

Jealousy, Unrighteousness and Ignorance of God?

Ancient Jewish and Christian Exegetes on Questionable Texts in the Book of Genesis

1. Philosophical Theology and Inter-religious Polemics

The well-known differences between Greek and Jewish or Christian theologies and ways of life caused a plethora of possible ways for Jews and Christians to react. Mythical Greek theology was no problem for them; they only had to follow the well-known critique on Homer in Plato's *Politeia*.¹ With regard to sexual misbehavior and avarice we should keep in mind the relative nearness of Exod 20:17 and the general warnings against *ἐπιθυμία* in Greek philosophy. Due to these convergences between Greek Philosophical Theology and Jewish and Christian Theology, Jews and Christians could see themselves as part of the intellectual and religious elite in this discourse.

However, Jews and Christians were not only authors but also addressees of philosophical critique.² Some texts of Israel's Holy Scripture are in contradiction to the most important axioms of Plato which mastered the philosophical discourse: God is good, and God is unchangeable.³ So there was a vivid competition in the religious-philosophical market-place, a competition which caused the need for apologetics, not only regarding the food laws⁴ or the offspring of Jewish nation.⁵ Aristobulos explains some Biblical wordings imply corporality in God when speaking allegorically of divine might⁶, and Philo occasionally complains about the *δαιμονία* of some Jewish believers.⁷

In Christian apologetics some issues arise from specific Christian problems: belief in a crucified man, Christian fraternity misunderstood as sexu-

¹ Plato, *Rep.* 376e–392c, LCL 237:174–224.

² Cf. the 2nd person pl. in Theodoret, *Qu. Gen.* 37, LEC 1:78: “your God call good but why do you refer such cruelty to him?” The contradiction between Gen 17:14 and Mt 5:22 is named.

³ Plato, *Rep.* 379bc, 382e, LCL 237:182–184, 196.

⁴ Cf. *EpArist.* 139–142; Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.37, LCL 241:284.

⁵ Cf. Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, Book 1, passim; Book 2:1–143.

⁶ vde. Euseb, *Praep. Ev.* 8:10.1–17, GCS 43.1:451–454.

⁷ Philo, *Mut.* 138, LCL 275:212.

al misbehavior, and Christian eschatology. Some issues, however, are ones also well-known from Jewish apologetics: exclusive monotheism and confidence in God's election, as well as certain crucial passages of the Bible. The first anti-Christian writers such as Tacitus, Sueton and Fronto condemned this new *δαισιδαίμωνία* as mere listening to gossip. Epictetus, Galenus and Marcus Aurelius were content to prove the non-philosophical character of Christianity. But Celsus, Porphyry and Julian the Apostate read the Bible in order to refute this new religion in regard to the misbehavior of its human proponents and failure of its divine exemplars.

In this paper I focus on some questionable texts of the book of Genesis and their Jewish and Christian interpretations. My thesis is that many of these interpretations have real or possible anti-Jewish or anti-Christian critiques in mind, but these critiques dealt with problems which presented themselves also to intellectual Jewish and Christian believers who read the Bible carefully.

2. Jealousy and Envy in God? – Jewish and Christian Exegesis on Gen 2; 3

Problems concerning the notion of God are to be found in relation to Gen 2:16–17, Gen 3:22a and Gen 3:22b. It is these same problems which led Marcionites and Gnostics to trace back these sayings to the Demiurge or the archons, and gave occasion to Celsus, Porphyry and Julian to refute Christian theology more generally.

In general, the distinction between the Demiurge and the true god can be perhaps traced back to the insight that Gen 2:16–17 and comparable sayings concerning God's wrath (Jer 15:4) and jealousy (Exod 20:5). God's revenge and repentance (1Sam 15:11) are incommunicable to the concept of the goodness of God as developed in Plato's *Politeia*, but, according to Origen, Gnostics did not read these sayings allegorically.⁸

According to Celsus the Christian God was "incapable of persuading even one man whom He had formed".⁹ Some Marcionites, however, stated that the nature of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was itself fatal, and in Gnostic texts the envy of the creator was an important part of the authors' worldview;¹⁰ sometimes Gen 2:16–17 is regarded as given by the

⁸ Origen, *Princ.* 4:2.1, SC 268:296–298.

⁹ Celsus, in Origen, *Cels.* 4:40, SC 136:288.

