Sefer Ben Sira, a late midrashic compilation published in Constantinople in 1580, contains the first printed edition of the Maaseh Avraham Avinu Alav HaShalom. The Maaseh, a late medieval work, was probably written in Persia and dispersed widely among Jews in the Muslim world, particularly in the Ottoman Empire. Two fragmentary manuscripts of the Maaseh at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America of Kurdustani provenance were copied no later than the first printed edition.

Jews in medieval Persia and in other lands dominated by Islam confronted a theological conundrum. Islam laid claim to Abraham, the founder of the Jewish religion through the line of Ishmael. It further claimed that Muhammad’s prophetic revelation superseded both Judaism and Christianity. How did Jews respond to this expropriation of Abraham and Islam’s supersessionist theology? The Maaseh responds to this question and reasserts the primacy of Abraham in Judaism and God’s covenant with the people of Israel.

Literary, historic, theological, linguistic, social, and folkloristic elements inhere in the text of the Maaseh Avraham Avinu Alav HaShalom. Scholars have long contended that this midrash was originally written in Arabic and was later translated into Hebrew. As such, language itself becomes one of the most intriguing aspects of the text. Other literary features influenced its composition. The

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fabulous royal court described in the midrash is on one hand like the courts of the *Arabian Nights* and on the other hand like the courts of the biblical kings, Ahasuerus and Nebuchadnezzar. The *Maaseh* draws upon a range of religious literature known to medieval Jews: the Hebrew Bible, the *Targumim*, the Talmud, the classic midrashim, the siddur, and the Koran.

The author (or authors) of the *Maaseh* used the classical *B’reishit Rabbah* (38:13 and 44:13) midrashim as the starting point for a new iteration of the tale. The author(s) sets out to reclaim Abraham, the first monotheist, the enemy of all forms of idolatry, and the faithful emissary of the One God. The *Maaseh* opens with a description of Nimrod as a cunning astrologer, who used magical arts to gain divine power over his people. The *Maaseh* closes with Nimrod’s last-gasp effort to accuse Abraham of sorcery. This structure of the *Maaseh*, from the opening to the closing scene, serves as a large inclusio, encompassing its underlying message: to deny validity to idolatry and to proclaim the truth of the one incorporeal God of the universe.

The *Maaseh* uses Moses and Abraham as central figures in the struggle for freedom, which has resonance in the Babylonian Talmud (*P’sachim* 116a) and on the pages of the Passover Haggadah. Moses leads the Jewish people in its struggle for physical emancipation from bondage in Egypt. Abraham is emblematic of the struggle of the Jewish people to liberate itself from the spiritual bondage of Babylonian idolatry. In this recounting, Pharaoh and Nimrod, considered divine by their people, become archetypes of the usurpation of the divine prerogative.

The author(s) of the *Maaseh* was familiar with the Arabic language, the Koran, and some Hadith tradition. The oft repeated phrase “the Maggid said” is a translation of the Arabic, *q‘al al-qa‘il*. Segments of the Koran, Sura 6:76 and 21:69, are incorporated into the body of the narrative. The depiction of Abraham, derived from the Hadith tradition, tying a rope around the heads of the idols and dragging them face down through the market, is deftly woven into the text.

The environment and flavor of the Books of Esther and Daniel, set in the courts of absolute eastern potentates, fit the reality of the Jews in Islamic lands. It may also explain why these historically late biblical works are frequently cited in the *Maaseh*. True believers, Esther/Abraham, in perilous circumstances faced destruction.
Esther’s noble behavior parallels that of Abraham. The biblical Book of Esther, like the Maaseh, was set in Persia, making its characters more real and accessible to its audience.

In every era we Jews endeavor to make our sacred literature relevant. We recreate our heroes, clothe them in contemporary garments, focus on their virtues, and make them responsive to our quotidian reality. The Maaseh Avraham Avinu Alav HaShalom is one notable example of that creative process. This apologue is an imaginative, passionate, and engaging effort by the author(s) to reconnect their contemporaries to the biblical Abraham. The Maaseh demonstrates how Jews, integrated in some measure in Muslim society, responded to the influence of Islam and how they educated their listeners/readers to Abraham’s foundational role in Judaism. In reading this translation, the reader is invited to consider how this iteration of the Abraham story can be reshaped and applied in our age.

Translation

They said3 that before Abraham was created, Nimrod[A] denied belief in God, Blessed Be God, vaunted himself, and then asserted that he was a god. The ancients in his time used to worship and prostrate themselves to him. Now this king [Nimrod] was a cunning astrologer, who saw through the science of astrology that a man would be born in his day and would arise against him, dissuade him of his faith, and defeat him. “And he was seized with violent trembling.”5 What did he do? He sent for his princes and governors and told them of the matter. He asked them, “What do you advise me to do about this child who is yet to be born?” They responded, “The counsel which we agree upon is that you should build a large house, set a guard at its entrance, then decree throughout your realm that all the pregnant women shall come there. After they arrive, they

Commentary

[A]
Nimrod and Astrology

The Maaseh opens with astrology as its central theme. Nimrod uses it to exert his power. His reputation is well established in the biblical text where he appears four times: Genesis 10:8, 10:9; Micah 5:5; and I Chronicles 1:10. He is known as the hunter and lord of Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh (?). He is connected to Ninurta, the Assyrian god of hunting and warfare. His power is epitomized in I Chronicles 1:10, “the first mighty one on earth.” At the end of the Maaseh this ancient, fabled warrior is bereft of his
shall also bring the midwives so that they are with the pregnant women at the time of their delivery. Now when a woman’s time to deliver arrives, the midwives will see, and if it is a boy, they will kill him at the womb, but if it is a girl they will let her live. Then they shall give gifts to her mother and clothe her in regal raiment and call out before her, “Thus shall you do to a woman who bears a daughter.”

When the king heard their counsel he was overjoyed. Then he decreed in all the provinces of his realm that all artisans should gather to build a large house for the king, sixty cubits high and eighty cubits wide. When the building of the house was completed, he decreed that all the pregnant women come to that house to be there until they gave birth. He appointed officials to bring them there and he also set guards over the house to guard the doorway that they do not escape. He also appointed midwives over them to help deliver them. He ordered them to kill a male child on his mother’s bosom; but if it was a female child, they were to clothe her mother in “raiments of fine linen, silk, and embroidery.”

