

# Jewish Confrontations with God in Antiquity

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Torah in Motion  
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## 1. 2 Maccabees 6:1–17

Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God; <sup>2</sup>also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as did the people who lived in that place. <sup>3</sup>Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. <sup>4</sup>For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. <sup>5</sup>The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. <sup>6</sup>People could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.

<sup>7</sup> On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when a festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and to walk in the procession in honour of Dionysus. <sup>8</sup>At the suggestion of the people of Ptolemais a decree was issued to the neighbouring Greek cities that they should adopt the same policy towards the Jews and make them partake of the sacrifices, <sup>9</sup>and should kill those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them. <sup>10</sup>For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. They publicly paraded them around the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then hurled them down headlong from the wall. <sup>11</sup>Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day.

<sup>12</sup> Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. <sup>13</sup>In fact, it is a sign of great kindness not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately. <sup>14</sup>For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, <sup>15</sup>in order that he should not take vengeance on us afterwards when our sins have reached their height. <sup>16</sup>Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people. <sup>17</sup>Let what we have said serve as a reminder; we must go on briefly with the story.

## 2. The Psalms of Solomon

### The Psalms of Solomon 2

A Psalm of Solomon Concerning Jerusalem

Arrogantly the sinner broke down the strong walls with a battering ram and you did not interfere. Gentile foreigners went up to your place of sacrifice; / They arrogantly trampled (it) with their sandals.

Because the sons of Jerusalem defiled the sanctuary of the Lord,

They were profaning the offerings of God with lawless acts;

Because of these things he said, "Remove them far from me; / They are not sweet-smelling."

The beauty of his glory was despised before God; it was completely disgraced.

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The sons and the daughters (were) in harsh captivity,

Their neck in a seal, a spectacle among the gentiles.

He did (this) to them according to their sins,

So that he abandoned them to the hands of those who prevailed.

For he turned away his face from their mercy;

(from) young and old and their children once again, / For they sinned once again by not listening.

And the heavens were weighted down, / And the earth despised them

For no one on (the earth) had done what they did. / And the earth shall know all your righteous judgments, O God.

They set up the sons of Jerusalem for derision because of her prostitutes.

Everyone passing by entered in in broad daylight.

They derived their lawless actions even in comparison to what they themselves were doing;

Before the sun they held up their unrighteousness to contempt,

And the daughters of Jerusalem were available to all, according to your judgments,

Because they defiled themselves with improper intercourse.

My heart and my belly are troubled over these things.

I shall prove you right, O God, in uprightness of heart; / For your judgments are right, O God.

For you have rewarded the sinners according to their actions, / And according to their extremely wicked sins.

You have exposed their sins, that your judgment might be evident; / You have obliterated their memory from the earth.

God is a righteous judge and he will not be impressed by appearances. / For the gentiles insulted Jerusalem, trampling (her) down;

He dragged her beauty down from the throne of glory. / She put on sackcloth instead of beautiful clothes,

A rope around her head instead of a crown.

She took off the wreath of glory which God had put on her; / In dishonor her beauty was thrown to the ground.

And I saw and implored in the Lord's presence and said,

"let it be enough, Lord, to make your hand heavy on Jerusalem by bringing gentiles (upon her),"

For they ridiculed (her) and did not refrain in anger and vicious rage,

And they will be finished unless you, Lord, censure them (=gentiles) in your anger.

For they have not done it in zeal, but in emotional passion, / To pour out their anger against us in plunder.

Do not delay, O God, to repay to them on (their) heads; / To declare dishonorable the arrogance of the dragon.

And I did not wait long until God showed me his insolence pierced on the mountains of Egypt, / More despised than the smallest thing on earth and sea.

His body was carried about on the waves in much shame,

And there was no one to bury (him) for he (god) had despised him with contempt.

He did not consider that he was a man,

For the latter/ Do not consider (this). / He said, "I shall be lord of land and sea";

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And he did not understand that it is God who is great. /Powerful in his great strength.  
He is king over the heavens, / Judging even kings and rulers.  
Raising me up to glory, / But putting to sleep the arrogant for eternal destruction in dishonor,  
Because they did not know him.  
And now, officials of the earth, see the judgment of the Lord, / That he is a great and righteous king,  
judging what is under heaven.  
Praise God, you who fear the Lord with understanding,/ For the Lord's mercy is upon those who fear  
him with judgment.  
To separate between the righteous and the sinner/ To repay sinners forever according to their actions  
And to have mercy on the righteous (keeping him) from the humiliation of the sinner,  
And to repay the sinner for what he has done to the righteous.

For the Lord is good to those who persistently call upon him, / To treat his devout in according with  
his mercy,  
To bring them (constantly) before him in strength. /Praised be the Lord forever before his servants.

### **Psalms of Solomon 8**

My ear heard distress and the sound of war, / The blast of the trumpet sounding slaughter and  
destruction.  
The sound of many people as of a violent storm, / As a raging fire storm sweeping through the  
wilderness.  
And I said to my heart, Where, then, will God judge it?