¹⁰ *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC II,4 88.27–32, Nag Hammadi Library 164); *Ap. John* (NHC III,1, 28, Nag Hammadi Library 120–121); *Testim. Truth* (NHC IX,3 47.14–18, Nag Hammadi Library 455; according to KOSCHORKE, *Polemik*, 149, this notion of an ungodly deity should mock the "catholic" Christians; for parallels in Julian the Apostate cf. KOSCHOR-

archons.¹¹ Ambrose of Milan offers a plethora of questions concerning Gen 2:16–17 which he ascribes to Apelles. Here I mention only the most important ones:

– If it is good to have knowledge of good and evil, and if what God himself possesses is good, then forbidding it is unrighteous.¹²

– Is the death of Adam due to the nature of the tree or due to God’s handling of the situation? In the first case, the fruit of this tree proves stronger than God’s inbreathing (Gen 2:7). But if Adam’s death is the work of God, then God is ignorant or weak.¹³

– If God did not foresee Adam’s disobedience, then he is not really God, and if God really did foresee it, then his command is superfluous.¹⁴

– Can the good God really be the creator of sinning man?

– If God was unable to prevent sinning man’s birth, then he was weak. If he was able but did not do it, then he was not good.¹⁵

Porphyry also accused the Christian God, as portrayed in the Eden narrative, of maliciously planting it in the garden.¹⁶ Severian of Gabala reports the interpretation of adherents of Porphyry as follows¹⁷:

Many say, and particularly those who follow the God-hated Porphyry who wrote *Against the Christians* and who drew many away from the divine dogma. They say accordingly: Why did God forbid the knowledge of good and evil? Let it be the case that he forbade the evil. Why then also the good? For when he said, “From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,” he says that he keeps him from the knowledge of evil; why then also the good? (Malice always works against itself and provides holds against itself. God did not forbid the knowledge of good.)

New fragments of Michael Glycas, edited in 2010 by Richard Goulet¹⁸, demonstrate the origin of this interpretation in Porphyry himself.

Julian the Apostate summarizes the objections mentioned above¹⁹:

KE, *Polemik*, 151), cf. further Ambrose, *Parad.* 8.40, CSEL 32/1:297. LAHE, *Gnosis*, 257, states that the motive of envy is borrowed from the Jewish concept of Satan.

¹¹ *Tri. Trac.* (NHC I,5, 106.107, Nag Hammadi Library 88–89); *Gos. Phil.* 94b (NHC II,3, 74.3–12, Nag Hammadi Library 153); *Orig. World* (NHC II,5, 98.11–108.2, Nag Hammadi Library 172–178).

¹² Ambrose, *Parad.* 6.30, CSEL 32/1:287. Ambrose answers: “Knowledge” in Biblical meaning is not only the mere theoretical knowledge but acting in the proper way.

¹³ Ambrose, *Parad.* 7.35, CSEL 32/1:292.

¹⁴ Ambrose, *Parad.* 8.38, CSEL 32/1:294; cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 2:5.2, CCSL 1:479–480. Ambrose criticizes this thesis remarking that Jesus also elected Jude though foreseeing his failure (Joh 6:64). But, so Ambrose, *Parad.* 8.39, CSEL 32/1:295, there was no necessity for both, Adam and Jude, to act in their way: It would have been possible for both to abstain from sin.

¹⁵ Ambrose, *Parad.* 8.40, CSEL 32/1:297.

¹⁶ Cf. COOK, “Porphyry’s Critique of the Jewish Scriptures.”

¹⁷ Severian of Gabala, *Creat.*, or. 6, PG 56:487. Cf. COOK, *Interpretation*, 170–171.

¹⁸ GOULET, “Cinq nouveaux fragments,” 149–152.

... is it not excessively strange that God should deny to the human beings whom he had fashioned the power to distinguish between good and evil? What could be more foolish than a being unable to distinguish good from bad? For it is evident that he would not avoid the latter, I mean evil things, nor would he strive after the former, I mean good things. And, in short, God refused to let man taste of wisdom, than which there could be nothing of more value for man. For that the power to distinguish between good and less good is the property of wisdom is evident surely even to the witless; so the serpent was a benefactor rather than a destroyer of the human race. Furthermore, their God must be called envious. For when he saw that man had attained to a share of wisdom that he might not, God said, taste of the tree of life, he cast him out of the garden, saying in so many words, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22).

