1955)
CH	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Hereses*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 169/170, Syr. 76/77 (1957)
HNat	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, ed E. Beck *CSCO* 186/187, Syr. 82/83 (1959)
CNis	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* [I] 218/219 (1961), Syr. 92/93; [II] 240/241, Syr. 102/103 (1963)
Parad	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradisco et Contra Iulianum*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 174/175, Syr. 78/79 (1957)
Resur	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 248/249, Syr. 108/109 (1964)
Virg	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 223/224, Syr. 94/95 (1962)
Pascha	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymus, de Crusifixione, de Resurrectione)*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 248/249, Syr. 108/109 (1964)
S	**Sermons**
DomNos	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Sermo de Domino Nostro*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 270/271, Syr. 116/117 (Louvain, 1966)
SdF	*Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Sermones de Fide*, ed. Beck, E., *CSCO* 212/213, Syr. 88/89 (1961)
Serm	Des Hl. Ephraem des Syrers Sermones , ed. by E. Beck *CSCO* [1] 305/306, Syr. 130/131 (1970), [II] 311/312, Syr. 134/135 (1970), [III] 320/321, Syr. 138/139 (1972), [IV] 334/335, Syr. 148/149 (1973)

[1] More information on bibliography see in Brock, *Harp of the Spirit*, Supl to SobornostNo.4, 1983 p.86

Ephrem's Scriptural commentaries

Diat	*Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Texte Syriaque,* ed. Leloir, L., (Dublin: Chester Beatty Monographs 8, 1963) Tr. Leloir, L., *SC* 121 (1966)
Diat Arm	*Commentaire de l'Evangile Concordant, Version arménienne,* ed. Leloir, L., *CSCO* 137Arm.1; tr. (Latin), 145 Arm.2 (1954-1955)
ExodCom/ GenCom	*Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et Exodum,* ed. Tonneau, R.M., CSCO 152/153, Syr. 71/72 (1955)
In Paulum	Arm. in *Srboyn Ep'remi Matenagrut'iwnk'* III (Venice, 1836) Tr. (Latin): *S. Ephraemi Syri Commentarii om Epistolas D. Pauli...a Patribus Mechitaristis* (Venice, 1893)

Other prose works of Ephrem

LPub	*Letter to Publius,* ed. and tr. S.P.Brock, *LM* LXXXVIII (1975)
PrRef	*St Ephreim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan,* ed. Mitchel, C.W., Bevan, A.A. and Burkitt, F.C., 2 vols. (London, 1912, 1921)

Periodicals / Publications

Aram	Aram Journal (Oxford)
ATR	Anglical Theological Review
Brock*HP*	Brock, S., *Hymns on Paradise* (NY: St.Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990)
ChrOr	Christian Orient (Kottayam)
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Leuven)
ECR	Eastern Church Review (London)
EHF	Ephram-Hunayn Festival, Baghdad (Baghdad 1974)
FAS	The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
Harp	The Harp: A Review if Syriac and Oriental Studies (Kottayam: SEERI)
HTS	Hervormde Theologiese Studies
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JCanSocSyrSt	Journal of the Canadian Society of Syriac Studies
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies (Baltimore)
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies (Oxford/Manchester)
JSSS	Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement
LM	Le Museon (Louvain la Neuve)
McNam	McNamara, et al (eds.) *The Aramaic Bible. The Targums.* Vol.2 *Targum Neofiti 1, Pseudo Jonathan*, trans. McNamara, Maher, Hayward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1994)
MGWJ	Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenstums
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Fribourg/Göttingen)
OC	Oriens Christianus (Weisbaden)
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta (Rome)
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica (Rome)

OIRSI	Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, India (Kottayam)
PdO	Parole de l'Orient (Kaslik)
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
Salvesen*ECE*	Salvesen, A., *The Exodus Commentary of St Ephrem* (Kottayam, India: Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute ( ), 1995)
SEERI	Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (Kottayam, India)
StPatr	Studia Patristica (Leuven)
Suppl	Supplement
SVSP	St.Vladimir's Seminary Press
SympSyr	Symposium Syriacum

- Symposium Syriacum I: OCA 196 (1974)
- Symposium Syriacum II: OCA 205 (1978)
- Symposium Syriacum III: OCA 221 (1983)
- Symposium Syriacum IV: OCA 229 (1987)
- Symposium Syriacum V: OCA 236 (1990)
- Symposium Syriacum VI: OCA 247 (1994)
- Symposium Syriacum VII: OCA 256 (1998)

Tonneau	Tonneau, R.M., *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii* (Louvain, 1955)
VC	Vigiliae Christianae (Leiden)
MGWJ	Monatschrift fur Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judensums
ZAC	Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum
ZKT	Zeitschrift fur Katholische Theologie (Vienna)
ZKG	Zeitschrift fur Kirchengeschichte (Stuttgart)
ZThK	Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche

Rabbinical Sources

MR	Midrash Rabbah	
GenRab / MRG	Bereshit Rabbah	(Vols. 1-2)
DeutRab / MRD	Deuteronomy Rabbah	(Vol.7) incl. Lamentations
ECclRab / MRE	Ecclesiastes Rabbah	(Vol.8)
EsRab / MREs	Esther Rabbah	(Vol.10)
ExodRab / MREx	Exodus Rabbah	(Vol.3)
LevRab / MRL	Leviticus Rabbah	
NumRab / MRN	Numbers Rabbah	
SSRab / MRSS	Songs of Solomon Rabbah	
RuthRab / MRR	Ruth Rabbah	(Vol.8)

ARN A/B	Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan, a/b
b.	ben
EJ	Encyclopedia Judaica
Jub	Jubilees Charlesworth, James, H., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* Vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1985)
Mek/M	Mekhilta

MekRI	Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael Lauterbach, J.Z. (ed. and transl.) *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael.* 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933-1935, reprint 1949)
MRSbY	Mekhilta de Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai Epshtein, J,N. and Melamed, E.Z. (eds.) *Mekilta de-Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai* (Jerusalem: Hilel Press)
PRK	*Pesikta De-Rab Kahana*, trans. Braude, W., Kapstein, I., The Litman Library of Jewish Civilization (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) Braude, W.G. and Kapshtein, I.J (eds.)*Pesikta de-Rab Kahana.* Translated from Hebrew and Aramaic (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2nd 1978)
PesR	Pesikta Rabbati Braude, W.G. (ed.) *Pesikta Rabbati.* 2 vols. Trans. W.G.Braude. Yale Judaica Series XVIII (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1968)
PRE	Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer Friedlander. G., (ed.) Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great, according to the text of the manuscript belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna. Translated and annotated with introduction and indices by Gerald Friedlander (NY: Hermon Press, 1965)
R/Rab	Rabbi
Tg	Targum
TgJ	Targum Jonathan
TgPsJ	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
TgO	Targum Onkelos
TgN	Targum Neofiti
b.Talmud	Babylonian Talmud
y.Talmud	Jerusalem Talmud

Patristic Literature

ANF	Anti-Nicene Fathers Roberts, Donaldson (eds.) *Anti-Nicene Fathers* (Peubody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995)
CC	*Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* (Turnhout, Belgium, 1953)
Dem	Demonstrations Parisot, J., *Aphraatis Sopientis Persae Demonstrationes, PS* I, II, 1-489 (Paris, 1894,19007)
FOC	Fathers of the Church McVey (ed.) *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 91, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, trans. Mathews, E., Amar, J. (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1994)
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera Jaeger, Wernerus (ed.) *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1986)
NAPNF I	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

	Shaff (ed.) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series (Peubody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995)
NAPNF II	Shaff, Wace (eds.) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series (Peubody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995)
PG	Patrologia Graeca Migne, J.P. (ed.) *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris, 1857-1886)
PL	Patrologia Latina Migne, J.P. (ed.) *Patrologia Latina*, i-ccxxi (Paris, 1844-1864)
PS	Patrologia Syriaca *Patrologia Syriaca*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1893-1926)
Schanz	Schanz, M., [C.Hosius & G.Kruger], *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (München: Beck, 1966-1971)

OT	Old Testament
NT	New Testament
MT	Masoretic Text

DJD	Skehan, P.W., et al. (eds.) *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, Vol. IX, *Qumran Cave 4*, Vol. IV, *Paleo-Hebrew and Greek Biblical Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

The field of biblical exegesis has a long history of development in many cultural and religious environments. This thesis will look at a particular period within the long development of the genre of biblical exegesis: the fourth century CE in the geographical areas of Syria and Palestine.

The fourth century CE is particularly important as a formative period for Jewish identity. This century witnessed the beginning of the process of compilation, into a written form, of Jewish oral tradition and biblical exegesis. Indeed, it was a key transitional period in which the classical Midrashim, and the traditions they contained, began to crystallise into the texts we know today.

The fourth century CE can also be seen as a significant period in the development of Christian identity. It was a time when the Christian religion was gaining its strength and its independence from Judaism, spreading through many regions, as the Christian mission succeeded in converting whole nations. The importance of this period for the formation of Christian identity is accentuated by the first Ecumenical Councils, which formulated the major dogmas of the Christian faith. Consequently, during this time many Christian writers were zealous to promote Christianity and its values. Also it was a time of St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory the Theologian who were furthering the Christian understanding of the Bible; and it was a time of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great who composed their liturgical hymns and prayers, and so contributing to the establishment of the Christian tradition of worship.

Although Christianity in the fourth century was developing according to its own dynamics, it remained a heir of Judaism in many respects. Hence, academic research in this historical period provides fertile ground for the comparative analysis of interaction between Jewish and Christian writers. This thesis presents a comparative analysis of exegetical material of Jewish and Christian origin. The emphasis of the study will be on the commentaries on the Book of Exodus presented by Midrashim and Targumim, as compared with the writings of the outstanding poet and Christian theologian, St. Ephrem the Syrian.

Ephrem the Syrian spent most of his life in Nisibis, from his birth in 306 CE until the year 363, when he was forced to leave the town, because it was given to the Persians. He spent the last ten years of his life in Edessa and died on 9 June, 373CE[1]. Little historical evidence exists about his life, although there is no shortage of apocryphal writings about him. His exegetical writings, hymnology, and other prose works, however, are all preserved in Syriac manuscripts. Thus the availability of critical editions of Ephrem's work encourages further serious scholarly research into his writings.

Ephrem the Syrian is one of the very few Christian writers of the period who presents solid and consistent work in the genre of biblical exegesis. Because his commentaries on the Pentateuch draw on much of the same exegetical traditions as Jewish Midrashim and Targumim, it is possible to compare Ephrem's writings and his Jewish sources. This, importantly, enables exploration of the nature of Ephrem's relationship with Judaism through direct analysis of the original sources.

This thesis will demonstrate how the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis becomes transformed into another realm of discourse by the creative approach of a Christian theologian. The importance of Ephrem's writings lies in his treatment of the Jewish exegetical tradition: he approaches Jewish tradition with piety and respect, demonstrates great knowledge of it, and practically works from within its format. This in its turn leads to a more general question for discussion: Ephrem's relationship with Judaism as a whole.

Various aspects of Ephrem's relationship with Judaism have been examined by previous scholars. However, considerable gaps remain in our understanding of this, and mistaken ideas still circulate in modern scholarship. This thesis will address these mistaken ideas through a close examination of scholarly writings on the subject.

Part One of this thesis presents a *Bibliographical Survey*, which lays out and evaluates the general ideas and traits of modern scholarship. In light of the critical evaluation of secondary sources, Part One begins by examining the general area of Ephrem's

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[1]Brock, S., *The Harp of the Spirit* (Oxford: FAS, 1983) p.6-7.

relationship with Judaism with an overview of Ephrem's exegetical writings and by differentiating the style of his biblical commentaries from that of his other work. In connection with this, the discussion explores specific areas of Ephrem's general environment by examining the historical, religious, and literary contexts of Syria in the fourth century CE.

The *Survey* aims to introduce the area of study and identify misunderstandings in some scholarly presentations of Ephrem's writings and his relationship with Judaism. In specifying the issues and major concerns of the chapters that follow, the *Bibliographical Survey* introduces three strategic themes for the whole thesis:

- Ephrem's explorations of the Jewish Scriptures
- Ephrem's presentation of Jewish concepts and ideas
- Ephrem's approach to Israel as a chosen nation.

Bibliographical Survey is divided into two chapters. Chapter One discusses Ephrem's critical remarks about Jews and Judaism, and analyses definitions of these remarks presented by contemporary scholars. Chapter Two sets the tone for further study in considering Ephrem's writings in direct relation to Judaism. In presenting a general description of the historical and religious situation in Ephrem's lifetime, particular attention is given to the relationship between Jews and Christians. Chapter One analyses the necessary background of the conflict situation in the Church for identifying the target audiences of some of Ephrem's writings. The chapter illustrates the complexity of the situation in the Christian community with decentralising elements that challenged the Church's interpretation of Christian revelation, and Judaising Christians disturbing the Church authorities with their attraction to Judaism.

The discussion of Ephrem's theological standpoint is set out to focus upon key issues of Ephrem's theological argument. In doing so, the study presents critical analysis of attribution of a '*replacement theology*' to Ephrem. Further analysis of Ephrem's critical remarks about Jews from a theological perspective will shed light on the nature of Ephrem's relationship with Judaism.

A close examination of the literary genres and exegetical techniques employed by Ephrem in his writings highlights Ephrem's methods, explores the relationship among the literary genres, exegetical techniques and general thrust of his argument. This is particularly helpful in determining to what extent Ephrem's critical remarks about Jews are consistent with his writings as a whole. The analysis of the secondary sources in the *Survey* aims to demonstrate that Ephrem's distinctive critical remarks must be apprehended within the context of his anti-Arian and inner-Christian polemic.

Chapter Two of the *Survey* demonstrates Ephrem's connection with Judaism, which is the primary concern of the thesis. Significantly, this study, based on what may be known about Ephrem's life in Syria at the time, shows that Ephrem was influenced by Jewish tradition. The chapter demonstrates the origins of Ephrem's closeness to Judaism from a historical standpoint by evaluating the Semitic character of the Syriac Church. In addition, by analysing Ephrem's theological bearings within the framework of the Jewish traditions of Halakha and Haggada, the study takes into account the religious dimension. Furthermore, a literary analysis of Ephrem's use of symbols and types is presented to identify him as a Semitic writer, as well as his use of the Jewish exegetical tradition.

The study also discusses Ephrem's identity as an exegete and a theologian within the Semitic tradition. The *Survey* aims to show that Ephrem's familiarity with Judaism is thoroughly grounded in the close interplay of the Jewish and Christian communities at the time. This emphasises Ephrem's predisposition to, rather than any resentment of, his Jewish heritage, especially in the area of biblical exegesis. The *Bibliographical Survey* makes it clear which areas require further discussion in the thesis to support this argument. These areas include analysing Ephrem's use of Jewish concepts and ideas in his exegetical writings, as well as his presentation of Israel.

As noted above, all of the issues considered in Part One are used as a basis for further discussion in Part Two, which is organised around the following areas of research:

1. A comparative analysis of Ephrem's writings and the Jewish sources:
    a. in how they address difficulties in the text of Scripture
    b. in how they present biblical figures
2. A demonstration of Ephrem's presentation of Israel as the chosen nation in his exegetical commentaries on the book of Exodus.

The *Introduction* to Part Two makes clear from whence the final conclusions derive, and how they have been supported by the thesis.

Chapter Three throws further light on the influence of Jewish tradition in Ephrem's exegetical writings by comparing them with the work of Theodoret, another Christian writer of similar background. The analysis focuses on six examples from the exegetical writings of the respective authors as they relate to particular themes in Exodus:

1. Explanations of words in Exodus 1:7,12
2. The story of the midwives
3. The meaning of the Passover celebration
4. The legislative norms of the OT, e.g. the altar of Earth
5. The idea of Israel as a chosen nation
6. The figure of Moses in the battle with Amalek.

The Theodoret-Ephrem comparison aims to draw out the following points:

- both authors' first-hand knowledge of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis
- the different approaches of Ephrem and Theodoret to the Jewish tradition
- the personal choices of each author, either in following the ideas and notions of the Jewish tradition of exegesis, or in avoiding them
- the level of engagement of the respective authors with Jewish argument.

This comparison, performed for the first time, leads to the argument affiliating Ephrem's exegetical style with Jewish exegetical tradition. Thus the comparison with Theodoret is offered to highlight the portrayal of Ephrem as an heir of a Semitic school of exegesis in his approach to the biblical text. Based on the textual examples,

Ephrem's involvement with the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis is described in one of the following ways: dialoguing with it, engaging with it, relying on it, using it.

Theodoret's textual examples are used as a contrast showing him working separately from the Jewish heritage, in spite of the fact that he:

- acknowledges the existence of Jewish tradition
- shows familiarity with the works of some Jewish authors
- uses Jewish material as a background illustration for his argument.

The Theodoret-Ephrem comparison highlights two major issues. Firstly, it emphasises Ephrem's special relationship with the Jewish tradition of exegesis. Secondly, it contributes to the picture characterising Ephrem as a unique writer who deeply involves himself with Jewish tradition, much more so than his contemporary Christian exegete.

The comparison between the exegetical writings of Ephrem and Theodoret prepares the way for the following chapter. Chapter Four presents a detailed examination of the exegetical writings of Ephrem and Jewish sources. The study deals with the textual difficulties of two verses of Exodus, 2:25 and 1:5. The analysis of the exegetical treatments of Exod.2:25 compares how Ephrem and the ancient Jewish sources construe the ambiguity of the scriptural text. The analysis of the exegetical treatments of Exod.1:5 demonstrates that Ephrem relies on the Jewish tradition of exegesis to find a solution to the problem of inconsistency in the biblical text.

Chapter Four illustrates Ephrem's close connection to Jewish biblical exegesis. Examples of this are offered to underline when Ephrem uses notions and ideas similar to those of the rabbis in relation to the biblical verses. Other illustrations present Ephrem approaching the textual problem in a similar way to Jewish writers, or even accepting the methods of Jewish traditional sources for solving textual problems. These above mentioned examples are offered to show that Ephrem acknowledges the authority of the Jewish tradition.

Two arguments are concerned with the exegetical writings on Exod.2:25. The first emphasises the succession and coherent development of the Jewish tradition of

biblical exegesis of the verse, tracing its origins from the Greek Jewish circles of the LXX, leading to Aramaic Targumim, and from there to classical Hebrew Midrashim. This is made possible through the similar exegetical transformation of the verb יעד of the MT as ידע by the LXX, Targumim and consequently Midrashim.

After presenting Jewish material over the centuries with regard to Exod.2:25, the chapter provides a comparison of it to Ephrem's approach. This contributes to the chapter's second argument that Ephrem was aware of the Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation, which had a significant influence on his writings. Particular attention is drawn to the instances in which Ephrem replicates the Jewish tradition of interpretation of Exod.2:25 when he understands it within the framework of revelation, repentance and servitude.

The discussion of Exodus 1:5 provides further illustration of similarities in approach to the biblical text both by Ephrem and Jewish sources. This further leads to the comparison of the traditions of biblical chronology and its development by Jewish and Christian writers. The discussion of Demetrius the Chronographer concerning the tradition of chronology traces the origins of the common tradition of biblical exegesis as far as the third century BCE, showing its consistency and further development throughout the centuries.

The study proposes at least three ways in tracing the influence of the Jewish tradition on Ephrem:

1. Through the Christian tradition tracing its origins to Demetrius
2. Through the Peshitta and its Jewish origins[2]
3. Directly by the oral tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis.

Whether Ephrem was influenced by a combination either of various sources, or of two out of these three ways, is the question beyond the scope of this study. Rather the chapter emphasises that Ephrem's interpretation of Exod.1:5 was firmly rooted in Jewish biblical exegesis.

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[2]See Weitzman, M. P., *The Syriac Version of the OT. Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999) p.I.

The comparison of Ephrem's writings with the Jewish sources, presented in Chapter Four, aims to shows Ephrem's agreement with Jewish exegetical tradition in the use of the number 'seventy' in Exod.1:5. The comparison also highlights common features in Ephrem's writings and Targumim and Midrashim, such as typological and symbolic interpretations of the biblical verse, and dependency on the number offered by Exod.1:5. The study demonstrates that Ephrem, by adopting and not arguing against the Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation of the numbers in Exod.1:5, treats this tradition as an authority.

After examining how Ephrem and Jewish sources deal with textual difficulties, Chapter Five focuses on the presentation of biblical figures, which is another major aspect of Ephrem's exegetical armoury. The chapter provides examples of Jewish and Christian writings describing Miriam, the sister of Moses; Hur, the husband of Miriam and the helper of Moses; and Moses himself. Significantly, the chapter shows Ephrem's considerable knowledge of Jewish traditions.

Chapter Five further adds to the comparison of Ephrem's writings with those of Jewish origin, i.e. Targumim and Midrashim, discovering the place of Ephrem's writings within the scope of traditional Jewish and Christian presentations of biblical figures. The chapter highlights the instances when Ephrem steps away from Scripture into the area of Midrashic presentations of biblical figures, and singles out instances where Ephrem's writings resemble Jewish exegetic material.

An analysis of Ephrem's approach to the figure of Miriam within the context of Jewish and Christian writings is central to the argument of the chapter. Such analysis illustrates Ephrem's closeness to rabbinical sources. The depiction of the figure of Hur in Ephrem's writings shows that Ephrem derives his additional exegetical material from Jewish sources, and even alludes to his possible Midrashic sources by the use of certain rabbinic expressions. The discussion of Chapter Five makes it clear that Ephrem replicates Jewish exegetes by going beyond the scriptural narrative into Jewish exegetical tradition.

The chapter emphasises how Ephrem's presentation of the figure of Moses fits into the framework of the popular rabbinical concept of the Merits of the Fathers. This makes it possible to compare Ephrem's presentation with Targumim and Midrashim further exploring into Ephrem's approach to rabbinical sources, and singling out ideas and notions in Ephrem's writings that could be seen as a follow-up to the Jewish exegetical tradition. Ephrem's symbolic presentation of the attributes of Moses is considered a feature connecting his exegetical writings with the Jewish tradition, thus further illustrating Ephrem's reliance on that tradition.

As sub-illustrations of the above argument, there is a presentation of the God-Israel and Moses-Jethro relationships. These presentations further illustrate Ephrem's closeness to the targumic tradition and introduce the subsequent chapter, which deals directly with Ephrem's perception of Israel.

Chapter Five also illustrates Ephrem's relationship with the Jewish and Christian scriptures by demonstrating the ways in which Ephrem presents the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament[3]. The chapter shows how Ephrem introduces the figure of Jesus in both Testaments, and how he attempts to offer a dialogue between the Jewish and Christian legacies.

The chapter's conclusion analyses and summarises the prominent similarities in Ephrem's writings with the Jewish sources. These support the thesis' primary argument that Ephrem must be understood in relation to Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis. Specifically, the study highlights that Ephrem replicates Jewish sources in his presentation of the figure of Miriam. Also it illustrates how Ephrem comfortably adopts and works within the framework of the Jewish concept in presenting the figure of Moses, and uses rabbinical expressions in presenting the figure of Hur.

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[3] Abbreviated further in the thesis as OT and NT

As a natural progression, Chapter Six moves from Ephrem's presentation of individual OT characters to his presentation of the nation as a whole. The chapter considers Ephrem's perception of Israel as a nation, and his presentation of the nature of Israel's relationship with God.

The chapter highlights the importance of the concept of Israel as the chosen people and emphasises the significance of the general theme of Israel in Ephrem's writings. Consequently, the material in this chapter reinforces the claim for Ephrem's close connection to Judaism and its legacy. It also introduces several ideas in relation to the ability of Israel to see God, leading to a discussion of Ephrem's presentation of the internal and external nature of human faculties, i.e. inner and outer seeing, inner and outer hearing, the inner and outer mind, and so on.

Particular attention in the chapter is given to the notions of the mirror and reflection. These are analysed in relation to Ephrem's symbolic and typological exegesis. A number of examples demonstrate Ephrem's manner of indirect narration of the story of Israel through its reflection in the stories of the biblical characters of Moses, Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The chapter also offers a selection of Ephrem's statements concerning the biblical story of Israel, which make it possible to stress Ephrem's presentation of Israel as the chosen nation. This returns the research to the first chapter's argument concerning Ephrem's relationship with Judaism and completes it.

The results of Chapter Six support the argument that Ephrem thought the people of Israel had a special role and unique place among the people of God. This serves as a counter-argument to the suggestions of some scholars who ascribe anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic tendencies to Ephrem[4].

[4] A detailed analysis of the arguments of these scholars is presented in Chapter One.

The conclusion of this thesis emphasises the following aspects of the general argument:

- the close connections between Ephrem and the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis, and even his dependency on it
- the emergence of Ephrem as an heir to the Jewish tradition, embracing it in his exegetical writings and replicating rabbinical ideas and methods
- the setting-up of fresh signposts for further research in the field.

The novel contribution of this thesis, therefore, can be seen in the following areas:

1) This thesis offers a different way of viewing Ephrem's critical remarks, i.e. his supposed 'anti-Judaism', considering them not as the distinct expression of his theological and religious position in relation to Jews and Judaism, but rather as tools and means for addressing an internal problem, with which the Christian Church of his time was struggling.

2) This thesis offers new insights into Ephrem's use of the Jewish tradition, which other scholars have not appreciated, for example:

- Jewish concepts and ideas that he works with, e.g. Merits of the Fathers, God's Justice and Mercy
- Rabbinical methods that he adopts in his writings: *kal va homer*, *mishak milim*, techniques of polarization, analogy and so on that are similar to rabbinical usage
- Other features that he adopts, whose origins can be traced to early Jewish sources: the way Ephrem deals with difficulties in the text by appreciating the significance of the numbers in Exod.1:5; and drawing a conclusion, in relation to Exod.2:25, similar to that of the rabbinical exegetes.

This thesis suggests that Ephrem's exegetical writings should be treated as a separate domain within his legacy: a domain which has its own agenda, methods, and ideas, and which fits the definitions of the genre of Jewish biblical exegesis.

This thesis considers the description and appearance of Israel in Ephrem's writings as a highly respectful presentation of God's chosen nation, a nation which has had a great impact on his outlook as an author. Ephrem rejoices with Israel in her heights, and personally relates to the tragedy of her faults.

PART ONE: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

Methodology

The secondary material may be divided into three categories:

1. Ephrem and anti-Judaism
2. Ephrem and Judaism
3. Ephrem's exegesis.

The above themes were chosen as being the most relevant to the area of research presented in this thesis. They are structured as follows:

a. Social-historical context
b. Religious context
c. Exegetical context.

There are three levels on which one can analyse Ephrem's so-called anti-Jewish rhetoric:

1. The social-historical level, where there is strong polarisation between Christians and Jews because of:

- self-definition of Christianity as a religious tradition
- self-affirmation of Christians in a Jewish-Christian environment
- the competition between Jews and Christians in mutual proselytism
- reaction to anti-Christian documents written within Judaism.

2. The religious / theological level, where

- anti-Judaism is irrelevant to Ephrem's theology
- the questions of concern in Ephrem's theology are: Christology, God's on-going revelation and God's presence in this world, God's choice etc[5].

[5]See Chapter II.2.

Ephrem allows criticism of Judaism in his writings. One can read this as Ephrem's concern for Judaism, not as an anti-Jewish theological disposition. Although Ephrem in his writings allows for the possibility of a change in the nature of the relationship between God and 'the people' due to the fact of their disbelief in Christ, he never doubts their initial status as God's chosen nation. Ephrem builds up a theology of Christians/Gentiles as 'the peoples' of God, the chosen nations in a position analogous to that of the Jews as 'the people'. This Ephrem's 'theology of Gentiles' should not be taken as an expression of his replacement theology or anti-Judaism, but an expansion of the OT revelation into the NT reality.

Ephrem's knowledge of Judaism covers both of the major traditional rabbinic concerns, i.e. Haggada through his connection with Midrash and Targum, and Halakha through his appreciation for and attention to the Law and the legislative norms in his writings. Ephrem was working in close connection with Judaism and its exegetical tradition. Ephrem's appreciation and skilful application of Jewish exegesis allowed him to introduce the Incarnation into the very core of Jewish concepts and notions, such as the Merits of the Fathers, God's Grace and Mercy and others.

3. The exegetical level:

- Ephrem's writings should not be formulated as anti-Jewish, because Ephrem himself is a Semitic author. The expression of his thought, his style of writing, his exegetical tools, and the manner in which he addresses his argument demonstrate the strong influence of Judaism.
- Ephrem's exegetical techniques: polarisation, analogy, and antithesis are used by the author functionally, in order to emphasise his argument, and not to create or express an anti-Jewish stance.

Chapter I: Ephrem and Anti-Judaism

Introduction

In her overview of the scholarship[6] covering the theme of anti-Judaism in Ephrem's hymns, Shepardson highlights some authors who describe Ephrem as being anti-Jewish. These include Morris, Beck, Kazan, Murray, Benin, Hayman[7]. Shepardson classifies them as 'early scholars' who base their argument on their view that Ephrem was referring to local Jewish practices, and complaining about them in his *Paschal Hymns*[8]. A different approach to the writings of the above-mentioned scholars may result in evaluating them as pointing out Ephrem's closeness to Judaism and setting the basis for further studies in this area. Therefore, more work needs to be done in describing the nature of Ephrem's connection with Judaism.

Some scholars, presented in this chapter, offer their arguments on Ephrem's anti-Judaism by collecting and compiling his anti-Jewish rhetoric and negative references to Judaism. That gives them sufficient evidence to classify Ephrem as an anti-Jewish writer. This way of dealing with the subject does not fairly represent Ephrem's theological position, nor does it give a fair account of the context in which he was writing. This approach is one-sided, because it provides only a partial presentation of Ephrem's writings. Shepardson admits that there is a lack of research in this area:

> Nonetheless, the details of the role of Ephrem's anti-Jewish rhetoric in a context of Nicene/Arian conflict have not yet been worked out.[9]

She identifies the impossibility of a literal approach to the so-called anti-Jewish rhetoric of Ephrem[10]. In support of that view one must emphasise that Ephrem's anti-

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[6]Shepardson, C. C., "Exchanging Reed for Reed: Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith", *Hugoye* 5:1 (2002) footnote 2 in http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol15No1/HV5N1Shepardson.htm 04/08/2005.

[7]Morris, J. B., *Select Works of St Ephrem the Syrian. Library of the Fathers* (Oxford: University Press, 1847) p.396n; Beck, E., *Ephraems Reden uber den Glauben* (Rome: Herder, 1953) p.118-119; Kazan, Stanley, "Isaac of Antioch's Homily against the Jews", *OrChr* 46 (1962) p.87-98; 47 (1963) p.89-97; 49 (1965) p.57-78; Murray, R., *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975); Benin, S. D., "Commandments, Covenants and the Jews in Aphrahat, Ephrem and Jacob of Sarug," in Blumental, D. R. (ed.), *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) p.135-156; Hayman, A. P., "The Image of the Jew in the Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemical Literature", in Neusner, J., Frerichs, E. S. (eds.) *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico. CA: Scholars Press, 1985) p.423-441.

[8]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed...", footnote 2.

[9]Ibid.

Jewish language cannot be read and understood literally. Some of the reasons for this will be discussed below.

At this point, it is important to highlight that the examples of anti-Jewish rhetoric in Ephrem are mainly present in his hymnology, which is directed predominantly towards Christian audiences. Anti-Jewish remarks in some of Ephrem's hymns do not occupy a position of major importance if taken within the general context of Ephrem's writings. Ephrem wrote exegetical commentaries on the books of the Torah which present a completely different position on the part of the author in relation to Jews and Judaism in general. This allows one to assume the possibility of Ephrem targeting Jewish audiences in his exegetical writings.

Some scholars' work, starting from the presentation above, has resulted in a misunderstanding of Ephrem's writings. This chapter is offering a balanced definition of Ephrem's writings, considering depiction of Ephrem as anti-Judaic writer (a.) as a misrepresentation of his theological position, and (b.) a misinterpretation of his general argument, which carries his polemics against contemporary Christians.

[10]Shepardson, C., "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Intra-Christian Conflict in the Sermons of Ephrem the Syrus", *StPatr* 35 (2001) p.503-504.

Opening Illustration

The first illustration of the contemporary scholarship presents the most colourful way in which Ephrem's writings were misunderstood. Kuhlmann depicts Ephrem:

- within the tradition of anti-Jewish polemic[11]
- as an author detesting Jews, and shifting on to them '*the blame for accusing and condemning Jesus*'[12].

Kuhlmann introduces an interesting and innovative approach to Ephrem's writings by:

- approaching Ephrem critically from the outset by emphasising the 'dark side' of the 'Luminous Eye'[13]
- contextualising Ephrem within the relatively modern concept and movement of anti-Semitism.

In Kuhlmann's words, '*it is the voice of Ephrem which dominates the earlier Syriac tradition of anti-Jewish polemic*'[14]. Kuhlmann's argument, however, is ambiguous, because it confuses two issues from the start:

1. Ephrem's anti-Judaism, which the author exaggerates
2. Further use in the Church, and in secular anti-Semitic movements, of Ephrem's writings.

For instance Kuhlmann writes:

> The gratuitousness of Ephrem's anti-Judaism is demonstrated by the way in which he simply has to throw in anti-Jewish comments in completely inappropriate contexts. In the *Hymns on the Faith,* no.82, from the group of the *Hymns on the Pearl*, describing the pearl in stanza 2 he throws in the following: "Your symbol rebukes the Jewish girls when they wear you."
>
> Ephrem's incessant need to bring in anti-Jewish themes reveals how deep seated was his detestation of the Jews. There can be no positives in Ephrem's theology without the inevitable negatives.[15]

There is, however, the possibility of finding another meaning for the quotation from the hymn, that being accomplished in this study[16]. The text of Ephrem's *Hymn* allows

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[11]Kuhlmann, K. H., "The Harp out of Tune: The anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism of St. Ephrem", *The Harp* 27 (2004) p.179.
[12]Ibid. p.180, see also Hayman, "The image of the Jew…".
[13]Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune…", p.181.
[14]Ibid. p.179.
[15]Ibid. p.180.
[16]See Chapter V.1.4.1.

the following alternative interpretation. One must be fair to the original intention of Ephrem's arguments. The context of the *Hymn* is nature testifying to God's greatness and witnessing divine presence in this world. Hence, the pearls as the symbols of Christ threaded into the jewellery on the necks of the Jewish girls testify to them about Christ. There is no gratuitousness in Ephrem's argument, and there is no anti-Jewish statement either. Therefore, one cannot accept Kuhlmann's argument on the basis that his illustration does not support his point.

On the basis of another hymn, Kuhlmann states the following:

> Ephrem's personal bitter animosity towards the Jews is nowhere revealed more clearly then in the 67th Nisibene Hymn. Here his anti-Jewish rhetoric sinks almost as low as anything produced by modern anti-Semites when he openly admits how much he hates the Jews.[17]

This is by far the strongest statement from any of the authors who have written about Ephrem's anti-Jewish rhetoric. Kuhlmann, however, does not present a balanced argument. He makes several mistakes:

1. Kuhlmann places Ephrem in the field of anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic polemic, which was never an agenda for Ephrem. A number of scholars emphasise that Ephrem's hymns were created within the liturgical setting, and Ephrem's audience were mostly Christians[18].
2. Kuhlmann collects his evidence and draws his conclusions by compiling Ephrem`s anti-Jewish expressions taken out of context, be it literal, historical, or religious. Kuhlmann's references are predominantly from Ephrem's hymnology[19], which limits the author's presentation of the overall scope of Ephrem's writings.
3. There is no reference to Ephrem's exegesis, which contains highly laudatory and appreciative remarks about Jews[20].
4. Kuhlmann makes no effort to reflect on Ephrem's connection to Judaism as such.

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[17]Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune...", p.180.

[18]Botha, P. J., "Christology and Apology in Ephrem the Syrian", *HTS* 45 (1989) p.20, see also Bardenhewer, O., *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur.* 4. Band (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962) p.342,344; Gribomont, J., "La tradition liturgique des hymnes pascales de st. Ephrem", *PdO* 4 (1973) p.191-246; Griffith, S. H. *Faith Adoring the Mystery* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997) p.10; Palmer, A., "'A Lyre without a Voice,' the Poetics and the Politics of Ephrem the Syrian", *ARAM* 5 (1993) p.371-399.

[19]*CNis*67, *HdF*, *Resur*1.

[20]See Chapter I.2 for more secondary authors' opinions and Chapter VI for positive examples of Ephrem's attitude to Jews and Israel.

Above Kuhlmann's example is illustrative here, because not many of the authors ascribing anti-Judaism to Ephrem choose to notice the fact that Ephrem borrowed much from the Jewish tradition.

These mistakes show that Kuhlmann (and others offering a similar argument) present definitions that are speculative, and offer arguments that do not hold up to scrutiny. A glaring example is the writings of Deschner which define Ephrem as '*one of the wildest enemies of Jews not only in his time*'[21], and present an apocryphal narrative of Ephrem being raised as an anti-Semite from his childhood. Emphasising a consistency in Ephrem's hatred of Jews, and extrapolating this attitude into Ephrem's theology and even into the definition of the Church, Deschner states:

> The saint is confronting the radiant purity of the Church with the madness and the stink and with the killing of the Jewish people. For St. Ephrem the Church is free from the stink of the stinking Jews who want to hand over their earlier sickness to the healthy.[22]

Deschner's approach to Ephrem's writings is somewhat misleading, as suggested even by Kuhlmann. Kuhlmann admits that Ephrem is taken completely out of context by Deschner[23]. However, similar thoughts are expressed by many other scholars writing about anti-Judaism in Ephrem. Not all of them are so extreme in presenting their argument, but quite a few, for example, state that Ephrem is anti-Jewish in his theology. The following parts of this chapter will criticise these positions.

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[21]Deschner, Karlheinz, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums,* Bd.1 (Reinbek:Rowohlt,1986) p.131-132, see also Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune…", p.181.
[22]Deschner, Karlheinz, K*riminalgeschichte...* p.131-132.
[23]Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune…", p.182.

I.1 Historical Context of Syria in the Fourth Century CE

Surprisingly, a number of scholars, presented in this chapter, consider Ephrem's anti-Jewish sentiment as integral to his writings. Although it is not the primary concern of the thesis to explore that field of study, it seems important to clarify these misunderstandings. Many scholars who depict Ephrem as anti-Jewish do not take into account the complexity of the historical and religious situation in Syria at the time. This section offers a number of illustrations from the secondary sources to uncover the motivation that lies behind Ephrem's so-called anti-Jewish rhetoric. A number of essential questions will have to be asked:

1. What is the historical context of Ephrem's writings?
2. What is his target audience?
3. Is Ephrem consistent in using anti-Jewish rhetoric in his writings?

After answering these questions one is in a better position to determine whether Ephrem was an anti-Jewish writer.

The following is a schematic presentation of the historical and religious background in Syria in Ephrem's time:

Conflict in the Church

(Christian attraction to Judaism)

Dissenters/	**'Heretics'**	**Jews**
Judaising-	Arians	Powerful community in Nisibis and Edessa
Christians	Manicheans	Anti-Christian writings
	Eunomians	Competition with Christians in proselytising

Christian identity

Insecure

Vulnerable

Confused

At the time of Ephrem, the question of self-affirmation and the search for Christian identity seems especially important. The influence of the Jewish community had an

enormous impact on the Syriac Christians. Shepardson, echoing the opinions of other scholars, argues that '*early Syriac Christianity was particularly Jewish in character, producing a long-lived hybrid 'Jewish-Christianity''*[24]. Thus when Christianity wanted to split with Judaism completely, the move implied the following:

- it was developed sufficiently to search for its own identity
- the differences between the two religions demanded the separation
- there was a conflict or a problem between the two religions that did not allow them to develop alongside each other successfully (e.g. Judaising Christians).

Thus the newly established Christian community found its way of independence from Judaism by arguing the inferiority of Judaism.

Scholars argue that there were large Jewish communities in Nisibis and Edessa in the time of Ephrem, possibly much stronger than the Christian ones[25]. Palmer argues that Ephrem's anti-Judaism was a reaction to the powerful position of Jews in Mesopotamia in the fourth century CE, which was intimidating to the vulnerable Christian community[26]. Shepardson, in agreement with Palmer, characterises Ephrem's anti-Jewish remarks as a reflection of the insecure identity of Christians at the time[27].

Jewish converts form another aspect of contemporary life in Syria at the time. McVey presents Gavin's argument in calling them the main source of Persian Christianity.

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[24]Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric...", p.502.

[25]Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune...", p.182; Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric...", p.502, see also Neusner, J., *A History of Jews in Babylonia,* Vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1965-70) p.121ff. See also Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.97 stating that Nisibis '*had a large and important Jewish community and was the main Jewish centre in Northern Mesopotamia'*, and on p.89:

> Edessa must have had an important Jewish community and several synagogues, one of them in the centre of the city near the intersection of the two principal streets. This synagogue was converted into a church dedicated to St. Stephen at the beginning of the fifth century when Rabbula was bishop of Edessa.

See also Segal, J. B., *The Jews of North Mesopotamia before the Rise of Islam* (Jerusalem: Sepher Segal, 1965) p.38ff, idem, *Edessa. The Blessed City,* p.41ff, see also Blum, G.G., "Rabbula von Edessa. Der Christ, der Bischof, der Theologe", *CSCO*, Subs. 34 (Louvain, 1969) p.105ff.

[26]Palmer, A. N., 'The Merchant of Nisibis...' in Den Boeft, J., Hilhorst, A. (eds.) *Early Christian Poetry. A collection of essays* (E.J.Brill: Leiden/NY/Koln, 1993) p.176-177, see also Shreckenberg, H., *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld: 1.-11 Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt etc.: P.Lang, 1990) p.286-92. Drijvers adds that '*the Jews in Edessa made their Christian fellow-citizens feel uncertain and often unsafe, whereas they themselves were self-confident and adherents of an old and traditional religion';* see Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.102.

[27]Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric...", p.506. Drijvers states that '*the Christian character of the Empire in the fourth century was not self-evident';* see Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.99.

Jewish converts are seen by some scholars as initiating Christian polemic against Jews[28]. Another factor that could have triggered Ephrem's anti-Judaic rhetoric is offensive statements towards Christians that, some suggest, existed in Jewish documents addressing Christianity. Brock allows the possibility that Ephrem knew the *Toledot Yeshu*, the Jewish document narrating that Jesus was born from a prostitute and a Roman soldier[29]. McVey agrees that Ephrem was defending Christianity against certain beliefs of contemporary Jews and their anti-Christian writings[30], which could have added to the feeling of threat within the Christian community, provoking a strong reaction from Christian writers. Summarising all the mentioned above, two factors may have provoked anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians in Ephrem's time:

- Internal reason: Reaction to the feeling of insecurity within Christian communities.
- External reason: Reaction to some Jewish documents with anti-Christian sentiments.

Cerbelaud acknowledges the fact that Christian communities in the time of Ephrem felt an attraction to Judaism. Some even attended synagogues to the great disappointment of Ephrem[31]. Cerbelaud writes:

> This situation did not only concern Nisibis and Edessa, but also the entire zone of Syria-Antioch, where it seemed to be a great preoccupation of the ministers to dissuade Christians from taking part in Jewish liturgy. Already in the Apostolic Constitutions[32] those assimilated to Jewish assembles were equated with the heretics and pagans[33].

It seems that the Church was disturbed by this and its ministers feared confusion about Christian self-identity. Botha states that some of Ephrem's formulations reflect contemporary conflict in the Church with dissenters and Jews[34]. McVey names

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[28]McVey, K. E., "The Anti-Judaic polemic of Ephrem Syrus' Hymns on the Nativity", in H. W. Attridge, J. J. Collins, T. H. Tobin (eds.) *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies in the Hebrew Bible...presented to J.Strugnell* (NY: Lanham, 1990) p.230-231, see also Gavin, F., "Aphrahates and the Jews", *JSOR* 7 (1923) p.95-166, esp.125-126; Snaith, J. G., "Aphrahat and the Jews", in Emerton and Reif (eds.) *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in honour of E.I.J. Rosenthal* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982) p. 237, 250; Hayman, "The image of the Jew...", p.423-441.
[29]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992) p.181.
[30]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic...", p.237.
[31]Cerbelaud, D., 'L'Antijudaïsme dans les Hymnes de Pascha d'Ephrem le Syrien', *PdO* 20 (1995) p.205.
[32]C.A. II, 62,3.
[33]Cerbelaud, 'Antijudaïsme...', p.206.
[34]Botha, P. J., 'Christology and Apology in Ephrem the Syrian', *HTS* 45 (1989) p.20.

scholars (Parisot and Kazan) who argue that there was Jewish proselytism in the fourth century that led to Christian anti-Judaism[35]. Neusner also suggests competition between Jews and Christians in the fourth century over proselytism[36]. Beck finds in Ephrem's writings[37] evidence of Judaising movements among the Christians of fourth-century Syria[38]. Darling also mentions that Ephrem expressed the problem of Judaising Christians in his hymns:

> There was a problem of competition – Ephrem himself attests that some of the "brothers" of his church were joining in the life and practice of the synagogue, particularly during Passover, and attempted to provide, as an antidote, reasons for not doing so.[39]

Ephrem's reinterpretation of the significance of the Passover emphasising Christian typology could, therefore, be considered as a reaction to a contemporary problem in the Church[40].

Drijvers points out that the simple existence of Jews and their synagogue, where Christians even attended the feasts and went to pray, was a real threat to Edessa's nascent orthodoxy, because it could exist neither without Jews nor together with the Jews[41]. Therefore Ephrem, as a church leader and a theologian, in his writings vocalises the problem within Christianity and not with Judaism. Drijvers draws the parallel between the Jewish-Christian situation in Syria in Ephrem's time and that in Antioch in the time of John Chrysostom, who attacked Jewish practice in the Church with all his rhetorical skills[42]. Drijvers writes that when Ephrem attacks Arians, he does it within the context of Jewish practices, common among Christians, i.e. circumcision, Shabbat observance and great feasts[43]. He also emphasises that Ephrem's writings are not a public assault on Judaism as such, but are intended in the

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[35]Parisot, I., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae: Demonstrationes* (*PS* 1 and 2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894 and 1907) esp. 1.xxv-xxviii; Kazan, S., 'Isaac of Antioch homilies against the Jews', *OrChr* 46 (1962), 87-98; 47 (1963), 89-97; 49 (1965), 57-78, see also McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic...", p.231.
[36]Neusner, J., *Aphrahates and Judaism,* SPB 19 (Leiden: Brill,1971) p.2.
[37]*SdF, Azym.*
[38]Beck, E., *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben* (Rome: Herder, 1953) p.73, 118-20, *see also* McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic...", p.232. Drijvers points that Jewish tradition '*served as a real magnet to many Christians and gave rise to very ambivalent feelings, especially among the church leaders and theologians who warned their co-religionists against the Jewish danger with all the exuberance of traditional rhetoric';* see Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.102.
[39]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations...",* p.113.
[40]Further on Christological symbolism of the Passover in Ephrem see Chapter III, Illustration V.
[41]Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.101-102.
[42]Ibid.p.98, see also Wilken, R.L., *John Chrysostom and the Jews. Rhetoric and Reality in the late 4th Century* (London: Berkeley,1983); Meeks, W. A., Wilken, R. L., *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978) p.25-36.
[43]*HdF* 3, see also Drijvers, H. J. W., 'Jews and Christians at Edessa', *JJS* 36 (1985) p.98.

first instance for internal Christian use, stating that '*Ephrem is obsessed by deviating views and practice within the church, and not by hatred for the Jews*', and concluding that '*Polemic with the Jews was a set element of Christian self-definition*'[44].

Darling points out that '*Ephrem worried about imperial building-programs in Jerusalem, with the implication that the empire was not solidly Christian*'[45]. Hence, Ephrem's statements arose from political and social concerns. Darling characterises in the following manner Ephrem's goals, which he wanted to achieve with anti-Jewish statements:

- Replacement theology
- Alienate Christians from Jews
- Unite the Church in the 'Orthodox' belief around its bishop and in the Christian empire[46].

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[44]Drijvers, H. J. W., 'Jews and Christians at Edessa', *JJS* 36 (1985) p.98; see also Ruggini, L. C., "Pagani, Ebrei e Cristiani: Odio sociologico e odio teologico nel mondoantico", *Gli Ebrei nell'Alto Medioevo,* Settimane XXVI (Spoleto, 1980) p.15-101.
[45]Darling, 'The "Church from the Nations...", p.113.
[46]Ibid.p.120, see also Murray, *Symbols*, p.245.

I.1.1 Ephrem's Target Audience: Is it Jews, Orthodox Christians, or 'Heretical Christians'?

The section below aims to identify Ephrem's target audience, especially in his writings with distinctive critical connotations. Darling supports the idea that Ephrem, in employing anti-Jewish rhetoric, was actually writing against certain groups of contemporary Christians, i.e. Manicheans, Arians and Eunomians[47]. Ephrem chooses in his writings to use the literary genre of negative portrayal of heretical Christians by analogy with Jews[48]. Botha gives an illustrative definition of that literary form:

> Since the earliest of times, Judaism was such a negative pole which was utilised to establish institutional stability and consent within the Church. Anti-Judaism did not primarily serve as a defence against attack, but was an intrinsic necessity of Christian self-affirmation.[49]

It is difficult, therefore, to consider certain of Ephrem's writings as anti-Jewish, as they were intended for a Christian audience. Drijvers emphasises that Ephrem '*does not address himself to the Jews as a separate community in the city, but deals with the members of the Christian church who were attracted to Jewish customs and frequented the synagogues*'[50].

Considering further the idea of Ephrem's hymns being addressed primarily to Christians[51], it becomes clear why he addresses Jews as 'them' and Christians as 'us'[52]. His aim in showing the alienation of 'them' and 'us' is to affirm and protect the clear 'Orthodox' identity of 'us'. Ephrem's goal is not to undermine Jews, but to show how far Arians had strayed in their theology and distanced themselves from mainstream Christianity. An artificially created analogy with Jews becomes Ephrem's methodological and literary approach in his polemical writings against certain groups of contemporary Christians. Shepardson gives an illustrative explanation of Ephrem's main goal as redrawing social boundaries distinguishing 'Heretical Christianity' and 'Orthodox Christianity'. She writes that:

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[47]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations..."*, p.120.
[48]On literary genre *Adversus Judaeos* see Chapter I.3.2.
[49]Botha, P. J., "Christology and Apology in Ephrem the Syrian", *HTS* 45 (1989) p.20, see also Reuther, R., *Faith and fratricide: The theological roots of anti-Semitism* (NY: Seabury, 1974) p.81.
[50]Drijvers, H. J. W., 'Jews and Christians at Edessa', *JJS* 36 (1985) p.97.
[51]Botha, P. J., "Christology and Apology in Ephrem the Syrian", *HTS* 45 (1989) p.20, see also Bardenhewer, O., *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur.* 4. Band (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962) p.342,344.
[52]*HdF*44.4, see also Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed...", [3].

> By describing Arians as the contemporary equivalent of, and in fact replacement for, the Jewish enemies of Christian lore as Satan exchanges "reed for reed", Ephrem replaces a blurred line between two Christian groups with what he presents as the unmistakable distinction between Christian and Jews.[53]

From Shepardson's argument it is clear that Ephrem's primary concern is to crystallise and sharpen Christian self-identity within the socio-historical circumstances of his time. In order to achieve this, Ephrem gives distinct definition – as enemies - to the groups of 'heretical' believers, i.e. Arians, Manicheans and suchlike.

Two separate issues emerge, then, from consideration of Ephrem's anti-Jewish statements within the complex and multi-dimensional socio-political and historical context of the time:

1. A tension between Jews and Christians, presented by some as a phenomenon of Judaeo-Christianity in the Syriac Church[54].
2. A contemporary conflict between 'Orthodox Christians' and 'Heretical Christians'.

The Church was flourishing, but not yet well established institutionally. The insecure Christian identity was threatened and endangered by the variety of sects within the Church. Therefore, Ephrem produced certain writings for 'inside' Christian use as a reaction to potentially harmful tendencies in his Church. Botha argues that '*anti-Jewish themes in Ephrem should be seen as the reverse side of the attempt to articulate a definition of Christianity... the intrinsic necessity for Christian self-affirmation* and *a way of claiming legitimacy for Christians*'[55]. Ephrem produced some of his writings under the influence and demands of the socio-political situation using *anti-Jewish themes* not as an end in itself, but as a means to the end mentioned above.

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[53]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed…", [15].
[54]Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish …", p.502.
[55]Botha, P. J., "Polarity: the theology of Anti-Judaism in Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on Easter", *HTS* 46/1&2 (1990) p.45.

Conclusion

To summarise the above arguments, it is possible to conclude that Ephrem is an author who is positively disposed to Judaism. He is indebted to Judaism to a great extent, inherits the exegetical tradition of rabbinic Judaism and creates a lot of his work under the influence of Judaism and its practices. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between Ephrem's theological position and the statements he makes in reaction to the historical, social and religious situation of Syria of his time. Therefore, scholars who present Ephrem as an anti-Jewish writer misinterpret the quintessential character of Ephrem, i.e. his Semitic identity.

On the basis of the argument in I.1, I suggest that scholars should cease to refer to anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in Ephrem's writings. Both terms, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, are modern terms carrying with them certain connotations. Anti-Semitism in the modern world is used within the context of racial discrimination, social non-acceptance etc. There is no indication in Ephrem's writings to suggest that he was ever interested in racial theories and the like. The definition of anti-Judaism pre-supposes some of the following actions:

- polemics, rejection, confrontation, denigration,
- contradiction, replacement, dislodging, condemnation,
- antagonism, refutation, opposition[56].

None of these characteristics can be fairly ascribed to Ephrem.

Using such terms are not useful in appreciating Ephrem's work. It is still profitable to discuss Ephrem's response to Judaism within the contemporary historical situation of Syria, given his Semitic background. Alternatively, one may consider Ephrem's relations with Judaism. Therefore, this study suggests considering Ephrem's so-called anti-Jewish remarks in some of his hymns and prose works as directed homiletically at his fellow Christians and their beliefs, and not at the Jews in a spirit of confrontation and condemnation.

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[56]Some of the definitions are taken from Simon, M., *Verus Israel,* trans. H. McKeating, The Litman Library (Oxford: University Press, 1986) p.135, 143. Simon's book has a chapter describing the characteristics and methods of Anti-Jewish polemics where the author presents definitions of other scholars, such as Harnack, Williams and Freiman.

I.2 Anti-Jewish Elements in Ephrem in their Religious Context

I.2.1 Introduction

Close Connections of Ephrem with Judaism: Dependency and Distance

Ephrem's Semitic background and closeness to Judaism may play a factor in his anti-Jewish elements. On the one hand, Ephrem's theological disposition is indebted to fundamental rabbinical concepts, for example, Merits of the Fathers, God's Mercy and Justice, and the notion of divine presence (Shekhinah). On the other hand, it seems that it is difficult for Ephrem to remain impersonal and objective towards Judaism in his writings. A number of scholars have noticed rather sharp and intense criticism of Jews as a people in his hymns, and have described this as a theological position of Ephrem. Yet anti-Judaism was by no means Ephrem's theological position. Some of Ephrem's theological standpoints will be highlighted in order to demonstrate their closeness to Judaism. The presence of the anti-Jewish elements in Ephrem's work may also be understood from a theological perspective.

One of the reasons for the presence of anti-Jewish elements in Ephrem could be his own attempt to distance himself from Judaism and 'the people', i.e. the Jews, in order to develop a theology of 'the peoples', i.e. the Gentiles. Jansma points out the problem that Ephrem had to solve within himself, namely, dependency on Judaism on the one hand, and his anti-Jewish remarks on the other. Jansma writes:

> The extent of Ephraem's indebtedness to Rabbinic fundamental concepts, so it seems, is directly proportioned to the intensity of the invectives directed by him to the people of the crucifiers.[57]

As mentioned before, a number of scholars highlight citations in which Ephrem makes negative remarks about Judaism. Fewer scholars, however, note the passages in Ephrem's work which speak well of Judaism. McCarthy puts Ephrem in the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue and ascribes to him sensitivity in his use of terminology of the 'First and Second Covenants' instead of 'Old and New Testaments'[58]. More

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[57]Jansma, T., 'Ephrem on Exodus II.5: Reflections on the Interplay of Human Free Will and Divine Providence', *OCP* 39 (1973) p.13.

[58]McCarthy, C., "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church: Ephrem's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount", in G. J. Norton and S. Pisano (eds.) *Tradition of the Text Studies offered to D.Barthélemy*

frequently one comes across remarks closer to Murray's expressing a regretful definition of Ephrem's writings:

> It must be confessed with sorrow that Ephrem hated Jews. It is sad that the man who could write the magisterial Commentary on Genesis, with the command it shows of the tradition which still to a great extent united Christians and Jews, could sink to writing *Carmina Nisibena* 67.[59]

Murray's statement concludes a chapter about replacement theology[60] in the Syriac Fathers; another statement suggests that with his theology Ephrem was '*happily moderating the hatred of which he was capable*'[61]. Murray mentions, however, that Ephrem shows '*intimate affection* and *devotion*' to the OT saints and to '*Christianity's Hebraic past*'[62]. Murray illustrates his point by alluding to Ephrem's presentation of '*Noah as the father of those who live in chastity*'[63]. The evidence for Ephrem's hatred of Jews fades the more Murray describes the ideas of the Syriac Fathers:

- God choosing Israel: '*God's choice of Israel...is a moment in history...pointing to the fulfilment*'[64]
- God's blessing on Israel: '*Israel as the cluster containing the grape which is Christ*'[65]
- The special role of Israel in the salvation of all: '*God's 'plan' for the salvation of the world by choosing and training one nation in order thereby to bring grace to all*'[66]
- '*The theme of the catastrophe, which introduces 'the time of the nations''*[67]. '*The catastrophe of the nation when it rejects Christ*'[68]
- Valuing the OT in itself:

(*OBO* 109, 1991) p.116. However in the same passage of the article McCarthy states that Ephrem is '*vehemently anti-Jewish*' ascribing to him '*distinct anti-Jewish bias*'.

[59]Murray, *Symbols*, p.68. It has to be noted that the reprint (2004) of Murray's *Symbols* is a new revised eddition from where the quoted passage is absent. However, in the 2004 eddition of *Symbols* Murray still refers to *CNis*67 as '*the most detestable of all Ephrem's attacks on the Jews, inhibited by no consideration of either truth or taste*' (see Muray, *Symbols* (London, NY: T&T Clark, 2004) p.339.

[60]See Chapter I.2.4 for a definition of *replacement theology*.

[61]Ibid.p.60.

[62]Ibid.p.49-50.

[63]Ibid.p.50, see also *GenCom*6.1. For further illustration of Ephrem's appreciation of the OT figures see Chapter V.

[64]Murray, *Symbols*, p.50.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.p.56.

[67]Ibid.p.62, see also *Azym*2.13, *Diat*2.16.

[68]Ibid.p.56.

> When Ephrem comments on the classical text, Ex.19:6...his scanty explanation reminds us that he knew neither of the NT passages (I Peter 2:9 and Apoc.5:10) which appropriate this text to the Church...Likewise he has little to say about the Blood of the Covenant (Ex.24:6-8), in which he finds a type not of the Eucharist, but of the 'Gospel which by the death of Christ has been given to the Nations.'[69]

Murray ascribes replacement theology to Ephrem by quoting various examples from his hymns[70]. He mentions, however, that '*the reprobation of the Jews is finally symbolized in EC 21*'[71] adding that '*in the hymns these same ideas are developed more dramatically, though in fact most of what Ephrem has to say is there in germ in the prose Scripture commentaries*'[72]. Unfortunately, in presenting a general statement based on Ephrem's prose Scripture commentaries, Murray refers only to Ephrem's commentaries on Diatessaron, completely ignoring his OT exegesis[73].

The next section will aim to answer the question whether Ephrem's anti-Jewish remarks are of a theological nature. Hence the following themes will be covered:

1. Ephrem's indebtedness to Judaism
2. Replacement theology in Ephrem, i.e. 'the people' vs. 'the peoples'
3. Ephrem's criticism of the Jews.

Further analysis of Ephrem's theological concepts demonstrates sufficiently the extent to which Ephrem could be considered and defined as theologically anti-Jewish.

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[69]Ibid.p.54, see also *ExodCom*19, 24.1.
[70]*HCrucif*3.3, 12, *HVirg*2, *HEccl*44.21-6, *HdF*10.10, *HAzym*2.13, 5.18-23.
[71]*Diat*21.4, see also Murray, *Symbols,* p.65.
[72]Murray, *Symbols,* p.65.
[73]In his commentaries on the books of the OT, however, Ephrem is doing something very different. He is expounding Scripture as the Jewish scholar would, and there he is almost entirely dependent on Jewish tradition. This is something that is not often found in other writers. Hence, this thesis will present various examples of Ephrem's writings and Jewish sources.

I.2.2 Is Anti-Judaism in Ephrem Theological in its Nature?

Several scholars ascribe anti-Jewish theology to Ephrem on the basis of the general tendency towards anti-Judaism in the Church and anti-Jewish tendencies in the NT. This type of claim about anti-Judaism in the NT, unless it is very carefully argued with regard to all the evidence, is best left out. The following is an example of the Syriac scholar who generalises about anti-Judaism in the NT:

> The anti-Judaism of the New Testament itself was of a theological nature...Christian theology was devised as the theology of opposition...Patristic theology carried on in the same vein... The polarity between Jews and Christians in the hymns of Ephrem should thus be seen in its relation to a literary and theological tradition...early Christianity saw itself as the theological opposite of Judaism, and this gave rise to a polar structure which was anti-Judaistic but not necessarily anti-Jewish.[74]

Botha distinguishes between 'anti-Judaistic', which is a theological concept, and 'anti-Jewish', which is possibly a social concept. Christian theology, including the patristic theology of the first centuries, is defined by Botha as the outcome of the anti-Judaism of the NT, i.e. the theology of opposition and rejection of Judaism. One cannot accept Botha's statement as it stands, because it does not take into account the contemporary fierce debates taking place over this matter[75]. There has indeed been a strongly developed and long-existing tradition of interpreting NT narrative in support of anti-Jewish arguments. However, one cannot accept this approach as all-embracing or as monopolising the theological understanding of the NT.

Botha applies the same pattern of anti-Judaism to Ephrem, which is not an appropriate application of the general theory. Botha argues that Ephrem shows the polarity of

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[74]Botha, P. J., "Polarity: the theology of Anti-Judaism in Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on Easter", *HTS* 46/1&2 (1990) p.44.

[75]These are the major books presenting their points on each side of the argument of anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism in the NT. Those supporting it: Beck, N. A., *Mature Christianity: the recognition and repudiation of the Anti-Jewish polemic of the New Testament* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1985) and Fredricksen, P. and Reinhartz, A. (eds.) *Jesus, Judaism and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville, NY, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) Those arguing against it: Evans, C., and Hagner, D. (eds.) *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, c.1993). More essays on the subject are presented in: *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity,* Vol. 1, ed. by P. Richardson; Vol. 2 ed. by S. G. Wilson, Studies in Christianity and Judaism (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1986).

Jews and Gentiles, which he makes the basis for assuming Ephrem's negativity towards the Jews:

> Ephrem's hymns are fiercely anti-Judaistic and the opposition between Jews and Christians in his Hymns on Easter was certainly meant to be polemical. But how does this polarity relate to his theology? I propose to show that the polarity Jews: Christians in Ephrem's hymns should be related to his theology. [76]

Botha himself gradually changes his argument, finally admitting to the necessity of reading Ephrem within his historical context. He states that '*anti-Jewish themes in Ephrem should be seen as the reverse side of an attempt to articulate a definition of Christianity*'[77]. Historically, dogmatic definitions of Christianity were made not through opposition to and rejection of Judaism, but through opposition to and rejection of what was later to be called heretical teachings. Therefore, as argued earlier, when Ephrem demonstrates a polarity between Judaism and Christianity he is pursuing the goal of condemning his Christian contemporaries. This implies that such polarisation is merely subsidiary to his given goal, not in itself essential to early Christianity, or, as Botha argues, '*an existential necessity in early Christian thinking*'[78].

When Ephrem contrasts Jews and Christians this does not necessarily imply anti-Jewish zeal. In his hymns, Ephrem pays much attention to developing the theology of the Gentiles as a chosen people. In order to emphasise the virtue of Gentiles who are the followers of Christ, Ephrem contrasts them with Jews rejecting Christ. When Ephrem uses polarisation with regard to Jews and Gentiles, 'the people' and 'the peoples', he is not compromising his theology of divine choice, but emphasising the call of the Gentiles. Similarly, when Ephrem contrasts Jewish feasts and sacrifices in Jerusalem with the living sacrifice of the Church, or the temporal salvation of the Jewish sacrificial lamb with the True Lamb, Christ[79], the core thrust of his argument is not to belittle Judaism, but to glorify Christianity.

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[76]Botha, "Polarity…", p.38.
[77]Ibid.p.45.
[78]Ibid.
[79]*Azym* XXI 22,24-25, V 16,17, see also Botha, "Polarity…", p.40-41.

In the following passage Botha presents a far-reaching conclusion based on Ephrem's methodology of polarity:

> Animosity of Christians against Jews is propagated as a religious duty, since this establishes solidarity with Christ and therefore with God. It can therefore be said that anti-Judaism in Ephrem's day had a theological dimension...Reciprocal action by God and Christians seems to establish a doctrine of retribution.[80]

Botha ascribes theological implication and anti-Jewish definition[81] to the instances when Ephrem is using exegetical tools. He bases his argument on Ephrem's use of polarity between:

- God and Israel in the OT
- Jews and Christ in the NT
- Jews and Christians in Ephrem's time[82].

Organically, Botha derives this argument from the previous one, stating that Ephrem does not differentiate between the Jews of the OT, NT and the Jews of his own time. As a response to Botha's argument and that of others supporting the same idea one can offer the following points:

1. Ephrem's theology is rooted in Judaism. He engages in his writings with many notions fundamentally important for Judaism, for example, legislation, Merits of the Fathers, God's Mercy and Justice.
2. Ephrem's commentaries on Exodus show a very positive, highly appreciative and respectful attitude to 'the people'. Thus, it could be argued that Ephrem had a high opinion of the Jews.[83]
3. Ephrem allows himself to criticise some elements of Jewish behaviour, but he does not cross the borderline between criticism and anti-Judaism, neither does he deprive Israel of her initial position as chosen nation.

The following section of the work, therefore, will further explore the question of Ephrem's indebtedness to Judaism.

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[80]Botha, "Polarity...", p.43.
[81]Several other scholars ascribe anti-Judaism as a theological concept in Ephrem. See Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune...", p.180, see also Hayman, "The image of the Jew..."
[82]Ibid.p.42-43.
[83]The main body of his thesis will demonstrate that in his *ExodCom* Ephrem is thoroughly grounded in Judaism.

I.2.3 Ephrem's Indebtedness to Judaism

McVey ascribes to Ephrem and Aphrahat criticism of the Jewish practices of circumcision, Sabbath observance, and food laws[84]. This thesis will offer various illustrations supporting the opposite view, namely Ephrem's great appreciation of the Law together with some other essential Jewish concepts[85]. In *Hymns on Nativity*, for example, Ephrem uses the following essential notions from Jewish theology to characterise Mary, the mother of Jesus:

- Shekhinah
- Covenant
- Law
- Holy of Holies.

Christ himself is presented as the High Priest[86]. In ascribing to Mary and Jesus the symbolism of High Priesthood, divine presence, and attributes of legislation and the Covenant, Ephrem demonstrates his regard for, and appreciation of, Jewish tradition. He presents his argument in a rabbinical way, by using these essential concepts accrediting Mary with magnitude. Therefore, it is difficult to agree with the statement of McVey that '*Ephrem Syrus' formative role for the style and content of the subsequent Syriac anti-Judaic polemic is clear*'[87].