Then they led her out from the house of confinement and gave her great honor, for thus did the king order. And so they led her to her home in honor.

The Maggid said that more than seventy thousand male infants were slain in this manner. When the angels on high saw the slaying of these children, they said before the Holy One Blessed Be God, “Have you not seen that which the sinner and blasphemer, Nimrod son of Canaan did? For he slew so many children and spilled their blood on the ground although they had done no harm!” God answered them, “Holy angels, I know and I see, ‘for I neither slumber nor sleep,’ for I see and know ‘the hidden and the revealed things.’ But you will see what I will do to this sinner and blasphemer, for ‘I will set my hand against him and chastise him.’”

The Maggid said that at that time the mother of Abraham, our father of blessed memory, went and married a man named Terah.
[B] She conceived with him and at the end of three months of pregnancy, her stomach grew large and her face became pale. Terah, her husband, said to her, “My wife, what is wrong with you? Your face is pale and your stomach is big.” She answered him, “Every year this illness befalls me and they call it Qolasni.” Terah responded, “Show me your belly for it seems to me that you are pregnant. And if you are, it is not fitting to transgress the command of Nimrod our god.” Now when he placed his hand on her belly, God performed a miracle on her behalf. The child moved up under her breasts. He felt with his hands and found nothing. He said to her, “You spoke honestly.” Thus nothing showed nor became known until the period of gestation finished.

Out of her great fear she left the city and went through the desert on the edge of a valley. She found a large cave there and entered it. The next day birth pangs seized her and she gave birth to a son. Then she saw the whole cave illuminated as if by the sun, by the face of the infant and she was overjoyed. [C] And he was Abraham, our father of blessed memory.

Then she opened her mouth and said, “I am the one who bore you at the time that king Nimrod killed seventy thousand male infants because of you. Now I greatly fear for you, for if he learns about your existence he will kill you! Therefore, it is better that you die in this cave so that my eyes do not see you slain upon my bosom.” So she took her own clothing and swaddled him. Then she abandoned him in the cave

[B] Marriage and the Birth of a Child

The Maaseh uses the motif of finding a mate but reverses the order of the biblical prototype. Abraham’s unnamed mother goes out and marries Terah. This detail is modeled on the Moses birth story: A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman (Exod. 2:1). Both stories reflect perilous times for the people of Israel ruled by cruel monarchs who claimed to be divine. In each instance the birth of an infant marks the reversal of Israel’s fortunes.

[C] Great Light

Light plays a central role in the birth story of Abraham. Earlier midrashic accounts depict the birth of heroes accompanied by great light. At Noah’s birth the house was filled with light (Sefer Derashot Rabbi Yehoshua Shu’ail, vol. 1, 13). Similarly the Sages relate that at the hour of Moses’s birth the house was completely filled with light (BT Sotah 12a; Avigdor Shinan, ed., Sh’mot Rabbah, 71).

Light in this story adumbrates the dawning light of monotheism, which will be brought to light by this newborn child.
and said, “May your God be with you. May God not fail you or forsake you.”

The Maggid said that when Abraham, our father of blessed memory, was in the cave and yet a child, he had no wet nurse to suckle him. He wept, and God, Blessed Be God, heard his cry “where he is.” God sent the angel Gabriel to sustain him and give him milk.

He made milk flow from the right finger of the baby’s right hand and Abraham suckled from it until he was ten days old. Then he began to walk about, left the cave, and walked alongside the edge of the valley. When the sun set and the stars came out, he said, “These are the gods.” Later when dawn came, he could not see the stars. He said, “I shall not worship these because they are not gods.” Later he saw the sun. He said, “This is my god and I will worship it.” But when the sun set he said, “This is no divine being.” He saw the moon and said, “This is my god and I will worship it.” When

Abandonment

The story of Abraham’s unnamed mother in the *Maaseh* parallels the story of Moses’s unnamed mother in the Tanach and Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:15. Each woman is unable to bear seeing her infant son die. One abandons her son on the banks of the Nile (Exod. 2:2–4), one swaddles him and leaves him in the cave, and one abandons her son under a bush. These women leave the destiny of their infant sons to God’s will.

This short midrashic unit ends with a citation expressing Abraham’s mother’s prayerful hope. But there is another literary twist to this story in parallel versions of the *Maaseh*. In the *Tanach*, Hagar casts her son Ishmael out of her sight in order not to see him die. She leaves his destiny to God’s will. In the biblical story God’s messenger reassures Hagar that God will attend to the child, *baasher hu sham*, “where he is” (Gen. 21:17). In two other printed versions of the *Maaseh* and in the Jewish Theological Seminary Manuscript #33 the identical words, “where he is,” are applied to Abraham’s mother in the moment that she abandons him in the cave, swaddled in her own clothing. Although these words are anachronistic, they heighten a mother’s anguish and reassure her of divine protection.

Gabriel

The angel Gabriel appears first in Daniel 8:16, 9:21 and in later Rabbinic literature as a defender of Israel. In this, his first appearance in the *Maaseh*, he provides nourishment for the abandoned infant, Abraham. Gabriel will deliver Abraham in several encounters he has with Nimrod. In the end, Gabriel delivers Abraham from death in the fiery furnace.

Gabriel also plays a role in Christian and Muslim Scripture. He is the herald of the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19) and Jesus (Luke 1:26). Gabriel is known as
it turned dark, he said, “This is not a deity—they have a force which moves them.” While he was still speaking the angel Gabriel came and said, “Peace be unto you Abraham.” He responded, “Unto you peace.” Abraham asked, “Who are you?” The angel replied, “I am Gabriel, a messenger of the Holy One Blessed Be God.” At that time Abraham went to a spring which he found there, washed his face, his hands, and his feet and worshiped God, Blessed Be God, bowing down and prostrating himself.

The Maggid said that the mother of Abraham our father remembered him, wept greatly, and left the city to seek her son in the cave in which she abandoned him, but did not find him. She cried even more for him, and said, “Woe is me, for I bore you to become prey for the wild animals, for the bears, for the lions, and the wolves.” She walked to the edge of the valley and found her son but did not recognize him because he had grown greatly. She said to him, “Peace unto you.” He responded to her, “Unto you peace. Why are you walking in these wastelands?” She answered him, “I left the city to seek my son.” He asked her, “Who brought your son here?” She answered him, “I was pregnant with child by my husband, Terah. At the time of delivery I was fearful for my son who was in my belly. I did not want our king, Nimrod son of Canaan, to kill him as he killed seventy thousand male infants. As soon as I came to one cave in this valley, then birth pangs came over me and I bore a son. And I abandoned him in the cave and went to my home and now I came to seek him out but I cannot find him.”

