

## **About "The Demonstrations"**

Aphrahat's works are collectively called the *Demonstrations*, from the identical first word in each of their titles (Syriac: ܛܗܘܘܬܐ, taḥwîṭâ). They are sometimes also known as "the homilies". There are twenty-three *Demonstrations* in all.<sup>[1]</sup> Each work deals with a different item of faith or practice, and is a pastoral homily or exposition. The *Demonstrations* are works of prose, but frequently, Aphrahat employs a poetic rhythm and imagery to his writing. Each of the first twenty-two *Demonstrations* begins with each successive letter of the Syriac alphabet (of which there are twenty-two). The *Demonstrations* were not composed all at one time, but in three distinct periods. The first ten, composed in 337, concern themselves with Christian life and church order, and predate the persecutions. *Demonstrations* 11–22 were composed at the height of the persecution, in 344. Some of this group deal with matters as before, others focus on apocalyptic themes. However, four *Demonstrations* are concerned with Judaism. It appears that there was a movement within the Persian church by some either to become Jews or return to Judaism, or to incorporate Jewish elements into Christianity. Aphrahat makes his stand by explaining the meaning of the symbols of circumcision, Passover and Shabbat. The twenty

1. *Demonstration on faith* — *Demonstrations* 1–10 were probably written 336–7
2. *Demonstration on charity*
3. *Demonstration on fasting*
4. *Demonstration on prayer*
5. *Demonstration on wars*
6. *Demonstration on members of the covenant*
7. *Demonstration on penitents*
8. *Demonstration on resurrection*
9. *Demonstration on humility*
10. *Demonstration on pastors*
11. *Demonstration on circumcision* — *Demonstrations* 11–22 were probably written 344
12. *Demonstration on the Passover*
13. *Demonstration on the Sabbath*
14. *Demonstration on preaching*

15. *Demonstration on various foods*
  16. *Demonstration on the call of the Gentiles*
  17. *Demonstration on Jesus the Messiah*
  18. *Demonstration on virginity*
  19. *Demonstration on the dispersion of Israel*
  20. *Demonstration on almsgiving*
  21. *Demonstration on persecution*
  22. *Demonstration on death and the last days*
  23. *Demonstration concerning the grape* — *Demonstration 23* was probably written in the winter of 344–5
  24. *Demonstration on the call of the Gentiles*
  25. *Demonstration on Jesus the Messiah*
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Aphrahat (c. 280–c. 345; A Persian hermit involved in the struggle against the Arian heresy. Aphraates was born on the Persian border with Syria. **He converted to Christianity and became a hermit in Edessa moving in time to Antioch, Turkey.** He was a **near contemporary to the slightly younger Ephrem** the Syrian, but the latter lived within the sphere of the Roman Empire. His hermitage attracted many, and miracles were reported. When Aphraates spoke publicly against the Arians, a servant of Emperor Valens tried to murder Aphraates. When the servant died suddenly, Valens took the death as a sign from God and protected Aphraates, refusing an Arian request to exile the hermit. Aphraates is sometimes identified as the **bishop of the monastery of Mar Mattai, near Mosul Mesopotamia.** Possibly a martyr, he is believed to have written a many-volumed defense of the faith called the *Demonstrations*, which is the **oldest extant document of the Church in Syria(344-5).** Aphraates is often referred to as "the Persian Sage." The *Demonstrations* are works of prose, but frequently, Aphrahat employs a poetic rhythm and imagery to his writing-**like many other Persians he wrote and spoke Aramaic.** Four *Demonstrations* are concerned with Judaism. It appears that there was a movement within the Persian church by some either to become Jews or return to Judaism, or to incorporate Jewish elements into Christianity. Aphrahat makes his stand for the distinctives of Christianity explaining the meaning of the symbols of circumcision (of heart), (Christ our) Passover and Shabbat(as made for man)

More about St. Aphraates from Wikipedia

Aphrahat (c. 280–c. 345; Syriac: ܐܦܪܗܬ — Aṗrahat, Persian: فرهاد, Greek Αφραάτης, and Latin Aphraates) was an Syriac-Christian author of the 3rd century from the Adiabene region of Assyria (then Sassanid ruled Assuristan), which was within the Persian Empire, who composed a series of twenty-three expositions or

homilies on points of Christian doctrine and practice. He was born in Persia around 280. All his known works, the Demonstrations, come from later on in his life. He was an ascetic and celibate, and was almost definitely a son of the covenant (an early Syriac form of communal monasticism). He may have been a bishop, and later Syriac tradition places him at the head of Mar Matti monastery near Mosul, in what is now northern Iraq. He was a near contemporary to the slightly younger Ephrem the Syrian, but the latter lived within the sphere of the Roman Empire. Called the Persian Sage (Syriac: ܫܚܝܬܐ ܦܪܫܝܐ, ḥakkîmâ pārsāyā), Aphrahat witnesses to the concerns of the early church beyond the eastern boundaries of the Roman Empire.