The amount of attention that Ephrem pays in his writings to the Jews is already evidence of how concerned he is about 'the people'. The least questionable disagreement between Jew and Christian is over the theology of the Incarnation. It is not surprising that Ephrem pays a lot of attention to developing this theme in his writings. In analysing one of the primary concerns of Ephrem's *HNat*, McVey identifies his emphasis on the theology of the Incarnation as a defence against Jewish criticism of Christian beliefs[88]. To what extent can this argument be used in support of an anti-Judaic polemic in Ephrem? It might rather suggest that he is in dialogue with

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[84]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic…", p.230.
[85]For more details about Ephrem's attitude to the Law see Chapter II.2.3.
[86]*HNat*16.16-17,17.5, see also McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic…", p.234.
[87]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic…", p.230. In opposition to McVey Drijvers supports the argument that Ephrem '*attacks Arians…within the context of Jewish practices common among Christians*' and that '*it is not a public assault on Judaism as such, but in the first instance intended for internal Christian use*'; see Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians in Edessa" *JJS* 36 (1985) p.98.
[88]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic…", p.232.

Jews and, therefore, writing critically about their theological disagreements with Christian writers. There is a sharp distinction between criticism and anti-Judaism, and Ephrem has nothing to do with the latter.

In his hymns, Ephrem could be rather harsh on 'the people', allowing severe criticism of them. Jansma presents the following summary of Ephrem's thought, taking *Homily on Palm Sunday*[89] as an example:

- Christ fulfilled all the prophets and the apostles
- The Jews deny fulfilment of the OT symbols through Christ
- The Jews rejected Two Testaments
- The Jews killed Christ through jealousy[90].

Similar ideas to Jansma are offered by Darling in his interpretation of Ephrem's attitude to Judaism in his hymns[91]:

- The Jews are the ones guilty of idolatry
- They crucified the Messiah
- Their rituals are from Satan[92].

If this is the Ephrem we find through the hymns, then who is the Ephrem we find in the Commentaries on Exodus, for example? Which Ephrem is true to himself, and which one is inconsistent?

McVey bases Ephrem's disagreement with the Jews on two basic issues:

1. The virginal conception
2. The resurrection of Jesus[93].

Ephrem records in his writings the responsibility of the Jews for their actions and how to classify their rejection of Christ. There is an issue of free will and free choice, which Ephrem values as one of the greatest gifts from God. Hence, the Jews carry their own responsibility for some of their choices. However, according to Ephrem, there is also an external source that has been involved in the fate of 'the people'. Shepardson presents the dilemma of Ephrem in the following description:

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[89]*Serm*II.
[90]Jansma, T., 'Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10. An enquiry into the Syriac Text Forms as Presented in his Commentary on Genesis', *PdO* 4 (1973) p.253.
[91]*CNis*61,62,67.
[92]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations..."*, p.112-113.
[93]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic ...", p.233.

> Through his writings Ephrem vacillates about where to place the blame for the Jews' actions (as described in scripture), sometimes making the Jews themselves solely responsible, and other times blaming Satan for manipulating history and using the blind and foolish Jews as unwitting minions to carry out his plans.[94]

However there is a need to ask to what extent is the figure of Satan relevant as the embodiment of an external force influencing the fate of 'the people'? There seems to be an inconsistency in Ephrem's writings. On the one hand, Ephrem puts great emphasis on the gift of free will and freedom of choice; while, on the other hand, he promotes the idea that the Jews were restricted in their free choice as they were acting under satanic influence[95]. The following excerpts from Ephrem could create the impression that he is trying to demonise Jews:

> The former scribes Satan disrobed: he clothed the later ones. The People that had grown old, the moth and the louse gnawed it and ate it, and they released and let it go. The moth came to the new garment of the new peoples.[96]

Or: [Satan] began with the People, and he came to the peoples in order that he might finish.[97]

It should be remembered here that rabbinic tradition itself attributed to Satan certain disasters in Jewish history. The sages of the Talmud, for example, take the story of the golden calf as an example of direct satanic influence:

> R. Joshua b. Levi also said: Why is it written: *And when the people saw that Moses delayed* [boshesh] [*to come down from the mount*]?[98] 'Read not boshesh' [delayed] but *ba'u shesh* [the sixth hour had come]. When Moses ascended on high, he said to Israel, I will return at the end of the forty days, at the beginning of the sixth hour[99]. At the end of forty days Satan came and confounded the world. Said he to them: 'Where is your teacher Moses?' 'He has ascended on high,' they answered him. 'The sixth [hour] has come,' said he to them, but they disregarded him. 'He is dead' - but they disregarded him. [Thereupon] he showed them a vision of his bier, and this is what they said to Aaron, *for* this *Moses, the man etc.*[100]

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[94]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed...", [8].
[95]Ibid.[9].
[96]*HdF*87.9. The English translation is taken from Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed...", *Appendix*.
[97]*HdF*87.12.
[98]Ex.32:1.
[99]i.e. at midday.
[100]b.Talmud, *Shabbath* 89a. *The Babylonian Talmud. Seder Moed,* Vol.1, trans. Rabbi Dr I. Epstein (London: The Soncino Press,1938) p.424. See also Exod.32:1ff.

TgPsJ presents a similar story:

> The people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, and the people gathered around Aaron *when they saw that the time he had fixed for them had passed. And Satan went and led them astray, and their hearts became proud.* And they said to him: "Arise! Make us *deities* that will go before us.[101]

Also, the *Book of Jubilees* holds Satan, Prince Mastema, responsible for initiating the sacrifice of Isaac:

> And Prince Mastema came and he said before God, "Behold, Abraham loves Isaac, his son. And he is more pleased with him than everything. Tell him to offer him (as) a burnt offering upon the altar.[102]

The passages quoted above show that the idea of Satan appearing at certain points in Jewish history is thoroughly grounded in Judaism. Thus, in asserting satanic influence on the Jewish people, Ephrem could be repeating Jewish tradition.

Darling suggests that Ephrem mostly criticised Jews for their unbelief:

> Ephrem remarks in the Diatessaron commentary, "they were not lost through Jesus' crucifixion, because already before his death they were lost through their unbelief" [Footnote 19: "If they had not killed the Messiah, God could have given life to the nations by other means"[103]] Similarly, the nations had already exchanged places with the old people because of "the good thought of [their] hearts"[104].

From the above citation it is evident that Darling introduces a very important issue picked by several other scholars as well. It is the question of replacement theology in Ephrem. It is the emphasis of Ephrem on the role of 'the peoples', i.e. the Gentiles, and their claim to the place of 'the people', i.e. the Jews. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section of the work.

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[101] *TgPsJ Exod.*32:1, see also vv.19,24.
[102] *Jub.*17:16.
[103] *Diat*21:24, 18:1.
[104] Darling, *The "Church from the Nations..."*, p.117-118.

I.2.4 Replacement Theology: 'The People' vs. 'The Peoples'

Palmer has defined replacement theology particularly well:

> According to the Church, Christianity fulfilled the *raison d'être* of Judaism, which existed to 'prepare the way' for Christ.[105]

However, the application of Palmer's general statement to concrete writings of Ephrem proves to be difficult. Hence this section is going to present the argument in opposition of replacement theology in Ephrem's writings.

McVey argues that Ephrem based his argument of the replacement of Jews by Gentiles on the interpretation of historical events[106]. There is, however, a different way of understanding Ephrem's argument:

1. Ephrem shows respect for the Jewish people by calling them 'the people', while other nations he calls just 'peoples'[107]
2. Ephrem does not want to replace 'the people', but he criticises them for failing to understand the great responsibility and accountability of 'the people' in the light of their special vocation.

Ephrem's interpretation of historical events in the Exodus narrative does not always commend the Israelites' behaviour. However, Ephrem's regard for the choice of Israel as a nation does not cease to exist. Israel's historical mistakes do not result in Ephrem rejecting the idea of Israel being a chosen nation.

In his description of Ephrem contrasting 'the people' and 'peoples', Botha introduces the notions of rejection and acceptance. He presents the following scheme: when Christ is rejected, then the people are also rejected; and when Christ is accepted, then the people are also accepted[108]. Indeed, the Incarnation of Christ brought division among the Jews; namely, between the followers of Christ and Jews who did not answer the call of Jesus. The key question is to what extent this division could be called replacement theology. Not all of the Gentiles answered the call of Jesus, neither

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[105]Palmer, A. N., "The Merchant of Nisibis..." in Den Boeft, J., Hilhorst, A. (eds.) *Early Christian Poetry. A collection of essays* (Leiden, NY, Koln: Brill, 1993) p.176.
[106]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic...", p.230.
[107]See Chapters VI and III.3.
[108]Botha, P. J., "Christology and Apology in Ephrem the Syrian", *HTS* 45 (1989) p.20, see also Botha, P. J., Polemiese trekke in die Paasfeeshimnes van Afrem die Sirier. Unpublished MA-dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1982, p.27-32.

did all the Jews. Therefore, the division is not as graphic as some scholars present it, i.e. it is not a replacement of all Jews by all Gentiles. Rather, some Jews reject Christ, and some Gentiles accept Christ. Hence, whoever accepts is accepted, and whoever rejects is rejected.

Botha argues that in opposing 'the people' to 'peoples', the latter are used with a positive connotation, while the examples of 'the people' are used *as 'a denigratory term for the Jews'*[109]. This argument proves to be incorrect, because in many cases Ephrem uses the term 'the people' as a special reference to the people of God, the chosen nation, the Jews. Darling classified the use of the expression 'the people', *'amma'*, in Ephrem according to the following categories:

- in the negative sense, meaning crucifiers
- in the positive sense, meaning the nation, the Church[110]
- in the neutral sense, meaning just one nation among the others[111].

This example from Darling shows that it is difficult to ascribe only a negative connotation to the use of the expression 'the people' in Ephrem's writings. There is a different use of the expression 'the people' in Ephrem's hymnology and in his exegesis. Therefore, one has to look at the context of Ephrem's use of the word 'the people', in order to see the implications of that term.

As evidence for replacement theology in Ephrem's writings McCarthy presents the following:

> Thus, for Ephrem the coming of Christ revealed God's hidden plan for the salvation of the nations, but it also brought a tragic catastrophe for the 'former nation'. This theme of catastrophe, and of the Jewish people's replacement by a new people, the Gentiles, runs like a connecting thread through the entire gospel commentary. It is often embedded in rather bitter anti-Jewish invective. Indeed it is no secret that Ephrem was very anti-Jewish in his writings, and seldom lost an opportunity to express this bias.[112]

Further reflection suggests that it is not with feelings of anti-Judaism that Ephrem narrates the faults of 'the people', but rather with sorrow and concern. Ephrem speaks

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[109]Botha, "Polarity...", p.37.
[110]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations..."*, p.113.
[111]Ibid.p.116.
[112]McCarthy, C., "Allusions and Illusions. St Ephrem's verbal magic in the Diatessaron Commentary", in Cathcart, K.J., Maher, M. (eds.) *Targumic and Cognate Studies. Essays in Honour of M. McNamara* (Sheffield: University Press, 1996) p.200, see also Murray, *Symbols...*, p.68.

of Israel as the bride of the king (God)[113]; he calls Jews the daughter of Israel, who is given as a bride to the Messiah (Christ). In both instances the bride rejects the groom; hence, the groom (Christ) weds 'the peoples', i.e. the Gentiles[114]. Again, Ephrem's argument could not be viewed as replacement theology or a justification of replacement theology. Ephrem is rather lamenting the nation losing her contact with her God. Ephrem writes:

> He, the Merciful One, and the Son of the Merciful One, had spread his benevolence over her like a father, but she conducted herself as perversely towards him as she had done towards the One who had sent him. Not being able to abuse the Father, she displayed her hatred against his Only-Begotten...But, now that she has stretched forth her hands against the Son and crucified the Son of the living [God], her house has been uprooted and her altar overturned.[115]

The *tragic catastrophe*, therefore, that McCarthy mentions in relation to the nation could as well be a tragic catastrophe for Ephrem himself in his expectations of the Jews. This initially presupposes Ephrem's high regard of the people.

Darling argues that Ephrem shifts the emphasis from Jews to Gentiles after 'the people' repeatedly rejected Christ. Hence, he introduces the idea of 'the peoples' coming out of the shadow, while the Jews fell into it[116]. Ephrem finds scriptural support for this by reinterpreting the blessing of Jacob as referring to the nations[117]. It is possible therefore to assume that the Jews' failure to recognise Christ made it necessary for Ephrem to reinterpret significant biblical events to justify and support the idea of a divine choice being expanded to Gentiles. By reinterpreting the biblical events of the Torah, Ephrem does not devalue their original interpretation, but rather extends its significance. Ephrem is building up a living tradition of biblical exegesis by adding new understandings to the scriptural narrative through contextualising it within the historical situation in which he was living.

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[113]*Resur*III 2 and 3, see also Botha, "Polarity...", p.42.
[114]*Resur*III 4 and 5, *Azym*II 10,see also Botha, "Polarity...", p.42.
[115]*Diat*XVIII,1, cf. McCarthy, C., *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes,* JSSSup (Oxford: University Press, 1993) see also McCarthy, 'Allusions and illusions...', p.199.
[116]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations...",* p.113-114, see also *Cruc*5, *Resur*3.
[117]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations...",* p.116-117, see *ExodCom*24.1.

Ephrem does not simply use Hebrew Scripture as *preliminary sketches* and *shadows* of the NT, as McVey argues[118]. In order to illustrate her statements, McVey quotes the following passages from Ephrem's *Hymns on Virginity:*

> [Christ's] power perfected the types, and His truth the mysteries,
> His interpretation the similes, His explanation the sayings,
> And His assurance the difficulties.
>
> By His sacrifice He abolished sacrifices, and libation by His incense,
> And the [Passover] lambs by His slaughter,
> The unleavened [bread] by His bread, and the bitter [herbs] by His Passion.
>
> By His healthy meal He weaned [and] took away the milk.
> By His baptism were abolished the bathing and sprinkling that elders of the People taught.[119]

A different approach to the understanding of this hymn could allow one to concentrate on Ephrem's use of typology as an exegetical tool illustrating his argument, rather than as an expression of Ephrem's theology. In the quoted passages from Ephrem one can see the expression of his skill:

- entering into the very essence of the Jewish understanding of the Scripture
- reinterpreting it with Christian insights.

The following adjectives characterise how Ephrem makes use of Jewish exegetical tradition:

- consistent
- sophisticated (in the way he embraces his Semitic background and uses it to build up a Semitic expression of Christianity)
- organic (in incorporating Jewish exegetical techniques in his writings)
- deeply rooted in Judaism
- creative (in his approach to Judaism and to the scriptural narrative)
- independent (from any material when he is pursuing his argument).

Developing the argument further, one can emphasise that Ephrem regards Jewish Scriptures and Jewish tradition as a whole as essential for Christian revelation. Ephrem sees Christ's revelation within the heart of classical Jewish concepts.

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[118]McVey, K. E., "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God", in S. T. Kimbrough (ed.) *Orthodoxy and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 2002) p.252.
[119]Ibid.p.253, see also *Virg*8.8-10.

Everything in them, i.e. people, concepts, and notions, is of value, because everything is pointing to Christ[120]. Thus, Ephrem indirectly points out the fact that what the Jews preserved in their tradition is positive, and indeed is essential for Christians. It is the fertile soil on which Ephrem builds his exegesis. And Ephrem himself could be considered as a fruit of this soil.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this section is similar to Brock's when he writes that '*neither in his'* poems,' *nor anywhere in Ephrem's genuine writings do we find the theme of replacement*'[121]. Ephrem's understanding of the Christian religion could be seen as a fulfilment of Judaism, as Judaism receiving its true meaning through Christ. In that sense, Judaism had to be worthy of Christ, and there could not be any denigration of it as something dead and gone. Thus, there is no place for replacement theology in Ephrem's writings. There is a need, therefore, to find another definition for what Ephrem is doing in his work. I suggest the following descriptions:

- Ephrem extends Jewish boundaries (to include Gentiles)
- He furthers the living tradition of Judaism or a common Jewish-Christian tradition into the revelation of Christ.
- Ephrem contributes to the tradition, or he supplements it. Thus, he is supplementing the tradition, not replacing it. Unfolding the story of the OT, full of saints and prophets, Ephrem presents the great drama to which Christianity adds; it does not take from it.

The latter characterises Ephrem's unique way of looking at the OT tradition. Ephrem organically accommodates NT revelation in the OT context. Therefore, the expressions of anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism and replacement are a world away from Ephrem's approach, which is one of integration. Thus, Judaism is not an inferior or useless tradition with its Scriptures, customs and understandings; instead Judaism is something of great value for Ephrem. Hence Ephrem incorporates elements of Jewish tradition in his work, while adding to it his own perspective.

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[120]See Chapters V.2 and VI.
[121]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992) p.122.

This section has argued that Ephrem's theology is far from anti-Judaic. Scholars claiming that in his hymns Ephrem exhibits strong anti-Judaic tendencies (and even has anti-Judaism in his theology) would have to admit Ephrem's inconsistency and change of heart towards Judaism. Because Ephrem is consistent in his pro-Judaic tendencies throughout the Commentary on Exodus, it is wrong for scholars to ascribe an anti-Judaic polemic to Ephrem's writings. This section concludes that anti-Judaism/replacement definitions of Ephrem's theology are unjustified and, therefore, should be not used. The following section will further analyse critical elements in Ephrem's writings by looking at them from within the literary and exegetical context.

I.3 Anti-Jewish Elements in Ephrem in their Exegetical and Literary Context

I.3.1 Introduction

This section continues from the previous ones, but with the emphasis more on Ephrem's exegesis than on his theology. It further develops the criticism of some scholars' arguments, which ascribe anti-Judaism to Ephrem. The aim of this part is to highlight the difference between Ephrem's use of the exegetical tools of antithesis, polarisation and apology in relation to the Jews, and his so-called 'theology of anti-Judaism'. Ephrem's adoption of the literary genre *'Adversus Judaeos'* for condemning contemporary Christians is another instance of his skilful application of a literary style.

Further examples are offered of Ephrem's use of Jewish exegetical techniques and major Jewish concepts in characterising Christianity:

- *qal va homer*[122]
- Merits of the Fathers.

These examples show that Ephrem presents his argument in a rabbinic manner[123], which disproves McVey's assertion that Ephrem use a '*graphic and bitter anti-Judaic polemic*'[124]. The question, therefore, is where does Ephrem's rabbinical presentation

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[122]Ephrem uses this rabbinical technique on various occasions, e.g. in *HNat*11.1, see also Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric...", p.505.
[123]I have presented an example earlier when Ephrem highlights essentially meaningful concepts within Judaism in order to lift up the figure of Mary in *Nat*11.1.
[124]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic...", p.235.

finish and his anti-Jewish one start? Is he confused in his two identities? Or is he using rabbinical exegesis in order to build up an anti-Jewish argument?

Ephrem allows a figurative approach to the Jews as the daughter of Zion, who killed the Watcher, Christ[125]. The personification of Israel as a whore in Ephrem[126], and the contrast to Zipporah who was chaste although being of pagan origin, could be seen as rather strong and possibly even anti-Jewish[127]. In presenting his argument, however, Ephrem also relies on the examples of the Merits of the Fathers through the figures of Moses, David, and Abraham; and he brings the figures of Elijah, Elisha and Melchizedek into the picture, further diluting suspicions of anti-Judaic inclinations[128]. Thus, Ephrem could be seen as:

- developing his argument within the framework of rabbinic exegesis
- using the biblical figures of the prophets from the Hebrew Bible
- using the technique of polarisation contrasting the virtues of the forefathers and prophets of the OT who followed God, to the Jews of the NT who rejected Christ.

One can argue that the 'negative' personification of Israel as a daughter of Zion, or even as a whore, does not apply generically to Israel. This term is used by Ephrem to characterise certain instances of Israel's behaviour, i.e. idolatry on the mount of Zion, disbelief in Jesus. Hence, it is the personification rather of Israel's ungodly deeds than of Israel as a body of people. Therefore, Ephrem should not be seen as an author supporting anti-Judaic argument, but rather as an author who involves himself in dialogue with Judaism. If he was anti-Judaic, Ephrem would have to reject Judaism entirely along with its theology; instead Ephrem embraces Jewish concepts and methods. This makes Ephrem a pro-Judaic writer working within the framework of the Semitic mindset.

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[125]Ibid.p.235-236; see also *Nat*6.23-24.
[126]Biblical examples of the personification of Israel as a whore can also be found in Hosea 2:5, 3:3, 4:10-15, 5:3, 9:1. OT narrative is a part of the common tradition to which Jewish and Christian writers both had access.
[127]McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic…", p.236, see also *Nat*14.19.
[128]See Chapter V.2

I.3.2 Ephrem's Literary Genres: *Adversus Judaeos*, Literary Exaggeration and Exegetical Tools

Ephrem demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of Judaism, which allows him scrupulously to create a Christian type for every major aspect of the Jewish faith[129]. By this means he reassures contemporary Christians as to the succession and validity of Christian practices. Botha presents his view on this:

> Religious history is also presented as a polar structure. Every aspect of Israelite religion has a superseding parallel in Christianity and the two dispensations are finely balanced in the elements of the feast of Passover. It is a result of this view of Christianity as a mirror image of Judaism, in which the reversal of attitude is particularly stressed, that reflection on the feast of Passover, and especially the crucifixion of Christ, becomes essentially anti-Judaic[130].

Although the use of polarity exists in Ephrem, there has to be strict differentiation between Ephrem's theological position and the literary forms and genres that he employs in his poetical hymns to give immediate illustration to his thought. Ephrem often chooses to use the literary genre of '*Adversus Judaeos*', which Darling characterises as *'a fixed literary technique in the first few Christian centuries, perhaps even a genre in its own right'*[131]. Darling identifies the following aspects in Ephrem's argument:

- the universal aspect of the Church
- the following of Christ[132].

The use of *Adversus Judaeos* in Ephrem should be understood only as a literary device, and not as his theological viewpoint. If taken literally and not as a genre of folklore polemic then the theological position conveyed through it does not stand critical approach. Botha adduces the following example:

> God's unchanging nature and the ability of his nature to change, seems to be functional in accentuating the antithesis between the Jews and the Church and should therefore not be read out of context. By calling the Jews 'the crucifiers'...one set of poles is semiotically marked negative so that the Christian reader will try to dissociate himself from it.[133]

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[129]See Chapter II.3.6.9.
[130]Botha, *"Polarity..."*, p.43.
[131]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations..."*, p.111, see also Simon, M., *Verus Israel* (Oxford: University Press, 1986), Schrechenberg, H., *Die christlichen adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11 Jh)* (Francfurt: P.Lang, 1980), Gager, J. G., *The origins of Anti-Semitism. Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: University Press, 1983), Wilken, R., *John Chrysostom and the Jews. Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Berkeley, 1982).
[132]Darling, *The "Church from the Nations"...*, p.119.
[133]Botha, P. J., 'Christology and Apology in Ephrem the Syrian', *HTS* 45 (1989) p.23.

Ephrem is not, therefore, presenting a theological argument for God changing his choice of 'the people', but using a certain genre to create clarity in presenting his argument. A consideration of literary forms, therefore, should be the primary principle in reading Ephrem's writings. Shepardson describes the literary genre that Ephrem adopts as follows:

> In *Sermons on Faith III* Ephrem appeals to Jews and Judaism as a rhetorical foil with which to frighten and to chastise his audience. He employs anti-Jewish rhetoric to make the heretics both victims whom he is attempting to rescue, and potentially dangerous enemies from whom he needs to protect orthodox Christians.[134]

This confirms that Ephrem's argument was directed primarily towards Christians[135], and that his main goal was not to mock Jews, but to alarm Christians into a greater self-awareness to strengthen their unique identity.

Shepardson also fails to extract a realistic historical picture of the contemporary situation from Ephrem's writings. She emphasises that Ephrem simply made use of the literary device of an exaggerated portrayal of the Jews in order to mock contemporary Christians[136]. He did not intend to give a proper account of the relationship between Jews and Christians in his time. Ephrem was not a historian; as already stated, he was a poet, a theologian and a Church leader who was concerned about a difficult situation in the Church and was trying to solve it with his writings. One has to take this into account in presenting Ephrem's polemical arguments.

Definition of the genre of the apology, for example, according to Botha, requires it to demonstrate the falsity of the opposite view, be it Judaism or Hellenism or any other example[137]. This is a strict requirement of the literary genre, but does not automatically reveal the theological standpoint of Ephrem. Botha also states:

> In expressing these polar structures, the early Christian writers found a useful instrument in antithesis. Since antithesis has both a unifying and a disconnecting function[138], it seems to be the natural stylistic instrument for purposes of consolidating opinion and urging readers to dissociate themselves from an opposing viewpoint. [139]

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[134]Ibid.p.505.
[135]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed…", **Abstract.**
[136]Shepardson, "Anti-Jewish Rhetoric…", p.507.
[137]Botha, 'Christology and Apology…', p.20.
[138]Krasovec, J., *Antithetic structure in biblical Hebrew poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1984) p. 140.
[139]Botha, 'Christology and Apology…', p.21.

From Botha's argument it seems that the polarity with Judaism was a necessity for the Church during the formative period. Ephrem puts the accent on the antithesis between Jews and Christians in order to clarify and reinforce the process of self-definition within Christianity. The relationship of Christians to Judaism was so close that the only way Christians could find their identity was by severing their dependency on Judaism. Botha, in agreement with Wilken, states that '*Christianity was interpreted in relation to Judaism, and Christian tradition knew no other way to view Judaism than as an inferior foreshadowing of Christianity*'[140].

Furthermore, Ephrem demonstrates the use of analogy in pursuing his argument against Julian and his teaching. He compares the disbelief and lack of faith of the Jews with the wrongdoings of Julian. McVey understands Ephrem's *Hymns against Julian* as an example of Ephrem's anti-Jewish argument[141], whereas in fact it is another illustration of Ephrem's use of an exegetical tool in his polemics against Julian. Shepardson argues that Ephrem draws an analogy between Arians and Jews in order to present their mutual antagonism to God's Son. According to the author, by means of this 'analogy' Ephrem illustrates the threat that both groups of people present to Christ[142]. He uses the 'negative type' of the Jews opposing Christ, as presented in some writings of the NT in order to create and support his anti-Arian argument. The question one ought to ask here is why such comparisons in Ephrem's writings inspire scholars to call Ephrem anti-Jewish. A similar question is raised by Shepardson in the following statement:

> Focusing primarily on the comparison that Ephrem makes in Hymn 87[143] between biblical Jews who crucified Christ and contemporary Christians who comparably threaten God's son, I argue that Ephrem's anti-Jewish rhetoric in these hymns should be read primarily in the light of his struggle against local Christians rather then Jews.[144]

When Ephrem employs negative depictions of the Jews from the NT narrative as an illustration of his argument he may be risking the possibility of anti-Jewish interpretation of the NT typology, but he himself is clearly not pursuing an anti-Jewish argument. Shepardson expresses the idea of Ephrem speculating on Christian anti-Jewish feeling by stating that '*Ephrem uses Christian anti-Jewish sentiment to*

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[140]Ibid., see also Wilken, R. L., *Judaism and the early Christian mind: A study of Cyril of Alexandria's exegesis and theology (*London: Yale University Press, 1971) p.227.
[141]McVey, 'Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God…', p.256.
[142]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed…", **Abstract.**
[143]*HdF*87.
[144]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed…", **Abstract.**

denounce 'heretical' contemporary Christians'[145]. In that sense Ephrem could be seen as manipulating anti-Jewish sentiment or, as Shepardson presents it, he '*manipulates negative Christian depiction of beliefs about Jews, rooted in (among other things) the New Testament Gospels, in order to discredit his Arian opponents'*[146].

As an illustration of Ephrem's use of 'negative types' one could analyse *Carmina Nisibena* 67 where Ephrem presents the following examples of negative imagery: Sheol, Death, Jezebel, the People, and Ephrem himself, - thus making four out of the five negative types non-Jewish. Ephrem deconstructs the dominance of the negative types in the hymn by emphasising the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus.

Most of the imagery in the hymn is biblical, making it a poetic version of a number of OT themes. Some scholars misread the context of the hymn and understood selected verses of it as anti-Semitic[147], for example, misinterpreting verse 17 as referring to the '*stink of the stinking Jews'*[148]. It seems more appropriate to understand this verse as Ephrem's reference to the Peshitta, Num. 11:5, when writing about the smell of garlic and onions as '*the heralds of people's doings'*[149].

However, it has to be noticed that Ephrem's biblical analogies in the hymn are not restricted to predominantly anti-Jewish imagery. He also uses examples of non-Jewish 'negative types' of the NT narrative to emphasise his anti-Arian polemics. Ephrem uses analogies of the 'negative types' of Herod and the crucified thief, i.e. Herod being a Roman citizen, and the thief possibly being a non-religious type[150]. Therefore, it should be stressed that when scholars choose their evidence for the 'negative type' only from his anti-Jewish analogies, they do not present the full picture. Ephrem's primary concern in choosing the 'negative type' for making comparisons is to adequately illustrate the undesirability of certain beliefs among contemporary Christians, e.g.:

- Antagonism to and denial of Christ
- Rejection of, or questioning, His Divinity

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[145]Ibid.[4]. In [9], see also *SdF*VI, *DomNos*19ff, *Virg*13.2, 14.5, *CNis*40.
[146]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed…", [15].
[147]Murray, *Symbols,* p.68, Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune…", p.177-183, Deschner, Karlheinz, *Kriminalgeschichte* … p.131-132, Hayman, A. P., "The image of the Jew…"
[148]See Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of Tune…", p.180, Deschner, Karlheinz, *Kriminalgeschichte* …, p.131-132, Hayman, A.P., "The image of the Jew…".
[149]*CNis*67.17.
[150]*HdF*7.7,9, see also Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed…", [5].

- Questioning of the Incarnation and Resurrection
- Perceiving Jews as the ones who murdered Christ[151].

Ephrem reaches the goal of creating a collective negative type that he can apply to the 'enemies' of the Church through the use of negative biblical imagery and typological interpretation. Ephrem also extends his 'negative typology' into the sphere of historical reinterpretation of events[152]. He uses the scriptural authority of the NT in passing judgement on the actions and practices of Arians describing them as blind[153], blasphemous, traitorous and non-virtuous people.

Conclusion

There are two very important sides of Ephrem that one has to consider in comprehending his writings. There is Ephrem the person, and there is Ephrem the voice of the Church, or '*the Harp of the Spirit*'. Ephrem the person, and even Ephrem the theologian, is deeply rooted in Judaism, appreciative of and compassionate towards its traditions. Ephrem the church worker, the builder of the church as an establishment, follows the demands of the historical situation at the time, and reacts to its needs. Thus, he was producing his writings as a reaction to the contemporary needs of his Church, be they social, political or religious. Ephrem pursued a very complicated agenda in his writings, which could have been personally, politically or emotionally inspired. However, in spite of all the complexity and confusion in the historical circumstances of fourth century Syria, one cannot simply stigmatise Ephrem as being anti-Jewish or the like. He cannot be fitted into these categories, because Ephrem was very clear in his agenda, on which he did not compromise. His main concern was with the Christian congregation, and he was warning them not about the evils of Judaism, but primarily about the evils of heresy, schism, and wrong doctrines, or heterodoxy. The following chapter, therefore, will analyse Ephrem's relationship with Judaism.

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[151]Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed...", [9], see *DomNos*5.6, *Crucif*1.5, *Azym*1.18, *CNis*67, *Fast*5.6 on the subject of Jews murdering Christ.
[152]Botha, *"Polarity..."*, p.43.
[153]On blindness of Jews see *HdF*8.5,27.4,9.13, see also Shepardson, "Exchanging Reed for Reed...", [6].

Chapter II: Ephrem and Judaism

II.1 Ephrem and the Jewish-Christian Environment

The previous chapter demonstrated that one could, by taking his writings separately and classifying them according to his attitude to Judaism, say that there are two Ephrems: one is the Ephrem of the Genesis and Exodus commentaries, i.e. an Ephrem deeply rooted in Judaism and its exegetical ideas. The other is presented by some scholars as almost an anti-Semite[154]. What is the answer to the question: which Ephrem is the one who is true to himself?

Ephrem has different goals in his various writings. His OT commentaries are written in the genre of Jewish exegesis, and keep within the rules and regulations of the genre. On the other hand, the commentaries on the Diatessaron are deliberately taken outside the framework of Judaism. Ephrem chooses to switch the emphasis from Jews to Gentiles, to emphasise the Christological perspective, and strengthen the position of 'the nations'. Another example is his hymnology and some prose works where Ephrem allows himself more freedom with critical remarks in relation to the Jews. However, Ephrem uses these remarks as indirect illustrations for his arguments about the role of the Gentiles or in his apologies to the contemporary Christians.

This chapter is a classified overview of modern scholarship divided into three categories:

1. Ephrem and the Jewish-Christian environment
2. Ephrem's theology in relation to Judaism
3. Ephrem's place within Jewish exegesis and Jewish literary tradition.

Such a presentation covers the broad scope of Ephrem's relationship to Judaism, i.e. starting from the historical situation of Jewish-Christian encounters in Syria in the fourth century CE, and going through Ephrem's theological thinking and exegesis. All of the material covered in this work illustrates that Ephrem may share a common tradition with Jewish exegetes.

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[154]Murray, *Symbols,* p.68; Kuhlmann, "The Harp out of tune…", p.180; Deschner, "Kriminalgeschichte…", p.131-132 and some others mentioned in Chapter I.

Judaism had a tremendous influence on the formation of Syriac Christianity. Many aspects of Christian life in Syria were connected to Judaism in one way or another:

- Jewish/Semitic ethos through language (Syriac-Aramaic-Hebrew)
- Environment: geographical connection to Palestine
- Social/Political: converts from Judaism
- Biblical: Peshitta origins could possibly have been Jewish[155].

Brock even introduces a special term for Christianity in Syria, i.e. 'Syriac Orient', differentiating it from the Greek and Latin worlds of the Mediterranean[156]. According to Brock, there is no doubt about the Jewish origins of Syriac Christianity. He talks about:

> Christian communities in the area of northern Mesopotamia whose origin was in Judaism, and whose orientation remained decidedly Jewish in character... It would have been from such communities that at least most of the Jewish features in fourth-century Syriac writers derive, and, one might add, it was thanks to them that narrative haggadic techniques continued to live on in Christian Syriac literature for some centuries.[157]

Drijvers disputes with Murray and Crammer in opposing the view that Syriac Christianity was '*Jewish-Christianity, since its first missionaries and adherents were Jews, who gave Edessene Christendom its typical Semitic flavour and* ***couleur locale*** *untouched by Hellenism*'[158].

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[155]See Weitzman, M. P., *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999) p.1, see also Brock, S., "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources", *JJS* 30 (1979) p.212-213, where he traces *the background of the Peshitta Pentateuch in the Palestinian Targum Tradition* and refers to numerous sources showing the relation between the two: Perles, J., *Meletemata Peschitoniana* (Bratislav, 1859), Wernberg-Moller, P., *Studia Theologica* 15 (1961) p.128-180 and *JSS* 7 (1962) p.253-266. Koster, M.D., *The Peshitta of Exodus* (Assen, 1977) p.164-212, playing down the links between Peshitta and Targumim; see Brock's review in *JTS* ns 29 (1978) p.549-551; Maori, Y., *The Peshitta Version of the Pentateuch in its Relation to the Sources of Jewish Exegesis* (Diss. Jerusalem, 1975). Brock also supports the view of Jewish converts translating Peshitta in "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac", *JJS* 46 (1995) p.282.

[156]Brock, S. P, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life (*Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc, 1987) p.xxxiii, see also idem. "An introduction to Syriac Studies", in J.H.Eaton (ed.) *Horizons in Semitic Studies: Articles for the Student,* University Semitic Study Aids 8 (University of Birmingham, 1980) p.4-5, McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions..." p.188, see also McCarthy, C., "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church: Ephrem's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount", in G. J. Norton and S. Pisano (eds.), *Tradition of the Text Studies offered to D.Barthelemy* (OBO 109, 1991) p.106; Weitzman, M. P., *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999).

[157]Brock, S., 'A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac', *JJS* 46 (1995) p.282, see also Kamesar, A., 'The Evaluation of the Narrative Aggada in Greek and Latin Christian Patristic literature', *JTS* .45 (1994) p.37-71, esp.p.70.

[158]Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.90, see also Murray, *Symbols,* p.4ff., Cramer,W., *Der Geist Gottes und des Menschen in frühsyrischer Theologie* (Munster: Aschendorff, 1979) p.7ff.

Several other scholars support the idea of the Semitic/Jewish background of the Syriac Church. McCarthy looks at Ephrem's writings strictly within that environment, suggesting the origins of the Syriac Church from Jewish converts to Christianity[159]. This is her description:

> There existed in the regions of Mesopotamia and Syria a distinctive, independent branch of Christianity, ascetic in outlook and strongly influenced by Jewish ways of thought. The language of this community was Syriac, a form of Aramaic... its thought patterns and modes of expression were distinctively Semitic.[160]

Murray also supports the idea of the Semitic background of the Syriac Church, arguing that the Christianity of Aphrahat and Ephrem had as its main base a breakaway movement from the Jewish community in Adiabene[161]. Barnard traces the history of the Church in Edessa from the first century, supporting the idea that it was strongly influenced by an early Jewish-Christian Gospel tradition[162]. Also, Sed characterises the Syriac Church as having an awareness of a Jewish-Christian origin[163].

Extending the arguments of the scholars mentioned above, one may suppose the following description of the Jewish-Christian context in Syria in Ephrem's time:

- Creative tension: the development of the Gospel tradition in relation to Hebrew Scripture
- Destructive tension: a breakaway movement from Judaism, and the search for an independent Christian self-identity.

In the process of finding independence from Judaism, Christianity in Syria was trying to break away from its strong influence. However, it turned out to be quite difficult to completely extricate the newly established Christian tradition from Jewish legacy. Thus, Syriac Christianity developed its character by using and refashioning its Jewish inheritance. Ephrem demonstrates this kind of relationship with Judaism in his writings.

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[159]McCarthy, 'Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...', p.106, see also Brock, *The Syriac Fathers...*, p.x-xi.
[160]McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions...", p.188.
[161]Murray, *Symbols,* p.7-8, see also McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions...", p.188.
[162]Barnard, L. F., 'The Origins and Emergence of the Church in Edessa during the first two centuries AD', *VC* 22 (1968) pp.161-175.
[163]Sed, N., 'Les hymnes sur le Paradis de Saint Ephrem et les traditions Juives', *LM* 81 (1968) p.501.

However, one should not expect Syriac Christianity to function only under Jewish influence. In the fourth century CE Christianity in Syria was also influenced, although not as strongly, by the wider Hellenistic world[164]. It is natural, therefore, to assume a process of interdependence between all three influential traditions existing at the time, i.e. Greek, Latin and Syriac[165]. Ephrem lived in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual environment. Jansma points out that Ephrem was quite *'well informed about the religious movements he felt obliged to refute'*[166]. Thus, it could have been a matter of choice, rather than mere habit, for Ephrem to follow the Semitic way of thinking, and to prioritise the rabbinic approach by keeping his style closely associated with it.

McCarthy describes Ephrem as *'thoroughly Semitic'* in his writings, idioms, imagery and language[167]. It is important to emphasise that Ephrem functions from within the Jewish exegetical tradition; his whole mindset is that of a person who embraced it as an organic part of his identity. Sed argues that Ephrem represents the tradition of Semitic Christianity, which was not directly influenced by Midrashic and rabbinic sources, but by an earlier tradition, which Sed locates in a *'specific period in the Jewish tradition, which was historically situated between the Apocrypha of the OT and the writing down of the first compilations of the Midrash'*[168]. Sed presents rabbinic writings as the departure point for the Syrian Christian tradition, but denies their direct influence on Ephrem, pointing out that that was a much later tradition[169]. The author accepts that Ephrem was influenced by the Oral Torah but denies the influence of the Midrash, which is a part of the *Oral Torah*. This thesis will argue against the inconsistency in Sed's argument by insisting upon 'complete' influence of the *Oral Torah* on Ephrem[170].

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[164]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions...", p.188, see also Brock S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Studies, 1992) p.118,143, McCarthy, "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...", p.120.
[165]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions...", p.189.
[166]Jansma, T., "Ephrem on Exodus II.5: Reflections on the Interplay of Human Freewill and Divine Providence", *OCP* 39 (1973) p.15.
[167]McCarthy, "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...", p.120.
[168]Sed, N., 'Les hymnes sur le Paradis...', p.501, translation by the author.
[169]Ibid.
[170]I will demonstrate instances of Ephrem's influence by Haggada and Midrash in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis, e.g. Chapter III.3.7.

II.2 Ephrem's Theology and Judaism

This presentation of Ephrem's theology gives an overview of his reliance on Jewish tradition, including Halakha and Haggada. Ephrem's theology consists of important concepts and ideas. These include:

- The concept of the Merits of the Fathers
- The concept of God's Mercy and Justice
- The concept of God's Presence (Shekhinah).

This section considers the ways Ephrem deals with essentially Jewish concepts, how he works within the framework of rabbinical argument in presenting them, and then how he reinterprets them. This analysis discusses the extent to which Ephrem embraces the exegetical tradition of Jewish Haggada in his writings.Also discussed in this part are Ephrem's ideas about God's revelation in the created world. It will be shown how Ephrem develops his Christology in relation to Judaism, i.e. through reinterpreting Jewish tradition. Ephrem's interpretation of Christ as a Passover Lamb will illustrate the point. Further examples will be given of Ephrem's Christology, i.e. his idea of Christ as 'the Medicine of Life', and the notion of healing in his writings.

In connection to the above mentioned, this section also supplies an account of Ephrem's relationship with the Law, i.e. Halakha. Ephrem's perception of circumcision will be used as a further illustration. And, finally, there will be a presentation of Ephrem's understanding of Israel in relation to:

- her free choice in not following Christ
- the sins of the Jews and the perspective of their forgiveness.

All of the above points provide an introduction to Ephrem's theological disposition and allows one to determine whether Ephrem can be defined as an original theologian.

Presented below is the schematic picture of the themes covered in this chapter. It is an overview of Ephrem's theology, which is particularly set out to demonstrate how Ephrem's ideas fit into the framework of Jewish traditional concepts and notions.

The relationship of Ephrem's theology to Judaism

Haggada

(Jewish concepts)

Merits of the Fathers

God's Mercy and Justice

Shekhinah (God's Presence).

Halakha

(Ephrem's relationship to the Law)

(e.g. Ephrem on circumcision).

Ephrem's ideas

God's revelation in the world:

-Through nature

-Through Scripture

-Through the Incarnation:

(Christ – the Medicine of Life/ the notion of Healing).

The Christology of Ephrem in relation to Judaism:

Christ as a Passover Lamb

Humility of Christ - Deification of humanity.

Ephrem on Israel:

Free will/ free choice

On Israel's sin and forgiveness.

II.2.1 Ephrem's Theology: Some Scholarly Definitions

A number of scholars, among them Salvesen, Florovskiy and McCarthy, suggest that Ephrem's theological teaching is not coherent and deep. Salvesen argues that there is *'nothing especially profound in Ephrem's theological exposition, which tends to be more popular and devotional'*[171]. She is not the only scholar who ascribes simplicity to Ephrem – and simplicity not only in form, but also in theology. Florovskiy writes that Ephrem was first of all a man of ascetic being and an undoubtedly talented poet. However, he mentions that the quality of 'thinker' was the least apparent in Ephrem[172]. Burkitt adds to the unflattering portrait of Ephrem's skills by writing:

> Ephrem is extraordinarily prolix, he repeats himself again and again, and for all the immense mass of material there seems very little to take hold of. His style is as allusive and unnatural as if the thought was really deep and subtle, and yet when the thought is unravelled, it is generally commonplace... Judged by any canons that we apply to religious literature, it is poor stuff.[173]

Segal, in agreement with Burkitt, describes Ephrem's theology as poor, but he admits that Ephrem was a master of the Syriac style:

> His work, it must be confessed, shows little profundity or originality of thought, and his metaphors are laboured. His poems are turgid, humourless, and repetitive.[174]

Other scholars restrict themselves to less definitive statements about Ephrem's theology. McCarthy, for example, ascribes well thought-out theological vision to Ephrem[175]. However, she also states that *'one will have difficulty in finding a fully systematized theology in Ephrem'*, and *'one will look in vain for a fully developed set of hermeneutical principles'*[176]. Alternatively, Brock sees the lack of systematisation in Ephrem's exegesis positively, as something that makes his exegetical approach to Scripture more flexible, dynamic and fluid in character[177]. Brock writes:

> Because the theologian poet is using a literary form that instinctively shrinks back from any attempt to encapsulate eternal verities and truths in fixed formulae and dogmatic definitions,

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[171]Salvesen, A., "The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem", *StPatr* 35 (1993) p.334.
[172]Florovskiy, G.V., *Vostochniye Otsi IV Veka* (Moscow: 1992) p.228.
[173]Burkitt, F., Crawford, *Early Eastern Christianity; St. Margaret's Lectures on the Syriac-Speaking Church* (London: John Murray, 1904) p.95,99.
[174]Segal, J. B., *Edessa, 'the Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) p.89, see also Griffith, S. H., *'Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997) p.5.
[175]McCarthy, 'Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...', p.114.
[176]McCarthy, 'Allusions and Illusions...', p.207.
[177]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Rome: CHS, 1985) p.9.

> he is able to present an essentially dynamic theological vision, continually urging the reader to move on beyond the outer garment of words to the inner meaning and truth to which they point.[178]

Yousif, on the other hand, offers a possibility of systematic approach to Ephrem's writings, suggesting exploration of the following three areas:

- Ephrem as a scholar commenting on the Bible
- Ephrem as a poet basing his thoughts on the Bible[179]
- Ephrem as an apologist citing the Bible[180].

Presented above various viewpoints of the scholars, therefore, allow one to study Ephrem's involvement with the scriptural text from different perspectives. Hence, Ephrem could be seen as an author of deep devotion to the biblical text with an extensive knowledge of it.

Murray provides a positive view of Ephrem's writings, and defines Ephrem as *'the greatest poet of the patristic age and, perhaps, the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante'*[181]. Another positive definition comes from Griffith who argues that:

> He was a teacher, a preacher, a biblical exegete, a theologian-poet whose discourse was Aramaic to the core. In his own idiom he commended to his flock what one now recognizes to be the orthodox faith of Nicaea, along with an unswerving loyalty to the Roman Empire[182]. His style of religious discourse was not academic; it was deeply contemplative, based on the close reading of the scriptures, with an eye to the telling mystic symbol (*raza*) or 'type' in terms of which God chose to make revelations to the church.[183]

Adding to the positive portrait of Ephrem, Brock defines Ephrem's theological vision as *profound* and *powerful*[184].

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[178]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992) p.160.
[179]In agreement with Murray, R., 'Der Dichter als Exeget', *ZKT* (1980) pp.484-494 and Brock, S.P., 'The Poet as Theologian', *Sobornost* 7 (1977) p.243-250.
[180]Yousif, P., "Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis", *StPatr* 18:4 (1990) p.297.
[181]Murray, R., "Ephrem Syrus", in *Catholic Dictionary of Theology,* Vol. II (London, 1967) pp.220-223, see also Murray, *Symbols*, p.31.
[182]Griffith, S. H., "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire", in Thomas Halton & Joseph P. Williman (eds.) *Diaconia...* (WashingtonDC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986) pp.22-52; *idem*, "Ephraem the Syrian's Hymns 'Against Julian'; idem, "'Faith Seeking Understanding' in the Thought of St. Ephraem the Syrian", in George C. Berthold (ed.) *Faith Seeking Understanding*...(Manchester NH: Saint Anselm College Press, 1991) pp.35-55, *idem*, "Setting right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephraem's Hymns against Heresies" in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1999) p.97-114.
[183]Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery...*, p.8.
[184]Ibid.p.161.

The appreciation of Ephrem's authority in the Syriac tradition and in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition starts from as early as the fifth century. Jacob of Sarug (c.451-521) celebrates Ephrem as a talented and sophisticated poet and theologian:

> A marvellous rhetor, who surpassed the Greeks in declamation; who could include a thousand subjects in a single speech.
>
> A divine citharist; he sets his phrases to verse, to make joyful sound in mighty wonder.[185]

This thesis will argue that Ephrem was a unique writer who worked within the genre of Jewish-Christian biblical exegesis. This thesis will demonstrate that Ephrem as an exegete felt most at ease and at his best when presenting his arguments following Jewish exegetical thought. Ephrem used rabbinical exegesis as a point of creative tension from whence he brought his arguments into Christological interpretation. That makes him Christian and Semitic at the same time.

The chain of Ephrem's argument is rather complicated. He disguises intricacy of his thought behind simplicity of form and presentation. Hence, the elaborate mode of presenting his argument at the same time gives an impression of being very understandable. It is more a testimony to his art and clarity of argument than a testimony to his simplicity and lack of depth. Kim shows the way Ephrem develops his arguments in *Homily on Our Lord*[186], demonstrating a massive construction of biblical passages from both Testaments, which Ephrem presents in a chain that cannot be easily reproduced without much explanation. Hence, one can hardly call Ephrem simplistic in his exegesis.

Ephrem might not be original in basing many of his arguments on Jewish exegesis. His emphasis on free will, justice and mercy are charged with the depth of knowledge of Jewish concepts. However, the way he reaches the very heart and core of these concepts, transforming them with new meaning, demonstrates his strong theological position[187].

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[185]Bedjan, P., *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum Syriace,* Vol. III (Paris & Leipzig, 1892) p.667, see also Amar, J. P., 'A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug', *PO* 47.1, no. 209 (1995) p.32-33.

[186]In her article Kim shows verbal links that Ephrem establishes between Ex.32-34 and Luke7:36-50; shows Ephrem's use of typology and Christology, exegetical technique of word play etc. See Kim, A. Y., "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques in his *Homily on Our Lord", Hugoye* Vol.3, No.1 (January 2000) [4-7], http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol3No1/HV3N1Kim.htm 04/08/2005. In [16-22] Kim presents many illustrative examples of Ephrem's way of building chains of arguments based on the use of various exegetical techniques.

[187]See Chapters II.2.4.1, II.3.9, IV.1.5.2.

II.2.2 Ephrem's Theology in Relation to Judaism

Ephrem chooses not to present great variety in his theological thoughts, but focuses on the concepts that are fundamental to his writings. The following section offers some examples of the Jewish concepts that Ephrem uses.

The first example is the concept of *God's Mercy and Justice*; it is remarkable how Ephrem tackles the '*creative tension between God's grace and his righteousness or justice*'[188]. In pursuing this theme Ephrem demonstrates fluency and confidence in dealing with this fundamentally Jewish concept. Brock argues that this concept is one of many within the Jewish tradition that Ephrem uses, which has not been pursued in other Christian sources[189].

Divine presence is another theme in Ephrem's theology that has a connection with Judaism. Ephrem uses the word *Shechinah*, which is a Hebrew term used by rabbinic exegetes. It is surprising that McVey, in her article specifically devoted to the use of the concept of divine presence in Ephrem's writings, does not trace the etymology of this word to the Hebrew language and Judaism, while acknowledging that '*Ephrem again shows himself to be a genuine heir to the Jewish prophetic tradition*'[190].

McVey points out a crucially important factor, which is Ephrem's presentation of the concept of the divine presence through the prism of the event of the Incarnation: Christ's introduction into the centre of the concept changes forever the relationship between people and God[191]. It is important to note how Ephrem reinterprets the concept of divine presence emphasising two new aspects of the God-human relationship:

1. The Humanity of God
2. The Deification of man.

Ephrem writes:

> ...the Deity imprinted Itself on humanity,
>
> so that humanity might also be cut into the seal of Deity.[192]

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[188]McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions...", p.203, see also McCarthy, "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...", p.114.
[189]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Rome: CHS, 1985), p.8, 20, see also McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions...", p.203.
[190]McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God...", p.258.
[191]Ibid.p.243, 246.
[192]*Nat*8.5, see also McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God...", p.246.

Ephrem as a theologian brings a new perspective into the understanding of the known concept. Brock mentions the following:

> Ephrem is making two basic points: since humanity cannot cross the ontological chasm and so approach God, God has to cross it in the opposite direction first; only thus can communication be established: God has to descend to humanity's lowly level, and address that humanity in its own terms and language. And secondly, the whole aim of this divine descent into human language is to draw humanity up to God.[193]

Unfortunately, no reference by scholars to Ephrem's use of the concept of the *Merits of the Fathers* has been found by this study. This thesis therefore devotes an entire chapter to the instances of Ephrem's use of this concept in order to further illustrate the relationship of Ephrem's theology to Judaism[194].

II.2.3 Ephrem and the Law/Legislation

The relevance of this section is expressed by its title. Law, and the legislative norms, constituted Halakha, one of the two major aspects of Jewish religious teaching[195]. Therefore, this part is devoted to references to the Law in Ephrem's writings, which in themselves could be seen and analysed as an indirect way of Ephrem expressing his views about Judaism. Ephrem's connection to Haggada through his use of Jewish exegetical concepts has been already demonstrated above. Presenting Ephrem's thoughts and reflections on the Halakhic arguments, I will further explore Ephrem's relationship with Judaism.

Russell perceives Ephrem as a supporter of the idea that through the commandments/the Law in the scriptural narrative God brings revelation to the body, while generically through the actual writings of Scripture God reveals Himself to the mind[196]. It seems important for Ephrem to differentiate between various aspects of scriptural revelation, ascribing special significance to the commandments for the body. Ephrem could be described as a writer promoting a rather moderate approach to

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[193]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publication, 1992) p.62, see also *HdF*31:1-7, 54:8.
[194]See Chapter V.2.
[195]The second major part of the Jewish tradition is Haggada.
[196]Russell, P. S., "Making Sense of Scripture: An Early Attempt by St.Ephraem the Syrian", *Communio* (2001) p.199, see also *SdF*6.259-308.

the letter of the Law. In *Sermones on Faith* 3.39-252 Ephrem compares biblical passages from the OT and the NT highlighting inconsistencies in the scriptural texts. He talks about the laws of Kashrut and the commandment of circumcision:

> There is a passage that says that a meal should be pure[197], and a passage which commands mixing one's food...[198]
>
> There is a passage: "Circumcise the male,[199]" and there is a passage which says circumcision is profane.[200]

In the passages quoted Ephrem contrasts common Halakhic postulates of Judaism with the broader NT view of the legislative norms. In writing about the Shabbat and the laws of purity he shows a deep knowledge of Jewish Halakha. He progressively develops his legislative ideas throughout the *SdF* to the following conclusions:

> Today have come to an end the commandments of the Sabbath, the circumcision, and purification. They are superfluous for those who came after, but they were useful for those in the middle. They were not useful for those at the beginning because they were sound in knowledge. And they are also not useful for those who come after who are sound in faith. They serve only the ones in the middle who have been wounded by paganism.[201]

And:

> What can circumcision do to sin which dwells within? Sin is forgiven in your heart, but you are cutting off your foreskin! "Circumcision was appropriate in its time".[202]

Throughout the whole *Sermon* Ephrem presents a creative and challenging approach to the understanding of the commandments, which cannot be taken as a one-sided rejection or support of legislative norms. He states that the commandments are directions and guides for people to value and understand[203]:

> Enter the search so that the commandments might be like a mirror for you. See in them your labour and work: seek the reward and promise.[204]

Ephrem could be understood as presenting a dubious argument, i.e. '*the commandments are iron*'[205]. He emphasises the fact that not all the commandments are relevant to everyone, and at the same time affirms that certain groups still have the

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[197]Lev.11.
[198]Acts10:13ff, see also *SdF*3.99, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.188 .
[199]Lev.12:3.
[200]Gal.5:1-6, see also *SdF*3.105, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.189.
[201]*SdF*3.179-188, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.191-192.
[202]*SdF*3.235, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.193.
[203]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.196.
[204] *SdF*3.45-48, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.186.
[205] *SdF*3.193, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.198.

privilege of fulfilling the commandments. He also claims that fulfilling the commandments means salvation, but states that the commandments are not just plain directives[206]. Ephrem develops his argument leading his readers and encouraging them to find the answers to these difficult questions. Overall, he perceives the commandments as:

- reflections of God's revelation
- tools to be used carefully and with respect[207]
- not only dependable, but also enduring
- there is no inadequacy or inaccuracy in the commandments that could change their value[208].

Additionally, Ephrem points out changes in historical circumstances in relation to the commandments. These were provoked by 'the people' not living up to their divine choice:

> Because the People and their illnesses transgressed, their cures were not useful. The pain came to an end and the pain kept rising up; the cure came to an end and the cure kept rising up. For, these pains and cures come to an end because the sacrifices, Sabbaths and tithes ended. But, there are pains and cures which continue, for example, "You must not swear, steal and commit adultery"[209]. You must not run from a commandment because it has come to an end and its evil come to an end. Be secure in the commandment, because it is the cure for your sickness. You must not put cures on your sores which are not useful for you. One pain increases another because deceit increases injustice.[210]

In his *Exodus Commentary* Ephrem proves the value of the commandment of circumcision. In the story of Moses being attacked by an angel, Ephrem describes Zipporah presenting a rabbinic argument. She uses the commandment of circumcision as a legitimate reason to stop the angel from killing:

> So if you don't hold back for my sake or Moses' sake, hold back for the sake of the commandment of circumcision that was established.[211]

Or he writes in *Genesis Commentary* about the importance of the covenant of circumcision:

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[206]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.196 .
[207]Ibid.p.198.
[208]Ibid.p.197 .
[209]Exod.20:7, 15,14.
[210]*SdF*3.213-228, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.192-193.
[211]*ExodCom*IV.4. See English translation in Salvesen, A., *The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem.* (Kottayam, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1995) p.27 (Further references to Salvesen's translation will be abbreviated as Salvesen*ECE*).

> Abraham made him swear by the covenant of circumcision. Because God saw that the two heads of the world had dishonoured this member, He set the sign of the covenant on it so that that member which was the most despised of all the limbs would now be the most honoured of all the limbs. The sign of the covenant that was set on it bestowed on it such great honour that those who take oaths now swear by it and all those who administer oaths make them swear by it.[212]

Kim interprets Ephrem's presentation of the *circumcision of the heart*[213] as a replacement of physical circumcision arguing that an external sign is replaced by an internal one[214]. A more satisfactory explanation could be that Ephrem sees the circumcision of the heart as complementary to the circumcision of the flesh. In his argument Ephrem functions within the framework of rabbinical exegesis where both notions are accepted, and each notion contributes to the fullness of understanding of the commandment[215]. This view is supporet by Murray who also suggests a link between the ideas of the Syriac fathers of the fourth century and the Qumran texts in interpreting and presenting the concept of the circumcision of the heart[216].

It is important to mention at this point that Ephrem does not replicate the legislative arguments of the debating rabbis, nor their views on the individual points of the Halakhah. Some of Ephrem's views may coincide with those of the rabbis, but he does not take part in the Halakhic discussions: Ephrem is not interested in legal principles as such. There are very good reasons behind the fact that Ephrem does not discuss the Law in depth:

1. The Christian problems which Ephrem addresses in his writings lie outside the legislative arguments presented by the Jewish sages.
2. Ephrem's Christian audience was unable to comprehend the legal background of these Halakhic debates.

Therefore, it must be emphasised that Ephrem primarily shows affinities with the rabbinic Haggadic exegesis.

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[212]*GenCom*XXI.2. See English translation in McVey, K. (ed.) *St.Ephrem the Syrian. Selected Prose Works,* trans. Edward Mathews and Joseph Amar, The Fathers of The Church 91 (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1994) p.167-168 (Further references to the Mathews's translation will be abbreviated as FOC91).

[213]*DomNos*7.

[214]Kim, A.Y., "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques in his *Homily on Our Lord", Hugoye* Vol.3, No.1 (January 2000) [11].

[215]The concept of the circumcision of the heart has a biblical origin. See Deut.10:16; Ezek.44:1, 9; Jer.6:10,9:25. For reference to it in the Midrash see Rashi on Lev.9:23.

[216]Murray, R., '"Circumcision of the heart" and the origins of the QYAMA', in G. J. Reinik and A.C. Klugkist, *After Bardaisan* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999) p.201-202.

II.2.4 Ideas of Ephrem: God's Revelation, Christology, Israel

Ephrem in his writings presents God's revelation as a part of the intention of creation. McCarthy, following Brock[217], understands God's revelation in Ephrem's presentation as God's communication with humans[218] which is only possible by God's choice, accepted, however, by human will. It is an expression of Ephrem's identity as a theologian when he talks about God's revelation being available through everything in this world[219]. There are various sources of God's revelation that some scholars identify in Ephrem:

- Revelation through Scripture
- Revelation through nature[220]
- The Incarnation, the ultimate Revelation[221].

McCarthy discusses the use of different names in God's revelation[222]. Ephrem writes:

> Let us give thanks to God, who clothed himself in the names of the body's various parts: Scripture refers to his ears, to teach us that he listens to us…[223]

Ephrem often describes the Incarnation by giving different names to Christ. He refers to Christ as a *Passover Lamb*[224], or as the *Medicine of Life*[225]. These are crucially important definitions in Ephrem's writings. The definition of Christ as the *Passover Lamb* allows the following:

1. Ephrem's deploying his knowledge of Jewish practices
2. Ephrem's reinterpreting the Jewish understanding of the Passover celebration
3. Ephrem's bringing Christian meaning to the Jewish tradition by filling it with a Christocentric argument.

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[217]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992) p.41.
[218]McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions…", p.190-191.
[219]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture…", p.174.
[220]McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions…", p.190-191, see also Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture…", p.175.
[221]All three modes of Divine Revelation are presented by Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992) p.41.
[222]McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions…", p.190-191.
[223]*HdF*31, see also McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions…", p.190-191.
[224]*Nat*18.18-19.
[225]*DomNos*9-13

The situation of Christians in Ephrem's time participating in Jewish celebrations, especially during the Passover, has already been noted[226]. Thus, Ephrem using his knowledge of Jewish tradition, reinterprets the Passover celebration emphasising:

- the centrality of the figure of Christ as the Paschal Lamb
- the everlasting and all-embracing offering of Christ[227].

McVey points out that Ephrem deliberately emphasises the universal nature of the sacrifice of Christ as a contrast to the Halakhic tradition of temporary sacrifices[228]. She connects Ephrem's writings with Mishnah and the verses in Exodus describing sacrificial procedures[229].

McCarthy notices that illness and diseases were themes of universal preoccupation in Syria at that time[230] and '*Edessa was a cultural centre with a certain reputation for healing and medicinal skills*'[231]. Ephrem makes use of this contemporary interest in searches for cures and healers in order to present his Christological argument, i.e. Christ as the *Medicine of Life*. He often contrasts human doctors and practitioners with the holistic healing that Christ offers, i.e. healing not only of the body and spirit, but also of the whole of human existence[232].

The following section will further introduce Ephrem's theological key points, and will highlight the connection between Ephrem's ideas and Jewish traditions.

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[226]See Chapter I.1.
[227]*Nat*18.18-19, see also McVey, "The Anti-Judaic polemic of Ephrem Syrus…", p.237.
[228]Ibid., see also Mishnah, *Meg*.3.6.
[229]Ibid., see also Num.7:1-89.
[230]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.206.
[231]Segal, J. B., *Edessa, The Blessed City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) p.71-72, see also McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.206.
[232]See various examples from Ephrem in *DomNos*V,23; VI,14; VII,2,7,12,16-17,19,21;X,7a; XIII,2-3.

II.2.4.1 Ephrem on Free Will and Israel

Another identifying feature in Ephrem's theology is his devotion to the idea of free will and freedom of choice. He develops these themes on numerous occasions in his work[233] showing similarities to Jewish exegesis. McCarthy points out the difficulties that Ephrem had to deal with[234], namely, the issue of Jews voluntarily rejecting Christ. Jansma points out that Ephrem used a rabbinical way of presenting the theological problem of human free will vs. divine providence[235]. Jansma illustrates his point by stating that Ephrem took his inspiration in dealing with the verse about Pharaoh's daughter[236] from the Jewish Haggada[237]. Ephrem undoubtedly argues that she acted according to her free will[238]. In order to support his argument, Ephrem ignores biblical references in his commentaries where an alternative understanding is supported[239]. Jansma describes Ephrem as a non-compromiser in his argument even at the cost of eliminating parts of the scriptural narrative:

> Ephraem emphasises human free will even at the cost of suppressing biblical portions which are embarrassing for his belief, and distorting the plain meaning of Scripture to reconcile it with his own credo… So Ephrem at all costs endeavours to find in Scripture support for his belief that the gates of repentance are open to the sinner until the very last moment.[240]

Jansma points out that in this particular argument about the gates of repentance being open until the last moment Ephrem shows Jewish influence. He writes:

> To my mind there can be no doubt that Ephraem's emphasizing the concept of God giving opportunity for repentance betrays Jewish influence.[241]

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[233]*Parad*12:18, *Eccl*3:9, 13:5, 2:18-23, *CH*11:4 etc., see also Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications,1992) p.34-36.
[234]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.203.
[235]Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5…", p.7.
[236]Exod.2:5.
[237]Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5…", p.7.
[238]*ExodCom*II.2, see also VII.1, VIII.2, IX.4, X.5 where Ephrem talks about Pharaoh's free choices. See further illustrations on the point in Chapter II.3.9.
[239]Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5…", p.10, 13. For more explanations on the matter see Chapter II.3.9.
[240]Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5…", p.13.
[241]Ibid., The theme of repentance is further developed in Chapter IV.1.4.3.

II.2.4.2 Ephrem on Sin and Forgiveness/ Retelling the History of Israel

Kim notes that Ephrem compares Israel's history to the imagery of the NT. Ephrem takes the scandalous story of the golden calf in the OT, traditionally viewed by the Church as an example of the sin of Israel, and links it to the narrative about the sinful woman in the NT, which is about forgiveness, not only sin[242]. By doing so Ephrem brings a new insight to the understanding of this very problematic story for Jewish writers[243], and demonstrates his care and affection for 'the people'.

II.2.4.3 Ephrem on Women and on Virginity

Ephrem's emphasis upon female characters distinguishes him from many Christian writers. The following quotation shows the extent to which Ephrem reveres the purity and chastity of Mary as the Mother of God and those who follow her in the virtue of virginity:

> May all the evidences of virginity of Your brides be preserved by You.
> They are the purple [robes] and no one may touch them except our King.
> For virginity is like a vestment for You, the High Priest.[244]

The typology of Mary is very significant, inasmuch as her virginity, and virginity as a virtue, is compared by Ephrem to the vestments of the High Priest, who is Christ. The use of the symbolism of high priesthood could have been borrowed from rabbinical sources, which ascribe the priestly role to Miriam, the sister of Moses[245]. This is yet another illustration of Ephrem applying the Jewish exegetical tradition of drawing an analogy or even a typological comparison in pursuing his argument.

It is interesting to notice that Ephrem attaches feminine characteristics to God, describing Him as a nursing mother or a wet nurse[246]:

> Attuned to us the Deity like a nursing mother to an infant,
> Watching the time for his benefits, knowing the time for weaning him,

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[242]Kim, A., Y., "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques in his *Homily on Our Lord", Hugoye* Vol.3, No.1 (January 2000) [3]. For more details on the matter see Chapter II.3.8.
[243]For example, Josephus omits it from his history, and the rabbis include the story of the Calf among the forbidden Targumim, see also Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques..." [1], footnote 7.
[244]*Nat*16:13, see also McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God...", p.254.
[245]See Chapter V.1.
[246]The perception of God as a midwife is familiar to Jewish exegesis, see *ExodRab*1.15, see also Chapter V.1. See McVey, K., "Ephrem the Syrian use of female metaphors to describe the deity", *ZAC* 5 (Nov 2001), 261-288, esp. 279-280; McVey, K., "Images of joy in Ephrem's Hymns on Paradise: Returning to the womb and the breast", *JCanSocSyrSt* 3 (2003), 59-77.

> Both when to rear him on milk and when to feed him with solid food,
> Weighing and offering benefits according to the measure of his maturity.[247]

Salvesen emphasises the fact that Ephrem often singles out and gives prominence to female characters in the biblical text[248]. This emphasis on women is generally ascribed by scholars to the way the early Syriac Fathers perceived women[249]. Ephrem's life story suggests that he was the director of a choir of virgins[250]. Even if that was not historically correct, one cannot help but notice Ephrem's particular sensitivity and appreciation of female characters in his writings.

