The genre of Hebrew Jewish liturgical texts consists of the Bible and various prayer books. The Bible is recited in synagogue throughout the year: a portion of the Pentateuch is read each Saturday (and additionally on Mondays and Thursdays), and the Haftara, selected chapters from the Prophets, is also read out loud each Saturday. In addition, the five scrolls (Megillot) are read on specific holidays throughout the year: Ecclesiastes on Sukkoth (Tabernacles), Esther on Purim, The Song of Songs on Passover, Ruth on Pentecost, and Lamentations on the ninth of Av. Psalms were also read on mourners’ days and when people were sick.

There are two types of Jewish prayer books, the regular daily prayer book (Siddur), and special prayer books for each of the major festivals (Maḥzors). All prayer books consist of blessings and prayers composed during both Rabbinical and medieval times. Most Maḥzorim also include Pirke Avot ‘Ethics of the Fathers’ and the Passover Haggadah.

Pirke Avot, a collection of wise sayings from rabbinical times, is customarily read in Sephardic Jewish communities between Passover and Pentecost—a chapter each week, totaling six chapters. The Haggadah, read on the first night of Passover (on the first two nights in the Diaspora), includes the story of the Exodus from Egypt along with rabbinical interpretations, praises to God, dietary commandments and instructions for special rituals. Both Pirke Avot and the Haggadah are abundant with biblical citations.

Because of their popularity, Pirke Avot and the Passover Haggadah have traditionally also been published as separate booklets. These liturgical texts were translated into Ladino, the Judeo-Spanish calque type language, by Sephardic communities after the expulsion from Spain in 1492, and, depending on the communities to which they were targeted, were printed using either Hebrew or Latin characters: the
expelled Jews used the Hebrew character set whereas the converted communities that returned to Judaism used Latin letters.¹

This paper will focus on biblical citations that can be found in the Haggadah (H1–5) and Pirke Avot (PA1–4). Citations from them and from the 1547 Constantinople translation of the Pentateuch, other biblical texts from Constantinople and Salonika (C, written in Hebrew letters),² and the 1553 Ferrara Bible (F, written in Latin letters)³ will be compared with the medieval Romaneceadas Biblias known as Escorial 3, 4, 7, 19, etc., the Alba Bible and other pre-exilic translations.⁴ Additionally, the biblical citations will be compared to Pirke Avot in Sēfer Tešubāh (ST, a pre-exilic manuscript from the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century written in Latin letters)⁵ and Pirke Avot and the Haggadah from the Ferrara Maḥzor (also written in Latin letters).⁶

Three sets of verses from Pirke Avot and the Haggadah will be compared below. The first paragraph is taken from Pirke Avot 3:6 (1). Since the citations in Pirke Avot are shorter than the ones from the Haggadah and one biblical verse is actually divided into two fragments in Pirke Avot, I have also chosen another paragraph from Pirke Avot, the beginning verse from Sanhedrin 10:1 (2), which is recited before