Life, history and identity

Aphrahat was born in Assuristan (Assyria) on the Sassanid Empire border with Roman Syria around 280.[1] His name, Aphrahat, is the Syriac version of the Persian name Frahāt, which is the modern Persian Farhād (فرهاد). The author, who was earliest known as hakkima pharsaya ("the Persian sage"), was a subject of Sapor II and may have come from a pagan family and been himself a convert from heathenism, though this appears to be later speculation. However, he tells us that he took the Christian name Jacob at his baptism, and is so entitled in the colophon to a manuscript of 512 which contains twelve of his homilies. Hence he was already confused with Jacob, bishop of Nisibis,[2] by the time of Gennadius of Marseilles (before 496), and the ancient Armenian version of nineteen of The Demonstrations has been published under this latter name. Thorough study of the Demonstrations makes identification with Jacob of Nisibis impossible. Aphrahat, being a Persian subject, cannot have lived at Nisibis, which became Persian only by Jovian's treaty of 363. Furthermore, Jacob of Nisibis, who attended the First Council of Nicaea, died in 338, and from the internal evidence of Aphrahat's works he must have witnessed the beginning of the persecution of Christians in the early 340s by Shapur II of Persia. The persecutions arose out of political tensions between Rome and Persia, particularly the declaration of Constantine I that Rome should be a Christian empire. Shapur perhaps grew anxious that the largely Assyrian and Armenian Christians within the Persian Empire might secretly support Rome. There are elements in Aphrahat's writing that show great pastoral concern for his harried flock, caught in the midst of all this turmoil.

It is learnt that his name was Aphrahat (or Pharhadh) from comparatively late writers, such as Bar Bahlul (10th century), Elias of Nisibis (11th), Bar-Hebraeus and Abdisho. George, bishop of the Arabs, writing in 714 to a friend who had sent him a series of questions about the "Persian sage", confesses ignorance of his name, home and rank, but gathers from his works that he was a monk, and of high esteem in the clergy. The fact that in 344 he was selected to draw up a circular letter from a council of bishops and other clergy to the churches of Ctesiphon and Seleucia on the Tigris[2] and elsewhere (later to become Demonstration 14) is held by Dr Wright and others to prove that he was a bishop. According to a marginal note in a 14th-century manuscript (B.M. Orient. 1017), he was "bishop of Mar Mattai," a famous monastery near Mosul, but it is unlikely that this institution existed so early.

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Aphrahat's works are collectively called the Demonstrations, from the identical first word in each of their titles (Syriac: ܬܗܘܘܬܐ, taḥwītā). They are sometimes also known as "the homilies". There are twenty-three Demonstrations in all.[1] Each work deals with a different item of faith or practice, and is a pastoral homily or exposition. The Demonstrations are works of prose, but frequently, Aphrahat employs a poetic rhythm and imagery to his writing. Each of the first twenty-two Demonstrations begins with each successive letter of the Syriac alphabet (of which there are twenty-two). The Demonstrations were not composed all at one time, but in three distinct periods. The first ten, composed in 337, concern themselves with Christian life and church order, and predate the persecutions. Demonstrations 11–22 were composed at the height of the persecution, in 344. Some of this group deal with matters as before, others focus on apocalyptic themes. However, four Demonstrations are concerned with Judaism. It appears that there was a movement within the Persian church by some either to become Jews or return to Judaism, or to incorporate Jewish elements into Christianity. Aphrahat makes his stand by explaining the meaning of the symbols of circumcision, Passover and Shabbat. The twenty-third Demonstration falls outside of the alphabetic system of the early works, and appears to be slightly later, perhaps near the end of Aphrahat's life. The twenty-third piece takes the symbolism of the grape, drawn from Isaiah chapter 65 and elsewhere, as its cue. It deals with the fulfilment of Messianic promise from Adam to Christ.[2] Aphrahat never strays too far from the Bible in

the Demonstrations: he is not given to philosophizing. **All of his gospel quotations seem to be drawn from the Diatessaron**, the gospel harmony that served the church at his time.

Aphrahat's mode of biblical interpretation is strikingly similar to that of the Babylonian rabbinic academies

of his day. His position within the church is indicated in Demonstration 14, in which Aphrahat appears to be writing a letter on behalf of his synod to the clergy of the Persian capital, Ctesiphon-Seleucia on the Tigris.

**In Demonstrations 5, Aphrahat, dealt with eschatology.** Concerning the beasts of Daniel 7, he identified the first beast as Babylon; the second, Media and Persia; the third, Alexander's Macedonian empire. The four heads of the leopard were the four successors of Alexander. The fourth beast appeared to include both the Macedonian successors of Alexander and the Roman emperors. Its horns he applied to the Seleucid kings down to Antiochus, whom he identified as the Little Horn. He reduced the time, times, and half a time to one and one-half times, in order to fit the ten and a half years of Antiochus' persecution of the Jews. Aphrahat also mentioned the Persian ram and the Grecian he-goat of Daniel 8.[3]

**In Demonstrations 8, Aphrahat stated that the Kingdom of Christ would not be established until the Second Advent at which time there would occur a literal resurrection of the righteous dead.[4]**

Translations

The Demonstrations were originally composed in the Syriac language, but were quickly translated into other languages. The Armenian version, published by Antonelli in 1756 and containing only 19 homilies, circulated mistakenly under the name Jacob of Nisibis. Important versions in Georgian and Ge'ez exist. A few of the Demonstrations were translated into Arabic, but wrongly attributed to Ephrem the Syrian.