Summary

The study offered in Chapter II.2 aimed to present Ephrem's use of theological concepts and ideas in relation to Judaism. The outcomes of this section allow us to assume that Ephrem's theology is deeply connected with Jewish tradition. Ephrem demonstrates a wide knowledge of and shows a great deal of creativity in his approach to Haggada and Halakha; both traditions are used as a starting point for his theological arguments and as a base for his Christology. Ephrem adds some original features to the ideas that he inherits or borrows from Judaism, i.e. the humanity of God and the deification of humans, for example, also the definitions of Christ as the Passover Lamb, and as the Medicine of Life.

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[247]*Eccl*25,18, see also McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God...", p.247.
[248]Salvesen, A., "Themes in Ephrem's Exodus Commentary", *The Harp* Vol.IV, No.1-3 (July 1991) p.23.
[249]For more details see Brock S. P. and Ashbrook Harvery, S., *Holy Women of the Syriac Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) p.154.
[250]*Vita*31 (Lamy II, p.68), Jacob of Serug's memra on Ephrem in ed. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum III*, p.668, 672, and Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.140ff. , see also Salvesen, A., "The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem", *StPatr* 35 (1993) p.337.

II.3 Ephrem's Exegesis and Judaism

II.3.1 Further Definitions of Ephrem's Exegesis

This section supplies illustrative examples from Ephrem's writings in support of those scholars who emphasise the influence on Ephrem of rabbinical exegetical methods[251] and the Midrashic way of exegesis[252]. This area is in fact underdeveloped by scholars. It is hardly possible to find a serious analysis of Ephrem's relationship to Midrash[253].

One can find numerous suggestive remarks in the articles of scholars singling out instances of Ephrem's usage of Jewish tradition in his writings. The following is just one of them:

> Another dimension of Ephraem's Old Testament commentary which most modern scholars seldom fail to mention is the Jewish connection... Many aspects of the interpretation have their closest analogies in the Jewish exegetical tradition rather than in other Christian traditions[254]. This is a dimension of Ephraem's thought which is perceptible not only in the straightforward commentaries, but in the hymns and homilies as well[255]. It reminds the modern reader of Ephraem's work that in the Christian world of the Semitic languages there was a certain continuity of thought and imagination with the Jewish world about the interpretation of the biblical narrative.[256]

Brock ascribes to Ephrem an '*awareness of certain targum traditions*'[257], which, he argues, were *transferred* to Ephrem '*on an oral rather then on a written level*'[258]. He

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[251]Kronholm. T., *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephraem the Syrian, With particular reference to the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition,* Conjectanea Biblica, OT Series 11 (Lund, 1978) p.25-27.

[252]Ortis de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca,* editio altera (Romae, 1965) p.61, see also Yousif, P., 'Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis', *StPatr* 18:4 (1990) p.297.

[253]The closest one can get is Kronholm, T., *Motifs from Genesis 1-11....*

[254]On this point see also Feghali, P., 'Influence des Targums sur la pensée exégétique d'Ephrem?', *OCA* 229 (1984) p.71-82, and Brock, S., 'Jewish tradition in Syriac Sources', *JJS* 30 (1979) p.212-232.

[255]On this point see also Kronholm, T., *Motifs from Genesis 1-11...*, and Sed, N., 'Les Hymns sur le paradis...', p.455-501.

[256]Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery*, p.15.

[257]Brock, 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources', p.218, 219, 223, 225, 226, 229; Gerson, D., 'Die Commentarien des Ephraem Syrus im Verhältnis zur jüdischen Exegese', *MGWJ* 17 (1868) p.15-33, 64-72, 98-109,141-149; Funk, S., *Die haggadischen Elementen in den Homilienen des Aphrahates* (Vienna: M. Knopfmacher, 1891); Hidal, S., *Interpretatio Syriaca,* Conjectanea Biblica, OT Series 6 (Lund: Gleerup, 1974) p.131-138.

[258]Brock, S., 'A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac', *JJS* 46 (1995) p.279, where on p.281 the author states that '*Ephrem uses wording that goes against the Peshitta, but accords with that of the Targumim, or some sort of the Targum tradition'*. See also idem. "Some aspects of Greek Words in Syriac", in A. Dietrich (ed.), *Synkretismus im syrisch-persischen Kulturgebiet* (Abh.Akad.Wiss. Göttingen III.96, 1975) p.98-104.

also affirms that Ephrem goes '*beyond the extant text of the Peshitta in the knowledge of some of the identifications made in the Pentateuch Targumim*'[259]. Salvesen mentions that Ephrem provides more details about Hur than there are in the biblical narrative: these are possibly taken from Jewish sources[260]. Romney mentions that Ephrem names certain cites in his *ComGen*[261], i.e. Edessa, Nisibis, Ctesiphon, Adiabene, Hatra and Resh'aina, stating that '*the identifications of the cities themselves are also known... from the Targumim*'[262].

Other scholars argue that Ephrem presents a certain approach to the Scripture that could be characterised as rabbinical. Drijvers acknowledges '*Ephrem's indebtedness to Jewish exegetical methods*' stating that '*substantial elements from Jewish Haggada and Targumic tradition are undeniably present in his hymns and commentaries*'[263]. According to Russell, Ephrem acknowledges that Scripture itself sometimes presents a problem (an oddity)[264]. He states that '*Ephraem displays here an acceptance of ambiguity and difficulty in the scriptural revelation that is rare among exegetes of any age*'[265]. Hence, Russell compares Ephrem's approach to the Scripture with the style of the sages in the Midrash. Indeed, on many occasions the primary concern of rabbinical authors is to identify the problem in the scripture by asking the following question: *Ma ha-qoshi?* Kim notices that Ephrem uses exegesis and interpretation that arise *'from problematic features that are perceived to be present in the text'*[266]. This is precisely the technique that is commonly used by the writers of the Midrash[267].

Although scholars offer various comments in relation to Ephrem's exegesis, there is a lack of an in-depth study of the similarity of approach in interpreting biblical events (i.e. the crossing of the Red Sea) and characters (e.g. midwives, Aaron, Moses, Hur etc.) in Ephrem's commentaries and the Jewish Midrash. Hence, there is a real need to

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[259]Brock, 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources', p.216.
[260]Salvesen, A., "The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem", *StPatr* 35 (1993) p.334. See also Chapter V.1.5.
[261]*GenCom*VIII 1.(2).
[262]Romney B.H., 'The identity formation of Syrian Orthodox Christians', *PdO* 29 (2004) p.112.
[263]Drijvers, H. J. W., "Jews and Christians at Edessa", *JJS* 36 (1985) p.101, see also Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, p.101ff.
[264]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.181.
[265]Ibid.p.183.
[266]Kim, A.Y., "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques in his *Homily on Our Lord", Hugoye* Vol.3, No.1 (January 2000) [7].
[267]See Vermes G., "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis", in *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies,* Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1975) p.62.

fill in the gap. Yousif deliberately points to an open door for research in the area of Ephrem's relationship to rabbinical exegesis[268]. This thesis aims to address some of the issues mentioned above in the research presented in Part Two. The following section, however, will further address the question of Ephrem's relationship with Jewish traditions.

II.3.2 Ephrem and Semitic/Jewish Exegetical/Literary Tradition: Semitic Inheritance of Ephrem

This part highlights the possibilities of the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition on Ephrem`s writings and looks into the following aspects of Ephrem's life:

- his Semitic background
- his relationship to Jewish scholarship
- his relationship to Jewish literary tradition and its influence on him.

An attempt is made to summarise and demonstrate the ways Ephrem uses exegetical techniques, e.g. *testimonia*, parallelism, analogy, play on words, polarisation. A comparative analysis of Ephrem's writings and Jewish sources illustrates his choice of exegetical tradition.

El-Khoury considers Ephrem a representative of the Antiochene school of exegesis admitting that he is firmly anchored in Jewish tradition[269]. Valavanolickal defines Ephrem's writings as being of the Syriac school of Christian thought in its most Semitic form[270]. Many other scholars, among them Leloir, Hidal, Vaccari, Kronholm, Murray, Bardy, Terant, Griffith and Yousif[271], describe Ephrem as a representative of the *Theoria* of the School of Antioch. The question is: to what extent is Ephrem

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[268]Yousif, P., 'Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis', *StPat* 18:4 (1990) p.302.
[269]El-Khoury, N., 'Hermeneutics in the Works of Ephraim the Syrian', *OCA* 229 (1987) p.95-96.
[270]Valavanolickal, K. A., 'The exegesis of Aphrahat and Ephrem with special reference to the Gospel Parables', *The Harp* XIII (2000) p.99, see also Murray, *Symbols,* p.2, McCarthy, C., "Saint Ephrem's commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron", *JSSS* 2 (1993) p.14-16.
[271]Leloir, L., "Symbolisme et parallélisme chez Saint Ephrem", *A la rencontre de Dieu. Mémorial Albert Gelin* (Le Puy : X.Mappus,1961) pp.363-374 ; idem., *Doctrines et méthodes de st. Ephrem d'après son commentaire de l'Evangile concordant, CSCO* 220 (Louvain: Peeters, 1961) p.40-44 ; Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca,* p.56; Vaccari, A., *Scritti di erudizione e di filologia,* Vol.1 (Roma: Edizioni..., 1952) p.110-111; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11...,* p.25-27 ; Murray, R., 'The Theory of Symbolism in Saint Ephrem's Theology', *PdO* VI-VII (1975-1976) p.1-20; idem, 'Der Dichter als Exeget: der hl. Ephräm und die heutige Exegese', *ZKT* 100 (1978) p.486 ; Bardy, G., "Interprétation", in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Supplément IV (1947), col. 380 ; Terant, P., 'La Theoria d'Antioche dans le cadre des sens de l'Ecriture', *Biblica* 34 (1953) p.137 ; Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery,* p.29; Yousif, P., 'Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis', *StPatr* 18:4 (1990) p.297.

Semitic by definition and to what extent is he working under the direct influence of Jewish scholarship?

El-Khoury differentiates between the richness of the poetic language of Ephrem's hymns and the literalism of his exegesis[272]. An alternative approach would not support such a sharp distinction between his writings, but would highlight that Ephrem's prose exegetical commentaries could be poetic, rich in both symbolism and parallelism. Sometimes the only difference between his prose and poetry is rhyme. This thesis provides various examples of Ephrem's poetic approach to Scripture in his commentaries on Exodus[273]. One can view Ephrem's exegetical style of taking his inspiration from the scriptural text as similar to that of a Jewish sage.

II.3.3 Ephrem and Jewish Scholarship

Botha presents historical links between Ephrem and Jewish scholarship. He argues that '*Ephrem is indebted to the Jewish mode of exegesis and came to absorb rabbinical traditions in his exposition of the Old Testament*'[274]. Botha insists that the origin of the Christian School of Nisibis is directly linked to the Jewish academies of Persia in organisation and curriculum[275]. Hence, the author builds a solid foundation for further research in comparing Ephrem's writings with the work of Jewish scholarship.

Salvesen sets Ephrem's exegetical writings within the context of the educational system of the Church in Edessa[276]. Her argument corresponds with Jansma's suggestion that Ephrem's *Commentaries* were oriented towards oral use[277]. Tonneau argues '*that the style of the Genesis and Exodus commentaries suggests that they were*

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[272]El-Khoury, N., 'Hermeneutics in the Works of Ephraim the Syrian', OCA 229 (1987) p.96.
[273]See Chapters II.3.8-9, III, IV.
[274]Botha, P., "Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar in comparison to that in Jewish sources", *APB* 6 (1995) p.23.
[275]Ibid., see also Murray, *Symbols,* p.23-24.
[276]Salvesen, A., "The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem", *StPatr* 35 (1993) p.337, see also Tonneau, R. M., *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii* (Louvain, 1955) Praefatio (Further references to Tonneau's translation will be abbreviated as Tonneau).
[277]Jansma, T., 'The Provenance of the Last Sections in the Roman Edition of Ephraem's Commentary on Exodus', *LM* 85 (1972) p.156, see also Salvesen, A., 'The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem', *StPatr* 35 (1993) p.332-333.

delivered as lectures in the School of the Persians at Edessa'[278]. Russell also emphasises the importance of Ephrem being an exegetic teacher in Nisibis and Edessa[279]. This brings the Jewish-Christian context into Ephrem's exegetical writings.

Sed acknowledges that Ephrem is indebted to the common tradition of biblical exegesis referring to it as the mutual ground between rabbinical and Christian Semitic tradition[280]. Thus, Sed presents the following two ways of looking at Ephrem's use of his possible Jewish sources:

1. Ephrem is influenced directly by Judaism,
2. Or, by the common tradition of exegesis that influenced both Jewish and Christian writers[281].

Sed also suggests Midrashic origin in some of the stories by Ephrem[282]. In his comparative analysis of Ephrem's writings and Jewish exegesis, Sed offers two initial sources:

1. direct literary influence
2. and/or, dependence on oral tradition.

Since there is a problem in finding direct literary evidence of Jewish sources in Ephrem's writings, there is a much stronger possibility that the influence was the oral one[283].

Botha, similarly to Sed, explains that scholars are careful in their arguments because of the lack of open acknowledgement by Ephrem himself of his sources[284]. However, it would have been difficult for Ephrem: he could not disclose his Jewish sources even if he had wanted to, because of the nature of the relationship between Jews and Christians in Syria at the time[285]. However, sometimes Ephrem uses phrases such as:

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[278]Tonneau, Praefatio.
[279]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.173.
[280]Sed, N., 'Les hymnes sur le Paradis de Saint Ephrem et les traditions Juives', *LM* 81 (1968) p.500.
[281]Ibid.p.456.
[282]Ibid.p.457 On page 499 of the article the author brings the table of comparison illustrating similarities in Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise* and *Sefer Yesirah* finding co-relation between the two cosmological doctrines in their similar use of the element of the 'air' in describing the stages between God and the world. See also Sa'adia ben Joseph de Fayyoum, *Commentaire sur le Sefer Yesira ou le Livre de la Création,* ed. M. Lambert (Paris : E. Bouillon, 1891) p.70-72, 94.
[283]Sed, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis...", p.501.
[284]Botha, "Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar...", p.21.
[285]See Chapter I.1 and I.2.

'some say' or 'it is written'[286]. Ephrem does so in the same manner as the Jewish sages did in the Midrash. These phrases of Ephrem are the only literary evidence that come near to being explicit about his possible contacts with Judaism[287]. Palmer praises the genius of Ephrem's poetic style and argues that he perfected the inherited literary genre[288].

Kim presents affirmative conclusions, suggesting that Ephrem relies on the rabbinical tradition of exegesis, offering a comparative analysis of Ephrem's work and rabbinical writings, but pointing out the difficulties in dating the Jewish sources:

> While both Targum PsJ and *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* are much later then Ephrem, he relies upon a similar kind of exegetical tradition.[289]

Thus, Kim exposes similarities in Ephrem's use of a combination of passages in Exod.32:19-20, 25-29 and Num.5:18 from *DomNos* to *TgPsJ* and *PRE*45[290]. Ephrem presents examples of a narration similar to TgPsJ over Peshitta in his work[291]. Kim provides the following characteristics of rabbinical presentation that could have influenced Ephrem in his work:

a. *'richer theological motifs'*
b. *'provides a convenient transition'* to his treatment of biblical passages
c. accommodates the 'word play' technique in compiling biblical reference passages[292].

The overall claim made above could indicate a deliberate choice by Ephrem to follow the rabbinical tradition of exegesis.

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[286]See Chapter II.3.7.2.
[287]See Chapter V.1.5.
[288]Palmer, A.N., 'The Merchant of Nisibis', in J. Den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (eds.) *Early Christian Poetry* (Leiden/NY/Koln: Brill, 1993) p.167-168.
[289]Kim, A.Y., "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques in his *Homily on Our Lord", Hugoye* Vol.3, No.1 (January 2000) [8].
[290]*PRE...*, trans. G. Friedlander (NY: Hermon Press, 1965), 356-357, see also Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques..." [7-9].
[291]Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques..." [9].
[292]Ibid.[10].

II.3.4 Ephrem and the Literary Tradition of Judaism

Sed, referencing Danielou, writes that Ephrem's hymnology has a Semitic structure. To be more precise, the symbolic background of his hymns is settled in the tradition of apocalyptic Jewry[293]. Sed also mentions that the origins of Ephrem's thought are in the Bible and in Judaism[294]. He concludes that Ephrem's hymns draw their inspiration from images of traditional Oriental poetry[295]. Thus, Sed builds a starting point for further research. Griffith reaffirms that Ephrem's *'Syriac poetry does bear a close formal resemblance to the prosody of the Hebrew Psalter'*. He acknowledges that '*the closest literary analogue to the Syriac madrashe in other religious literatures is probably to be found in the Hebrew Piyyutim, synagogue hymns which enjoyed great popularity in Palestine from the eighth century on*'[296].

A number of authors who explore Ephrem's poetry from a literary perspective tend to analyse his meter, point out the similarities of Ephrem to Jewish sources, but, surprisingly, do not describe the nature of his relationship to the Jewish liturgical tradition. The following is an example from an article by Rodrigues Pereira, who allows an allusion to the Semitic origins in Ephrem's writings:

> The technique of linking strophes within a longer poem by lexical or semantic means in order to strengthen its overall structure is applied by Ephrem with great sophistication. The technique is not typical for him, nor for Syriac poetry. Ben-Hayyim describes in detail how it is applied in liturgical poems in Samaritan Aramaic.[297] He calls it by the Hebrew term *sirsur*, "concatenation".[298]

The author only describes the facts, but does not show the link between Ephrem's writings and Semitic traditions, nor does he define the nature of Ephrem's approach which is similar to liturgical poems of Jewish origin. Botha, by contrast, is more

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[293]Sed, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis...", p.455, see also Danielou, J., 'Hymnes sur le Paradis', *Dieu vivant* 22 (1952) p.79-82 ; idem, 'Terre et Paradis chez les Pères de l'Eglise', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1953) p.433-472.
[294]Sed, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis...", p.455.
[295]Ibid.p.501.
[296]Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery,* p.10, where Griffith emphasises that '*while these comparisons are from later time and a different people, they do provide a useful point of comparison. Two of the earliest writers of them, Yannai and Qallir, employ literary devises very similar to those regularly used by Ephrem, and like him, they most often take their themes from the Bible'*. See also Shirmann, J., 'Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology', *JCR* 44 (1953-1954) p.123-161.
[297]Ben-Hayyim, Z., 'Samaritan Piyyutim for Festive Occasions', *Tarbiz,* 10/2 (1939): 190-200; 10/3-4 (1939): 331-37 (Hebrew).
[298]Rodrigues Pereira, A. S., " Word play in the Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian", in S. B. Noegel (ed.) *Puns and Pundits* (CDL Press: Bethesda MD, 2000) p.262.

positive in his arguments, suggesting that Ephrem knew the Jewish tradition well[299]. The analysis of Ephrem's writings, presented further in this thesis, highlights various ways of connecting Ephrem's exegesis with Jewish traditions.

II.3.5 Ephrem's Types and Symbols

Ephrem could be called a master of symbolism. McCarthy defines Ephrem's mode of theological discussion as being '*essentially couched in symbolic and typological dress*'[300]. El-Khoury mentions the '*highly symbolic language, thoroughly grounded in sensual perceptions*' as a main characteristic of Ephrem's writings[301]. He points out the unique use of nature symbolism in Ephrem's work[302] and the particularly rich visual imagery in his *Sermons*[303]. El-Khoury suggests that symbolism occupies a central hermeneutical place in Ephrem's writings[304]. The etymology of the Syriac word, RAZA, is Semitic of Persian/Aramaic origin[305]. Sed highlights the connection of Ephrem to Judaism through the use of symbolism. He writes:

> Generally the connection of Ephrem's symbolism to Judaism is quite obvious... But we can never find the borrowed material, the copies of the expressions from the rabbinic sentences.[306]

It has to be noticed that neither symbols nor types used by Ephrem fit into the traditional definition of the genres[307]. One can agree with Brock's definition of Ephrem's use of various OT types and symbols as vehicles '*which Ephrem discovers latent in the Old Testament*' pointing '*forward to the advent of Christ: what was hidden in the symbol is revealed in Christ*'[308]. Griffith, in agreement with Brock, mentions that Ephrem's writings show that the '*mysteries*' of the OT are '*now fully revealed in the* NT *and in the life of the church*'[309]. Yousif emphasises the wide

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[299]Botha, P., 'Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar...', p.20.
[300]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions...", p.202.
[301]El-Khoury, N., 'Hermeneutics in the Works of Ephraim the Syrian', OCA 229 (1987) p.94.
[302]Ibid.
[303]Ibid.p.95.
[304]Ibid.p.93.
[305]Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery,* p.30.
[305]Ibid.
[306]Sed, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis...", p.456.
[307]Brock notices that Ephrem's understanding of the term 'symbol' '*is very different from that current in modern English usage*'. See Brock, *The Luminous Eye,* p.41. Griffith ascribes the '*role of symbols, types, names and titles in his* [Ephrem's] *thought goes well beyond this limited range of applicability*'. See Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery,* p.29.
[308]Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.56.
[309]Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery,* p.35.

application of Christological typology in Ephrem[310]. Murray offers three main themes of typological exegesis in the fourth century Syriac Fathers:

1. The calling of the Gentiles
2. The Person of Christ
3. His death on the Cross[311].

None of these have an immediate relationship to Judaism. However, Ephrem brings them close to Judaism by:

- constant reference to 'the people' in his typological argumentation
- use of rabbinical exegesis in presenting his arguments.

Ephrem uses types and symbols for events and people allowing the possibility of assuming that he took his inspiration from Jewish tradition. Some scholars allude to the Jewish influence on Ephrem. Cayre and Ortiz de Urbina define Ephrem's exegetical methods as being midrashic and rabbinic[312]. McCarthy ascribes Ephrem's use of typology to the common Jewish and Christian tradition of exegesis. She points out that Ephrem's exegesis is close (a.) to the Early Fathers, and (b.) to Judaism[313]. McCarthy defines Ephrem as a Semitic author. To illustrate this view, she points out that Ephrem establishes the contrast between Adam and Christ in *Diat*[314] using the Semitic imagery of 'corporate personalities'[315]. An overview of the scholarship in relation to Ephrem's use of typology provides a few points in support of the idea and could be seen as an illustration of his connection to Judaism[316].

It is important to emphasise that through Ephrem's use of symbols and types the OT is uncovered and revealed further as being a 'veiled' carrier of the NT revelation. Brock notices a '*continuous dialectic between the one divine reality and many*

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[310]Yousif, P., "Exégèse et Typologie Bibliques chez S. Ephrem de Nisibe et S. Thomas d'Aquin", *PdO* XII (1986) p.38.
[311]Murray, *Symbols,* p.41, see also McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions…", p.199.
[312]Cayre, F., *Précis de Patrologie et d'histoire de Théologie I,* p.370, see also Ortiz de Urbina, P. I., *PS,* 2e ed. (Rome: 1965) p.61 saying: "*Methodus exegetica Ephrem generatim et 'antiochena', nempe sobrie textum juxta sensum obvium et immediatum explana, partum midrashica, rabbinis oxima. Ante exegesim praemittitus brevis introductio*", see also Yousif, P., 'Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis', *Studia Patristica* 18:4 (1990) p.297.
[313]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.193.
[314]*Diat*II,2.
[315]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.195.
[316]Yousif, 'Exégèse et Typologie Bibliques …', p.33, see also Grant, R., *L'interprétation de la Bible des origines chrétiennes a nos jours* (Paris, 1967); Brock, S. P., "The Poet as Theologian", *Sobornost* 7 (1977) p. 244-245; Yousif, P., "Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis", *StPat* 18:4 (1990) p.297.

symbols'[317] in Ephrem's presentation. Further reflection on Brock's suggestion could lead to the consideration of a continuous dialectic relationship between the OT and the NT in Ephrem's writings. In support of this argument Yousif identifies the unity between the OT and the NT in Ephrem's biblical typology[318], which contradicts the argument of McVey who suggests that '*Ephrem saw the Hebrew Scripture as preliminary sketches, as shadows, when compared with the realities of the New Testament*'[319].

In her characteristic of Ephrem's typology, Salvesen classifies it as being developed in two ways:

1. Forward typology: when Ephrem alludes to the Gospel
2. Backward typology: when Ephrem mentions events going back to God's Covenant with Abraham[320].

The second shows how important it is for Ephrem to demonstrate continuity and maintain a connection of biblical events from the OT to the NT. Moreover, Ephrem is very keen to use essential Jewish notions and concepts, e.g. God's Covenant with Abraham, Torah, the Ark[321]. Ephrem ties NT and OT typology together and shows an on-going relationship between the two. Ephrem's types in the OT are much more dynamic and vibrant than mere prefigurations. He often describes OT characters as having personal knowledge of Christ, which is conveyed in their writings, actions and deeds[322]. Typology and symbolism are the tools which Ephrem uses to present the dynamic connection of events and personalities in both Testaments. Therefore, in Ephrem's presentation the OT is not pushed into the background and left aside, but valued and appreciated as a living expression of the divine revelation[323].

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[317]Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.56.
[318]Yousif, P., 'Exégèse et Typologie Bibliques …', p.39.
[319]McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God…", p.252.
[320]Salvesen, A., 'The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem', *StPatr* 35 (1993) p.336
[321]Ibid.
[322]See the examples of Moses *ExodCom*XVII.2, *HdF*XX.8-11*:* "Moses too, who was victorious by the outstretching of his hands…The prophet was victorious through the symbols of the Son" (Salvesen*ECE* p.52), also Moses had hidden the symbol of Christ as a Medicine of Life in the unleavened bread (*Azym*18:5), and Ruth had recognized the hidden presence of Christ in Jesus' ancestor Boaz (*Nat*1:13), see also Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p. 99. See also Chapter V.2.
[323] For more illustrations see Chapter II.3.6.1.

II.3.6 Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques

McCarthy considers Ephrem to be Jewish by nature because of his use of rabbinical exegetical techniques, such as:

(a.) explaining the text of Scripture by text of Scripture (i.e. exegetical technique of *testimonia*)

(b.) using biblical typology and allusions[324].

Yousif paraphrases Leloir's definition of Ephrem's hermeneutics[325] as being full of symbolism and parallelism, sometimes using synonymous and sometimes antithetic approaches[326]. Other scholars emphasise the symbolism and parallelism in Ephrem's work, e.g. Murray, Hidal, Kronholm[327]. The following sections will offer an overview of Ephrem's exegetical tools with special emphasis on those techniques that are to be found in Jewish exegetical tradition as well, e.g.:

- *Testimonia*
- Parallelism
- Analogy
- Play on words (*Mishak Milim)*
- Analogy based on play on names
- Polarisation.

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[324]McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions…", p.189-190.
[325]Leloir, L., *Doctrines et méthodes de saint Ephrem d'après son commentaire de l'Evangile Concordant* (Original Syriaque et Version Arménienne), *CSCO*220, Subsidia 18 (1961) p.40-52.
[326]Yousif, 'Exégèse et Typologie Bibliques…', p.33; idem., 'Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis', *StPat* 18:4 (1990) p.297.
[327]Murray, R., "The Theory of Symbolism in Saint Ephrem's Theology", *PdO* VI-VII (1975-1976) pp.1-20; idem., 'Der Dichter als Exeget', *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* (1980) p.484-494; Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca*, p.25; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11…*, p.25-27.

II.3.6.1 *Mishak Milim*/Word Play

Ephrem is very fond of word play in his writings[328]. It is worth noting that this technique of exegesis is one of the most popular in rabbinical writings as well, especially in the Midrash. Quite a number of scholars acknowledge Ephrem's use of this technique. McCarthy ascribes it to Ephrem's '*richly fertile, and at times playful, imagination*'[329]. Valavanolickal notes that Ephrem takes delight in word play[330]. Ephrem makes use of both antonyms and synonyms[331]. For example, Ephrem uses a technique of drawing biblical parallels, such as the following:

> Pharaoh drowned in the waters in which he himself had drowned the infants[332].

Rodrigues Pereira discusses at length word play in Ephrem's work. He ascribes theological significance to the literary technique of word play in Ephrem's writings stating that '*they are part and parcel of his personal theological language*'[333]. It is possible, however, to look at this from another perspective. Ephrem would use word play together with other exegetical techniques strictly as exegetical tools. Thus, his theological position should not be described by means of the techniques that he uses. They are only a means that Ephrem adopts to express himself. It is noticeable that his expressive techniques are often similar to rabbinical ones. Rodrigues Pereira, however, does not connect the fact that Ephrem is fond of word play in his writings with the observation that Jewish authors appreciate the same literary convention, e.g.:

- word play on names of places and persons
- plays on similar sounding words
- root play and so on.

The overall impression from the article is that Rodrigues Pereira presents a scrupulous statistical analysis of the instances of word play in Ephrem's writings. The author provides all his references to the secondary sources, alluding to Hebrew poetry with no explanation, justification or further commentary with regard to Ephrem being influenced by the same initial tradition. The author shows that Ephrem borrows word

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[328]For an illustration of Ephrem's use of *word play* in his *ExodCom* see Chapter III.5.I.
[329]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.205.
[330]Valavanolickal, K.A., 'The exegesis of Aphrahat and Ephrem with special reference to the Gospel Parables', *The Harp* XIII (2000) p.104.
[331]Palmer gives an example of Ephrem's use of antonymous word play, e.g. fools (sakhle) – intelligence (sukolo). See Palmer, 'The Merchant of Nisibis…', p.173
[332]*Diat* IV,12, see also McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.205.
[333]Rodrigues Pereira, " Word play in the Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian…", p.252.

play from Samaritan liturgical practices[334]; however, he chooses to leave the whole issue without coming to any conclusion. It is surprising that Rodrigues Pereira references Kronholm's book[335] in his article without any comment on the relationship between Ephrem and Judaism. The literary analysis of the genre that Rodrigues Pereira offers is similar to Palmer's[336], in that both authors present an analysis predominantly of literary forms rather than exegetical methods.

Ephrem uses the word play technique when establishing parallel situations between the Old and New Testaments. Saul, the first king of Israel, is an analogue for Saul/Paul, the apostle, and David becomes the analogue for the Son of David, Jesus. Ephrem creates a complicated chain of comparisons, i.e. Simon, the priest, is compared to Simon Peter, the apostle, both of whom Ephrem treats as counterparts to their namesake Simon, the Pharisee, in Luke 7:36-50[337]. It is essential to emphasise here that Ephrem does not employ the arguments of replacement theology; rather, with typological illustrations, he establishes the links between the OT and the NT. Hence, one can argue that Ephrem treats both Testaments as of equal scriptural authority. In fact, Ephrem himself presents an argument that both the NT and the OT are inspired by the Holy Spirit[338].

Ephrem builds chains of biblical passages creating a circle of succession leading through the OT to the NT. Palmer provides an illustrative example of this:

> Significant connections dominate this stanza: the Ark is linked to the Torah, the Torah to the types, the types to Christ, Christ to the Church and, coming full circle, the Church to the Ark.[339]

The following is an example from Ephrem's writings:

> Myth and Mystery, Ark and Torah tell the self-same story! That wooden womb was unburdened of beasts, As types in the texts their burdens have borne. The Anointed answered to the Scripture's sign; Naves echo the Ark, whose meaning they mark: Thy Church hails Thee, ark![340]

Ephrem presents a sequence of Jewish conceptual notions that he links with the figure of Christ, and thus, brings Christ to the centre of these notions.

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[334]Ibid.p.262, see also Ben-Hayyim, Z., "Samaritan Piyyutim for Festive Occasions", *Tarbiz* 10/2 (1939): 190-200; 10/3-4 (1939): 331-37 (Hebrew).
[335]Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11*....
[336]Palmer, 'The Merchant of Nisibis...', p.167-233.
[337]Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques..." [1] and footnote 5.
[338]Yousif, 'Exégèse et Typologie Bibliques ...', p.37, see also Leloir, *Doctrines et méthodes de saint Ephrem,* p.31.
[339]Palmer, 'The Merchant of Nisibis...' p.195.
[340]Ibid.p.175, see also *HdF*49.5.

II.3.6.2 Parallelism / Analogy/ Polarisation/ Antithesis/*Testimonia*

Some of Ephrem's exegetical techniques, especially parallelism, are identified by scholars as connecting points between Ephrem's exegesis and Jewish tradition. A significant number of authors consider the use of parallelism in Ephrem as a sign of his being influenced by Semitic rhetorical tradition[341]. Yousif mentions Ephrem's use of analogy in the context of his anti-Jewish polemics[342]. Kim offers a detailed description of the way Ephrem creates a chain of analogies for his compilation of the passages from the OT and the NT[343], and she gives more explanations to illustrate Ephrem's exegetical techniques in *DomNos*[344], demonstrating the following:

- The use of typology and antithesis in the story of the calf. Kim writes:

  > The typology of the golden calf is one way in which Ephrem reflects upon Christ, for the golden calf is an antithesis of Christ.[345]

- The use of polarisation and parallelism in Ephrem's presentation of biblical characters:

  > Unlike the Pharisee who doubts Christ, the woman recognizes the theophany before her. In this section, Ephrem points out that Paul's blindness ironically led to his ability to see. With similar irony, Moses is granted the opportunity to see the glory of YHWH.[346]

In an example from *HdF,* Palmer shows Ephrem's use of antithesis in the story of Noah[347]. Rodrigues Pereira comments on Ephrem's use of antithesis, chiasmi and reversals[348]. De Margerie expands Ephrem's use of antithesis into three dimensions:

1. antithetical parallelism
2. antithetical literalism
3. antithetical symbolism[349].

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[341]Valavanolickal, K.A., "The exegesis of Aphrahat and Ephrem with special reference to the Gospel Parables", *The Harp* XIII (2000) p.104, see also Maude, M.M., "Rhythmic patterns in the Homilies of Aphraates", *ATR* 17 (1935) pp.225-233, see also Murray, R., "Some rhetorical patterns in early Syriac Literature", in R.H.Fischer (ed.) *A tribute to Arthur Vööbus (*Chicago, 1977) p.109-131; idem, "Hellenistic-Jewish rhetoric in Aphrahat", in *III SympSyr* 1980, OCA 221 (1983, Rome) p.79-85; McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions…", p.203; idem., 'Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church…', p.103-23, esp. p.114-17.

[342]Yousif, P., 'Exégèse et Typologie Bibliques …', p.40, see also Chapter I.3.

[343]*DomNos*8, see also Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques…" [16].

[344]*DomNos*22-33.

[345]Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques…" [21],[22].

[346]Ibid.[17].

[347]*HdF*49, see also Palmer, 'The Merchant of Nisibis...', p.176.

[348]Rodrigues Pereira, A. S., "Word play in the Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian", in S. B. Noegel (ed.) *Puns and Pundits* (CDL Press: Bethesda MD, 2000) p.262.

Many of the scholars mentioned above tend to notice and cite various episodes of Ephrem's use of Jewish exegesis without defining the nature of his relationship with Judaism. McCarthy, by contrast, affirms the use of symbolism, parallelism and antithesis in Ephrem as definitive factors for Ephrem's Semitic affiliation[350]. She also mentions other techniques that Ephrem uses in his work: *testimonia*, allusion and typology[351]. Yousif does not mention any similarities with the rabbinical technique of *testimonia* when presenting Ephrem's exegetical principle of interpreting *'the Bible with or from the Bible'*[352]. This exegetical technique is not monopolised by Jewish exegetes, however its use, and its general presentation in Ephrem's exegesis, suggest the possibility of rabbinical influence.

II.3.7 Ephrem and Oral Torah

Ephrem's indebtedness to Jewish exegesis has been recognised by some scholars from the very beginning of studies in this field[353]; further research, however, has not developed since then. Most scholars do no more than acknowledge similarities between Ephrem and Judaism. Botha, for example, alluding to Gerson, states quite clearly that Ephrem is *'indebted to a significant degree to the Jewish exegesis of Midrashim, Targumim and Halachot'*[354]. Referring to Brock and Murray, Botha proposes that Ephrem was influenced primarily by the oral/narrated tradition[355]. McCarthy repeats frequently that Ephrem uses the Semitic way of interpretation[356]. Unfortunately, she does not analyse the nature of Ephrem's relationship with the Jewish exegetical tradition that she links with the writings of Qumran[357].

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[349]De Margerie, B., "La poésie biblique de Saint Ephrem exégète syrien (306-373)" in *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse: I.Les pères grecs et orientaux* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1980) p.179-184.
[350]McCarthy, "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...", p.114, see also Leloir, L., *Ephrem de Nisibe, Commentaire de l'Evangile concordant ou Diatessaron, traduit du syriaque et de l'arménien.* SC no.121 (Paris: Editions du Cerf,1966) Introduction, p.31.
[351]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions...", p.189-190.
[352]Yousif, P., 'Exegetical principles of St Ephrem of Nisibis', *StPat* 18:4 (1990) p.300.
[353]The earliest source presenting research in the area of Ephrem's relationship with Judaism has been published in 1868 and presented by Gerson, D., "Die Commentarien des Ephram Syrus im Verhältnis zur jüdischen Exegese", *MGWJ* 17 (1868) p.15-149.
[354]Botha, 'Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar...', p.15, see also Gerson, "Die Commentarien des Ephram Syrus ...", p.15-33, 64-72, 98-109, 141-149.
[355]Botha, 'Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar...', p.15, see also Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.20, Murray, *Symbols,* p.18-10, 24.
[356]McCarthy, "Allusions and illusions...", p.199.
[357]Ibid.

As has been mentioned above, one of the reasons hindering scholars from pursuing their research in this area is the problem of dating Midrashic material[358]. However, if one accepts the possibility that Ephrem could have been influenced by an oral/narrated tradition of Midrash, then the dating of the written/published texts is not so important. Ephrem may or may not have had a written text of various Midrashim in front of him, but there is a strong likelihood that he had first hand knowledge of the ways Jews expounded their Scripture. He knew the tradition, which later in history was written down in the form of the classical Jewish texts we know today[359].

Feghali presents a slightly different perspective from that of previously mentioned scholars. He argues that in literal exegesis Ephrem goes along with Jewish exegetical tradition, while in spiritual exegesis he follows the Gospel. Feghali strengthens the argument for Ephrem's knowledge of Jewish tradition by giving numerous examples of Jewish sources in relation to Ephrem's commentaries on Genesis, i.e.:

- *TgN* and *TgF* (fragmentary targum) on Gen.49:8,9
- *TgJ*, *TgO* on Gen.49:9
- Talmud: *Baba Metzi'a* 59[360].

Feghali offers the following conclusion:

> This is the picture of Judah in St Ephrem's Commentary on Genesis. When he interprets the OT literally he takes ideas from the Jewish tradition and puts them in his work. But when he invites his readers to pass from the Letter of the Law to the Spirit, he detaches himself from these traditions, and his spiritual interpretation is done in the light of the Gospel, which summarises scriptures and fulfils them.[361]

Presented by Feghali polarisation between the system of the Law/Letter of the OT and the Spirit in the NT seems plain and two-dimensional. A different approach to this problem, however, supports the claim of this thesis, that Ephrem organically embraced Jewish tradition without any compromise to his Christian identity.

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[358]There is unwillingness among scholars to use Jewish material, which is preserved in documents of the fifth or sixth century. See Chapter II.3.3.
[359]Drijvers indicates the possibility of '*personal contact of Ephrem and the Rabbis*' arguing that '*the influence of Jewish Haggada is not literary*', but that '*Ephrem and Haggada share a common tradition*'. See Drijvers, H.J.W., 'Jews and Christians at Edessa', *JJS* 36 (1985) p.101.
[360]Feghali, P., 'Le Messe du Juda: Gen 49:8-10 dans saint Ephrem et les traditions judaïques', in H.Cazelles, *La Vie de la Parole...* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer,1987) p.165-166.
[361]Ibid.p. 175, the translation by the author.

II.3.7.1 Ephrem and Targumim

A number of scholars stress that Ephrem works in tune with Targumim. Jansma writes that Ephrem '*closely resembles... the reading of Targum Onkelos*'[362]. Supporting the general argument for Jewish influence on Ephrem, Jansma adds:

> It has already been demonstrated that Ephrem is influenced by Jewish exegetical tradition[363].
>
> Furthermore, there can be no doubt that he was acquainted with Onkelos readings[364].

And the following comment:

> The words quoted by Ephrem which he [Tonneau[365]] considered to be identical in meaning with those of the Syriac Version actually are the reading from Onkelos[366]. How this reading came to Ephraem's attention cannot be decided on the basis of available evidence... In connection with the words quoted from the Targum Ephraem uses the expression "It is written"[367] following one of the rabbinic ways of introducing scriptural passages.[368]

Jansma presents many illustrative examples in support of his suggestion that Ephrem was influenced by the tradition of Targumim, but he does not develop the argument further. But he has at least asked the question of how *TgO* appeared on Ephrem's table, pre-supposing Ephrem's acquaintance with Jewish material.

Several other scholars support the possibility of the connection between Ephrem's writings and the Targumim. Guillaumont points out that there are parallels with rabbinic sources in Ephrem's writings[369], and Salvesen affirms that there is '*a link between Jewish Palestinian tradition and Ephrem's thinking*'[370]. This thesis suggests looking at Ephrem as an organic part of Jewish exegetical tradition, or Jewish-Christian tradition, belonging to either of these and functioning within that context. His writings grew from the symbiosis of the air that he breathed, the way his mind worked, his exegetical skills, and his religious background.

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[362]Jansma, T., "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10", *PdO* 4 (1973) p.254.
[363]Gerson, D., "Die Commentarien des Ephraem Syrus im Verhältnis zur jüdischen Exegese", *MGWJ* XVII (1868) SS. 15-33, 64-72,89-109, 141-149.
[364]Jansma, "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10...", p.254.
[365]Tonneau. p.116, 16-19, trans. p.99, 9-13.
[366]*b'ly plgwt'*, text p.116, 18.
[367][1] p.113, 19 *lm*, [2] p.113, 28 *hy d*, [3] p.113, 30-31 *hy d*, [4] p.114, 7 *hy hy*.
[368]Jansma, "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10...", p.254-255.
[369]Guillaumont, A., "Un Midrash d'Exode 4,24-26 chez Aphraate et Ephrem de Nisibe" *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus* (Chicago: The Lutheran Scholl of Theology, 1977).
[370]Salvesen, A., "Themes in Ephrem's Exodus Commentary", *The Harp* Vol.IV, No.1-3 (July 1991) p.28, where she points out also that there are '*significant differences*' in Ephrem's writings and the Jewish sources.

II.3.7.2 Ephrem as a Jewish Sage: '*It is Written*' as an Expression of Rabbinical Exegesis

In the passage quoted above, Jansma draws attention to Ephrem's use of the rabbinical expression '*It is written*' in his exegetical writings[371]. Ephrem also uses another rabbinic expression in his writings, namely '*Some say*'[372]. These phrases in Ephrem's writings could be used as evidence of his potential sources:

(a.) '*some say*' points to the narrated tradition

(b.) '*it is written*' could be literary evidence of him borrowing from external written sources.

Ephrem could have been accustomed to the use of these commonly known rabbinical expressions and accepted them as a part of his exegetical inheritance.

II.3.8 Ephrem's Approach to the Scripture

In his overview of the Peshitta, Jansma stresses the connection of the Syriac Bible to the Hebrew MT and *TgO*[373]. This assumption strengthens the argument for the Syriac tradition of biblical exegesis being deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, and builds on the mentioned above arguments of Jansma and Brock pointing to the instances of Ephrem prioritising rabbinical material over what is found in the Peshitta. The following passage will show examples of Ephrem using non-canonical books of the OT. McVey argues that Ephrem based his interpretation of the character of the Samaritan woman from the Gospel on the story of Sarah from the *Book of Tobit*[374]. McVey writes that Ephrem shifts from the traditional understanding of the Samaritan woman as an immoral character and portrays her '*as an apostle, prophet, and type of the Theotokos, the Mother of God. He praises her for her readiness to share her insight into Jesus' messianic identity*'[375]. Ephrem writes the following about the Samaritan woman:

> Blessed are you, O woman, for not suppressing

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[371]Jansma, "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10…", *PdO* 4 (1973) p.255, see also *Gen/ExodCom* 1.19,2.28, 3.30-31, 4.7.
[372]See Bacher, W., *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur II* (Leipzig, 1905), SS.91-92; see also the Chapter III Illustration IV.
[373]Jansma, "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10…", p.249.
[374]McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian: a theologian of the presence of God…", p.248.
[375]Ibid.

> Your judgment about what you discovered.[376]

In support of his argument, Ephrem compiles various OT passages as scriptural evidence, and then applies it to the NT context. Russell portrays Ephrem as having a holistic view of the Bible using some parts of it with great freedom, and leaving others aside[377].

As has already been mentioned, Ephrem could be seen as advocating an ongoing understanding of scriptural revelation, i.e. to the mind through the narrative of the Scripture, and specifically to the body through the commandments[378]. In his understanding of exegesis as a part of the living tradition, Ephrem accommodates it to the contemporary historical situation. One of his concerns naturally lies in the area of Jews not accepting the NT part of God's revelation. Russell presents Ephrem's *'willingness to entertain the idea that not all of Scripture is actively relevant to everyone's life of faith'*[379]. Ephrem attempts to accommodate the OT commandments of Jewish law into the reality of the NT[380], yet remains within the framework of Jewish exegesis. Russell asks the question where this locates Ephrem among the Christian authors of the time[381]. A different question could be asked in this respect, i.e. where this locates Ephrem among the authors of his time. This broadens the context of the research by including the long-standing tradition of Jewish exegetes.

The following points can be derived from the above mentioned arguments in characterising Ephrem's approach to the Scripture:

- he sometimes prioritises Jewish traditions over Peshitta
- he is freely using his sources (e.g. using non-canonical books of the OT)
- he presents his exegesis creatively, as a collaboration of the OT and NT.

One of the essential features of Ephrem's approach to his sources, therefore, could be characterised as selective approach. He only uses material that supports his argument. This method, as will be illustrated below, is also applicable in characterising Ephrem's approach to Jewish tradition of exegesis.

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[376]Ibid.p.249, see also *Virg*23.1.1-2.
[377]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture…", p.182.
[378]Ibid.p.199 Cf. *SdF*6.259-308.
[379]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture…", p.186.
[380]Ibid., *SdF*6.259-308.
[381]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture…", p.199.

II.3.9 Ephrem's Approach to Jewish exegesis: Intimate and Creative

One way to illustrate how Ephrem deals with his sources in constructing his interpretation of the Scripture is to begin with a very poetic citation from McCarthy:

> He has the freedom of a bird to move at will over the vast range of scripture, and select whatever texts please him. In this sense his commentary is deeply biblical. Convinced of the unity of scripture, he brings together, by means of typology, allusion and direct quote, many varied pages, so that each one can illuminate that other and testify to the ultimate author of all.[382]

Jansma notices that Ephrem uses quotations from the Bible at his own convenience[383]. He mentions that Ephrem deliberately ignores passages of the Bible if they do not support his way of developing the argument[384]. He illustrates his point with the example of how Ephrem perceives the nature of Pharaoh's choice in the story of Exodus. Jansma writes that i*n 'commenting upon the chapters Ex. VII-XIV, Ephraem went out of his way to extract from Scripture the notion of Pharaoh's freewill'*[385]. Salvesen illustrates the point as follows*: 'where the biblical text says that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, Ephrem ignores the phrase entirely'*[386]. She also observes that Ephrem selectively chooses passages from the biblical narrative describing Pharaoh's heart being hardened by Pharaoh himself, while abstaining from passages which mention that his heart was hardened by God[387]. Russell describes Ephrem as an exegete who is honest and consistent in his principal ideas[388].

Jansma argues that Ephrem's presentation of Moses' birth '*has been derived from the Jewish sources*'[389]. Characterising the way Ephrem deals with Jewish material Jansma notes that '*in his exposition of this passage from the Book of Exodus... Ephrem*

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[382]McCarthy, "Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church...", p.120.
[383]Jansma, "Ephraem on Genesis XLIX, 10...", p.255.
[384]Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5...", p.27.
[385]Ibid.
[386]Salvesen, A., "Themes in Ephrem's Exodus Commentary", *The Harp* Vol.IV, No.1-3 (July 1991) p.32.
[387]Ibid.p.33.
[388]Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture...", p.184.
[389]Exod.2:5, *ExodCom*II.2; see also Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5...", p.5, see also Ginzberg, L., *Legends of the Jews,* 8th impr. Vol. II (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1964) p.266 and Vol. V (1965) p.398 note 48.

proceeds to develop this motif in an independent way'[390]. Jansma points out that Ephrem had two options in developing his argument:

1. to follow Jewish exegetical tradition
2. to proceed with his own independent presentation of the biblical narrative[391].

In *ExodCom*II.2 Ephrem chooses to follow both options by beginning his argument with a motif similar to Jewish sources, and then diverging into developing his own argument[392]. This is a colourful demonstration of what has been established by this thesis as Ephrem's way of dealing with his sources. It is possible to describe the pattern which Ephrem adopts in relation to his initial sources, be they biblical narrative or Jewish exegetical material. The general direction of the argument presented in this part of the work is reminiscent of Jansma's. Summarising Ephrem's approach to rabbinic exegesis, one may propose the following schema:

1. Ephrem starts his explanations within the framework of Jewish exegesis (as has been demonstrated in the examples of the concepts of God's Mercy and Justice, divine presence,);
2. Then he deepens the understanding of the topic within the framework of Jewish explanations. Even if he shifts the emphasis of the argument, he follows the rabbinical method of exegesis;
3. Towards the end Ephrem presents his main argument; be it his concerns about free will and divine providence, or the introduction of Christ as the central point of his argument[393].

Ephrem's approach to rabbinical exegesis reaffirms that:

- he feels comfortable within the mindset of Jewish exegesis
- he is by no means dominated by it.

Ephrem will follow the rabbinical exegetical approach only if it goes along with his argument. The reliance on, and awareness of, Jewish exegesis are essential to him. Ephrem uses his sources dynamically, selectively choosing only those parts which contribute to his ideas. Valavanolickal characterises Ephrem's approach to his sources as:

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[390]Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5…", p.5.
[391]Ibid.
[392]In this particular passage Ephrem emphasises the importance of free will. See also Jansma, "Ephrem on Exodus II.5…", p.6.
[393]There will be further illustrations in this thesis of the use of this pattern in Ephrem's exegesis.

- pastoral rather then historical
- his methods of exegesis depend entirely on the application of the argument
- his choice of the sources depends on '*which would provide the most meaningful understanding for the particular context* he *had in mind*'[394].

This specific manner of exegetical approach could be characterised as the exegetical style of Ephrem. Botha states:

> Though certain motifs found in the exposition of the biblical text may be common only to Ephrem and Jewish exegesis, the particular perspective of each source can cause a motif to be used towards different purposes and with a different emphasis... The goal of this paper is to show that Ephrem indeed made use of rabbinic traditions in his exposition of Genesis 38, but that he used such traditions in accord with his own agenda. [395]

Ephrem's fluency in Jewish exegesis allows him to develop his argument by presenting a Christian perspective on it. This could be emphasised as the main characteristic of Ephrem's methodology in his use of Jewish exegesis. Kim also notices that Ephrem *reverses* the Jewish mode of exegesis by introducing Christology at the centre of his argument[396]. Hence, he could be perceived as a 'Jewish sage' opening new horizons for rabbinical principles, possibly even orienting some of his writings towards both a Jewish audience and a Christian one.

The goal of this thesis is similar to Botha's: to explore Ephrem's relationship with Judaism. Also the methodology of the thesis is similar to the one Botha employs in his article:

> Three completely different entities will thus be compared in this paper: Firstly, the text of Genesis 38 with its own plot as part and parcel of the story of Joseph; secondly, the early rabbinic interpretation of the text; and thirdly, the Syriac-Christian interpretation from the middle of the fourth century of both of these sources. [397]

The difference between Botha's work and this thesis is that this thesis covers a much wider research area and delves more deeply into the sources: Ephrem's work, other Christian writers, and Jewish sources.

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[394]Valavanolickal, K.A., 'The exegesis of Aphrahat and Ephrem with special reference to the Gospel Parables', *The Harp* XIII (2000) p.107.
[395]Botha, "Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar...", p.15.
[396]Kim, "Signs of Ephrem's Exegetical Techniques..." [11].
[397]Botha, "Ephrem the Syrian's treatment of Tamar...", p.15.

Summary

From all that we have observed in Part One it is clear that scholars in the past have recognised Ephrem's indebtedness to Jewish tradition and his affinities with some aspects of it. Some scholars have noticed individual points of contact between Ephrem and Judaism; others have pointed out the allusions to Judaism in Ephrem's work. However, this thesis maintains that there is more than a contact at various points between Ephrem and Judaism. The Jewish world that Ephrem reveals to us is something of which he is a part. The Jewish/Semitic world is not something external to Ephrem's work as a theologian; it is a part of a raw material, which he uses to construct his theology.

This study supplies concrete examples of Ephrem using and adopting rabbinical methods, ideas and concepts, and going further into Christological interpretations. The main feature of Ephrem's exegesis is that he bases his writings on the rabbinical grounds; he is working within the genre of rabbinical exegesis. Therefore, the following chapters of the work provide illustrative examples and assessments of how Ephrem the Syrian uses his Jewish legacy and brings it further to Christological interpretations.

Ephrem uses Jewish tradition and his knowledge of it in a different way than other exegetes of the period. This thesis offers a comparison of Ephrem's writings to the writings of Theodoret. Both authors demonstrate substantial knowledge of Jewish material, but although Theodoret quotes a number of Jewish authors, he does not demonstrate his personal approach to Jewish tradition in the same manner as Ephrem does. Jewish tradition is external to Theodoret's writings. Although Theodoret evidently knows Jewish tradition, he shows a different kind of knowledge, understanding and appropriation of it from what we find in Ephrem. One can remove quite a lot of Jewish material from Theodoret's commentaries, and it will not make much difference to what he is saying, whereas with Ephrem one cannot do that. It is absolutely impossible to deprive Ephrem of his Jewish legacy precisely because it is an integral part of him as a theologian and as an exegete, as a Semitic writer and as a sage.

PART TWO: EPHREM – A 'JEWISH' SAGE

Introduction

Part Two of the thesis draws on many issues which were discussed in Part One. The aim of the following chapters, therefore, is to further address and illustrate the argument presenting Ephrem as a Semitic writer who has a very special relationship with Judaism. This thesis analyses the nature of Ephrem's relationship with the Jewish tradition by emphasising his commitment to:

- Jewish Biblical exegesis
- Jewish Scripture
- Jewish concepts, ideas and notions.

As was emphasised in the *Introduction to the Thesis*, the main concern of this study is Ephrem's exegesis, and the primary source is his *Commentary on Exodus*. Hence, the scope of this research covers the following three key areas which illustrate different ways in which Ephrem offers his exegesis:

1. Dealing with the difficulties in the biblical text
2. Presenting the biblical figures
3. Describing in his writings the concept of Israel as the chosen people.

In order for the thesis to make it abundantly clear that Ephrem is indebted to Judaism, the three key areas for the discussion are prefaced by an examination of a quite different approach of another Christian exegete, Theodoret, a near contemporary of Ephrem and also one of the few Fathers of the Church who wrote biblical commentaries on Exodus. The distinctiveness of Ephrem's approach to the Bible will be highlighted by a comparison of his exegetical work with writings of Theodoret, whose procedures, methods and results vary from those of Ephrem.

The above-mentioned themes represent the basic structure of this part of the work.

The illustrations presented in the forthcoming chapters of the thesis aim to contribute to the portrait of Ephrem as an exegete who is deeply involved with the Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation. Some of Ephrem's writings, therefore, are viewed as a reaction to the Jewish tradition; others stay in dialogue with it, presenting questions of primary concern to the rabbis. Ephrem shows indebtedness to and dependency on Jewish tradition when he borrows material from Haggadic sources. Following chapters offers some illustrations of Ephrem either engaging with the rabbinic debates by presenting the notions of salvation and redemption of Israel, or disengaging from them by ignoring certain themes of rabbinic exegesis, as in the case of the notion of the repentance of Israel. Part Two offers examples showing Ephrem's agreement with rabbinical conclusions, as in the case of the calculations in Exod.1:5.

The study presents various illustrations in support of the argument that Ephrem takes his initial inspiration from Jewish tradition, and further develops it by emphasising symbolic interpretations, or brings forward the notion of divine healing, or calls attention to the significance of the female characters in the Bible. This thesis, therefore, considers Ephrem's work within the context of Jewish biblical exegesis, a powerful tradition uniting and embracing the mutual interests of Jewish and Christian exegetes in fourth-century Syria.

The research in the coming chapters provides illustrations of Ephrem treating the biblical narrative of the OT as a constant source of inspiration, while dealing with the themes and concerns of the scriptural text, be it the question of numerology or chronology, or any other question. Thus, the Jewish Scripture in itself could be seen as a source of Jewish inheritance for Ephrem's exegesis. As was indicated in the previous chapters, Ephrem sources his exegesis and even his theology from the OT narrative. For Ephrem the OT is an on-going discovery of the divine revelation, of which the Christ-event is the most significant element.

Another aspect of this study illustrates Ephrem's approach to Israel as chosen nation in his *Commentary on Exodus*[398]. The very fact that he praises the people when they reach the heights of their relationship with God shows Ephrem's high regard for

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[398]See Chapter VI.

Israel. The work in the coming chapters attempts to provide adequate illustration for the argument by emphasising the positive aspect of Ephrem's relationship with Jews as a nation and Judaism as a whole. Although Ephrem does not openly dispute or dialogue with Judaism in his writings, his approach to it may be seen through his interaction with rabbinic ideas. Consequently, Ephrem's support of rabbinical concepts makes it possible to argue that Ephrem related his writings to the Jewish exegetical tradition.

Ephrem's relationship with Jewish biblical exegesis is illustrated through citing textual examples from Ephrem's *Commentary on Exodus* interacting with Targumim and Midrashim by highlighting similar ideas, concepts, descriptions, and exegetical methods in Ephrem's writings and Haggadic material. By identifying the 'Jewish features' in Ephrem's writings, an attempt is made to build up a picture showing the ways Ephrem developed his biblical exegesis by:

- reading closely the literal meaning of the text
- emphasising the symbolism of a certain event
- highlighting some material, and suppressing other material
- showing his concerns with the text.

An analysis of similarities between Ephrem's writings and rabbinic texts contributes to the argument of Ephrem working within the framework of Semitic environment of Syria in the fourth century. Ephrem's relationship with the Peshitta provides a useful illustration of this point.

Sections of this thesis presented below annunciate directions for the discussion in the rest of the thesis. By signposting each section, this introduction offers schematic summary of the argument that will be substantiated in the following chapters.

1. Dealing with Difficulties in the Scriptural Text

A comparison of Ephrem's biblical commentaries (specifically of the solutions to the textual problems that he discerns) with Jewish exegetical writings answers the question of whether Ephrem may be considered an inheritor of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis. The following analysis is organised around two verses from the Exodus narrative: Exod.2:25 which presents an ambiguous and open-ended sentence, the meaning of which is unclear; and Exod.1:5 which provides a questionable calculation regarding the numbers of Israelites entering Egypt. Showing the dependency of Ephrem on Jewish biblical exegesis in both instances allows one to present him as an heir of a long established and extensively developed tradition of his own day. The difference between the two illustrations is that in the case of Exod.2:25 Ephrem interacts with the rabbinical argument, while in the case of Exod.1:5 he shows no signs of interaction as such, but fully relies on the rabbinic tradition, and thus accepts its authority.

1.1. Exodus 2:25: 'And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew'

Ephrem introduces additional material to the biblical text in order to explain the meaning of the verse. This process exposes two ways in which Ephrem deals with his sources:

- Ephrem employs the method of adding material to the biblical narrative, which is the one popular with the rabbis.
- The additional non-scriptural material in Ephrem's writings serves the purpose of pointing to his sources. Therefore, by finding material analogous to Ephrem's writings and emphasising similar solutions to the difficulties of the text, from various sources, it is possible to find the answers to the following questions: (a.) From where does Ephrem take his material? And (b.) Where else is this material used before his time?

The answer to question (b.) points towards a long-existing tradition of biblical exegesis. The answer to question (a.) needs a thematic analysis: in presenting the context of the discussion around Exod.2:25, Ephrem introduces two out of three key issues used in the rabbinical exegetical writings explaining the verse:

1. Israel's slavery/hardship/suffering/pain
2. Israel's redemption.

The fact that Ephrem ignores a third key issue, i.e. Israel's repentance, could suggest that he deliberately omitted the subject of Israel's repentance. Hence, even by ignoring one aspect of rabbinical understanding of the verse Ephrem testifies to the fact that he was interacting with the rabbinical knowledge on the subject by allowing himself the freedom to disagree with it.

Another aspect of Ephrem's methodology is the fact that he is asking questions similar to Jewish exegetes in relation to the biblical verse, such as what did God see, and what did He know? Hence, Ephrem can be seen to replicate the rabbinical method of identifying the problem in the Scripture as a starting point for exegetical writings, namely introducing the Midrashic question: '*Ma ha-qoshi*?'

Ephrem also picks up on a number of concepts associated with the verse. He writes about God's Mercy and Justice, and God's healing, all of which are present in the rabbinical writings of Targumim and Midrashim. Ephrem also extends the biblical narrative by adding the information about the Israelites departing in haste from Egypt and taking Egyptian possessions. This motif he could also have borrowed from the Jewish Midrashic tradition. All this allows one to argue that in drawing his conclusions about the text Ephrem is following Jewish tradition and joining its legacy.

Further analysis of Ephrem's writings suggests that he accentuates and amplifies some of the peripheral ideas of rabbinical argument, which later become key features of his exegetical style, such as the concept of God as Healer, or the way he presents women characters, or his symbolism of the Mirror and so on.

1.2. Exodus 1:5: 'And all the souls that descended from Jacob, were seventy souls…'

Ephrem deals differently with his sources in presenting his discussion of this verse. He shows no signs of actual interaction with rabbinic material, but simply reproduces the exact number of the scriptural narrative, seventy, which in itself is a signal for attention. Ephrem is a careful exegete, aiming to clarify and convey the message of the scriptural narrative of Exodus. It is surprising when he does not point to the questionable calculation of the Israelites in Exod.1:5. Therefore, the study suggests

reading his interpretation of the verse as a passive agreement with the extensively developed tradition of Jewish commentaries specifically devoted to this matter. Jewish Midrashic tradition covers different aspects of understanding this verse:

- presenting various ways of calculating the number seventy, emphasising the importance of the literal understanding of the Bible
- extending the literal meaning of the verse into the typological and symbolic descriptions of the number seventy, introducing the sphere of transcendent reality.

Thus, the way Ephrem tackles this verse, i.e. suggesting its reading in agreement with the scriptural and rabbinic perception of seventy Israelites entering Egypt, shows his silent, but firm acceptance of and agreement with the Jewish tradition. No questions asked, no hesitation shown. Ephrem simply presents a plain statement demonstrating his certainty in the sources, and his confidence in following their guidelines.

Further discussion of this biblical verse introduces another sphere of common interest for Jewish and Christian exegetes, the chronology. Consequently, Ephrem presents an exegesis counting the number of years between the events, prioritising and selecting scriptural events according to their significance. The fact that he uses similar chronology to the rabbinic may not strictly be associated only with Jewish tradition, because of the extensive interest in chronology of Christian authors. However, the very fact that Ephrem prioritises and accentuates certain biblical events brings him closer to Jewish exegetes. By prioritising God's Covenant with Abraham, Moses' birth, and the exodus from Egypt over all other episodes of the biblical narrative, Ephrem demonstrates similar concerns to the Jewish sages in reading the Bible. In addition, Ephrem's calculation of the years between these events contributes to the evidence for his loyalty to the tradition of chronology, which possibly takes its origins in the Jewish circles of the Septuagint scholars, and Demetrius the Chronographer[399].

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[399]More on the chronological problem in this literature see J. Fennegan, W. Adler, A. Mosshammer. For example Mosshammer, A.A., *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, London: Associated University Press, 1979) on p. 16-17 identifies a distinct problem of historicity of chronologies, and the problem of the context of each particular chronology, which reflects how it looks at the original source. Also the dates of chronologies derived from an earlier chronographic traditions he highlights as questionable, so as the quality of evidence used in chronologies.

2. Presenting the Biblical Figures

The significance of the choice of the figure of Moses as an example for this work is determined by the centrality of his presence in the scriptural narrative. The choice of the second figure, i.e. Miriam, the sister of Moses, is inspired by the extensive tradition of typological and symbolic interpretations of the figure of Miriam in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The abundance of exegetical material, therefore, allows one to offer a wide comparison of Ephrem's presentation of Miriam with various writings of the Church Fathers and Jewish sages.

A minor illustration of Ephrem adding non-biblical information in describing the figure of Hur, the follower of Moses, is considered in this thesis as a direct borrowing from Jewish exegetical tradition of Midrashic origin. By stating that Hur was the husband of Miriam, Ephrem follows a number of Jewish sources, e.g. Josephus *Antiquities* III.54, 105, *PRE* XLV and *ExodRab* 48.4[400].

2.1. Miriam, the Sister of Moses

The typology of the figure of Miriam sometimes unites, and sometimes clearly differentiates, Jewish and Christian exegetes. The comparison of the presentation of the figure of Miriam, the sister of Moses, in Ephrem's writings with Jewish and Christian sources, clearly shows the influence of rabbinical exegesis on Ephrem's writings, as Ephrem's approach to the figure of Miriam is very close to the Jewish interpretation. Ephrem emphasises three roles attributed to Miriam that are essential for the rabbis:

- that of a prophetess
- that of a midwife
- that of a bearer of a royal and priestly dynasty,

while the majority of Christian writers emphasise the typology of Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the Mother of God, or the Church.

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[400]Salvesen*ECE* p.52.

The comparison of Jewish and Christian writings on this matter highlights that Ephrem's perception of Miriam goes along with the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis by embracing the in-depth understanding of the significance of the figure of Miriam and her role in the history of Israel. Hence, Ephrem demonstrates agreement with and reliance on Jewish exegetical tradition.

2.2. Hur

The presentation of Hur in Ephrem's exegetical commentaries on Exodus further illustrates his closeness to Jewish exegetical tradition. The importance of the figure of Hur in Ephrem's presentation has already been stated by Alison Salvesen[401]. She however did not develop the implications of Ephrem's use of rabbinical tradition, and only noted the similarities. This study looks into and explores the analogous use of rabbinical formula/expression *'some say'* in the course of Ephrem's discussion about Hur, and says what this signifies in the overall approach of Ephrem to biblical text.

2.3. Moses

In discussing the figure of Moses Ephrem prefers to adapt to his own use the rabbinical concept of the Merits of the Fathers. That he should chose to present Moses in association with this important, indeed central, rabbinical notion is in itself a colourful illustration of his indebtedness to the Jewish tradition of Bible exegesis. Furthermore, by honouring the concept in his writings, Ephrem confirms his connection to the salvation story of 'the people', and to the Jewish patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Ephrem also links the OT patriarchs through Moses to Christ, thereby amplifying the soteriological aspect of the Exodus narrative.

In Ephrem's presentation Moses is a significant figure who:

- shapes Israel into a nation
- raises the nation
- connects the generations of Israel.

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[401] See Chapter V.1.5.

All this accentuates in Ephrem's writings the significance of Israel as a nation and her role in the Exodus narrative. Ephrem offers and develops the concept of Israel as 'the people' and the chosen nation, presenting his high expectations of the Jews. It could be concluded, therefore, that Ephrem presents the historical account of Israel in the narrative of Exodus as a lesson of inspiration for the contemporary lives of his readers.

3. Israel/'the People'/the Chosen Nation in Ephrem's Writings

The compilation offered in Chapter I.2.4. has shown a number of scholars commenting on Ephrem's description of Israel as 'the People' and sharing their different perspectives on the subject. Chapter VI will emphasise the constructive implications of Ephrem's presentation of Israel as 'the People' in its pursuit of a 'Semitic' and 'pro-Israel' portrait of Ephrem. The insights of Sebastian Brock are important in this quest. This study aims to further his ideas by presenting and exploring the links between 'the People' and the notions of the Sight, the Mirror and the Signs.

Ephrem's relationship with Judaism, although not explicit, could be defined through his attitude to 'the People', Israel, and through looking into the ways he presents the God-Israel relationship in his *Commentary on Exodus*. Hence, there is an analysis of the following motifs in Ephrem's work:

- the God-Israel relationship
- Israel's ability to see God
- division in Israel
- 'the People' and the nations.