I heard a sound in Jerusalem, the holy city. / My stomach was crushed at what I heard;  
My knees were weak, my heart was afraid, /My bones shook like reeds.  
I said, "They directed their ways in righteousness.  
I thought about the judgments of God since the creation of heaven and earth;  
I proved God right in his judgments in ages past.  
God exposed their sins in the full light of day;  
The whole earth knew the righteous judgments of God.  
In secret places underground was their lawbreaking, provoking (him),  
Son involved with mother and father with daughter;  
Everyone committed adultery with his neighbor's wife;  
They made agreements with them with an oath about these things.

They stole from the sanctuary of God / As if there were no redeeming heir.  
They walked on the place of sacrifice of the Lord (coming) from all kinds of uncleanness;  
And (coming) with menstrual blood (on them), they defiled the sacrifices as if they were common  
meat.  
There was no sin they left undone in which they did not surpass the gentiles.

Because of this God mixed them (a drink) of a wavering spirit,  
And gave them a cup of undiluted wine to make them drunk.  
He brought them someone from the end of the earth, one who attacks in strength;  
He declared war against Jerusalem, and her land.

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The leaders of the country met him with joy. They said to him,  
“May your way be blessed. Come, enter in peace.”  
They graded the rough roads before his coming,  
They opened the gates to Jerusalem, they crowned her city walls.

He entered in peace as a father enters his son’s house; / He set his feet securely.  
He captured the fortified towers and the wall of Jerusalem, /For God led him in securely while they wavered.  
He killed their leaders and every (man) wise in counsel; / He poured out the blood of the inhabitants of Jerusalem like dirty water,  
He led away their sons and daughters, those profanely spawned. / They acted according to their uncleanness, just as their ancestors;  
They defiled Jerusalem and the things that had been consecrated to the name of God.

God was proven right in his execution of the nations of the earth,  
And the devout of God are like innocent lambs among them.  
Worthy of praise is the Lord, who judges the whole earth in his righteousness.  
See, now, God, you have shown us how you rightly judge;  
Our eyes have seen your judgments, O God.  
We have proven your name right, which is honored forever, / For you are the God of righteousness, Judging Israel in discipline. / O God, turn your mercy upon us and be compassionate to us.  
Bring together the dispersed of Israel with mercy and goodness, / For your faithfulness is with us.  
For we stiffened our necks, but you are the one who disciplines us. / Do not neglect us, Our God, Lest the gentiles devour us as if there were no redeemer. / But you (have been) our God from the beginning,  
And on you we have hoped, Lord. / And we will not leave you,  
For your judgments upon us are good.

May (you) be pleased with us and our children forever; / Lord, our savior, we will not be troubled at the end of time. Worthy of praise is the Lord for his judgments by the mouth of the devout, /And may Israel be blessed by the Lord forever.

### **Psalms of Solomon 13**

Of Solomon. A Psalm: Comfort for the Righteous:

The right hand of the Lord covered me; / The right hand of the Lord spared me.  
The arm of the Lord saved us from the sword that passes through, /From famine and the sinners’ death. Wild animals attacked them viciously, / They tore their flesh with their teeth,  
And crushed their bones with their molars. / The Lord protected us from meeting all these things.

The godless person was terrified by his mistakes / Lest he be taken along with the sinners.  
For the destruction of the sinner is terrible; / But nothing shall harm the righteous, of all these things.  
For the discipline of the righteous (for things done) in ignorance / Is not the same as the destruction of the sinners.  
In secret the righteous are disciplined / Lest the sinner gloat over the righteous.

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For he will admonish the righteous as a beloved son / And his discipline is as for a firstborn.  
For the Lord will spare his devout, / And he will wipe away their mistakes with discipline.  
For the life of the righteous (goes on) forever, / But sinners shall be taken away to destruction,  
And no memory of them will ever be found. / But the Lord's mercy is upon the devout  
And his mercy is upon those who fear him.

### II. Exploring Theodicy in Biblical Interpretation: The Case of Abraham

#### 1. Philo, On Abraham, 2–5

Now these are those men who have lived irreproachably and admirable, whose virtues are durably and permanently recorded, as on pillars in the sacred scriptures, not merely with the object of praising the men themselves, but also for the sake of exhorting those who read their history, and of leading them on to emulate their conduct; for these men have been living and rational laws; and the lawgiver has magnified them for two reasons; first, because he was desirous to show that the injunctions which are thus given are not inconsistent with nature; and, secondly, that he might prove that it is not very difficult or laborious for those who wish to live according to the laws established in these books, since the earliest men easily and spontaneously obeyed the unwritten principle of legislation before any one of the particular laws were written down at all. So that a man may very properly say, that the written laws are nothing more than a memorial of the life of the ancients.