Abraham said to her, “These things that you related to me concerning the child that you abandoned, how old was he?” She replied, “About twenty days old.” He said to her, “Is there [really] a woman in the world who would abandon her infant child, all by himself in the desert, and come to see him after twenty days?” She responded, “Perhaps God will have mercy.” He said to her, “I am your son, Abraham, for whose sake you came to the valley.” She replied,

“My how you have grown my child! [F] Only twenty days old and you are able to walk and talk!” He answered, “Yes, my mother, you know that there is in the world

Ruh-ul-amin, the Spirit of Faith (the faithful), attesting to his role in delivering the word of God to Muhammad.

Rediscovery

After twenty days

Abraham’s mother
a great and awesome God," living and ever-existent, who sees but is not seen. God is in the heavens and God’s presence fills all the earth." She inquired, “My son, is there another god besides Nimrod?” He answered, “Yes my mother, the God of heaven and the God of earth is also the God of Nimrod, son of Canaan. Now you go to Nimrod and inform him of this.”

So she went to the city and told her husband, Terah, how she found her son. Now Terah was “a prince and leader” in King Nimrod’s house. He went to the palace, to the place where the king was to be found. He prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. In that time it was the rule that anyone who prostrated himself to the king could not raise his head until the king ordered, “Raise your head.” The king commanded him, “Raise your head and state your request.” He responded, “Long live my lord, the king. I have come to notify you about that which you saw through the medium of astrology. [Through astrology you learned] that a male child would be born in your realm who would destroy faith in you. [In trying to eliminate such a child,] you slew seventy thousand male infants. I have come to notify you that he is my son. His mother conceived but I did not know of her pregnancy because she told me, ‘I am ill with Qolasni.’ I examined her belly but I found no embryo. When she completed the period of gestation, she left the city for the valley and there found a cave. She gave birth to a son and abandoned him to the wild beasts of the field. After twenty days she went [back] to him and found him walking along the edge of the valley, speaking like an adult man. He told her that there was a God in heaven, who sees but is not seen, a single God with no second. When Nimrod heard these things, “he was seized with a violent trembling.” He asked his advisers and princes what to do with this child. They answered, “Our king, our god, why are you frightened of a small child? There are thousands upon thousands of princes in your realm. ‘You have commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens,’ and officers without number. Let the
least among your commanders go and bring him and put him in prison.” He answered them, “Have you ever seen a child twenty days old walk and speak and with his own tongue announce that there is one God in heaven and has no second? That God sees but is not seen?”

The Maggid said, all the princes who were there were horror-struck at these words. Meanwhile Satan came disguised as a man, dressed in black silk. He entered and prostrated himself before King Nimrod until the king ordered, “Raise your head and state your request.” Satan asked, “Why are you worried and why are all of you horror-struck by a small boy? I will advise you what to do.” The king asked, “What is your advice?” Satan retorted, “Open all your arsenals and give [weapons] to all your commanders, adjutants, governors, and to all the warriors. Then dispatch them to Abraham [so that] he comes and worships you and is under your control.”

The Maggid said that the king ordered all the princes and all the warriors to come and take weapons from the royal arsenals. Thus they went forth to take Abraham. When Abraham our father saw that a great number of people were coming for him, trembling and great fear seized him on their account. He cried out to the God of heaven to deliver him from their hand, for God is the one who “‘Delivers the weak from one stronger than he.’ Now please deliver me from them.” God heard his cry and saw his tears and sent the angel Gabriel to deliver him from their hand. The angel said to him, “What is the matter Abraham? Why are you crying?” He answered, “I was afraid of these men who are coming to slay me.” Gabriel said to him, “Do not be frightened or afraid for, ‘God is with you’ and will deliver you from the ‘hands of all your enemies.’”

The Maggid said that the Holy One Blessed Be God commanded Gabriel to place a “dense cloud” between Abraham and his assailants. When they saw the darkness and dense cloud they were frightened and returned to Nimrod their king and said to him, “Let us get away from this

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[G] Dense Cloud

Nimrod and his minions assail Abraham. Gabriel is dispatched to aid Abraham. He is commanded to place a dense cloud between the camps. The incident resembles the flight of Israel before Pharaoh (Exod. 14:19–20).
empire.” When the king heard this he gave money to all his princes and courtiers and set out from there for Babylonia.

After they moved, God commanded the angel Gabriel, “Go tell Abraham to follow after the enemy Nimrod to Babylonia.” Our father Abraham of blessed memory said to him, “I have no provisions for the road, no horse to ride upon and no soldiers to wage war with him.” The angel Gabriel responded, “You need nothing: neither provisions for the road, nor horse to ride upon, nor soldiers to wage war; neither chariot nor horsemen because you will ride upon my shoulders and I will bear you up and bring you to Babylonia.” In an instant Abraham arose and rode on Gabriel’s shoulder and found himself within the gates of the city of Babylon. Then the angel said to him, “Enter the city and proclaim loudly, ‘Adonai is God in the heavens above and on the earth below there is none other’,43 God is unique with no second; 44 God has neither bodily form nor corporeality; is the only God, the God of Nimrod; and I am Abraham, God’s servant, in God’s house.” Our father Abraham of blessed memory went and entered the city and proclaimed aloud to all the people of the city, “Adonai is God; God is unique and there is no second; God is God of the heavens; is the only God and the God of Nimrod! [H] Testify that this is the truth, all you men, women, and children. Testify also that I am ‘Abraham, God’s servant,’ ‘Trusted in

[ acknowledge of the One God

In this unit the theological heart of the midrash unfolds. Aided by Gabriel, Abraham enters the city of Babylon. He proclaims the nature of the one and only God: unique, without second, and incorporeal. He challenges Babylon’s denizens to acknowledge the God he proclaims and his role as God’s servant.

In a curious narrative twist, Abraham meets his parents and the angel Gabriel. Gabriel urges Abraham to proselytize his own parents. He scorns and derides their worship of a mere mortal. He uses biblical versets as barbs to disparage idolatry.