Order and subjects of The Demonstrations

Demonstration on faith — Demonstrations 1–10 were probably written 336–7

Demonstration on charity

Demonstration on fasting

Demonstration on prayer

Demonstration on wars

Demonstration on members of the covenant

Demonstration on penitents

Demonstration on resurrection

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## EPHREM THE SYRIAN

Sermon on the Transfiguration of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

### INTRODUCTION

This prose sermon is to be found among the Greek texts attributed to St Ephrem the Syrian. The text is to be found in the two eighteenth century editions as well as in the recent edition published in Thessaloniki, accompanied by a translation into modern Greek. None of these is a critical edition. The English version which follows is, so far as I am aware, the first to be published. The numbering of the sections is my own, for ease of reference.

It is clear that the present form of the text cannot go back to the fourth century. Sections 13, 16 and 17 use the technical language of Chalcedon in 451 and the long section 15 is also redolent of the fifth century rather than the fourth. As D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou has noted, a number of manuscripts attribute this text to Isaac of Antioch rather than Ephrem.

The text gives the impression of being a compilation. After the opening section, there follows a fairly straightforward commentary on the biblical narrative (sections 2-12). This includes a series of paragraphs (sections 3-7) beginning, 'He led them up the mountain', which have quite a Syrian feel to them, though they are not metrical in Greek. Section 15, a long series of antitheses on the two natures also has a Syrian feel and the closest parallel I have found is in a homily by Narsai (died 503).

Section 13 forms a transition to the more strictly theological part of the sermon, in which the Father's testimony (Matt. 17:5) becomes a peg on which the author hangs a long defence of the Chalcedonian definition of the two natures.

A number of phrases and ideas are reminiscent of Byzantine liturgical texts, some of these are pointed out in the notes.

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Sermon on the Transfiguration of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

1. From the land comes the joy of harvest, from the vineyard fruits that give food, and from the Scriptures teaching that gives life. The land has one season for the harvest, and the vineyard has one season for the vintage, but the Scripture when

read always overflows with teaching that gives life. The land when it has been harvested lies fallow and the vineyard when the grapes have been picked is unproductive, but when Scripture is harvested the grapes of those who expound it are not lacking in it. It is picked every day and the grape clusters of the hope in it are never exhausted. Let us then draw near to this land and enjoy its life-giving furrows; and let us harvest from it grapes of life, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said to his Disciples, 'There are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of man coming in his glory'.1[1]

2. 'And after six days he took Simon Peter and James and John his brother to a very high mountain and he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white like light'.2[2] Men whom he said would not taste death until they saw the image of his coming, are those whom he took and led up the mountain and showed them how he was going to come on the last day in the glory of his divinity and in the body of his humanity.

3. He led them up the mountain to show them who the Son is and whose he is. Because when he asked them, 'Whom do men say the Son of man is?'3[3] They said to him, some Elias, others Jeremias, or one of the Prophets. This is why he leads them up the mountain and shows them that he is not Elias, but the God of Elias; again, that he is not Jeremias, but the one who sanctified Jeremias in his mother's womb;4[4] not one of the Prophets, but the Lord of the Prophets, who also sent them. And he shows them that he is the maker of heaven and earth, and that he is Lord of living and dead. For he gave orders to heaven and brought down Elias, and made a sign to the earth and raised up Moses.

4. He led them up the mountain to show them that he is the Son of God, born from the Father before the ages and in the last times incarnate from the Virgin, as he knows how, born ineffably and without seed, preserving her virginity incorrupt; for wherever God wills it, the order of nature is overcome.5[5] For God the Word dwelt in the Virgin's womb, and the fire of his divinity did not consume the members of the Virgin's body, but protected them carefully by its nine month presence. He dwelt in the Virgin's womb, not abhorring the unpleasant smell of nature, and God incarnate came forth from her to save us.

5. He led them up the mountain to show them the glory of the godhead and to make known to them that he is the redeemer of Israel, as he had shown through the Prophets, and they should not be scandalised in him when they saw his voluntary sufferings, which as man he was about to suffer for us. For they knew

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him as a man, but did not know that he was God. They knew him as son of Mary, going about with them in the world<sup>6</sup>[6], and he made known to them on the mountain that he was Son of God and God. They saw that he ate and drank, toiled and rested, dozed and slept, things which did not accord with his divine nature, but only with his humanity, and so he took them to the mountain that the Father might call him Son<sup>7</sup>[7] and show that he is truly his Son and that he is God.

6. He led them up the mountain and showed them his kingship before his passion, and his power before his death, and his glory before his disgrace, and his honour before his dishonour, so that, when he was arrested and crucified by the Jews, they might know that he was not crucified through weakness, but willingly by his good pleasure for the salvation of the world.