#### 2. The Testament of Abraham

**10:1-3:** And the Archangel Michael went down and took Abraham on a chariot of cherubim and lifted him up in to the air of heaven and led him onto the cloud...and on the carriage Abraham soared over the entire inhabited world. And Abraham beheld the world as it was that day: Some were plowing, others leading wagons; in one place they were pasturing (flocks), elsewhere abiding (with their flocks) in the fields, while dancing and sporting and playing the zither; in another place they were wrestling and pleading at law; elsewhere they were weeping, then also bearing the dead to the tomb. And he also saw newlyweds being escorted in procession. In a word, he saw everything which was happening in the world, both good and evil. Then continuing on, Abraham saw men bearing swords, who held in their hands sharpened swords, and Abraham asked the Commander-in-chief, "Who are these?"

And the Commander-in-chief said, "These are robbers, who want to commit murder and rob and burn and destroy." Abraham said, "Lord, Lord, heed my voice and command that wild beasts came out of the thicket and devour them." And as he was speaking wild beasts came out of the thicket and devoured them. And he saw in another place a man with a woman, engaging in sexual immorality with each other, and he said, "Lord, Lord, command that the earth open and swallow them up." And immediately the earth split in two and swallowed them up. And he saw in another place men breaking into a house and carrying off the possessions of others, and he said, "Lord, Lord, command that fire come down from heaven and consume them."

And as he was speaking fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And immediately a voice came down from heaven to the Commander-in-chief, speaking thus, "O Michael, Commander-in-chief, command the chariot to stop and turn Abraham away, lest he should see the entire inhabited world. For if he were to see all those who pass their lives in sin, he would destroy everything that exists. For behold, Abraham has not sinned and he has no mercy on sinners. But I made the world, and I do not want to destroy any one of them; but I delay the death of the sinner until he should convert and live.

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**3. Genesis Rabbah 39:6, 49:9**

רבי עזריה משם רבי אחא פתח ( תהלים מה, ח : (אֲהַבְתָּ צְדָקָה וְנִשְׁבָּא רָשָׁע עַל כֵּן מִשְׁחָה אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵיךָ שְׁמֹן שִׁשׁוֹן מִחֲבָרָה, רבי עזריה פתח קריה באברהם, בשעה שעמד אברהם אבינו לבקש רחמים על הסדומים, מה קתיב תמן) בראשית יח, כה : חללה לה מעשת כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם רשע וזהו וגו' )

Rabbi Azariah began a homily in the name of Rabbi Aha: You love righteousness and hate wickedness; [rightly has God, your God, chosen to anoint you with oil of gladness over all your peers] [Ps. 45:8]. . . . Rabbi Azariah interpreted it in the name of Rabbi Aḥa: when Abraham our father stood to plead for mercy for the Sodomites, what is written there? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty [Gen. 18:25].” (trans. Theodor-Albeck)

...

אמר רבי לוי שני בני אדם אמרו דבר אחד, אברהם ואיוב, אברהם אמר חללה לה מעשת כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם רשע. איוב אמר (איוב ט, כב : (אחת היא על פן אמרתי תם ורשע הוא מכלה, אברהם נטל עליה שחר, איוב נענש עליה. אברהם אמר בשולה, איוב אמר פגה.

Rabbi Levi said: Two men said the same thing, Abraham and Job. Abraham said: Far from you to do after the manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked [Gen. 18:25]. Job said: It is all one—therefore I say: He destroys the innocent and the wicked [Job 9:22]. Yet Abraham was rewarded for it, and Job was punished for it? The reason is because Abraham said it with due deliberation while Job spoke intemperately. (trans. Theodor-Albeck)

**4. Lamentations Rabbah 24**

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמן, בשעה שחרב בית המקדש בא אברהם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא בוכה וממרט זקנו ותולש שערות ראשו ומכה את פניו וקורע את בגדיו ואפר על ראשו, ונהיה מהלך בבית המקדש וסופד וצועק, אמר לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא מפני מה נשתגית מפל אמה ולשון שבאתי לידי בוישה וכלמה זאת, כינן שראוהו מלאכי השרת אף הם קשרו הקספד שורות שורות ואמרין) ישעיה לג, ח : (נשמו מסלות שבת עבר ארח וגו', מאי נשמו מסלות, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא מסלות שהתקנת לירושלים שלא יהו עובדי דרכים פוסקים מהם היאך היו לשממה. שבת עבר ארח, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא דרכים שהיו ישראל עובדים ושבים בהם בחגים היאך שבתו. הפר ברית, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבוננו של עולם, הופר ברית של אברהם אביהם, שעל ידו מתישב העולם, ועל ידו הכירוהו בעולם שאמה אל עליון קונה שמים וארץ. מאס ערים. אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא מאסת ירושלים וציון לאחר שבחרת בהם, הדא הוא דכתיב (ירמיה יד, יט : (המאס מאסת את הוודה [ו]אם בציון געלה נפשך וגו') . ישעיה לג, ח : (לא תשב אנוש. אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא אפלו כדור אנוש שהיו ראש לעובדי עבודת פוכבים לא חשבת את ישראל. באותה שעה נזקק הקדוש ברוך הוא למלאכי השרת, אמר להם, מה לכם קושרין מספד בענין הזה שורות שורות. אמרו לפניו רבוננו של עולם, מפני אברהם אבהך שבא לביהך וספד ובכה מפני מה לא השגחת עליו, אמר להם מיום שנפטר אהבי מלפני לבית עולמו לא בא לביתי, ועכשו (ירמיה יא, טו : (מה לידידי בביתי.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman said: When the Temple was destroyed, Abraham came before the Holy One blessed be He weeping, pulling out his beard, tearing out the hair of his head, striking his face, rending his garments, ashes on his head, and he was walking in the Temple and lamenting and screaming. He said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Why am I different from all nations and