Finally, Abraham confronts Nimrod. He denounces him as a fraudulent deity and urges him to acknowledge the One God. Abraham’s words, like the points of spears, demolish the idols in Nimrod’s house. The images fall from their pedestals, broken into many pieces of shattered crockery.

The episode mirrors the biblical account of the Philistine’s capture of the Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark was brought into the temple of Dagon the image of the god Dagon fell to the ground and broke into pieces (I Sam. 5:3–4). But it also resonates with the story of Abraham the idol-breaker found in the classic midrash, B’reishit Rabbah 38:13.
God’s house!’” As he walked through the markets and the streets, proclaiming [this message], he found his father and his mother and also the angel Gabriel. The angel said to him, “Abraham, tell your father and your mother that they should also believe and attest to that which you are proclaiming, that ‘Adonai is God and there is none besides God.’” When Abraham heard the word of the angel, he said to his father and his mother, “You worship a mortal like yourselves. You prostrate yourselves to the image of Nimrod. Do you not realize that it has ‘a mouth but does not speak, an eye but does not see, an ear but does not hear,’ it cannot walk on its feet and it serves no purpose to itself or others?” When Terah heard his words, he persuaded Abraham to enter the house where he related how it happened that in one day he completed a forty-day journey. Upon hearing this Terah went to Nimrod and reported, “Know, our lord the king that the lad, my son from whom you fled, has arrived here.” Nimrod asked him, “How much time did his journey take?” Abraham responded, “Last night I left there and today I arrived here.” When Nimrod heard this, “He was seized with violent trembling” and ordered all his princes, counselors, and wise men to bring him advice on what to do with this child. They answered him unanimously, “May King Nimrod live forever!” So he issued a decree declaring that a feast and rejoicing take place for seven days throughout the city. Every person will celebrate at home, dress up, and go out in different kinds of clothes and ornaments. And there shall be “shouting and rejoicing.”

They shall also do this in the outer and inner courtyards of the royal house and in the provinces of your realm, and the force of your great power will bring forth every person to worship you. The king ordered that this be done, “and a decree was issued” in all the markets and streets. They all donned “raiments of fine linen, silk, and embroidery” and all sorts of silver ornaments, each person acquiring what he could—and thus they did.

Afterwards, when King Nimrod was sitting on his royal throne, he sent for Abraham to come to him with his father, Terah. Abraham passed by the governors and prefects until he reached the royal throne, the one on which King Nimrod was seated. He grasped hold of the throne and shook it, proclaiming these words in a loud voice, “O Nimrod, you loathsome man, who denies the unity of God, who does not believe in the living and ever-existent God, nor in ‘Abraham, God’s servant,’ ‘Trusted in God’s house.’”
Attest and declare as do I, that Adonai is God, God is unique and has no second, God has no body, lives, and is eternal, 'neither slumbers nor sleeps.' Further testify against yourself that you are a mortal and aver that I am [God’s servant] and that God created all the world in order that they would believe in God.” While Abraham raised his voice with these very words, the idols which were standing there fell to the ground on their faces. Now when the king and his princes saw how the idols had fallen [and heard] Abraham’s outcry, they all fell face-down on the ground with their god Nimrod. Nimrod’s heart melted within him and he remained two and one half hours on the ground. His heart melted within him, his soul also fled from him. After two hours his spirit and soul returned to his body, “and he awoke from his sleep.” At that time the king asked, “Is this your voice, Abraham, or the voice of your God?” He answered, “This voice is the voice of the smallest of the creatures which the Holy One Blessed Be God created.” Then King Nimrod said, “Indeed, your God, Abraham, is a great and mighty deity, the Sovereign of Sovereigns.” Then he ordered Terah to take his son and remove him and go to his city, “Now the two of them went together.”

When Abraham reached the age of twenty years, his father, Terah, fell ill. He said to his sons, Haran and Abraham, “By your lives, my sons, sell these two idols for I have not the money to pay for our expenses.” Haran went and sold the idols and brought the money to cover his father’s expenses. Then Abraham went and took two other idols to sell. He placed a rope around their necks with their faces to the ground. In that manner he dragged them and he cried out, “Who wants to buy an idol that serves no purpose, either to itself or to the one who purchases it, in order to worship it? It has a mouth but does not speak, an eye but does not see, feet but does not walk, an ear but does not hear.”

Abraham the Iconoclast

The Maaseh substantially enlarges one element of the B’reishit Rabbah tale. In that iteration an old woman brings a plate of flour as an offering to the idols. She becomes a more fully developed character in the Maaseh. Abraham is depicted as a more vigorous missionary. When his father falls ill, and the family’s welfare is endangered, he takes two idols, ties ropes around their necks, and drags them through the market. Instead of promoting the sale of his goods, he mocks and scoffs at the idols. The old woman appears as a potential customer but Abraham berates her for thinking the idols can be of any help. He uses her own experience with her
When the people of the city heard Abraham’s words, they were greatly surprised. As he went through the streets, he met an old woman who said to him, “By your life, Abraham, select an idol for me, a very good and large one, that I may worship and adore it.” Abraham answered her, “Old woman, old woman, I don’t know of any purpose in any of them, neither the big ones nor the little ones; neither by themselves nor for others.” He went on, “What has become of the big idol which you bought to worship from my brother Haran?” She responded, “Thieves came that night while I was in the bathhouse and stole it.” He retorted, “If this is so, how can you worship such an idol that was unable to save itself from thieves, let alone deliver others and you, you old, foolish woman from misfortune! And how can you say that the idol whom you worshiped is God? If it is God, why didn’t it deliver itself from the hands of the thieves? It is but an idol. It has neither intrinsic worth nor value for the one who purchases it in order to worship it.”

The old woman retorted, “If this is as you say, Abraham, whom shall I worship?” He answered, “‘Worship the supreme God, the supreme Sovereign,’ the God of ‘heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them’—the God of Nimrod, the God of Terah, the God of the east and west, south and north. Who is Nimrod the dog, that he has made himself a divine worthy of worship?” The old woman answered, “From now on I shall not worship any god except your God, the God of Abraham. Now if I do worship God, what benefit will I have?” He answered, “All which was stolen from you will be restored to you and you will save your soul from Gehenna.” The old woman asked, “What shall I do in order to save my soul from destruction?” He answered her, “Say, stolen household gods to illustrate their worthlessness. Convinced by Abraham’s arguments, the old woman abandons idolatry and professes her faith in the One God. She then goes out to urge the people in Babylon to embrace the God of Abraham. This element in the Maaseh serves as a paradigm for Abraham’s larger mission. Abraham’s monotheism set the standard for the new faith—to proselytize humanity.