These myths can perhaps be interpreted allegorically but

"they are filled with many blasphemous sayings about God. For in the first place, to be ignorant that she was created as a help meet would be the cause of the fall. Secondly, to refuse the knowledge of good and bad, [when] this knowledge alone seems to give coherence to the mind of man. Lastly, to be jealous lest man should take of the tree of life and from mortal become immortal, this is to be grudging and envious overmuch."²⁰

Jewish and Christian authors focused on the free will²¹ of men, implicitly following the lines of Deut 30:11–16; Sir 15:11–17. Thus God's seeming failure was no problem for them. The forbidding was interpreted to be a test as to whether Adam would be obedient.²² It was no restraint but instead prophylaxis: Adam should not acquire a *sensus malitiae*.²³ Josephus focuses implicitly on the problem of God's envy in his retelling of Gen 3:14, where he uses general philosophic and specifically Stoic terms²⁴:

¹⁹ Julian, *C. Gal.* 89a–93d, LCL:324–327 (also English translation).

²⁰ Julian, *C. Gal.* 94a, LCL:326 (also English translation).

²¹ The reason for the absence of Ps 50:13[14] in this debate is easily to be understood though authors like Theodoret can identify this spirit with τὸν ἀυτοκράτορα λογικόν: This πνεῦμα ἡγεμονικόν is object of pray but not of creation (Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1249a). Also other commentators of Psalms do not refer to the combination of ἡγεμονικόν and of the parts of the soul, and I did not find any philosophical reflection on ἡγεμονικόν; e.g. Augustine, *En. Ps.*, CCSL 38:612; Cassiodor, *Exp. Psalm.*, CCSL 97:463; Ps.-Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:244a. Theodor of Mopsuestia offers an interpretation which is referred to David in a stark way: πνεῦμα ἡγεμονικόν is the rulership over the surrounding nations due to the grace of spirit (*In Psalm.*, CCSL 88A:216). Ambrosiaster, *Qu. V.N.T.* 112.19, CSEL 50:295, refers on the Holy Spirit who is Lord over all creation. In Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Psalm.*, PG 23:440cd, this passage is not interpreted at all; John Chrysostom does not interpret Ps 50.

²² Theophilus, *Autol.* 2:25.3, PTS 44:74; According to Caesarius of Nazianzus, dial. 132, GCS:102–103, sin is not caused by an evil nature but by human προαίρεσις.

²³ Origen, *Princ.* 3:6.3, SC 268:240: In the state of final perfection there is no desideratum for man to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil; man will be always within good and God is all for him.

²⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 1:46, LCL 242:23.

Nay, I had decreed for you to live a life of bliss (*βίον εὐδαιμόνα*), unmolested by all ill, with no care to fret your souls. All things that contribute to enjoyment and pleasure were, through my providence (*πρόνοια*), to spring up for you spontaneously, without toil or distress of yours.

Some Christian authors identify knowledge of good with obedience to God's command itself, knowledge of bad with disobedience.²⁵

In the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve*²⁶ it is the serpent, the medium of the devil, which presupposes that God's envy is responsible for the command 2:16–17. In the line of narrative criticism, the reader knows how to deal with this presupposition.

Theophilus of Antioch²⁷ and Gregory of Nazianzus especially refute the misleading interpretations of the tree:²⁸

The tree of knowledge was not planted for harm nor was it forbidden from envy (may the enemies of god not direct their tongues there, nor may they imitate the serpent).

Gen 3:22a (“See, the man has become like one of us”) is said in irony, at least in the interpretation by Theodoret,²⁹ whereas Procopius of Gaza regards these words as emphasizing the stupidity of Adam, deceived by the devil's notion of polytheism. This interpretation is based on the wording *ὡς θεοί* in Gen 3:5. Due to the Hebrew *plurale tantum* some exegetes read in Gen 3:5 *ὡς θεός*, but Procopius refutes this interpretation because of the plural in Gen 3:22.³⁰

Gen 3:22b (“Lest perchance be put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and eat and live forever?”) is first explained in Philo's³¹ *Questions on Genesis*³²:

“What is the meaning of the words, ‘Lest perchance be put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and eat and live forever?’ For there is neither doubt nor envy in God.

It is true that the Deity neither doubts nor envies. However, (Scripture) often uses ambiguous terms and names, according as it indicates a principle as if addressed to man. For the highest principles, as I have said, are two: one, that God is not like man, and the other, that just as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord God disciplines you. ... The words lest perchance are not a sign of doubt in God, but an indication of man's being a doubter

²⁵ John Chrysostom, *Serm. in Gen. 7,2*, SC 433:314; Eucharius of Lyon, *Instr. 1. Gen. 9*, CSEL 31:69.