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tongues that I have come to this state of shame and humiliation?’ When the ministering angels saw him, they too composed lamentations standing in rows and saying: “[Behold, their angels cry out outside....] The highways are desolate, wayfarers have ceased; [he breached the covenant, rejected cities, regarded no man]” (Isaiah 33:7–8). What is “the highways are desolate”? The ministering angels said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘The highways to Jerusalem that You prepared so that travelers would never cease from them, how have they become desolation?’ “Wayfarers have ceased” – the ministering angels said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘The ways upon which Israel would travel on the festivals, how have they become idle?’ “Breached the covenant” – the ministering angels said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Master of the universe, the covenant of their patriarch Abraham has been breached, by means of whom the world was settled, and by means of whom You were recognized in the world as God on High, Maker of the heavens and the earth.’ “Rejected cities” – the ministering angels said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Have You rejected Jerusalem and Zion after You chose them?’ That is what is written: “Did You reject Judah, did Your soul loathe Zion...?” (Jeremiah 14:19). “Regarded no man [*enosh*]” – the ministering angels said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘You did not consider Israel even like the generation of Enosh, who were the originators of idol worshippers.’ At that moment, the Holy One blessed be He attended to the ministering angels. He said to them: ‘Why are you composing lamentations like this, standing in rows?’ They said to Him: ‘Master of the universe, why did You not pay attention to Abraham, Your beloved, who came to Your House and lamented and wept?’ He said to them: ‘From the day that My beloved passed away from before Me to his eternal home, he did not come to My House, and now: “What has My beloved to do in My House?”’ (Jeremiah 11:15).

אמר אברהם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, רבוננו של עולם מפני מה הגלית את בני ומסרתן בידי האומות והרגום בכל מיתות משנות, והתרת את בית המקדש מקום שהעליתי את יצחק בני עולה לפניך. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם בניך חטאו ועברו על כל התורה ועל עשרים ושנים אותיות שבה, הלא הוא דקתיב (דניאל ט, יא): (וכל ישראל עברו את תורתך. אמר אברהם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבוננו של עולם מי מעיד בהם בישראל שעברו את תורתך, אמר לו תבא תורה ותעיד בהם בישראל, מיד באה תורה להעיד בהן, אמר לה אברהם בתי אתם באה להעיד בהן בישראל שעברו על מצותיך ואין לך בשת פנים מפני, זכרי יום שהתחזירך הקדוש ברוך הוא על כל אמה ולשון ולא רצו לקבלך עד שבאו בני להר סיני וקבלו אותך וכבודך, ועלשו אתם באה להעיד בהם ביום צרתם. כיון ששמעה תורה כך עמדה לצד אחד ולא העידה בהן.

Abraham said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Master of the universe: Why did You exile my children, deliver them into the hand of the nations, kill them with all kinds of uncommon deaths, and destroy the Temple, the place where I elevated my son Isaac as a burnt offering before You?’ The Holy One blessed be He said to Abraham: ‘Your children sinned and violated the entire Torah and the twenty-two letters that are in it.’ That is what is written: “All Israel have violated Your Torah” (Daniel 9:11). Abraham said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Master of the universe, who will testify against Israel that they violated Your Torah?’ He said to him: ‘Let the Torah come and testify against Israel.’ Immediately, the Torah came to testify against them. Abraham said to it: ‘My daughter, you have come to testify against Israel that they violated your mitzvot, and you have no shame before me? Remember the day that the Holy One blessed be He circulated you among every nation and they did not want to accept you, until my descendants came to Mount Sinai and accepted you and honored you. Now you come to testify against them on their day of distress?’ Once the Torah heard this, it stood to one side and did not testify against them.

אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם באו עשרים ושנים אותיות ונעידו בהן בישראל. מיד באו עשרים ושנים אותיות, באה אל"ף להעיד בישראל שעברו על התורה, אמר לה אברהם, אל"ף את ראש לכל האותיות ובאת להעיד בישראל ביום צרתם,