It becomes apparent from this work that there is a possibility to interpret Ephrem's *Commentary on Exodus* as a narrative about Israel, in which other biblical figures are used indirectly to pin-point particular aspects of that narrative. This study offers various examples of Ephrem presenting Israel's story by indirect association with the Pharaoh, or describing Israel's acts while narrating Egyptian behaviour.

The notions of Sight, the Mirror and the signs are introduced in this part of the work as illustrations of the ideas that Ephrem uses in conveying the story of Israel. Ephrem engages with rabbinical thought and presents observations similar to the Jewish sources writing about the ability of Israel to see God. The following examples will illustrate the point:

- the ability of Moses to see God, while Israel fails to do so
- the presentation of the notion of sight as a metaphor for the faith of the people.

Ephrem's presentation of the notion of God's Mercy and Justice in his narration about Israel is also illustrative. He seems to be more inclined to use God's attribute of Justice when talking about the ungodly deeds of Israel, while mentioning God's attribute of Mercy generically, for example, in relation to the gift of clear sight. This shows Ephrem engaging with rabbinical ideas and creatively developing them in his writings. Ephrem explains the concept of Justice further by stating that Moses is given a chair of Justice and Judgement on behalf of God and directly from God. Moreover, Ephrem suggests that the Mind and the Mirror function as Judges and cause divisions. He also ascribes the attribute of law to the Mind. Hence, the points above are presented in this study as further illustrations of Ephrem working with rabbinical ideas. Ephrem presents them from a different perspective in his own unique way using many symbolic interpretations.

Ephrem's involvement and preoccupation with the themes of Israel as the chosen nation, and the problem of Israel rejecting God on Mount Sinai, allow one to suggest that through the narrative of Exodus he is trying to solve a problem more topical in his day than in ours, that is, Israel's rejection of Christ. This study further suggests that Ephrem follows the rabbinical argument in order to reinterpret it by presenting Christ as the very essence of Israel's OT history. Ephrem shows the signs of struggle with Israel's disbelief, and thus, through his *Commentary on Exodus* he presents a number of explanations of the reasons behind the lack of faith of 'the people':

- proud mind
- heard-heartedness analogous to Pharaoh's
- disbelief in and forgetfulness of the signs from God, that is, the manna, quails, pillar and cloud.

It is possible to suggest, therefore, that through the narrative of Exodus, Ephrem conveys the complicated story of his personal relationship with the concept of Israel. The background of Ephrem's exegetical writings is rather complicated as it combines personal, political, religious and biblical contexts as his sources of inspiration and motivation. Thus it represents Ephrem's work within the context of the Jewish-Christian environment of his time[402]. It is particularly in his commentaries that one sees most clearly that Ephrem attempts to solve the dilemma of contextualising the eternal position of Israel as a chosen nation into the life, tradition, and everyday practice of the Christian Church of his own period.

Consideration of the background context of Ephrem's writings could help in understanding his critical approach to 'the people' (not only in the *Commentary on Exodus*, but also and more so in his hymns and other works, where Ephrem becomes emotionally charged about the subject of the Jews rejecting Christ). Thus, when his perspective leads to an occasional sharp criticism of 'the people', this should only be understood in the light of his personal preoccupation with the question of accommodating NT revelation into the life and practice of contemporary Judaism. Therefore, when he passes judgement on 'the people' for failing in their vocation, he is again showing his concern for the Jews, and not expressing anti-Judaism, as some scholars have suggested[403].

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[402]See Chapter I.2, I.3, II.1.
[403]See Chapter I.

Chapter III: An Illustrative Comparison of Ephrem's Exegetical Style with an External Christian Source: Ephrem and Theodoret

Introduction

A comparison of Ephrem's exegetical writings with those of Theodoret serves as a catalyst in determining the level of Ephrem's involvement with Jewish exegesis. Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus and theologian, born at Antioch in Syria about 393; died about 457. Theodoret's writings show a deep knowledge of Judaism. He openly quotes Jewish authors, such as Philo, Symmachus, Josephus, Aquila, and Theodotion. However, he shows no relation, involvement or interaction with Judaism or Jewish exegesis. The following passages provide clear illustrations of this.

I have chosen six different passages each showing Ephrem's and Theodoret's exegesis of similar themes taken from the Exodus narrative. Each of the passages gives an illustrative example of the two Christian authors conveying their interpretation of the biblical text on various subjects. The key elements that can be detected in the styles of the two authors are schematically summarised in the table below. More detailed and substantiated analysis of each passage can be found further in the chapter.

Biblical Theme	Ephrem	Theodoret
Exodus 1:7,12	Involves himself with the tradition of the Tg and Midrash Bases his choice of the word '*swarm*' for Exod.1:7-9 in accordance with the Jewish tradition Uses Jewish exegetical technique '*mishak milim*' Presents chronology	Preoccupied strictly with the etymological concerns
Midwives	Uses Jewish exegesis to extensively expand biblical text by adding non-scriptural information found in Josephus, *TgPsJ* and Midrash: -redundant labour of the Hebrews -offering additional information on the characters -describing Hebrew women as midwives -portraying God as a midwife Ephrem is stepping aside from the Peshitta text in order to follow the Midrash in presenting the positive characteristic of the midwives as: -'being good' -originating a priestly dynasty	Slightly expands the biblical text on minor issues, emphasising the piety of the midwives and dealing with property and possession issues

Biblical Theme	**Ephrem**	**Theodoret**
Passover	Introduces Christ into the story by stating that Moses knew Christ Sees the symbolism of Christ as a Passover Lamb Otherwise stays within the literal meaning of the text	Sees Passover only within the typology of Christ Shows Hellenistic influence on his ideas Shows signs of replacement theology Warns against the dangers of a literal understanding of the text (hints at an allegorical approach)
Exod.20:25 The altar of Earth	Connects the OT and the NT Expands the significance of the legislation into the NT and gives the OT commandments a transformation through the Incarnation Rehabilitates details of the OT legislation	Sees the OT as transitional and temporary Limits the OT within its time-frame Explains the Law from a historical perspective
Exod.19:5-6 Israel as a Chosen Nation	Does not mention Christ, talks strictly about the God-Israel relationship (important point showing Ephrem's concerns with the subject) Follows Jewish exegesis: -Shows closeness to the reading of the *TgPsJ* ('*eagles' wings*') -Changes the reading of the Peshitta ('*kingdom of priests*') to '*kingship and priesthood'*, which is the same as in Targum and Midrash	Christological perspective: Israel is chosen, because it provides the genealogy of Christ Sees the Covenant strictly as a legal document and Christ as redeemer from the curse of the Law, as sin became known through the Law Quotes Symmachus, but does not engage with the Jewish source
Amalek/ Moses	Sees Christian symbolism in Moses, but does not restrict his exegesis to it Interprets Moses' posture in two ways: -Moses' hands up: Targumic interpretation -Moses' hands stretched: Christological interpretation Introduces non-scriptural details about the figure of Hur, which he most probably takes from Jewish tradition Genuinely concerned with the close reading of the OT narrative	Sees typology of Christ in Moses Sees the battle with Amalek within the framework of Christian typology Shifts emphasis from victory of Israel to victory of Christianity – replacement theology

The outcomes from the above comparison of the two authors suggest that Ephrem relies heavily on the Jewish tradition of Bible exegesis, while Theodoret is indifferent to it. The overall impression from the comparison of the two authors presents us with the following:

Ephrem	**Theodoret**
1. Does not quote Jewish sources, but embraces the tradition of Jewish Bible exegesis	**1.** Quotes a number of Jewish sources showing a broad knowledge of the Jewish tradition, but does not get himself involved with the rabbinical argument using quotations only for illustrative purposes
2. Works within the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis	**2.** Occasionally refers his readers to the Jewish sources
3. Perceives the OT as an on-going revelation of God	**3.** Considers the OT only as a pre-figuration of Christ

The summary of Ephrem's exegesis of the passages could be described in the following way:

- Ephrem uses the 'Semitic way[404]' of the Peshitta and its close association with the Targumim
- Closely follows Jewish exegesis digging from it minor and major details/information expanding the scriptural narrative showing his consistency and loyalty to the Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation
- Occasionally prioritises Jewish exegesis over Peshitta
- Ephrem reaches a harmony between Christological symbolism and Jewish exegesis, the OT and the Christian revelation
- Sometimes Ephrem chooses not to introduce Christology in the narrative of the OT, which shows the 'pure' value of the Jewish Scripture for his exegesis.

The last point constitutes a major difference between Ephrem and Theodoret. The OT seems to be of great value for Ephrem; his commentaries are full of detailed explanations of the OT, which do not necessarily carry Christological connotations

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[404]This refers to the whole question of the possible Jewish origins of the Peshitta translation. See references to works of Weitzman in Chapter I.

with them. Thus, the OT for Ephrem is not a shadow of the NT, as seems to be the case for Theodoret. Ephrem values the OT narrative in itself; his biblical commentaries on it are aimed at extending the knowledge of the OT revelation, and one studies it in order to understand the nature of the divine revelation through it.

The following sections present six selected examples from Ephrem's and Theodoret's writings. They will provide further illustration and more detailed description of the points mentioned above.

Illustration I: Exodus 1:7, 1:12 in Theodoret and Ephrem

The exegetical explanations of Ephrem and Theodoret in this instance demonstrate their priorities and concerns in choosing their sources for biblical interpretation. Theodoret is predominantly concerned with Exod.1:7 and specifically with the word χυδαῖοι [405]. Theodoret's need to explain the word comes from his concern for the etymology of the Greek word in the historical context. According to the Greek-English Lexicon, χυδαῖοι could have the negative vulgar meaning of 'coarse', together with 'poured out in streams, abundant'[406]. Hence, in his commentaries Theodoret emphasises that in the context of Exod.1:7 the meaning of the word is simply to characterise the large crowd of people in order to stress the fact that the Hebrews grew strong and multiplied under the Pharaoh's decree:

> How is this to be understood, *They became "poured out"* [χυδαῖοι]?
>
> Scripture does not put this here as an insult, as certain people imagine; but it indicates a populous crowd of people. For thus, it declares, they grew so that they were scattered abroad throughout the whole of their land. Aquila, too, understood it in this way; and it is indicated also by what follows: *For the land was multiplying them*, it says; and a little later *but the more they humiliated them, the more they were giving birth, and they grew very, very strong.*[407]

On the other hand, when Ephrem comments on the biblical passage, he demonstrates a close link to the Jewish exegetical tradition. He does not direct his commentaries to

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[405]Fernández Marcos, N. and Saenz-Badillos A. (eds.) *Theodoreti Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum. Editio Critica,* CSIC 17 (Madrid:Textos y Estudios "Cardenal Cisneros",1979) p.100 All the translation of the Greek text of Theodoret into English was made in collaboration with Prof. Hayward, C.T.R.

[406]*Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Liddell, George and Scott, Robert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) p.2012-2013.

[407]Marcos, *Theodoreti,* p.100.

any specific word in the biblical verses, but concentrates predominantly on giving examples from the Jewish oral tradition, putting more insights into the biblical narrative. First, he takes a similar approach to the Targumim and Midrashim by expanding the biblical verse of 1:8 stating that *there arose a new king, who initiated a new policy*.[408] Midrash Rabbah on Exodus presents a similar explanation in addition to the biblical, introducing the fact of a new king inventing a new policy:

> NOW THERE AROSE A NEW KING. Rab and Samuel explained this differently. One said it means a new king actually, and the other, merely that new decrees were issued by him, in that he made new decrees and tribulations for them.[409]

The idea of a new king bringing about new policies does not appear in the biblical narrative of the Peshitta verse of 1:8. However, there is a possibility of word play in the Syriac language between 'malka' – 'king' and 'melka' – 'policy'[410]. The exegetical technique of the play on words, 'mishak milim', is a very common one for Jewish exegesis. If Ephrem was using it, even in the very fact of using this exegetical tool Ephrem could be seen as a follower of Jewish exegetical tradition.

Moreover, the argument in support of Ephrem's reliance on Jewish traditions could be based on the evidence of the Targumim. Both *TgN* and *TgPsJ* mention the new king who '*arose over Egypt* and *who did not know Joseph and did not walk in his customs*'[411]. The evidence of the Targumim suggests that the tradition of the additional interpretation of the verse of Exod.1:8 existed before the time of Ephrem. Hence, Ephrem could be using the same tradition in his commentaries.

Within the context of one passage commenting on the narrative of Exod.1:7-9 Ephrem discloses other occasions when he agrees with Jewish exegesis. It is when he presents the chronology of the four hundred years of the Covenant of God with Abraham[412] and another occasion when he chooses the word ܫܪܨܐ[413], -'swarm', which is not found

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[408]*ExodCom*I.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.11.
[409]*ExodRab*1.8, p.9.
[410]See footnote 5 in Salvesen*ECE* p.11.
[411]*TgN* on Exod.1.8. For the English translation see McNamara et al. (eds.) *The Aramaic Bible. The Targums*. Vol.2 *Targum Neofiti 1, Pseudo Jonathan*, trans. McNamara, Maher, Hayward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1994) p.12, see also p.160-1 for *TgPsJ* reading of Exod.1:8: '*Then a new king – as(if) at the beginning (of his reign) arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph, and he did not walk according to his laws*' (further references to McNamara's critical addition will be abbreviated as McNam).
[412]*ExodCom*I.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.11, see also Chapter IV.2.
[413]*ExodCom*I.2. Tonneau p.124.

in the Peshitta, but is present in the Targumim[414] as the verb 'srs' also meaning 'swarm, teem'. It is unlikely that Ephrem was consulting the Hebrew bible, as we do not have any evidence of his knowledge of Hebrew. But what one can draw from this is that Ephrem choose the word ܐܫܬܐ in accordance with the Jewish tradition of interpreting the passage. Hence, Ephrem adds the word 'swarm' to his commentaries as a tribute to the Jewish exegetical tradition.

Both Ephrem and Theodoret pay close attention to the meaning of the words in their commentaries on Exodus 1:7-8. Theodoret is preoccupied with choosing the right meaning of the word χυδαῖοι, while Ephrem plays with the vocalisation of the word ܡܠܟܐ, i.e. 'melka'-'malka', and deliberately chooses the word ܐܫܬܐ, which is not present in Peshitta, but is close to the Hebrew שרץ -'swarm'[415]. What becomes clear from the evidence of Theodoret's and Ephrem's exegesis is that Ephrem relies predominantly on Jewish exegesis, while Theodoret in this instance is far from following a Jewish argument.

Illustration II: The Presentation of Midwives in Ephrem and Theodoret

The commentaries of Ephrem and Theodoret on the virtues of the midwives are an illustrative demonstration of the different styles of these biblical exegetes. Theodoret, although mentioning the episode with midwives, does not offer a lot of explanation into the situation. What he says is short and non-problematic:

> What does it mean: "Since the midwives feared God he made for them houses"[416]?
> When Pharaoh ordered the midwives to destroy the males, because they feared God[417] they refused to obey the law about killing the boys. For this reason God rewarded them, and granted them an abundance of good things.[418]

Theodoret asks the question quoting the verse of Exod.1:21 and gives his explanation of the verse by slightly expanding it. He indicates that the reason God rewarded the midwives was because of their piety. Scripture only mentions the fear of God in connection with the midwives, while Theodoret emphasises the fact that the reward of the midwives came not from their fear of God, but on the basis of their piety and virtuous behaviour. Also, Theodoret explains the meaning of the use of the word

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[414]See *TgO, TgPsJ* on Exod.1:7. McNam p.12 footnote 2, p.160 footnote 8.
[415]*ExodCom*I.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.12, footnote 8.
[416]Exod.1:21.
[417]Literally 'because of their piety'.
[418]Marcos, *Theodoreti,* p.100.

οἰκίας – 'houses, property, household, families' as a 'multitude of goods', which is not the original meaning, but which is used by Theodoret as a generic explanation.

Ephrem, on the other hand, goes into a much more detailed explanation of the story behind God's reward to the midwives. In the prelude to the story of the Pharaoh's decree he mentions certain people that fuelled Pharaoh's anxiety about the Hebrews:

> He became envious of the Hebrews' numbers, and all the more so because ecstatics among them who claimed to know the future from the reckoning of years that had passed were proclaiming the forthcoming deliverance of the Hebrews[419].

This incident is not mentioned in Scripture, but is alluded to by some Jewish exegetical material. Josephus mentions:

> One of the sacred scribes, who were very sagacious in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would be a child born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages.[420]

TgPsJ mentions the names of the two magicians advising Pharaoh:

> Immediately Jannes and Jambres, the chief magicians, opened their mouths and said to Pharaoh: 'A son is to be born in the assembly of Israel, through whom all the land of Egypt is destined to be destroyed.'[421]

It is most likely, therefore, that Ephrem drew his knowledge of the events from the Jewish tradition of exegesis. The following passage of Ephrem's writings is also reminiscent of Jewish exegesis:

> So Pharaoh decreed death for the Hebrew babies and made their parents labour to build storehouses that were not needed.[422] For if the corn of Joseph's storehouses was sufficient to sustain Egypt, Canaan and the land of the Amorites during the seven years of famine, were they inadequate to sustain his own land with their supplies?[423]

Scriptural narrative does not mention anything about the meaningless and redundant labour that the Egyptians imposed on the Hebrews. However, this tradition of

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[419]*ExodCom*I.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.12.
[420]Josephus, *Ant.*II.205 (II.IX.2, p.55).
[421]*TgPsJ* on Exod.1:27. McNam p.162.
[422]Exod.1:11.
[423]*ExodCom*I.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.12.

understanding the action of Egyptian taskmasters vis-à-vis the Israelites occurs in Jewish exegesis. It is mentioned in the rabbinic literature that the taskmasters purposely told the Hebrews to build on sandy soil, so that the Hebrews would constantly have to repair the constructions on their insecure foundation, and would be working continuously.[424] Ephrem creatively develops the tradition by finding a logical explanation for the redundancy of the additional building of the storehouses that were not needed after Joseph's time.

The following passage of Ephrem's commentaries also demonstrates various allusions to the Jewish tradition of exegesis:

> These women whom he had instructed to kill infants complied by doing the opposite, and instead of their charges they considered themselves as the ones who would be slain. But on the day they thought they would receive the martyr's crown for this, they were saved from death by the wise speech that God put in their mouth.[425] "**They became good**" means that they became a great dynasty, though they had imagined that Pharaoh would wipe out their entire line because of all the babies they had saved.[426]

The verse of Peshitta on Exod.1:19 reads as following:

ܐܡܪܝܢ ܠܗ ܝܠܕܬܐ ܥܒܪܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܢܫܝ ܡܨܪܝܬܐ ܐܪܡ ܐܢܝܢ ܚܝܬܢ ܥܒܪܝܬܐ ܗܢ ܕܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗܢ ܡܝܠܕܢ ܥܕ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܝ ܠܘܬܗܢ ܝܠܕܬܐ ܘܝܠܕܢ.

The text of the Peshitta could be understood to mean that the Hebrew women are considered to be midwives too[427]. This approach to the scriptural narrative about the midwives is very close to the Jewish exegesis, which presents Hebrew women as midwives[428]. This way of interpreting Exod.1:19 brings the scriptural verse of Peshitta into close relation with the Jewish exegetical tradition. Hence, it is the text of the Syriac Bible which could be seen as holding potential insights into the Jewish exegetical tradition and, for this reason, providing an inspiration for Ephrem to follow. Following on the above mentioned tradition, it should be pointed out that the Targumim also present a similar understanding of Hebrew women delivering the babies with the help of God, who can be considered as a midwife for the Hebrew women. *TgPsJ* reads:

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[424]*ExodRab*I.10, p.13.
[425]Exod.1:19.
[426]*ExodCom*I.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.13.
[427]See Salvesen*ECE* p.13.
[428]*ExodRab*I.16, p.21 reads that '*Hebrew women were midwives themselves*'.

> The midwives said to Pharaoh: 'Because the Jewish women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are strong and skilful. Before the midwife comes to them, they raise their eyes in prayer, praying and imploring mercy before their Father who is in heaven; he hears the voice of their prayer, and they are answered immediately, and they give birth and are delivered safely.'[429]

Ephrem in one of his hymns also refers to God as a midwife to Israel cleansing and nourishing the people, thus following Midrashic interpretations[430].

Jewish exegetical tradition presented by Targumim and Midrashim shows how Jewish biblical interpreters understood the notion of the midwives in the story of Exodus. Ephrem's work resembles Jewish tradition and shares a lot of understandings of the biblical narrative with Jewish exegetes. Ephrem does this on his own initiative and also through the inspiration of the Peshitta text, which offers a certain way of interpreting Hebrew women as midwives.

Ephrem could be seen as stepping away from the text of Peshitta in order to emphasise the interpretation he wants to present. He does so when he quotes the phrase, '*They became good*'[431] as if it was a verse from the Peshitta, and gives an explanation to it in his commentaries. In fact this verse is not present in the Peshitta, i.e. neither in Exod.1:20 nor in Exod.1:22. However, Ephrem's understanding is similar to the Midrashic interpretation emphasising the fact that because of saving the Jewish babies, the midwives have made their names memorable for ever. *ExodRab* reads:

> It is only to add praise to praise; for not only did they not fulfil his command, but even went beyond this and did deeds of kindness to them. For those who were poor, the midwives would go to the houses of the rich to collect water and food and give them to the poor and thus keep alive their children.[432]

As an explanation of the *goodness* of God's blessing Ephrem mentions that '*they became a great dynasty*'. This very much resembles the understanding of the Midrash,

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[429]*TgPsJ* on Exod.1:19. McNam p.163.
[430]See Ephrem's comparison of God to nursing mother in *De ecclesia* 25.18, see also Chapter II.4.4. For Jewish interpretation of God as a midwife see *ExodRab*1:12, see also Chapter V.1.
[431]*ExodCom*1.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.13.
[432]*ExodRab*I.15, p.20.

which mentions that the midwives '*established priestly and levitical families... and they were founders of the royal family*'[433].

The overall impression is that Ephrem compiles quite a lot of the Jewish exegetical evidence in support of expanding the biblical narrative of the midwives. Every single passage of Ephrem's exegesis in relation to the midwives leads to material in the Jewish exegetical tradition. Hence, it is possible to assume that Ephrem relies heavily on Jewish exegetical material. The comparison of Ephrem's exegesis with Theodoret's writings illustrates the extent to which Ephrem is working under the influence of Jewish material.

Illustration III: Exodus 19:5-6 in Ephrem and Theodoret

Exod.19:5-6 illustrates Theodoret's and Ephrem's perception of Israel as a chosen nation and how both of the exegetes present their understanding of this notion.

The MT of this verse is ambiguous:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ could be translated either as 'kingdom of priests and the holy nation', or 'kingdom, priests and holy nation'. Peshitta of Exod.19:6 reads:

And you will be to Me the *kingdom/kingship*, and priests and the holy nation[434].	ܘܐܢܬܘܢ ܬܗܘܘܢ ܠܝ ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܟܗܢܐ ܘܥܡܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ.

There is no ambiguity in the Syriac text, it is a pretty straightforward formula consisting of the three elements:

1. **kingdom**
2. **priests**
3. **holy nation**

Ephrem in his *Commentary* shows again his loyalty to Jewish exegesis. First of all, there are similarities to *TgPsJ* in his interpretation of Exod.19:4. Ephrem writes:

> And I carried you as on eagles' wings, by the cloud that is leading you.[435]

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[433]*ExodRab*I.17, p.22.
[434]The translation by the author.

TgPsJ reads:

> I bore you on clouds as on eagles' wings from Pelusium.[436]

Ephrem also introduces the notions of kingship and priesthood, whilst the biblical narrative suggests a description of the kingdom of priests:

> Now, *if you obey me, you will be dearer to me than all the nations,* in that I have chosen you alone out of all the races[437], to *be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy people,* because from them would come kings and priests, and all of them would be set apart in sanctity from all the abominable deeds of the nations.[438]

Ephrem in this passage goes along with the Targumim that also use the phrase of "kings and priests".[439]

TgPsJ reads:

> And you will be before me kings adorned with the crown, ministering priests, and a holy people.[440]

TgN reads:

> And you shall be to my name kings and priests and a holy nation.[441]

Hence, it is most likely that Ephrem used Peshitta as his biblical source, and was possibly also guided by the interpretation of the Targumim. There is a similarity between the Targumim and Peshitta in the presentation of Exod.19:6. It is important to highlight this connection and to mark it as a sign of the closeness of the traditions of understanding Scripture of the translators of the Targumim and of the Peshitta. Bearing in mind Weitzman's theory, which suggests that the possible translators of Peshitta were Jews[442], one can use this argument as supportive evidence for Ephrem's reliance on the Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation already available from the Peshitta.

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[435]*ExodCom*XIX.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.55-56.
[436]*TgPsJ* on Exod 19:4. McNam p.215.
[437]Exod.19:5.
[438]*ExodCom*XIX.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.56, see also Exod.19:6.
[439]See Salvesen*ECE* p.56.
[440]*TgPsJ* on Exod.19:6. McNam p.215.
[441]*TgN* on Exod.19:6. McNam p.80.
[442]Weitzman, M. P., *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999) p.206-207.

The ending of the above passage of Ephrem's commentaries demonstrates another instance of Ephrem following the Jewish exegetical tradition. Commenting on Exod.19:6, Ephrem uses the phrase similar to the *Mekhilta Bahodesh*, which describes Israel as '*holy and sanctified, separate from the nations of the world and their abominations*'[443]. The use of the word 'abomination' within the context of the sanctification of the nation and its chosen status among the rest of the nations connects Ephrem with the *Mekhilta*.

Finally, Ephrem does not demonstrate any allusion to the NT or to Christology in this passage. Ephrem goes beyond the scriptural narrative and chooses to follow Jewish exegesis. His writings concentrate predominantly on the idea of God's care for his people. Although the idea of God's care for the people as such is very similar to Theodoret, the methodologies of the two exegetes are very different. Ephrem is strictly loyal to the Jewish exegesis, as he demonstrates in the three allusions to the Jewish interpretation of Exod.19:4-6, which are highlighted by the Targumim and also by the text of Peshitta itself. Theodoret, on the other hand, simply shows his awareness of the Jewish writings, but stays predominantly within the framework of strictly Christian exegesis.

Theodoret reflects on the might of God and His care for the universe. However, within His global concern for humanity God selects and promotes certain people in order to highlight the lineage of Christ:

> For just as he promoted the Levites, who were also Israelites, over the remaining tribes, and separated them for the divine service – not because He was overlooking the other tribes, but so that He might exercise His care for the latter through the former – so He chose the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. First, because out of them Christ the Lord was destined to arise according to the flesh...[444]

Theodoret also depicts the idea of the Covenant as one of a written legal document, which is initiated by God and signed by the people:

> But this Covenant of the people is similar to a written document of a certain kind; consequently, by acting against His literal agreement contained in it, the people became guilty

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[443] *Mekhilta Bahodesh*II, p.206, see also *ExodCom*XIX.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.56.
[444] Marcos,*Theodoreti*,p.125.

> of the curses contained in the Law, from which Christ the Lord liberated those who believed in Him.[445]

Theodoret's primary concern is the Christological interpretation of God choosing Israel as His people. Subsequently, Theodoret emphasises that by accepting the title of the chosen nation, the people are also expected to accept the responsibility of the consequences of disobeying the agreement. Hence, Theodoret suggests the sacrifice of Christ as redemption from the '*curse of the Law*'.

Theodoret's agenda in the interpretation of the biblical verses is to promote Christ and His role in the redemption of humankind. Theodoret includes Christ's figure within the global plan of God's care for humanity. And although Theodoret quotes the translation of Symmachus in the passage, he does not seem to write his commentaries under the influence of Jewish exegetes.

It is noteworthy to mention here that Theodoret does not pick up on the notion of kings and priests as such. He goes along with the quotation of the biblical verse according to LXX, which reads, '*And you shall be for me a royal priesthood, a holy nation*'[446]. Theodoret's commentary suggests that the only knowledge that he possesses in relation to Exod.19:6 is the verse of LXX, which reads:

> And ye shall be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation: these words you shall speak to the children of Israel.

From Theodoret's commentaries it is evident that he does not go beyond the scriptural narrative in his interpretation. The text of LXX contains the notion of priesthood and the holy nation, and this is exactly what Theodoret mentions in his commentaries.

The illustrative evidence of this section emphasises the extent to which Ephrem is closer to Jewish exegesis in his commentaries than Theodoret. And although they both share the same knowledge of the Jewish tradition of interpreting Scripture, Ephrem's loyalty to that tradition is unquestionable, whereas Theodoret uses it as only one among various examples in his commentaries.

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[445]Ibid.
[446]Ibid.

Illustration IV: Amalek/Moses in Ephrem and Theodoret (Exod.17:8-14)

This section analyses the parallels between Theodoret and Ephrem, and between Ephrem and the Targumim in interpreting the significance of the battle of Moses and Amalek. It makes it possible to demonstrate the points in Ephrem's commentaries that connect with Christian symbolism and Jewish exegesis.

Theodoret emphasises the typology of Christ in Moses' posture of stretching out his hands. He also gives the theological definition of this typology as one demonstrating the power and the victory of truth. Hence, according to Theodoret, the victory of Israel over Amalek is ultimately a victory of Christology:

> How did it come about that Israel prevailed when Moses stretched out his hands; and that when he let them drop Israel was conquered? While he was stretching out his hands, he was fulfilling the type of Him who was crucified for us; for in that type the power of the truth was demonstrated. For just as Amalek fell when the servant (of God) stretched out his hands: so, when [the Lord] stretched out his hands, the devil's army was destroyed.[447]

Theodoret undoubtedly and plainly understands the incident of the battle with Amalek as a demonstration of Christian typology. In fact the typology itself testifies to the victory of Christianity. Theodoret shifts the emphasis away from the victory of Israel towards the prophecy of the victory of Christianity that he sees as being hidden in the text of Exod.17.

Theodoret does not reflect on only one instance of typology in relation to the battle with Amalek. He goes further in emphasising, through the figure of Joshua, the imitation of Christ and His actions of selecting and using the apostles. In the case of Joshua, Theodoret draws a parallel with Christ based on the similarities of their names:

> And in that battle the one who set up the trophy was the one of like name to our Saviour, and acquired this designation then, and made use of the deeds of co-workers, just as the Lord Christ made use of the ministry of the holy apostles.[448]

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[447]Marcos,*Theodoreti*,p.124-125.
[448]Marcos, *Theodoreti*,p.125.

The passage above shows how determined Theodoret is in propounding the Christological interpretation of the narrative of Exod.17. He uses every possible means to bring the figure of Christ into the exegesis of the Scripture. There is nothing else apart from the typology of Christ that interests Theodoret in the narrative of the battle with Amalek. Hence, both passages of Theodoret's commentaries are completely dedicated to that.

Ephrem, on the other hand, goes beyond Christian symbolism and comments on other issues and lessons that can be derived from Scripture. As usual Ephrem digs into Jewish exegetical tradition to broaden the narrative of Scripture, enriching it with insightful details from the oral tradition of biblical interpretation. He mentions, for example, that Hur was believed to be the husband of Miriam, the sister of Moses[449]. This detail is not directly mentioned in the Scripture, but is known through the Jewish sources[450]. What is particularly important in Ephrem's reference to the Jewish sources is that he uses the phrase *'they say that Hur was the husband of Moses' sister'*, very clearly indicating his reliance on oral Haggadic tradition[451].

There are several ways in which Ephrem approaches the biblical narrative of the battle with Amalek. He discusses the symbolism of Moses' posture, but also emphasises the symbolism of the Staff. He starts by highlighting that Moses was in possession of the Staff of God. This is a very important statement, as with it Ephrem shifts the attention from Moses to God as being the main figure in the scene. Ephrem further explains that he sees the Staff as a sign of the Cross:

> Moses ascended the mountain with the staff of God in his hand. Moses only held the staff on the occasion of mighty deeds and miracles, so that you would know that it was a sign of the Cross, and that it was through the power of the Cross that he performed all the miracles.[452]

After establishing the symbolism of the Staff, Ephrem goes on to describe the posture of Moses. He mentions in the first instance that Moses raised his arms, while further on he describes Moses' posture as one with 'outstretched hands':

> When Moses raised his arms, *Israel prevailed* and destroyed the presumptuous nations who had rushed to make war on the people. When Moses lowered his arms the nations prevailed

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[449]*ExodCom*XVII.2.
[450]See Josephus A*nt.*III.54, 105, *PRE*XLV, *ExodRab*48.4, see also Salvesen*ECE* p.52.
[451]*ExodCom*XVII.2. See also Chapter V.1.5.
[452]*ExodCom*XVII.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.51.

> and began to destroy constantly those who constantly grumbled against the Lord and against Moses[453].
>
> The outstretching of Moses' hands and the staff that stood upright against his breast formed the unmistakable sign of the Crucified one.[454]

Among the possible reasons for Ephrem to describe the posture of Moses in different ways could be the following:

- when Ephrem wants to emphasise the symbolism of Christ through the posture of Moses he describes him as standing with outstretched hands
- whereas when Ephrem merely narrates the posture of Moses he mentions that his arms are raised, in the same way as the description of the Targumim[455].

The Christian symbolism of the posture of Moses is very strongly emphasised by both of the commentators. The main difference, however, between Ephrem and Theodoret is that Theodoret is only concerned with the typology of Christ, whereas Ephrem introduces Christology only as a final illustration of the scene.

Ephrem does not limit his exegesis to the Christological interpretation of the passage. His commentary is different from Theodoret's in its complexity. Ephrem makes an attempt to broaden the scriptural narrative by means of various descriptive details that he adds to the visual elements of the scene. He adds information about Hur being the husband of Miriam, and he also brings up the detail of Amalek destroying only the wicked people among Israel. This shows that Ephrem is genuinely concerned with the understanding of the OT narrative.

Therefore, again, one of the main differences between Ephrem and Theodoret lies in their set of priorities. Theodoret follows only one priority in his agenda, which is Christian typology. Ephrem, on the other hand, shows interest in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible *per se*, appreciating, so to speak, 'purely' the OT exegesis. Hence, he uses Jewish exegetical tradition when it provides his commentaries with additional information about the scriptural narrative. Thus, one can see that Ephrem's methods of approaching the scriptural narrative bring him closer to the Targumic tradition.

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[453]Exod.17:11.
[454]*ExodCom*XVII.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.
[455]*TgPsJ* on Exod.17:11 reads: '*Whenever Moses held his hands up in prayer, those of the house of Israel prevailed; but whenever he lowered his hands and ceased praying, those of the house of Amalek prevailed*'. McNam p.211.

TgPsJ, for example, expands this scriptural narrative by emphasising the significance of the three important components that allowed Moses and Israel to be victorious in the battle with Amalek:

- prayer
- fasting
- merits of the patriarchs and matriarchs:

> Moses said to Joshua, "pick out for us men (who are) strong and mighty (in the observance) of the commandments and victorious in the battle. Go out from beneath the clouds of glory and draw up battle lines against the camps of Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand, fasting (and) relying on the merits of the patriarchs, the heads of the people, and the merits of the matriarchs, who are comparable to the hills, with the rod, by which miracles were performed from before the Lord, in my hand.[456]

It is important to demonstrate here how the Targumim deal with the situation of such a strong Christian symbolism as that depicted in the posture of Moses and promoted by the Christian exegetes. *TgPsJ* deliberately shifts the emphasis in another direction away from the significance of the staff and the posture of Moses. While Christian exegetes derive the strength of Israel and Moses from the symbolism or the typology of Christ, the emphasis of the *TgPsJ* is on prayer, fasting and the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. *TgN* emphasises the significance of the staff in the hands of the Moses, in a way that is reminiscent of Ephrem's understanding of the Staff of Moses as a manifestation of God's power:

> I will stand ready on the top of the height and in my hand the staff by which signs were done before the Lord.[457]

It is important to notice that the significance of the Staff of Moses is downplayed by *TgPsJ*. Instead, *TgPsJ* emphasises prayer, fasting, and merits. It is possible to assume here that the reasons for doing so may be related to the significance and place held by the Staff and the posture of Moses occupy in the Christian commentaries on the story of the battle with Amalek. All of it is an illustration of close interactions between Jewish and Christian exegetical writings.

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[456] *TgPsJ* on Exod.17:9. McNam p.210-211.
[457] *TgN* on Exod.17:9. McNam p.74.

Illustration V: The Commentaries on the Passover in Ephrem and Theodoret

Theodoret brings extensive external evidence from various sources, i.e. Theodotion, Symmachus, Philo, Josephus. He demonstrates a broad knowledge of various Jewish exegetes. Tracing the etymology of the word 'Pascha', Theodoret refers readers to the Jewish sources. He even bases his argument on the meaning of the Hebrew word referring to 'Passover'. Theodoret builds up an etymological interpretation of the word as one of soteriological significance:

> Now the Hebrew word means the salvation of the first born. For when they had taken a bunch of the hyssop dipped in the blood of the killed lamb, he commanded them to anoint the doorposts and the lintels, so that when the destroyer came in to smite the first born of Egypt, he might pass over the houses of Hebrews when he saw the blood. Not because the incorporeal nature was lacking from these signs, but because it was necessary that they should understand, by means of the symbol, the divine providence. And we who sacrifice the immaculate lamb should know the type which was written about beforehand.[458]

Theodoret uses the symbolism of the Passover as a typology of Christ. Hence, the event of the Passover bringing salvation to Israel, which Theodoret uses as a depiction of the soteriological mission of Christ, is seen as an event of major significance.

Further on in his commentaries on the biblical passage, Theodoret builds on the Christological significance of the Passover, when he explains the significance of the numbers of days of the month in relation to Christ's sacrifice:

> Moreover he commanded that they should take the animal on the tenth day of the first month, so that they should make preparation before the festival, and sacrifice on the fourteenth day towards the evening. Also during this very evening the Lord Christ was handed over to the Jews.[459]

Theodoret imposes Christian symbolism on the notion of the unleavened bread and the hasty departure of Israel from Egypt. Hence, Theodoret further bolsters the Christological interpretation with the following connotations:

- in the same manner as unleavened bread teaches Israel to avoid the bad influence of the Egyptians, so does the Gospel teach against the cunning of the scribes and Pharisees

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[458]Marcos,*Theodoreti*,p.118.
[459]Ibid.

- Theodoret emphasises the scriptural ethical teaching of charitable deeds and generosity to the poor resembling the Jewish interpretation of practising charity and generosity
- The feast of the Passover Theodoret compares to the liturgical/Eucharistic celebration/sacrifice of the Christian community, drawing on the similarities of the presence of the blood of the lamb:

> By means of the unleavened bread he also signified not only the haste/hurry of the journey, and the hastily prepared food, but also that it was necessary that no trace of the Egyptian civic life should be carried away with them. (As the Lord understood in the Gospel, beware of the scribes and Pharisees.) Also he commanded that those who lacked a sufficient number to eat the lamb at the same time should sacrifice the Passover, teaching them fraternal charity and mercy towards the poor. For this reason he advised that the remainder of the flesh should be burned and not kept for the following day, by this means forcing them to invite the poor to the feast, which is to be celebrated communally. Moreover, all these things are symbols of our mysteries, for we too anoint the blood of our lamb on the door posts purifying and sanctifying externally the tongue and the lips, and externally sanctifying ourselves and our rational, logical part according to our understanding.[460]

Following this passage, Theodoret's ideas about the scriptural narrative of the Passover could be characterised as being developed under Hellenistic influence. He uses Hellenistic ideas in his commentaries when he talks about the external and internal purification of the rational faculties of the human body, i.e. the faculty of concupiscence etc:

> We understand it as a form of purification both external and internal, each door post represents our faculty of anger and the faculty of concupiscence. So the idea is that when the OT says the pouring of blood to the two door posts etc. It is fitting for us also to eat things not raw or soaked with water, but roasted with fire. Neither do we pay attention to the letter only, but we follow the sense of the scripture. Nor do we introduce human reasoning into divine statements. For this reason Isaiah accused certain people as people who mixed water with wine.[461]

Theodoret warns against the literal understanding of the scriptural words. This idea is similar to the one further developed in other Christian thinkers, which has the generic term of 'replacement theology'. Further development of the idea could lead to the stereotypical representation of Jewish exegesis as that of 'the people of the

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[460]Marcos,*Theodoreti*,p.118-119.
[461]Ibid.

letter/word/law', while Christian exegesis is perceived as that of 'the people of the Spirit/grace/love'.

Ephrem, likewise, picks up on Christian symbolism in relation to the Passover lamb commenting on the significance of the numbers of the days of the month in order to emphasise the connection between the Passover lamb and the birth of Christ (or more precisely the pre-Annunciation events):

> Now the Lamb is a symbol of our Lord, who was conceived on the tenth of Nisan. For Zachariah was told on the tenth day of the seventh month that John was going to be born, and six months later, when the message was brought to Mary by the angel, was the tenth day of the first month. Because of this the angel said to her, "this is the sixth month with her who was called barren."[462]

Ephrem brings to bear the evidence of the NT narrative. It is the second of the two quotations from the NT that Ephrem allows himself to use in his commentaries on Exodus[463]. Although Ephrem discusses the narrative in relation to the birth of Christ, his use of the NT quotation within the context of the commentaries on Exodus is brought up purely for information. He does not go beyond the literal understanding of the parallel between the tenth day of the month for the Passover lamb and the tenth day of the month on which Zachariah was told about the birth of John. This suggests that Ephrem is not primarily concerned with the use of the NT in the commentaries on Exodus, but merely deploys the two quotations functionally.

It is interesting to notice that Ephrem draws together historically opposed/different events in the life of Christ, basing this conflation on the significance of the numbers ten and fourteen. The number ten Ephrem interprets in relation to the birth of Christ, while the number fourteen he interprets in relation to Christ's passion:

> So on the tenth day when the lamb was confined, our Lord was conceived in the womb, and on the fourteenth when it was slain, the One it symbolises was crucified.[464]

Ephrem's understanding of the unleavened bread and bitter herbs are as the '*signs of His* [Christ's] *renewal*'[465]. Similar ideas can be seen in Ephrem's hymn:

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[462]*ExodCom*XII.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.39, see also Luke 1:36.
[463]The first one was from Matthew 22:40, *ExodCom*XX.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.57. For the significance of the quote from Matthew see Chapter III Illustration VI.
[464]*ExodCom*XII.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.39.
[465]*ExodCom*XII.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.39.

> The Lamb gave instructions about his symbol: they should eat it with unleavened bread; fresh bread and fresh meat, to depict the symbol of his newness. Because the ancient leaven of Eve, that ages everything, had spread, grown old, and worn out all, through the unleavened bread that renews everything...[466]

There is an allusion to the Eucharist in the hymn of Ephrem, which is not so clear in the Exodus commentaries of Ephrem on the passage. However, in his commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem develops the Christian idea of suffering and cross-bearing as an inspiration from the commandments in Exod.12:11:

> As for the unleavened bread, with bitter herb that Scripture mentions, there is a sign of his renewal in the unleavened bread, and the bitter herb is because those who bear him suffer.[467] "Roasted"[468] is a symbol that he was baked with fire, "*with your loins girded and shoes on your feet*" symbolises the new discipleship that is ready to go and preach the gospel. "*With your staffs in your hands*"[469] are the crosses on their shoulders; "standing on their feet" because no-one partakes of the Living Body sitting down.[470]

One can single out the following ideas of Ephrem, which he brings from the Passover narrative of Exodus:

- Christ`s suffering
- Moses' awareness of Christ's presence at the time of the Passover
- Signs of Christian discipleship
- Cross-bearing as a vocation for Christians
- Baptism as the entrance to becoming a full member of the Church and a participant in the Eucharistic communion
- Christ as the True Lamb, symbolised by the Passover lamb.

While Theodoret uses typology in interpreting the OT narrative christologically, Ephrem introduces the presence of Christ into the historical context of the actual Passover. Ephrem's implication is that Moses is the one who possesses the knowledge and awareness of Christ's presence in the historical account of Exodus. Hence,

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[466]*HCruc*II.5, see also Rouwhorst, G. A. M., *Les Hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe II: Textes* (Leiden: Brill, 1989); Salvesen*ECE* p.39-40.
[467]This idea is developed in *HCruc*II.3: '*The True Lamb commanded (Moses) go gather bitter herbs, so that mourning for him would spread among those who ate it'.*
[468]Exod.12:8-9.
[469]Exod.12:11.
[470]*ExodCom*XII.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.39-40.

through his actions, Moses is passing his knowledge/awareness to the people. The revelation of Christ is therefore understood as entering the reality of OT history. This approach to the OT by Ephrem is somewhat different from the approach of Theodoret. The overall impression given by Theodoret's commentaries is that he sees the OT only as a typological prelude to Christ, while Ephrem describes the reality of Christ's presence in the OT.

Because Ephrem uncovers the historical reality of Christ's revelation in the OT, the whole 'value' of the scriptural narrative emerges clothed in a new 'not-ignorable' significance. On the basis of Ephrem's commentaries one sees that Exodus, as a part of the OT Scripture, is not only a prelude for Christ's revelation, or a preparation for Christ to come. According to Ephrem's understanding of the OT narrative, it is already a revelation of God's salvation and redemption. These are the main aspects that Ephrem sees and highlights in the Exodus narrative of the Passover, and these are the ideas that he sees throughout the scriptural narrative of the OT. Christ's presence is one of the aspects of the revelation of Scripture for Ephrem. It plays an important role in Ephrem's vision of the OT story, but there are other significant aspects of it that Ephrem puts a lot of effort into revealing through his commentaries. Ephrem values the OT narrative not exclusively for the fact of Christ's revelation in it; hence, he also picks up on the revelations of God's participation in the history of humankind and highlights their significance throughout his commentaries.

Jewish Targumim interpret the Passover experience of Israel from a perspective that differs from that of Christian commentators. However, it is interesting to notice some similar ideas shared by Jewish and Christian writings. The emphasis of the interpretation of *TgPsJ* is on the blood of the covenant of the circumcision. This connection that the Targum derives is on the basis of the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of the covenant of the circumcision:

> The blood of the Passover sacrifice and (that) of the cut of the circumcision will be mixed by you so as to make of it a sign on the houses in which you dwell. When I see the merit of the blood, I will spare you, and The Angel of Death, to whom authority to destroy has been given, will have no power over you when I slay in the land of Egypt.[471]

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[471] *TgPsJ* on Exod.12:13. McNam p.191.

According to the Targum, the blood of the Covenant is seen as a sign of the vocation of believers. This resembles a little Ephrem's understanding of the Passover narrative in relation to the Christian vocation and cross-bearing. Ephrem also stresses the significance of the covenant of circumcision straight after the Akeda narrative[472].

TgN brings the idea of God's judgement on Egypt for their idolatry:

> And according to this order you shall eat it: your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staffs in your hands. And you shall eat it in a hurry. It is a paschal sacrifice before the Lord. And I will pass in my Memra through the land of Egypt this night of the Passover, and I will kill all the first-born in the land of Egypt from the sons of man to beast. And I will execute different judgements on all the idols of Egyptians", says the Lord.[473]

There are obvious differences in their perception of the Passover narrative on the part of the Jewish and Christian interpreters. However, Ephrem manages to combine Jewish exegetical tradition with Christian symbolism, and organically incorporates both traditions in his commentaries. On the one hand, he gently borrows ideas, stories and explanations from the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis, while, on the other hand, he brings the reality of the presence of Christ into the narrative of the OT. That is the most characteristic feature of Ephrem's exegesis, and precisely what makes Ephrem so unique among Christian exegetes.

The comparison of Ephrem's and Theodoret's exegeses shows how different these two authors are. Theodoret's perception of the OT does not go beyond the Christology. Although he uses quotations from Jewish sources, Theodoret is not seriously influenced by the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis. Ephrem, on the contrary, preserves a very strong connection to Jewish exegesis. And, although he does not acknowledge the borrowings from the Targumim and Midrashim, the comparison of Ephrem's writings with the Jewish material shows how closely they are related.

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[472] *GenCom*XXI.2, see also Chapter III Illustration V.
[473] *TgN* on Exod.12:11-12. McNam p.47-48.

Illustration VI: Exodus 20:25 in Theodoret and Ephrem/ The Altar of Earth

Theodoret is concerned with finding the right explanation for the commandments of God first of all, for the prohibition of building the altar of hewn stones and secondly, for the prohibition of the use of iron implements upon the altar that would constitute defilement of it[474].

Theodoret brings up the use of iron together with the use of gold and silver and bronze during the building of the Tabernacle. As the next step Theodoret asks for what reason the iron of the knives of sacrifice did not defile the altar, but iron used to hew the stone would pollute it. And then he switches the focus from the iron to the hewn stones. Hence, according to Theodoret, the answer to the question is not about the iron but about the hewn stones. It is the nature of the structure of the altar that explains the prohibition. It is clear that an altar which is built of hewn stones is a long-lasting construction. Hence, there is a danger that it could be used as a place of worship to other gods after the Israelites abandoned it. Whereas altars built of earth and of unhewn stones are easily demolished and, hence, appropriate for the temporary use of Israelites wandering in the desert.

Theodoret argues that the building of altars before the building of the Temple is a compromise in order to convince the wicked. Therefore, the prohibition on building altars of hewn stones is a security measure to prevent these altars being used by idol worshippers. Overall, Theodoret explains the OT instructions to build the altar of earth as a temporary measure for the Israelites wandering in the desert and making their sacrifices to God.

Ephrem makes use of the biblical verses of Exod.20:22-26 in connection with the NT narrative. It is not often that Ephrem introduces a quotation from the NT in his commentaries on Exodus. In fact, this is one of the two instances when he actually quotes from the NT. But, it is important to notice that the verse from the NT is used by Ephrem not for the purpose of Christological argument. He chooses to quote Matt.22:40 to prioritise the commandments and set the perspective for understanding

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[474]Marcos,*Theodoreti*,p.132.

the Law and the Prophets. Ephrem extracts from the Exodus verse the essentials of the law, that is, the '*two commandments* on which *the law hangs*'[475].

Ephrem prioritises the significance of certain requirements of law. According to Ephrem, the laws expressed by the NT verse of Mat.22:40 are '*the natural laws contained in the "Law" and the Prophets*'[476]. Ephrem also sets apart the tradition of developing the '*new laws that were introduced for circumstances as they arose*'[477]. Therefore, when Ephrem brings up the verses of Exod.20:24-25, the implication is that these are new laws that have to be understood through the prism of Mat.22:40. Ephrem connects the meaning of verses 24 and 25 of Exodus to Matt.20:22. Hence, overall, Ephrem understands the commandments in Exod.20:24-25 as a prohibition against idolatry.

Both Ephrem and Theodoret tackle the issue of idolatry in connection with the prohibition of building the altar of hewn stones. However, they approach the subject from different perspectives. Theodoret brings an explanation of the laws from the historical perspective of Israel wandering in the wilderness. He emphasises the fact that the prohibition of Exod.20:24-25 is a temporary measure and a compromise for Israel's time of wandering prior to the building of the Temple as the only place for the sacrifices. Hence, Theodoret also establishes the priority of the laws, and considers the commandments of Exod.20:24-25 to be of but temporary importance. In this, both Ephrem's and Theodoret's understandings of the law correspond. The difference of Ephrem's argument is that he looks at the commandments of Exod.20:24-25 through the perspective of the incarnation of the Law and the Prophets described in Matt.22:40.

It is possible to argue here, on the evidence of Ephrem's and Theodoret's commentaries on the verses of Exod.20:24-25, that both authors draw similar conclusions about the significance of the verses, which are:

- the primary concern of the prohibitions is against idolatry

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[475] *ExodCom*XX.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.57, see also Matt.22:40.
[476] *ExodCom*XX.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.57.
[477] *ExodCom*XX.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.57.

- the significance of these laws is of secondary importance in comparison to the primary law of Matt.22:40 (according to Ephrem), and in relation to the temporary historical period of Israel wandering in the desert (according to Theodoret)

However, their exegetical approach to the subject is different, as they use their own approaches, albeit leading to similar conclusions. Here Ephrem transforms details of OT legislation that are difficult to understand by transferring them from the OT context to the NT reality. In other words, Ephrem gives these commandments their NT fulfilment.

Summary

The initial aim of the chapter in setting up a comparison between Ephrem and another Christian author of closely similar background was to emphasise Ephrem's 'Semitic mind`. Ephrem's relationship with Jewish traditions became evident through demonstrating the ways and methods by which he deals with Scripture. And indeed, the comparison of Ephrem and Theodoret illustrated that Ephrem's identity as a biblical exegete can be firmly associated with the Jewish tradition of interpreting Scripture. The six illustrations presented in this chapter show that Ephrem is persistent and confident in the use of the common exegetical material that found its place also in Targumim and Midrashim. Therefore, it seems appropriate to call Ephrem a Semitic writer, and a follower of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis.

Exegesis of Ephrem

Referring to the suggestion that Syriac exegesis is not creative and original, Romeny suggests looking into the mind of a Syriac compiler, which he sees as a useful exercise that could uncover features important to that period of time and to the personal preferences of the author in choosing his sources. Romeny writes:

> Biblical interpretation is the key to the origin, myth, early history, and world-view of the community … It is the subtle strategy of adaptation and rejection of earlier material that needs

> to be described. In not a few cases, the comparison with earlier material tells us more of what was considered important at a certain moment than so-called original work might.[478]

It is questionable as to whether the use of the common exegetical tradition makes Ephrem unoriginal in his exegesis. Ephrem indeed absorbed to a great extent the tradition of Jewish Bible interpretation, but at the same time he presented his writings in a strikingly personal manner:

- reflecting on the contemporary religious situation (reflecting on Judaising movements in the Church, and on the battle with heretical teachings)
- presenting ideas important to him personally (i.e. Israel-God relationship, Jews rejecting Christ)
- bringing his personal understanding of some ideas, and creatively developing them in his writings (e.g. Mirror, reflection, healing).

The above-mentioned characteristics depict Ephrem as an original writer and an inventor or at least a further developer of certain exegetical features and presentations, such as:

- symbolic interpretations
- the use of the names of Christ as the Medicine of Life, or Christ as the Pascal Lamb; highly positive presentation of female characters
- the introduction of the notions of the Mirror, the Mind, inner and outer sight and so on.

One cannot deny originality to Ephrem's work only on the basis of the fact that he was using components of other religious traditions. As Van Rompay noticed, Syriac writers '*stood in inter-relationship with surrounding cultures, but expressed their own interests with the help of all traditions available to them'*.[479] And Ephrem's 'own' voice and his theological position are soundly and clearly expressed in his writings, demonstrating his highly developed exegetical skills and literary abilities.

Ephrem's exegesis is a work of art. Griffith presents the following description of it:

> He begins with the literal meaning of the text, and then he looks for the spiritual sense encoded in the symbols and types, the names and the titles which have the incarnate son of God as their constant point of reference.[480]

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[478]Romeny, B. H., 'The identity formation of Syrian Orthodox Christians', *PdO* 29 (2004) p.104.
[479]Ibid.p.105, see also Van Rompay, L., "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation" in M. Saebo (ed.) *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* 1.1. *Antiquity* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1996) p.612-641, esp.637-641.
[480]Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery,* p.33.

It may be useful to concentrate on the first step of Ephrem's exegetical approach, i.e. what the author calls beginning '*with the literal meaning of the text*'. This could be described more specifically, as Ephrem starting his approach to the Scripture using Jewish traditions[481], i.e. working with the biblical text by:

- identifying the problem and asking questions[482]
- presenting certain non-scriptural information in addition to the biblical narrative[483].

Drijvers states that '*Ephrem and the Haggada share a common tradition, but often develop it in opposite directions*'[484]. It may be a good idea to reconsider the definition of 'opposite directions'. Various examples of exegetical writings presented in this thesis show that, generally, Jewish sages and Ephrem share their 'directions', in being orientated towards further study and clarification of God's revelation through the words of Scripture. It is noticeable, however, that Ephrem often pushes his argument further into developing Christological presentation, but he is not doing it in opposition or contradiction to the rabbinical arguments. Thus, Ephrem is not changing the 'direction' of the rabbinical argument as such, but adding to it his perspective, following from his inspiration in the biblical narrative and his personal beliefs.

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[481]See Chapter II.3.9.
[482]See Chapter IV.1.5, IV.2.
[483]See Chapter IV.1 featuring the information that Ephrem adds to the scriptural text about Hur as the husband of Miriam. Other scholars present various other observations of Ephrem borrowing from Jewish Aggadic tradition. See Brock, S., 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources', *JJS* 30 (1979) p.217,226,229, see on Noah: *CNis*1.9, *ComGen*6.12, Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* I, p.166, see also Guillaumont, A., 'A propos du célibat des Esseniéns', in A. Dupont-Sommer, *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1971) p.395-404.
[484]Drijvers, H. J. W., 'Jews and Christians at Edessa', *JJS* 36 (1985) p.101.

Chapter IV: Dealing with Difficulties in the Text: A Comparative Analysis of Ephrem's Writings with Jewish Sources

IV.1 Exodus 2:25

IV.1.1 Introduction

This chapter examines Jewish and Christian commentaries on Exod.2:25. The verse is complex because of the unclear meaning that it presents. Hence, from a very early stage biblical commentators made it their primary concern to explore the meaning of the verse and to present their interpretations of it.

One may start by exploring the commentaries on the verse from various biblical translations and interpretations in order to establish the connection across the broad spectrum of Jewish exegetical material spread out throughout the centuries. This chapter highlights the similarities in their approaches to the text, and points out the common ideas and notions that Jewish biblical commentators share. The primary concern is to point out the significant elements of biblical exegesis that Jewish sources associate with Exod.2:25.

After introducing Jewish material the chapter presents Ephrem's commentaries on the verse. It compares Ephrem's ideas with the ideas of Midrashim and Targumim, pointing out similar notions and concepts within the writings of Ephrem and the Jewish commentators. This will make it possible to trace the influence of the Jewish sources on the exegetical writings of Ephrem. The aim is to determine the extent to which Ephrem was aware of the Jewish approach to the verse and shared the ideas that writers of Targumim and Midrashim presented in connection with it.

This section argues for the existence/ historical reality of:

- interrelations between Jewish Targumim and Midrashim
- an interrelation of Jewish and Christian exegesis
- a relation between Ephrem's commentaries and the Midrashim and the Targumim.

The various ancient translations of Exod.2:25 allow one to trace how the meaning of the original Hebrew text was understood through the process of its translation into

different languages, i.e. Greek, Aramaic and Syriac. The question to be explored is: what were the reasons for attributing various meanings to the biblical verse? Hence, this section begins with the LXX translation of the verse, which will make it possible to work through the understanding of the Hebrew text by the Jewish-Greek interpreters of the Septuagint. Various Targumic ideas that were offered by Aramaic translators of the Bible will also be presented here. Additionally, the place of the Midrash in the exegetical approach to Exod.2:25 will be studied; and the commentaries of Ephrem in comparison to the commentaries of *Exodus Rabbah* will be analysed.

IV.1.2 LXX on Exodus 2:25

The Hebrew text of Exod.2:25 ascribes to God anthropomorphic qualities[485], as it reads of God seeing and knowing. The Hebrew verse is far from explicit in presenting the actual objects of God's sight and His awareness (or His knowledge). It leaves opportunities for discussion, and the sages of the Midrashim and Targumim pick up on a number of issues raised by Exod.2:25. Already prior to Midrashic interpretations different translations of the biblical narrative present their understanding of the verse. LXX expresses the meaning of the verse by stating that it is God who became known to the children of Israel. It reads:

καὶ ἐπεῖδεν ὁ θεὸς τοὺς υἱοὺς Ισραηλ καὶ ἐγνώσθη αὐτοῖς	And God looked upon the children of Israel and was made known to them

It is in the second part of the biblical verse that the translators of LXX expose the alternate meaning of the Masoretic Hebrew text. Hence, the question of their motives arises. Did the translators of the Hebrew Bible make an attempt to change the original meaning of the text or did they in fact discover the true meaning of it? Or did they have a Hebrew text which differed from the one that is known as MT?

The second part of Exod.2:25 in the Septuagint makes the biblical verse into a coherent verse, which creates a more satisfactory conclusion for the reader. It emphasises the fact that God revealed Himself to Israel, which puts the whole verse

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[485]McNamara (eds.) *The Aramaic Bible*, Vol.7 *The Targum Onkelos to Exodus* (Edinburgh: T&T. Clark Ltd, 1988) p.7.

and in fact the whole chapter into the perspective of God's revelation to Moses and to Israel[486].

Traditional understanding of the Hebrew text read the second part as an active approach by God, i.e. 'and God knew'. That raised many questions for the rabbinic exegetes. This and the subsequent rabbinic attempts to clarify the meaning of the verse show that Jewish sages struggled with their understanding of it. The example of LXX shows that the writers of the Septuagint read the active form of the Hebrew verb **ידע** as the passive form of it, i.e. **ידוע**. Hence, the meaning of the text shifted from 'God knowing' into 'God being known'. The unvocalised Hebrew text of Exod.2:25 reads:

וירא אלהים את-בני ישראל וידע אלהים[487]

It turns out that the translators of LXX adopted a particular reading of this verse on two occasions:

1. by introducing a particular vocalisation of the word **ידע** by reading it as **ידוע**, and keeping the original consonantal Hebrew unchanged
2. by changing the order of consonants in the word **אלהים** as if it were **אליהם** 'to them', presenting their understanding of the verse.

The translators of Septuagint, therefore, exercised their freedom by introducing different interpretation of the verse, and the original biblical text allowed them to select this particular meaning of the Hebrew words.

Exod.2:25 poses an open-ended question and leaves an unclear ending to the whole chapter. Therefore, by bringing a sensible explanation to the verse the translators of LXX avoided any confusion that the Hebrew text might create. The last verse of Exod.2 in MT reads that 'God knew', while the next sentence of the biblical narrative does not present an explanation of God's knowledge. The translation of LXX, on the other hand, makes the biblical verse into a coherent verse, which creates a more satisfactory conclusion for the reader.

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[486]Wevers, J. W., *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) p.24, see also Exod.3, 3:15ff.
[487]Elliger, Rudolph (eds.) *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967/77) p.88.

There are two verbs that the LXX translation of Exod.2:25 uses. One is ἐπεῖδεν and another is ἐγνώσθη. The following paragraphs will bring forward other biblical examples of the relevant use of the verb γινώσκω in LXX translation of Exodus. This will help in defining the meaning that the interpreters implied through the use of the verb in Exod.2:25.

The first example from Exod.25:22 refers to the revelation of God to Israel:

> And I will make myself known to thee [γνωσθήσομαί] from thence, and I will speak to thee above the propitiatory between the two cherubs, which are upon the ark of testimony, even in all things which I shall charge thee concerning the children of Israel.

According to the text it is God who initiates the special relationship with Israel[488]. It is also God's initiative to specify the place and the manner of communication with His people. Exod.30:6 describes the personal aspect of the relationship between God and Israel. It brings an intimate note to it:

> And thou shalt set it before the veil that is over the ark of the testimonies, wherein I will make myself known to thee [γνωσθήσομαί] from thence.

The Scripture develops a detailed description of the setting in which God's revelation is going to take place. Israel is perceived as a child in her relationship with God, the Father; she is told where to be, how to behave and what to expect from the relationship. The above passage also highlights the new start of an ongoing relationship. The following reading of Exod.29:42 emphasises the presence of God in Israel throughout the generations. The passage establishes the connection between the generations through worship/sacrifice:

> A perpetual sacrifice throughout your generations, at the door of the tabernacle of witness before the Lord; wherein I will be known to thee [γνωσθήσομαί] from thence, so as to speak to thee.

Israel is brought up and raised as the 'special' people for God throughout the generations. What makes Israel so 'special'? It is God's choice in the first place, but it is also the merits of a significant people who were able to offer *a perpetual sacrifice* through the generations[489]. It is possible to understand here that through the merits of

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[488]See reference of Philo on the same topic in Chapter IV.1.4.1.
[489]This has overtones of the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. See Chapter V.2.

the forefathers Israel reached the state of being able to be invited to a 'special' relationship with God[490]. It is through the sacrifice that God is 'made known' to Israel. Hence, the relationship of the people with their God is based on their witness of faith through the sacrifice and Temple worship.

The final example is taken from Exod.30:36 which shows God's involvement in worship offered by Israel:

> And of these thou shalt beat some small, and thou shalt put it before the testimonies in the tabernacle of testimony, whence I will make myself known to thee [γνωσθήσομαί]: it shall be to you a most holy incense.

God establishes the Temple as a holy place, which becomes a place where God makes Himself known. God's revelation to the people is closely linked with the tabernacle. Temple service becomes the act of knowing God, while the Temple itself becomes a sacred space where God is 'made known'.

In all of the cited verses the Greek verb **γινώσκω** of the LXX translation interprets the passive form of the Hebrew verb **יעד** of the MT. Each one of the LXX passages offers its own emphasis in picturing the relationship between God and Israel. The use of the verb **γινώσκω** in four selected verses of Exodus creates a coherent theological context for its meaning that can be considered a basic interpretative principle of the Septuagint. LXX's understanding of the verb **γινώσκω** brings the following aspects to the description of the relationship between God and Israel, i.e.:

- divine revelation
- divine presence
- intimacy
- God's active participation in Israel's worship.

Hence, all of these characteristics are applicable to the meaning of Exod.2:25 through the use of the verb **γινώσκω.**

All of the above examples emphasise the fact that the Temple Service is the surrounding where God 'is made known' to Israel. In Exod.30:6 and 30:36 of the Septuagint the Hebrew verb **יעד** in *Niph'al*, which has a meaning of 'assemble/meet'

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[490]See Chapter V.2.

is translated with the verb **γινώσκω**. It is very interesting that the verb 'to meet' is translated as 'to be made known' by the Septuagint. It could form a link to the Tabernacle account, where God makes Himself known to the people. By translating the verbs **ידע** and **יעד** as **γινώσκω** the Septuagint text seems to be saying that as God has been known to Israel in their affliction[491], so He would be known to them in the Tabernacle[492]. This is partly confirmed by the use of the verb **ἐφοράω** in Exod.2:25, which has overtones of divine providence. Wevers ascribes the notions of recognition and compassion to the meaning of this verb **ἐφοράω** in Exod.2:25[493]. The verb **ἐπεῖδεν** goes beyond the plain interpretation of the Hebrew **ראה**. The definition of the Greek verb has to do with concern and taking notice, which implies personal relationship and involvement with the object of seeing, i.e. in this case with Israel.

Another significant place in the Old Testament where the word **ἐπεῖδεν** is used in connection to God is Gen.4:4:

> And Abel also brought of the first born of his sheep and of his fatlings, and God looked [ἐπεῖδεν] upon Abel and his gifts

It is worth noticing that the following verse explaining that God did not look at Cain's offering does not use the verb **ἐπεῖδεν**, but uses **προσέσχεν** instead. Hence, the context of the use of the verb **ἐπεῖδεν** implies divine intervention. It has overtones of divine choice and divine providence. It is, therefore, possible to assume that the use of this verb in Exod.2:25 is bringing the context of God's providence to the understanding of it.

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[491]Exod.2:25.
[492]Exod.30:6,36.
[493]Wevers, J. W., *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) p.24.

Summary

The LXX does not leave a big question mark at the end of the verse. The Masoretic Text, on the other hand, creates a lot of questions for the interpreters. The LXX translation is different from the Hebrew text, which finishes the verse of Exod.2:25 with a verb without an object. The Septuagint makes an attempt to give a strong meaning to the verse by using two verbs that define the relationship between God and Israel. The Septuagint presents a special bond between God and Israel, bringing the flavour of the divine presence and divine revelation into their encounter, and develops an interpretation of the Hebrew text in agreement with the basic texts of Exod.25:22; 29:42; 30:6 and 30:36[494].

It is possible to assume that the understanding of Exod.2:25 presented by LXX influenced further exegetical work on the verse. Later this work shows that the Targumic understanding of Exod.2:25 is similar to that of the LXX. One can assume that the tradition informing the Septuagint translation could have been known to them, and the understanding of the verb used by the LXX could have influenced the writers of the Targumim in their interpretations of the biblical verse of Exod.2:25.