Nimrod is dejected and his advisors propose a solution to his melancholy—make a great display of your power and wealth and Abraham and the people will abandon their infatuation with Abraham’s unorthodox views and return to a true faith in the king. Nimrod, however, will soon learn that wealth and power are evanescent. The spiritual truth of Abraham’s message will, in the end, prevail.
'Adonai is God in the heavens above and on the earth below', God is unique and has no second, ‘God deals death and gives life’, lives, and will not see death, also that I am Abraham, God’s servant, trusted in God’s house. The old woman said, “From now on I will affirm your words and attest that ‘Adonai is God in the heavens above and on earth below’, and that you, Abraham, are God’s prophet and I believe in God, may God be blessed, and in you.”

The Maggid said that she repented and regretted that she had worshiped idols. He also reported that she found the thieves and they returned her stolen articles along with the idol. What did the old woman do? She took stone in hand and struck the head of the idol. She said, “Woe to you and the one who might worship you in the future, for you have no purpose and give no benefit to the one who worships you.” Thus she went out of her house into the markets and streets and cried out, “Anyone who wants to save his soul from destruction and prosper in all his doings, let him worship the God of Abraham.”

The Maggid said that the old woman would cry out every day until many men and women repented. The king heard this report, sent for her, and they brought her before him. He asked her, “What have you done? You have strayed from worshiping me. Why don’t you worship me, for I am your god? ‘I formed you and even uphold you with My right hand.’” She answered, “You are a liar. You deny the unity of the unique God who has no second. You survive out of God’s goodness, yet you worship another god, denying God, God’s Torah, and Abraham, God’s servant.” When the king heard her words, he gave the order to kill her. And they killed her, but, “his heart trembled and expanded” because of her words. He wondered but did not know what to do about Abraham who undermined the people’s faith in him [Nimrod], for most of the people believed in the God of Abraham. When his princes saw the grief in his heart and when they heard his words, they said to him, “Arise quickly and go to the place where it is your custom to go on occasions and decree that all the people of the city make a seven-day feast, a rejoicing, and a holiday. Have them put on their finest robes of silk and embroidery, fine stones, and precious jewels—yellow emerald and jasper; objects of gold and silver, food and drink, and all kinds of fine fruits.” They argued that “by such a display of great wealth and power by the people of the city,
people ‘who glory in their great wealth,’77 Abraham would return to the faith of the king.”

When Nimrod heard this report he was overjoyed. He issued a decree that all the people of the city go to the place in the garden where they were accustomed to come each year. Let them bring their idols there and let them make a feast, a rejoicing, and a holiday greater than they were accustomed to previously. During the feast, the king asked Abraham’s father, Terah, to bring his son to see his greatness, “and the vast riches of his realm,”78 and the multitude of his officers and courtiers. Terah asked his son, “My son Abraham! Come with me to the assembly of King Nimrod our god.” Abraham answered, “I am unable to go there.” Terah responded, “If this is so, you stay with the idols until our return from there.” He agreed and Terah went. Abraham stayed with the idols, the king’s idols being among them. When Abraham saw that the king went to his assembly he took an ax in his hand and looking at the seated images of the king he said, “Adonai is God, Adonai is God,” and cast them from their throne to the ground. He gave them a mighty blow beginning with the largest and ending with the smallest. He cut off the hands of one and beheaded another; he put out79 this one’s eyes and broke that one’s legs, so that all were mutilated. Then Abraham left (but first he placed the ax in the hand of the largest idol).80 [J]

When the feast81 days ended the king returned home. When the king saw his idols broken, he asked, “Who was here? and Who dared to do this?” All the people weeping, answered, “Our lord the king, know that Abraham stayed with the idols and we heard that he smashed them.” Then the king ordered that Abraham be brought before him. When they brought him, the king and his princes asked, “Why did you smash our gods?” He answered, “I
did not smash them, but the largest among them did it. Don’t you see the ax in his hand? And if you don’t believe me, ask him and he will tell you.” When Nimrod heard his words, “he was angry enough to die.” Then he ordered that they imprison Abraham and he charged the commander of the prison to give him neither bread to eat nor water to drink.

The Maggid said that while Abraham our father of blessed memory was in prison, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, “Adonai my God, You know the hidden things, You also know that I ended up here only because I worship You.” The Holy One Blessed Be God hearkened to his prayer and sent the angel Gabriel to save him from the power of this dog. He said, “Peace to you, Abraham, ‘Fear not, be not dismayed for Adonai, your God, is with you.’” Immediately a well of fresh water appeared to him and he drank. Then the angel brought all kinds of food to eat and he dwelled with him there, serving as company for him for a complete year. At the end of the year, the king’s commanders and advisers came to eat and drink with the king. They told the king to build a fence and to decree in all the city that anyone who wants to serve the king bring a lot of wood to this house, until the whole place is totally filled with wood. Afterwards they will set the wood afire until the flames reach the heavens. Then they will hurl Abraham into its midst. Thus they will believe in you forever and not undermine your faith. The king was overjoyed by this advice. He ordered all the nation, every man, woman, youth, and old person who was in all the king’s provinces to bring wood to this large house which he had built, until it was full. So all the people did this and they hastened to bring the wood to that house, for he gave them up to forty days’ time to do it. During all this Abraham remained in the prison-house. The king further ordered them to prepare a large furnace within the house which he built. They ignited the wood in it and the flames reached the heavens so that all the people were terrified of the vastness of the fire.