7. He led them up the mountain and showed the glory of his divinity before the resurrection, so that when he rose from the dead in the glory of his divine nature, they might know that it was not because of his harsh toil that he accepted glory, as if he lacked it, but it was his before the ages with the Father and together with the Father, as he said as he was coming to his voluntary passion,<sup>8</sup>[8] 'Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world existed'.<sup>9</sup>[9]

8. And so on the mountain he showed his Apostles the glory of his divinity, concealed and hidden by his humanity. For they saw his face bright as lightning and his garments white as light. They saw two suns; one in the sky, as usual, and one unusually; one visible in the firmament and lighting the world, and one, his face, visible to them alone. His garments white as light showed that the glory of his divinity flooded from his whole body, and his light shone from all his members. For his flesh did not shine with splendour from without, like Moses,<sup>10</sup>[10] but the glory of his divinity flooded from him. His light dawned and was drawn together in him. Nor did depart somewhere else and leave him, because it did come from another place and adorn him, nor was it for his use. And he did not display the whole depth of his glory, but only as much as the limits of their eyes could encompass.<sup>11</sup>[11]

9. 'And there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him'.<sup>12</sup>[12] And the words that they said to him were such as these: they were thanking him that their words and those of all their fellow Prophets had been fulfilled by his

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coming. They offered him worship for the salvation which he had wrought for the world for the human race; and that he had fulfilled in reality the mystery they had only sketched. There was joy for the Prophets and the Apostles by this ascent of the mountain. The Prophets rejoiced when they saw his humanity, which they had not known. The Apostles also rejoiced when they saw the glory of his divinity, which they had not known, and heard the voice of the Father bearing witness to his Son; and through this they recognised his incarnation, which was concealed from them. And the witness of the three was sealed by the Father's voice and by Moses and Elias, who stood by him like servants, and they looked to one another: the Prophets to the Apostles and the Apostles to the Prophets. There the authors of the old covenant saw the authors of the new. Holy Moses saw Simon the sanctified; the steward of the Father saw the administrator of the Son. The former divided the sea for the people to walk in the middle of the waves; the latter raised a tent for the building of the Church. The virgin of the old covenant saw the virgin of the new:<sup>13</sup>[13] [Elias and John;] the one who mounted on the chariot of fire and the one who leaned on the breast of the flame. And the mountain became a type of the Church, and on it Jesus united the two covenants, which the Church received, and made known to us that he is the giver of the two. The one received his mysteries; the other revealed the glory of his works.

10. Simon said, "It is good for us to be here, Lord".<sup>14</sup>[14] "Simon, what are you saying? If we remain here, who fulfils the word of the Prophets? Who seals the sayings of the heralds? Who brings to perfection the mysteries of the just? If we remain here, in whom are the words, 'They dug my hands and my feet'<sup>15</sup>[15] fulfilled? To whom do the words, 'They parted my garments among them, and cast lots for my clothing'<sup>16</sup>[16] apply? To whom does, 'They gave me gall as my food, and with vinegar they quenched my thirst'<sup>17</sup>[17] relate? Who confirms, 'Free among the dead?'<sup>18</sup>[18] If we remain here, who will tear up the record of Adam's debt?<sup>19</sup>[19] And who will pay his debt in full? And who will restore to him the garment of glory?<sup>20</sup>[20] If we remain here, how will all that I have said to you come to pass? How will the Church be built?<sup>21</sup>[21] How will you take the keys of the kingdom of heaven from me?<sup>22</sup>[22] What will you bind? What will you loose? If we remain here, everything that was said through the Prophets will come to nothing."

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11. He then said, "Let us make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elias".<sup>23</sup>[23] Simon was sent to build the Church in the world, and he is making tents on the mountain; for he was still looking at Jesus in human terms, and placed him with Moses and Elias. And besides this he showed him that he did not need his tent, for it was he who had made for his fathers a tent of cloud in the desert for forty years.<sup>24</sup>[24] "For while he was still speaking, a cloud of light overshadowed them". <sup>25</sup>[25] "Do you see a tent made without toil, Simon? A tent that prevents heat and contains no darkness? A tent that blazes and shines?"<sup>26</sup>[26]

12. And while the Disciples were marvelling, out of the cloud a voice was heard from the Father, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him."<sup>27</sup>[27] At the voice of the Father, Moses returned to his place and Elias returned to his country, and the Apostles fell on their faces to the ground, and Jesus stood alone, because the voice was fulfilled in him alone. The Prophets left and the Apostles fell to the ground, because the Father's voice in witness, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him", was not fulfilled in them. The Father taught them that Moses' dispensation was fulfilled, and that they should listen to the Son, "For Moses, as a servant, spoke what he was ordered to, and he proclaimed what he had been told, and so did all the Prophets, until the one to whom it belongs has come,<sup>28</sup>[28] that is Jesus, who is Son, not servant, Lord and not slave, who is master and not subject, lawgiver and not subject to the law. By divine nature, "This is my beloved Son"". On the mountain the Father made known to the Apostles what was hidden from them. The One Who Is<sup>29</sup>[29] reveals the One Who Is. The Father makes known the Son.

13. At that voice the Apostles fell on their faces to the ground; for there was a fearsome thunder, so that the earth shook at his voice, and they fell to the ground.<sup>30</sup>[30] It showed them that the Father had drawn near; and the Son called them with his voice and raised them up.<sup>31</sup>[31] For as the voice of the Father had thrown them down, so too the voice of the Son, raised them up by the strength of his divinity, which dwelt in his flesh and was united in it without change, both remain indivisibly and unconfusedly in one hypostasis and one person. He did not, like Moses, become resplendent from without, but as God he blazed with glory. For Moses was anointed with splendour by the appearance of his face,

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while Jesus in his whole body blazed, like the sun with its rays, with the glory of his divinity.