Presented below is a schematic demonstration of the succession of the tradition of biblical exegesis from LXX to Targumim:

1. LXX translation:

a.) LXX vocalising the second part of the verse as אליהם instead of אלהים, hence also facing the need to vocalise ידע as ידוע

b.) in the relevant verses of Exod.25:22;29:42;30:6,36 the confirmation is given of LXX seeing the root יעד expanding the Hebrew to ידע in order to give the sense of knowledge to the vocalisation encapsulated in יעד

There are two reasons behind such a transformation of the MT by LXX: either creators of LXX had a different Vorlage, or, most probably, they were expanding

[494]Le Boulluec, A., Sandevoir, P., *La Bible d'Alexandrie L'Exode* (Paris: Editions Du Cerf, 1989) p.87.

Hebrew in order to give the sense of knowledge and revelation to the verse. Thus they derived the verb **ידע** from the MT by Midrashic means[495].

2. Targum *TgPsJ* follows a similar tradition to LXX of Exod.2:25 by reading the Hebrew text as **ידע אלהים** twice:

a.) asking the question: 'know – what?' and answering: '*the repentance was revealed before Him, which they exercised in concealment*'

b.) presenting a literal exegesis of the verb 'to know': '*so that no man knew that of his companion*'.

This chapter aims to further illustrate the argument in support of the succession of the longstanding tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis. Hence, the following sections will highlight the instances when Targumim present a Midrashic way of dealing with the biblical text.

IV.1.3 Targumim on Exodus 2:25

Various Targumim interpret Exod.2:25 by expanding the Hebrew verse. Targumim present notions of the affliction and bondage of Israel and connect them to the notion of repentance:

- *TgN* and *TgO* connect the notion of Israel's suffering with God's plan to redeem Israel
- *TgPsJ* directly connects the suffering and repentance of Israel.

It is important to notice that both *TgN* and *TgO* understood God's 'knowing' as a reference to the promise of redemption. The reasons for this could be found in the biblical narrative, as the immediate verse before Exod.2:25 refers the reader to God remembering the Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

TgO reads:

And the servitude of the sons of Israel was revealed before the Lord, and the Lord said in His Word, that He would deliver [redeem] them.[496]	וגלי קדם יוי שעבודא דבני ישראל ואמר במימריה למפרקהון יוי[497]

[495]Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus,* p.401, 488.
[496]*The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, trans. Etheridge, *Genesis and Exodus* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862) p.348.

TgN follows the translation of *TgO*:

And the servitude of the sons of Israel was manifest before the Lord, and he determined in his word to redeem them.[498]	וגלי קדם ייי ית שעבודהון דבני ישראל ואמר במריה למפרוק יתהון[499]

Note that both texts try to avoid using the anthropomorphic terminology of the original Hebrew text. In order to do so, the two verbs describing the actions of God were revisited. Hence, in the cases of *TgN* and *TgO*, the original meaning of Exod.2:25 was changed. The verb '*saw*' was modified in these two Targumim. Anti-anthropomorphic tendencies unite these Targumim and the LXX.

It seems that both Targumim experience a problem with God seeing the Israelites[500]. In both cases they change the object from 'sons of Israel' to the 'servitude of the sons of Israel'. The Targumim seem to expand the meaning of the verse in the same manner as the LXX did by using the verb ἐπεῖδεν to interpret a neutral Hebrew verb ראה. Both Targumim mention God delivering or redeeming Israel. This notion is significant, as it sets the stage for the narrative to follow. God is considered by the Targumim to be the essential redeemer of Israel; He is the only one who brings deliverance to Israel. Hence, the messianic hopes of these Targumim are centralised around God[501].

TgPsJ on Exod.2:25 makes further additions to the original Hebrew text by allowing the following interpretation:

And the Lord looked upon the affliction of the bondage of the sons of Israel; and the repentance was revealed before Him which they exercised in concealment, so that no man knew that of his companion.[502]	וגלי קדם ייי צער שעבדהון דבני ישראל וגלי קדמוי ית תיובתא דעבדו בטימרא דלא ידעו אינש בחבריה[503]

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[497]Sperber, A., (ed.) *The Bible in Aramaic. Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts.* Vol I, *The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) p.91.
[498]Diez Macho, A., (ed.) *Neophyti 1. Targum Palestinense MS de la Biblioteca Vaticana.* Tom II, *Exodo* (Madrid-Barcelona: Consejo Superior De Investigaciones Cientificas, 1970) p.410.
[499]Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1. Targum,* p.11.
[500]Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, p.24.
[501]Horbury, W., *Messianism Among Jews and Christians* (London,NY: T&T Clark, 2003) p.303.
[502]*The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, trans. Etheridge, *Genesis and Exodus* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862) p.448-449.
[503]Clarke, E. G. (ed.) *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1984) p.68.

The main concern of this *TgPsJ* is based around the same questions that were explored in *TgN* and *TgO*. However, the major difference of *TgPsJ* is the extensive biblical exegesis that it presents, which change the original sound of the biblical verse:

1. changing of the verb 'to see' from *qal* to *niph'al*
2. providing the object of God's seeing
3. changing the application of the verb 'to know' from God to the people.

TgPsJ presents a connection between the notion of the affliction of the sons of Israel and their repentance. What is interesting to notice is that the repentance of Israel is described as secret. It is possibly done to emphasise the essential value of the act of repentance for the individual. One of the Midrashim presents the idea that whatever Israel experiences as a community is not as essentially profound as what Israel experiences on the level of the single person:

> R. Jonathan said in the name of R. Akiba: Any distress that is confined to an individual is a real distress, but any distress that is not confined to an individual [but is shared by the community] is not such a distress'.[504]

According to the rabbinic tradition, the significance of the repentance of each individual is more than the repentance of a nation as a whole. In the second part of the Targumic verse the main attention is directed towards the effort of the sons of Israel in times of trouble. The explanation for this could be seen in the intention of the writers to emphasize to their readers this one particular issue of Israel's affliction and repentance. An alternative reason could be seen in the attempt of the creators of the Targum to emphasise the fact that the secret repentance was just a starting point leading to the true repentance that ought to be done not in secret, but as an act of witness to each other and to the entire world[505].

In the first part of the verse *TgPsJ* changes the verb '*to see*' into the passive form, while the verb '*to know*' stays as the description of the actions not of God, but of the Israelites. God is described only in passive terms, while the two verbs relating to the acts of the Israelites are used in their active forms. The version of *TgPsJ* makes the

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[504] *DeutRab*II.22, p.50.
[505] See further Chapter IV.1.4.3 *MRSbY*.

original Hebrew verse of Exod.2:25 less recognizable by including further commentary on its initial form:

MT Exod.2:25	*TgPsJ* on Exod.2:25	
וירא אלהים את-בני ישראל וידע אלהים	And the affliction of the slavery of the Israelites was revealed before the Lord, and the repentance which they have undertaken in secret – so that one person did not know about the other – was revealed before him.[506]	וגלי קדם ייי צער שעבודהון דבני ישראל וגלי קדמוי ית תיובתא דעבדו בטימרא דלא ידעו אינש בחבריה[507]

All of the additional material that the Targum presents belongs to the genre of biblical exegesis and is similar to the Midrashic interpretation[508]. Exod.2:25 was expanded by *TgPsJ* from only five words into a three line sentence. The first part of the original biblical text was enriched with an additional explanation of Israel's hardship, while the second part was transformed into a rather extensive discussion explaining how Israel reached repentance. The repentance of Israel becomes the issue of major importance for the Targum and the focal point of the verse, thus making the rest of the issues supplementary to it.

IV.1.3.1 The Notions of Suffering and Repentance as the Issues Uniting Various Sources in Jewish Tradition of Biblical Exegesis

The following part of the chapter will aim to provide further evidence to show how rabbinical thinking developed from the notion of suffering to the notion of repentance in the interpretation of Exod.2:25. This will demonstrate the development of the tradition of rabbinical exegesis from earlier sources, in the following sequence:

LXX – Targumim – Midrashim

This will support the argument that the rabbinic ideas of the Midrash relate to the ones of the Targum, and possibly go back a long way in early history.

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[506]McNam p.167.
[507]Clarke, E. G. (ed.) *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Heboken:Ktav Publishing House,1984) p.68.
[508]See section IV.1.4: *Midrashim on Exodus 2:25.*

There is an expression of rabbinical thought directly correlating the sufferings of Israel to the atonement[509]. *GenRab* puts forward the argument that the suffering of Israel is a matter of joy as it leads her to release:

> when Jerusalem was taken ... Even that connotes joy, was his reply, for on that very day Israel received full quittance for their sins, as R.Samuel b.Nahman said: Israel received quittance in full measure for their sins on the day that the Temple was destroyed, as it is written, The punishment of thine iniquity is complete, O daughter of Zion, etc.[510]

The physical suffering of Israel through deprivation of food is, according to the *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, the way that has led Israel to repentance:

> R.Aha explained, [carobs are poor eating, and] poor eating is what Israel require to get them on the road to repentance.
>
> Indeed said R.Akiba, poverty is as becoming to the daughter of Jacob as a red ribbon on the neck of the white horse.[511]

Both of the statements are reflected by other rabbinic sources, i.e. *Mekhilta de Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai* and *LevRab*13.4:

> R.Aha has said: when a Jew has to resort to carobs, he repents. (R.Akiba said): Poverty is becoming to a Jew, even as a red strap on the breast of a white horse.[512]

MRSbY reads:

> R. Joshua b.Karha says: And God said
>
> The HOBBH[513] said: Israel was worthy to be granted manna only on account of hunger and thirst, nakedness and nudity, but I am paying them the reward of their father Abraham who stood and acted ministering before the angels of the service [ministering angels]. And he took the butter and milk ... And behold I am asking to exit from Egypt and you are saying: Send please by the hand of one that you will send.[514]

The main theme of these passages in relation to Exod.2:25 is based around the perception that the suffering of Israel is directly related to her repentance. This could

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[509]Horbury, William, *Messianism Among Jews and Christians* (London, NY: T&T Clark, 2003) p.302-302, see also Heineman, Joseph, 'Profile of a Midrash', *JAAR* 39 (1971) p.141-150.
[510]*GenRab*42.3, p.345.
[511]*Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, trans. Braude, Kapstein (London:Routledge&Kegan Paul,1975) p.268. (further references to *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* will be abbreviated *PRK*). See Hebrew in
פסיקתא דרב כהנה (ניו יורק: הוצאת אום, 1949) צר קיז
[512]*LevRab*13.4, p.168. See Hebrew in *Midrash Rabbah al Sefer Vayekra ve-Megilat Shir ha-Shirim* Jerusalem: Levin-Epstein) p.33.
[513]Rabbinic abbreviation for '*Holy One Blessed Be He*'.
[514]*MekRSbY* p.5, all translations are made by the author.

be expressed as follows: final redemption is possible when the sons of Israel reach repentance through suffering. This is the theme that is developed in both Midrashic and Targumic sources. The goal of the passages from various Midrashim is concentrated in the attempt to provide an object for the verb ידע of Exod.2:25; and then to explain why the Jews in Egypt deserved to be supported by God. The *Mekhilta* provides an answer to the question: what has Israel done to merit this divine intervention? According to the above passage from *MRSbY* God saves Israel because of the 'merits of the Fathers', i.e.:

> I am paying them the reward of their father Abraham.[515]

Following on the similar notion of repentance of Israel in relation to her suffering, Midrashim and Targumim create the connection between exegetical traditions that they represent. This allows one to assume that rabbinic exegetical material, which was later compiled in the Midrashim, possibly existed in some form in the Targumim. It is also possible to assume that the oral expression of the similar tradition was earlier than these sources. Hence, Midrashim and Targumim could be seen as the written reflection of a much earlier Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation[516].

IV.1.3.2 Biblical References to Suffering and Repentance

This section explores how the ideas of repentance and suffering are illustrated in the biblical narrative of the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon. This thesis has been providing examples of the use of the notion of God's Mercy and Justice and the notions of suffering and repentance in various passages of the Midrashim and Targumim. Therefore, it is important at this stage of the research to show the origins of the ideas by bringing in the biblical references. This will provide an illustration of how some of the Targumim and Midrashim applied a similar understanding in their exegesis of the biblical verses, and will emphasise the potential antiquity of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis.

The ideas of suffering and secret repentance can be found in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon[517]. According to the biblical narrative it is God who taught His people

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[515]*MekRSbY* p.5.
[516]Horbury, William, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1998) p.3.
[517]Wis.18:7-9,12:10,15,19,26-27,11:23, 5:1-3, RSV.

righteousness and kindness, as He is the One to give repentance[518]. The salvation of the righteous from their oppression is seen as an inspiration for the repentance of their oppressors, the unrighteous ones[519]. Developing the concept of suffering and repentance, the following verse establishes the connection between these two notions:

> For when in their suffering they became incensed at those creatures that they had thought to be gods, being punished by means of them, they saw and recognised as the true God the one whom they had before refused to know. Therefore the utmost condemnation came upon them.[520]

The emphasis on the idea of secret repentance in the Targumim finds its origins in the use of this notion in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon:

> For in secret the holy children of good people offered sacrifices.[521]

The popular rabbinical concept of God's Mercy and Justice may also be found in passages of the Wisdom of Solomon. The biblical narrative emphasises the following:

- the righteous do not rebel[522], as judgement is granted by God to '*those who have not heeded the warning of light rebukes*'[523]
- through judgement comes repentance:

  But judging them little by little you give them an opportunity to repent.[524]
- God's attributes of Judgment and Mercy are exercised on the righteous through their deliverance, and on their enemies through their destruction[525].

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[518]Wis.12:19.
[519]Wis.5:1-3.
[520]Wis.12:17.
[521]Wis.18:9.
[522]Wis.12:15.
[523]Wis.12:26.
[524]Wis.12:10.
[525]Wis.18:7-8.

Summary

The summary of the themes and concerns expressed by the writers of different Targumim with respect to Exod.2:25 leads to the conclusion that all the previously mentioned translations of the Hebrew Bible were making comparable attempts to answer two general questions which they found in Exod.2:5. These questions could be read as follows:

1 - What exactly did God see?

2 - What did God know?

TgN and *TgO* produced answers to the problem, which could be directly linked to the two questions. *TgPsJ* gradually developed their interpretation further, in a manner comparable to the Midrashic interpretation. In spite of the different styles of interpretation all the Targumim show some interrelation. One can see rabbinic ideas forming and gradually developing from one Targum to another. The way these Targumim are exhibited in this section demonstrates a gradual accommodation to rabbinic ideas that were built up from the more 'literal' approach of the *TgN* to the more exegetically complex *TgPsJ*. Developing the argument of the inter-connection of the rabbinic sources further, the Midrashic approach to Exod.2:25 will be set out in the following section of the work.

IV.1.4 Midrashim on Exodus 2:25

This section presents a number of the Midrashic interpretations of Exod.2:25 in order to highlight a connection between the ideas of the Targumim and the Midrashim. It also demonstrates the nature of their relationship to the broad spectrum of Jewish biblical exegesis.

IV.1.4.1 First Century Jewish Interpretations of Exodus 2:25: Philo and Josephus

The following study will explore how the interpretation of Exod.2:25 is seen by various Jewish sources of the first century CE with examples from the works of Josephus, Philo, the Qumran Scrolls and *The Book of Jubilees*. The purpose of such an examination is to establish the link between the early exegetical sources within Judaism and the later established tradition represented by Midrash Rabbah.

It is important to notice that Philo in his writings does not deal directly with the biblical verse of Exod.2:25. In all of his writings, Philo's commentaries go as far as Exod.2:23 and then move to Exod.3:1. Hence, one could consider that Philo was deliberately not commenting on Exod.2:25, which signifies that he was not interested in the verse. However, it is important to present here his thoughts on Exod.2:23, where Philo argues that the cry of the children of Israel ascended to God only by means of God's Mercy:

> Now however he says "their cry ascended to God",[526] bearing witness by so saying to the grace of the existent one; for had He not powerfully called to Himself the suppliant word, it would not have ascended.[527]

Philo is trying to assert in his interpretation of the verse that it is God's initiative to communicate with His people. According to the author, God summons and presents the '*divine intimation*'[528] of a relationship with His people. It could be concluded here that, according to Philo, God answers prayers through His Grace. God not only

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[526]Exod.2:23.
[527]Page, et al (eds.) *Philo*, trans. Colson, Vol. I, *The Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heinemann LTD, MCMLIX) p.447.
[528]Ibid.p.449.

answers the prayers/thoughts of the people; He also heals and blesses the mind[529]. Hence, God is the One who redeems Israel from its pain and affliction. But first God calls Israel to Himself and starts the communication process. One could get the impression from reading Philo that God is almost waiting for people to turn to Him, and then He answers their request:

> We read that "children of Israel groaned by reason of their works"[530] When they do this, the gracious God instructs His prophet regarding their coming out, and His prophet delivers them.[531]

In the passage above Philo refers to Moses as the prophet whom God instructs. This idea is similar to Esther Rabbah, where the figure of Moses is perceived as the chosen person appointed by God[532]. The summary of Philo's ideas in the box below has been carried on in the later works of biblical interpretation[533]:

- God's Mercy[534]
- The intimacy of God with His people
- God as a healer[535] and redeemer[536]
- Moses as a God's chosen one to perform His task

Josephus adds the motif of *suffering in servitude* in relation to the story of Israel in Egypt. He also describes Moses as the one sent by God to perform His task. The implication is that God is aware[537] of the state of His people in Israel. Hence, God says to Moses:

> Thou art sent by me and doest all at my command... and by no delaying prolong the time for the Hebrews, now suffering in servitude.[538]

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[529]*'For if a thought of God come into the mind, He forthwith blesses it and heals all its sickness'* in Page, *Philo*, p.449

[530]Exod.2:23.

[531]Page, *Philo*, p.141.

[532]In *Esth.Rab* Moses is seen as *'geon'* (the appropriate person) for His task. See Table1 in *Appendix*2 on *EsthRab*. See also *Midrash Rabbah al Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Ester* (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epshtein) p.17Heb, and Neusner, *Esther Rabbah I. An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) p.131.

[533]The outline of the points in the box will highlight similar ideas presented in other sources.

[534]See the parallel interpretation in *MekRSbY* and Ephrem on this, in relevant parts of this work.

[535]See Ephrem on this in relevant parts of this thesis.

[536]See *MekRSbY* and other Midrashim on this. The idea is also found in the Wisdom of Solomon.

[537]Note the possible connection to Exod.2:25 citing that 'God saw the sons of Israel...'.

[538]Page, et al (eds.) *Josephus,* trans. Thackeray, Vol. IV, *Jewish Antiquities,* Books I-IV, *The Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1961) p.283,285.

Thus I highlight another idea in the Jewish writings of the first century that is similar to later Targumim and Midrashim:

- Suffering and servitude of Israel in Exodus

IV.1.4.2 The Book of Jubilees and the Qumran Scrolls on Exodus 2:25

Jubilees mentions the notion of servitude and affliction in relation to the narrative of Exodus. The text specifies that the birth of Moses happened during '*the days of affliction upon the children of Israel*'[539]. The following passages from *Jubilees* are significant, as they present a number of ideas popular in the Jewish exegetical tradition of this verse.

The notion of Israel's suffering in slavery is developed extensively in the passage describing the relationship between the Egyptians and the Israelites, where the men of Egypt are described as making Israelites '*slaves by force*'[540]. Similar to the Targumim and Midrashim are the motifs of deliverance/redemption. These are also mentioned in *Jubilees*[541]. Describing the place of God in the relationship between Israel and Egypt, the *Jubilees* presents the notion of God's Judgement. Moses is described as the one who was sent to execute God's judgement[542]. This idea is similar to Midrash:

1. mentioning Moses as the figure chosen to perform God's tasks
2. standing at the beginning of the development of the popular rabbinic idea of God's attributes of Mercy and Judgement.

Jubilees specifically highlights the aspect of God's Judgement on Egypt for the suffering of Israel:

> And the Lord executed great vengeance upon them on account of Israel…And everything happened according to your word, ten great and cruel judgements came on the land of Egypt so that you might execute vengeance upon it for Israel.[543]

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[539] *Jub*47:1, p.138.
[540] *Jub*46:15, p.137.
[541] *Jub*48:3-4, p.139.
[542] *Jub*48:3, p.139.
[543] *Jub*48:5-7, p.139.

The notion of the servitude and suffering of Israel leads to their being generously rewarded with Egyptian gold, silver and bronze, which Israel acquire on their departure from Egypt:

> On the day when they were requesting vessels and clothing from the men of Egypt – vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of bronze – so that they might plunder the Egyptians in exchange for the servitude which they subjected them to by force. And we did not bring the children of Israel from Egypt in their nakedness.[544]

The significant details of Israel taking clothes and vessels from the Egyptians[545], and also the mention of nakedness in relation to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, all find their place in later Midrashim. When the scriptural motif of Exod.3:22 joins various Midrashic sources, it becomes part of the tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis.

MRSbY uses the motif of nudity in the following context:

> HOBBH said, Israel only deserved that the manna should be given to them in the wilderness through hunger and thirst, nakedness and nudity. But I am repaying to them the reward of Abraham their father.[546]

The text highlights the notion of Mercy as an aspect of God's relation to Israel. This selection of Midrashim clearly states both of the attributes of God, i.e. Mercy and Judgement:

> R.Judah said: "And God spoke", HOBBH said to Moses: I am a Judge in truth, I am full of mercy, I am faithful to pay a reward; and Israel are enslaved by the power of uncircumcised and unclean persons. And I am seeking to bring them out from under their hands.[547]

An earlier passage of *MRSbY* introduces the idea of God rewarding Israel because of the merits of the fathers. The text touches on this idea by mentioning the promise of God to Abraham. *Jubilees* emphasises that the judgement upon Egypt was executed '*on account of Israel and according to the covenant which he [*God*] made with Abraham that he would take vengeance upon them [*the Egyptians*] just as they had made them [*the Israelites*] serve by force*'[548]. A Qumran text gets closer to the idea of

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[544]*Jub*48:18-19, p.140.
[545]Exod.3:22.
[546]*MekRSbY* p.5.
[547]*MekRSbY* p.4.
[548]*Jub*48:8, p.139.

the merits of the fathers as the text acknowledges the merits of Abraham[549], and adds to his merits also the names of Isaac and Jacob. 4Q11 reads:

> His name is/was Gershom…And it came to pass, during those many days that the king of Egypt died…because of the labour; and they cried out, and their cry went up to…God their groaning; and God remembered…Isaac and Jacob; and God saw the sons of Israel…And/now Moses was pasturing the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Madian…and he came to…Flame underneath the thorn-bush and saw… And Moses said: Let me turn aside now, I pray, so that I may see…And the Lord saw/ was seen.[550]

The Qumran text presents some ideas which are similar to *Jubilees*. The text describes that God remembers His Covenant with the patriarchs after He hears the groaning of Israel. What is interesting in the Qumran text is that the story of Moses is included in God's sight. The actual phrase 'God saw' is located after the Burning Bush event. Hence, the Qumran perception of God's sight is as being transcendent. Thus, the writers of the Qumran avoided the difficulty of Exod.2:25 by ascribing to God constant seeing. In parallel with *Jubilees*, the relationship between God and Israel is presented in the context of God's Mercy.

One can see a connection between the notion of the Merits of the Fathers and the attribute of God's Mercy in the passages of the Midrashim. As I have mentioned earlier in the chapter, indications of the concept of the Merits of the Fathers may be seen in the Septuagint, in Exod.29:42, when Israel's acts of sacrifices to God have impact throughout the generations[551]. The notion of the Merits of the Fathers is expressed very clearly in *MRSbY*, where it is plainly said that God's Mercy to Israel is shown as a reward to Abraham their father[552]. According to the *MRSbY* Israel does not deserve to be saved, but because of the significant figures in Israel God shows His Mercy to the people. Therefore, through the merits of the fathers Israel receives redemption as a reward from God.

*DeutRab*2.23 presents the most visually graphic illustration of how a later Midrash adopted the ideas of early Jewish sources:

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[549]The name of Abraham has not survived in the scroll, but according to the context it should have been there originally. Therefore, I propose reading in lines 5-6 the following: '*and God remembered…Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*'. See Hebrew in *DJD*, p.27.
[550]The translation by the author from *DJD*, p.27.
[551]See Chapter IV.1.2.
[552]*MekRSbY* p.4, see *Table*2 in *Appendix*2.

Another explanation: R. Eliezer said: When Israel were redeemed from Egypt, they were redeemed only because of the following five reasons:

(i) distress,

(ii) repentance,

(iii) the Merits of the Fathers

(iv) God's Mercy

(v) the Term [of their slavery, which has come to an end].[553]

The examples presented above illustrate the theory that Jewish sources preserve the succession of certain ideas. I have shown this through highlighting the relevant examples from the first century writings of Qumran and *Jubilees* and the Midrashim of later centuries. At this stage one can identify a number of the ideas that have been progressively used by various Jewish sources, from the earlier writings to the much later ones:

- God`s Mercy and Justice
- Israel taking vessels of gold, silver and bronze
- Israel`s nakedness
- God's Covenant with Abraham in relation to Exodus
- Moses being the chosen one from God to perform the task
- Israel's affliction in servitude.

IV.1.4.3 Further Development of Exodus 2:25 by *MRSbY*: God's Attributes of Mercy and Justice

There are two passages that interpret the verse of Exod.2:25 in *MRSbY*. In all of these instances *MRSbY* presents both positive and negative interpretations of the verse. The positive interpretations of the verse are concerned with the notion of God's Covenant with Abraham and the promise of the redemption of Israel, for the sake of 'the merits of the Fathers' and for the sake of God's name. The negative interpretations are connected with the notion of Israel's idolatrous behaviour and its turning away from God. These two interpretations could be connected to the two attributes of God, i.e. Justice and Mercy, that *Mekhilta* also connects with the verse of Exodus:

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[553] *DeutRab*2.23, p.51, see Hebrew in *Midrash Rabbah al' Sefer Dvarim* (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epshtein) p.11.

> I am Judge in Truth, I am full of Mercy.[554]

According to His attribute of Mercy God is seeking to bring Israel out of their affliction, to redeem them. However, due to His attribute of Justice, God sees that Israel was idolatrous in Egypt:

> The brides of Israel became worthy of guilt in Egypt.[555]

The second passage of Mekhilta makes the argument stronger by mentioning that Israel were destined to blaspheme God:

> God saw the sons of Israel that they were going to provoke him to anger. And God knew that they were destined to blaspheme Him.[556]

The notion of the predestination of Israel's idolatry may also be found in Midrash Rabbah. Midrash states that the more Israel received from God, the more they sinned[557]. Hence, they finally built a calf despite the fact that God had warned Israel against idolatry before Sinai:

> R. Joshua b. Levi said: God said: 'Seeing that the penalty for idol worship is so severe I must forewarn them [Israel] against it, so that they should not later on say, "Had we been warned we would have kept away from it."
>
> God said to Isaiah: 'Do not think that I have not warned Israel against idol worship long ago. Already long before they came to Sinai to receive the Torah, I warned them against idolatry'... and it is through Moses, my servant, that I forewarned them.[558]

Further, the Midrash teaches that Israel was 'testing God's patience' for a long time, performing evil deeds, and taking itself away from God:

> R. Ishmael taught: [Scripture says]: *And a man and his father go unto the same maid (Amos II.7):* You might think that it was for the sake of lust, therefore, the text adds, *To profane My holy name.* This is the force of expression, To provoke him. R. Levi said: Israel was not exiled until seven generations became wicked.[559]

This story follows the narrative about Manasseh's idolatry and repentance presenting the argument that nothing can stand in the way of true repentance, i.e. through

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[554]*MekRSbY* p.4, see *Table*2 in *Appendix*2.
[555]*MekRSbY* p.5.
[556]*MekRSbY* p.137.
[557]*DeutRab*II.19.
[558]*DeutRab*II.18, p.45.
[559]*DeutRab*II.21.

repentance the idol worshipper turns to God[560]. Therefore, the implication is clear – although Israel has turned away from God throughout the generations, the doors of repentance are still open. Hence, according to the attribute of Justice it was fitting for Israel *'to go out of Egypt and to be given into the hand of Ammon and Moab and Amalek'*[561]. However, immediately God's Mercy intervenes and brings the notion of salvation:

> But with an oath I have sworn to fight their battle and I will save them.[562]

It is possible to describe the situation as a dialogue between the two attributes of God, between Mercy and Justice. According to the attribute of Justice, Israel is not worthy of salvation on account of the evil deeds which the people performed in Egypt. But according to the attribute of Mercy, God is consistent in His promises to the forefathers to stand by Israel always, and to bring them to final redemption. The dichotomy remains throughout the Midrash and forms a two-sided interpretation of the biblical verse, i.e. a positive one based on God's Mercy and redemption, and a negative one based on God's Justice and Israel's idolatry. The notion of repentance stays in the middle and links the two dimensions of the understanding of Exod.2:25.

The second passage which interprets a verse of Exodus in *Mekhilta* starts with the notion of Justice:

> But eye for an eye, measure for measure, as it is said, *Because you have not served the Lord your God, then as a result of that you will serve your enemy.*[563]

According to the passage above, Israel's punishment for idolatry is to suffer in slavery. When Israel repents in secret of idolatrous behaviour, God exercises his attribute of Mercy upon them. However, *Mekhilta* does not approve of Israel's repentance in secret. Israel's actions are shown as weak when compared with God's actions towards the people:

> R. Yosi said: Behold, Scripture says, I have not spoken in secret etc (Is.45:19). When I gave the Torah to Israel, I did not give it in secret. Nor in a dark land have I spoken to the seed of

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[560] *DeutRab*II.20.
[561] *MekRSbY* p.5.
[562] *MekRSbY* p.5.
[563] *MekRSbY* p. 136, see also Deut. 28:47-48.

> Jacob (Is.45:19), that it should be tohu[564] for you to seek me (Is.45:19). I have not made it as a mortgage deed, but I have given it as a gift.[565]

Again *Mekhilta* presents an interpretation which is unfavourable to Israel. Israel's act of secret repentance is not sufficient after they had openly blasphemed against their God. Hence, their repentance is inadequate in comparison with their sin. However, the Mercy of God and His desire to restore the special relationship and special bond with Israel accepts any sign of repentance. Other Midrashim also put forward this idea arguing that:

> The gates of repentance always remain open.[566]
>
> The hand of God ever open to receive the penitent.[567]

Overall, the ideas that *Mekhilta* presents further build up the tradition of the biblical interpretation of Exod.2:25. *MRSbY* highlights the following concepts:

- God's attributes of Mercy and Justice
- Repentance
- Israel's idolatry
- Redemption.

IV.1.4.4 Later Rabbinic Material

There are a limited number of places in the extensive collection of Midrash Rabbah where one can find specific references to Exod.2:25. All of the related Midrashim present their answers to the same questions as were identified in the Targumim. The only difference in the Midrashim is the more extensive nature of the biblical exegesis. Midrash usually gives several explanations in answer to one question, and gradually develops the ideas into one all-embracing argument inspired by the scriptural verse.

There are only three places in the Midrash Rabbah where there is a direct reference to Exod.2:25. *ExodRab* naturally has the most material; *DeutRab* refers to the verse; and

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[564]Chaos, formlessness.
[565]*MekRSbY* p.137.
[566]*DeutRab*II.12, p.40.
[567]*DeutRab*II.12, p.41.

also *EsthRab* gives an account of it. In addition two early rabbis, R.Ishmael and R.Shimon bar Yohai refer to Exod.2:25 in their biblical commentaries. The connection may be noticed between all the Midrashic material and the Targumic writings. It can be seen in the similar methodological approach, as both Midrashim and Targumim present their answers to the concrete questions that they set out after reading Exod.2:25.

ExodRab, for example, starts its narrative with the simple, nearly Targumic explanation of the biblical text, i.e.:

Biblical text of Exodus 2:25	*ExodRab*
וירא אלהים את-בני ישראל וידע אלהים	וירא אלהים את בני ישראל כמה דתימא ראה ראיתי את עני עמי וידע אלהים כי ידעתי את מכאוביו[568]

At the beginning of the Midrash *ExodRab* offers the original part of the biblical text and then allows a brief commentary. The actual commentary consists of another quotation from the Scripture presenting '*And God saw the children of Israel*' as the original text of Exod.2:25, while adding '*I have surely seen the affliction of My people*' and '*For I know their pains*' from Exod.3:7[569]. This method of using scriptural quotations as a source of building up an argument illustrates the typical methodological approach of rabbinical exegesis[570].

Each of the Midrashim of *ExodRab*, *DeutRab*, *EsthRab* and Midrashim of *Mekhilta* present their own unique arguments with regard to Exod.2:25. However, there is a certain unity between these various Midrashic passages, as all of them together gradually build up explanations focusing in the same biblical verse. Furthermore, within all the Midrashim, as is the case with the Targumim, one can see a coherent gradual development of the argument. Jewish exegetes aim to deliver the most complete understanding of the divine revelation, which was made available through the Scripture. Their goal could be seen also in explaining and contextualising the divine revelation. Hence, Midrashim and Targumim could be seen as following the

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[568]סדר שמות, פרשה א, מב
Midrash Rabbah al' Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Esther (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein) p.9.
[569]Freedman, H., (ed.) *Midrash Rabbah*, Vol. 3, *Exodus*, trans. S. M. Lehrman (London: Soncino Press, 1951) p.44.
[570]This method is referred to as *testimonia* in Chapter II.3.6.2.

same objective, which permits a certain agreement and even alliance between various Jewish sources and the continuity between them.

The illustration below describes the nature of the relationship between Midrashim and Targumim. In order to do so, there is a presentation of a number of examples showing how Midrashim and Targumim are connected. To demonstrate the connection, previously presented Midrashic and Targumic quotes are compiled in one table:

***ExodRab*I.35**	***DeutRab*II.23**	***TgPsJ***	***TgN***	***TgO***
וירא אלהים את בני ישראל כמה דתימא ראה ראיתי את עני עמי וידע אלהים כי ידעתי את מכאוביו[571]	ד"א אמר ר"א כשנגאלו ישראל ממצרים לא נגאלו אלא מתוך ה' דברים אלו. מתוך צרה. ומתוך תשובה. ומתוך זכות אבות. ומתוך רחמים. ומתוך הקץ[572]	וגלי קדם ייי צער שעבדהון דבני ישראל וגלי קדמוי ית תיובתא דעבדו בטימרא דלא ידעו אינש בחבריה[573]	וגלי קדם ייי ית שעבודהון דבני ישראל ואמר במימריה למפרוק יתהון[574]	וגלי קדם יוי שעבודא דבני ישראל ואמר במימריה למפרקהון יוי[575]
AND GOD SAW THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL; as it says: '*I have surely seen the affliction of My people*'. AND GOD KNEW, [as it is written] *For I know their pains (ib.)*[576]	Another explanation: R. Eliezer said: When Israel were redeemed from Egypt, they were redeemed only because of the following five reasons: (1)distress, (2)repentance, (3)the Merits of the Fathers (4)God's Mercy (5)the Term [of their slavery, which has come to an end].[577]	And the affliction of the slavery of the Israelites was revealed before the Lord, and the repentance which they have undertaken in secret – so that one person did not know about the other – was revealed before him.[578]	And the servitude of the sons of Israel was manifest before the Lord, and he determined in his word to redeem them.[579]	And the servitude of the sons of Israel was revealed before the Lord, and the Lord said in His Word, that He would deliver [redeem] them.[580]

[571] סדר שמות, פרשה א, מב
Midrash Rabbah al' Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Esther (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epshtein) p.9.
[572]11 מדרש רבה על ספר דברים (ירושלים: לוין-אפשטין, תשב"ז)
[573]Clarke, E. G. (ed.) *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1984) p. 68.
[574]Diez Macho, Alejandro (ed.) *Neophyti 1. Targum,* p.11.
[575]Sperber, Alexander (ed.) *The Bible in Aramaic. Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*. Vol.I, *The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) p.91.
[576]*ExodRab*1:35, p.44.
[577]*DeutRab*2.23, p.51.
[578]McNam p.167.
[579]Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1. Targum,* p.410.

From the table above one can see that the Midrashim of *ExodRab* and *DeutRab* agree with the Targumim on the issue of God seeing the troubles of Israel. The Midrashim use the same words in the context of God's sight (i.e. '*affliction*', '*pains*', '*distress*', '*slavery*') as the *TgPsJ*[581], *TgN*[582] and *TgO*[583].

As will be demonstrated, a number of Midrashim mention redemption in order to interpret the second part of the biblical verse. *ExodRab* states that the time for the redemption of Israel had come[584], so God redeemed the Israelites for the sake of His name and the Covenant, but not on account of Israel's good deeds[585]. *DeutRab* presents five reasons for the redemption of Israel[586] using ideas essential for the Targumim, which are slavery, distress, and repentance. This connects the Midrash with the ideas of the *TgN* and *TgO* which feature the same concerns.

Additionally, the idea of the secret repentance of the sons of Israel mentioned in the *TgPsJ* is also found in several of the Midrashim. *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* reads:

> 'And God saw the children of Israel'[587] – God saw in them that they were repenting though they themselves did not see it in one another" [588]. 'And God knew' – God knew that they repented, though they did not see one another [doing so].[589]

Similar ideas can be found in *MRSbY*:

> R.Yossi b.Dormaskit said: Behold he said, 'And God saw the children of Israel and God knew'. He saw that they repented and they have not seen each other. 'And knew', God knew that they repented and they did not know this about each other.[590]

Similarly *ExodRab* writes as follows on the same idea:

> ...And God knew - one did not know even his friend's intentions... each one made up his mind to repent.[591]

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[580]*The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, trans. Etheridge, *Genesis and Exodus* (London: Longman ,Green , Longman , and Roberts, 1862) p.348.
[581]McNam p.167.
[582]Diez Macho, *Neophyti 1. Targum,* p.410.
[583]Sperber, Alexander (ed.) *The Bible in Aramaic. Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*. Vol I, *The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1959) p.91.
[584]*ExodRab*I.35.
[585]*ExodRab*I.36.
[586]*DeutrRab*II.23.
[587] Exod.2:25.
[588]Lauterbach, Jacob, Z. (ed.) *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Vol.2 *Shirata, Vayassa, Amalek, Bahodesh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933) p.196.
[589]Neusner, J., *Mekilta According to Rabbi Ishmael. An Analytical Translation*, Vol.2 *Amalek, Bahodesh, Neziqin, Kaspa and Shirata* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) p.43.
[590]The translation by the author from the critical addition of Epstein, Melamed (eds.) *Mekilta D'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai* (Jerusalem: Mikze Nirdamim, 1955) p. 137.

The Midrash uses the biblical paraphrase '*God knew*' and contrasts it to the people who '*did not know*', which gives a different start to the otherwise similar ideas of the secret repentance of the sons of Israel presented by the *PalTg* and *TgPsJ*.

Putting together all the examples cited above, one can see that the Targumim and Midrashim resemble the common tradition of biblical exegesis of the early rabbinic writings of as early as the second century. The following table gives an illustrative example of how the idea of secret repentance finds its development in rabbinical writings, being preserved and developed in them throughout the centuries:

ExodRab	*MRI* מסכתא דבחודש	*MRSbY*	*TgPsJ* Exod.2:25
ורבנן אמרי וירא אלהים שעשו תשובה הבינונים וגם הרשעים הרהרו לעשות תשובה דכתיב (שיר ב) התאנה חנטה פגיה.	וירא אלהים את בני ישראל אלהים ראה בהם שעשו תשובה והם לא ראו זה את זה וידע אלהים ידע בהם שעשו תשובה והם לא ידעו זה בזה[593].	או' הרי הוא או' וירא אי'ם את בני יש' וידע אי'ם (שמ' ב כה) [ראה בהם שעשו] תשובה והן לא ראו זה את זה וידע [אי'ם ידע בהם שעשו תשובה] והם לא ידעו זה את זה[594].	וגלו קדם ייי צער שעבודהון דבני ישראל וגלי קדמוי ית תיובתא דעבדו בטימרא דלא ידו אינש בחבריא[595].
וידע אלהים. שאפי' אחד בחבירו לא היה וידע אלא הקב"ה לבדו וזה מכוון את לבו וזה מכוון את לבו ועושין תשובה[592].			

[591]*ExodRab*I.36.
[592]Midrash Rabbah al' Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Esther (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epshtein) p.10.
[593]Lauterbach, Jacob, Z. (ed.) *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Vol.2 *Shirata, Vayassa, Amalek, Bahodesh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933) p.196.
[594]*MekRSbY* p.137.
[595]Clarke, E. G. (ed.) *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1984) p.68.

ExodRab	*MRI* Tractate Bahodesh	*MRSbY*	*TgPsJ* Exod.2:25	
The Sages say, And God saw that the average among them were repenting and that also the wicked were contemplating reforming, as it is written: The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs (S.S.2:13). And God knew – one did not know even his friend's intentions, save God alone. Each one made up his mind to repent[596].	*And God saw the children of Israel" (Ex.2.25)* – God saw in them that they were repenting though they themselves did not see it in one another.[597] *And God knew* – God knew that they repented, though they did not see one another [doing so][598].	*And God saw the children of Israel and God knew.* (Ex.2:25) He saw that they repented but they did not see it in each other. And God knew: He knew that they repented and they did not know this about each other[599].	And the Lord looked upon the affliction of the bondage of the sons of Israel; and the repentance was revealed before Him which they exercised in concealment, so that no man knew that of his companion[600].	And the affliction of the slavery of the Israelites was revealed before the Lord, and the repentance which they have undertaken in secret – so that one person did not know about the other – was revealed before him[601].

As already shown using the examples from various Midrashim, all the ideas in selected Targumim derived from Exod.2:25 are found and further developed by the authors of the Midrash. Among these are:

- slavery, affliction, bondage, pain, distress, hardship
- redemption
- repentance

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[596]*ExodRab*I.35, p.45.
[597]Lauterbach, J. Z. (ed.) *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Vol.2 *Shirata, Vayassa, Amalek, Bahodesh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933) p.196.
[598]Neusner, J., *Mekilta According to Rabbi Ishmael. An Analytical Translation*, Vol.2 *Amalek, Bahodesh, Neziqin, Kaspa and Shirata* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) p.43.
[599]The translation by the autho.
[600]*The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, trans. Etheridge, *Genesis and Exodus* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862) p.448-449.
[601]McNam p.167.

IV.1.5 Ephrem's Commentary on Exodus 2:25

This section explores how ideas from Jewish sources are used in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian. It includes examples from Ephrem's hymns and exegetical writings where he follows up the notions of Israel's departure from Egypt, God's attributes of Mercy and Judgement, the relationship between suffering and redemption, Israel's repentance, and the idea of God's healing. Ephrem's commentary on Exod.2:25 are analysed in relation to the Midrash Rabbah's commentary on the verse. This comparison allows one to argue for Ephrem's familiarity with the ideas of Judaism and his engagement with them in his exegetical writings and his poetic works. In cases where Ephrem uses the same ideas as are found in Jewish writings, one may ask to what extent Ephrem was aware of borrowing the material from Jewish exegetical tradition. The material is grouped according to the similarity of ideas and notions found in Ephrem's writings and in Jewish sources.

IV.1.5.1 The Israelites' Departure

The previous section provided a number of Jewish texts dealing with the story of Israel leaving Egypt and bringing Egyptian gold and silver with them. Ephrem in his commentaries on Exodus replicates some of the Jewish ideas.

First, Ephrem dwells on the subject of Israel obtaining vessels and clothes from the Egyptians:

> They leave Egypt in a hurry, armed and furnished with the Egyptian's gold and silver and garments they have taken.[602]

Secondly, Ephrem highlights the aspect of haste and describes the dynamism of the situation. As I have shown earlier, *Jubilees* explains the scene by giving a detailed description of what has been taken by the Hebrews. *Jubilees* mentions that Egyptians were plundered in recompense for the forced servitude to which they subjected the Israelites, or as he writes *'in exchange for the servitude which they subjected them* [Israelites] *to by force'*[603]. Ephrem has his own explanation for what happened. In the

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[602] *ExodCom* Synopsis. SECSE p.9.
[603] *Jub*48:18, p.140.

following passage Ephrem mentions God's promise to Abraham and its fulfilment through the Exodus:

> To give you further assurance that you will leave Egypt, *I will give people favour*, and they will plunder the Egyptians. When my promise to Abraham is fulfilled through this, the Hebrews will be unable to see the faces of the Egyptians again because of all the treasures they have seized on departing.[604]

Thirdly, Ephrem describes the plunder of the Egyptians as a sign of reassurance from God, and a sign of God's Covenant with Abraham. The connection between God's promise to Abraham and the Exodus stories is highly popular in Jewish writings. Earlier on in this thesis it was demonstrated how the concept of God's Covenant with Abraham was expounded in the Jewish sources, and examples of this were also discussed.

IV.1.5.2 God's Attributes of Mercy and Justice in Ephrem's Presentation

The Jewish idea of God's attributes of Mercy and Justice finds its place in various writings of Ephrem. In his commentaries on Genesis Ephrem explicitly presents the two notions together as if he is demonstrating and comparing God's attributes:

> Now because God had given to Adam everything inside and outside Paradise through Grace, requiring nothing in return, either for his creation, or for his glory in which He had clothed him, nevertheless out of Justice He held back one tree from him to whom He had given, in Grace, everything in Paradise and on earth, in the air and in the sea.[605]

Ephrem quite openly engages with the rabbinic idea repeating it several times in his commentaries:

> Even though God had given them everything else out of Grace, He wished to confer them, out of Justice, the immortal life which is granted through eating of the Tree of Life.[606]

> With the promised life that they would have acquired through Justice, they would also have had, through Justice, everything that previously they had been given through Grace.[607]

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[604] *ExodCom*III.4. SECSE p.24, see also Gen.15:13-14.
[605] *GenCom*II.17. Brock, S., *Hymns on Paradise* (NY: SVSP, 1990) p.208 (further references to Brock's translation will be abbreviated as Brock*HP*).
[606] Ibid.p.209.
[607] *GenCom*II.18. Brock*HP* p.210.

> [God punished the serpent first] so that Adam and Eve might become afraid and repent while Justice was appeasing its anger on the serpent: then there would be an opportunity for Grace to hold them back from Justice's curses.[608]

Ephrem creates the impression that these two attributes function quite independently. On one occasion the attribute of Justice prevails, while on another occasion the attribute of Mercy takes the lead. The similarities in Ephrem's writings to the interpretations of *MRSbY* are evident here, when both sources present the complicated relationship between the two attributes of God, i.e. Justice and Mercy[609]. Ephrem develops his argument further suggesting that God's attribute of Justice could be passed on to someone or something. For example, the Tree in Paradise is perceived as a judge[610]. Also, victorious people, according to Ephrem, are crowned with the attribute of God's Justice[611]. Ephrem also ascribes the attribute of Justice to Moses as one to whom this was granted by God:

> Out of sense of justice he rescued the girls.[612]

The idea is similar to *Jubilees*, where Moses was *sent to execute judgement*[613]. Also, the perception of Moses as a servant of God, i.e. a significant figure and the chosen one to perform God's task, is similar to the Midrash. Ephrem's portrayal of Moses is similar to the Jewish sources, when Moses is pictured by Ephrem as an agent of God sent to perform God's task[614]. Ephrem clarifies the task in his commentaries and presents it as the redemption of Israel:

> When he reaches manhood he goes out to his brethren, to see if their redemption will be accomplished through his agency.[615]

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[608]*GenCom*II.30. Brock*HP* p.219.
[609]See Chapter IV.1.4.3.
[610]*Parad*III.10. Brock*HP* p.94.
[611]In *Parad*III, the Response is: *'Praise to you Justice that crowns the victorious'*. Brock*HP* p.91.
[612]*ExodCom*II.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.19.
[613]*Jub*48:3, p.139.
[614]As mentioned earlier, in *EsthRab* Moses is seen as the *geon* (the appropriate person) for His task. For the textual reference see *Midrash Rabbah al Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Ester* (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epshtein) p.17heb, and Neusner, *Esther Rabbah I. An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) p.131; see also the part *4. Midrashim on Exodus 2:25,* and *Table*1, *EsthRab* in *Appendix*2
[615]*ExodCom*I.Synopsis. SECSE p.8.

III.1.5.2.1 The Notions of Suffering and Repentance in Ephrem's Writings

Ephrem mentions the connection between the attribute and expression of God's Justice and Israel's repentance:

> Its fruit was the key of Justice that would open the eyes of the bold – and cause them great remorse.[616]

The idea of Israel's suffering through God's judgment being closely connected to Israel's repentance is familiar to the rabbinic sources. *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* illustrates the idea that punishment is a means to repentance, which leads to the ways of redemption[617]. The passage of Piska 14.3 quotes the verse of Isaiah 1:19-20, where the obedience of Israel implies the experience of God's Mercy, while rebellious behaviour provokes God's Justice. Hence, the experience of God's Justice for Israel leads to repentance. R. Aha argues in the passage that even physical deprivation is beneficial for Israel's repentance, while R. Akiba generalised the matter into the generic term of poverty:

> R. Aha explained, [carobs are poor eating and] poor eating is what Israel require to get them to the road to repentance.
>
> Indeed, said R. 'Akiba, poverty is as becoming to the daughter of Jacob as a red ribbon on the neck of a white horse.[618]

Both of God's attributes of Justice and Mercy in the examples above lead to redemption. It could be summarised as follows:

- through Justice comes suffering, which leads to repentance
- with repentance God's Mercy shows the ways of redemption.

Ephrem, in connection to the above, emphasises that people who repent, according to God's Justice, occupy a special position in Paradise:

> With justice He raises up each one to the degree that accords with his labours;
>
> ...the lowest part for the repentant, the middle for the righteous, the heights for those victorious, while the summit is reserved for God's Presence.[619]

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[616]*Parad*III.5. Brock*HP* p.92.
[617]Piska 14.3, see *PRK* p.xxi.
[618]*PRK* p.268; For parallel Midrashic interpretation see *LevRab*13.4, 35.6; and see above p.10f.
פסיקתא דרב כהנה (ניו יורק: הוצאת אום, 1949) צר קיז
[619]*Parad*II.11. Brock*HP* p.89.

The symbolism of the Tree of Life, on the other hand, being the essential focus of Paradise, the expression of the divine presence, the *Shechinah*[620], represents for Ephrem the source of hope for humanity:

> The tree of life brings hope to the dying.[621]

IV.1.5.2.2 On God the Healer

Emphasising the notion of God's Mercy, Ephrem often describes God and His attributes as means of healing, which also paves the road to redemption:

> The world has been long in sickness...The breath of Paradise proclaims that saving remedy has been send to heal our mortality.[622]

PRK compiles various biblical verses describing repentance in order to show that God longs for and delights in His people showing signs of repentance. The following phrase from Piska 24.5 illustrates the point:

> The Holy One deems one who acts in repentance as though he had gone up to Jerusalem and there built the Temple, built the altar, and offered a sacrifice upon it.[623]

The whole passage of *PRK* develops the idea of restoration, which implies the healing and mending of something that is broken. R. Abba bar Yudah's argument is that God holds the broken hearts of His people in order that they might offer sacrifices to Him[624]. Ephrem also asserts that the healing power of God preserves people for the final meeting with their God:

> Because the dead have tasted death, He will repair them first, but those not yet buried will be snatched up to meet Him at the end.[625]

PRK in exposition of repentance concludes that God, in His Mercy, does not hold on to the past sins of Israel if they repent[626]. Ephrem refers to the initial sin of Adam and God's healing power for it:

> Moses saw the fixed serpent that healed the stings of basilisks,

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[620]Ibid.p.74. Note here that *Shechinah* also is a Jewish concept.
[621]*Nat*I.8. McVey, K. E., *Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns*, trans. Kathleen E. McVey. The Classics of Western Spirituality (NY: Paulist Press, 1989) p.64.
[622]*Parad*XI.10. Brock*HP* p.157.
[623]*PRK* p.368.
[624]Ibid.p.369.
[625]*Nat*I.37. See McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns*, p.68.
[626]*PRK* p. xxi, 364.

> And he anticipated he would see the Healer of the first Serpent's wound[627] (Num.21:4-9).

The overall impression from the material presented above allows one to argue for common ground between Ephrem's writings and rabbinical sources. This may be illustrated by identifying the common interpretative themes in the respective sources:

- connecting the notions of suffering and redemption with an all-embracing definition of God's revelation
- seeing God's presence not only through the blessings of one's life, but also through one's suffering and affliction.

IV.1.5.3 Ephrem's Commentaries on Exodus 2:25

Ephrem presents the following commentary on the biblical verse:

> God saw the Israelites that they were in bondage, and God knew their pain, and what kind of a remedy he would bring them.[628]

One can identify three significant ideas in his commentary on Exod.2:25:

1. Israel's servitude
2. The suffering/affliction of Israel
3. God's healing of His people.

In this part of the chapter the accent will lie specifically on the fact that - in presenting his commentaries on the biblical verse - Ephrem replicates two out of three notions that the Targumim and Midrashim associate with this verse[629]. It is also noteworthy that the third significant notion Ephrem deliberately ignores and replaces, thus showing his engagement by disagreeing with the rabbinical argument.

Most likely Ephrem was using the Peshitta version of Exod.2:25 as a basis for his commentaries on the Scripture. The Syriac translation of the Bible reads:

And God saw the children of Israel and God knew	ܘܚܙܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܣܪܝܠ ܘܝܕܥ ܐܠܗܐ[630]

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[627]*Nat*I.28. See McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns*, p.67.
[628]*ExodCom*II.9. Salvesen*ECE* p.21.
[629]See Chapter IV.1.3 and 4.
[630]The Peshitta Institute, *The Old Testament in Syriac*, Part I, *Genesis-Exodus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) p.120. Translation by the author.

It is important to notice that the Syriac translation of Peshitta repeats the Hebrew Bible word by word. This puts Ephrem, as a biblical exegete, in the same position as the rabbinic sages. And Ephrem develops his commentaries on Exod.2:25 according to the same principles as Jewish sages. He answers questions such as: 'What did God see?' and 'What did He know?' in the same manner as *ExodRab*.

Not only does Ephrem repeat the structure of the Midrashic exegesis, but he also uses the same expressions, and even supports his commentaries with the same biblical quotations of Exod.3:7 as the rabbinic commentaries of *ExodRab*. The following table illustrates this:

Ephrem: *ExodCom*II.9	**Midrash: *ExodRab*I:35**
ܘܚܙܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܒܢܝ ܐܝܣܪܝܠ ܕܗܘܘ ܒܥܒܕܘܬܐ ܘܝܕܥ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܚܒܘܬܗܘܢ ܘܡܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܡܫܕܐ ܠܗܘܢ[631]	וירא אלהים את בני ישראל כמה דתימא ראה ראיתי את עני עמו וידע אלהים כי ידעתי את מכאוביו[632]
God saw the Israelites, that they were in bondage, And God knew (Exod.2:25) their pain (Exod.3:7) and what kind of remedy he would offer them.[633]	And God saw the children of Israel (Exod.2:25); as it says: 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people'(Exod.3:7). And God Knew, [as it is written] For I know their pains (Exod.3:7).[634]

The next table presents the significant notions that are emphasised/missed in the biblical commentaries:

Ephrem	**Midrash Rabbah**
1. Servitude 2. Suffering 3. Repentance is ignored, but God's healing is introduced	1. Servitude 2. Suffering 3. Repentance

[631] *ExodCom*II.9. Tonneau p.129.
[632] סדר שמות, פרשה א, מב
Midrash Rabbah al' Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Esther (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein) p.9.
[633] *ExodCom*II.9, Salvesen*ECE* p.21.
[634] Freedman (ed.) *Midrash Rabbah*, Vol. 3, *Exodus*, trans. Lehrman (London: Soncino Press, 1951) p.44,

The latter table shows that there is one significant item in the rabbinic commentaries, which is not mentioned in Ephrem's commentaries on Exod.2:25. The fact that Ephrem misses the idea of repentance is of major importance. It gives grounds for an assumption that he was using Jewish sources selectively. The reasons behind Ephrem ignoring the notion of repentance among the sons of Israel highlight his attitude to the issue. Throughout his writings, Ephrem argues that Israel, although chosen by God, lost its special position gradually through evil deeds and turning away from God[635]. Hence, according to Ephrem, the idea of repentance during and after the time of the Exodus does not apply to the Jewish people.

Ephrem justifies his argument against the Jewish sages by stating that the Israelites hardened their hearts over that period[636]. For that reason, Ephrem chooses only two of the three key ideas that are presented in Targumim and Midrashim, omitting in his commentaries the issue of repentance, while using the motifs of slavery and redemption. This is unlikely to be a coincidence. Ephrem expresses his views on the destiny of the children of Israel very strongly and clearly. In his other writings he clearly states that there is no repentance in Israel. Therefore, he omits the rabbinic idea of Israel's repentance deliberately as a sign of his disagreement, which shows his full awareness of Jewish material. Ephrem made a conscious choice of his argument while being fully aware of the rabbinic approach to Exod.2:25.

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[635]See Chapter VI.

[636]In *ExodCom*IV.1 Ephrem states: '*As Moses knew his people were hard-hearted…*', see Salvesen*ECE* p.24.

Summary

The illustrations of Ephrem's commentaries reflect popular ideas from Jewish sources, as already demonstrated. They reveal a tendency in Ephrem to follow Jewish exegetical material. The fact that Jewish exegetical work had a long history of formation and development over the centuries puts the origins of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis prior to Ephrem's time. This study have pointed out that some ideas were already seen in the Qumran scrolls, others were mentioned in *Jubilees* (Israel taking possessions from Egypt), and in the writings of Philo and Josephus (God's healing etc). Therefore, there is a strong likelihood that Ephrem may be perceived as an inheritor of the Jewish tradition of exegesis.

The initial goal of this chapter was to demonstrate similarities between the exegetical writings of Ephrem and the rabbinical sources. The overall impression from this analysis strengthens the argument in support of Ephrem's extensive use and awareness of the rabbinic material. This study illustrated that Ephrem presented his commentaries in relation and connection with rabbinical notions. This adds weight to the suggestion that Ephrem consciously borrows from rabbinical exegesis the ideas and notions that he agrees with, i.e. God's Mercy and Justice, and the notions of servitude and suffering in relation to redemption. Ephrem also deliberately ignores the ideas and notions of Jewish sages that he does not agree with, as in the case of Israel's repentance in relation to Exod.2:25. Ephrem shows his disagreement with this notion by:

- ignoring it in his commentary
- replacing it with another notion of God's healing, which is also present in early Jewish writings, e.g. in Philo.

The relationship between Ephrem's exegesis and the Jewish material should not be considered coincidental. Ephrem demonstrates confidence and awareness of the Jewish tradition by engaging with it and successfully incorporating its inheritance into his own argument. Therefore, Ephrem's knowledge and appreciation of the Jewish legacy is difficult to deny.

The second part of the chapter will further demonstrate how Ephrem deals with textual difficulties in his commentaries on Exodus.

IV.2 The Presentation of Exodus 1:5: A Comparative Research into the Use of the Number 70 by Ephrem the Syrian and the Jewish Exegetical Tradition

Introduction: Exegesis of Numbers in Exodus 1:5

This part continues to explore further Ephrem's commentaries on Exodus revealing elements in his writings similar to those in Jewish sources. This further illustrates Ephrem's reliance on Jewish exegetical tradition.

Several writers point to the various cultural sources that influenced the Syriac Fathers in the fourth century. Murray makes an attempt '*to locate the fourth-century Syriac fathers in relation to earlier Christian, Gnostic and Jewish literature and, even more speculatively, to earlier Mesopotamian traditions*'[637], while Wilken presupposes that the Syriac fathers of the fourth century were more aware of issues linked with Judaism[638]. Later on in the history of the Church, i.e. from the fifth century onwards, Greek culture would become more influential in Syria overshadowing the influence of the Jewish tradition[639]. Thus, living in a multi-cultural environment was a characteristic experience of the religious writers of the period. However, Ephrem lived in the particular period of the development of the Syriac Church when the influence of Jewish culture was predominant.

In order to provide specific examples of the influence of Jewish biblical exegesis on Christian thought in fourth century Palestine and Syria, certain commentaries of Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Midrashim related to Exod.1:5 have been chosen. The question to be examined in this section is, first of all, whether the tradition of the use of numbers that Ephrem follows gives a concrete methodological ground for arguing his connection to Jewish biblical exegesis. For that the numbers that Ephrem gives in his commentaries regarding the Israelites' entry into Egypt will be compared with the numbers that are common in traditional interpretations of Jews at the time, Midrashic sources and Aramaic Targumic interpretations. The idea of the cosmic significance of the number 70 (representing all nations) will be discussed in relation to both Jewish and Christian exegesis in a section III.2.4.

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[637]Murray, *Symbols,* p.3.
[638]Wilken, R., *Judaism and the early Christian Mind* (London: Yale University Press, 1971) p.22-23.
[639]Brock, S., 'Jewish Tradition in Syriac Sources', *JJS* 30 (1979) p.212.

An alternative to the MT tradition of numbering that already existed in the fourth century and that was almost certainly known to Ephrem was the tradition of the Septuagint. This chapter will present the numbering of the LXX in order to show the differences between the Jewish biblical tradition as written in Hebrew and preserved in the MT, and the alternative Jewish tradition that was expressed in Greek in the Septuagint, originating around 250 BCE. The reasons why Ephrem adopted the numbering system of the Hebrew Bible could unveil his connection with and awareness of various exegetical traditions of the time, while his giving priority to the Hebrew numberings could suggest that he opted to follow that exegetical trend as opposed to the LXX interpretation.

This work will address various traditions of scriptural chronologies and will present and analyse a number of Jewish and Christian writers who actively worked on the development of biblical chronological systems. The presentation will start with the Jewish chronographer of the third century BCE, Demetrius, and follow to another Jewish writer, Josephus, of the first century CE, and Eusebius, a Christian writer of the fourth century CE. Various biblical translations will also be examined for their use of chronology. The study will look at the Septuagint version, the Masoretic Text, and Peshitta; it will also mention the Samaritan text and note the Qumran tradition. An analysis of chronological approaches of Ephrem and other systems and schools of biblical exegesis and chronology will demonstrate which sources Ephrem used when writing his biblical commentaries.

Basing the argument on the previously mentioned evidence, an attempt will be made to present a strong case for Ephrem's awareness of the Jewish exegetical traditions existing in his time. The priority given by Ephrem to Midrashic and Targumic tradition over other biblical exegetical traditions in his commentaries may indicate their influence on him. There may have been a tradition of biblical exegesis common to both Jews and Christians, of Semitic origin. This tradition could have involved work with Semitic languages, i.e. Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac. Later, this tradition could have been developed further by rabbinical exegesis to form the basis of various later Jewish compilations like the Talmud, and classical Midrashim.

The conclusion will give an impression of the extent to which Ephrem relied on the Jewish tradition of interpreting Scripture in his Exodus commentaries. It will also

highlight the possibilities for future research in the area of Jewish-Christian biblical exegesis in Syria and Palestine of the fourth century CE.

IV.2.1 Various Interpretations of Exodus 1:5 in MT, Peshitta, LXX and in Ephrem

The biblical context of Exod.1:1-5 presents the following:

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel coming to Egypt with Jacob, each man with his household: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3 Issaehar, Zebulon, and Benjamin, 4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5 And all of the souls of the side of Jacob were seventy souls. And Joseph was in Egypt.[640]	1 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיְמָה אֵת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ׃ 2 רְאוּבֵן שִׁמְעוֹן לֵוִי וִיהוּדָה׃ 3 יִשָּׂשכָר זְבוּלֻן וּבִנְיָמִן׃ 4 דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי גָּד וְאָשֵׁר׃ 5 וַיְהִי כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ יֹצְאֵי יֶרֶךְ־יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים נָפֶשׁ וְיוֹסֵף הָיָה בְּמִצְרָיִם׃

The Syriac version of Exod.1:5 is similar to the Hebrew text.

If, however, one looks at a different translation of the Bible that was circulating at that time, i.e. the Septuagint version, then the number presented by LXX in Exod.1:5 is seventy five[641]:

But Joseph was in Egypt. And all the souls [*born*] from Jacob were five and seventy.[642]	Ιωσηφ δὲ ἦν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἦσαν δὲ πᾶσαι ψυχαὶ ἐξ Ιακωβ πέντε καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα[643]

This sections argues that Ephrem is not only repeating the biblical information of the MT and Peshitta, but he is doing so in full awareness of other traditions of interpreting Exod.1:5, which he chooses not to introduce in his commentaries. Reading the MT and Peshitta highlights differences in numbers throughout the OT narrative[644]. Ephrem as an exegete was faced with this problem, and his apparent uncritical acceptance of the MT and Peshitta reading of Exod.1:5 conceals that:

- he possibly knew the Septuagint reading of the verse

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[640]Exod.1:5, translation by the author.
[641]V. 26-27, see also Hayward, C. T. R., *Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, eds. Chadwick Henry and Louth Andrew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.231.
[642]Exod.1:5, translation by the author.
[643]Wevers, J. W. (ed.), *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scentiarum Göttingensis editum*, vol. II, 1, *Exodus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1991) p.66.
[644] Exod.1:5, Gen.46:8-27, Deut.10:22.

- he knew Jewish traditions of emphasising the importance of the number seventy in spite of disagreements in presenting numbers in other parts of the OT
- he was fully aware of the fact that the biblical narrative itself is inconsistent on numbers of Hebrews entering Egypt.

Taking all of these into account one can understand Ephrem's methodology in dealing with the difficulty in Exod.1:5 by:

1. passing silently the different interpretation of the LXX
2. fully embracing the rabbinical tradition of reading Exod.1:5.

The number seventy for the people of Israel entering Egypt given in the biblical narrative already raises many questions. In discussing the plain meaning of this number, one has to ask who the people that were counted were. It is said in Exod.1:1 that each member of Jacob's family went with their family and presumably with their household and servants etc. Therefore, the total number of people entering Egypt with Jacob could be far more then seventy. This was no doubt a consideration for both Jewish and Christian scholars who were involved in the process of interpreting Exod.1:5.

The reader of Exod.1:5 who wants to fathom the difficulties over the number seventy, should refer back to Gen.46:8-27. The Scripture states the following in Gen.46:27:

And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, two souls; all the souls of the house of Jacob, that came to Egypt were seventy[645]	וּבְנֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יֻלַּד־לוֹ בְּמִצְרַיִם נֶפֶשׁ שְׁנָיִם כָּל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לְבֵית־יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיְמָה שִׁבְעִים׃ ף

However, throughout the narrative of the previous verses of Genesis and Exodus the total number of seventy includes the two sons of Judah, Er and Onan, who died in Canaan[646]. These two obviously could not enter into Egypt with Jacob. Also Joseph and his sons, Ephrem and Manasseh, were noted as already being in Egypt[647]. Thus, they did not actually enter the country. This observation already excludes five people

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[645]Gen.46:27, translation by the author.
[646]Gen.46:12.
[647]Sarna, N., *The JPS Torah Commentary. Exodus* (Philadelphia/NY/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991) p.4.

from the total number of seventy presented in Scripture. However, the Scripture remains faithful to the number seventy on other occasions it refers to the event[648].

The above questions about the number seventy in Exod.1:5 are just obvious examples, and they are based only on the plain meaning of the number seventy. There are plenty of other exegetical possibilities. Rabbinical tradition tends to pay a great deal of attention to numbers in Scripture. The primary concern of this study is whether Ephrem was aware of Jewish commentaries. Did he rely on them? Did Ephrem consult Jewish exegetical material to solve the problem of Exod.1:5? Ephrem is precise in presenting the number of Israelites entering Egypt. He clearly mentions the number seventy on two occasions in his commentaries:

> And these, he said, are the names of the sons of Israel that entered with Jacob to Egypt[649], seventy souls.[650]

Another occasion of Ephrem mentioning the number seventy is at the very beginning of his commentary where he writes:

> Exodus, the second book, tells us of seventy people who entered Egypt with Jacob, and of the death of Joseph and his contemporaries.[651]

Ephrem's loyalty to the scriptural text and to the number presented in Exod.1:5 is similar to the approach of Jewish rabbinical exegetes, who developed a tradition of considering every letter and every number in the Bible as authoritative. Therein also lies the connection between Ephrem's commentaries on the number seventy and Jewish tradition. This connection may indicate Ephrem's awareness of the Jewish exegetical approach to Exod.1:5. The following sections, therefore, are going to address Jewish traditional interpretations of the verse.

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[648]See Deut.10:22, where MT, Peshitta, and LXX read *seventy* referring to Israel going down to Egypt.
[649]Exod.1:1.
[650]*ExodCom*I.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.11.
[651]*ExodCom* Synopsis. Salvesen*ECE* p.8.