Nimrod sent to the commander of the prison-house and ordered, “Bring me my enemy, Abraham, so that they may hurl him into this fiery furnace.” The commander of the prison-house came before the king, prostrated himself before him and asked, “How can you ask me for such a man, who has just completed a full year in the prison-house, [during that time] nobody brought bread or water or any food known in the world?” He responded,
“In spite of this, you go into the prison-house and call out to him. If he answers, bring him and I shall hurl him into the fire. But if he is dead, the better! You will bury him ‘and his name will be remembered no more.’”87 The commander of the prison-house went to the entrance of the dungeon and called in a great, strong voice, “Abraham, are you alive or dead?” He answered him, “I am alive.” He asked him, “Who gave you food and drink all this time?” He answered, “The One who is capable of all fed me and gave me drink; ‘the supreme God, the supreme Sovereign,’88 ‘who alone does wondrous things.’89 The God who is also the God of Nimrod, and the God of Terah, and the God of all the world. God sustains and supports everything.90 God sees and is not seen. God is in the heavens above and is found in every place. God attends to every detail.” Now when the commander of the prison-house heard his words, he also believed in the God of Abraham. He declared, “Your God, O Abraham, is God and I attest to this. Furthermore, you are in truth God’s servant and prophet. And as for Nimrod, he is a liar!” After he spoke in this manner, they reported to the king, “The commander of the prison-house attests that the God of Abraham is the true God and that Abraham is God’s truthful servant.” The king was horror-struck91 and sent after him. He asked him, “Commander of the prison-house, what is troubling you? How can you blaspheme against me and say that Abraham’s God is the true God and that Abraham is God’s truthful servant?” He replied to him, “For it is the truth, and you, King Nimrod, deny the truth.” When the king grasped the words of the commander he was greatly grieved and he was filled with anger. He gave the order to strike him dead. The commander of the prison-house cried out when they struck him and declared, “Adonai is God, God of all the world and the God of Nimrod, the blasphemer.”

The Maggid said that the sword did not cut into his neck, rather the one who smote with the sword, broke the sword.92 The king was horror-struck93 and gave the order to bring Abraham in order to hurl him into the fire. One of the princes was dispatched and brought him before the king. The king ordered, “Hurl him into the great fire.” As he got up to cast him into the fire, a flame from the furnace leapt forward and consumed him. Then another prince left Nimrod’s presence to cast Abraham into the fire but he too was consumed. Thus whoever would take hold of him to cast him into
The fire was consumed, so that many died, “incalculable and without number.” Then Satan came along95 masked as a human being and prostrated himself before the king.

The king asked, “What is it? Ask what you wish!”96 He responded, “I shall give you counsel on how to hurl Abraham into the fiery furnace. [K] Bring me many trees, nails, and rope. Then I will make a catapult,97 the movement of which will enable you to hurl him into the fiery furnace from afar. Thus the fire will not consume the man who operates the catapult. The king was overjoyed by this counsel. He gave the order to do this and they built a catapult. When they completed it, they tested it three times in the king’s presence so that from afar, they hurled stones with it into the fire. (This is what is called a catapult.)98 Then they took Abraham, tied his arms, hands, and feet together with a strong knot and placed him in the catapult to hurl him [into the fire]. When our father, Abraham of blessed memory, saw how they had bound him, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, “Adonai, my God, You see what this wicked man is doing to me!” Even the angels on high spoke before the Holy One Blessed Be God, “Sovereign of the universe, ‘Your Presence fills all the earth.’”99 Have you not seen what Nimrod the blasphemer has done to Your servant and Your prophet Abraham?” The Holy

In prison Abraham is again aided by the angel Gabriel who earlier provided milk when Abraham was in the cave. He opens a well for him and supplies him with food and companionship during his imprisonment.

Nimrod’s advisors hatch a plan. The king decrees that the people should bring wood to a fenced-off house and fill it to the hilt. Inside the house they prepared a huge furnace and ignited a massive fire. The commander of the prison was dispatched to bring Abraham to the house. The commander of the prison was amazed to find Abraham still living. He is convinced of the veracity of Abraham’s teaching and returns to Nimrod professing the One God and denying the divinity of Nimrod. In a rage the king orders the executioner to decapitate the commander of the prison but his sword broke.

Abraham was brought forward and each prince who attempted to hurl him into the flames was consumed by the fire while Abraham remained unscathed. The image of the fiery furnace is no doubt connected to the tanur ’ashan (the smoking oven) (Gen. 15:17) in the b’rit bein habetarim (the covenant between the pieces).

The fiery furnace episode in the Maaseh has a close resonance with Daniel 3. In that account (Dan. 3:6) King Nebuchadnezzar threatens Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with execution in the fiery furnace unless they bow down to his golden
One Blessed Be God answered, “How is it possible for Me not to know, when I know all ‘the hidden things.’ But I will show you vengeance against Nimrod the blasphemer, and I will deliver Abraham, My servant.”

The Maggid said that Satan came to Abraham masked as a man and said to him, “If you wish to deliver yourself from the fire of Nimrod, prostrate yourself before him and affirm your faith in him.” When Abraham heard the words of Satan, he replied to him, “May rebuke you, O Satan,” repulsive, contemptible, accursed blasphemer!” Then he left his presence. At that time Abraham’s mother came to kiss her son before they hurled him into the fiery furnace. She said to him, “My son, prostrate yourself before Nimrod and enter into his faith and save yourself from the fiery furnace.” Abraham answered her, “My mother, my mother, go away.” Then he pushed her away from himself and said to her, “My mother, that water can extinguish Nimrod’s fire but the fire of my God is eternal, it is inextinguishable, no water can put it out.” When his mother heard these truthful words she said, “May the God whom you worship deliver you from Nimrod’s fire.” Afterwards they placed him in the catapult to hurl him into the furnace.

idol. Their zealous obduracy parallels Abraham’s adamant refusal to worship Nimrod as a god. In both narratives the heroes emerge from their ordeals whole and unscathed.

In addition to the motif of idolatry the Maaseh shares another important detail with Daniel 3. Both accounts have a miraculous concluding element. A stunned Nebuchadnezzar blesses the God of the Jews (Dan. 3:28) and Nimrod’s advisors and courtiers embrace the One God of Abraham with these words: “ is God, in heaven above and on earth beneath there is none else” (Deut. 4:39).

Satanic Proposals

Satan arrives and provides counsel to Nimrod: Build a catapult and propel Abraham into the fiery furnace. In order to accomplish this feat, Abraham’s arms, feet, and hands are bound with a strong knot. The biblical imagery of the ‘aqeda (Gen. 22:9), of Abraham binding his son Isaac, is a poignant example of intertextual artistry.