²⁶ Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* 18.4, TSAJ 106:324.

²⁷ Theophilus, *Autol. 2:25.1*, PTS 44:74: It was not the tree which brought death but disobedience. Cf. further *Diogn. 12.2*.

²⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. 45.8*, PG 36:632c.

²⁹ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. Gen. 40*, OECT 1:88: *εἰρηγικῶς τοῦτο εἶρηκεν ὁ τῶν ὄλων θεός*.

³⁰ Procopius of Gaza, *In Gen.*, GCS NF 22:152–153.

³¹ Philo's allegorical explanation of Gen 3:20–23 is missing. It would be expected at the end of *Leg 3*.

³² Philo, *QG 1:55*, LCL 380:32–34.

by nature, and a manifestation of the affection that exists in him. ... The Deity, however, is without part in any evil and is not envious of immortality or anything, else whatever in the case of the good man. And a sure sign of this is that without being urged by anyone, He created the world as a benefactor, making contentious, disordered, confused and passive substance into something gracious and lovingly mild with a great and harmonious order and array of good things.”

In his interpretation of Gen 3:22b Ephrem the Syrian follows the lines of Theophilus and Irenaeus³³ and emphasizes the merciful consequences for men:³⁴

God did this (i.e. Gen 3:22b), lest this life-giving gift that they would receive through the tree of life become misery, and thus bring worse evil upon them than what they had already obtained from the tree of knowledge. From the latter (the tree of knowledge) they obtained temporal pains, whereas the former (tree) would have made those pains eternal. ... If they had eaten, however, one of two things would have occurred. Either the decree of death would have become a lie, or the life-giving capacity of the tree of life would have been denied. Therefore, lest the decree of death be loosed or the life-giving capacity of the tree of life become false, God took Adam far away from there lest he also incur loss from the tree of life just as he had been harmed by the tree of knowledge.”

Not mercy but blaming Adam’s sin is the nucleus of these words according to Procopius of Gaza: It would be unworthy, if it would be allowed for the sinner to eat from the tree of life.³⁵

3. Unrighteousness in God? – Ancient Jewish and Christian Exegesis on Gen 4

Why does God accept the sacrifice of Abel, and why does he reject the sacrifice of Cain?³⁶

Augustine mentions God’s acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice but does not discuss this problem at all.³⁷ Most of other Jewish and Christian exegetes used some exegetical strategies in order to avoid the notion of unrighteousness in God. They have not always been successful as the real fact of Julian’s critique makes clear.

First efforts to suppress the obstacles of this text have been made already in Septuagint. These efforts concern the terminology of sacrifice. In Gen 4:4–5^{MT} the term *קָרַבַּן* is the term which names both the sacrifice of Abel and the sacrifice of Cain. In the Septuagint, the sacrifice of Abel is named *δῶρον*, gift, the sacrifice of Cain is named *θυσία*, offering. This di-

³³ Theophilus, *Autol.* 2:25,6, PTS 44:75; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3:23,6, SC 211:460.

³⁴ Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.35,2-3, FaCh 91:122–123.

³⁵ Procopius of Gaza, *In Gen.*, GCS NF 22:154, including a hint on Matt 7:6.

³⁶ Vde. APTOWITZER, *Kain und Abel in der Agada*.

³⁷ Augustine, *Civ.* 15:18, CSEL 40/2:98.

vergence in terminology implies divergence in estimation.³⁸ Abel's gift was more valuable than Cain's offering. According to Philo³⁹

"Cain retained in his own keeping the firstlings of the fruits of his husbandry and offered ... merely the fruits at a later time."

Ephrem the Syrian imagined Cain to be a rich farmer:⁴⁰

"Cain had bulls and calves and an abundance of animals and birds that he could have offered. But he offered none of these on that day when he offered the first fruits of his land."

Another detail of the Septuagint text is understood at least in later times in order to solve the problem. LXX names the "dividing" of the sacrifice of Cain, whereas the verb to divide is missing when the gift of Abel is described. The interpretations of Jewish and Christian exegetes are very similar. I quote Philo of Alexandria, whose interpretation of "dividing" is influenced by the difference between *θυσία* and *δῶρον* named above.⁴¹

What difference is there between a gift and a sacrifice? Philo answers: "He who slaughters a sacrifice, after dividing it, pours the blood on the altar and takes the flesh home. But he who offers something as a gift offers the whole of it, it seems, to him who receives it. And the lover of self is divider, as was Cain, while the lover of God is a giver, as was Abel."