IV.2.2 Exodus 1:5 and the Targumim

This section investigates whether one can find in Ephrem's writings further signs of his awareness of Midrashic or Targumic interpretation. Syriac, the language that Ephrem knew best was the *Lingua Franca* of Syria and Mesopotamia in that period. It is very likely that both Jews and Christians in Nisibis and Edessa used it for everyday communication. Therefore, linguistically and geographically Ephrem was well placed to be in contact with the Jewish tradition of exegesis. Thus, it suggests the possibility of Ephrem's direct access to the Jewish biblical exegetes of his time. Later in the history some Church leaders, i.e. Jacob of Edessa (d.708)[652], did have some knowledge of Hebrew. According to Weitzman, Ephrem himself in his commentaries shows some knowledge of Hebrew words[653].

There is not much variety concerning the numbers in Exod.1:5 among the Targumim:

TgN on Exod.1:5	*TgPsJ*	*TgO*
And all the persons who came forth from the *loins* of Jacob were seventy persons[654]	The *sum total of* the persons who were direct descendants of Jacob were seventy persons[655]	And all the souls that came forth from the thigh of Jacob were seventy souls[656]

All of the Targumim mentioned agree on the number seventy, which correlates with the biblical texts in Hebrew and Syriac, i.e. the MT and Peshitta. Hence, Ephrem's choice of the number 'seventy' in his commentaries following the Hebrew and Peshitta versions of the Bible can only be considered natural and deliberate.

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[652]Van Rompay, L., "Jacob of Edessa and the early history of Edessa", in G. J. Reinink, A. C. Klugkist, *After Bardaisan* (Leuvein: Peeters, 1999) p.269.
[653]Weitzman, M. P., *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999) p.278.
[654]*TgN* on Exod.1:5. McNam p.12.
[655]*TgPsJ* on Exod.1:5. McNam p.160.
[656]Etheridge, J. W. (ed.) *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, vol.1, *Genesis and Exodus* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862) p. 345, see also Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic...*, p.89.

IV.2.3 Exodus 1:5 and the Midrashim

The rabbis were aware of the problem in Exod.1:5 and adopted different approaches to solving it. However, no matter what solution each of the Jewish sages chose, they were all consistent in one thing: their loyalty to Scripture and its authority. Thus, they always referred to the number seventy at the end of their Midrashim on Exod.1:5. The following passages will give a few typical examples of rabbinical exegesis.

As most rabbinical exegetes begin by specifying the problem, the easiest way to do so is to formulate a question. Hence, when rabbis counted the numbers as presented in Exod.1:5, they counted sixty nine persons. And that raised the question: who was the seventieth person? Therefore, *NumRab*III.8 identifies/clarifies the problem:

> At the very time when the Holy One, blessed be He, bade Jacob go down to Egypt, at the very time He numbered His children and found the total to be sixty-six... With the two sons of Joseph and Joseph himself there is a total of sixty-nine; yet the text says: All the souls of the house of Jacob, that came into Egypt, were threescore and ten![657]

This Midrash invites the reader to explore the basic calculation, which shows the inconsistency in the biblical text. Having identified the problem, the usual Midrashic style would lead the reader to find the solution.

NumRab offers a few suggestions on who that seventieth person might be. R. Levi identifies the missing person as Jochebed. Although she was not yet born at the time the Israelites entered Egypt, she was still counted:

1. as a daughter of Levi
2. as an important figure for Israel, being the future mother of Moses[658].

The significance of the tribe of Levi is highlighted by the Midrash[659], when, according to the rabbinic interpretation, this tribe was chosen by God:

> The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to number them FROM A MONTH OLD AND UPWARD so that in rewarding them He might take His calculations with them from the age of a month old. This explains the text, FROM A MONTH OLD AND UPWARD YOU SHALL NUMBER THEM.[660]

And also:

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[657]*NumRab*III.8, p.83.
[658]*MRN*XII.20, p.550.
[659]*MRN* III.8, p.82-83.
[660]*MRN* III.8, p.83, see also Exod.3:15.

> Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, bade Moses number them from a month old; for He had an especial love for them.[661]

In the case of Jochebed, Midrash presents explanations that she was counted while she was in her mother's womb:

> Johebed was born between the walls when Israel came down to Egypt..., but her conception did not take place in Egypt.[662]

> So with Johebed: her mother was pregnant with her at that time and though she was still in her mother's womb she was included in the number.[663]

> Johebed made up the number [seventy] of Israelites in Egypt.[664]

The emphasis of this particular Midrash on including a woman to make up the total number of Israelites entering Egypt in accordance with the Biblical verse is significant in its own right, as in Jewish tradition women usually were not counted. In this particular case Jochebed, a woman, was honoured and singled out by Midrash. Ephrem showed a great deal of respect for women in his writings as a theologian. His biblical commentaries and his hymns and, indeed, his life illustrate this. Some of his hymns were written specifically for women[665]. He was also known to have led a choir of virgins in performing his hymns. Jacob of Serug's poem about Ephrem describes Ephrem's actions on behalf of women throughout his life. He writes the following about Ephrem:

> The wise Moses made the virgins not to hold back from the praise that was requisite, so too Ephrem, who proved a second Moses for women folk, taught them to sing praise with the sweetest of songs.[666]

In fact, Ephrem was unique in his attitude to women. His contemporary, Aphrahat, for example, in his Demonstration XVIII.10 allowed an allegorical allusion that distanced woman from man and from God[667]. However, Ephrem in his commentaries and other

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[661]*MRN* III.8, p.84.
[662]*MRN* XIII.20, p.551.
[663]*MRN* III.8, p.83.
[664]*MRG* XCIV.9, p.876.
[665]Murray, R., *Symbols,* p.30.
[666]Brock*HP* p.23, see also Bedjan, P. (ed.) *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (Paris&Leipzig, 1897) III, p.668, 672.
[667]Brock*HP* (NY: SVSP, 1990) p.28.

works never undermined or underestimated the significance of women. On the contrary, through his works he attempted to value women and to give greater significance to their achievements in the biblical narrative, as he signifies by his presentation of the story of Miriam, the sister of Moses[668]. It is important to emphasize that Ephrem enhances the role of the female characters in his commentaries and other work, while still preserving his connection to the Midrashic approach, as in the case of Jochebed and Miriam being perceived as midwives of Israel[669].

Other rabbinical explanations of the number seventy and the seventieth person in Exod.1:5 count Jacob, or Joseph, or God Himself, or Hashim, the son of Dan, or Serah, the daughter of Asher:

> I am she who completed (hashlamti) the number of Israelites in Egypt. She made up the number 70 who descended into Egypt.[670]

Or: Jacob himself made the number… Or God making up the number… Hushim the son of Dan made up the number.[671]

Or: Serah the daughter of Asher.[672]

> With Joseph who already was in Egypt there were seventy.[673]

By bringing forward the significant variety of people in order to find the seventieth person in Exod.1:5, the rabbis are already making an attempt to present the global reality of the story of Exodus. It seems to be of immense importance for Jewish exegetes (a.) to have the number seventy and (b.) to talk about who is the seventieth person. Hence, they introduce a great variety of significant people, from Jochebed to Serah representing women; and bring in various ideas of the chosen nation or the chosen tribe, as in the case of the tribe of Levi.

The exercise of finding the seventieth person in rabbinical exegesis turns out to be a source of numerous parables:

- about sacrifice and salvation, as in the story of Sheba the son of Bichri

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[668]See Chapter V.1 and Chapter I.2.
[669]Ibid.
[670]*MREccl*IX.18.2, p.257.
[671]*MRG* XCIV.9, p.876.
[672]*MRG* XCIV.9, p.877.
[673]*MREx* I.7, p.8.

- implying a communion with the dead and their participation in the entrance to Egypt, as in the case of Judah's sons Er and Onan.

And, of course, the presence of God as the seventieth person among the people of Israel at the time of their entry into Egypt is not the least important interpretation of the biblical verse. Therefore, it is likely that Ephrem's understanding of Exod.1:5 replicated rabbinic exegesis in symbolic interpretation of the inclusiveness of the number seventy.

IV.2.4 Typological and Symbolic Interpretation of Exodus 1:5

This section employs the definition of typology presented by such scholars as Auerbach, Murray, Cullman and Marcus. It will not go into detail about their respective definitions, but will summarize their perception of the typological approach as historical, representing real events and people[674]. Below is Auerbach's definition of figural prophecy, in other words, typological interpretation:

> Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfils the first. Both remain historical; yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event.[675]

This thesis will adopt the definition of the typological approach as being the representation of an event or a person through another event or another person: it talks about an event and its fulfilment. Symbolic interpretation, which is considered a part of typological interpretation by the above mentioned scholars[676], is according to Murray a meeting point of the Christian fathers and early Jewish exegetes, like the Qumran sect[677]. Indeed, one can find a Jewish use of typology/ symbolism in various commentaries. For example in *PRK,* as in other Jewish commentaries, which will be analyzed further, the number seventy in Exod.1:5 is considered as a representation of the whole world, all the nations[678].

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[674]On the differences between typology, symbol and allegory see *Appendix*3.
[675]Auerbach, E., *Scenes from the Drama of the European Literature.* Theory and History of Literature, Vol.9 (Manchester: University Press, 1984) p.58-59.
[676]Brock, S., *The Harp of the Spirit* (Oxford: FAS, 1983) p.11.
[677]Murray, *Symbols,* p.290.
[678]Sarna, *The JPS Torah...*p.4.

Some Midrashim attempted to create a whole theory of symbolic interpretation of the process of counting. The significance of counting and its importance for Israel is presented in *PRK* in these words:

> As long as Israel are counted when there is a need for such counting, there is no decrease in their number; but when no need exists, the counting is followed by a decrease. At what particular time were they counted where there was need? In the days of Moses. And at what particular time were they counted where there was no such need? In the days of David.[679]

Thus, the need for counting and the actual counting of the Israelites entering Egypt, according to R. Kahana, is a sign that Israel did not decrease in number over that period. And, indeed, that was the case, as the Israelites multiplied and grew in number immensely at the time of the birth of Moses, according to the biblical narrative of Exod.1:12:

> But the harder their lives were made, the more they increased and spread, until people came to fear the Israelites.

IV.2.4.1 The Significance of Numbers

Numbers as theological or religious symbols acquire great significance in biblical exegesis. Numbers join the whole spectrum of symbolic and typological interpretation of Scripture as the representation of a new reality through a constant process of divine revelation that carries its symbolic significance throughout history, regardless of time and space, and expresses itself even through the use of numbers in the scriptural narrative. Therefore, through interpreting numbers biblical exegetes attempt to reveal certain aspects of the divine reality to their readers.

Jewish and Christian writers were accustomed to the use of symbolic interpretations of numbers and numbering and thus established a common ground and a connection between both traditions of biblical exegesis. Of all the exegetical features that Ephrem employs in his writings, symbolism may be seen as the identifying mark of his work[680]. The use of symbolism in the Midrashic explanations of the significance of counting for Israel[681] could be seen as an inspiration for Ephrem's writings. It is possible to assume here that Ephrem was shaping his symbolic understanding of the

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[679]*PRK*, *Piska* 2, p.32.
[680]See Chapter II.2.
[681]*PRK*, *Piska* 2, p.32.

use of the number seventy in Exod.1:5 under the influence of Jewish exegesis. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to identify the features in Ephrem's interpretation of the verse that would support the idea of him working under the distinctive influence of the Jewish exegetical tradition.

The following examples from rabbinic exegesis demonstrate the significance of the use of symbolic and typological interpretations of numbers in traditional Jewish sources. One person is vitally important for Midrash on Genesis. In order to demonstrate the significance of one person, the Midrash presents the story of Sheba, the son of Bichri, whose death saved the whole town of Abel Beth-Maacah[682]. One can derive from this story the rabbinical principle of sacrificing one person for the sake of the rest of the people[683]. The idea of sacrificing one for the sake of others is fascinatingly close to the Christian development of Christology. It signifies that there was common ground for Jewish-Christian exegesis, which took expression in their respective writings where certain elements were emphasized more in Christianity, i.e. the sacrifice of one for all, and other certain elements were more often expressed in Judaism, i.e. the global significance of the number 'seventy'.

The same principle of working with Jewish exegesis may be found in Ephrem's writings. He picks up themes and ideas from Jewish interpretations and develops them accordingly. This study demonstrates how Ephrem, in his commentary on Exod.1:5, embraces the wide gamut of rabbinical interpretation in his mode of understanding.

Jewish rabbinical exegesis shows various examples of the attribution of typological and symbolic meaning to numbers. There are certain numbers in Jewish exegesis that usually represent much more than just a numerical value. Some numbers turn out to have a very special meaning in Christian exegesis as well, for example, 'one', 'three', 'seven', 'twelve', 'six', 'nine' and, of course, the number 'seventy'.

In reference to the number 'seventy' in Judaism, Sarna writes the following:

> The number seventy in the Bible is usually meant to be taken typologically, not literally; that is, it is used for the rhetorical effect of evoking the idea of totality, of comprehensiveness on a

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[682]*MRG*XCIV.9, p.877-878.
[683]*MRG*XCIV.9, p.877-878.

> large scale. Thus in Genesis 10 precisely seventy nations issue from the three sons of Noah, and these constitute the entire human family.[684]

In that sense one could say that for biblical exegesis the literal meaning of numbers is not important. What makes the numbers in the Bible of crucial importance is when they start to carry symbolic or typological significance. Then it is vital to have precisely this number in the biblical narrative and no other. This is the case with the number 'seventy' in Exod.1:5.

Rabbis could not let the simple numerical inconsistency in the number of Jacob's family entering Egypt interfere with the symbolic and typological significance of the number seventy. This number was far too important for the exegetes as the representation of totality and the symbol of all humanity moving to Egypt, itself a symbol of a certain stage in human development and a place of future slavery. The inconsistency of the Scripture gives new opportunities for biblical exegetes to explore deeper levels of understanding of the biblical narrative. Consequently, Ephrem's choice to follow the use of the number seventy in agreement with rabbinical sources should not be seen as a coincidence.

This study agrees with Brock's definition of the tropes as deriving from a broader Semitic poetic tradition of the Syriac exegetes and poets in their use of symbolism. He talks about '*early Syriac Christianity as "a Semitic milieu"*'[685]. He also describes Ephrem as

> one of a few surviving representatives of a truly Semitic Christianity, and throughout his writings he displays that characteristically Semitic love of parallelism and antithesis, which, in his hands, proves a tool admirably suited to the expression of the various paradoxes of the Christian mystery.[686]

Various other scholars present arguments in support of Jewish and Christian links and influences in fourth century Syria. Murray, for example, calls Ephrem '*typically Semitic in the way'* he orders his matter[687]. Wilken mentions the significant amount of evidence in support of '*continued contacts between Jews and Christians*'[688].

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[684]Sarna, *The JPS Torah*...p.4.
[685]Brock, S., *The Luminous Eye.* (Rome: Placid Lectures, 1985) p.2.
[686]Brock, S., *The Harp of the Spirit* (Oxford: FAS, 1983) p.6.
[687]Murray, *Symbols,* p.2.
[688]Wilken, R. L., *Judaism and the early Christian Mind* (London: Yale University Press, 1971) p.21.

Developing his argument further, Wilken suggests a '*genuine acquaintance*'[689] of Jews and Christians with one another in fourth century Syria. He builds his argument on the basis of the amount of knowledge of the Jewish tradition shown in the polemical writings of Aphrahat, Ephrem's contemporary.

So far it was indicated that Ephrem's choice of the number seventy in commenting on Exod.1:5 could be inspired by the following factors:

1. the use of the number seventy in the Peshitta
2. the influence of the tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis of the verse
3. the influence of common Jewish-Christian tradition of exegesis.

With regard to the Peshitta translation of the Bible, Ephrem does not always follow its reading. Quite often he prefers to follow a reading which is different from the Peshitta and is similar to the Targum[690]. Therefore, just the use of the number seventy in the Peshitta could not be the primary reason for Ephrem to use this number in his exegetical writings. However, Ephrem on this occasion chooses to follow Peshitta even in the inconsistency of the calculation in Exod.1:5. It signifies the importance of this particular choice for Ephrem. The question that is important and that has to be asked at this point is where does Ephrem get his knowledge and inspiration from?

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[689]Ibid.

[690]For more illustrative examples see Brock, S., "A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac", *JJS* 46 (1995) p.271-282; Brock, S., "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources", *JJS* 30 (1979) p.212-232.

IV.2.5 Exodus 1:5 and the Tradition of Chronology: a Common Jewish-Christian Inheritance

Chronology is another area involving the use of numbers. From an early stage of human development people have organized and produced a chronological description of their time and historical events. Since the biblical narrative does not always specify time periods, and is not very consistent in presenting the number of years between each event, both Jewish and Christian writers put much effort into producing their biblical chronology.

One of the earliest Jewish chronographers writing in Greek of whom we have a record is Demetrius, who lived around the third century BCE. Not much of his work has survived. However, from the six fragments that are available one may draw some conclusions about his intentions in writing chronology, and the audience he was addressing. Demetrius was most likely a representative of the Greek-speaking Jewry of Alexandria, as the style of his work is closest to the style of the literature of Alexandria of the third century BCE[691]. The main concern of Demetrius was to produce a patriarchal chronology, and the whole tone of his presentation leads to the assumption that he was addressing only a Jewish audience[692].

Hanson and Wacholder state that the writings of Demetrius did not have much influence on the further development of apocryphal traditions that represented or reflected on chronological systems within Judaism, i.e. *Jubilees*, Genesis Apocryphon, *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Seder Olam Rabbah*, and other Talmudic or Midrashic traditions[693]. Alternatively, one could offer two counter-arguments that suggest the possibility of the influence of Demetrius on the further development of Jewish biblical exegesis. Firstly, as both, Hanson and Wachover noticed, Demetrius did not stand on his own in his work, but rather represented a whole school of biblical chronological exegesis[694]. Thus, being part of an exegetical tradition and possibly participating in or being related to the circles that created the

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[691]Hanson, J., 'Demetrius the Chronographer", in Charlesworth, James (ed.) *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* Vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985) p.845.
[692]Ibid.
[693]Ibid.p. 846, see also Wacholder, 'Demetrius the Chronographer", *EJ*, CD version.
[694]Hanson, 'Demetrius…', p.843, see also Wacholder, 'Demetrius the Chronographer", *EJ*, CD version

Septuagint translation, Demetrius contributed to furthering the Jewish exegetical tradition. Demetrius relies on the LXX against the Hebrew manuscripts in presenting the numbers of years from the creation to Exodus; however, he occasionally demonstrates the use of other traditions[695]. But still there is a significant difference in the chronological system of Demetrius, which is more closely linked to the LXX than to the Hebrew and Samaritan versions[696]. The possibility that Hanson mentioned, of Demetrius using other traditions, might suggest that Demetrius himself was inspired by pre-existent sources that have not survived. Thus, through his work Demetrius himself could have represented the succession of the exegetical tradition, which he passed on to the next generation of chronological and exegetical writers.

IV.2.5.1 Demetrius the Chronographer on the 'Cushite' Woman

As an illustration of the similarities and the possibility of succession between Demetrius' exegesis and a much later rabbinic source, one can have an example from his fragment 3. There Demetrius identifies Zipporah, the wife of Moses, with the 'Cushite' woman (black, possibly Ethiopian), who is mentioned in Numbers 12:1[697].

One can find the same comparison in various Midrashim, i.e. *Sifre on Numbers* 12:1, and in the Talmud, *Mo'ed Katan*16b. Of course, one cannot prove that these Midrashim were directly influenced by Demetrius the Chronographer. There is the possibility of coincidence between similar interpretations of the biblical passage. However, the possibility that both Demetrius and the much later Jewish writings were working within the same exegetical tradition can be derived from such a comparison. The strong line of succession that one can observe in studying Jewish biblical exegesis throughout the centuries of its development could testify that somehow Jewish writers managed to preserve the connection between their work and the work done before them. It might be difficult for the modern researcher to find the clear evidence of how they managed to do so, but the fact that similar interpretations of Zipporah as a 'Cushite' woman can be seen in the writings of the third century BCE Jewish chronographer and much later rabbinical work, leaves the possibility of

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[695]Hanson, 'Demetrius…', p.844.
[696]Ibid., also see *Appendix*1.
[697]Jacoby, F., *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3C, *Demetrios* (Leiden: Brill, 1958) p.670.

succession open. In other words, the similarities in interpretation of the figure of Moses' wife as a 'Cushite woman' in the Jewish exegetical tradition of the third century BCE as compared with further rabbinical interpretations of the third century CE could testify to the existence of a long-existing and influential tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis.

The formation of the Jewish exegetical tradition and its influence on Jewish and later rabbinical writers can in theory be traced to before the time of Demetrius and even before the completion of the Septuagint. Thus, according to Hanson, the '*Septuagint itself, upon which Demetrius relies, gives hints that it, too, may represent a school of biblical chronology*'[698]. Therefore, already in the third century BCE there might have been various schools of Jewish chronologies that already differed in their systems[699].

The influence of Demetrius on other Jewish and Christian scholars can be traced through the reference to his work in other authors. Josephus[700] and Clement of Alexandria[701] mention Demetrius in their writings. Most of the fragments of Demetrius are preserved in the work of Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*[702]. Eusebius was writing in the third century CE significantly later than Demetrius. However, he also uses the Septuagint as a source for his *Canon*. He mentions in the *Canon* that according to the LXX the five books of Moses, i.e. from Gen.1:1 to Deut.34:12, contain the history of a period of 3730 years[703]. Therefore, at least two sources of influence may be traced in the writings of Eusebius:

- Demetrius the Chronographer
- LXX.

Both sources connect Eusebius to the Jewish tradition of exegesis through the six centuries that lie between them. Hence, one can allow the possibility of the existence of a common tradition of Jewish and Christian exegesis that was influencing authors at that time. Alternatively, one can presuppose that the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis was openly available to Christian authors of the time.

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[698]Hanson, 'Demetrius…', p.844.
[699]See *Appendix*1.
[700]Josephus, *Ant.*1:218.
[701]Clement, *Stromata*, 1:141 in *GCS*.
[702]Wacholder, *Demetrius*, *EJ*, CD version.
[703]Eusebii Pamphili, *Chronicon bipartitum, Greco-Armeno-Latinum.* Pars II. *Chronicon, Canon* (Veneliis: Typis Coenobii pp. Armenorum in Insula St. Lazari, 1818) p.109.

IV.2.5.2 Ephrem and Chronology

Ephrem in his commentaries also makes considerable use of chronology. He mentions, for example, that when Moses was in Pharaoh's house the 400 years of the promise of God to Abraham were coming close to fulfilment[704]. In his statement Ephrem refers to Gen. 15:13-14[705]. Also, Ephrem implies that after Joseph had died and the new Pharaoh arose it was close to the fulfilment of the number of years from the promise of God to Abraham, i.e. close to 400 years. And Moses knew about this, according to Ephrem, from his Jewish family, from his mother and his sister[706].

Ephrem counts the years from '*the day God established the covenant with Abraham*'[707] and presents the years that the Israelites dwelt in Egypt as 430 since then[708]. The same numbers appear in Peshitta and in *TgJ*. Eusebius mentions the same number in his *Canon* stating the following:

From the first year of the promise of God to Abraham … till the Exodus of the (people of) Hebrews from Egypt was 430 years.[709]	Primus annus repromissionis Dei ad Abraham … et egressum gentis Hebraeorum ex Aegypto, supputantut anni CCCCXXX[710]

Ephrem mentions that Moses was 40 years in Midian, which is in accordance with Peshitta Exod.2:23. The time in Midian, according to Ephrem, was spent by Moses in order to complete the number of years from the promise of God to Abraham plus another 30 years, which then made the total number of years from God's promise to Abraham as 430[711]. It is possible that Ephrem makes an additional comment in his writings specifying that '*another 30 years had already passed*'[712] since the time of the promise to Abraham in order to make the precise number of 430. Ephrem makes an extra attempt to sum up the number of years in accordance with the tradition of chronology represented by Demetrius and other sources, thereby demonstrating his loyalty to, knowledge of, and reliance on the common tradition of chronology.

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[704]*ExodCom*II.4.
[705]*ExodCom*II.4.
[706]*ExodCom*II.4.
[707]*ExodCom*II.4, II.9, XII.6.
[708]*ExodCom*II.4.
[709]Translation by the author.
[710]Eusebii Pampili, *Cronicon Bipartitum*, p.69, 105.
[711]*ExodCom*II.9, XVIII.1.
[712]*ExodCom*II.9. Salvesen*ECE* p.21.

Ephrem's explanation of his use of chronology is important:

> Six hundred thousand set out from Raamses and encamped at Succoth[713]. Their stay in Egypt lasted four hundred and thirty years[714]; you must not reckon this figure from Jacob's entry into Egypt, but from the day God established the covenant with Abraham.[715]

What supports the argument of Ephrem's reliance specifically on the Jewish tradition of exegesis is the matter of his deliberate choice to follow it in his writings. Ephrem must have been aware of the different chronologies, i.e. counting the time in Canaan and in Egypt separately, as in the case of *Seder Olam Rabbah*[716]. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion he specifically mentions how exactly he is counting the years that the Israelites stayed in Egypt, and makes a definitive choice to follow the tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis. For example, Ephrem specifically mentions that the 430 years must not be counted as the years only from Jacob's entry into Egypt, but from the day that God gave his promise to Abraham, thus including the time both in Egypt and in Canaan[717].

Eusebius, although giving the number 430 as the time from God's promise to Abraham, mentions that the Hebrews stayed in Egypt 250 years from the time that Jacob and his sons got there[718]. Ephrem ignores all the chronological differences in dividing the time spent in Canaan and Egypt and presents a total figure of 430 years, in this way avoiding the conflicting systems presented by others.

Wacholder, acknowledging the significant divergence in the Hebrew and Greek texts, presents his explanation of why some Christian exegetes, including Ephrem, adopted the Greek chronology presented in LXX. He offers a numerical reasoning for choosing the Septuagint's chronology, as it gives 1396 more years from the Creation to the Exodus than the Hebrew version. This, according to Wacholder, was a good enough reason for Christian exegetes, as they were longing to see the Messianic millennia come[719]. One may disagree with the idea of a predominantly Christian

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[713]Exod.12:37.
[714]Exod.12:40.
[715]*ExodCom*XI.6. Salvesen*ECE* p. 41.
[716]See *Appendix*1.
[717]*ExodCom*XI.6. Salvesen*ECE* p. 41.
[718]Eusebii Pampili, *Cronicon Bipartitum*, p.93.
[719]Wacholder, B. Z., *Eupolemus. A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* (Cincinnati, NY, LA, Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College, 1974) p.98, see also *Appendix*1.

reliance on LXX chronology, as the example of Demetrius shows that Jewish exegetical tradition relied on the chronology presented in LXX already in the third century BCE. Demetrius writes:

And from Adam until Joseph's brothers came into Egypt there were 3624 years.[720]	Αδάμ ἐως τοῦ εισελθείν ἐις Αιγύπτον τους Ιωσείφ συγγενείς ἐτη γχκδ[721]

The period of 3624 years agrees with the LXX system of calculation; the MT has 2238 years. Josephus, for example uses both Hebrew and Greek chronology in his writings, i.e. he uses the LXX for the Adamite generations and the Hebrew for the Noachites[722]. Therefore, Josephus uses several conflicting chronologies in his writings. Hanson mentions that *'although 215 years is attested by Josephus, Ant 2.318'* as the years after Jacob moved to Egypt, *'he exhibits divergent chronologies elsewhere*[723]*... yielding 230 years'*[724].

It is clear that Ephrem uses his own logic when he chooses either from one or from another tradition of biblical exegesis. Wacholder argues that the tradition of a *'permissive attitude in regard to changing biblical dating'* has a long history in Jewish biblical exegesis[725]. In fact, he implies that Demetrius or his school of biblical exegesis originated the system of reading Exod.12:40 as the combined number of years spent in Egypt and Canaan. Thus, he must have influenced the work of the Palestinian Jews in *The Book of Jubilees*, which was written almost a century after Demetrius, and other later rabbinical chronologies, such as the *Seder Olam Rabbah*, which used the same tradition of dividing 430 years into 220 years in Canaan and 210 years in Egypt[726]. Demetrius could have influenced the later rabbinic exegesis, an idea which Wacholder himself does not support. Wacholder ascribes the authorship of the chronological system to Demetrius or his school[727]. One could further develop this argument and propose that the Septuagint itself was under his influence. This demonstrates the complex relationship between the traditions of biblical exegesis that were forming under the influence of various writers for centuries.

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[720]Hanson, 'Demetrius...', p.851.
[721]Jacoby, F., *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, Vol. 3C, *Demetrios* (Leiden: Brill, 1958) p.669.
[722]Wacholder, B.Z., *Eupolemus*, p. 99.
[723]*Ant.*1.154; 1.256ff; 2.187ff.
[724]Hanson, 'Demetrius...', p.851 footnote 16d, see also footnote 18e on p.852.
[725]Wacholder, B.Z., *Eupolemus,* p.102.
[726]See *Appendix*1.
[727]Wacholder, *Eupolemus,* p.102.

The examples from Ephrem's writings presented below illustrate the argument of Ephrem following the tradition of Jewish biblical exegesis in his commentaries on Exodus:

- Ephrem estimates the years that the Israelites spent in Egypt, from Jacob entering it till the time Moses took the people to the desert, as a total of 225 years[728]
- Ephrem also mentions that the people were in Egypt for 80 years quoting from Peshitta Exod.3:7[729]
- Ephrem's commentaries present the number of six hundred thousand Israelites crossing the Red Sea[730].

These numbers correspond to the ones presented by Josephus. Josephus, another Jewish writer of the first century CE, also engages in the presentation of various numbers and chronologies, stating that *'those that were of the age fit for war were six hundred thousand'*[731]. In fact, he uses chronological numbers similar to those used by Ephrem on various occasions. Josephus writes:

> They left Egypt in the month Xanthicus, on the fifteenth day of the lunar month; four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt. It was the eightieth year of the Age of Moses, and of that of Aaron three more.[732]

Ephrem does not explicitly mention that the Israelites left on the fifteenth day of the month. However, he gives a detailed chronology of the events that happened up until the fourteenth day of the month. Thus, it is clear that they left the next day, i.e. the fifteenth of the month. In fact the significance of the fourteenth day of the month for Ephrem is highlighted, as Ephrem already mentions the fourteenth day of the month in the Introduction of his Exodus commentaries:

> The Hebrews kill the lamb on the fourteenth day and eat it.[733]

It is interesting that the event of killing the lamb comes after the Egyptian first-born die in the Introduction, while chronologically the Hebrews were instructed to kill the

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[728]*ExodCom*I.1.
[729]*ExodCom*III.3.
[730]*ExodCom*XV.1.
[731]Josephus, *Ant.*II:XV.2.
[732]Ibid. The English translation is taken from Josephus, *Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1963) p.62.
[733]*ExodCom* Synopsis. Salvesen*ECE* p.9.

lamb at sunset on the fourteenth[734]. And the first-born of Egypt died at midnight[735]. Logically the Hebrews must have left on the fifteenth day of the month as they were leaving in a hurry[736]. Ephrem in these passages is more concerned with the significance of the tenth day of the first month, when the Hebrews were supposed to confine the lamb, as a typological representation of the day on which Jesus was conceived. And the fourteenth day of the month, when the lamb was supposed to be slain by the Hebrews, symbolizes the crucifixion for Ephrem[737]. Therefore, Ephrem moved the accent from the actual date of the Exodus, i.e. the fifteenth of the first month, to the presentation of the Messianic story of salvation while using the pre-Exodus narrative. This example shows how Ephrem used numbers for his exegetical purposes in the same way as Demetrius, or even introduced his system of numbering in accordance with the LXX.

Ephrem's use of the Jewish tradition of exegesis may be described from various perspectives. On the one hand, his writings demonstrate traces of influence from the Jewish exegetical tradition, as in the cases of numerology and chronology, while, on the other hand, Ephrem modifies his initial material for the sake of Christological argument. Thus, Ephrem makes use of Jewish exegesis, but he is using it in support of demonstrating the presence of Christ in the OT narrative.

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[734] *ExodCom*XII.1,2.
[735] *ExodCom*XII.4.
[736] *ExodCom*Synopsis.
[737] *ExodCom*XII.3.

Conclusion

Although the LXX formed the Christian Old Testament, Ephrem would rely on the Syriac Bible tracing its origins to the Hebrew Bible. This chapter's primary consideration has been to demonstrate how Ephrem followed the Jewish tradition of numbering the people in Exod.1:5. According to the analysis of the commentaries of Ephrem and related Jewish Midrashic material, the conclusion of this chapter demonstrates the influence and reliance of Ephrem on Jewish biblical exegesis.

This chapter asks two major questions in relation to the way Ephrem treats the biblical verse of Exod.1:5:

1. What are the indications of Ephrem's awareness of the Midrashic material on this verse?

It is not clear and straightforward in the case of Ephrem's exegesis on Exod.1:5. On the surface the situation clearly indicates that Ephrem just relies on biblical material. He does not introduce any analysis, any discussion with regard to the verse, but he simply follows the Peshitta. And for the most part of his commentaries he is silent about the verse. But this in itself can be seen as surprising, and raises the second question:

2. What are the reasons behind the fact that Ephrem does not pick up and bring out the problematic issue of the questionable calculation of the verse?

There are further questions that could lead to the answer of the question: Why does Ephrem not deal with the difficulty in the scriptural text of Exod.1:5? It is clear that the calculation of the verse is questionable. And Ephrem, of course, can calculate correctly. And he is an exegete; it should be his primary concern to deal with the difficulties in the text. Why then in this particular case does Ephrem ignore on the textual problem? The answers to these questions could indicate that Ephrem is employing Jewish sources while dealing with the verse.

As demonstrated in the chapter, the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis dealt with the issue of Exod.1:5 for centuries, and came out with several solutions as to why the number of the verse should stay as 'seventy'. Jewish exegetes invented the whole concept of the globality and universal significance of this number, and invented various typological and symbolic interpretations of the verse. Jewish writers

developed the whole concept of the significance of the use of this particular number in Exod.1:5, and it seems that Ephrem implicitly accepted the whole concept by silently agreeing with it in his exegetical writings. Thus, Ephrem spares himself the trouble of repeating all the issues that this concept leads to, but simply replicates the results of the Jewish exegetical tradition, i.e. he follows the biblical narrative as it is, because he no longer sees the problem in the text. The problem has been solved by Jewish exegetes, and Ephrem takes the number 'seventy' as a standard rabbinical number in relation to this verse, even though there are different numbers presented elsewhere in the Bible, i.e. Gen.46:27, or by other translations, i.e. LXX. Rabbis had dealt with the issues of inconsistency before, and they stated that the reading of Exod.1:5 should remain as 'seventy'. Hence, we read the number 'seventy' in Ephrem's commentary on the verse.

Chapter V: Presenting Biblical Figures

V.1 The Presentation of Miriam, the Sister of Moses, in Jewish and Christian Biblical Commentaries

V.1.1 Miriam, the Sister of Moses, in Ancient Christian Commentaries

The understanding of the figure of Miriam, the sister of Moses, in Christian commentaries usually goes beyond the literal interpretation. It carries also typological and symbolic interpretation. Some commentators draw parallels between Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the Mother of God, while others put Miriam as the first woman within the biblical tradition of women prophetesses. Other Christian writers present the figure of Miriam as a representation of the Church and an example of prayer.

The most common ministry attributed to Miriam is the prophetic one. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* uses the general term of prophetesses combining Miriam, the sister of Moses, and the Mother of God. They are mentioned along with other women in the biblical narrative. Among them are Deborah, Huldah and Judith of the OT story and Elisabeth, Anna and the daughters of Philip in the NT narrative[738].

The parallel interpretation of Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the Mother of God, is found in the writings of the ancient Christian commentaries. It is not the usual and most obvious parallel that can be drawn, but a few authors, such as Peter Chrysologus (425-450CE) and Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 CE) make the typological representation of the Mother of God by Miriam, the sister of Moses, quite clear. Others, like Ephrem and the authors of *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* present the more general connection between Miriam and Mary through the prophetic ministry of both.

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[738]Funk, F. X., *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Paderborn, 1905) VIII.2.9, p.470-471; see also Oden, T. C. (ed.) *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. III *Old Testament, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove,2001) p.82.

Peter Chrysologus mentions that the name Mary relates to prophecy and salvation, being the '*badge of virginity*' and '*the sum of sanctity*', and thus linking the sister of Moses to the Mother of Jesus[739]. Gregory of Nyssa also suggests this typological representation of the Mother of God through the song of Miriam, the sister of Moses. He draws this suggestion from the interpretation of the timbrel in the hand of Miriam as the symbol of virginity and, thus, the prototype of the Mother of God[740]. St. Gregory mentions that Miriam with her timbrel conducted women in their dance. Miriam is perceived by this Church Father as the first to perfect the virtue of virginity. Because of this, he considers her to be a type of the Mother of God. He writes:

> By this timbrel the story may mean to imply virginity, as first perfected by Miriam; whom indeed I would believe to be a type of Mary the Mother of God.[741]

St. Ambrose (339-397CE) supports the ideas of some other Fathers of the Church in perceiving Miriam as a prototype of a virgin. He makes the connection to the Virgin Mary, who is the supreme example of the virtues of virginity and piety. St. Ambrose presents the eschatological picture of the Virgin Mary leading a procession of virgins to Christ. And in that choir Miriam is holding her timbrel and leading the virgins in singing to the Lord[742]. St. Ambrose mentions that the Virgin Mary was foreshadowed by Miriam. He also talks about Miriam as a Christian type[743] and presents Miriam as the type of the Church itself[744]. However, the murmuring of Miriam against Moses and her being ignorant of '*the mystery of the Ethiopian woman'* St. Ambrose ascribes to the type of the Synagogue, which is also '*ignorant of the mystery of the Ethiopian woman'*[745]. The mystery of the Ethiopian woman, according to St. Ambrose, is the gathering within the body of the Church of different nations, i.e. Gentiles[746].

St. Ambrose summarizes typological and symbolic interpretations of the song of Miriam into the transcendent image. He transforms the historical narrative of the OT and brings it into the current lives of Christians. In his writings Miriam becomes a

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[739]*Serm.*146, Shanz, IV, 2, 538; PL, lii, 183. Halton (ed.) *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994) 17:241-42.
[740]*De Virginitate* 19, *GNO* VIII, I, p.323, ll.1-2; NPNF II, 5, p.365, n.5.
[741]*De Virginitate* 19, *GNO* VIII, I, p.323, ll.1-2; NPNF II, 5, p.365, n.5.
[742]*De Virginibus* II, PL, xvi, 210-211; NPNF II, 10, 376.
[743]*Letter*LXIII.34, PL, xvi, 1198; NPNF II, 10, 461.
[744]*De virginibus* I, PL, xvi, 192; NPNF II 10, 365.
[745]*Letter*LXIII, PL, xvi, 1203-1204, ¶57; NPNF II, 10, 464.
[746]Ibid.

symbol and example of prayer, which all of the faithful are encouraged to perform accordingly. This type of thinking finds support in the writings of Jacob of Serug. He starts with historical typology representing Adam through Christ and Eve through Mary. Then he goes further into symbolic typology showing the relationship between this world and the heavenly world[747]. In his scheme of things the figure of Miriam the sister of Moses, as the figure of Mary the Mother of God, transcends historical reality.

V.1.2 Miriam in Jewish Tradition

According to the rabbinic tradition Miriam, the sister of Moses, was a prophetess from a very early age. Rashi mentions that she foretold to her mother the birth of Moses. That is why, according to Rashi, she is called in Exod.15:20 Miriam 'the prophetess, the sister of Aaron'. When she prophesised the first time Moses was not yet born, and she was indeed the sister of Aaron only[748].

Jewish Midrashic tradition often mentions Miriam in connection with her two brothers. The number three thus becomes meaningful, as in the allusion of Jacob seeing three flocks of sheep in the land of the people of the east[749]. Midrash Rabbah refers to these flocks of sheep as Moses, Aaron and Miriam[750]. Later on in the biblical narrative one can find the interpretation of a dream of the chief butler about the three branches as representing Moses, Aaron and Miriam again. Then its blossom is perceived as the redemption of Israel[751]. *Leviticus Rabbah* refers to Moses, Aaron and Miriam as three messengers to Israel[752]. The interpretation of the unity of these three builds up into a major allegory, and brings to light the allusion of the significant threesome for the history of Israel. In the same passage of *Leviticus Rabbah* and in other parts of the Midrash, God announces that he is providing for the people for the sake of these three. God gave the manna '*for the sake of Moses, the well for the sake of Miriam, and the clouds of glory for the sake of Aaron*'[753]. According to the Jewish

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[747]Jacob of Serug, *On the Mother of God,* trans. Hansbury, Mary, introduction Brock, Sebastian (Crestwood, NY: SVSP, 1988) p.6.
[748]Cohen (ed.) *The Soncino Chumash* (Hindhead, Surrey: The Soncino Press, 1947) p.420.
[749]Gen.29:1.
[750]*GenRab*LXX:8, p.641.
[751]*GenRab*LXXXVIII:5, p.816.
[752]*LevRab*XXVII:6, p.350.
[753]*LevRab*XXVII:6, p.350.

tradition of interpretation, the well accompanied Israel during their dwelling in the wilderness[754].

The significance of linking Moses, Aaron and Miriam and interpreting events in the history of Israel with reference to them leads one to think that their alliance in the Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation was quite meaningful. Miriam becomes an authentic and significant figure mentioned together with her brothers. God, as presented in Midrash, makes a special remembrance of them in the Torah when, according to R. Simeon, He recalls the waters of Meribah three times for the deaths of Moses, Aaron and Miriam[755]. The passage refers to Moses, Miriam and Aaron as three judges, which is another aspect of how they are perceived by the oral Jewish tradition. It allows one to suggest that in the Midrash they are perceived as patriarchs. The number of references to the threesome of Moses, Miriam and Aaron is impressive. *Midrash Rabbah on Numbers* refers to them as three special tutors for Israel[756], almost ascribing to them the divine function of leading and teaching the people. Miriam, Aaron and Moses are also called the three good patrons of Israel by R. Jose. He adds that their death was pronounced in the same month, suggesting that when one member of their special body departed, the whole body found its doom[757]. Miriam was the first one to depart, according to the Midrash, and the well ran dry; but it was then restored for the sake of Moses and Aaron. But when they all died, all the divine miracles which were performed for their sake ceased to operate[758].

There is a special reference to the death of Miriam made by R.Abba b.Abina in connection with the ashes of the Red Heifer. He explained the connection by saying that both, the ashes of the Red Heifer and the death of the righteous Miriam, effect atonement[759]. This highlights the significance for rabbis of both the life and the death of Miriam for Israel and its future.

Miriam and her mother Jochebed were perceived by Samuel b.Nahmani as the midwives of Israel who used to nurture and feed Israel. They were called the

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[754]*NumRab* I:2, p.3-4.
[755]*LevRab*XXXI:4, p.399.
[756]*NumRab*I:2, p.3-4.
[757]*SSRab*IV:5#2, p.200.
[758]*SSRab*IV:5#2, p.200.
[759]*LevRab*XX:12, p.264.

shepherds of the people in Egypt up until the time of the Red Sea[760]. R.Judah supports Samuel b.Nahmani and gives biblical explanations of the titles of Miriam and Jochebed as the Hebrew midwives based on Exod.1:15[761]. The Midrash on this verse of Exodus presents the midwives of Israel as the saviours of the nation. When Pharaoh ordered them to slaughter the Hebrew babies, they were disobedient to his command and on the contrary worked towards the increase of the babies in the nation[762]. The virtues of the midwives were compared to the virtue of Abraham, who was called a God-fearing man[763] when he was ready to sacrifice his life and the life of Isaac. So were the midwives ready to risk their lives by contradicting Pharaoh's commands[764]. Two of the midwives were mother and daughter, Jochebed and Miriam[765].

God Himself in the Midrash is compared to a midwife who makes a child look beautiful by cleaning away the blood and placing the child in the bed and clothing it. The same quality is attributed to God by R.Akiba in connection with the suffering of Israel in Egypt. He sent an angel to '*cleanse and beautify*' His people[766]. According to another explanation, God Himself came down to do that[767].

More symbolism grows out of the story of God's reward to the midwives. The Bible states that '*because the midwives feared God He built them houses*'[768]. This phrase is understood by Rab and Levi in the sense of His establishing priestly, levitical families from Moses and Aaron and a royal family from Miriam, as king David descended from her[769]. Thus, Israel was fruitful and increased because of Miriam's labour as a midwife and later on because of the great king descended from her.

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[760]*SSRab*IV:5#2, p.200.
[761]*EccLRab*V:5#1, p.169-170.
[762]*ExodRab*I:15, p.16-22.
[763]Gen.22:21.
[764]*ExodRab*I:15, p.21.
[765]*ExodRab*I:15, p.22.
[766]*ExodRab*I:12, p.15-16.
[767]Ibid.
[768]Exod.1:21.
[769]*EsRab*I:17, p.22-24.

V.1.3 Common Approach to the Punishment of Miriam by Christian and Jewish Commentators

Various Jewish and Christian commentaries refer to the fact that after Miriam spoke against Moses she was punished with leprosy. Jewish commentators ask questions about the reality of that event and answer in the affirmative. Christian commentators present the illness of Miriam as a result of her disrespect towards Moses. Both Christian and Jewish commentaries bring parallel understandings of the biblical history to bear.

The Midrash ascribes the 'lying tongue' of Proverbs[770] to the action of Miriam against Moses[771]. Hence she is punished for that with leprosy.

Irenaeus (120-202 CE) reflects on how Miriam's punishment affected Aaron who was not punished in the same manner as his sister[772]. He entreated Moses to intervene with and deal with the affliction, which Moses did. Irenaeus shows how the Lord brought the whole family back together through the punishment of Miriam. Miriam and Aaron deceived Moses and broke their unity, while through the common intervention for her health they were able to reunite.

The ability of Miriam to reunite the family is picked up also by Jewish commentaries. *Pesikta Rabbati* presents the story of how Miriam as a little girl influenced her father to remarry Jochebed, which led to Moses being born after their reunion[773].

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[770]Prov.6:17.
[771]*LevRab*XVI:1, Num.12:1-9.
[772]*Fragmenta*XXXIII, PG, 7, ¶348 1245, see also ANF 1, p.573.
[773]*Piska*15.11. See also *Pesikta Rabbati*, trans. Braude, W., G., Vol.II (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968) p.321-322.

V.1.4 Exegesis of Miriam's Position in Exodus 2:4

Exodus Rabbah ascribes a good deal to the position of Miriam while she was standing by the river. To begin with, according to R.Amram in the name of Rab, it signifies an active position of prophecy[774]. In addition, the rabbis interpreted the fact that Miriam '*stood afar off the river*' as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and *Shechinah*, because of the use of the same form of the verb in the passages of Exod.2:4 and ISam.3:10:

Exod.2:4	And his sister stood afar off to know what would happen to him	ותתצב אחתו מרחק לדעה מה-יעשה לו
ISam.3:10	And the Lord came and stood	ויבא יהוה ויתיצב

Most of the Targumim read this verse the same using the words '*stood afar off*':

TgO reads the following on Exod.2:4:

And his sister stood afar off to know what would happen to him	ואתעתדת אחתיה מרחיק למידע מא יתעביד ליה[775]

TgN agrees on the same position of Miriam:

And his sister stood afar off to know what would happen to him	ואתעתדת אחתיה מרחוק למידע אחתיה מה אתעביד ליה[776]

The Peshitta translation of the Bible states that Miriam '*stood by*':

ܘܩܡܬ ܐܚܬܗ ܪܚܝܩܐ ܠܡܕܥ ܡܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ[777].

Aphrahat, the contemporary of Ephrem, writes that '*Miriam stood on the edge of the river when Moses was floating in the waters*'[778]demonstrating his agreement with the text of the Peshitta.

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[774]*ExodRab*I:22, p.28.
[775]Sperber, Alexander (ed.) *The Bible in Aramaic*, Vol.1, *The Pentateuch According to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill,1959) p.90.
[776]Diez Macho, Alexander (ed.) *Neophyti 1. Targum Palestinense MS de la Biblioteca Vaticana*, Tom II, *Exodo* (Madrid-Barcelona:Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas,1970) p.7.
[777]The Peshitta Institute, Leiden, *The Old Testament in Syriac. According to the Peshitta Version*, Part I, *Genesis-Exodus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) p.119.
[778]*Dem*XXI, NPNF II, V.14, p.396.

V.1.4.1 Ephrem on Miriam, the Sister of Moses

Ephrem writes that Miriam sat by the river in his commentaries on Exod.2:4, using a vocabulary that is different from the Peshitta, but similar to the Targumim:

ܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܚܬܗ ܕܡܘܫܐ ܝܬܒ ܠܗ ܠܟܠ ܐܝܟ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܠܬܝܒܐ[779]
Miriam, Moses' sister, sat by the river to find out what would happen to the child in the ark[780]

Ephrem's description of Miriam as sitting by the river shows a further resemblance to Jewish sources when considered in the broader context of the Exodus narrative. The same word is used by Ephrem in describing Moses sitting next to the well in Exod.2:15:

He sat by the well[781]	[782]ܘܝܬܒ ܠܗ ܠܟܠ ܚܢܟ ܒܬܪ

The position of sitting usually signifies passivity. In the case of Moses, he sat by the well waiting for something. According to *ExodRab,* he was waiting to meet his destiny, following the tradition of his ancestors who met their wives near a well, the symbol of continuity and purity[783].

It seems that Ephrem changes the words, describing the position of Miriam near the river, in order to concentrate on her quiet awareness of what will become of the child. It is as if Ephrem plays down the moment, plays down the scenery, in order to show the contemplative side of the event. Miriam sits down and waits for divine providence to look after Moses, in the same manner as Moses will sit down and wait for his destiny further on in the biblical narrative. Thus, both Miriam and Moses became the silent witnesses of and participants in the divine influence in their lives.

In a similar manner, Ephrem describes the feelings of Miriam after she saw what happened to Moses in the ark. According to Ephrem she felt neither sadness nor joy,

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[779]*ExodCom*II.2, p.126.
[780]*ExodCom*II.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.15.
[781]*ExodCom*II.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.19.
[782]*ExodCom*II.6, p.128.
[783]*ExodRab*1:32, p.39-40.

as those feelings were alien to her[784]. The description assumes again the contemplative sense of being free from feelings and passions and relying on God. He writes earlier on that Miriam and her mother trusted in God and in the beauty of the child[785].

Ephrem is very particular in highlighting Miriam's leadership qualities when he describes her organising women to sing praises to God at the Red Sea. According to Ephrem, the people were divided into two singing groups:

> Moses led the men in the singing, and Miriam the women.[786]

Ephrem puts great emphasis on the role of Miriam in the story of Israel. This is seen in the fact that he mentions her singing and leading women at the Red Sea in the very introduction to his commentaries on Exodus, in the sequence of the most significant events of the biblical narrative:

> The Sea parts and the Hebrews cross, while the Egyptians are drowned.
> Miriam sings a hymn of praise by the Sea. They travel three days without water.[787]

It is important to notice here that Ephrem only mentions Miriam as the leader of the women in the Synopsis, while leaving Moses' role without comment. This could indicate the importance of Miriam's mission at the Red Sea for Ephrem.

Ephrem in his commentaries on Exodus raises questions similar to those posed by Jewish exegetes. For example, in clarifying the title of Miriam as a prophetess he mentions that, although Miriam was not a real prophetess, she acquired this as an honorary title[788]. In this passage Ephrem inquires into the title of Miriam and compares her with Isaiah's wife, the righteous woman. He writes:

> *Miriam the prophetess took*[789]... In what way did she prophesy? Or did Scripture honour her with the title of prophetess, like Isaiah's wife, since although she was not a prophetess, she was a righteous woman?[790]

It is important to notice here that Ephrem builds up his exegesis by quoting the biblical verse and asking a question, which is similar to the Jewish exegetes[791]. Also,

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[784]*ExodCom*II.3, p.126.
[785]*ExodCom*II.2, p.126.
[786]*ExodCom*XV.3, p.145; Salvesen*ECE* p.49.
[787]*ExodCom* Synopsis, p.123. Salvesen*ECE* p.9.
[788]*ComExod*XV.2, p.145.
[789]Exod.15:20.
[790]*ExodCom*XV.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.48.
[791]See Chapter II.

this example is an illustration of Ephrem's concern for, and attention to, the female characters of the scriptural narrative. He uses the opportunity in his *Commentary* to link the figure of Isaiah's wife with Miriam, honouring their virtues together.

Ephrem agrees with Jewish exegetical tradition in allowing the possibility of describing Miriam and Jochebed as midwives of Israel[792]. Also in agreement with Jewish commentaries, he mentions that Miriam and Jochebed formed a great dynasty, possibly alluding to the royal and priestly dynasties of Israel. Ephrem writes:

> "They became good" means that they became a great dynasty...[793]

There is no resemblance between Ephrem's presentation of Miriam, and that of other Christian writers, who make a typological connection between Miriam and the Virgin Mary. Ephrem does not explicitly compare Miriam to the Mother of God. However, in one of his hymns 'on the Pearl', dedicated to the Mother of God, he symbolises the Mother of God as the '*bride of the sea*' who gives birth to the Pearl, Christ, who rebukes the Jewish girls:

> Your Mother is the virgin bride of the sea
> without its having married her; she fell into its bosom
> without its being aware; she conceived you in it
> though it knew her not. Your symbol
> rebukes the Jewish girls when they wear you.[794]

Ephrem also draws a connection between the Mother of God and a particular event in the Exodus narrative. Ephrem presents an interesting parallel in one of his hymns between God revealing himself to Moses in the bush and Christ's Incarnation through the Virgin Mary. Ephrem writes that '*just as a bush in Horeb bore God in the flame*[795]*, so did Mary bear Christ in her virginity*'[796].

The overall impression gained from Ephrem's presentation of the figure of Miriam in his *Commentary on Exodus* is that he is much more inclined to follow the tradition of Jewish exegetes, while leaving Christian symbolism to his hymnological work.

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[792]*ExodCom*I.4, see also Salvesen*ECE* p.13, footnote 12.
[793]*ExodCom*I.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.13.
[794]*HdF*82.2, see Brock, S., *The Harp of the Spirit* (Oxford: FAS, 1983) p.32.
[795]Exod.3:2.
[796]*HNat* lines 13-16, see Brock, S., *The Harp of the Spirit,* p.62.

V.1.5 Ephrem Presenting Hur

Ephrem's references to Hur have already been noticed by Salvesen as an illustration of Ephrem's relation to Jewish sources[797]. However, it is important to present further observations in relation to the figure of Hur in Ephrem's *Commentary*. First of all, the importance of this illustration is the complete lack of information about Hur in the biblical narrative. Therefore, all the additional information about Hur that Ephrem presents presupposes that he was borrowing the material from an external non-biblical source. A second observation is the fact that Ephrem openly and clearly refers to the oral tradition from which he took his inspiration. In mentioning both that (a.) Hur was the husband of Miriam and that (b.) Hur was stoned by Israelites, Ephrem identifies his sources by presenting the rabbinical formula '*some say*' to introduce the additional information. It is a solid indication of him taking his inspiration from the oral tradition, which I am inclined to describe as being of Jewish origin.

The biblical narrative mentions that when Moses went up the mountain, he told the elders to bring their problems for judgment to Hur[798]. But after Moses' descent, Hur is no longer mentioned. Ephrem makes an attempt to explain the situation, using the knowledge that he received from the oral tradition of biblical exegesis in his time. He writes about Hur, basing his story on what '*people say*'[799]*:*

> Aaron argued with them, and he saw that they wanted to stone him as they had stoned Hur. For when Moses went up to the mountain, he told the elders to bring their judgment to Hur; but after Moses' descent, Hur is nowhere mentioned. Because of this people say that the Israelites killed him when they rioted against Aaron over the image of the Calf, since Hur forbade them to change the gods. So Aaron was afraid that he too would die, and that they would incur blood-guilt for his murder.[800]

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[797]Salvesen*ECE* p.52 footnote 79, and p.63 footnotes 109-111.
[798]Exod.24:14.
[799]As I have suggested earlier in Chapter II, Ephrem could have been referring to the oral tradition of biblical commentaries, which later on got written down in the classical Jewish texts. See the footnote below for the examples of rabbinic material on the story of Hur.
[800]*ExodCom*XXXII.2, p.152-153 ; Salvesen*ECE* p.63.

It becomes apparent, from the passage quoted above, that Ephrem resembles Jewish exegetical material on several points:

1. in presenting the death of Hur[801]
2. in justifying Aaron allowing the people to build the calf, by stating that he was trying to prevent the people from committing another murder.

The last point is clarified in *PRE* with the following explanation:

> Aaron was afraid that if the people killed him as well as Hur, there would be no forgiveness for them, since they would have slain both a priest and a prophet.[802]

Ephrem mentions more details about Hur earlier in his *Commentary* when he points to the fact that Hur was Miriam's husband. Ephrem again refers to the oral tradition using the expression '*they say*':

> Aaron and Hur went up with Moses (they say that Hur was the husband of Moses' sister).[803]

This information is supported by Josephus and other rabbinical sources as well[804].

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[801]See *ExodRab*48:4, *LevitRab*8:3,*b.Sahnedrin*7a, *Pirque dREliezer*XLV, *TgPsJ* on Exod.32:5
[802]*Pirque dREliezer*XLV(Lamentations 2.20) I owe these illustrative examples to Alison Salvesen, see Salvesen*ECE* p.63, footnotes 109,110.
[803]*ExodCom*XVII.2, p.147 ; Salvesen*ECE* p.51-52.
[804]*Ant.*III.54, 105, *PRE*XLV, *ExodRab*48.4.

V.2 The Depiction of the Figure of Moses in Ephrem's Writings within the Context of the Rabbinical Concept of the Merits of the Fathers

This thesis so far has shown the development of the rabbinical concept of the Merits of the Fathers through different writings of Jewish origin. Previous chapters introduced this notion in the biblical narrative[805]. Then further development of the concept was shown in the early Jewish texts of Qumran and in later Midrashim[806]. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the use of this concept in Ephrem's writings.

The concept of the Merits of the Fathers is a popular one in the commentaries of Ephrem on the book of Exodus. He approaches this notion from various angles. At the very beginning of section one of his commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem establishes the fact of God's promise to Abraham. Ephrem presents the historical development of that promise when on various occasions he offers his way of calculating the time from God's promise to Abraham up until Moses' time[807]. Together with the promise to Abraham, Ephrem mentions the promise of God to the fathers to release and deliver the people, and to bring them out of slavery in Egypt. In His dialogue with Moses it is God who addresses the subject:

> *I have come down that* through you I may release them to *deliver them* and bring them into *the land of the Canaanites* which I promised to their fathers.[808]

By bringing up the subject of God's promise to the fathers in the conversation of God with Moses, Ephrem emphasises the connection of Moses with the fathers, and generally with the whole history of the deliverance of Israel, i.e. from the first promise of God to Abraham till the actual exodus from Egypt of Moses and the people. To illustrate the connection between the forefathers and Moses, Ephrem adduces similarities in the stories of the forefathers and Moses. For example, Ephrem draws attention to the episodes of both Jacob and Moses saving their future wives from working with the flock:

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[805]See the example of LXX on Exod.29:42 in the Chapter IV.1.2.
[806]See Chapter IV.1.4.2.
[807]*ComExod*1.1, 2.4, 2.9, 12.6. Salvesen*ECE* p. 11,17, 21, 41.
[808]*ComExod*3.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.22-23, see Exod.3:8.

> As Jacob spared Laban's daughters the ignominy of working as shepherdesses, Moses was also to save Zipporah and her sisters from the drudgery of following the flock.[809]

On the basis of Jacob's story Ephrem builds up the notion of sacred space. Then he adds to Jacob's story the experience of Moses with the divine presence, the Shekhinah, when the prophet encountered the holy ground of the burning bush[810]. Ephrem puts both stories together, connecting them and emphasising the similar experiences that both Jacob and Moses had with God. Either Ephrem feels the need to add extra credentials to the figure of Moses, or it is essential for him to emphasise the continuity of Moses' experience with that of the venerable forefathers of the Jewish tradition.

In the Jewish tradition, and even outside of the Jewish faith, the authority of the elders and respect for them is considered one of the most important factors in maintaining the tradition. In the Exodus narrative, Moses and Aaron first acquire the trust of the elders by performing the signs[811]. It is likely that people believed in the mission of Moses[812] only after the approval of the elders. Ephrem describes the episode further. He writes that Pharaoh did not reject Moses because of the respect granted Moses by the '*crowds of Hebrew elders*'[813] following him. Therefore, the respect of the elders and his connection with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were, according to Ephrem, the definitive factors of Moses' ministry.

Why was it important for Ephrem to connect Moses' experience with the experience of the forefathers and to link his merits with the merits of the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? First of all, Ephrem presents Moses as a figure connecting the generations of Israel. Moses is the one who shapes a people into a nation. Ephrem presents the whole story of Moses and Pharaoh as a historical example of the rise of the nation, to which the later generations will refer for encouragement and inspiration. Ephrem explains the events of the pre-exodus experience, i.e. Moses' encounter with the Pharaoh, as a part of the divine plan for the history of Israel. Even the

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[809]*ComExod*2.8. Salvesen*ECE* p.20.
[810]*ComExod*3.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.22.
[811]Exod.3:29-30.
[812]Exod.3:31.
[813]*ComExod*5.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.28.

stubbornness of the Pharaoh in relation to Moses is perceived by Ephrem as part of the divine plan. Therefore, Ephrem inserts the following explanation:

> *And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh* and do not fear his arrogance. For I *have hardened his heart* with the patience that I showed him during the plagues that came through you. It was not that I was unaware of his treacherous nature when I trusted his penitence, for I said to you before that Pharaoh would not listen to you. But it was so *that* through him *I could perform signs* that would be recounted to your descendants."[814]

Ephrem establishes the connection between the generations in order to show their interrelation in fulfilling God's mission. Moses, therefore, takes his place in the succession of the forefathers from Abraham onwards. Ephrem links Moses' exodus, Abraham's Covenant and Jacob's entry into Egypt into a chain of related events. He does it in the commentaries on Exodus by means of numbers. He relates three significant episodes of the Torah - the Covenant with Abraham, Israel's entry into Egypt, and the Exodus from Egypt - by counting the years between each of them, using chronological evidence in order to list and link the events from Abraham to Jacob and then to Moses[815].

This kind of argument can be found in *TgPsJ* stating that:

> The *days* that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt (were) *thirty weeks of years that is two hundred and ten years.* But *the number was* four hundred and thirty years since *the Lord had spoken to Abraham, from the time he has spoken to him on the fifteenth of Nisan between the pieces until the day they went forth from Egypt.*[816]

The fact that Ephrem counts the four hundred years not from Jacob's entry into Egypt, but from the time of God's promise to Abraham[817] shows that Ephrem goes along with the Jewish tradition of interpretation in its support for the connection between the original promise of God to Abraham and the final exodus of Moses together with his people. The reasons behind Ephrem's argument could perhaps have been that he wanted to highlight Moses' exodus as the focal point in the history of God's promise to Israel.

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[814] *ComExod* 10.1. Salvesen *ECE* p.36, see Exod.1:1.
[815] *ComExod* 12.6. Salvesen *ECE* p.41.
[816] *TgPsJ* on Exod.12:40. McNam p.194.
[817] *ComExod* 12.6. Salvesen *ECE* p.41.

According to Ephrem's interpretation, Moses is encouraged to create ancestral history: Moses is chosen by God to act as an example for the people not only for his contemporaries, but also for his descendants. Therefore, Ephrem establishes the figure of Moses as one of the forefathers; Moses is the one who stands in the same ranking as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When Ephrem describes the episode with the manna, he highlights the fact that the people kept some manna in a pot in order to show it to future generations[818]. It is an initiative of the people, with the permission of God, to preserve material for their ancestral history. In this episode again, Ephrem's perception of Moses is as one of the so-called "fathers" or "forefathers"; while the manna is taken as evidence of God's Mercy shown to the people according to his merits, which Moses adds to the merits of the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. According to Ephrem, it is God who asks Moses to write a historical account of the events and to create the ancestral history[819]. Thus, Ephrem's perception goes along with Jewish tradition in ascribing the writings of the Torah to Moses[820].

Quite significant is the episode when Ephrem mentions that Moses took Joseph's bones with him when he went out of Egypt. The fact that Moses took care of Joseph's bones could be considered as a virtuous act by the prophet. Ephrem contrasts Moses' possession of Joseph's bones with the possessions of the people, who took with them the plunder from the Egyptians[821]. One can get an impression that Ephrem specifically establishes Moses' priorities at the time of the exodus. Ephrem's narrative suggests that for the prophet his connection with the forefathers is essentially important. That is why Moses brings Joseph's bones with him out of Egypt, i.e. out of slavery into freedom. The priority of the people was the material possessions of the Egyptians, which they chose to bring with them to the promised land; while for Moses the most important thing was to testify to the fulfilment of God's Covenant with Abraham by bringing his descendants into the promised land. And that deed of Moses was certainly the one that not only connected him with the forefathers, but also added his deeds to the merits of the fathers. This is the impression that Ephrem gives when he describes the actions of Moses in his commentaries. His main concerns were the

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[818] *ComExod*16.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.50.
[819] *ComExod*17.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.53.
[820] *Jub*1.26 mentions that the secret tradition was revealed to Moses exposing all the events in the history; *Meg*13a states that the whole Torah was given to Moses at Sinai. See also *Meg*29b; *Yoma*4a; *ExodRab*47.1,8; *SifreiDeut*26; *NumRab*19.12.
[821] *ComExod*13.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.42.

fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham and the connections between the forefathers that Moses establishes and completes through his ministry.

In Ephrem's commentaries even the possessions of the people show a connection with God's promise to Abraham. The Hebrews went out of Egypt with '*high hand*'[822], i.e. with Egyptian treasures and fine clothes, with silver and gold, with herbs and good health[823]. According to Ephrem, all the details of the people's exodus were '*just as God had promised Abraham*'[824]. Again Ephrem shows how important it is for him to maintain the connection with the original promise of God to Abraham. Through his actions Moses establishes the connection from the forefathers to the people he leads. Noble-spirited Moses prioritises this spiritual connection, presenting himself as a personal example of the merits of the Fathers. The people, on the other hand, also illustrate the fulfilment of the Covenant if only by robbing the Egyptians of their possessions. Ephrem illustrates the existence of Israel in total unison with God's plan, even in the simple detail of fulfilling the scriptural prophecy of leaving Egypt with '*high hand*'.

In section XX of his commentaries Ephrem refers to the sins of the forefathers and emphasises the idea of God's judgement on them. First of all, it is quite possible to relate this idea, i.e. the idea of the sins of the forefathers, to the idea of the merits of the fathers. In a sense the two ideas are the different sides of one notion. By using the notion of the sins of the forefathers in his commentaries, Ephrem is dealing with the reverse side of the notion of the Merits of the Fathers. The other interesting detail is the fact that Ephrem emphasises the attribute of God's Justice by deliberately changing the notion of the Mercy of God, which appears in the Peshitta version as the word 'Grace', to speak of the notion of the Judgement of God. It could not have been done by mistake. Therefore, Ephrem's choice was to emphasise the dark side of Israel's life in order to make the point that God's Judgement was exercised on the people. In the same part of the work, however, Ephrem mentions that God acts justly towards Israel for the sake of the forefathers[825]. This idea directly relates to the Jewish

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[822]Exod.14:8.
[823]*ComExod*14.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.42.
[824]*ComExod*14.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.42.
[825]*ComExod*20.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.56.

sources promoting a similar attitude to the Merits of the Fathers[826]. The difference, however, is that again Ephrem changes the notion of God's Mercy into God's Judgement.

Continuing with the idea of Judgement, Ephrem states that the Lord's hand is on the throne of Judgement that God establishes for Moses over the people[827]. It is as if Ephrem legitimises the authority of Moses as the one passing God's judgment on the people by stating that it is done through God delegating this authority to Moses directly. It is interesting to note that Ephrem uses God's hand as the means by which authority is passed to Moses. This highlights the idea of Incarnation by materialising God's presence through laying hands on Moses in the presence of the people. It also brings in the symbolism of the apostolic succession, through one generation of God's servants laying hands and passing on their authority to others. It is quite possible that Ephrem is illustrating the practice of ordination in the Church by adding this description in his commentaries. Ephrem describes the ritual of God ordaining Moses for his ministry. Hence, Moses becomes the one chosen directly by God to perform His tasks[828] - he becomes the mediator between God and His people.