14. And the Father cried out, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him". The Son was not separated from the glory of the godhead, for the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit are one nature, one power and once essence and one kingship. And he cried out to one with a simple name<sup>32</sup>[32] and with fearsome glory. And Mary called him 'son', not separated from the glory of his divinity by his human nature; for he is one, God who appeared in a body to the world. His glory revealed the divine nature that was from the Father, and his body revealed his human nature that was from Mary; both natures coming together and being united in one hypostasis. Only begotten from the Father, and only begotten from Mary. And anyone who parts him will be parted from his kingdom, and anyone who confounds his natures will perish from his life. May anyone who denies that Mary gave birth to God not see the glory of his divinity; and anyone who denies that he bore a sinless body will be cast out from salvation and from the life that has been given through his body.

15. The facts themselves bear witness and his divine acts of power teach those who doubt that he is true God, and his sufferings show that he is true man.<sup>33</sup>[33] And if those who are feeble in understanding are not fully assured, they will pay the penalty on his dread day. If he was not flesh, why was Mary introduced at all? And if he was not God, whom was Gabriel calling Lord? If he was not flesh, who was lying in the manger? And if he was not God, whom did the Angels come down and glorify? If he was not flesh, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes? And if he was not God, whom did the shepherds worship? If he was not flesh, whom did Joseph circumcise? And if he was not God, in whose honour did the star speed through the heavens? If he was not flesh, whom did Mary suckle? And if he was not God, to whom did the Magi offer gifts? If he was not flesh, whom did Symeon carry in his arms? And if he was not God, to whom did he say, "Let me depart in peace"?<sup>34</sup>[34] If he was not flesh, whom did Joseph take and flee into Egypt? And if he was not God, in whom were words "Out of Egypt I have called my Son" fulfilled?<sup>35</sup>[35] If he was not flesh, whom did John baptise? And if he was not God, to whom did the Father from heaven say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased"? If he was not flesh, who fasted and hungered in the desert? And if he was not God, whom did the Angels come down and serve? If he was not flesh, who was invited to the wedding in Cana of Galilee? And if he was not God, who turned the water into wine? If he was not flesh, in whose hands were the loaves? And if he was not God, who satisfied

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crowds and thousands in the desert, not counting women and children, from five loaves and two fishes? If he was not flesh, who fell asleep in the boat? And if he was not God, who rebuked the winds and the sea? If he was not flesh, with whom did Simon the Pharisee eat? And if he was not God, who pardoned the offences of the sinful woman? If he was not flesh, who sat by the well, worn out by the journey? And if he was not God, who gave living water to the woman of Samaria and reprehended her because she had had five husbands? If he was not flesh, who wore human garments? And if he was not God, who did acts of power and wonders?<sup>36</sup>[36] If he was not flesh, who spat on the ground and made clay? And if he was not God, who through the clay compelled the eyes to see? If he was not flesh, who wept at Lazarus' grave? And if he was not God, who by his command brought out one four days dead? If he was not flesh, who sat on the foal? And if he was not God, whom did the crowds go out to meet with glory? If he was not flesh, whom did the Jews arrest? And if he was not God, who gave an order to the earth and threw them onto their faces.<sup>37</sup>[37] If he was not flesh, who was struck with a blow? And if he was not God, who cured the ear that had been cut off by Peter and restored it to its place? If he was not flesh, who received spittings on his face? And if he was not God, who breathed the Holy Spirit into the faces of his Apostles? If he was not flesh, who stood before Pilate at the judgement seat? And if he was not God, who made Pilate's wife afraid by a dream? If he was not flesh, whose garments did the soldiers strip off and divide? And if he was not God, how was the sun darkened at the cross? If he was not flesh, who was hung on the cross? And if he was not God, who shook the earth from its foundations? If he was not flesh, whose hands and feet were transfixed by nails? And if he was not God, how was the veil of the temple rent, the rocks broken and the graves opened? If he was not flesh, who cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me"? And if he was not God, who said "Father, forgive them"? If he was not flesh, who was hung on a cross with the thieves? And if he was not God, how did he say to the thief, "Today you will be with me in Paradise"? If he was not flesh, to whom did they offer vinegar and gall? And if he was not God, on hearing whose voice did Hades tremble? If he was not flesh, whose side did the lance pierce, and blood and water came out? And if he was not God, who smashed to gates of Hades and tear apart its bonds? And at whose command did the imprisoned dead come out? If he was not flesh, whom did the Apostles see in the upper room? And if he was not God, how did he enter when the doors were shut? If he was not flesh, the marks of the nails and the lance in whose hands and side did Thomas handle? And if he was not God, to whom did he cry out, "My Lord and my God"? If he was not flesh, who ate by the sea of Tiberias? And if he was not God, at whose command was the net filled? If he was not flesh, whom did the Apostles and Angels see being taken up into heaven? And if he was not God, to whom was heaven opened, whom did

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the Powers worship in fear and whom did the Father invite to "Sit at my right hand". As David said, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, etc." If he was not God and man, our salvation is a lie, and the words of the Prophets are lies.

16. But the Prophets spoke the truth, and their testimonies were not lies. The Holy Spirit spoke through them what they had been commanded. So too John the pure, who leant on the breast of flame,<sup>38[38]</sup> reinforcing the voices of the Prophets, speaking of God in Gospels, taught us when he said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him nothing that was made, was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us".<sup>39[39]</sup> God the Word from God and only begotten Son from the Father, consubstantial with the Father; the One who is from the One who is, preeternal Word, ineffably born, without a mother, from the Father before all the ages. The same is born, without a father, in the last times from a daughter of man, from Mary the virgin, as God incarnate, bearing flesh from her, and becoming man, which he was not, while remaining God, which he was, that he might save the world. And he is the Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten from the Father, and only begotten from a mother.