The same interpretation is given also by Procopius of Gaza.⁴²

Sometimes the verb "to divide" is understood not as a ritual term for correctly handling with the sacrifice but as a moral term referring to dividing one's wealth.⁴³ But Christians were not always able to give a satisfying explanation. Julian the Apostate discussed with a bishop who insisted that not sacrifice but division led to God's disapproving Cain's offering, but this bishop could not explain why the division should have been blameworthy at all. Julian's own answer is as follows⁴⁴:

"Those things that have life are more precious than those that are lifeless to the living God who is also the cause of life, inasmuch as they also have a share of life and have a soul more akin to is—for this reason God was more graciously inclined to him who offered a perfect sacrifice."

³⁸ This divergence in estimation is denied by Gennadius, *Frgm. in Gen.*, PG 85:1640c, referring to Hebrews 5:1; 9:26, where *θυσία* is used in a positive sense. But Gennadius does not comment the issue discussed here.

³⁹ Philo, *Conf.* 124, LCL 261:79.

⁴⁰ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 3.2.1, FC 91:124.

⁴¹ Philo, *QG* 1:62, LCL 401:38.

⁴² Procopius of Gaza, *In Gen.*, GCS NF 22:164–65.

⁴³ Maximus of Turin, *Serm.* 17.3, CCSL 23:65.

⁴⁴ Julian, *C. Gal.* 347ab, LCL:418–420.

Of course, this answer is given in order not to defend the Bible but to underline Julian's own intellectual superiority. Apparently, Julian was unaware of Philo's similar explanation.⁴⁵

"His offering was living, Cain's was lifeless."

Yet there was at least one Christian reader of Julian, who criticized him on the Emperor's own religious background: Procopius of Gaza remarked that Pythagoras had another sort of offering in mind.⁴⁶

There is still another strategy which helps to avoid the notion of unrighteousness in God. In terms of narrative criticism, Cain is presented in a negative way, even at the beginning of the story. His name is explained etymologically and means 'acquisition' (*κτησις γὰρ ἐρμηνεύεται*)⁴⁷ or 'having an eye only to gain'.⁴⁸ Cain is characterized as self-loving, Abel as God-loving,⁴⁹ Cain hates his brother; Abel is pure in heart.⁵⁰ Within Augustine's construction of salvation history, Cain symbolize the Jewish literal observation of Torah which is inadequate after the coming of Christ.⁵¹ According to (Ps.-)Prosper of Aquitaine, Cain is a prefiguration of the Jews with their earthly desires, whereas Abel is a prefiguration of Jesus Christ, killed by the Jews.⁵² Maximus Confessor regards Cain as symbol of fleshly mind, whereas Abel represents grief and repentance; the symbolism of Cain lies in the "field" (Gen 4:7), the field of fleshly theory, whereas the symbolism of Abel is not explained in any way.⁵³

Philo and Ambrose focused on the beginning of Gen 4:3: "And it came about after some days that Cain brought to the Lord an offering." From the wording "after some days" both exegetes deduce that Cain's mind is careless.⁵⁴ Ambrose adds the comparison to Gen 22:3: Abraham at the earliest

⁴⁵ Philo, *Sacr.* 88, LCL 227:161.

⁴⁶ Procopius of Gaza, *In Gen.*, GCS NF 22:163–164.

⁴⁷ Philo, *Det.* 32, LCL 227:223; Eucherius of Lyon, *Instr.* 2.1, CSEL 31:140: *Abel lucus uel miserabilis; Cain possessio uel lamentatio.*

⁴⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 1:53, LCL 242:24–25.

⁴⁹ Philo, *Det.* 32, LCL 227:223.

⁵⁰ Chromatius of Aquileia, *Serm.* 23.1, CCSL 9 A:104.

⁵¹ Augustine, *C. Faust.* 12:9, CSEL 25/1:337.

⁵² (Ps.-)Prosper of Aquitaine, *Lib. prom.* 1:6/9, CCSL 60:18; cf. also Isidor of Seville, *Qu. Gen.* 6, PL 83:223b.

⁵³ Maximus Confessor: *Qu. dub.* 77, GCS 10:58.