Satan comes to Abraham and urges him to recant his unorthodox beliefs and aver his faith in Nimrod as god. Abraham dismisses Satan. Abraham’s mother pleads with her son to recant. He rejects her appeal and asserts that his God will deliver him. Gabriel attempts to intercede but Abraham rejects his offer with the claim that his God will save him. God orders the flames to cool off. God’s spoken words are a Hebrew translation of Sura 21:69 in the Koran.

Satan in Rabbinic literature often dons a disguise to deceive the humans he visits. In the Maaseh we see this aspect of Satan most fully developed.
Meanwhile the ministering angels sought mercy from the Holy One Blessed Be God to go down to deliver Abraham from Nimrod’s fire. The angel Gabriel came to him and asked him, “Well, Abraham, shall I save you from this fire?” Abraham answered, “The God in whom I trust, the God of heaven and earth will deliver me.” When the Holy One Blessed Be God saw his sincere devotion, he turned to him in mercy. He commanded the fire, “Cool off and bring tranquility to My servant Abraham.”

The Maggid said that the fire was extinguished without water. The logs flowered and all brought forth fruit, each tree producing its own fruit. The furnace turned into “the king’s pavilion,” and the angels sat in it with Abraham. When the king turned and saw the garden and the angels sitting with Abraham, he said to Abraham, “Great sorcery! You know that fire does not have power over you, moreover, you show the people that you sit in a pavilion.”

Then all Nimrod’s princes in unison answered the king, “No, our lord, this is not sorcery! Rather, this is a great, divine power, the God of Abraham. Besides God there is none other. Furthermore, we testify to this and also that Abraham is truly God’s servant!” In that hour all of Nimrod’s princes and all the people believed in Adonai, the God of Abraham. They all proclaimed, “Adonai is God, in heaven above and on earth beneath there is none else.”

Notes
2. Manuscripts, JTS Steinschneider Collection (Mic 4879); JTS Ma’aseh Avraham Avinu (Mic 5049).


4. The midrashic reading of Nimrod’s name is important. It is linked to the Hebrew root, mrd (to rebel). He rebelled by denying a belief in the one God.

5. Gen. 27:33.

6. After Exod. 1:16.

7. This statement echoes Esther 6:8–9,11 with appropriate changes to fit the midrash. Such was the custom in medieval Muslim countries. I thank Dr. Ezra Spicehandler for bringing this custom to my attention.


10. See Ps. 121:4. The verb form has been modified to the first person to serve the purpose of the midrash.


12. This is modeled on the story of Moses and not on the story of Jesus in the Greek Scripture. Ginzberg, Legends, vol. 5, 209 n. 8.

13. See BT Nidah 8b; Tosefta, Nidah 1:7; B’reishit Rabbah 85:10; Targum Yerushalmi, Genesis 38:24.

14. I follow Ginzberg’s suggestion: See Ginzberg, Legends, vol 5, 209 n. 10. This malady was some sort of hardening of the stomach. See also Max Grunbaum, Neue Beitrage zur Semitischen Sagenkunde (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1893), 128, who relates the word to a Spanish origin, which has the same meaning as the Italian word “calcinaccio,” a tumor in the joints, a hard lump in the body that occurred annually.


16. See Deut. 31:6, 8; I Chron. 28:20.

17. Gen. 2117.

19. This coming to an awareness of God by Abraham is similar to the description in the Koran 6:76.

20. Exod. 15:2.


22. This frequent biblical usage is found in Gen. 29:9; I Kings 1:22, 42; II Kings 6:33; Esther 6:14; and in other places.


24. Ibid.

25. Deut. 7:21b; Ps. 99:3.

26. Josh. 3:10; II Sam. 22:47; Hosea 2:1; Pss. 18:47; 42:3; 84:3.

27. This term is found in the biblical Aramaic in Dan. 6:27 and occurs in Hebrew in the prayer book as it is found here. See also Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990), 490.

28. Isa. 6:3.

29. II Sam. 3:38.


31. See note 14.


33. Ibid.

34. This phrase אֶלָּד אֲמַתָּנִי אֲשֵׁרִי is used as a numerological form in Eccles. 4:8, 10 without theological implication. The same phrase assumes clear theological meaning in the hymn קָנִיתִי לֶכְךָ where we read, אֲדֹנָי אֲשֵׁרִי אֱלֹהִי. This theological note is the tone that the midrash wishes to strike. This may also be an adaptation of the Koran, Sura 2:255. See Finkel, “An Arabic Story of Abraham,” 388–89.

35. Gen. 27:33.


39. Ps. 35:10; See J. F. Stenning, ed. and trans., *The Targum of Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 228. In this text the *Targum Jerusalmi, Isaiah* 10:23 (British Museum Or. MSS. 2211 and 1474) reflects Abraham’s reaction to the advancing adversary as is depicted here.