Expanding the idea of Ephrem's presentation of Moses and his relationship with God, the next chapter will talk about Ephrem's presentation of the God-Israel relationship. This will help in understanding the significance of Moses' mediation between people and their God in Ephrem's writings.

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[826]See the Chapter IV.1.3-4 presenting Jewish commentaries on it. There is a more detailed description there of the concept of God showing Mercy to Israel, instead of Judgement, for the sake of the Merits of the Fathers.
[827]*ComExod*17.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.53-54.
[828]A similar interpretation of Moses as the one who has been chosen by God to perform His tasks is found in the Midrash, *EsthRab*, see *Table*1 in *Appendix*2.

V.2.1 Ephrem on the God-Israel Relationship

The relationship of God with Israel is a topic to which Ephrem makes much reference. This section shows the connections to the Merits of the Fathers and to the idea of the salvation of Israel that Ephrem sees in that relationship. Ephrem mentions God's protection of the people. God was watching over Israel from the very first day of their exodus from Egypt:

> From the very first day the Lord protected them with a cloud by day, and with a pillar of fire at night.[829].

There is a very important aspect of the God-Israel relationship, which Ephrem presents as the mediation and leadership of Moses. Ephrem presents the connection between two initiatives, i.e. one shown by Moses, and another one shown by God. God protects Moses and the people in the very fact that the people, especially Moses, venerate and respect the ancestral history. While the people become the witnesses and participants of the fulfilment of the Covenant, Moses himself becomes the key figure linking the forefathers' expectations to the historical reality of the exodus. Hence, one can see the connection between God's protection and the merits of the forefathers. In other words, Ephrem here demonstrates yet another link between God's Mercy and the concept of the Merits of the Fathers.

Ephrem describes the intimacy of the relationship between God and His people. This relationship is active on both sides. On the one hand there is total trust in God's active protection of the people:

> Moses said to them, "It will be just the same here as it was in Egypt: *the Lord shall fight for you, while you stay cal[m]*".[830]

On the other hand, there is an incredible affection and even devotion on the part of God towards His people. The level of communication that God has with Moses is displayed at the profoundest level:

> The Lord said to Moses, "*What do you pray* that I should do for you? I am ready to act for your people before you pray to me".[831]

There is a sense of totality in the relationship between God and Moses. Moses' level of relationship with God reaches that of the forefathers. In that Moses becomes one of

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[829]*ComExod*13.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.42, see also Exod.13:2.
[830]*ComExod*14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.43, see also Exod.14:14.
[831]*ComExod*14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.43.

the 'Fathers', he is made one by God's choice, as were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because of Moses, God shows mercy to His people, as He showed mercy before to the people because of the merits of the forefathers. God raised Moses to become the 'Father', the leader, the chosen one, and ultimately the Messiah, when he delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. Similarly Moses motivated people to trust God, rely on Him, serve Him, listen to Him, obey Him, follow Him, etc. The Jewish concept of *Imitatio Dei* applies to the relationship of God-Moses-Israel as follows: Moses teaches the people the values that he was taught by God.

The idea of *Imitatio Dei*, which connects Ephrem with the Jewish tradition of biblical commentaries, could be drawn from the passage cited below. By engaging himself with the principles of Jewish exegetical tradition, Ephrem shows his connection with it. After the divine encounter, Moses treats the people in the same careful and thoughtful manner, with which God treated him during their encounter. This is the reason for Moses covering his radiant face from the people in the biblical narrative[832]. Ephrem explains it as follows:

> And so, out of love, God kept Moses from seeing the glory that was too harsh for his eyes.[833]

And:

> In the same way Moses, out of love, kept his fellow countrymen from seeing the splendour that was too intense for their eyes. He learned from the One who overshadowed and spread out His hands, hiding the radiance of His glory from him so it would not harm him, that (Moses) should also spread out a veil and hide (his) intense brilliance from the frail so that it would not harm them.[834]

The relationship between God and Israel is very close during the time of Israel leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea. During the plagues of Egypt and during the whole period of negotiation with Pharaoh, God encourages people to grow in understanding of their privileged position with Him. This period of the God-Israel relationship could be considered as the most profound and close between the people and their God. According to Ephrem's commentaries, the high point of that relationship is the song of praise sung by the people under the leadership of Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea. Ephrem describes the situation of joy and victory, pure trust and praise of God[835]. The people are united in praise and appreciation of the deeds of God on their behalf.

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[832]Exod.34:33.
[833]*DomNos*29.3. FOC91, p.304.
[834]*DomNos*29.4. FOC91, p.304-305.
[835]*ComExod*15.1, Salvesen*ECE* p.46.

The people are aware that God is their Redeemer and Saviour, and that they are His people.

In describing the relationship between Israel and God, Ephrem pays a great deal of attention to the unity of the people with their God. The Israelites were raised and encouraged to trust their God through the union between the people and their leader, Moses. The way people sang praise to the Lord at the Red Sea is a good illustration of the point. Ephrem describes people singing in response to Moses leading them in praise, with men's and women's choirs responding antiphonally:

> Moses and the *Israelites sang this hymn of praise to the Lord.* Moses sang the hymn and the people responded antiphonally. "Sing to the glorious Lord" means the Lord who was avenged on *the horsemen and their riders whom he cast into the sea.*[836]

This illustration of the singing shows the deep level of trust and communication between the people and their leader, while their common effort is directed towards their God and Saviour. The characterisation of the singing of the people as antiphonal could have been added by Ephrem in order to bring the songs of praise at the Red Sea closer to the synagogal worship of the Church, where antiphonal singing was used. It is quite possible that antiphonal singing was a part of the liturgical practice of both Christian and Jewish worship.

In this passage, Ephrem allows the same addition to the biblical text, '*the Lord was avenged',* as found in *TgPsJ* and *TgN* on Exod.15:1:

TgN	***TgPsJ***
Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song of praise before the Lord and said thus: "We will give thanks and praise before the Lord, who by his Memra takes revenge of every one who exalts himself before him: horses and riders, because they had exalted themselves and had pursued after the people, the children of Israel, he cast them down and drowned them in the Sea of Reeds.[837]	Behold, then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song of praise before the Lord and said thus: "Let us give thanks and praise before the Lord, the eminent one who is exalted above the exalted and elevated above the elevated. Through his Memra he takes revenge on anyone who exalts himself before him. Because the wicked Pharaoh plotted before the Lord, was elevated in his heart and pursued the people of the children of Israel, horses and riders he cast (them) and drowned them in the Sea of Reeds.[838]

[836] *ExodCom*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.46.
[837] *TgN* on Exod 15:1. McNam p.64.
[838] *TgPsJ* on Exod 15:1. McNam p.202.

While *TgN* and *TgPsJ* mention *'the word' (Memra)* of God, Ephrem talks about the lips:

> *By your wind, the waters were heaped up*; either, the waters were heaped up and divided by the wind whose direction you changed, or, at the command of your lips.[839]

Moses' connection with the Merits of the Fathers may be seen in Ephrem's commentary on the song of praise that Moses sang at the Red Sea. Ephrem illustrates the relationship between God-Moses and Israel by bringing out the connection between the concepts of the Salvation of Israel and the Merits of the Fathers. This connection may be seen when one analyses the following passage in relation to Ephrem's perception of the God-Moses-Israel relationship:

> *Mighty and praised* – the mighty drowner of the Egyptians, praised for the deliverance of the Hebrews. *Yah the Lord* – that is, it is the Lord who was, *has become our saviour,* and not the calves that were shortly to be cast. So *this is my God, I will praise him, the God of my father Abraham, I will exalt him.*[840]

Commenting on the song of praise that Moses performed at the Red Sea Ephrem emphasises the following themes:

1. Soteriology, i.e. the idea that the Lord is the saviour and deliverer of Israel
2. Merits of the Fathers, i.e. addressing God as '*God of my father Abraham*'.

Ephrem specifically mentions that it is the Lord who is doing the job for Israel, not the calves that are to be made at a later stage. What is important for Ephrem at this stage is to highlight the essentials of the relationship between God and Israel at the glorious moment of their victory, and to hint at the future unfaithfulness of the people.

During the time of temptation and testing in the desert, Israel started to show signs of weakness, which led to their disloyalty to God. While facing the wilderness of the desert, people started to grumble about the lack of meat, so God gave them manna[841]. During the time of collection of the manna, Ephrem notes that the Israelites showed signs of division among themselves. Ephrem describes some people as being greedy and some as faithful[842]. This description of the division of the people in the desert is

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[839]*ExodCom*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.47.
[840]*ComExod*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.46, see Exod.15:2.
[841]*ComExod*16.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.50.
[842]*ComExod*16.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.50. The translation of Salvesen reads '*out of faith*' as it fits better the logic of the narrative. Tonneau suggests the alternative translation, i.e. '*out of laziness*'.

different from the description of the division when Israel sang praises to God at the Red Sea. Then, the people were divided into men's and women's choirs, but both choirs were united in singing and worshiping God[843]. That was a 'positive' division which characterised and highlighted the unity of the people as a nation in prayer and praise of God. However, in other texts, such as the one describing the manna experience, Ephrem presents a 'negative' division and separation among the people:

> The people grumbled about meat, and he gave them bread from heaven. So that they should gather sufficient food for the day and not worry about the next day; and because some in their greed took too much while others out of faith took too little, the measure itself made up inside it what was missing, and reduced any excessive amount.[844]

Ephrem here starts to show the signs of the change in the relationship between Israel and God. God changes His behaviour towards Israel by switching from total care, i.e. unlimited gifts and signs to Israel, to introducing Israel to various tasks and challenges. But the actual change in the relationship between Israel and God is initiated by Israel, as their faithfulness and loyalty to God grow weak. They start by groaning about meat, then they show signs of division among themselves, and later people stop merely grumbling and begin actually quarrelling[845]. The situation escalates when they start to doubt the existence of God among them:

> They said, "How can *the Lord be among us*? We cannot even slake our thirst in water," and he made them realise that the Lord was truly among them by the water that he made flow in front of the elders.[846]

Another example of 'negative' division within Israel is presented by Ephrem during the battle with Amalek. Ephrem describes that only the wicked among Israel were destroyed during that battle[847]. Unless Ephrem had great respect for the people of Israel, he would not have added these comments. According to Ephrem's commentaries the righteous ones among Israel were not harmed during the low points of the battle with Amalek, i.e. when Moses' hands were lowered. By making this point, Ephrem shows that he values Israel's chosen position in relation to God. He also describes the division among the people as between righteous and wicked. In the

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[843] *ComExod*15.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.49.
[844] *ComExod*16.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.50.
[845] *ComExod*17.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.51.
[846] *ComExod*17.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.51, see Exod.17:7.
[847] *ComExod*17.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.

episode with Amalek, Ephrem singles out the group of the wicked among Israel, i.e. those who groan against Moses and God. These wicked people among Israel, according to Ephrem, could be identified with the presumptuous nations in their disregard for the miracles and signs from God and in questioning His existence, singling themselves out among Israel and leading others astray from God[848].

The overall impression of Ephrem's presentation of the God-Israel relationship allows one to present Ephrem as an author who has a strong position with regard to the quality of that relationship. One could highlight the following stages of the development of that relationship in Ephrem's writings:

1. Based on the ancestral history people enter the initial Covenant of God with Abraham
2. People show trust in God's protection
3. There is constant affection and devotion on the part of God towards the people
4. Israel as a nation reaches the high point of its relationship with God during the time of the song of praise after the crossing of the Red Sea
5. God changes His behaviour towards the people by introducing the tests and challenges for Israel, which leads to division and quarrels among the people
6. The final episode of Israel's failure is the idol worship of the golden calf
7. From then on there is a general decline in the God-Israel relationship, which leads to the people not recognising Christ as their Saviour.

V.2.2 Ephrem's Presentation of the Moses-Jethro Relationship

Ephrem's illustration of the Moses-Jethro relationship deserves attention. It could be seen as another illustration of Ephrem's dependence on the Jewish tradition of exegesis. Ephrem writes that Moses bowed down to Jethro:

> *Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came*[849] *and Moses went out to meet him*[850]. When Moses was in exile he used to *bow down to him,* and he maintained this custom even after all these miracles had been performed through him.[851]

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[848]For more details see Chapter VI.
[849]Exod.18:6.
[850]Exod.18:7.
[851]*ExodCom*18.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.54.

This presentation of the Moses-Jethro relationship in Ephrem is similar to writings of rabbinical origin. *TgPsJ* describes the situation as follows:

> Moses went out *from beneath the clouds of glory* to meet his father-in-law bowed down and kissed him, *and made a proselyte of him.* Each asked about the other's welfare, and they came to the tent *of the academy.*[852]

Ephrem is most likely relying on Jewish tradition when he mentions that Moses converted Jethro:

> After he had bowed down to his father-in-law, he told him about the miracles that had happened through his agency, in order to convert him. In the forty years Moses had spent with him he had not converted him through words, but Jethro converted when he heard about the signs.[853]

Mekhilta states that Moses converted Jethro to Torah[854]. Also both *Mekhilta* and *TgPsJ* mention that Moses waited on people[855]. *TgPsJ* states:

> And Jethro, [Moses' father-in-law], took burnt offerings and sacrifices *of holy things before the Lord;* and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread before the *Lord* with Moses` father-in-law. *And Moses was standing and serving before them.*[856]

It is possible to assume that the presentation of the Moses-Jethro relationship in Ephrem's mind could reflect the situation between the chosen people of Israel and the conversion of the nations. Jethro, representing the nations, shows how someone converts just by hearing about the signs that God performed for His people. On the other hand, Israel, who had the pleasure of experiencing all these signs from God in their everyday life, still disregards them and forgets about the signs by taking them for granted.

V.2.3 The Use of Christian Symbolism in the Concept of the Merits of the Fathers

In this and the following parts of the work, the questions below will be discussed:

1. Why does Ephrem change his presentation in his *Commentary on Exodus* from a plain literal OT style of exegesis to Christian symbolic forms from a certain point onwards?

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[852]*TgPsJ* on Exod.18:7. McNam p.212. See also *MekRI* Exod.18:7 (II, p.174).
[853]*ExodCom*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.54 footnote 88.
[854]*MekRI*, Amalek 3 (II, p.174).
[855]*Mekhilta* Amalek 3 (II p.177); *TgPsJ* on Exod.18:12; see also Salvesen*ECE* p.54 footnote 87.
[856]*TgPsJ* on Exod.18:12. McNam p.213.

2. How does Ephrem reach the connection of Jesus through Moses with a concept of the Merits of the Fathers?
3. What is the significance of the Staff and the wood in Ephrem's commentaries and in Jewish exegesis?
4. What is the place of Jesus in the story of Israel according to Ephrem?

The answers to these questions will allow one to explore further Ephrem's perception of the nature of the God-Israel relationship, and to determine the extent to which Ephrem was aware of Jewish exegetical tradition with regard to the story of Moses and the concept of the Merits of the Fathers.

From a certain point in the commentaries on Exodus, i.e. after the events at the Red Sea, Ephrem starts to express Christian symbolism very openly, straightforwardly and plainly. For example, with Moses' staff Ephrem simply writes the following in addition to the verse of the Scripture:

> *Raise your staff*, which is the sign of the Cross.[857]

It is important to note that Ephrem's manner of interpretation with reference to Christian symbolism becomes much more obvious halfway through his commentaries on Exodus, i.e. from section XII onwards[858]. The question one has to ask is what makes that particular point in the OT narrative such a significant moment for Ephrem that he embarks on extensive use of Christian symbolism? Why would Ephrem start using (and in some instances actively promoting) Christian symbolism in his commentaries on Exodus from that point onwards? Thus, this study will investigate the narrative of Chapter XII of Ephrem's commentaries in order to highlight the significant ideas that lead Ephrem to change the style of his commentaries, from OT paraphrase to active emphasis on Christology.

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[857] *ComExod*14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.43, see also Exod.14:16.
[858] In *ComExod*2.1 there is a hint at the bush, the 'tree of Life' in Ephrem's commentaries, but it is not clearly Christocentric. However, from section XII onwards Ephrem uses plain and simple allusions, i.e. the Staff is the Cross etc.

V.2.3.1 The Connection between the Forefathers, Moses and Jesus in Ephrem's *Commentary on Exodus*

Ephrem does not merely establish the succession between Abraham and Moses. He uses this connection between the forefathers and Moses in order to bring the figure of Jesus into the picture. Ephrem uses the narrative of Exodus as an illustration of the birth of Christ. In Exod.12:2-7 God is described as the One who establishes a time-frame for Israel. Using this divine intervention in Israel's historical reality, Ephrem emphasises the connection between Exod.12 and Jesus' birth. The passage he presents is this:

> Now the lamb is the symbol of our Lord, who was conceived on the tenth of Nisan. For Zachariah was told on the tenth day of the seventh month that John was going to be born, and six months later[859], when the message was brought to Mary by the angel, was the tenth day of the first month.[860]

Ephrem plays on the use of the numbers in Exodus, i.e. 'the tenth day' and 'the first month'[861]. Then the author brings in the connection to the sacrificial lamb and Jesus[862]. That in itself is not unusual symbolism for the Christian fathers. What makes Ephrem's commentary stand out is the use of the rabbinic methodology of playing with the numbers ('*mishak misparim'*) in order to present the Christological argument. Ephrem uses all the numbers of Exodus, i.e. the tenth day and the first month. He also incorporates the number fourteen mentioned in Exodus[863], which is the date of the month when Israel was commanded to slaughter the sacrificial lamb. Ephrem uses this number to symbolically represent the sacrifice of Christ:

> So on the tenth when the lamb was confined, our Lord was conceived in the womb, and on the fourteenth when it was slain, the One it symbolised was crucified.[864]

By presenting the Christian symbolism of the Passover meal in such a detailed manner, Ephrem is connecting the divine intervention at the time of the Exodus with the divine revelation through Christ's Incarnation. Ephrem connects both events in the history of the people of Israel through his use of the numbers in Exod.12:2-7. Ephrem

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[859]The reference to Luke 1:26.
[860]*ComExod*12.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.39.
[861]Exod.12:2-3.
[862]*ComExod*12.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.39.
[863]Exod.12:6.
[864]*ComExod*12.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.39.

establishes the connection firstly through the use of numbers, and after that he deepens the connection through the symbolism of the Passover meal representing the birth of Christ. And finally, Ephrem affirms the soteriological aspects of both events in the history of Israel. As the Passover lamb was given to Israel in order to deliver the people from slavery in Egypt to salvation and freedom in the Promised Land, so the Incarnation of Christ was given to Israel in order for Israel to achieve spiritual renewal and salvation through baptism. All of this Ephrem draws up through the symbolic explanation of the Passover meal. Ephrem also does it as if he was giving his explanation to each herb and action in the manner of the Passover Haggadah[865]:

> As for the unleavened bread, with bitter herb that Scripture mentions, there is a sign of his renewal in the unleavened bread, and the bitter herb is because those who bear him suffer. "*Roasted*" is a symbol that he was baked with fire, "*with your loins girded and shoes on your feet*" symbolises the new discipleship that is ready to go out and preach the gospel. "*With your staffs in your hands*" are the crosses on their shoulders; "standing on their feet" because no- one partakes of the Living Body sitting down. "No foreigner *may eat of it*" because no one who is not baptised eats of the Body. "They shall not break *any of its bones*", because no one who is not baptised eats of the Body. "They shall not break any of its bones", since even though our Lord's hands and feet were pierced and his side wounded, none of his bones was broken.[866]

As mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis, there is a strong connection between the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of the circumcision[867]. Therefore, one can argue that in Judaism the understanding of the Passover is closely linked with the concept of the Merits of the Fathers[868]. It is possible to summarise, therefore, that all the elements of the Passover meal are explained by Ephrem in a rabbinic manner, but with the addition of Christian symbolism (i.e. Christocentrically).

Ephrem emphasises the soteriological aspects of Moses' mission by bringing the symbolism of Christ into the time frame of Moses, and thus brings the idea of salvation into the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. Emphasising the Christian significance of Moses, Ephrem transforms the scheme of the God-Moses-Israel relationship into a God-Christ (through Moses)-Israel relationship connecting the

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[865]Exod.12:8-9,11,43,46.
[866]*ComExod*12.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.39-41.
[867]See Chapter III Illustration V.
[868]*TgPsJ* on Exod.12:13 emphasises the merits of the blood of Passover sacrifice and the Covenant of the circumcision, and with this introduces the figure of Abraham as the first person to undergo the circumcision as the sign of God's Covenant.

figure of Christ to the Merits of the Fathers. The overall impression from Ephrem's commentaries in their discussion of the figures of Moses and Christ is that Ephrem views Christ as represented by Moses. On this basis, he introduces the connection between Jesus and the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Ephrem deduces this through the symbolism that he finds in the posture of Moses and in his staff.

Further on in the commentaries, describing the song of Moses, Ephrem highlights the connection between Abraham and Moses in a scriptural verse. He quotes Exod.15:2 in his commentaries:

> *This is my God, I will praise him, the God of my father Abraham, I will exalt him.*[869]

It is important to notice here that Abraham is not mentioned in the MT. Hence, mentioning his name must have a great significance for Ephrem. And straight after that, Ephrem chooses to quote another biblical verse:

> *The Lord is a mighty man and warrior,* because he fought for us against the Egyptians while we stood still.[870]

This choice of biblical verses is interesting. Using the first verse, Ephrem signifies the connection between Moses and the merits of the fathers, while the second verse could be read Christologically, as it highlights the 'humanity' of God, and brings in the idea of Incarnation. It is unlikely that Ephrem made a random choice in quoting these two verses together. He most probably wanted the reader's attention to be focused on Christ's presence at the Exodus. The overall perspective of Ephrem's commentaries suggests that the author wants to link the figure of Christ with the concept of the Merits of the Fathers, and thus bring His presence into the OT narrative by emphasising Christ's historical presence in the episode at the Red Sea.

Ephrem uses the symbolism of Moses representing Christ on several occasions when Moses raises his hands. Once Ephrem describes him doing so during the parting of the sea[871], and another time Moses symbolises Christ when he is standing and praying with his outstretched arms during the battle with Amalek[872]. In the story of the division of the sea, Ephrem describes Moses raising and lowering his hands over the

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[869] *ComExod*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.46, see Exod.15:2.
[870] *ComExod*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.46, see Exod.15:3.
[871] *ComExod*14.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.45.
[872] *ComExod*17.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.

sea. Although Ephrem mentions the Scripture, his description of Moses' encounter with the sea differs from MT and Peshitta. Ephrem writes:

> When the sea was divided, Scripture says "*Moses raised his hand over the sea*[873]. When it returned to its place, it says "Moses let his hand drop over the sea."[874] So it seems that from the time it was parted until the whole people had passed through, Moses kept his arm outstretched, just as he did later during the battle with Amalek.[875]

The verses of Peshitta in both instances mention that Moses kept his hands raised. However, Ephrem shows how Moses' hand movements affect the sea, i.e. he keeps the sea parted by raising his hands, and bring the sea down by lowering his hands over it. What could make Ephrem step away from the Peshitta text and illustrate the situation as he did? It could have something to do with the battle with Amalek that Ephrem establishes as a parallel event: Moses governed the sea with his hands in the same manner as he directed the battle with Amalek. The sign of Moses raising his hands is important for Ephrem, because it again emphasises the idea of Incarnation. Through the example of Moses stretching out his hands, Ephrem illustrates the idea that Christ-God became incarnate as a human being. Moses, the chosen one from God, in his posture symbolises Christ, also the chosen one from God. Therefore, in the two events mentioned, i.e. the parting of the sea and the battle with Amalek, Moses, according to Ephrem's interpretation, (a.) mediated God's power through his physical abilities, and (b.) symbolised Christ's Incarnation.

By using Christian symbolism for Moses and his attributes, i.e. the staff, Moses' posture etc. Ephrem puts the idea of Incarnation at the very centre of the Exodus narrative. Ephrem strongly stresses the symbolism of the Crucifixion when he writes that Moses represents '*the unmistakable sign of the Crucified One*'[876]. Moses' outstretched hands and his staff had been the subjects of various Jewish and Christian commentaries. Christian writings, i.e. those of Justin Martyr, the Epistle of Barnabas and other sources of the early Church, highlight the symbolism of the Cross symbolically represented by Moses and the Staff. Jewish commentaries, on the other hand, tend to play down the significance of the staff, while emphasising Moses'

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[873]Exod.14:21.
[874]Exod.14:27.
[875]*ComExod*14.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.45.
[876]*ComExod*17.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.

prayer[877]. *MekRI* and *TgPsJ* emphasise the fact that Moses relies on the merits of the fathers and on fasting during the battle with Amalek[878]. *TgPsJ* writes:

> Whenever Moses held up his hands in prayer, those of the house of Israel prevailed; but whenever he lowered his hands and ceased praying, those of the house of Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hand grew heavy, because he delayed the battle until the following day and was not zealous on that day for the liberation of Israel. So he was not able to hold them up in prayer. But because he wished to afflict himself, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; so his hands remained stretched out in faith, in prayer and (in) fasting until the setting of the sun.[879]

It is hard to determine to what extent Jewish and Christian commentaries were developed in relation to each other's respective perception of Moses' actions. It is possible to assume that Ephrem was aware of the Jewish commentaries, because he emphasises the Christian symbolism of Moses representing Christ again and again in those situations where Jewish commentators develop a strong tradition of alternative interpretation. In his *Hymns on Faith* he writes the following:

> Moses, too, who was victorious by the outstretching of his hands, was a symbol of the One who vanquished and was defeated by his hands... for a hidden power gained the victory through his arms, it was present in his arms in order to depict symbols. The prophet was victorious through the symbols of the Son.[880]

As mentioned earlier, in ascribing Christian symbolism to Moses, Ephrem continues the chain of succession of the fathers from Abraham via Moses to Christ, and thus he makes Christ the focal point of the history of the Merits of the Fathers. The concept of the Merits of the Fathers is central to the relationship between God and Israel; therefore Christ, according to Ephrem, becomes the essential figure in the history of Israel.

In order to analyse Ephrem's symbolic interpretations within the broader context, the following section will present how symbolism of the staff and the tree developed in Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation.

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[877] *MekRI* Exod 17:9, *Amalek*1 (II, p.142); *TgPsJ*17.11-13; *PRE*44 (347).
[878] *MekRI* Exod.17:12 (2, p.145), see also Salvesen*ECE* p.52, footnote 80.
[879] *TgPsJ* on Exod.17:11-13, see also McNam p.211.
[880] *HdF*20.8-11. Salvesen*ECE* p.52, footnote 80.

V.2.3.2 The Symbolism of the Staff and the Tree/Wood in Jewish and Christian Exegesis

Another Christocentric interpretation that Ephrem uses in his commentaries is the symbolism of the Staff as a sign of the Cross[881]. The relevance of this symbolism to the theme of this part of the work becomes clear when one compares early Jewish material on the symbolism of the Staff. The Jewish sources mention the names of the forefathers when interpreting the symbolism of the Staff. For example, *TgPsJ* mentions that the names of the Three Patriarchs of the World, the Six Matriarchs and the Twelve Tribes of Jacob were engraved on the staff:

> And Moses inclined his hands over the sea, *holding the great and glorious rod that had been created in the beginning, and on which the great and glorious Name was clearly inscribed, as well as the ten signs with which he had smitten the Egyptians, the three fathers of the world, the six matriarchs, and the twelve tribes of Jacob.* And *immediately,* the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all the night, and he turned the sea into dry land. And the waters were split *into twelve divisions, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Jacob.*[882]

PRE states also that '*the waters were made into twelve valleys, corresponding to the twelve tribes*'[883], and *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* mentions that the sea was divided into '*twelve parts*'[884]. This presents the succession from Adam to Joseph via Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and then to Jethro[885], and finally to Moses. The Jewish sources mentioned above very explicitly connect the symbolism of the Staff to the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. Ephrem's stark reference to the Cross might at first seem to disregard the broad and all-embracing interpretation of the *TgPsJ* and *PRE*.

When Ephrem states that the Staff is the sign of the Cross[886] he clearly emphasises the Christian symbolism, which is not a part of Jewish interpretation. This could be seen as Ephrem's personal addition to the depth of the exegetical commentaries of the

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[881] *ComExod*14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.43.
[882] *TgPsJ* on Exod.14:21. McNam p.201; see also Salvesen*ECE* p.43, footnote 64.
[883] *PRE*42 (330), *ARN* A33 (134), *DeutRab*11.10.
[884] *MekRI* Exod.14:16 (1, p.223) Lauterbach's edition states that the sea was divided into *two parts,* while other additions state *twelve parts,* e.g. Friedmann (Vienna, 1870) p.30a.
[885] *PRE*XL, see also Salvesen*ECE* p.43, footnote 64.
[886] *ComExod*14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.43.

Jewish sages that were in existence at the time[887]. But does Ephrem go against the Jewish tradition? One cannot consider Ephrem's interpretation in isolation from the Jewish commentaries mentioned above, because he embraces the tradition of Jewish commentaries, and then - additionally - he places the symbolism of Christ into the heart of it. Ephrem, in a sense, tops up the Jewish commentaries with Christian symbolism.

After the episode at the Red Sea, i.e. the song of praise, the nation of Israel is depicted by Ephrem as showing much less commitment in following their God. Ephrem in his commentaries presents the escalating situation of Israel's poor behaviour and lack of gratitude to God's presence in their lives. Section XVI of Ephrem's writing presents the instances when God tests Israel. The people do not meet the test well, and follow their initial grumbling with quarrelling. Ephrem writes:

> When they had crossed the sea, God wanted to test them by withholding water. *They complained angrily* about the water at Mauret, *and God showed Moses a tree.* He threw it *into the water and it became sweet.* The tree was a symbol of the Cross, by which the bitterness of the nations was going to be sweetened.[888]

This passage of Ephrem, if considered within the context of rabbinical writings, could be seen as a reaction to an alternative interpretation of Jewish origin. *MRSbY* mentions that God showed Moses a word from the Torah[889], and *TgN* presents a similar explanation:

> And he prayed before the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree, *and the Memra of the Lord took from it a word of the Law,* and he cast it into the midst of the water and the waters were made sweet. There he gave statutes and the orders of judgment, and there he tested him.[890]

TgPsJ states the following:

> So he prayed before the Lord, and the Lord showed him a *bitter oleander* tree. *He wrote the great and glorious name on it* and threw (it) into the water, and the water became sweet. There *the Memra of the Lord* enjoined on him the decree *of the Shabbat, the statute to honour (one's) father and mother,* the judgements *for wounds and blows, the penalties to be imposed on the guilty,* and there he tested him *with the tenth temptation.*[891]

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[887]The dating of the Jewish sources remains a problem. However, the existence of the oral tradition of the Biblical commentaries is no doubt much earlier than Ephrem's period.
[888]*ComExod*16.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.49, see Exod.15:23-25.
[889]*MRSbY*1:113-15 9 (p.104) ; *MekRI* on Exod.15:25 (2, p.92) (*Vayassa'* 1:109), 1:95-105.
[890]*TgN* on Exod.15:25. McNam p.69.
[891]*TgPsJ* on Exod.15:25.

Ephrem describes the situation when the people become divided, which results in them being aggressive to each other. The people are portrayed by Ephrem as being angry and complaining. Moses calms them down on this occasion by showing them a tree[892]. The symbolism of the tree/wood in Ephrem's commentaries is a clear reference to the Cross. There are plenty of Jewish interpretations to explain the situation of Moses and the people. *TgN* mentions the Torah as being symbolically represented by the tree, while *Mek RSbY* and *RI* state that it was the word of the Torah that was symbolically represented by the wood. *TgPsJ* mentions that the name of God was carried on the tree that Moses had thrown into the water.

Ephrem does not seem to contradict Jewish ways of interpretation. One may assume that he presents his own interpretation of the encounter by bringing into the picture the symbolism of the Cross. However, there is no evidence suggesting that Ephrem disregards the Jewish commentaries. On the contrary, from his writings it is possible to assume that Ephrem embraced the Jewish commentaries and added Christian symbolism to them. The ideas set forth in Jewish writings on the subject are not rejected by Ephrem's understanding. In fact, the reason for Ephrem being so forthright about the wood representing the Cross in fact lies in his knowledge of the variety of Jewish writings already commenting on the wood. His awareness of the Jewish commentaries becomes clearer through his own interpretations of the figure of Moses and the Staff. In order to highlight the most important aspect from the biblical story, Ephrem straightaway mentions the Cross, while leaving aside all the other interpretations brought out by Jewish commentators.

The overall impression from Ephrem's commentaries on the posture of Moses and on the Staff is that it is a deliberate choice, on Ephrem's part, to prioritise the Christian symbolism over any other interpretations that could have been made on the subject. Therefore, Ephrem's awareness of other commentaries using alternative symbolism is all the more evident through his persistent use of Christian symbolism.

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[892]Exod.17:1-2.

V.2.3.3 The Connection of Christ with the Story of Israel in Ephrem's Presentation

The vocation of the people of Israel in Ephrem's commentaries is seen as comparable to the vocation of Christ on earth. Ephrem mentions that after the high point of their relationship with God, i.e. the crossing of the Red Sea and the songs of praise, the people are tested. According to Ephrem, '*they had been tested at Mauret'*, and after they came into the wilderness of Sinai[893]. The symbolism of the desert as a place of temptation is closely associated with the NT narrative of Christ being tempted and tested in the desert after His baptism. The parallels in the stories of Israel and of Christ are significant, i.e. both had an encounter with water, which was a deeply uplifting and highly spiritual experience. After the encounter with water - baptism in the Jordan, in Christ's case, and crossing the Red Sea in Israel's, - both face testing and temptation in the desert. The outcomes of their being in the desert, according to Ephrem, are somewhat different. Christ comes from the desert ready for His earthly mission, while Israel becomes idolatrous at the foot of Mount Sinai. By establishing the connection between the stories of Israel and Christ, Ephrem emphasises Christ's presence in the midst of Israel during their time of Exodus[894].

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[893]*ComExod*16.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.50, see Exod.16:1.
[894]For further details on Ephrem's presentation of Israel see Chapter VI.

Conclusion

Ephrem links several ideas with the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. He looks at the notion through the prism of the God-Israel relationship. Within the historical context of God's first promise to Abraham, Ephrem builds up the chain of succession of God's chosen people, the forefathers of Israel, who contribute to the development of Israel as a nation. Moses is perceived by Ephrem as one of the forefathers of Israel. Moses adds to the merits of the fathers, and in a sense completes the succession from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, by fulfilling the Covenant of God with Abraham. Moses accomplishes the promise of God to the people by uniting them as a nation and bringing them from slavery to redemption. Ephrem presents the song of praise at the Red Sea as the focal point of the God-Israel relationship, because of the fact that the people were united in praising their God.

At the beginning of this chapter, it was asked why Ephrem introduced Christian symbolism so forcefully at a certain point in his commentaries on Exodus. The answer lies in the text of the commentaries. If one makes the effort to uncover the ideas as already highlighted and the emphasis of the commentaries from section XII onwards, then there are a number of points that Ephrem brings out. These include:

- Israel's deliverance from Egypt
- Israel's redemption from slavery
- Israel's salvation from the Egyptians as they followed recently-departed Hebrews in order to kill them
- The fulfilment of messianic expectations through the deliverance and redemption of Israel.

There are several attributes of Christ that correlate to the ideas that Ephrem emphasises in the text of Exodus. First of all is the idea of Christ as Messiah, the Deliverer and the Redeemer of Israel. Also, the idea of salvation that comes to the people through Christ can be seen as similar to the ideas of Exodus. Therefore, by starting to impose Christian symbolism from a particular point in the commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem wants to connect the OT narrative with the figure of Christ. It then becomes quite understandable why Ephrem's style of interpretation switches from

that of the neutral OT commentaries in the Chapters I to XII, to the openly Christocentric approach to the text of Exodus in the following chapters. Ephrem's idea is to portray Moses symbolising Christ at the time when Israel was experiencing the most powerful and redeeming events in their history, that of the crossing of the Red Sea and the victory in the battle with Amalek.

The motif of salvation becomes for Ephrem one of the essential trends in the relationship between God and Israel. Ephrem brings the idea of God's Incarnation right into the midst of the God-Moses-Israel relationship. Thus, through Moses Christ is seen potentially as a focal point of the forefathers' succession, and also as the key figure in the history of the people of Israel. Moses shows Christ to the people either by his personal deeds, as in his posture during the battle with Amalek, or through the symbolism of the Staff. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Ephrem's perception of the God-Israel relationship combines the following events:

1. God sent His chosen ones to Israel, i.e. the forefathers from Abraham to Moses
2. God brought the Incarnation of Christ right into the middle of the Exodus experience.

Ephrem emphasises divine providence in bringing the Incarnation of Christ into the OT context. Therefore, by not grasping the Christocentric symbolism that Moses shows to Israel, the people resist God's choice for them.

In the relationship of God with Israel the episode at the Red Sea is the crucial experience. After that point, the rise of Israel - in reaching closeness and intimacy with God - ceases. Neither Moses as a link to the fathers, nor the symbolism of Christ that he brings to the people, can make Israel fulfil the expectation of being the people, the only nation, chosen by God. Illustrating the point, Ephrem compares Israel's behaviour to the ways of the Egyptians resisting God and His servant Moses. Israel goes astray into disbelief and idolatry at Mount Sinai. In that sense the concept of the Merits of the Fathers finds its culmination in Moses, since under his leadership Israel reaches the highest point of her relationship with God. However, in spite of the encounter at the Red Sea, Israel rejects Christ as God's choice for Israel.

Ephrem's presentation of the story of Moses in his *Commentary* could be seen as his way of explaining the failure of Israel in following Christ. And the way Ephrem chooses to show it through the Exodus narrative is by portraying the figure of Moses:

1. as symbolically representing Christ
2. as the significant figure within the Jewish concept of the Merits of the Fathers.

Moses, in Ephrem's presentation, becomes the connecting figure between Jewish tradition and Christology. Therefore, Ephrem's depiction of Israel's rise and fall as a nation in Moses' time becomes a powerful illustration of the stages of the relationship between God and Israel. Ephrem starts the presentation of the God-Israel relationship in the Jewish fashion, within the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. Subsequently, Ephrem emphasises the presence of Christ as a focal point of that relationship. Therefore, Israel's rejection of God on the Mountain of Sinai, according to Ephrem, could also be seen as Israel's rejection of Christ.

The following chapter will further analyse Ephrem's presentation of Israel in his commentaries on Exodus.

Chapter VI: Ephrem Presenting Israel: The Ability of Israel to See God

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse Ephrem's interpretation of Israel as the people of God in Exodus' narrative. This study contributes to the overall argument of this thesis in analysing Ephrem's involvement with Jewish traditions, and defining the place in which Jewish exegesis fits into his writings.

In his commentaries on Genesis Ephrem does not mention Jacob's change of name[895]. He simply ignores this fact on both occasions of its appearance in the OT narrative[896]. Therefore, it is fundamental for this part of the work to examine the subjects that Ephrem does specify from the biblical narrative in relation to Israel, and to identify the matters on which he refrains from commenting. Commenting on Jacob's encounter with someone in Gen.32, Ephrem presents the story as follows:

> That night an angel appeared to [Jacob] and wrestled with him[897]. He both overcame the angel and was overcome by the angel so [Jacob] learned both how weak he was and how strong he was. He was weak when the angel touched the hollow of his thigh and it became dislocated[898], but he was strong, for *the angel said to him, "Let me go"*. It was to show how long they had been contending with each other that [the angel] said, *"Behold, the dawn is rising."*[899] Then Jacob sought to be blessed in order to make known that it was in love that they had laid hold of each other. Then the angel blessed him[900] to show that he was not angry that an earthly being had prevailed over him.[901]

There is a strong feeling from Ephrem's commentaries that he is deliberately not mentioning the two episodes of Jacob's change of name from Jacob to Israel, and also the fact of Israel seeing God face to face[902]. It is important, therefore, to ascertain the reasons for Ephrem's selective use of the Genesis narrative, and to present some answers to the following questions:

- What is Ephrem's attitude to Israel as a nation?
- What definitions of Israel do we find in Ephrem's writings?

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[895]Gen.32:28-30, 35:9-12.
[896]In *GenCom*30.3 Ephrem only mentions the fight of Jacob with an angel, while completely ignoring the verses of Gen.35:5-26 telling the story of Jacob's second encounter with God.
[897]Gen.32:22-24.
[898]Gen.32:25.
[899]Gen.32:26.
[900]Gen.32:26-29.
[901]*GenCom*30.3. FOC91, p.180-181.
[902]Gen.32:30.

- Does Ephrem agree with the presentation of Israel as 'the one who sees God'[903]?

This chapter deals directly with Ephrem's presentation of Israel in his commentaries. Certain themes are going to be further developed in order to understand Ephrem's position on the following notions in his writings:

- the notion of sight
- the notion of sign
- the notions of Mirror/reflection, Mind.

The presentation of Ephrem's point of view on these notions will help in answering the main question of this chapter, i.e. Ephrem's attitude to Israel as a nation and her relationship with God. Therefore, further thoughts will be presented at the end of the chapter with regard to the God-Israel relationship in Ephrem's writings.

VI.1 The Notion of Sight in Ephrem's Writings

In discussing the ability of Israel to see God, it is important to explore Ephrem's understanding of the notion of sight. In *Sermon on Our Lord* Ephrem raises questions concerning the inability of man to see God[904]. Commenting on Exod.33:20, Ephrem stresses two points. Firstly, he writes that '*eyes that have been fashioned and created cannot look at that essence*[905]*, which is neither fashioned nor created*'[906]. Secondly, he points out that in special cases, such as Moses being able to see God, God allows individuals to see Himself '*out of His great love*'[907].

Ephrem's statement that human eyes are not able to see God has to do with the fragile nature of human sight. Thus, God does not interfere with nature as a part of His creation[908] and withholds Himself from being seen. However, out of His love He permits Moses to see and Paul to hear by enabling them to acquire supernatural abilities. Ephrem writes:

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[903]The allusion here is to Gen.32:30, but with more general application to Israel as a nation.
[904]*DomNos*29.1.
[905]Exod.33:20.
[906]*DomNos*29.1. FOC91, p.304.
[907]*DomNos*29.1. FOC91, p.304.
[908]*DomNos*30.1. FOC91, p.305.

> Whenever anything is revealed to us that is greater than and beyond our nature, the strength of our nature is unable to endure in its presence. But if another power beyond our nature reinforces us, we are able to endure the presence of something extraordinary which we do not experience in nature, because what we receive is above and beyond nature.[909]

Exploring further the question of why most people are not able to see God, Ephrem writes that human eyes are not capable of doing so. God could not be seen by natural sight, as He is far greater and far too overwhelming for human eyes to endure. However, God gives supernatural ability to some so that they can experience His presence. This argument is illustrated by Ephrem through the stories of Moses and Paul. The key point of Ephrem's argument lies in the ability of humans to see God through their inner sight. This is a potential privilege for every human. However, the fact of free will allows people either to activate their inner sight and discover God's presence through it, or to shut down their inner sight and ignore God's existence. This argument closes the circle of Ephrem's claim concerning the ability of humans to see God. The actual ability of inner sight is there for people to exercise; however, it is either disabled or enabled by another human ability, free will. Concerning the relation of God to free will, Ephrem argues that God totally supports and respects the freedom of people. Ephrem explains his point as follows:

> After all, the Just One would have found fault with Himself if He had withheld freedom from humanity, and out of jealousy had denied a feeble creature the gift that made it great[910]. This is why in His goodness He gave (freedom) without hesitation, so that He could not justly find fault with Himself, even though slanderers, using His gift of freedom, unfairly find fault with Him.[911]

Ephrem mentions the mysterious ability of Moses to see without seeing[912]. In order to explain this, Ephrem gives a detailed graphical description of Moses' gaze:

> ...because frail eyes would not have been able to endure the overwhelming flood of its brilliance. This is why God, who out of love intended that the gaze of Moses be directed to the fair radiance of (His) glory, likewise out of love did not intend that the gaze of Moses be overwhelmed by the mighty rays of (His) majesty[913]... He saw in order to be uplifted, but he did not see so that he would not be harmed.[914]

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[909]*DomNos*31.1. FOC91, p.307.
[910]See *H.Parad*12.8, *H.Eccl*22.3.
[911]*DomNos*30.2. FOC91, p.306.
[912]*DomNos*29.3. FOC91, p.304.
[913]*DomNos*29.2. FOC91, p.304.
[914]*DomNos*29.3. FOC91, p.304, see Exod.33:17-23.

Ephrem demonstrates very carefully how God avoids harming the humanity of Moses by protecting his external sight from possible damage, and introduces here the inner ability of Moses to see God and to endure His presence in his life. Another ability that Moses possesses is his sensitivity to the teaching of God, which allows him to be uplifted and encouraged after experiencing the divine encounter.

Divine teaching was one of the components in uplifting or showing favour to Moses. Although Moses' eyes were open, he endured God's revelation through his inner eyes. Thus, only inner sight, according to Ephrem, could be the source of divine revelation. Thus, people either exercise their ability of inner sight, or make a choice not to use it in relation to God. As for Israel, Ephrem argues that their inner sight was closed. He adduces the examples of the miraculous signs granted by God to Moses and the Apostle Paul, which did not convince people to put their trust in them[915]. The reason that people did not put their trust in Moses and Paul could lie in their inability to open up their inner sight and see God through it. According to Ephrem, Israel chose the opposite path by practising paganism and idolatry[916].

VI.1.1 Natural and Inner Sight

In his commentaries on Exodus Ephrem often uses the verb 'to see' (ܚܙܐ). For example, he writes that '*Satan saw that the four hundred years decreed to Abraham were at an end*'[917] or '*Pharaoh too saw how numerous the people had become*'[918]. These two quotations are illustrative of how the verb 'to see' can be used in different contexts. In the case of Pharaoh, natural, physical sight was involved. Pharaoh saw with his own eyes that the number of Hebrews in Egypt was increased. The situation with Satan is different. Satan was aware of what had taken place between God and Abraham and he realized that it was coming to an end. Satan was exposed to inner spiritual knowledge of God's Covenant with Abraham and God's promise to him about his descendants. When Ephrem writes that Satan 'saw', he does not imply that it is the actual physical sight of Satan that is involved, but rather his inner sight, which

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[915] *DomNos*32.4. FOC91, p.308-309.
[916] *DomNos*5.3. FOC91, p.281.
[917] *ExodCom*1.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.11.
[918] *ExodCom*1.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.11-12.

resulted in his awareness of God's revelation in human history through God's promise to Abraham.

Further examples from Ephrem's commentaries on Exodus illustrate his understanding of natural sight and inner sight. Ephrem describes how Jochebed hid Moses when she '*saw that he was fair*'[919]. On the surface it seems that he is describing a scenario of natural vision, and the natural feelings of the mother for her baby. However, later on Ephrem develops further the understanding of Jochebed's sight. He writes that Miriam '*and her mother were trusting in God and the child's beauty*, so *that the first person to see the ark would take it out and save him*'[920]. In this statement the notion of seeing is connected to Miriam's and Jochebed's trust in God. These two entrusted the destiny of the child to God, and they also trusted that the sight that Moses presented would protect him. Ephrem particularly emphasizes the notion of sight when he describes how Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter. Instead of using the biblical verse of Exod.2:6, which reads in the Peshitta:

And she opened and saw the baby, and the baby cried.[921]	[922]ܘܦܬܚܬ ܘܚܙܬ ܠܛܠܝܐ ܘܗܐ ܛܠܝܐ ܒܟܝ

Ephrem quotes Exod.2:2 emphasizing the similarity in reaction of Pharaoh's daughter and Jochebed. The Peshitta text of Exodus reads:

And she saw that he was fair.	[923]ܘܚܙܬ ܕܛܒ ܗܘ ܒܪܐ

Ephrem in his commentary writes:

When she saw that the baby was fair.	[924]ܟܕ ܚܙܬ ܕܛܒ ܗܘ ܛܠܝܐ ܒܪ

This is exactly the same phrase that Ephrem uses for Jochebed when she saw that the baby was good-looking:

And the mother saw that he was fair.	[925]ܘܚܙܬ ܐܡܐ ܕܛܒ ܗܘ ܒܪܐ

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[919]*ExodCom*2.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.14.
[920]*ExodCom*2.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.15.
[921]All Peshitta translations are made by the author.
[922]Peshitta, Exod.2:6.
[923]Peshitta, Exod.2:2.
[924]*ExodCom*II.3. Tonneau p.126.
[925]*ExodCom*II.1. Tonneau p.125.

One may ask why Ephrem did this. What was the reason for Ephrem to contradict the biblical text? Could he be emphasizing the fact that Pharaoh's daughter looked at Moses and saw him in the same manner as Jochebed did? Both not only looked at him with their physical eyes, but engaged their inner sight as well. Therefore, logically Pharaoh's daughter mentions divine intervention when she finds Moses in the ark. She says that '*the gods of Egypt had provided her with the son through the river - for she was barren*'[926]. Pharaoh's daughter through her inner sight sees divine providence in Moses' appearance in her life. Thus, when Ephrem uses the same phrase describing her sight and the sight of Jochebed, he may be implying that both of the women formed their opinion of Moses by means of their inner sight.

Describing Pharaoh's sight, Ephrem writes: '*When he saw the river befouled with babies, he was glad, but when he saw Egypt teeming with Hebrews, he was gloomy*'[927]. Pharaoh's sight causes two opposite reactions. When he sees Hebrew babies cast into the river at his command he is happy, while he is sad when he realizes that - in spite of his determination to reduce the number of Hebrews in Egypt - they are increasing. Ephrem is possibly making an attempt to show that Pharaoh only relied on his natural sight, which at first gave him the impression that his plans were successful, but defeated him subsequently when he saw that the opposite was true.

Ephrem follows this up by showing how natural sight may evoke anxiety in people. He describes how the Hebrews turned away from God '*when the people saw that Moses was a long time coming down from the mountain* and *they pressed Aaron to make them gods who would go before them*'[928], because they were insecure: uncertain of Moses' return from the mountain. Another example concerns the Hebrews at the Red Sea using their physical sight and finding themselves in distress: '*When the Israelites saw the Egyptians, they were afraid*[929]*... wondering who would see to their families*'[930]. When the people were using their physical sight instead of their inner sight, what they saw evoked natural emotions, such as fear in this case. Moses expresses anger and distress after seeing the horror of the Israelites' idolatrous

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[926]*ExodCom*2.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.16.
[927]*ExodCom*1.5. Salvesen*ECE* p.14.
[928]*ExodCom*32.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.62.
[929] Exod.14:10.
[930]*ExodCom*14.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.42.

handiwork. According to Ephrem, '*when Moses saw the Calf and the cymbals, he broke the tablets*'[931].

From these passages one could conclude that Ephrem presents a twofold understanding of the use of sight. Natural sight reflects on physical reality. Hence, natural or physical sight causes natural feelings, such as joy or grief, as Pharaoh's example demonstrated; or fear, as in the example of Israelites. On the other hand, inner sight is able to reflect and appreciate divine reality. Thus, inner sight causes inner feelings, such as trust, belief, awe, etc. Miriam and Jochebed trusted in God when they looked at Moses, while Pharaoh's daughter acknowledged divine providence in her life through looking at the baby.

All of the above-mentioned people were using their sight to admit a certain reality. Those of them who were employing their inner sight were in touch with divine reality, while those using their natural sight were only reflecting the natural, physical cause of events. The next step after acknowledging divine reality is to take certain actions, according to Ephrem's commentaries. In the case of Miriam, Jochebed and Pharaoh's daughter, they accepted divine revelation in their lives and believed in it and obeyed it by putting their trust in the divine. Ephrem reports that Moses, for example, constantly experienced the sight of God, which made him totally obedient to Him. Moses, according to Ephrem's commentary, was granted the ability of seeing and experiencing the presence of God all the time. Ephrem presents Moses telling Zipporah:

> If you were so afraid of him in the single moment he was revealed to you, how much more should I fear God who appears to me at all times, and consecrate myself to him. He performs great deeds through me.[932]

The example presented below emphasises that, according to Ephrem, obedience is one of the required actions which follow the use of inner sight. This can be seen in the words that God spoke to Moses and to the people after they had crossed the Red Sea:

> "*You all saw what I did to the Egyptians*", meaning "the plagues that I brought upon them on the land and in the sea", "*and I carried you as on eagles' wings,* by the cloud that is leading

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[931] *ExodCom*32.8. Salvesen*ECE* p.66, see also Exod.32:19.
[932] *ExodCom*4.5. Salvesen*ECE* p.27.

> you, *and I brought you to myself,* to this mountain[933]. *Now, if you obey me, you will be dearer to me than all the nations,* in that I have chosen you alone out of all the races[934], *to be for me a kingdom and priests and a holy people".*[935]

Ephrem writes that originally people saw God's presence in their lives. After this experience of sight, the presentation of the Decalogue followed, illustrating how the Israelites were expected to obey God through trusting His word and following His commands.

VI.1.2 The Human Faculty of Inner Sight/ Inner Hearing

In the *DomNos* Ephrem notes two biblical examples of men, Moses and Paul, who were able to experience divine encounter. In both cases their sight was involved, but their ability to see God was different[936]. The difference lies in the notions of inner and external sight that Ephrem describes. Although with ordinary natural sight a human being cannot see God, the inner sight of human beings has this ability. In the case of Paul, there was a need to close down his outer sight in order for his inner sight to be activated. Thus, Ephrem writes that '*Paul's exterior eyes were kept closed, so that by the closing of his exterior eyes those within would be opened'*, while *'the exterior eyes of Moses radiated, because his interior eyes saw clearly'*[937].

In order to open up Paul's inner sight God uses Paul's ears. He allows Paul to listen to His voice without Paul's ears being harmed:

> But the voice did not harm his ears the way the light harmed his eyes. Why? So that he would hear, but not see. This is why the doors of hearing were opened with their key, the voice. But the doors of sight were closed shut by light, which opens them.[938]

In the case of Moses God chose to allow his eyes to see without seeing[939], while in the story of Paul God closed his eyes, but opened his ears in order that he could hear Him. In both cases the intention was to activate the inner sight in order for that person to engage in a divine encounter, and to be appointed to his ministry.

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[933]Exod.19:4.
[934]Exod.19:5.
[935]*ExodCom*19.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.55-56.
[936]*DomNos*30.1-32.4. FOC91, p.305-308.
[937]*DomNos*32.3, FOC91, p.308.
[938]*DomNos*32.1. FOC91, p.307.
[939]As I have mentioned above, in *DomNos*29.3 Ephrem writes: *'This is why Moses saw without seeing: he saw in order to be uplifted, but he did not see so that he would not be harmed'*. FOC91, p.304

As in the case of Moses' gaze, Ephrem again uses detailed and graphic constructions in order to explain the relationship between inner and outer sight. For example, Paul's inner eyes were closed, so God closed his outer eyes in order to open his inner eyes through his ears. Apparently, according to Ephrem, this was the only way that God was able to let Paul know that he was persecuting Him[940].

Ephrem also points out that through his inner sight Moses was able to see Christ:

> Even though the eyes of Moses were physical, like those of Paul, his interior eyes were Christian. For *"Moses wrote concerning me..."*[941]

Ephrem often brings the testimony of Christ into his writings. It is essential for him that Christian inner sight was an ability that humanity possessed even before the Incarnation took place in history. Thus, he mentions that Moses had a Christian inner sight[942]. Through this definition of Moses' inner sight, Ephrem builds up the argument of Israel's inability to see God. He writes that Israel disregarded all the signs from God shown either through Moses or through Paul:

> So, visible signs in no way helped the exterior eyes of the Jews: faith of the heart opened the eyes of the hearts of the nations.[943]

Ephrem here mentions Israel losing the ability to interpret the signs as a testimony of God's existence and care for them. Hence, he brings in the example of the nations who were able by means of faith to have the faculty of inner sight. The following section will develop the relationship between the notion of inner sight and the faith of the people.

VI.1.3 The Notion of Sight as Evoking Action

The example above demonstrated that, in Ephrem's presentation, the notion of sight often leads on to certain actions on the part of the 'seers', who are involved in the process of seeing and acknowledging the divine reality behind what they see. The following examples will illustrate that in Ephrem's commentaries the notion of sight could often be interpreted as representing a certain underlying reality. Ephrem often indicates that sight provokes further actions on the part of those who experience it.

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[940] *DomNos*32.2. FOC91, p.307-308.
[941] *DomNos*32.2, see also John5:46. FOC91, p.308.
[942] *DomNos*32.2. FOC91, p.308.
[943] *DomNos*32.3. FOC91, p.309.

When God said to Moses: '*I have indeed seen the bondage of my people... I have come down that through you I may release them to deliver them and bring them...*'[944], the implications are precisely those: God sees and God acts. God's sight meant release, deliverance for His people and further development of the situation, in that He offered to bring them to the land of the Canaanites[945]. In the same manner as God spoke to Moses, Ephrem writes:

> Moses returned to Midian and told his father-in-law that he would go and see his brethren in Egypt.[946]

The expression 'Go and see' ([947]ܙܠ ܘܚܙܝ), therefore, implied saving the people and delivering them from slavery and bringing them into the Promised Land. As God saw the Hebrews in order to save them, so Moses went to see the Hebrews in order to lead them to salvation. Hence, the notion of inner sight already includes the potentiality of salvation and redemption.

VI.2 The Relationship of the Mind and the Mirror with Inner Sight

Ephrem often uses the imagery of the Mind and the Mirror in order to describe the ability of people to awaken their inner sight. The Mind is an inner resource within human capabilities. Ephrem uses the image of a Mirror as a symbol of the Gospel and the inner consciousness of people. Thus, the Mirror carries both internal and external symbolism.

VI.2.1 The Role of the Mind

Reflecting on the role of the Mind in connection with the ability of seeing signs from God, Ephrem offers the following example. He writes that Israel deliberately made the choice not to follow Moses, but to go after the calf. He adds that the source of their decision was a proud Mind:

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[944]Salvesen*ECE* p.22-23.
[945]*ExodCom*3.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.23.
[946]*ExodCom* 4.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.25.
[947]Tonneau p.132.

> And so we have briefly demonstrated that when the mind is intent on a certain thing, but it meets with some contradiction, it forcibly manipulates it to open the door to whatever it wants.[948]

Ephrem often compares the unbelief and inability of Israel to see the signs from God with the person of Simon the Pharisee, '*a son of Israel*'[949], personalising the notion of Israel in one man who is not able to see Christ as God. Ephrem follows the NT imagery[950] when he compares Israel to a barren fig tree[951]. It is noteworthy that Israel's lack of belief in Moses and her later failure to believe in Jesus allow Ephrem to speak of one coherent strand in the character of Israel, who does <u>not</u> see. Thus, according to Ephrem, the inability of Israel to see the signs of God through Moses led to the idolatry and paganism of the people[952]. Bearing in mind Ephrem's argument about inner sight, one can assume that Ephrem denies the use of inner sight in Israel. As mentioned earlier, Moses himself had a faculty of Christian sight[953].

Ephrem explains further the inability of Israel to see Christ, emphasising that it is the 'proud mind' that does not allow Israel to see God. Ephrem further engages with the imagery of the proud mind in the *Letter to Publius*:

> At times even we when we were in error, mired in the pride of our mind as if with our feet in the mud, did not perceive our error because our soul was unable to see itself.[954]

It is worth mentioning that Ephrem uses two definitions of the Mind; the inner mind and the outer mind. He emphasises the notion of the inner mind, which is capable of seeing the soul. It is, therefore, the inner mind that informs the inner sight:

> Although we would look [into the mirror] each day, we would *grope around* in the dark *like blind men*[955] because our inner mind did not possess that which is necessary for discernment. Then, as if from a deep sleep, the mercy of the Most High, poured out like pure rain, was sprinkled on our drowsiness and from our sleep we were roused and boldly took up this mirror to see our self (our 'soul') in it.[956]

One can see that the Mind is perceived as a judge by Ephrem:

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[948]*DomNos*43.4. FOC91, p.319.
[949]*DomNos*42:3, see also *DomNos*42,43,44; *HdF*3:317-18. FOC91, p.273,281,292, see Luke7:36-50 .
[950]Matt.2:19f .
[951]*DomNos*47-48. FOC91, p.331-332.
[952]*DomNos*1.1, 5.3. FOC91, p.273, 281.
[953]*DomNos*32.3. FOC91, p.308.
[954]*LPub*11. FOC91, p.348.
[955]Deut.28:29, Isa.59:10.
[956]*LPub*11. FOC91, p.348.

> I believe the inner mind has been made judge and the law, for it is the embodiment of the figure of the law and itself is the figure of the Lord of the law'.[957]

And also:

> Perhaps, for the wicked, that which they see is Gehenna, and their separation is what burns them with their mind as a flame. That hidden judge who dwells in the discerning mind has spoken and there has become for them the judge of righteousness and he scourges them without mercy with torments for the compunction of their soul.[958]

According to Ephrem, Gehenna, or the notion of hell, is inside one's Mind: it is not something that exists externally, but rather a part of the inner being of the person. The inner mind separates the wicked from the righteous by bringing the imagery of Gehenna to the wicked.

We must now consider the notion of the Mirror that Ephrem employs. According to Ephrem, one can see similarities concerning the roles that both Mirror and Mind play in a person's inner life. Both effect division between the righteous and the wicked.

VI.2.2 The Role of the Mirror

Ephrem ascribes internal and external symbolism to the Mirror. The Mirror as a representation of the Gospel carries existential symbolism. That Mirror speaks to a person and brings revelations:

> That, then, which I saw in that living mirror that speaks, on which the images of all the deeds of men move – from Adam until the end of the world and from the resurrection until the day of the judgment of righteousness – and that which I heard from that blessed voice that could be heard from inside it...[959]

The '*voice heard from the inside*' represents divine revelation. The divine voice is reached by a person going to the depths of total silence and purity. The Mirror speaks of divine revelation and reveals total knowledge and wisdom. The revelation of this Mirror is available through the ability of inner hearing and sight. A person looking in the Mirror with inner sight receives divine revelation through inner hearing. Hence, in the Mirror '*the kingdom of Heaven is depicted and can be seen by those who have a pure eye*'[960].

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[957] *LPub*23. FOC91, p.354.
[958] *LPub*22. FOC91, p.354.
[959] *LPub*25. FOC91, p.355.
[960] *LPub*2.FOC91, p.339, *HdF* 67.8.

Ephrem also describes the Mirror as a reflection of human consciousness and as the judge, which brings internal symbolism to it. The righteous can see themselves in Paradise looking in the Mirror, while the wicked can only see the disturbing pictures of Gehenna[961]. The process of looking into the Mirror symbolically represents both the inner sight of the person, and the actual practice of looking inside oneself, searching for the inner being. The Mirror in that case is perceived as a tool for finding one's inner being. By looking at it people get the ability to see their imperfections and heal their souls:

> It rebukes the ugly ones for their defects so that they might heal themselves and remove the foulness from their faces. It exhorts the beautiful to watch over their beauty and even to increase their natural beauty with whatever ornaments they wish, lest they become sullied with dirt.[962]

Ephrem emphasizes the process of constant development, which is a goal of the ascetical life, the development further and higher, which is achieved through constant repentance. Hence, the Mirror in Ephrem's presentation leads a person to repentance:

> And when I saw these things in the bright mirror of the holy Gospel of my Lord, my soul became weak and my spirit was at an end and my body was bent down to the dust; my heart was filled with bitter groans that perhaps my stains might be made white by the washing of my tears… I took refuge in repentance and hid myself beneath humility and I said… [Psalm 51 is cited].[963]

There is a possible similarity to the Hesychast tradition that can be detected in Ephrem's writings. This is illustrated by the following passage from his *Letter to Publius*. It reveals the vision that Ephrem presents to his addressee:

> Everything that their eyes see causes them suffering, for when they reach out to the boundary of the chasm, they quickly pass over it and fly to the garden of Eden and hover over the Paradise of God[964] and see the blessed place of rest and are filled with desire for the banquet tables of the kingdom[965]. And they hear the sound of pure melodies combined with holy songs and intermingled with the praises of God. And as they stretch out they soar to heaven and the gates of the kingdom are opened. Before their Lord they hover with joy, sending only the sound of their mouths back and forth to each other. There the vision of their eyes is allowed to come and go, and on the two sides[966] it either grieves or gives joy so that when the good look

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[961]FOC91, p.336.
[962]*LPub*1. FOC91, p.338.
[963]*LPub*24. FOC91, p.355.
[964]*HdP*1.12,7.29.
[965]Luke22:30, see *HdP*2.5,7.24.
[966]*HdP*7.29.

> out upon the wicked their lot increases and they rejoice therein. But, as for the wicked, their souls are condemned and their distress is multiplied.[967]

The Mirror carries the active functions of rebuking and judging. Just as the Mind plays the role of judge and brings the imagery of Gehenna to the wicked, so also the Mirror reflects the consciousness of the individuals and envisions the righteous in Paradise and the wicked in Gehenna[968]. Therefore, consciousness, Mind and Mirror could be considered as the three elements of inner sight.

- There are commonalities in the roles played by the Mind and the Mirror:
- Mind enables inner sight, Mirror represents inner sight/consciousness
- Mind is the inner judge, Mirror judges the person reflecting the inner self
- Both Mirror and Mind create a division between the righteous and the wicked
- Mirror and Mind have a capacity to rebuke, while the ability of the Mind can be directed against inner sight (e.g. the proud mind prevents Israel from recognising the signs of God).

Note here that the division of the righteous and the wicked is perceived by Ephrem as a division within Israel. In his *Homily on our Lord* he writes about the unity of Israel that was lost after the curse:

> "*I will divide them in Jacob*[969]," that is, one against the other. For they did not possess, after the curse, the unity that they had before the curse. They had been united to such a degree that they did not even inform their (other) brothers when they went in to be avenged for the shame committed against Dinah. "I will divide them in Jacob," that is, among the descendants of Jacob, "and I will scatter them in Israel"[970], that is among the offspring of Israel.[971]

Apart from demonstrating the rabbinic way of commenting on biblical verses, whereby verses are derived from different parts of the Bible according to their relation to the subject matter (in this case, verses relating to the notion of division), Ephrem argues that Israel lost her ability to be a single body of people. This could further support Ephrem's argument that Israel is no longer the one who is able to recognize the signs that God surrounded her with. Hence, Israel is no longer the one who has the inner ability of seeing God.

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[967] *LPub*21. FOC91, p.353-354, see also *HdP*1.17.
[968] FOC91, p.337.
[969] Gen.49:7.
[970] Gen.49:7.
[971] *ComGen*42.2. FOC91, p.201-202.

VI.3 The Notion of the Mirror and the Reflection

Ephrem's use of the concept of Mirror and reflection is not as obvious in his commentaries on Exodus as in his hymns. However, knowing the importance of the Mirror and its symbolism for Ephrem, one should also be able to trace this idea in his biblical commentaries.

Ephrem mentions an angel as a reflection of God. Moses was able to see the angel reflecting God's appearance to him:

> When there appeared to him a sight too great for him to look at, he hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God in the same way he had looked at an angel.[972]

This vision Moses experienced at the burning bush. In the beginning, Moses confused the vision of God with the vision of the angel:

> Moses… saw an angel… in a bush. When Moses went to look more closely at the bush that was not being burned up in the fire, it was the ordinary likeness of an angel that was visible to him while he was approaching. When he got there it was not the angel he had seen, but God who called him.[973]

When Ephrem uses the phrase 'likeness of an angel', he implies that the vision of the angel was a reflection of the vision of God, and even a Mirror and the reflection of God. It is God who uses the appearance of an angel in the passage above to reveal Himself to Moses as through a reflection in a mirror.

Ephrem also uses symbolism as a reflection of the divine. Ephrem's commentaries on Exodus are very rich in the use of symbolism. He tries to introduce Christian symbolism through many signs and events presented in the biblical narrative. Ephrem presents the sacrificial Lamb as '*the symbol of our Lord*'[974]. According to Ephrem, the '*blood of the covenant*[975] *symbolized the Gospel that was given to all the nations through the killing of the Messiah*'[976]. The Tabernacle is considered by Ephrem as a reflection of the Church, '*the Heavenly Tabernacle*'[977]. Ephrem engages in symbolic interpretation of the events and signs in the Exodus narrative as archetypes and models of Christian signs and events. He uses the traditional Jewish way of explaining

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[972]*ComExod*3.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.22, see Exod.3:6.
[973]*ComExod*3.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.21-22.
[974]*ComExod*12.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.39.
[975]Exod.24:7-8.
[976]*ComExod*24.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.60.
[977]*ComExod*31.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.62.

the Passover meal and includes Christian symbolism in the narrative. Within the scenario of the Passover meal, Ephrem discovers a reflection of the Eucharist[978].