⁵⁴ Philo, *Sacr.* 52, LCL 227:133; id., *QG* 1.60, LCL:37: "Why did Cain after some days offer first fruits of offerings, while Abel (brought an offering) from the first-born, and fat ones, not after some days? Scripture manifests a distinction between the lover of self and the lover of God. For one of them took for himself the fruit of the first fruits and impiously thought God worthy (only) of the second fruits. For the words 'after some days' instead of 'immediately' and 'from the offerings' instead of 'from the firstfruits' "

obeyed God's command to sacrifice Isaac.⁵⁵ Philo characterizes Abel but not Cain as keeping the commands of Torah: Abel fulfills the sacred ordinance Exod 13:11–13,⁵⁶ whereas Cain fails to fulfill the command Deut 23:21⁵⁷:

“If you vow a vow, do not delay to pay it.”

According to Origen, however, Abel also brought his offering after some days. Origen's caveat to the well-known stark contrast between the brethren does not intend to discharge Cain but is based on a re-reading of Gen 4 according to the lines of Rom 5:12: Even if Abel is called the Righteous one, he is not to be discharged in any respect, for “all have sinned”.⁵⁸

Other writings offer a thoroughgoing negative portrait of Adam's first-born. According to Wis 10:3, Cain “as an unrighteous man departed from her (i.e., wisdom) in his anger.”⁵⁹ Josephus underlines the contrast between the righteous Abel and the rapacious Cain and continues his portrait⁶⁰ by alluding to Greco-Roman mythology concerning the end of the golden age⁶¹ and reversing the issue of *πρῶτος εὐρέτης*.⁶²

“He (i.e., Cain) put an end to that simplicity in which men lived before by the invention of weights and measures. He was the first to fix boundaries of land and to build a city, fortifying it with walls and constraining his clan to congregate in one place.”

In the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* (1.3), Cain is named “Adiaphotos,” man without light, and is characterized as “merciless” (2.2). The archangel Michael also names Cain a “Son of wrath” (3.2). In Heb 11:4 we read:

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous.

According to Theophilus the devil himself inspired Cain⁶³; 1 John 3:12 states that Cain “was from the evil one”⁶⁴, and the author of the *Gospel of Philippus* regards him to be the son of the serpent beguiling Eve.⁶⁵

indicate the great wickedness. But the other offered the first-born and elder animals without any delay at all or rejection by his Father.”

⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Cain* 1.8, CSEL 32/1:364.

⁵⁶ Philo, *Sacr.* 88, LCL 227:161.

⁵⁷ Philo, *Sacr.* 53, LCL 227:135.

⁵⁸ Origen, *comm. Rom.* 5.1, FC 2/3:53.

⁵⁹ 1 Clem 4:3, Lindemann/Paulsen 84, reads *Καῖν ἐλυσθήθη* instead of *ἐλύπησεν τὸν Καῖν*, in order to dissociate God from all negative acting against Cain.

⁶⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 1:61, LCL 242:29.

⁶¹ Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 90.3, Rosenbach 342.

⁶² Cf. Ps.-Hecataeus, in Josephus, *Ant.* 1:154–156, LCL 242:76–78 et al.

⁶³ Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.29.3, PTS 44:79; cf. Lactantius, *Epit.* 22,5, SC 335:106.

⁶⁴ Without explicit reference to this Biblical remark, Isidor of Seville, *Qu. V.N.T.* 24, PL 83:204a, states that the devil is Cain's father.

⁶⁵ *Gos. Phil.* 42 (NHC II,3, 61.7–10, Nag Hammadi Library 146).

4. Ignorance in God? – Ancient Jewish and Christian Exegesis on Gen 18:21

For ancient exegetes the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah was justified by the wicked deeds of their inhabitants. Josephus uses common Greek terms in order to characterize the Sodomites in a very negative way⁶⁶:

“Not about this time the Sodomites, overweeningly proud of their numbers and the extent of their wealth, showed themselves insolent (ὕβρισται) to men and impious (ἀσεβεῖς) to the Divinity, insomuch that they no more remembered the benefits that they had received from him, hated foreigners and declined all intercourse with others. Indignant at this conduct, God accordingly resolved to chastise them for their arrogance (ὕπερηφανεία), and not only to uproot their city, but to blast their land ... completely.”

A real problem, instead, was raised by Gen 18:21:

“So when I go down I shall see whether they are perpetrating according to the outcry concerning them that is coming to me, but if not—that I may know.”