40. I Sam. 10:17; I Chron. 17:2.

41. II Sam. 22:1; Ps. 18:1.

42. This image recalls, “the pillar of cloud,” in Exod. 14:19–20. The expression “dense cloud” is found in the following biblical passages: Num. 14:14; Ezek. 34:12; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15; Ps. 97:2.
43. Deut. 4:39.
44. See note 34.
45. Esther 8:15.
46. These words reflect philosophical usage and usually describe God’s power. They are aptly applied to Nimrod who is depicted as a king/divinity in the midrash.
47. Esther 9:14.
48. Ezek. 16:13
49. This usage reflects the wording of Jer. 51:23; Ezek. 26:6, 12, 23.
50. See note 27.
51. Ps. 105:6, 42.
52. This attribute of Abraham is derived from Num. 12:7, where it is attributed to Moses.
53. See note 34.
54. Moses ben Maimon, Mishneh Torah, Y’sodei HaTorah, 1:7.
55. Josh. 3:10; II Sam. 22:47; Hosea 2:1; Pss. 18:47; 42:3; 84:3.
56. Ps. 121:4.
57. This incident reflects upon the biblical story in I Sam. 5:3, when the Philistines brought the captured Ark of God into Beit Dagon. In that episode, on the following morning the people of Ashdod entered Beit Dagon and found that the god Dagon had fallen face down on the ground (I Sam. 5:4). The parallel with its implication cannot be missed here in the midrash.
58. Isa. 19:1 reflects this idiom and shares an anti-idolatrous backdrop. Isaiah contends that God will come to Egypt, “Mounted on a swift cloud.” Egypt’s idols will tremble and “The hearts of the Egyptians will melt within them.” Here Nimrod’s heart melts as he realizes the truth about Abraham’s God and the falsity of his own idolatry. Other biblical passages reflect the use of this idiom, especially Josh. 2:11; 5:1; 7:5.
61. The episode describing the dragging of the idols with ropes is discussed by Ezra Spicehandler, “Shahin’s Influence on Babai ben Lotf: The Abraham-Nimrod Legend,” in Irano-Judaica II, ed. Shaul Shaked and Amnon Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1990), 161 nn. 11–12. The mockery of idolatry follows the tone and wording of Pss. 115:5–7; 135:16f, although the sequence mouth, eye, ear is somewhat different.
63. This passage resonates with the language of the fourth commandment as found in Exod. 20:11. I have supplied the fuller biblical text, which makes the point more sharply.
64. Deut. 4:39 and compare the Koran, Sura 7:158. See Joshua Finkel, “An Arabic Story of Abraham” in 388–89.
65. See note 34.
68. The expression הָלֶא רַאֲאֵתָה מַחְיָה is used in Ps. 89:49 as descriptive of human mortality. The midrash turns this phrase aptly, arguing for God’s deathlessness, hence God’s eternality. Only such a God is worthy of worship.
69. There is great stress placed on Abraham’s status as a trusted servant, prophet of God. This emphasis may reflect Islamic influence from the Shahada: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.”
70. See note 52.
71. See note 43. The 1580 printed edition of Ma’aseh Avraham Avinu and the manuscripts JTS Steinschneider Collection (Mic 4879, p. 87b) and JTS Ma’aseh Avraham Avinu (Mic 5049, p. 9a) read, בֹּרְאָה שֵׁם אָרוֹן reflecting other midrashic usage. See Midrash B’reishit Rabba 30:3; Ma’aseh Daniel Alav ha-Shalom, in Jellinek, Beit ha-Midrasch, vol. 5, 122; Baraita d’Mazalot, in Eisenstein, Otzar Ha-Midrash, 281, col. 1; and Abraham Wertheimer, ed., Batei Midrashot, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1953), 18, line 9.
72. This statement by Nimrod to the old woman reflects the combination and adaptation of three texts from the Book of Isaiah, 43:7; 44:21; and 41:10:
   a) תִּרְצִיתָא יְשָׁתֵיתִי
   b) יִתְרֹצֵיתִי יָכֹל לָי
   c) אַל תַּרְצוּ אוּכְלַיְתָא אַתָּא נַעֲמַתְךְ בְּמִיָּךְ זָדְקָי
73. These words are an echo of I Kings 13:4, in which Jeroboam orders the execution of the faithful man of God. See also II Kings 6:30; 22:11; II Chron. 34:19.
74. The midrash cites Isa. 60:5 with an adjustment of the pronominal suffix to meet the context here.
75. This reflects the sense of Ps. 13:3.
76. “Emerald and jasper” may refer to the stones in the breastplate mentioned in the Torah. According to the accounts in the Book of Exodus, they were onyx and jasper. See Exod. 28:20; 39:13. They are also mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 28:13). M. Jastrow cites שעピン as a yellow emerald in his discussion of another gem. See Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary (Berlin: Verlag Choreb, 1926), 166. He indicates that this stone was more dazzling and costly than onyx. This description fits this context best.
77. The printed text does not give the whole biblical allusion. By providing the full half verse as it appears in Ps. 49:7 the irony of the midrash is sharpened.
78. See Esther 1:4.
79. The idiom “put out the eyes” is more fitting than “broke his eyes,” which is attested to in Mishnah Bava Kama 8:1. See Ginzberg, Legends, vol. 5, 211–12 n. 27.
80. I insert this sentence one sentence before it is found in the printed editions published by Jellinek and Eisenstein. It is consistent with the flow of the story.
81. The story now continues more smoothly.
82. Jon. 4:9.
83. This tradition is found in the Babylonian Talmud. See BT Bava Batra 91a.
84. Here near the conclusion of the Maaseh, Abraham is placed in a prison cell and is again closed off from life. The Maaseh began with Abraham in a similar circumstance. He was born in a cave, shut off from the world. These two instances form a large inclusion around this midrashic work. I am grateful to my colleague, Rabbi Daniel Polish, who made this observation.
86. According to Louis Ginzberg this is the preferred reading. See Ginzberg, Legends, vol. 5, 212 n. 29. The implication is that the fence enclosed the larger house which was to be set on fire.
87. Jer. 11:19.
88. Deut. 10:17.
89. Ps. 72:18.
90. These words are from the first blessing of the Birkat HaMazon. A discussion of these blessings may be found in BT B’rachot 48b.
94. The phrase רָצוּ הַפְּנֵימִים אֶלָּא חַקֶּר אֶלָּא מַסְפֶּרָה is much like Job 9:10 רָצוּ הַפְּנֵימִים אֶלָּא חַקֶּר אֶלָּא מַסְפֶּרֶה and seems to be an adaptation here.
95. In the description of Satan’s arrival at God’s assembly, the same Hebrew verb is used as in Job 1:6; 2:1. One senses the author’s focus on the Book of Job, for an idiom from that book is suggested by The New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 5746/1985), 1339–40.
96. Esther 53
97. In translating the word כָּפַלְתָּן by the English “catapult,” I follow the work of Max Grunbaum. He translates this word with the German die Wurfmaschine, which I translate “catapult.” See Grunbaum, Neue Beiträge, 129–30. I thank Dr. Isaac Yerushalmi
of Cincinnati for his help in confirming the meaning of this word from its use in the Spanish. See J. Corominas, *Diccionario Critico Etimologico de la Lengua Castellana*, vol. 4 (Bern: 1954 Editorial Francke), 522.

98. I believe this definition was originally a marginal note, which in the course of time was incorporated into the body of the midrash.

99. This represents a slight adjustment in the text of Isa.6:3 to suit the context. The biblical text reads, וְשָׁמַרְתָּ בְּכָל תַּחַソֹר הָאָדָם and the midrash changes the third person, masculine, pronominal suffix to the second person, masculine singular, בְּכָל תַּחַשָּׁרוֹ.

100. Deut. 29:28.


102. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 5, 212 n. 31 for this textual reading.

103. After Song of Songs 8:7


105. This image is an adaptation from the story of Aaron’s flowering staff. Num. 17:23.