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זכרי יום שנגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא על הר סיני ופתח בך (שמות כ, ב): אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, וְלֹא קִבְלוּךָ אִמָּה וְלִשׁוֹן אֶלָּא בְּנִי, וְאַתָּה בָּאתָ לְהַעֲיִד בְּבָנַי. מִיָּד עָמְדָה אֶל"ף לְצַד אֶחָד וְלֹא הָעִידָה בְּךָ. בָּאתָה בִּי"ת לְהַעֲיִד בְּכֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַר לָהּ אֲבִרְהֶם בְּתֵי אֶתְּ בָּאתָ לְהַעֲיִד עַל בְּנֵי, שָׁהֶם וְרִיזוּן בְּחֻמְשָׁה חֲמֵשֵׁי תוֹרָה שָׂאתָ בְּרֹאשׁ הַתּוֹרָה, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית א, א): (בְּרֵאשִׁית פְּרָא אֱלֹהִים, מִיָּד עָמְדָה בִּי"ת לְצַד אֶחָד וְלֹא הָעִידָה כְּלוּם. בָּאתָה גִימ"ל לְהַעֲיִד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, אָמַר לָהּ אֲבִרְהֶם גִּימ"ל אֶתְּ בָּאתָ לְהַעֲיִד בְּבָנֵי שְׁעָבְרוּ עַל הַתּוֹרָה, כְּלוּם יֵשׁ אִמָּה שְׁמִקְנֵמָת מִצְנַת צִיצִית שָׂאתָ נְתוּבָה בְּרֹאשׁ, אֶלָּא בְּנֵי, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (דְּבָרִים כב, יב) גְּדֹלִים תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ. מִיָּד עָמְדָה גִּימ"ל לְצַד אֶחָד וְלֹא הָעִידָה כְּלוּם. וְכִינּוּן שְׂרָאוּ כָּל הָאוֹתִיּוֹת שְׁהַשְׁתִּיקוּן אֲבִרְהֶם, גַּתְּבִישׁוּ וְעָמְדוּ בְּעֶזְמוֹן וְלֹא הָעִידוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

The Holy One blessed be He said to Abraham: ‘Let the twenty-two letters come and testify against Israel.’ Immediately, the twenty-two letters came. *Alef* came to testify against Israel that they violated the Torah. Abraham said to it: ‘*Alef*, you are the leader of all the letters, and you come to testify against Israel on their day of distress? Remember the day that the Holy One blessed be He revealed Himself on Mount Sinai and began with you, “I am [*anokhi*] the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2) – no nation other than my descendants accepted you, and you come to testify against my descendants?’ Immediately, *alef* stood to one side and did not testify against them.

*Bet* came to testify against Israel. Abraham said to it: ‘My daughter, have you come to testify against my descendants, who are diligent in the five books of the Torah, as you are at the head of the Torah?’ That is what is written: “In the beginning [*bereshit*] God created” (Genesis 1:1). Immediately, *bet* stood to one side and did not testify at all.

*Gimel* came to testify against Israel. Abraham said to it: ‘My daughter, have you come to testify against my descendants that they violated the Torah? Is there any nation who fulfills the mitzva of ritual fringes, which you appear at its head?’ That is what is written: “You shall make for yourselves twisted threads [*gedilim*]” (Deuteronomy 22:12). Immediately, *gimel* stood to one side and did not testify at all. When all the letters saw that Abraham had silenced them, they were ashamed, stood by themselves, and did not testify against Israel.

מִיָּד פָּתַח אֲבִרְהֶם לְכַנֵּי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמַר רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם לְמֵאָה שָׁנָה נָתַתָּ לִי בֵן, וְכִשְׁעָמַד עַל דַּעְתּוֹ וְהָיָה כַּחוּר בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים אָמַרְתָּ לִי הִעֲלֵהוּ עוֹלָה לְכַנֵּי, וְנִעֲשִׂיתִי עָלָיו כְּאֲכֹזְרִי וְלֹא רַחֲמֵתִי עָלָיו, אֶלָּא אָנִי בְּעֶזְמִי כְּפָתַתִּי אוֹתוֹ, וְלֹא תִזְכֵּר לִי זֹאת וְלֹא תִרְחַם עָלַי בְּנֵי. פָּתַח יִצְחָק וְאָמַר רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, כְּשֶׁאָמַר לִי אָבָא (בְּרֵאשִׁית כב, ח): (אֱלֹהִים יִרְאַה לּוֹ הַשָּׂה לְעֵלָה בְּנֵי, לֹא עִכְבְּתִי עַל דְּבָרֶיךָ וְנִעְקַדְתִּי בְּרִצּוֹן לְבִי עַל גְּבִי הַמְּזַבֵּחַ וּפְשָׁטִי אֶת צְנֹאֲרֵי תַּחַת הַסִּפִּין, וְלֹא תִזְכֵּר לִי זֹאת וְלֹא תִרְחַם עָלַי בְּנֵי.

פָּתַח יַעֲקֹב וְאָמַר רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, לֹא עָשִׂיתִי שָׁנָה עִמְדִיתִי בְּבֵית לָבֵן, וְכִשְׁיִצְאָתִי מִבֵּיתוֹ פָּגַע בִּי עֵשָׂו הַרְשָׁע וּבְקִשׁ לְהַרְגֵּ אֶת בְּנֵי וּמִסְרֵתִי עֲצָמִי לְמִיתָה עֲלֵיהֶם, וְעָכְשׁוּ נִמְסְרוּ בְּיַד אוֹיְבֵיהֶם כְּצֹאֵן לְטַבְּחָה, לְאַחַר שֶׁגִּדְלָתִים כְּאֲפְרוּחִים שֶׁל תְּרַנְגּוּלִים וּסְבִלְתִי עֲלֵיהֶם צֶעַר גְּדוֹל בְּנִים, כִּי רַב גִּימִי הָיִיתִי בְּצֶעַר גְּדוֹל בְּעִבּוּרָם, וְעַתָּה לֹא תִזְכֵּר לִי זֹאת לְרַחֵם עָלַי בְּנֵי.