17. I confess<sup>40[40]</sup> the same to be perfect God and perfect man, acknowledged in the two natures united hypostatically, or in person, indivisibly, unconfusedly and unchangeably; having put on flesh that is animated by a rational and intelligent soul, in all things becoming passible like us, sin alone excepted. He is both earthly and heavenly, temporary and eternal, starting and without beginning, timeless and subject to time, created and uncreated, passible and impassible, God and man, perfect in both, one in two and in two one. One person of the Father, one person of the Son, and one person of the Holy Spirit. One godhead, one power, one kingship in three persons or hypostases. So we glorify the Holy Unity in Trinity, and the Holy Trinity in Unity. In this the Father cried out, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him".

18. All this the holy Catholic Church of God has received. In this Holy Trinity it baptises for eternal life. Into this Trinity it sanctifies with equal honour, confesses it without separation, without division; worships it without error, confesses and glorifies it. To this Unity in three persons belong glory, thanksgiving, honour, might, majesty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

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## Discourse On the Passion of the Saviour by Our Venerable Father Ephrem the Syrian

I am afraid to speak  
and touch with my tongue  
this fearful narrative  
concerning the Saviour.  
For truly it is fearful  
to narrate all this.

Our Lord  
was given up today  
into the hands of sinners!

For what reason then  
was one who is holy  
and without sin given up?

For having done no sin  
he was given up today.

Come, let us examine closely  
why Christ our Saviour  
was given up.

For us, the ungodly,  
the Master was given up.

Who would not marvel?  
Who would not give glory?

When the slaves had sinned  
the Master was given up.

The sons of perdition  
and the children of darkness  
went out in the darkness

to arrest the sun  
who had the power  
to consume them in an instant.

But the Master, knowing  
their effrontery  
and the force of their anger,  
with gentleness,  
by his own authority,  
gave himself up  
into the hands of the ungodly.

And lawless men, having bound  
the most pure Master,  
mocked the one  
who had bound the strong one  
with unbreakable bonds,  
and set us free  
from the bonds of sins.

They plaited a crown  
of their own thorns,  
the fruit borne  
by the vine of the Jews.

In mockery  
they called him 'King'.  
The lawless spat  
in the face of the most pure,  
at whose glance  
all the Powers of heaven  
and the ranks of Angels  
quake with fear.

See, once again grief and tears  
grip hold of my heart,  
as I contemplate the Master  
enduring outrage and insults,

scourgings, spitting  
from slaves, and blows.

Come, observe well  
the abundance of compassion,  
the forbearance and mercy  
of our sweet Master.

He had a useful slave  
in the Paradise of delight,  
and when he sinned  
he was given to the torturers.

But when the Good One  
saw his weakness of soul  
he took compassion on the slave  
and had mercy on him  
and presented himself  
to be scourged by him.

I wished to remain silent  
because my mind  
was utterly amazed;  
but then again I was afraid  
lest I reject  
by my silence  
my Saviour's grace.  
For my bones tremble  
when I think of it.

The fashioner of all things,  
our Lord himself,  
was today arraigned  
before Caiaphas,  
like one of the condemned;  
and one of the servants  
struck him a blow.

My heart trembles  
as I think on these things:  
the slave is seated,  
the Master stands,  
and one full of iniquities  
passes sentence  
on the one who is sinless.

The heavens trembled,  
earth's foundations shuddered;  
Angels and Archangels  
all quailed with terror.  
Gabriel and Michael  
covered their faces  
with their wings.

The Cherubim at the throne  
were hidden beneath the wheels;  
The Seraphim struck their wings  
one with the other  
at that moment,  
when a servant gave  
a blow to the Master.

How did earth's foundations  
endure the earthquake  
and the tremor  
at that moment,  
when the Master was outraged?

I observe and I tremble  
and again I am stunned,  
when I see the long-suffering  
of the loving Master.

For see my inward parts  
tremble as I speak,  
because the Creator,  
who by grace fashioned



humanity from dust,  
he the Fashioner is struck.

Let us fear, my brethren  
and not simply listen.  
The Saviour endured  
all these things for us.

Wretched servant,  
tell us why  
you struck the Master?

All servants,  
when they are set free,  
receive a blow,  
that they may obtain  
freedom that perishes;  
but you, miserable wretch,  
unjustly gave a blow  
to the liberator of all.

Did you perhaps expect  
to receive from Caiaphas  
a reward for your blow?

Had you perhaps not heard,  
had you perhaps not learned  
that Jesus is  
the heavenly Master?

You gave a blow  
to the Master of all things,  
but became slave of slaves  
to age on age,  
a disgrace and abomination,  
and condemned for ever  
in unquenchable fire.

**A great marvel, brethren,  
it is to see the gentleness  
of Christ the King!  
Struck by a slave  
he answered patiently,  
with gentleness  
and all reverence.**

A servant is indignant,  
the Master endures;  
a servant is enraged,  
the Master is kind.

At a time of anger,  
who could endure  
rage and disturbance?  
But our Lord  
submitted to all this  
by his goodness.