God’s going down causes the problem of his corporality whereas God’s motivation seems to be in contradiction to the motif of God’s omniscience. The latter motif was a crucial point for some Manichaeans who emphasized the inferiority of the god of law.⁶⁷ Caesarius of Arles opposes this inference: Really, God knows both the righteous and the sinners; the statement “I do not know you” means “I do not recognize my image in you”.⁶⁸ Yet even before Augustine had understood these words as threat; they were spoken in divine accommodation to human manner of speaking.⁶⁹ Ambrose and John Chrysostom interpreted this passage in terms of morality: We should not condemn someone from hearsay⁷⁰ or semblance merely.⁷¹

5. Ignorance in God? – Ancient Jewish and Christian Exegesis on Gen 22

Modern preaching on Gen 22 very often focuses on God’s cruelty but this was not always the main point of most Ancient Jewish and Christian exegetes; there are only implicit references when the emotions of the father

⁶⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 1:194–5, LCL 242:94–96 (also English Translation).

⁶⁷ Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 83.7, CCSL 103:343–344.

⁶⁸ Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 83.7, CCSL 103:344.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Qu. Gen.* 38, CCSL 33:16.

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 42.3, PG 54:389.

⁷¹ Ambrose, *Abraham* 1:6.47, CSEL 32/1:535.

are mentioned⁷², and these emotions are not only paternal emotions but raised by the problem of the reliability of the promise Gen 21:12, as Hebr 11:17–18 for Christian exegetes makes clear. And we could add that this modern issue is no issue of ancient anti-Christian polemics as well: Celsus criticizes the story of the birth of Isaac with regard to the old age of his parents⁷³ but did not criticize Gen 22.

The cruelty of God is an issue only for the Book of Jubilees: According to Jub 17:16 it is Mastema who is responsible for this testing.⁷⁴ Apparently, the author of the Book of Jubilees intends to dissociate such a command from God's own mind; similarly to the plot of the book of Hiob, Mastema proposes this testing, and God is only permitting it. Josephus remarks *en passant* that God is not craving for human blood⁷⁵, but the main focus for him lies on Abraham's virtue, and the sacrifice is really an honor for Isaac⁷⁶:

He has judged that you are deserving to be removed from life neither by disease nor by war nor by some other of the afflictions that are conditioned by nature to befall humanity, but that He would receive your soul with prayers and sacrificial rites and would keep it near Himself.

PRE 31 mentions the weeping of the ministering angels when Abraham reached out his hand; the angels quote Ps 36:7^{MT} ("you save humans and animals alike, O Lord").⁷⁷ Gen 22 is the reading for the second day of the New Year; in addition, the daily morning prayer commemorates Isaac's voluntary self-sacrifice and prays that God's compassion will be stronger than his judgment against his people.⁷⁸

According to Diodore of Tarsus the text itself denies God's cruelty: the wording ἐπειράζεν excludes that God would really demand this sacrifice.⁷⁹ It's contradiction to the Decalogue (Exod 20:13) is decisive for Adaman-

⁷² Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 8.2, SC 7bis:216; Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaph. Gen.* PG 69:140b; Procopius of Gaza, *In Gen.*, GCS NF 22:293.

⁷³ Celsus, in Origen, *Cels.* 4:43, SC 136:294–296.

⁷⁴ This interpretation is reported (without explicit reference to the book of Jubilees) also in Origen, *Princ.* 3:2.1, SC 268:154.

⁷⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 1:233, LCL 242:114.

⁷⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 1:230, LCL 242:114 (English Translation: Feldman, 91).

⁷⁷ PRE 31, SJ 26:358 (without the quotation of the Psalm also GenR 56:8, Wünsche 268).

⁷⁸ Krupp, *Den Sohn opfern?*, 14; Gerhard, *Opferung*, 115. In the Targum to the Song of Songs, this willingness of Isaac is said to have the effect of God restraining his wrath on the occasion of Israel's sin according to Ex 32 (STEIGER, "Ad Deum contra Deum," 152).