Immediately, Abraham began [speaking] before the Holy One blessed be He and said: ‘Master of the universe, at one hundred years You gave me a son. When he achieved cognition and was a thirty-seven-year-old young man, You said to me: Sacrifice him as a burnt-offering before Me. I became like a cruel person to him and had no mercy on him. Rather, I, myself, bound him. Will You not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on my descendants?’



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Isaac began and said: ‘Master of the universe, when my father said to me: “God, Himself, will see to the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8), I did not delay fulfillment of Your words, and I was bound willingly upon the altar and extended my neck under the knife. Will You not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on my descendants?’

Jacob began and said: ‘Master of the universe, did I not remain in Laban’s house for twenty years? When I departed from his house, the wicked Esau encountered me and sought to kill my children, and I endangered my life on their behalf. Now they are delivered into the hand of their enemies like sheep to slaughter after I raised them like chicks and suffered the travails of child raising on their behalf, as most of my days I experienced great suffering for their sake. Will You not now remember this on my behalf to have mercy on my descendants?’

פתח משה ואמר רבונו של עולם, לא רועה נאמן הייתי על ישראל ארבעים שנה ורצתי לפניך פסוס במדבר, וכשהגיע זמן שיפנסו לארץ גזרת עלי במדבר ופלו עצמותי, ועכשו שגלו שלחת לי לספד ולכפות עליהם, זהו המשל שאומרים בני אדם משוב אדוני לא טוב לי ומרעתו רע לי. באותה שעה אמר משה לי רמיה לך לפני שאלך ואביאם ואראה מי מניח ידו עליהם. אמר לו ירמיה אי אפשר לילך בדרך מפני ההרואים, אמר לו אף על פי כן, מיד הלך משה וירמיה לפניו, עד שהגיעו לנהרות בבבל, ראוהו למשה ואמרו זה לזה בא בן עמך מקברו לפדותינו מיד צרינו, יצתה בת קול ואמרה גזרה היא מלפני. מיד אמר להם משה בני להחזיר אתכם אי אפשר שיקבר נגזרה גזרה, אלא המקום יחזיר אתכם במהרה והניח אותם. באותה שעה הרימו קולם בבכי גדולה עד שעלתה בכיתם למרום, הדין הוא דכתיב (תהלים קלז, א: (על נהרות בבבל שם ישבנו גם כבינו.

Moses began and said: ‘Master of the universe, was I not a loyal shepherd over Israel for forty years? I ran before them like a horse in the wilderness, yet when the time came for them to enter the land, You decreed against me that my bones would fall in the wilderness. Now that they have been exiled you sent to me to lament them and weep over them.’ This is the parable that people say: From the goodness of my master it is not good for me, and from his evil it is bad for me.

At that moment, Moses said to Jeremiah: ‘Go before me so I may go and bring them. I would like to see who is going to restrain them.’ Jeremiah said: ‘It is impossible to go on the way due to the corpses.’ He said to him: ‘Nevertheless.’ Immediately, Moses went and Jeremiah was before him, until they reached the rivers of Babylon. They saw Moses and said to each other: ‘The son of Amram has come from his grave to redeem us from the hand of our adversaries!’ A Divine Voice emerged and said: ‘It is a decree from before Me.’ Immediately, Moses said to them: ‘My children, to return you is impossible, as the decree has already been issued. Rather, the Omnipresent will return you speedily.’ He left them. At that moment, they raised their voice in great weeping until their weeping ascended On High. That is what is written: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept” (Psalms 137:1).

כיון שראו משה אצל אבות העולם אמרו לו מה עשו האויבים בבנינו, אמר להם, מהם הרגו, ומהם כפתו ידיהם לאחוריהם, ומהם אסורים בכבלי ברזל, ומהם נפשטים צרמים, ומהם מתו בדרך ונגלתם לעוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ, ומהם משלכים לחמה רעבים וצמאים, מיד פתחו פלם ובכו וקוננו בקינות ני על דמטא לבנו, היכי הניתון כיתמי בלא אבא, היכי דמכיתון בטיהרא ובקייטא בלא לבושא ובלא כסו. היכי סגיתון בטורי ובחצאי חליצי מסאני ובלא סנדלא. היכי טעניתון מובלי טעוני דחלא, היכי הוו ידיתון לפיתון לאחוריתון, היכי לא בלעתון רוקא בפומיכו. פתח משה ואמר ליטא שמשא אמאי לא תשכת בשעה דעאל שגאה לבית מקדשא. אהדר ליה שמשא בחיף משה רביא מהימנא, היכי אהוי חשוכא דלא שבקין לי ולא רפו לי דנקטין לי בשיתין שטי דנורא ואמרין לי פוק ונהר נהרין.