Who can express  
your long-suffering,  
Master?

You that are longed for  
and loved by Christ,  
draw near, with compunction  
and longing for the Saviour.

Come, let us learn  
what took place today  
in Sion, David's city.

The longed-for and chosen  
offspring of Abraham,  
what did they do today?

They gave up to death  
the most pure Master  
on this day.

**Christ our Saviour  
was unjustly hanged  
on the tree of the Cross  
through lawless hands.**

Come, let us all  
wash our bodies  
with tears and groans,  
because our Lord,  
the King of glory,  
for us ungodly people  
was given up to death.

If someone suddenly hears  
of one truly beloved  
having died,  
or again, suddenly sees  
the beloved himself  
lying a dead corpse  
before their eyes,  
their appearance is altered,  
and the brightness  
of their sight is darkened.

So, in heaven's height,  
when it saw  
the outrage to the Master  
on the tree of the Cross,  
**the bright sun's  
appearance was altered;**  
it withdrew the rays  
of its own brightness,  
and unable to look on  
the outrage to the Master,  
clothed itself  
in grief and darkness.

**Likewise the Holy Spirit,  
who is in the Father,  
when he saw**

**the beloved Son  
on the tree of the Cross,  
rending the veil,  
the temple's adornment,  
suddenly came forth  
in the form of a dove.**

All creation was  
in fear and trembling  
when the King of heaven,  
the Saviour suffered;  
while we sinners  
for whom the only immortal  
was given up  
ever treat this with contempt.

We laugh each day  
when we hear of the Saviour's  
sufferings and outrage.

We enjoy ourselves daily  
filled with great zeal  
to deck ourselves in fine clothing.

The sun in the sky  
because of the outrage to its Master  
changed its radiance  
into darkness,  
so that we, when we saw it,  
might follow its example.

**The Master on the Cross  
was outraged for your sake,**  
while you, miserable wretch,  
ever deck yourself  
in splendid raiment.

Does your heart not tremble,  
does your mind not quail,  
when you hear such things?

**The One who alone is sinless  
was for you given over  
to a shameful death,**  
to outrages and revilings,  
while you hear all this  
with lofty indifference.

**The whole rational flock  
should look intently  
on its shepherd,  
and ever long for him  
and respect him,  
because for its sake  
he suffered, he  
the dispassionate and all pure.**

Nor should it deck itself  
in corruptible garments,  
nor yet indulge in pleasure  
and worldly nourishment,  
but should give its Maker pleasure  
by ascesis and true reverence.

Let us not become  
imitators of the Jews;  
a people harsh and disobedient  
and that ever rejects the blessings  
and benefactions of God.

God Most High  
for the sake of Abraham  
and his covenant  
from the beginning bore  
the stubbornness of the people.

From heaven he gave  
them Manna to eat;  
but they, the unworthy,  
longed for garlic,  
evil-smelling foods.

Again, he gave them water  
from the rock in the desert,  
while they in place of these  
gave him vinegar  
when they hanged him on a Cross.

Let us be careful, brethren,  
not to be found  
as fellows of the Jews  
who crucified the Master,  
their own Creator.

Let us always be fearful,  
keeping before our eyes  
the Saviour's sufferings.

Let us always keep in mind  
his sufferings,  
because it was for us he suffered,  
the dispassionate Master;  
for us he was crucified,  
the only sinless One.

What return can we make  
for all this, brethren?

Let us be attentive to ourselves  
and not despise his sufferings.

**Draw near all of you,  
children of the Church,  
bought with the precious  
and holy blood  
of the most pure Master.**

Come, let us meditate  
on his sufferings with tears,  
thinking on fear,  
meditating with trembling,  
saying to ourselves,

'Christ our Saviour  
**for us** the impious  
was given over to death'.

Learn well, brother,  
what it is you hear:  
**God who is without sin,  
Son of the Most High,  
for you was given up.**

Open your heart,  
learn in detail  
his sufferings  
and say to yourself:  
God who is without sin  
today was given up,  
today was mocked,  
today was abused,  
today was struck,  
today was scourged,  
today wore  
a crown of thorns,  
today was crucified,  
he, the heavenly Lamb.

Your heart will tremble,  
your soul will shudder.

Shed tears every day  
by this meditation  
on the Master's sufferings.

Tears become sweet,  
the soul is enlightened  
that always meditates  
on Christ's sufferings.

Always meditating thus,  
shedding tears every day,

giving thanks to the Master  
for the sufferings  
**that he suffered for you,  
so that in the day  
of his Coming  
your tears may become  
your boast and exaltation  
before the judgement seat.**

Endure as you meditate  
on the loving Master's  
sufferings,  
endure temptations,  
give thanks from your soul.

**Blessed is the one  
who has before his eyes  
the heavenly Master  
and his sufferings,  
and has crucified himself**  
from all the passions  
and earthly deeds,  
who has become an imitator  
of his own Master.

This is understanding,  
this is the attitude  
of servants who love God,  
when they become ever  
imitators of their Master  
by good works.

Shameless man, do you watch  
the most pure Master  
hanging on the Cross,  
while you pass the time  
that you have to live on earth  
in pleasure and laughter?



Don't you know, miserable wretch,  
that the crucified Lord  
will demand an account  
of all your disdainful deeds,  
for which, when you hear of them, you show no concern,  
and as you take your pleasure  
you laugh  
and enjoy yourself with indifference?

