

מדרש Midrash

ON GENESIS 11:28

Real faith is tested, not just claimed after the fact

Bereshit Rabbah 38:13

Abraham, placed in charge of his father Terach's idol shop, demonstrates through his destruction of the idols—and later in his confrontation with Nimrod's escalating hierarchy of fire, water, clouds, and wind—the absurdity of idolatry and the truth of belief in the One who transcends all natural forces. Haran, by contrast, commits to neither conviction but merely waits to see who prevails, declaring loyalty to Abraham only after witnessing his survival in the furnace; his lack of genuine faith leaves him unable to survive the same test, and he dies before his father. The midrash thus contrasts true, tested conviction with opportunistic, untested allegiance, explaining the verse "Haran died in the presence of Terach his father." AI SUMMARY



"Haran died in the presence of Teraḥ his father in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans" (Genesis 11:28). "Haran died during the lifetime of Teraḥ his father" – Rabbi Ḥiyya grandson of Rav Ada of Yafo: Teraḥ was an idol worshipper [and a seller of idols]. One time, he went away to some place, and he installed Abraham as salesman in his stead. A person would come seeking to buy. He [Abraham] would say to him: 'How old are you?' He would say to him: 'Fifty or sixty years old.' He would say to him: 'Woe to this man who is sixty years old and seeks to prostrate himself before something that is one day old.' He would be ashamed and leave.

One time, a certain woman came, carrying a dish of fine flour in her hand. She said to him: 'Here, offer it before them.' He arose, took a club in his hand, shattered all the idols, and placed the club in the hand of the largest among them.

When his father came, he said to him: 'Who did this to them?' He said to him: 'I will not lie to you, a certain woman came, carrying a dish of fine flour in

her hand. She said to me: Here, offer it before them. I offered it before them. This one [idol] said: I shall eat first, and another one said: I shall eat first. This big idol, who was standing among them, got up and took the club and shattered them.' He [Teraḥ] said to him: 'What, are you mocking me? Are they sentient at all?' He said to him: 'Do your ears not hear what your mouth is saying?'

He [Teraḥ] took him and handed him over to Nimrod. He [Nimrod] said to him [Abraham]: 'Let us bow down to fire.' Abraham said to him: 'Let us better bow down to water, that extinguishes fire.' Nimrod said to him: '[All right,] let us bow down to water.' He said to him: 'If so, let us bow down to the clouds, that bear the water.' He said to him: '[All right,] let us bow down to the clouds.' He said to him: 'If so, let us bow down to the wind, that scatters the clouds.' He said to him: '[All right,] let us bow down to the wind.' He said to him: 'Better let us bow down to a person, who can withstand the wind.'

He said to him: 'You are saying mere words. I bow down only to fire. I will cast you into it, and let that God to whom you bow down come and rescue you from it.' Haran was there and he was conflicted. He said: 'Either way [I will know what to do]; If Abraham is victorious, I will say: I am with Abraham, and if Nimrod is victorious, I will say: I am with Nimrod.' When Abraham descended into

the fiery furnace and was rescued, they said to him [Haran]: 'With whom are you?' He said to them: 'I am with Abraham.' They took him and cast him into the fire and his innards were scorched.

He emerged and died in the presence of Terah his father. That is what is written: "Haran died in the presence of Terah..."