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When Moses came to the patriarchs of the world, they said to him: ‘What have the enemies done to our descendants?’ He said: ‘Some of them they killed, some of them they tied their hands behind them, some of them were bound in iron chains, some of them were stripped naked, some of them died on the way and their carcasses were left for the bird of the heavens and the animals of the earth, and some of them were cast in the sun hungry and thirsty.’ Immediately, they all began weeping and lamenting: ‘Woe over what has befallen our children! How have you become like orphans without a father; how do you lie in the afternoon and in the summer without garment and without covering; how have you walked on mountains and on gravel with shoes removed and without sandals; how have you carried bundles filled with sand; how have your hands been bound behind you; how have you been unable to swallow even the spittle in your mouths?’ Moses began and said: ‘Cursed sun! Why did you not darken when the enemy entered the Temple?’ The sun responded to him: ‘Moses, loyal shepherd, how could I darken, they did not allow me and did not relent from me, as they took me with sixty rods of fire and said to me: Go and shine your light.’

תוב פתח משה ואמר ני על זינוך מקדשא היכי חשד, ני פי מטא זמניה דיתרב ותיקלא מכלי ונדדקי דבי רב מתקטלין ונאבוהון אנלין בשביה וגלותא ובחרבא. תוב פתח משה ואמר, שבאי אי בחייכון אתון קטולי, לא תקטלון קטולא אכזרצא וקלא תשוון פלאה גמירא, וקלא תקטלון ברא באנפיה דאבא, וברתא באנפיה דאמא, דמטא זימנא דמרי שמנא חוישבנא חשיב מנכון. וכשדאי רשיעיא לא עבדין הכי אלא מותבין ליה לברא בכנפיה דאמיה ואמרין ליה לאבוה קום נכסיה, בכיא אמיה ונתרין דמעמא עלוהי ונאבוהי תלה ליה רישיה. ועוד אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם, כתבת בתורתך (ויקרא כב, כח): (ושור או שיה אתו ואת בנו לא תשחטו ביום אחד, והלא כבר הרגו בנים ונאמותיהם במה וכמה ואתה שותק.

Again Moses began and said: ‘Woe over your radiance, Temple, how has it gone dark? Woe that its time to be destroyed arrived, the Sanctuary was burned, schoolchildren killed, and their fathers sent to captivity, exile, and the sword.’ Again Moses began and said: ‘O captors, by your lives! You killers, do not kill cruelly and do not implement total annihilation, do not kill a son in the presence of his father, or a daughter in the presence of her mother, for the time will come when the Master of heaven will settle the score with you.’ But the wicked Chaldeans did not do so, but rather, would seat the son on his mother’s lap and say to his father: Rise and slaughter him. The mother would cry and her tears would fall on him, and his father would hang his head. He also said before Him: ‘Master of the universe, You wrote in Your Torah: “An ox or a sheep, it and its offspring you shall not slaughter on one day” (Leviticus 22:28). But have they not killed many, many children and their mothers, and yet You are silent!’

באותה שעה קפצה רחל אמנו לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמרה רבונו של עולם, גלוי לפניך שיעקב עבדך אהבני אהבה יתרה ועבד בשבילי לאבא שבע שנים, וכשהשלימו אותן שבע שנים והגיע זמן נשואי לבעלי, יעץ אבי להחליפני לבעלי בשביל אחותי, והקשה עלי הדבר עד מאד כי נודעה לי העצה, והודעתי לבעלי ומסרתי לו סימן שיפיר ביני ובין אחותי כדי שלא יוכל אבי להחליפני, ולאחר כן נחמתי בעצמי וסבלתי את תאנותי ורחמתי על אחותי שלא תצא לחרפה, ולערב חלפו אחותי לבעלי בשבילי, ומסרתי לאחותי כל הסימנין שמסרתי לבעלי, כדי שיהא סבור שהיא רחל. ולא עוד אלא שנכנסתי תחת המטה שהיה שוכב עם אחותי והיה מדבר עמה והיא שותקת ואני משיבתו על כל דבר ודבר, כדי שלא יפיר לקול אחותי וגמלתי חסד עמה, ולא קנאתי בה ולא הוצאתיה לחרפה. ומה אני שאני בשור ודם עפר נאפר לא קנאתי לצרה שלי ולא הוצאתיה לבושה ולחרפה, ואתה מלך סי וקיים, רחמן, מפני מה קנאת לעבודת כוכבים שאין בה ממש, והגלית בני ונהרגו בחרב ועשו אויבים גם כרצונם.

