

them: their trauma and subsequent demands for official compensation earned them the Greek classification of *omiros*, or hostages—a bureaucratic description of their victimhood, and an identity marker that only accentuated their Otherness in Greek Salonica. In the eyes of much of the Orthodox Christian public, Jews were a nuisance, battling to reclaim property that many Orthodox Christians had come to view as their own. Now the price of “becoming Greek” did not necessitate abandoning Shabbat observance or converting, but rather forgetting past injustices in order to quietly reenter society—which, for many survivors, would have been an unimaginable insult to the memory of their deceased. Without most of the city’s Jewish institutions left to fortify a physical representation of Hellenic Judaism, that burden now fell to a select few.

When Jack stepped onto the field at PAOK stadium in 1950, he entered into that exceptional space of which many Salonican Jewish athletes before him had taken part. Jack’s Jewish contemporaries who watched him play saw that vision of Hellenic Judaism reemerging, and the protest against their community’s erasure by the Greek state was reinvigorated once again.

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Looking at the photo of my Papu standing with Iraklis and the crowd in the background, I hear the memories of a young Jewish spectator, another survivor who would become Jack’s brother-in-law, who proudly listened to a crowd of Orthodox Christians cheer for one player as he ran toward the goal: “Abravanel, Abravanel.” As they applauded his success, Jack demanded that his predominantly non-Jewish audience publicly acknowledge that their Greek hero was a Jew.

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**MAKENA MEZISTRANO** is the assistant director of the *Sephardic Studies Program at the University of Washington in Seattle*. She holds a BA in English Literature and an MA in Biblical and Talmudic Studies, both from Yeshiva University. Her maternal grandparents are Holocaust survivors from Salonica.

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i See Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

## Prophetic Protest in the Hebrew Bible

Marian Kelsey

The Hebrew Bible contains many examples of protest against God. Such protest was crucial to the role of a prophet. It is normally understood as intercession, in which the prophet pleads for God’s leniency regarding human transgression. Yet the word “intercession” obscures the fact that prophets do criticize God, however cautiously they phrase it. Sometimes God allows the criticism, and changes his plans accordingly, and sometimes the criticism is rejected. The protest itself is, however, expected, even demanded, by God. In the book of Ezekiel, God complains that “I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would

**A well-known example of prophetic protest is Abraham negotiating with God in an attempt to spare Sodom and Gomorrah.**

not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezek 22:30). God demands that we exercise moral judgement, even toward God—although, needless to say, he will not always accept our rulings.

A well-known example of prophetic protest is Abraham negotiating with God in an attempt to spare Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18). God tells Abraham that he intends

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to destroy the wicked city Sodom. Abraham asks God whether he would destroy the whole city if fifty righteous people could be found in it. Hearing that the whole city would be spared for that number, Abraham gradually negotiates God down to an assurance that for only ten righteous people, the city would be spared. Unfortunately, Abraham's stopping point was a little optimistic. Future events demonstrate that not even ten righteous inhabitants can be found, and the city is destroyed. Abraham's protest to God, however, goes without challenge: "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked ... Far be that from you!" Abraham's language is suitably self-effacing, but his point is blunt: God's initial plan to destroy the city without considering the righteous was unjust, and unworthy of God.

A rather different approach is taken by Jonah. He travels to Nineveh at God's command, and proclaims that in forty days the wicked city will be overthrown. The inhabitants have other ideas, and change God's mind with a great display of penitence and fasting, even among their livestock. Jonah, however, is greatly displeased and remonstrates with God for relenting from punishment. Rather than exasperation, God's reaction to Jonah's protest seems almost one of amusement. God toys with a recalcitrant Jonah, sending a miraculous bush and worm, to tease out the reasons for Jonah's anger.

The stories of Sodom and Nineveh are interconnected. Both concern wicked gentile cities. God determines to destroy each city, and the cities' contrasting responses result in contrasting fates. Both prophets protest, though on different grounds. Abraham attempts to avert Sodom's overthrow, whereas Jonah is angry that Nineveh was spared. Abraham asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" while Jonah complains "Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? ... For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful." And each protest apparently fails. Jonah, sitting outside the city, sees Nineveh still standing. Abraham, early the next morning, looks down on Sodom's smoking remains.

Yet the "failure" of the prophetic protests is not all that it seems. Abraham, asking for justice, in fact desires mercy. Jonah, describing God's mercy, actually wants justice. Matching the obliqueness of their words, each gets

exactly what his lips speak, though not what his heart wishes. God agreed to each of Abraham's propositions, so was just by the definition Abraham presented—and in fact went further, destroying Sodom when "all the people to the last man" proved wicked. Similarly, despite Jonah's protest against God's relenting nature, later in history, Nineveh was utterly destroyed. God is more just than Abraham dared expect, and less merciful than Jonah feared.