⁷⁹ Diodor of Tarsus, *In Gen.*, in: *Collectio Coislana in Gen.* 203, CCSG 15:198.

tius to deny God's cruelty;⁸⁰ whereas in the view of Theodoret the charge of offering children (Ps 105:37–38; Ezek 16:20–21) would be unjustified.⁸¹

Other writings focused almost exclusively on Abraham, on the exceptional character of his achievement⁸², on his faithfulness mentioned in Gen 15:6⁸³, on his obedience, his εὐσεβεία⁸⁴ or θρησκεία⁸⁵ or ἀρετή.⁸⁶ His deed confirms Jesus's word in Matthew 10:37: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."⁸⁷ Jewish and Christian exegetes like Origen presume sometimes a modern-sounding, reader-oriented approach. They interpreted the text not only with regard to the possible emotions of Abraham and Isaac but understood the story as written for readers:⁸⁸

"[Y]ou too indeed have believed in God, but unless you shall fulfill 'the works of faith', unless you shall be obedient to all the commands, even the more difficult ones, unless you shall offer sacrifice and show that you place neither father nor mother nor sons before God, you will not know that you fear God nor will it be said of you: 'Now I know that you fear God.'"

But how was Abraham able to announce his and his son's return (Gen 22:5), if he was to sacrifice him? Following the lines of Heb 11:19, Origen and Caesarius of Arles presupposed Abraham's hope that Isaac would be resuscitated immediately,⁸⁹ whereas John Chrysostom presupposes Abraham's ignorance of future and thus his prophetic speech.⁹⁰

With regard to God, it was not his cruelty but his seeming ignorance concerning Abraham's behavior which was the real problem, because it was an issue of both pagan attacks and inner-Christian controversy. For Marcion the God of the Old Testament was imperfect.⁹¹ Anti-Marcionite exegetes refute this interpretation: Gen 22 is an instruction not on God's knowledge but on men's fear of God⁹² and on men's obedience to God's commands.⁹³ The wording "For now I know" in Gen 22:12 is also inter-

⁸⁰ Adamantius, *Dial.*, GCS 4:20.

⁸¹ Theodoret, *Qu. Gen.* 74, OECT:150.

⁸² Philo, *Abr.* 178–183, LCL 289:226–228.

⁸³ 1Macc 2:52; Jas 2:21.

⁸⁴ Philo, *Abr.* 199, LCL 289:236.

⁸⁵ Josephus, *Ant* 1:224, 234, LCL 242:110, 114.

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 47.1, PG 54:428.

⁸⁷ Quodvultdeus, *Lib. prom.* 1:17/24, CCSL 60:32–33.

⁸⁸ Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 8.8, FaCh 71:143.

⁸⁹ Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 8.5, SC 7bis:222; Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 84.4, CCSL 103:346–347.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 47.2, PG 54:430.

⁹¹ Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 8.8, SC 7bis:226.

⁹² Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 8.8, SC 7bis:226.

⁹³ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 47.1, PG 54:429; similarly Theodoret, *Qu. Gen.* 73, OECT:150.

preted with regard to this issue: that means “you have proved and notified that you really fear God.”⁹⁴

Yet, there is another problem with regard to God’s cruelty grasped in some Christian writings: Isaac is not really sacrificed, but the daughter of Jephthah must die. Ambrosiaster und Ps.-Athanasius hint on Jephthah’s stupidity and wickedness;⁹⁵ according to Ambrose it is the daughter herself who is responsible for her sad fate. Whereas Abraham brought Isaac immediately to offering, she mourned two months.⁹⁶

6. Conclusion

Ancient Jewish and Christian exegetes often were reliable contemporaries to debates in philosophy and theology. For our times, their answers are not convincing. But the questions they discussed are questions of human beings in general. Modern scholarship on the Bible has its own issues, including questions of history, philology, social science, etc. But we should remember that only the fact that the Bible is read by believers and disbelievers, by faithful and doubters, justifies our intensive efforts on this book.⁹⁷

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⁹⁴ Diodor of Tarsus, *In Gen.*, in: *Collectio Coislana in Gen.* 204, GCS 15:199–200; similarly Eucherius of Lyon, *Instr.* 1 Gen 23, CSEL 31:73. In GenR 56:10, Wünsche 268, הודעתו instead of יודעתו is presupposed.

⁹⁵ Ambrosiaster, *Qu. V.N.T.* 43.2f., CSEL 50:70; Ps.-Athanasius (recorded in the manuscript tradition of Anastasius Sinaitia), *Qu.* 38, PG 89:580c–581a: What had Jephthah should do, if a dog or an ass would have been the first which came out from his house to meet him – it would have been forbidden to sacrifice this unclean animal (Lev 11).

⁹⁶ Ambrosius, *Virg.* 2.5–9, PL 16:281–282.

⁹⁷ With gratitude I mention Mark Glenn Bilby who improved my English.

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