The day will come,  
that fearful day,  
for you to weep unceasingly  
and cry out in the fire  
from your pains,  
and there will be no one at all  
to answer  
and have mercy on your soul.

I worship you, Master,  
I bless you, O Good One,  
I entreat you, O Holy One,  
I fall down before you, Lover of humankind,  
and I glorify you, O Christ,  
because you, only-begotten  
**Master of all,  
alone without sin,  
for me the unworthy sinner  
were given over to death,  
death on a Cross,  
that you might free  
the sinner's soul  
from the bonds of sins.**

And what shall I give you  
in return for this, Master?

Glory to you, Lover of humankind!  
Glory to you, O Merciful!  
Glory to you, O Long-suffering!

Glory to you, who pardon  
every fault!  
Glory to you, who came down  
to save our souls!  
Glory to you, incarnate  
in the Virgin's womb!  
Glory to you, who were bound!  
Glory to you, who were scourged!  
Glory to you, who were crucified!  
Glory to you, who were buried!  
Glory to you, who were raised!  
Glory to you, who were proclaimed!  
Glory to you, who were believed!  
Glory to you, who were taken up!  
Glory to you, who were enthroned  
with great glory  
at the Father's right hand,  
**and are coming again**  
**with the glory of the Father**  
**and the holy Angels**  
to judge every soul  
that has despised  
your holy sufferings  
in that dread  
and fearful hour,  
when the powers of heaven  
will be shaken;  
when Angels, Archangels,  
Cherubim and Seraphim  
will come all together  
with fear and trembling  
before your glory;  
when all the foundations  
of the earth will tremble,  
and everything that has breath  
will shudder at your great  
and unendurable glory.

In that hour  
your hand will hide me  
under its wings  
and my soul be delivered  
from the fearful fire,  
the gnashing of teeth,  
the outer darkness  
and unending weeping,  
that blessing you, I may say,  
'Glory to the One, who wished  
to save the sinner  
through the many acts of pity  
of his compassion.

#### EPHREM on PRAYER

Prayer is a guard of prudence, control of wrath, restraint of pride, cleansing of malice, destruction of envy, righting of impiety. Prayer is strength of bodies, prosperity of a household, good order of a city, might of a kingdom, trophy of war, assurance of peace. Prayer is a seal of virginity, fidelity in marriage, weapon of travellers, guardian of sleepers, courage of the wakeful, abundance for farmers, safety of those who sail. Prayer is an advocate for those being judged, remission for the bound, consolation for the grieving, gladness for the joyful, comfort for mourners, a feast on birthdays, a crown for the married, a shroud for the dying. Prayer is converse with God, equal honour with the Angels, progress in good things, averting of evils, righting of sinners. Prayer made the whale a house for Jonas, brought Ezechias back to life from the gates of death, turned the flame to wind of moisture for the Youths in Babylon. Through prayer Elias bound the heaven not to rain for three years and six months.

EPHREM ON PSALMODY Psalmody is calm of soul, author of peace. Psalmody is convenor of friendship, union of the separated, reconciliation of enemies. Psalmody attracts the help of the Angels, is a weapon in night-time fears, repose of the day's toils, safety for infants, adornment for the old, consolation for the elderly, most fitting embellishment for women. It make deserts into homes, market places

sober. It is the ABC for beginners, progress for the more advanced, confirmation for the perfect, the voice of the Church. It makes festivals radiant; it creates mourning that is in accordance with God, for psalmody draws tears even from a heart of stone. Psalmody is the work of the Angels, the commonwealth of heaven, spiritual incense. Psalmody is enlightenment of souls, sanctification of bodies.

Let us, brethren, never stop making psalmody our meditation, both at home and on the road, both sleeping and waking, speaking to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Psalmody is the joy of those who love God. It banishes idle chatter, brings laughter to an end, reminds us of the judgement, rouses the soul towards God, joins the choir of the Angels. Where there is psalmody with compunction, there God is, with the Angels. Where the songs of the opponent are, there is God's wrath, and 'woe!' is the reward of laughter. Where sacred books and readings are, there are the joy of the just and the salvation of the listeners. Where there are harps and dances, there is the darkening of men and women, and a festival of the Devil.

EPHREM ON LOVE Because what gain is there, my children, if someone has everything, but does not have love which saves? For just as if someone were to make a great dinner in order to invite the King and the rulers, and were to prepare everything sumptuously, so that nothing might be lacking, but had no salt, would anyone be able to eat that dinner? Certainly not. But he would have lost everything he had spent and wasted all his hard work, and brought ridicule on himself from those he had invited. So it is in the present instance. For what advantage is there in toiling against winds, without love? For without it every deed, every action is unclean. Even if someone has attained complete chastity, or fasts, or keeps vigil; whether they pray or give banquets for the poor; even if they think of offering gifts, or first fruits, or offering; whether they build churches, or do anything else, without love all those things will be reckoned as nothing by God. For the Lord is not pleased by them. Listen to the Apostle when he says, 'If I speak with the tongues of Angels and of humans; if I have prophecy and know all mysteries, and have complete knowledge, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I gain nothing'.

*DATA from CHURCH OF THE EAST RESEARCHED BY BOB COFFEY*