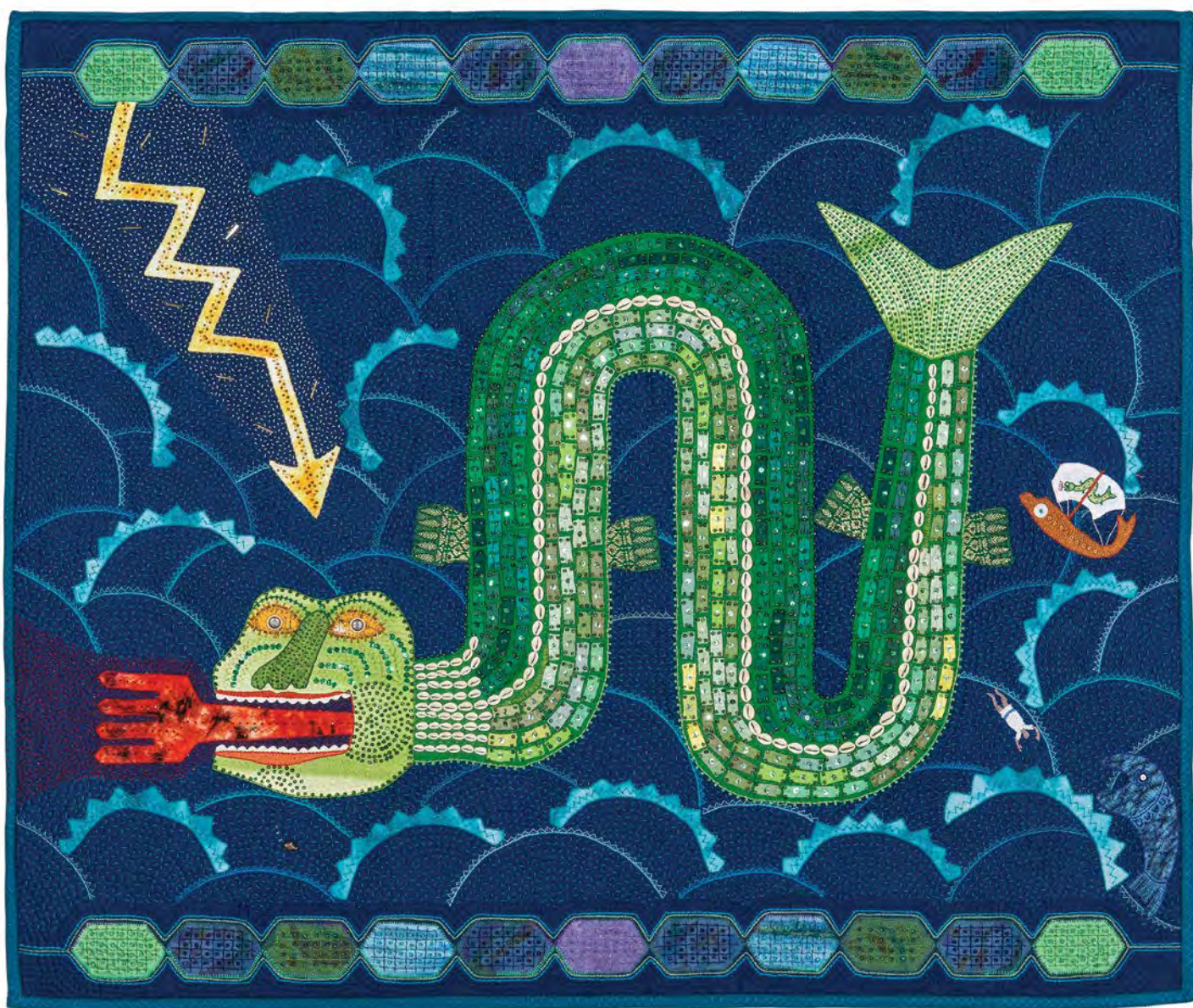
Another protest which is prophetic, if not from a prophet, is found in the book of Job. In her only recorded words, Job's wife exclaims, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." Though Job's wife is often viewed negatively, her insight cuts to the heart of Job's experience. At the beginning of the book, God asserted Job's integrity, while the satan contended that Job would curse God, if only he suffered enough. Job having lost family, wealth, and health, God is so far winning, but Job seems unaware of the stakes in this game. Job's wife correctly identifies both the issue at hand and the current state of affairs. Job, thus far, has persisted in his integrity, as God had predicted and Job's wife affirms. In urging Job to curse God, Job's wife presents to him the very test that God had set. This is in marked contrast to Job and his friends, all of whom miss the point: Job is at a loss to understand God's actions and considers his treatment unjust and unworthy of God. Job's friends insist that he must have sinned, and try to prove God just by denigrating Job.

The insight of Job's wife is implicitly acknowledged by God in the final scenes of the book. Here, God confirms Job's integrity. God also rebukes both Job and his friends. As with Abraham and Jonah, their views of God's justice fall short. There is no condemnation of Job's wife. Abraham and Jonah, Job and his friends, all try to fit God's actions to human conceptions of what is appropriate for the nature of God, and protest when God's actions fall short of those conceptions. Their protests are tolerated, but the stories reveal the shortcomings of their conceptions of God. Job's wife, meanwhile, in calling for a curse, is the one character who seemingly has little patience with human notions of God's justice, and does not expect God to abide by them. Abraham and Jonah



get precisely that of which they speak, though their protest fails in what they mean to accomplish. By contrast, the protesting speech of Job's wife is not heeded; and yet, in refusing to expect God to act according to human notions of God's justice, she is the only character in the book who does not earn God's rebuke.

**MARIAN KELSEY** is a visiting scholar at the University of St. Andrews. She is currently researching the literary role of foreign cities in the Hebrew Bible and writing a chapter on *Jonah and Ruth* for *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Narrative*.



4 ART CONTRIBUTOR: LINDA BAR-ON

*The Female Leviathan*, 2014. Quilt. 43.3 x 52 in. © 2014 Linda Bar-On. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Yoram Reshef.