At that moment, Rachel our matriarch interjected before the Holy One blessed be He and said: ‘Master of the universe, it is revealed before You that Your servant Jacob loved me abundantly and

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worked for my father seven years for me. When those seven years were completed and the time for my marriage to my husband arrived, my father plotted to exchange me with my sister for my husband. The matter was extremely difficult for me when I became aware of that plot, and I informed my husband and gave him a signal to distinguish between my sister and me so that my father would be unable to exchange me. Afterward, I regretted what I had done and suppressed my desire. I had mercy on my sister, so that she would not be led to humiliation. In the evening they exchanged me with my sister for my husband, and I transmitted to my sister all the signals that I had given to my husband, so that he would think that she is Rachel. Moreover, I entered beneath the bed on which he was lying with my sister. He would speak with her and she would be silent, and I would respond to each and every matter that he said, so that he would not identify my sister's voice. I performed an act of kindness for her, I was not jealous of her, and I did not lead her to humiliation. If I, who is flesh and blood, was not jealous of my rival, and I did not lead her to humiliation and shame, You who are a living and eternal merciful King, why were You jealous of idol worship that has no substance, and You exiled my descendants, and they were killed by sword, and the enemies did to them as they pleased?'

מיד נתגלגלו רחמיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמר, בשבילה רחל אני מחזיר את ישראל למקומן, הֲדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב (ירמיה לא, טו): (פֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תְמָרוּרִים רַחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאַנָּה לְהַנָּחם עַל בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ. וְכָתִיב) ירמיה לא, טז: (פֹּה אָמַר ה' מְנַעֲי קוֹלָךְ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיִךְ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֹתֶיךָ וְגו', וְכָתִיב) ירמיה לא, יז: (וַיֵּשׁ תְּקִנָּה לְאַחֲרֵיתֶיךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם.

Immediately, the mercy of the Holy One blessed be He was aroused and He said: 'For you, Rachel, I will restore Israel to its place.' That is what is written: "So said the Lord: A voice is heard in Rama, wailing, bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be consoled for her children, as they are not" (Jeremiah 31:14). And it is written: "So said the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, as there is reward for your actions.... And there is hope for your future, the utterance of the Lord, and your children will return to their borders" (Jeremiah 31:15–16).

Yohanan Muffs, *The Personhood of God*, 177–178, 184:

The Rabbis, in their wisdom, tell us of the sins of the saints. In this they follow the Bible. They even add sins that the Bible does not tell us about. All of this is done with the intuitive genius of the master pedagogue. An educational model has to lend itself to imitation. One cannot imitate perfection, and there is little personal empathy between the sinner and the perfect saint. But if David, the great and noble king, sinner and yet was able to repent, every man is capable of empathizing with him and thus imitating him. David is noble even though flawed, and that is why he can serve as a model.

This principle can be extended mythically – that is, seriously but not literally – to the Divine. God in His infinite wisdom knew that if He revealed His true, transcendent nature to man, He would cause great havoc. Therefore, He donned a human persona. He appeared before man as a personality: exalted, yet fallible and warm. He entered into a contractual relationship with man, became involved in the human condition, experienced exasperation over the hardness of men's hearts, regretted that he had ever created an, was moved by the intercession of Moses and other prophets, broke out into fits of rage over the sinfulness of His people, and was so involved with Israel that despite their sinfulness

## Jewish Confrontations with God in Antiquity

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He actually re-espoused them after having delivered them the bill of divorcement. God appears to experience all the human emotions: love, anger, involvement, indignation, regret, and so on. By so doing, He gives the seal of divinity to the very essence of our humanity.

...

The biblical God even allows Himself to be tested... at least in one case in the Bible, it is not the testing of God that arouses divine ire, but the refusal to test Him: King Ahaz declines to test God's power when a choice of authenticating experiments ("signs") is offered the king by the prophet (cf. Isa 7:10ff).

God does not want to outrage the human mind by demanding affirmations of faith not grounded in experience. Furthermore, when experience conflicts with preconceived notions about divine justice, biblical religion does not seem to require the man of faith to repress his doubts in silent resignation. Abraham, Jeremiah, and Job, all men who question God's ways, are hardly numbered among the wicked. There is even some evidence that God demands such criticism, at least from His prophets (cf. Ezek. 22:30).

However, the doubt tolerated by the Bible is radically different from that generated by philosophical speculation. Job's mind may doubt God's justice, but his heart never for a moment doubts God's existence.

Dov Weiss, *Pious Irreverence*, 160:

The radical humanization of the divine in rabbinic culture reflects the extent to which the sages rejected the Greek philosophical tradition. Unlike most early Christian thinkers who sought to reconcile the philosophical and biblical traditions, the rabbis do not appropriate philosophical language when formulating their own conceptions of God and the world. This posture allowed the rabbis to conceive of God in extreme human terms. This humanization also affected the ways in which the rabbis constructed their (exegetical) confrontations with God. Because God, like humanity, is bound by Torah law, the sages could have biblical figures accuse God of violating the mitzvot. Notwithstanding these subversive dimensions, it should not be forgotten that this humanization was driven, most probably, not by a desire to deride God, but a desire to become familiar with God, to experience divine intimacy. This is where the great paradox lies; divine humanization is a double edged sword. On the one hand, the notion breaks down the sharp ontological divide between heaven and earth; closeness with the divine can now be achieved. On the other hand, the price of this intimacy is quite high: it provides the space to produce a morally fallible God.