In his Exodus commentaries, Ephrem uses some events as a reflection of others. For example, on several occasions he refers to the killing of the first-born of the Egyptians as a reflection of the killings of the Hebrews:

1. First born of Egypt *and the first-born of cattle will die*[979]. *And there will be a wailing*[980] in the whole of Egypt as there was wailing in all the Hebrews' houses when their children were thrown into the river.[981]
2. Since the river had been filled with the first-born of the Hebrew women, the graves of Egypt were filled with the first-born of the Egyptian women.[982]
3. *The Hebrews saw the Egyptians lying dead on the sea shore*[983], as the Egyptians had seen the Hebrews' sons heaped on the river bank. Because of the things that had happened in Egypt and in the sea, the people *had faith in the Lord and in Moses his servant.*[984]

The first and second quotations simply present a connection between the two events, while the third quote implies that the signs opened up inner sight, and brought the people to faith. The people had faith, because of what they saw. The power of the signs will be discussed further later in this work.

Ephrem connects the refusal of Pharaoh to let the people go on a three-day journey to make sacrifice to the Lord[985] with the death of the Egyptians in the Red Sea:

> Since Pharaoh refused to allow this to take place, he and his troops marched for three days and became sacrifices to wild beasts and birds that settled on the drowned bodies lying in heaps on the sea shore.[986]

Hence, these two events reflect on the same idea of a three-day walk and sacrifice.

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[978]*ComExod*12.1-3. Salvesen*ECE* p.39-40, see also chapter III Illustration V.
[979]Exod.11:4.
[980]Exod.11:6.
[981]*ComExod*11.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.38.
[982]*ComExod*12.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.41.
[983]Exod.14:27-28.
[984]*ComExod*14.7. Salvesen*ECE* p.45, see also Exod.14:31.
[985]Exod.3:18.
[986]*ComExod*3.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.23.

VI.3.1 *Imitatio Dei*. Moses as the Mirror/ Reflection of God for Israel

Moses is presented by Ephrem as a follower of God who embodies God's intentions for His people. Being chosen by God, Moses in his actions mirrors God's ways. As previously mentioned, the notion of the inner sight of Moses is a reflection of God's sight, as it initiates salvation and redemption for the people. The next example shows how Moses through his faculty of inner sight was able to see injustice and to seek justice. When Moses '*saw two men fighting*'[987] he understood that '*the man who was saved from the Egyptian was unfairly treated, like the girls by the well*'[988]. Moses was able to see and assess the situations as unjust. and he made an attempt to restore justice in both situations, i.e. with both the Hebrew men and the girls by the well. Ephrem writes: '*He sat by the well and saw some lazy shepherds who wanted to snatch the water the girls had drawn. Out of his sense of justice he rescued the girls*'[989]. Why would Ephrem think that the sense of justice that Moses possessed came from God? It follows from his other commentaries, when he writes that '*the Lord's hand is on the throne of judgment that God establishes for Moses over the people*'[990]. As God was able to see and to judge the situation knowing what was unjust, so also did Moses - having being taught by God and chosen by Him.

Ephrem clearly explains these qualities of God when he comments on Exod.2:25. Ephrem states:

> *God saw the Israelites*, that they were in bondage, *and God knew*[991] *their pain*[992], and what kind of remedy he would bring them.[993]

Ephrem here shows that God sees and judges the situation through His sight. Moses also judges the people using his inner sight.

God desired redemption for Israel right from the outset. Ephrem demonstrates this by citing God's promise to Abraham four hundred years before Moses was born[994]. However, it is Moses who embodied God's desire and led the people to redemption.

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[987] Exod.2:13.
[988] *ComExod*2.5. Salvesen*ECE* p.18.
[989] *ComExod*2.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.19.
[990] *ComExod*17.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.53-54.
[991] Exod.2:25.
[992] Exod.3:7.
[993] *ComExod*2.9. Salvesen*ECE* p.21. See also Chapter IV.1.
[994] *ComExod*1.1-2. Salvesen*ECE* p.11.

God was the teacher and leader for Moses in the same manner as Moses was the teacher and leader for his people. Therefore, Moses could be presented as a mirror reflecting God for Israel. Ephrem demonstrates this idea in the following passage:

> *When the clerks saw the unhappy plight of the Israelites*[995], they complained to the Lord about Moses' family in front of Moses himself. Moses said to the Lord, "Ever since I spoke in your name to Pharaoh, the deliverance that the people had been expecting has not come, and their oppression is worse than it was before."[996]

In Ephrem's presentation, Moses sees the real cause of the complaint and delivers it to God. Moses is approaching God on behalf of His people, while for the people he speaks and acts on behalf of God. Ephrem connects God and Israel through Moses. The idea of Moses as people's mediator with God is of course popular in Jewish tradition[997].

Ephrem offers an understanding of Moses reflecting God even through his natural disability. Moses' physical weakness is transformed into strength, reflecting a divine likeness:

> His Lord said to him, "You are great in this very area where you are weak. Like God who is silent, you will have a prophet to speak for you. But I will be with your mouth[998]... in order that eminent deeds accompany stumbling speech."[999]

Silence is described as a category of the divine. Hence, meeting with God who is silent is possible in total silence.

According to Ephrem, God Himself chose Moses as an intercessor for his people. He writes:

> By revealing this to Moses God prepared him to intercede... he invited Moses to intercede... Therefore, he told Moses that he was going to destroy the people", so that Moses would pray to God for his people to be forgiven. And "the forgiveness would be important to them, and the intercessor dear to their hearts."[1000]

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[995]Exod.5:19.
[996]*ComExod*5.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.29.
[997]According to the *Assumption of Moses* (c. 7–30 C.E.), Moses was prepared from before the foundation of the world to be the mediator of God's covenant with his people (1:14; 3:12). *ExodRab*47.1 mentions that not only were the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and Haggada taught to Moses, but all interpretations that were destined to be propounded by future students were also revealed to him during the encounter with God on the Mount Sinai.
[998]Exod.4:12.
[999]*ComExod*4.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.25.
[1000]*ComExod*32.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.65.

God was preparing Moses to stand up for his people, and God also prepared the people to repent before Him for the calf. Hence, God taught Moses, while Moses carried God's teaching to his people. God teaches Moses and prepares him for his vocation in the same way that Moses prepares his people for their destiny. As Moses reassures his people through signs and through his leadership, so does God reassure Moses when Moses questions his own ability to communicate God's will to the people. Ephrem presents a constant dialogue between God and Moses, in which God encourages him. The following is a representation of the dialogue that Moses has with God in Ephrem's *Commentary:*

Moses to God about Pharaoh:

> What importance will he see in me that he should believe my words?[1001]

God to Moses about the people:

> You fear that they will not listen to you, but I tell you that they will obey you.'[1002]

God speaks to Moses about Pharaoh:

> I have told you that your people will listen to you: similarly, I tell you that Pharaoh will not listen to you, *not because of his mighty arm*[1003], nor because of the might of his tutelary idols, but because of the Egyptians' pride.[1004]

Aaron in Ephrem's commentaries admits that everything that the people had in terms of God's revelation came through Moses[1005]. Hence, Moses is clearly presented by Ephrem as the one who stands as a reflection of God before his people. On the one hand, Ephrem reflects the popular Jewish concept of *Imitatio Dei* in his presentation of Moses. On the other hand, Ephrem could be seen as developing the concept further into an understanding of Moses not so much as *Imitatio Dei,* but as a divine reflection, a mirror of God for his people.

[1001]*ComExod*3.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.23.
[1002]*ComExod*3.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.23, see Exod.3:8.
[1003]Exod.3:19.
[1004]*ComExod*3.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.23.
[1005]*ComExod*32.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.62.

VI.3.2 Pharaoh as the Mirror/Reflection of Israel

Ephrem could be seen as further developing the concept of certain biblical figures being an indirect mirror reflection of others. For example, Ephrem mirrors the story of Israel through the story of Pharaoh. Although he never directly exposes the comparison, it becomes obvious when one remembers Ephrem's comments in his hymns about Israel not being able to see God and turning away from God's ways. In this way, the comparison between Israel's acts and the acts of Pharaoh becomes clearer. Pharaoh in Ephrem's commentaries on Exodus may be seen as a reflection of Israel's future behaviour. Pharaoh is the one who is hard-hearted and has a proud mind. He shows his unbelief in God and in Moses as God's chosen one, and he also disregards the divine signs that God demonstrated for him through Moses. Ephrem ascribes similar actions to Israel in his hymns[1006].

Ephrem states clearly in his commentaries that Pharaoh did not listen to Moses '*because of Egyptian pride*'[1007]. The same reason - Israel's proud mind - turned the Israelites away from God and towards idolatry, according to Ephrem's writings[1008].

Ephrem implicitly allows for a comparison between Israel and Pharaoh when he describes both of them as being hard-hearted ([1009]ܩܫܝ ܠܒܐ). Ephrem speaks of Pharaoh's heart as being hardened on several occasions[1010], and emphasizes that Pharaoh's heart is hardened by his own free will. Ephrem supports his argument with biblical evidence:

> *And the Lord said*, not "I have hardened his heart" but "*Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he refuses to let the people go.*"[1011]

By allowing the same description to refer to the hearts of the people of Israel, Ephrem supports the comparison between Pharaoh and Israel:

> As Moses knew his people were hard-hearted.[1012] ([1013]ܩܫܝ ܠܒܐ)

[1006]See Chapters II.3.9, III.3, VI.2.1 for more details about the hard-heartedness of Israel.
[1007]*ComExod*3.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.23.
[1008]See Chapters I.2.4, III.3, VI.2.1, VI.3.2, VI.3.4 for Ephrem's references to Israel's proud mind/heart.
[1009]Tonneau p.131.
[1010]*ComExod*8.2;9.4;10.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.33,35,37.
[1011]*ComExod*7.1;10.5. Salvesen*ECE* p.30, 38, see Exod.7:14.
[1012]*ComExod*4.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.24.
[1013]Tonneau p.131.

A similar comparison is allowed by Ephrem when he writes, on separate occasions, that Pharaoh and the Hebrews disregarded the signs from God that either Moses demonstrated to the Pharaoh, or that God Himself revealed to the people:

About the people:

> Since they forgot the earlier signs they tested God by asking for the later ones.[1014]

About Pharaoh:

> *Behold, I am hardening the heart* – that is, I am not restraining the presumption – of the Egyptian, who though they see a fresh miracle, the Parting of the Sea, will not heed the warning.[1015]

The two quotations above demonstrate a similar response to the signs of God both by the people of Israel and by the Egyptians led by Pharaoh. In other words, the people and Pharaoh are alike in disregarding the signs shown to them by God.

Another passage illustrative of the connection between Pharaoh and Israel is when Ephrem explicitly mentions that the signs that God showed to Pharaoh were actually signs for Israel:

> Through him [Pharaoh] *I could perform signs* that would be recounted to your descendants.[1016]

Writing about the magicians Ephrem mentions:

> It is a deceitful heart that is set against God and is inconsistent with itself![1017]

Much inconsistency was shown by the Hebrews as they chose, alternately, to follow their God and to turn away from Him every so often after facing various difficulties. Basing the argument on the passages quoted above, it is possible to suppose that Ephrem allowed a comparison between Pharaoh's and Israel's behaviour. That is why, in his commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem often uses the figure of Pharaoh as a reflection / mirror image, or as an embodiment, of Israel[1018].

[1014] *ComExod* 17.1. Salvesen *ECE* p.51.
[1015] *ComExod* 14.3. Salvesen *ECE* p.43.
[1016] *ComExod* 10.1. Salvesen *ECE* p.36, see Exod.1:1.
[1017] *ComExod* 7:2. Salvesen *ECE* p.31.
[1018] A similar comparison of Israel to a single person may be found in Ephrem's hymns. See Ephrem's comparison of Israel with Simon the Pharisee in Chapter II.3.6.1, and VI.2.1.

VI.3.3 Symbols and Signs as Reflections of the Divine

Ephrem extensively uses symbols and signs as reflections of the divine presence in the world. In the commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem pays particular attention to the sign of the Cross. He is enthusiastic about showing the symbolism of the Cross in Moses' and Aaron's staff[1019], and also in the tree that God showed to Moses, which is referred to as '*a symbol of the Cross*'[1020]. In Moses' posture together with his staff Ephrem sees a reflection of Christ:

> The outstretching of Moses' hands and the staff that stood upright against his breast formed an unmistakable sign of the Crucified One.[1021]

This passage is significant as it presents Moses as a symbol of Christ, embodying His divine power and protection. As long as Moses through his posture represented the Cross and Christ, the people were successful; whereas '*when the people saw that he had let his arms fall, fear fell upon them*'[1022] and they began losing the battle. The sight of Moses symbolizing the Crucified One had an inner power, as it determined the victory of the people. Ephrem here connects the notion of sight with the power of the sign. As long as the people were able '*to see the sign*' of the Crucified One they were victorious. They needed to see the sign that Moses symbolized by his outstretched arms in the midst of their battle to be empowered by it. The sign that Moses represented encouraged people's faith in God. Overall, the importance of the sign of Moses for his people in that concrete moment of their history should not be underestimated. There is here a connection between Ephrem's commentary on the biblical passage and the Jewish one. The Mishnah suggests[1023] that when the people saw Moses' hands being raised they lifted their eyes to God in response to Moses' hands. And that was the main reason for them being victorious. R. Eliezer, commenting on the verse 'Go down'[1024], remarks: '*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "Moses, descend from thy greatness. Have I given to thee greatness except for the sake of Israel? And now Israel has sinned; then why do I want thee?"*'[1025].

[1019] *ComExod*7.4;14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.32,43.
[1020] *ComExod*16.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.49.
[1021] *ComExod*17.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.
[1022] *ComExod*17.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.
[1023] *Rosh Ha-ShanahH*3:8.
[1024] Exod.32:7.
[1025] *Berachot*32a.

It is important to highlight at this point that Ephrem in his presentation of Israel's battle with Amalek could be seen to be engaging with Jewish commentaries on the verse, and emphasising the Christian symbolism of the scene.

VI.3.4 The Power of Signs

The significance of signs is explained by Ephrem in differing ways. He writes about the use of signs by God in order to convince His people:

> God knew that he was asking for signs, and said to him, "So that they will believe that I am the one who sent you, *throw your staff on the ground*"[1026]... The sign God gave him to convince the people convinced him too.[1027]

Through signs God empowered Moses for his mission. In a similar way Moses performed signs to convince the people about himself and about God who had sent him.

In Ephrem's understanding, signs tend to have enormous significance for the faith of the people. The power of signs as such is perceived by Ephrem as an active testimony about God among the people. Ephrem writes that the sign of the Tablets of the Lord was meant to be an encouragement for people's faith. When Moses gave the people the Tablets, Ephrem saw the reason for this in the uplifting of people's faith:

> [Moses gave the people] *tablets inscribed by the finger of God*[1028] so that God's commandments would be precious in their eyes if only because God had written them.[1029]

The signs depict the presence of God. As a reflection in a mirror depicts the image of the object, so do the signs reflect divine reality. The tablets are the sign of the divine by representing on the physical level God's participation in the lives of His people. Ephrem uses the biblical imagery of the finger of God inscribing the commandments on the tablets in order to create a bridge between physical reality and divine providence. The sign of the tablets is a reflection and a mirror of God's involvement

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[1026]Exod.4:3.
[1027]*ComExod*4.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.24.
[1028] Exod.31:18.
[1029]*ComExod*24.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.61.

with His people. What is important for Ephrem in the passage is that the tablets are a sign reflecting God's care and commitment.

Signs also serve the purpose of warning. For example, Ephrem explains all the signs of Moses to Pharaoh as a warning in anticipation of the deaths of the first-born in Egypt[1030]. He specifically mentions that the fish, during the turning of water into blood, were meant to die instead of the first-born[1031].

When the people disregarded the signs, it resulted in their idolatrous behaviour. Ephrem writes that one of the reasons the Hebrews turned to false gods lies in their lack of appreciation of the signs that God showed them, i.e. the manna, quails, pillar and the cloud. They were so concerned about Moses spending a long time on the mountain, that they were not convinced any more by the signs that had come to them through Moses[1032]. Pharaoh deliberately did not want to see the signs, as he did not want to forego his own plans and let the Hebrews go. Instead, he acted out of pride and wilfulness and questioned God's existence. According to Ephrem, Pharaoh had heard about the signs that Moses performed in front of the elders, but he deliberately chose not to see them. He did not want to recognise God, so that he could still behave as he wished[1033].

Signs are used by Ephrem to depict and reflect on particularly significant moments, as if in a mirror. Ephrem regards signs as useful for the future generations of Israel, and for creating significant memories for the people. Hence, the sign of the burning bush serves this purpose for Israel:

> The bush that was of no use for making an image of dead gods was able to symbolize the Living God. Moses, this is the sign for you that you have seen the God who dwells in the midst of fire! In the same way, you[1034] must serve with fire the God who dwells in fire.[1035]

In this passage the notion of *Imitatio Dei* is applied not only to Moses, but to the rest of the people throughout future generations. Although God spoke specifically to

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[1030]*ComExod*6.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.30.
[1031]*ComExod*7.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.31.
[1032]*ComExod*32.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.62.
[1033]*ComExod*5.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.28-29.
[1034]The verb is used in the plural form.
[1035]*ComExod*3.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.22.

Moses from the bush, Ephrem presents the biblical verse as if God had spoken to the whole of Israel through Moses. Hence, because of the plural form of the expression that Ephrem uses (*you must serve),* it becomes clear that Ephrem's concerns are with Israel. Although Moses was the only one who had the vision of God in the fire, it is implied that through him this vision was passed on to all the people. Hence, the whole of Israel through the sign of the burning bush received the vision of God. The sign of this vision, the burning bush, according to Ephrem's writings, is the symbol of the 'Living God', which could mean that the vision continues as long as people recognize the sign and follow it by serving God. The vision is depicted by the sign, which is also a reminder and reflection of the need to serve God. The passage could signify that Ephrem supports the idea of Israel receiving the vision of God directly through Moses from the episode of the burning bush.

Apart from being the reflection of the divine presence among the people, the signs also serve as a testimony about God to unbelievers. Through the signs that Moses performed in front of Pharaoh, Egyptian magicians saw the '*finger of God*'[1036] on Moses. They were able to see the divine power of Moses through their art of magic. Also Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was converted through the signs. Ephrem writes:

> In the forty years that Moses had spent with him, he had not converted him through words, but Jethro was converted when he heard about the signs.[1037]

Ephrem demonstrates the power of signs when he says that Jethro did not even have to see the signs. He was converted only by hearing about the signs that Moses performed. By performing the signs among the elders of Israel, Moses was able to assure them of his divine vocation:

> The two of them [Moses and Aaron] gathered the elders and performed the signs[1038] in front of them as commanded, and they believed Moses, just as the Lord told him.[1039]

The signs serve the purpose of building a bridge between physical and inner sight. Signs activate the inner sight and enable people to see and recognize divine reality and so eventually to transform their physical sight into spiritual/inner sight.

[1036]*ComExod*8.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.33.
[1037]*ComExod*18.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.54.
[1038]Exod.4:30.
[1039]*ComExod*4.6. Salvesen*ECE* p.28.

VI.4 A Definition of Israel as the 'One Who Sees God' in Ephrem's Exegetical Commentaries

Ephrem does not explicitly support the idea of Israel's ability to see God. However, the tendency of Ephrem's argument regarding Israel's ability to see or not to see may be traced through his commentaries. For example, Ephrem writes that Israel as a people is not able to see the divine radiance of Moses:

> Just as Israel, without a veil, was unable to look upon the face of Moses[1040], neither were the animals able to look upon the splendor of Adam and Eve[1041]; when the beasts passed before Adam and they received their names from him, they would cast their eyes downwards, for their eyes could not endure Adam's glory.[1042]

This statement implies that the Israelites failed to open up their inner sight, and so were unable to see God's presence in Moses.

This part of the work will gather together some considerations about the notion of sight and the definition of Israel in the writings of Ephrem. Firstly, Ephrem argues that Israel could not see God after rebelling against Moses and worshipping the calf[1043]. This definition of Ephrem's stands in absolute contradiction to the definition of Israel as 'the one who sees God'. Ephrem mentions that Israel lacks the faculty of inner sight in the same manner as the animals in Eden. As the beasts in Eden turned away their eyes from Adam, not possessing the faculty of inner sight, so did Israel turn away its sight from God. Ephrem goes on to lament and grieve about Israel losing her zeal for God and her purity of devotion and pious life:

> Be alarmed by this your seal, and consider where all the children of Adam are… Rouse yourself from this deep sleep that is enfeebling you and that is spreading over all your limbs like a shadow of death. Rise, then, and bring yourself back to those former generations about which you have heard.[1044]

What is noticeable in the above passage is the fact that Ephrem does not deny outright the ability of Israel to see God, but rather laments the loss of this ability by the following generations. In addition, the fact that Ephrem deliberately does not present any comment on the story of Jacob's change of name, which was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, could allow one to assume that he did not do so as a matter

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[1040]Exod.34:33-35.
[1041]Literally '*the house of Adam*'.
[1042]*ComGen*14.2. FOC91, p.107.
[1043]*ComExod*6.1; *DomNos*43.4. FOC91, p.281, 319.
[1044]*LPub*17. FOC91, p.351.

of disagreement with the definition of Israel as 'the one who sees God'. Therefore, Ephrem's argument about Israel's ability to see God fluctuates depending on what timeframe he is referring to. Ephrem uses a method of selective commentary on Scripture, and intentionally avoids those parts that do not support his argument[1045]. Hence, the fact that Ephrem does not comment on Genesis 32 and 35 allows one to assume that he decided to pass them over as contradicting his argument.

In his commentaries on Exodus, however, Ephrem twice mentions occasions when Israel was able to see God. Firstly Ephrem reveals that selected groups of people close to Moses saw God:

> Moses and his relatives and seventy of the elders went up, and they saw God.[1046]

Although Ephrem does not explicitly say that the whole of Israel saw God, his use of the number seventy – the count of the people that saw God - could imply the totality of the vision for Israel[1047]. In the following extract, Ephrem mentions another occasion when the vision of God was beheld by the whole of Israel:

> And the whole house of Israel saw the glory of the Lord.[1048]

When Israel saw God, their inner sight was open and active, which allowed the people to enter into a close relationship with God through following His Covenant and obeying His commandments. Thus, at a certain time in Israel's history, according to Ephrem's writings, the people were able to see God and they acted with faith in God as the result of their seeing. By showing that there was a time when Israel was able to see God, Ephrem can explore, further on in the narrative, the tragedy of Israel losing the ability of capturing the sight of God. Thus, in the commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem acknowledges the ability of Israel to see God.

However, there is a sense in Ephrem's writings that for Israel the ability to see God did not last long, because the people rejected God on Mount Sinai, and they never really recovered from their loss of faith. Even so, Ephrem does not reject the fact that

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[1045]See Chapter II.3 for more examples of how Ephrem deals with the scriptural narrative with regard to his argument.
[1046]*ComExod*24.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.60, see Exod.24:9-10.
[1047]On the significance of the numbers see Chapter IV.2.
[1048]*ComExod*24.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.61, see Exod.24:13-17.

Israel is the chosen nation that is meant to see God. This is what Israel ought to do, but the people do not live up to these high expectations. Therefore, Ephrem's definition of Israel as 'the one who sees God' remains a potential goal for the people, which they have currently lost.

Summary

The overall impression from Ephrem's writings with regard to his description of Israel as a nation allows one to present the following conclusions:

- Whilst acknowledging the fact that human eyes are not able to see God, Ephrem allows a number of exceptional cases when God permits individuals, e.g. Moses and Paul, and even the whole nation of Israel to see Himself. The major characteristic of such cases is that God reveals Himself to the chosen people as a sign of His love.

- Ephrem develops the idea of the human capacity for seeing God by arguing that all people are able to see God through their inner ability or inner seeing. The exercise of this ability, however, becomes a matter of free choice for people.

- With regard to Israel's ability to see God, Ephrem reflects on two alternative possibilities:
    1. Israel sees God in the moments of the people's total trust and acceptance of God's providence
    2. Israel is unable to see God as a consequence of the people's idolatrous behaviour at the Mount Sinai.

These illustrations show that Ephrem's perception of Israel as the chosen people is in dynamic relation to their relationship with God. On the one hand, Ephrem admits to the reality of the very special place of Israel as a chosen nation, while on the other hand, Ephrem points to Israel's failures in this relationship. Ephrem presents trust and respect as essential principles of the God-Israel relationship; the total trust of the people in their God, and respect for Israel's free choice and free will by God.

The very nature of the God-Israel relationship is dynamic. It requires, from the two parties involved, constant work and effort in maintaining the living and functional relationship. God is consistent in His loyalty to and care for the people. His election of the chosen people remains unchanging. However, it is the people who, by worshiping other gods, turn away from the relationship and fail to keep it going. The following table presents the elements of the God-Israel relationship:

Israel	**God**
Actions taken in this relationship	
Decline the relationship	Develop the relationship
Features/steps of the God-Israel relationship	
	Loyalty
	Consistency
Reliance: Trust in God's words; Faith	Protection
Obedience: Following God's commands; Worship	Guidance; Care

It is important to highlight that the God-Israel relationship consists of both common and individual features. It is also important to notice that Israel refused the development of the relationship by breaking the requirements involved in every step of this relationship. God gave signs of His presence amongst His people so that the people would follow Him. Israel, on the contrary, disregarded God's signs, worshipped other gods, and broke the commandments. This gradually led to the people losing their trust in God.

Because Israel is responsible for the breakdown of the relationship, it is up to her to restore it. According to Ephrem, the people do not make the effort to mend the break; however, the possibility of reverting to the initial relationship is there:

- The doors of repentance are always open
- The choice of God, like the promise of God, never changes.

Thus, Israel remains the chosen nation even during the time of their decline, which, however, severely damages their relationship with God.

Ephrem presents the nature of the God-Israel relationship as active. There are acts from both sides of the relationship. Therefore it is illustrative to consider the dynamics of these acts:

God: challenges, pushes people to further development, seeking to deepen the relationship.

People: turn away from God, worship idols, look back to the times of slavery in Egypt.

There is another important aspect that Ephrem introduces to the description of the God-Israel relationship: namely, the figure of Christ. However, the presence of Christ in the God-Israel relationship is something yet to be accepted by the people. Ephrem in his writings describes the presence of Christ in the Moses-God relationship, and also in the Paul-God relationship, while Israel as a nation is not able to accept Christ as a part of their relationship with God. This for Ephrem is the most tragic consequence of the decline in the God-Israel relationship.

God's care for His people, for humanity, and for the whole creation is consistent and does not decline despite the fact that Israel as His people, through their deeds, reject the choice of performing God's tasks. Ephrem introduces new dimensions in the God-Israel relationship:

- The Christ-Israel relationship
- The Gentile-Israel relationship.

The Christ-Israel relationship has not happened yet, while the Gentile-Israel relationship has developed through other nations accepting Christ. The important aspect of the Gentile-Israel relationship is that the Gentiles do not replace Israel in her relationship with God, because Israel has not yet discovered her relationship with Christ. Therefore, the criticism of Israel in Ephrem's writings cannot be taken as a denial of her position in the God-Israel relationship, but as the expression of concern for the damaging nature of Israel's acts in that relationship, in which the major harm stems from the fact that Israel does not see Christ in that relationship.

When Gentiles step into the relationship with Christ they do not replace Israel, but expand the nature of the God-Israel relationship. On God's side there is an acceptance of Gentiles into the relationship, while on Israel's side there is an expectation of Israel

to join the Christ-Israel relationship. It is possible to assume that initially Israel was supposed to lead the relationship between nations and God. However, in reality the relationship of Israel and Christ is delayed by the people of Israel.

Ephrem's writings are full of allusions to Christ's presence in Israel's history. Christ's presence is clearly marked during the time of Moses, while His presence is assumed elsewhere in OT history. The God-Israel relationship is created by God's choice, while the Christ-Israel relationship ought to be initiated by the people. Hence, it is possible to illustrate the latter as follows:

<u>The dynamics of Christ-people relationship:</u>

a. total rejection as in the case of Israel
b. acceptance and entering the relationship by the Gentiles

As an illustration of the final point in Ephrem's presentation of Israel in his writings, I would like to summarise the idea of reflection. In talking about the Mirror and reflection Ephrem presents the following analogies:

- The Angel as a reflection of God (in God's appearance to Moses)
- The reflection of Christ through symbols (Paschal Lamb)/ signs and symbols as a reflection of the divine: Signs depict the presence of God as in a mirror
- The reflection of one event by another (the killing of the first-born of the Egyptians is a reflection of the killings of the first-born of the Hebrews)
- Moses reflects God for Israel/ Moses as a symbol of Christ.

The examples presented above almost entail the introduction of the following possibility:

- Israel as a reflection of God to the nations

or even a further notion of Israel as a New Adam living in harmony with God and taking care of His creation. Instead, Israel behaves as an Old Adam in failing God. Therefore, we find these comparisons in Ephrem:

- Pharaoh as a reflection of Israel
- Egypt as a reflection of Israel's failure.

The following excursus will further illustrate reasons for Ephrem not emphasising the 'positive' possibility of Israel as a reflection of God to the rest of humanity, and even to the creation as a whole, while presenting the 'negative' reality of Israel's failure as reflected in Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

VI.5 A Presentation of the God-Israel Relationship in Ephrem's Commentaries: Further Considerations

Ephrem emphasises the exclusive relationship that Israel has with God. His additional commentary on Moses' song of praise is a good illustration of this. Moses' words according to the Bible were '*The Lord will reign over us forever*'[1049], and Ephrem adds to this '*and not other nations*'[1050]. Why would Ephrem make such an exclusive remark? Does he really believe in it himself? Ephrem without any doubt admits to the divine choice of the people of Israel. Thus, Ephrem adds this remark, confirming the exclusive and privileged relationship that Israel is destined to have with God, at the time of Moses singing the song of praise at the Red Sea. Therefore, in his commentaries Ephrem calls Israel '*the People*'[1051], while all other nations he styles differently.

According to Ephrem there is only one Israel, the people who have been chosen to enter into a unique relationship with God, i.e. a relationship of intimacy, loyalty, trust and obedience, a relationship of inexhaustible potential, through God's constant initiative on behalf of His people. By His mercy, God protects Israel from other nations and delivers the people from oppression and slavery. And it is God with the help of Moses who brings the people to this relationship. Through the efforts of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the people were led to the highest point of their relationship with God, i.e. at the Red Sea. Moses, following the merits of the fathers, brings the people to that point. Hence, Moses fulfils the mission of the

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[1049]Exod.15:18.
[1050]*ComExod*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.48.
[1051]*ComExod*15.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.49.

forefathers, or at least brings it to its logical conclusion by bringing the people out of Egypt and towards the Promised Land[1052].

VI.5.1 The Egypt-Israel Relationship in Ephrem's Presentation

This part of the work further analyses the thoughts mentioned earlier, regarding the relationship between Pharaoh and Israel, which is close to the symbolism of the relationship between Egypt and Israel. This comparison shows Ephrem's preoccupation with giving as much attention as possible to the development of the definition of the God-Israel relationship in his exegetical commentaries.

Commenting on Exod.14, Ephrem examines the testimony of the Egyptians to the relationship between God and Israel. In order to illustrate the Egyptians' testimony to that relationship[1053] Ephrem brings together two verses of Exodus, 14:18-19 and 14:25, a move which highlight a scriptural connection between the death of the Egyptians and the testimony of God's close relationship with His people. It is important to notice that the testimony of the Egyptians comes just before their death in the Red Sea. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask the question: To whom is their testimony addressed? Do they testify to the remaining Egyptians? No, because there is no one to pass on this testimony to the others, as all of the Egyptians die there and then. The only remaining witnesses of the event are the Israelites. Therefore, the testimony of the Egyptians is in fact brought in to reassure the Israelites. Ephrem uses the testimony of a third party, the testimony of the enemies and oppressors of Israel, in order to convince Israel that '*the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt*'[1054]. What Ephrem is doing is similar to the presentation of the Midrash Rabbah, where the episode of the dialogue with the 'minim' is located. The writers of the Midrash were using the testimony of the Gentiles as the testimony of outsiders in order to demonstrate the closeness of the relationship between God and Israel[1055].

[1052]See Chapter V.2.
[1053]*ComExod*14.3. Salvesen*ECE* p.43.
[1054]Exod.14:25.
[1055]There is an example in the Midrash where the evidence of God's special relationship with Israel is supported by Gentiles: *DeutRab*II.16.Other references to 'minim' in Jewish sources: *DeutRab*II.13, *GenRab*VIII.9, b.Talmud *San*.38b, y.Talmud *Ber*.IX,12d,13a. For further analysis of the use of 'minim' in rabbinic literature see Simon, M., *Verus Israel*, trans. H., McKeating, The Littman Library (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.181-187.

Following on the rabbinic practice of illustrating the relationship between God and Israel through the witness of a third party, Ephrem brings in the testimony of the nations as confirmation of God's mercy to Israel:

> By your grace you led with the cloud and pillar this people that you redeemed from Egypt[1056].
> *The nations heard*, meaning that the Amorites heard about the river that turned to blood, *and trembled*...[1057]

In the passage above, Ephrem mentions the idea of the redemption of the people. His perception of Israel here is as God's people. The fact of God's particular care and affection for Israel becomes evident to the nations. Hence, the nations testify to the God-Israel relationship and fear this people who have God, the Saviour, on their side. Ephrem uses ideas, similar to those in the Jewish sources, of God making an extra effort to bring Israel closer to Himself, and to encourage His people[1058]. Ephrem emphasises God's concern to help the people, and highlights the fact that God is fighting on their side. Discussing the scene of Exod.14:19, Ephrem writes the following: '*this happened to frighten the Egyptians and to encourage the Hebrews*'[1059]. Ephrem agrees with the interpretation of the Targumim and the Jewish Greek translator Symmachus[1060] commenting on the difficult Hebrew verse of Exod.14:19.

Ephrem highlights the beauty of the relationship between Israel and God while describing the Exodus experience of the people. However, he also introduces hints about the future failure of Israel with the golden calf. Ephrem illustrates the break in the relationship between Israel and God by describing how the Egyptians and Pharaoh relate to God and to Moses. For example, in the episode describing the Egyptians in the Red Sea there is a strong possibility that Ephrem is predicting the Israelites' future while describing the behaviour of the Egyptians:

> At *the morning watch* the Lord appeared to the Egyptians and *threw them into confusion, and bound the wheels of their chariots*[1061]... but they were not afraid of the Lord *who appeared to*

[1056] Exod.15:13.
[1057] *ComExod*15.1. Salvesen*ECE* p.48.
[1058] See *ExodRab* commentaries on Exod.2:25 in Chapter IV.1.4.
[1059] *ComExod*14.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.44.
[1060] See reference to Jewish sources in Salvesen*ECE* p.44, footnote 65.
[1061] Exod.14:24-25.

> *them*, nor were they chastened by the binding of their wheels: they dared to drive their chariots *by force.*[1062]

Looking closely at how Ephrem uses the biblical quotations and how he inserts his commentaries, one can presume that he is not only talking about Egypt. The whole passage may be seen as a warning sign to Israel about their future betrayal of God by means of the golden calf. In the above passage Ephrem graphically presents the story of the relationship between Israel and God; first, God appears to the people, and then the people rebel in spite of all the signs and actions that God shows them[1063].

Ephrem uses the example of the Egyptians:

- as a living testimony of the might of God and His support of Israel
- in order to illustrate the ungodly behaviour of Israel.

On some occasions Israel's behaviour is described by Ephrem in a manner similar to that of the Egyptians. The way the people distrust God and question His existence among them is similar to the way Pharaoh and the Egyptians distrusted the signs Moses showed them. Ephrem mentions that Israel forgets God's presence in their midst the moment the experience of their first encounter with God passes. The people challenge their God in the same way as Pharaoh did when he asked Moses: '*Who is the Lord that I should obey him?*'[1064] Similarly, Ephrem describes the people challenging Moses again and again to show them signs proving that God is still with them:

> Since they forgot the earlier signs, they tested God by asking for the later ones. Though they had constant signs in the cloud and the pillar, the manna and the quail, because they remained with them all the time they did not regard them as miraculous. This was why they kept testing whether the Lord was among them or not, by asking for new signs.[1065]

While describing the story of God hardening the heart of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, Ephrem stresses the signs and miracles that God presents through Moses and Aaron. The question is: were these signs and miracles addressed to Pharaoh and the Egyptians or were they addressed to Israel? It is more likely that Ephrem was implying that through the signs God again and again proclaims and demonstrates His care for Israel. These signs were not meant to convince Egypt, but to reassure Israel,

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[1062] *ComExod* 14.5. Salvesen *ECE* p.45.
[1063] *ComExod* 17.1. Salvesen *ECE* p.51.
[1064] *ComExod* 5.1. Salvesen *ECE* p.28.
[1065] *ComExod* 17.1. Salvesen *ECE* p.51.

of God's close relationship with His people. Therefore Ephrem again uses the example of the Egyptians as an illustration in order to demonstrate the relationship of God to Israel. While on the surface it seems as if Ephrem is talking about Egypt, it is in fact Israel that becomes his main concern. Ephrem wants to show the way God lifts up the people and prepares them to accept divine providence and His divine choice of them.

Regarding Israel's unfaithfulness, Ephrem uses the example of the Egyptians in order to highlight the possibility of repentance and God's desire for this to happen in Israel. In the story of the parting of the Red Sea, Ephrem offers an explanation as to why the Red Sea inundating the Egyptians happened in slow motion. Although different interpretations of the event are possible[1066], the outcome is the same, i.e. God slows down the process of dividing the Red Sea in order to give the Egyptians time to reconsider their actions:

> The sea could have been parted in the twinkling of an eye, but to give the Egyptians time to repent, *the whole night a scorching wind laboured to drive it back and make it into dry land.*[1067]

Is this idea similar to the story of Moses delaying his descent from the mountain after receiving the Tablets from God? On the one hand, his delay was something that provoked the people to despair and to turn to idolatry by building a calf[1068]. On the other hand, the slow descent of Moses from the mountain could have been buying Israel time to repent for their lack of faith in God.

Ephrem's perception of God giving His people every opportunity to repent is similar to the Jewish interpretation. Midrash Rabbah greatly emphasises the opportunities for repentance. Jewish sages emphasise the ever-open possibility of repentance and God's constant desire for it[1069]. There are various examples in the text of how God waits for the repentance of the people, and how He waits for just a glimpse of repentance from them so that he can respond and grant forgiveness[1070]. Ephrem shows an approach similar to that of the Midrash concerning the importance of repentance by including the above-mentioned passages in his commentaries. The repentance of Israel in the

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[1066]See Targumim on Exod14:19, and footnote 66 in Salvesen*ECE* p.44.
[1067]*ComExod*14.4. Salvesen*ECE* p.44, see Exod.14:23.
[1068]Exod.32:1.
[1069]See *ExodRab*2.25.
[1070]See Chapter IV.1.3.

story of the calf comes eventually, though only after Moses had acted with great severity against the people personally involved in the acts of idolatry[1071]. Again, it is possible to draw a parallel between the stories of Israel and Egypt, i.e. Moses kills the rebels just as the Red Sea killed the Egyptians who refused to repent.

At one point Ephrem describes a situation in which the Israelites and the Egyptians have exchanged their roles. The example is taken from the history of Egypt's oppression of Israel and the later events at the Red Sea: in the final episode for the Egyptians at the Red Sea, i.e. during the time of their death, Ephrem emphasises the fact that the Hebrews took the place of the Egyptians in witnessing the death of their opponents:

> *The Hebrews saw the Egyptians lying dead on the sea shore*[1072], as the Egyptians had seen the Hebrews' sons heaped on the river bank.[1073]

In his commentaries Ephrem emphasises the significance of the moment when Egypt becomes a victim and Israel takes on the role of a witness. Again Ephrem explains:

> Because of the things that had happened in Egypt and in the sea, the people had *faith in the Lord and in Moses his servant.*[1074]

Ephrem clearly establishes a close interplay between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. Throughout his commentaries on Exodus, Ephrem shows that the Israelites and the Egyptians exchange roles. In relation to this, my question is: To which of the two, Egyptians or Israelites, is Ephrem referring when he describes the rebellious behaviour of Egypt and their Pharaoh? I think it is more likely that throughout the narrative of the Israel-Egypt relationship, Ephrem's main concern is with Israel. And therefore he analyses the role of Israel through two personages, Israel itself, and Egypt. He uses Israel's role in order to demonstrate Israel's past, while the role of Egypt he uses to hint at Israel's future.

Ephrem makes the parallel between Israel and Egypt in order to characterise the behaviour of the people towards their God, and to illustrate instances of high and low points in the relationship between Israel and God. For the same reason Ephrem uses

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[1071]Exod32:19-28.
[1072]Exod14:27-28.
[1073]*ComExod*14.7. Salvesen*ECE* p.45.
[1074]*ComExod*14.7. Salvesen*ECE* p.45, see Exod.14:31.

the symbolism of Moses raising his hands and lowering them[1075], which could symbolically represent the relationship between God and Israel, and which, according to Ephrem, is constantly up and down on Israel's side. In the episode of Moses' arms during the battle with Amalek, it is interesting to remark on the way Ephrem describes the 'ups' and 'downs' of that relationship. When Moses raises his hands, Israel prevails and destroys the presumptuous nations. When Moses' hands go down, the presumptuous nations destroy only those people in Israel who constantly groaned against Moses and the Lord[1076]. This clearly points out that for Ephrem it is important to emphasise that the virtuous of Israel were not harmed in the battle with Amalek.

In conclusion to the chapter, it is important to emphasise that Ephrem's presentation of the God-Israel relationship clearly demonstrates that:

- Ephrem shows a close interest in presenting the nature of the God-Israel relationship
- Israel in Ephrem's writings is perceived as 'the people', the chosen nation.

According to Ephrem's writings, there were occasions in Israel's history when the people saw God and acted in accordance with their faith in God. Thus, Ephrem reflects on several occasions when Israel was granted the great privilege of seeing God as a nation, as a body of people united by God's choice of them. However, Israel made a 'wrong' choice in exercising their gift of free will, by following the path of idolatry and blasphemy starting on Mount Sinai. This led to catastrophe for Israel as a nation, which resulted, according to Ephrem's presentation, in the loss of the ability of the people to see God. Consequently Israel did not see Christ and did not recognise Him. Thus, the loss of the ability to see God resulted in Israel losing its path of divine choice and virtue. Israel damaged its ability to see God by diverting its eyes to the golden calf, and, therefore, according to Ephrem's presentation, Israel is no longer able to focus on God and to follow His guidance. This could be seen as a national catastrophe, which Ephrem repeatedly refers to in his various writings. What it is important to emphasise is that this tragedy is taken by Ephrem as his personal tragedy, as well as the tragedy of the nation[1077].

[1075]Exod.17:11-12.
[1076]*ComExod*17.2. Salvesen*ECE* p.52.
[1077]See Chapter I for further references to this sense of tragic catastrophe for Ephrem in Israel's failure.

CONCLUSION OF THE THESIS

It was suggested in the introduction to the thesis that, among the most important results of the study, would be the re-consideration of Ephrem's so-called anti-Jewish rhetoric. Consequently, this lead to a review of the nature of Ephrem's relationship with Judaism, an analysis of Ephrem's exegetical writings, and a reflection on Ephrem's presentation of Israel in his work. In the attempt to substantiate these points and the others that have been discovered along the way, the following suggestions and conclusions are offered below:

This thesis concludes that the presentation of Ephrem's critical remarks towards Jews within the historical, religious and literary context of the time does not support the argument that he is an anti-Jewish or an anti-Semitic writer. In order to confirm that Ephrem's anti-Judaism is often misunderstood this study looked at Ephrem's texts - predominantly his hymns and sermons, which contain most of his critical remarks and 'negative' imagery alluding to Jews, Judaism and such like. These texts were re-examined from within the context in which they were written. It is concluded that most of these critical remarks are addressed not directly to Jews, but homiletically to contemporary Christians, to warn them of various short-comings and dangers in their own conduct and attitudes.

The first observation, crucial for this thesis, is that Ephrem does not follow the specific genre of critical remarks and negative imagery of Jews and Judaism in his exegetical writings. This allows one to propose that Ephrem's biblical commentaries were oriented to reach a far wider audience than the Christian Church alone, possibly including Jews. As a demonstration of this point, the thesis offers a second observation: Ephrem's extensive use and frequent reliance on the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis.

To support the claim that there is a misunderstanding circulating in the contemporary scholarship with regard to Ephrem's so-called 'anti-Judaism', this thesis closely analysed Ephrem's exegetical writings (for example, his commentaries on the verses of Exodus 2:25 and 1:5), and his presentation of the biblical figures of Miriam, Hur and Moses. This study compared Ephrem's writings with the relevant Jewish sources

of Targumim and Midrashim. The conclusion was reached that in all of the given textual examples from Ephrem's exegetical writings, he relates to the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis preserved by Midrashic and Targumic sources. To aid in the exercise of illustrating the closeness of Ephrem's exegesis to the Jewish sources, the contours of resonance is set out. In so doing, one cannot avoid the problem of dating the Jewish material. This thesis has argued that, even though some of the Midrashic texts were put in their written format at a later time than Ephrem, nevertheless they must have been in existence in their oral form during his time. Thus, the table below allows the reader to appreciate the similarities between Ephrem's approach to the text of Exodus and that of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis.

Jewish Sources	**Ephrem's writings**
Exod.1:5	
The presentation of numbers	
MT, Peshitta: seventy, LXX: seventy five	
*TgN, TgPsJ, TgO, ExodRab*I.7: seventy	*ExodCom*I.1: seventy
*ExodRab*I.7: seventy with Joseph	*ExodCom* Synopsis: seventy
*NumRab*III.8, *GenRab*XCIV.9: sixty nine + Jochebed	
*EcclRab*IX.18.2: sixty nine + Serah	
*GenRab*XCIV.9: sixty nine + Jacob or God or Hushim	
Exod.1:8	
*ExodRab*1.8: A new king…made new decrees	*ExodCom*I.2: A new king initiated a new policy
TgN and *TgPsJ*: A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph and did not walk in his customs	
Exod.1:7-9	
1) *TgO, TgPsJ*: present the word שרץ -'swarm'	**1)** *ExodCom*I.2: Ephrem chooses the word ܫܪܨܐ - 'swarm', although it does not appear in Peshitta
2) *TgJ:* 430 years from God's covenant with Abraham until the end of Israel's dwelling in Egypt	**2)** *ExodCom*I.2, II.4, II.9, XII.6, XVIII.1: 400 years from God's covenant with Abraham plus another 30 years in order to reach the total of 430 years for Israel's stay in Egypt

Jewish Sources	Ephrem's writings
Exod.1:11	
*ExodRab*I.10: The Egyptians imposed on the Hebrews the redundant and useless labour of building on sandy soil, so that the Hebrews had to constantly repair the construction	*ExodCom*I.4: Pharaoh made the Hebrews build storehouses that were not needed = redundant labour
Exod.1:19	
1)*ExodRab*I.16: The Hebrew women were midwives	**1)***ExodCom*I.4: The Syriac text of Peshitta could be interpreted as meaning that the Hebrew women were midwives, and Ephrem goes along with that in his exegesis[1078]
2)*TgPsJ* on Exod.1:19: The pious and virtuous midwives established priestly and levitical families, and royal families *ExodRab*I.17: The midwives established priestly and levitical families, and royal families	**2)** The midwives became good by becoming a great dynasty
3) *ExodRab*I.12: Comparing God to a midwife	**3)** *Eccl*25:18: Comparison of God to a nursing mother
Exod.1:27	
Josephus, *Ant.*II.205: Tellers of the future were foretelling the rise of Israel *TgPsJ*: Jannes and Jambres, the chief magicians, prophesied to Pharaoh about the rise of Israel	*ExodCom*I.2: Ecstatics among them who claimed to know the future were proclaiming the deliverance of the Hebrews
Exod.2:25	
TgO, TgN: servitude, redemption *TgPsJ, ExodRab*I.35: Israel's redemption, servitude, and repentance in relation to the verse *GenRab*42.3, *PRK*, *LevRab*13.4, *MRSbY*: Israel's suffering leads to repentance Josephus, *Ant.*I-IV, *Jub*47:1: Suffering and Servitude of Israel *MekRSbY*: Israel's repentance in secret	*ExodCom*II.9: Israel's redemption, servitude and healing in relation to the verse

[1078]See SECE p.13, footnote 12.

Jewish Sources	Ephrem's writings
Exod.17:10	
Josephus *Ant.*III.54,105, *PdRE* XLV, *ExodRab*48.4: Hur is the husband of Miriam, sister of Moses	*ExodCom*XVII.2: They say that Hur was the husband of Moses' sister
Exod.17:11	
TgPsJ: **1)** Moses held his hands up in prayer…when Israel prevailed	*ExodCom*VII.2: **1)** When Moses raised his arms, Israel prevailed
2) Emphasis on prayer, fasting, Merits of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs *TgN*: the staff of Moses – manifestation of God's power	**2)** The outstretching of Moses' hands and the staff that stood upright against his breast constitute the sign of Christ
Exod.19:4	
TgPsJ: I bore you on clouds as on eagles' wings	*ExodCom*XIX.1: And I carried you as on eagles' wings by the cloud that is leading you
Exod.19:6	
1) *TgPsJ, TgN*: Notions of kings, priests and holy people	**1)** *ExodCom*XIX.1: Kingdom of priests, holy nation
2) *Mekhilta Bahodesh*II describes Israel as: holy and sanctified, separate from the nations of the world and their abominations	**2)** [Israel] would be set apart in sanctity from all the abominable deeds of the nations
Exod.12:13	
Biblical Reference **Lamb** – symbol of the Passover of the Lord (Ex.12:11) **Unleavened Bread** - symbol of belonging to Israel (Ex.12:15,19) - symbol of liberation from slavery (Ex.12:17)	*ExodCom*XII.2: **Lamb** – symbol of Christ *ExodCom*XII.3, *HCruc* II.5: **fresh bread and fresh meat** - signs of Christ's renewal **Bitter herbs** –symbol of bearing Christ's sufferings *(ExodCom*XII.3) – mourning for Christ*(HCruc* II.3)
TgPsJ: connection of the Passover to the Merits of the Fathers (through the merits of the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of circumcision)	*ExodCom*15.1: commemoration, in the song of Moses, of Abraham – the first of the forefathers

Exod.20:25

*ExodCom*XX.3:

Prohibition of idolatry

Significance of the OT

On the basis of these parallels and similarities of presentation, it is concluded that Ephrem may be seen as following on from, and organically adapting, the exegetical tradition of the Jewish sages, and in that sense he could be seen as an heir to the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis.

The distinctive feature of Ephrem's creative approach to Judaism is that Ephrem introduces Christ into the very core of some of the Jewish concepts, ideas, and practices, for example, the Passover celebration, or the concept of the Merits of the Fathers. Therefore, the conclusion was that Ephrem allowed himself great freedom in working with the Jewish tradition of exegesis, occasionally disagreeing with it, or developing it further from a Christological perspective. The overall impression that was obtained, however, is that even when he disagreed with the Jewish argument, Ephrem composed his exegetical writings in close collaboration with the Jewish exegetical tradition.

Standing back from the detailed reading of the text, this thesis studied the broader picture of Ephrem's presentation of Israel as a nation, and, in particular, of Israel's ability to see God. This study has examined the way Ephrem refers to the human faculties of sight, hearing and cognition in his writings, and also the ways he offers textual examples of occasions on which Israel showed an ability to see God, and the reasons behind the loss of such ability. On the basis of the examples analysed the conclusion was reached that Ephrem's presentation of Israel in his writings amounts to a very special treatment of 'the people', i.e. as the people of God, and as the chosen nation.

This study provides the basis for further work in analysing Ephrem's biblical commentaries. Firstly, this thesis proposes to redefine the place of Ephrem's exegetical writings within the overall context of his poetry and prose writings. Secondly, this thesis suggests that in further studies of Ephrem's writings, his biblical commentaries should be analysed separately from his other prose works and from his Hymns. This argument emerged from the discussion with the number of scholars presented in the *Bibliographical Survey*, who have offered their studies of Ephrem's work, but have not really picked up on the diversity of his writings, and have not thought through the consequences of Ephrem's use of the Jewish traditions. It is further concluded, therefore, that Ephrem's exegetical writings show a distinctive resemblance to Judaism, in that they accord with rabbinical methods, and support Jewish concepts and ideas.

In conclusion, this present research suggests that we now view Ephrem's writings, especially his exegesis, as a creative genre consisting of two ingredients: (1.) the influence of the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis, and (2.) the inspiration of the author. In his relationship with Judaism Ephrem may be seen as an heir of the rabbinical tradition in which Jewish sages further develop the inherited tradition, on the one hand preserving its consistency, while on the other hand adding their own perspective to it. Ephrem the Syrian brought the Jewish tradition of biblical exegesis into a new realm of Christocentric interpretation. Therefore, to the reader who responds to the richly nuanced resonance of his exegetical writings in the Jewish tradition, it appears that Ephrem recreates for his audience a rabbinical approach to the Exodus narrative, and that he should in fact be regarded – from the methods he uses and from the concepts and ideas that he supports in dealing with the scriptural text of the OT – as nothing less than a Jewish sage.

Appendix 1

Chronological system of Demetrius in comparison with other systems, i.e. LXX and MT. Based on the comparison presented by Ben Zion Wacholder, *Demetrius the Chronographer*, in EJ, CD version:

Event	Demetrius	LXX	MT
From Creation/Adam to: Flood	2264 years	2262 years	1656 years
Birth of Abraham	3334 years	3334 years	1948 years
Exodus	3839 years	3849 years	2668 years

Demetrius and others on Abraham and Exodus according to Hanson, 'Demetrius the Chronographer', p.852:

Event	Demetrius	LXX	Josephus	MT	Jubilies
Adam to Flood	**2264** = 3624-1360	Gen5:1-6:1, 7:11 **2262**	Ant 1:80-88 **2262** Ant 8.61f Ant 10.147 **1662**	**1656**	**1307**
Adam to Joseph	**3624**				
Flood to Jacob coming to Egypt	**1360**	**1360**		**580**	
Abraham's entry to Canaan to Jacob's entry to Egypt	**215**	Gen11:1-26 12:4 **215**	Ant II:XV.2 **430** after Abraham came to Canaan, but **215** after Jacob removed onto Egypt		Seder Olam 2-3 **220** Canaan **210** Egypt

Wacholder, Ben Zion, *Eupolemus. A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* (NY, LA, Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College, 1974) p.98:

Event	Hebrew Text	LXX	Demetrius	Samaritan+ Codex Alexandrinus	Talmudic exegesis
Exod.12:40 Israelis stayed in Egypt	**430**	**215** in Egypt/ plus Canaan	**215** from Abraham entry to Canaan to Jacob's entry to Egypt (see note 1 in Wacholder)	Agrees with LXX, but emends Israelites "and their ancestors" from the text to make sense out of correct text which alludes patriarchs as Israelites	Seder Olam2-3 **220**Canaan **210** Egypt
Adam to Abraham Gen5:3-31; 11:10-25	**1948**	**3334** **2262**	**215** from Jacob coming to Egypt to the Exodus (see note 2)		

Appendix 2

Table 1: Esther Rabbah

35 Esther Rabbah I to Esther 2:4	מדרש מגילת אסתר, פרשה ה, דף יז:
"And God saw the children of Israel and God knew them" (Ex. 2:25) Who was the appropriate person for this task? It was Moses: "Now Moses was keeping…" (Ex. 3:1).	וירא אלהים את בני ישראל וידע אלהים. מי היה הגון לדבר זה משה ומשה היה רועה.
And Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to the city" (1 Sam. 8:22) Who was the appropriate person for this task? It was Saul: "Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish" (1 Sam. 9:1)	ודכותיה (ס"ל ח) ויאמר שמואל אל אנשי ישראל לכו איש לעירו וגו' מי הגון לדבר זה שאול שנאם' (שם ט) ויהי איש מבנימין ושמו קיש.
And when Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid (1 Sam. 17:11) Who was the appropriate person for this task? It was David: "Now David was the son of the Ephrathite" (1 Sam. 17:22)	ודכותיה (ס"ל יז) וישמע שאול וכל ישראל את דברי הפלשתי האלה ויהתו ויראו מאד מי הגון לדבר זה דוד (שם) ודוד בן איש אפרתי הזה.
R.Joshua bar Abirim said two things: "It is written, 'He mightily oppressed the children of Israel' (Judges 4:3). What is the meaning of "mightily"? R.Isaac said, "Insulting and blaspheming: "Your words have been all too mighty against me' (Mal.3:13) Who was the appropriate person for this task? It was Deborah: 'Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth' (Judges 4:4)	ר' יהושע בר אבירים אמר תרתי כתיב (שופתים ד) והוא לחץ את ישראל בחזקה מהו בחזקה א"ר יצחק בחירופין ובגידופין המד"א (מלאכי ג) חזקו עלי דבריכם מי הגון לדבר זה דבורה הה"ד (שופטים ד) ודבורה אשה נביאה אשת לפידות.
R.Joshua bar Abirim said another thing: "And the people, princes of Gilead, said to one another, What man is he who will begin to fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead' (Judges 10:18) Who was the appropriate person for this task? It was Jephthah: 'Now Jephthah the Gildeadite was a mighty man of valor' (Judges 11:1).[1]	ר' יהושע בר אבירים אמר חורי (שם י) ויאמרו העם שרי גלעד איש אל רעהו מי האיש אשר יחל להלחם בבני עמון יהיה לראש לכל יושבי גלעד. מי הגון לדבר זה (שם יא) ויפתח הגלעדי היה גבור היל:[2]

[1]Neusner, *Esther Rabbah I. An Analytical Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) p.131

[2]מדרש מגילת אסתר, פרשה ה
Midrash Rabbah al Sefer Shemot ve Megilat Ester (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epshtein) p.17 (Hebrew).

Table 2: Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohay

MRSbY	מכילתא דרבי שמעון בן יוחאי
	4.11
The land now. Behold the oath is pressing and has come before me to bring out	[הארץ עכשיו] הרי שבועה מבוהלת[7] ובאת [לפני להוציא את]
The sons of Israel from Egypt. And you are saying: *Send now*[3]. R.Judah said: And God spoke, HOBBH said to Moses: I am a Judge in truth, I am full of mercy, I am faithful to pay a reward; and Israel is	[בני ישראל ממצרים ואת]ה אומ' שלח נא. ר' יהודה או' וידבר א'ים אמ' הק'[ב'ה] [למשה אני דן ב]אמת אני מלא רחמים אני נאמן לשלם שכר וישראל
enslaved by the power of uncircumcised and unclean persons. And I am seeking to bring them out from under their hand. And you are saying:	[משועבדין ביד ער]לים וטמאים ואני מבקש להוציאם מתחת ידם ואתה א[ו']
	5.5
Send now.[4] Rabbi Nehemiya said, HOBBH said to Moses: it is revealed and known before me, is the affliction of Israel in Egypt.	[שלח נא ר' נחמי]ה או' אמ' הקב'ה למשה גלוי וידוע לפני צער ישראל במצרי[מ]
...the harsh sorrow, as it is said: *And God saw the sons of Israel etc.*(Ex.2:25) They are dwelling in distress, and you are dwelling in satisfaction; and I already have visited/remembered[5] them in mercy to bring them out from Egypt and you are saying: *Send now*...R. Josi the Galilean said: 'God spoke', HOBBH said to Moses: the brides of Israel became worthy of guilt in Egypt	[.....צע]ר קשה שנ' וירא א'ים א[8] בני ישראל וג' (שמ' ב כה) הם שרויים בצרה [ואתה שרוי בריוח] ואני כבר פקדתי אותם ברחמ' להוציאם ממצרים ואתה א[ו'] [שלח נא ר' יוסי] הג' או' וידב' אי'ם אמ' [הקב"ה] למשה כלייה[9] נתחייבו ישראל במצ'
...for they were defiled with the idols of Egypt [...as it is said] and God said: Let each men *cast away the cursed things your eyes feast on, every one of you and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt etc. But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me etc.*(Ezek.20:7-8) But for the sake of my great name and for the sake of the merit of the fathers	[..... שנטמאו] בגלולי מצרים [..... שנ'] ואומר אליהם איש שקוצי עיניו [השליכו ובגלולי מצ' וג' וימ]רו בי ול' אבו לש' אלי וג' (יחז' כ ז-ח) אלא בעבור שמי הגדול ולמען זכות אבות
As it is said, *And God heard their groaning* etc.(Ex2:24) And in order that my name should not be profaned among them, for thus Scripture says, *I acted for the sake of my name* etc. *Which I made known to them* saying *to bring them out from the land of Egypt etc.*(Ezek.20:9) R.Tarpon	[שנ' וישמע אי'ם א]ת נאקתם וג' (שמ' ב כד) ולמען שלא יתחלל שמי בהם שכן הו[10] n או' ואעש [למען שמי וג' אשר] נודעתי אליהם לאמר להוציאם מארץ מצ' וג' (יחז' כ ט) ר' טרפ[ון]
said, HOBBH said, it is revealed and known before me that Israel were fitting to go out from Egypt and to be given into the part of Amon and Moab and Amalek. But with an oath I have sworn to fight their battle and I will save them.	[או' אמר הק'בה' גל]וי וידוע לפני שישראל ראו[יים] ל[צא]ת ממצרים ולהנ[תן] [ביד עמון ומואב ועמלק אלא בשבועה נשבעתי ללחום] מלחמתם ואוש[יע]
As it is said, Because there is *a hand upon the throne of the Lord etc.* (Ex.17:16) And said, *And I acted for the sake of My name so as not to profane it* (Ezek.20:9)	[אותם שנ' כי יד על כס יה וג' (שמ' יז טז) ואו' ואעש ל]מען שמי לבלתי הח[ל] (יחז' כ ט)

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[3]Reference to Ex.4:13, when Moses says:
'*Send, I pray, by the hand of someone that you will send*' שלח-נא ביד-תשלח-
[4]An you are saying etc. [send down by the hand of someone that you will send].
[5]In rabbinic texts the root can have a sense of *remember* as well as *visit* - פקד.
[6]Chaos, formlessness.
[7]בהל –to press, to become urgent.
[8]את - the letter is missing from the text.
[9]Brides, ornaments.
[10]הו/הוא- the abbreviation for Scripture.

And behold I am seeking to bring them out from Egypt and *you are saying to me send* etc. R. Joshua b.Korha said, And God spoke. HOBBH said, Israel were not fitting that the manna should be given to them in wilderness. Except by means of hunger and thirst, nakedness and nudity. But I am repaying to them the reward of Abraham their father who stood and acted in front of the angel of the service. As it is said, *And he took butter and milk etc.*(Gen.18:8) And behold I am asking to bring them out from Egypt and you are saying to me, *Send now by hand that you will send* And with eye. But eye for an eye, measure for measure, as it is said, *Because you have not served the lord your God, then as a result of that you will serve your enemy.*(Deut.28:47,48) In that day they came in the wilderness of the Sinai. This teaches you that it was the first day of the month. It is said here, *On this day* and it's said in that other passage, *On this month* (Ex.12:2). Just as this scriptural verse says, this, and the other scriptural verse says, the first day of the month, it means the beginning of the month. R.Yosi b.Dormaskit says, behold Scripture said, *And God saw the children of Israel and God knew.* (Ex.2:25) He saw that they repented and they have not seen it in each other. And knew: God knew that they repented and they did not know this about each other. R.Yehuda b.Lakish said, behold Scripture says and God saw the sons of Israel, that they were destined to provoke him to anger. And God knew: that they were destined to blaspheme Him. R.Yosi said: Behold, Scripture says, *I have not spoken in secret* etc.(Is.45:19) When I gave the Torah to Israel, *I did not give it in secret. Nor in a dark land have I spoken* *to the seed of Jacob* (Is.45:19) That it should be *tohu*[6] *for you to seek me* (Is.45:19) I have not made it as a mortgage deed, but I have given it as a gift. *... I am the Lord who speaks righteousness* (Is.) I am speaking about charitable acts of Israel. I am declaring that they have acted before me out of love. *He has not acted so towards any nation* (Ps.147:20). What will the nations of the world do in that they have not learned all Torah, and as for the Statutes they have not known them. Seven commandments I gave to them and they were not able to stand in them.	[והריני מבקש להוציאם ממצ' ואתה או' לי שלח וג'. ר' יהו]שע בן קרחה או' וידבר אי'ם [אמ' הק'בה' לא היו] ישראל [ראויין ל]יתן להם מן במדבר אלא ברע[ב] [וצמא ערום ועריה א]בל מש[לים אני להם] שכר אברהם אב[יהם] שעמ[ד ועשה] [לפני מלאכי] השרת שנ' [ויקח] חמאה וחלב [וג' (בר' יח ח) והריני מבקש] [להוציאם ממצרים ואתה או' לי שלח נא ביד תשלח] 136.18 (ו)ביען אלא עין בעין מידה במידה שנ' תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלק(י)ך ועבדת את אויבך (דב' כח מז) ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני מלמד שהוא ראש חודש נא' כן ביום הזה ונא' להלן החודש הזה (שמ' יב ב) מה הזה הא' להלן ראש חדש אף הזה (ה)אמור כן ראש חודש ר' יוסי בן דורמסקית 137.1 או' הרי הוא או' וירא אי'ם את בני יש' וידע אי'ם (שמ' ב כה) [ראה בהם שעשו] תשובה והן לא ראו זה את זה וידה [אי'ם ידה בהם שעשו תשובה] והם לא ידעו זה את זה ר' יהודה בן לקיש א[ו' הרי הוא אומר] וירא אי'ם את בני יש' שעתידין להכע[ים וידע אי'ם שעתידין] (ו)לאץ ר' יוסי או' הרי הוא [אומר לא בסתר דברתי ג' (ישע' מה יט) כשנתתי] תורה ליש' לא נתתיה לא בסתר [ולא בארץ חשך לא אמרתי] לזרע יעקב (ישע' מה יט) שלכם הוא תהו בקש[וני (שם) לא עשיתיה הפותיקי[11] אלא נתתי מתן] שכרה בצדה אני ה' דובר צדק (שם) [דובר אני צדקתן שלישראל מגיד] מיש' (שם) מגיד אני שעשו ל[פני מאהבה לא עשה כן לכל גוי (תה' קמז ב) מה יעשו] אומות העולם והלא לא למדו תורה ומשפטים כל ידעום (שם) שבע מצות נתתי להם ולא היו יכולין לעמוד בהן.[12]

[11]Of Greek origin; meaning mortgage document, pledge.
[12]Epstein, Melamed (eds.) *Mekilta D'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai* (Jerusalem: Mikze Nirdamim, MCMLV) p.4-5, 136-137 (Hebrew). The English translation is made by the author.

Appendix 3

Auerbach, Erich 'Figura', *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Manchester:Manchester University Press, 1984), 11-79:

Comparison between the function of Allegorical and Figural interpretation

Allegory	Figura
Represents either virtue or general phenomena	Both the figura and what it signifies are historical
Transforms Old Testament	
The Law and History of Israel lose their national and popular character	
Replaced by mystical and ethical systems	
Text loses concrete history	
Little use for the freshly converted people, it is more of a scholarly, elite use (origin and nature of all – small circle of intellectuals)	Figural phenomenal prophesy had grown out of a definite historical situation, the Christian break with Judaism and the Christian mission among the gentiles; it had a historical function

Comparison between the notion of Symbol and Figura

Symbol	Figura
Interpret and order life as a whole	
Conceivable only in religion and religious spheres	
Symbol must possess magic power	Figura is not a magic symbol
Symbol must not always be historical	Figura must always be historical
Symbol is a direct interpretation of life and of nature	Figural prophesy relates to an interpretation of history (by nature or textual interpretation)
	Figural interpretation is a product of late cultures

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