

## Mock, Mockery

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### I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Mocking or mockery is human behavior which attacks fundamental human honor and respect for other people. It occurs in the HB/OT mainly as part of the experience of those who are rejected and suffering, or where it is an instrument for humiliation, ridicule, and derision. Mocking is the opposite of acting with honor, respect, and solidarity. In addition to the primary level of interhuman relationships (Ps 79:4; Prov 30:17; Sir 13:7), mocking is also used in the context of ideological or religious polemics (mocking the idols in Isa 44:9–10, the prophets of Baal in 1 Kgs 18:27, or the living God in 2 Kgs 19:4, 16). Mockery can also be aimed against generally accepted principles or values (to mock at justice in Prov 19:28; at the guilt offering in Prov 14:9, et al.).

A distinctive term is the Hebrew root *l-ḡ* (“to jeer,” “to deride someone,” “to make a face”: Ps 22:8; Prov 17:5; Job 21:3; Neh 2:19; 3:33). It is very often found in parallel with expressions having a similar meaning, for example *ś-ḥ-q* (“to laugh”: Ps 2:4), *ś-m-ḥ* (“to be glad at”: Prov 17:5), *b-z-ḥ* (“to despise”: Ps 22:7), *ḥ-r-p* (“to taunt,” “to scoff”: Ps 44:14), *q-l-s* (“to make fun of”: Ps 79:4), or *g-d-p* (“to revile”: Ps 44:17).

*ḥ-n-p* and *l-ḡ* occur in parallel with the phrase “they gnashed at me with their teeth” (Ps 35:16), and perhaps primarily refer to a contemptuous mimicking gesture. The LXX often translates it using a verb which also has connotations with a mimicking gesture, “to turn up one’s nose at someone” (μυκτηρίζω [1 Kgs 18:27] or ἐμυκτηρίζω [Ps 22:8; LXX 21:8], et al.). In expressive poetic language, God’s laughter at his enemies is also referred to in this way (Pss 2:4; 59:9 [LXX 58:9]).

Forms of the root *ḥ-r-p* (“to taunt,” “to scoff”) are often used in this sense in the HB/OT (2 Sam 21:21; 2 Kgs 19:4; Ps 74:10), as are formulations with the expression *ḥerpâ* (“mockery,” “taunt,” “object of mocking,” “scorn”: Ezek 5:14–15; Pss 39:9 [ET 39:8]; 69:10 [ET 69:9]).

Other terms belonging to this group include the verbs *l-y-š* (“to scorn,” “to have contempt for”: Prov 3:34; 19:28), *q-l-s* (*hithpael*, “to make fun of,” “to jeer at”: 2 Kgs 2:23; Ezek 22:5), *h-t-l* (*piel*, “to mock”: 1 Kgs 18:27; Sir 13:7), *t-l-l* (*hiphil*, “to mock,” “to trifle with”: Judg 16:10, 13, 15), and *t-š-š* (*pilpel*, “to make a mockery of”: Gen 27:12), and their derivatives (*lêšim*, “scoffers”: Ps 1:1; *lāšôn*,

“scoffing”: Prov 1:22; *ma’āšê ta’tū’im*, “a work of mockery”: Jer 10:15; 51:18; *qeles*, “derision”: Jer 20:8; Ps 44:14 [ET 44:13], et al.).

On the level of interhuman relationships, mockery is mentioned most often in the HB/OT in individual laments. In this type of prayer, people who are suffering ask God for help. Their distress is further heightened by the fact that they are ridiculed by their enemies (Pss 31:12 [ET 31:11]; 102:9 [ET 102:8]), and even by their friends and those close to them (Pss 44:10; 55:14; Job 16:20; 17:2; 21:3; 30:9). This applies in a similar way to collective laments, where Israel becomes the object of ridicule and contempt on the part of surrounding nations, especially when it is defeated by the Babylonians and ignominiously led off into exile (Pss 44:14–17 [ET 44:13–16]; 79:4; 80:7 [ET 80:6]; 123:3–4; Lam 3:61–63). The reason given for this by the prophets is that Israel has reviled and blasphemed YHWH through idolatry, and this is why it has been punished so ignominiously (Isa 43:28; 65:7; Ezek 20:27; Jer 19:8; 24:9). However, the faithful have hope that YHWH will once again console his humiliated people (Isa 37:6–7, 22–27; 40:1–11; 54:4; Ezek 39:25–26), and will even take vengeance himself on those who taunted it (Isa 47:1–3; Ezek 25:6; 35:14–15; Zeph 2:8–10). The pronouncements of some prophets directed against enemy powers are formulated using the genre of derisive songs (Isa 14:4–23; Nah 3:8–19).

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### II. New Testament

The term for mock appears only twice in the NT ([δυνα]χευάζω “to mock” [Acts 2:13; 17:32]; ἡ χλευή “mockery”). As a considered part of his passion, the mocking (ἐμπαίζω) of Jesus occurs several times in the Synoptic Gospels of the NT (Matt 27:29, 31; Mark 15:20; Luke 22:63; 23:36). The guards holding Jesus hurt and mock him, questioning his prophecy (Luke 22:63). After his condemnation by the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, Roman soldiers flog and mock Jesus. In an act of travesty they equip Jesus with the insignia of an earthly king, cloth him with a ‘royal’ robe, put a crown of thorns on his head and a staff in his hand, by doing so, accidentally speaking the truth, which mirrors the irony covering this whole scene. Finally, they kneel down before him, addressing him by “King of the Jews” (Matt 27:29). In the Gospels Jesus predicts his own torture also mentioning the mockery (Matt 20:19; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:32). In addition to that there are a few other references for mock/mockery in the NT. Mockery is also mentioned when Jesus in Luke 14:29 discusses the costs of discipleship in form of two parables using the pictures of building

a tower and waging war. When someone wants to build a tower, he needs to calculate the costs in order not to be ridiculed when he fails. Besides, in Acts 2:13 the narrator describes two different reactions to the experience of glossolalia occurring in Acts 2:4 in the context of the descent of the Holy Spirit during the celebration of the Festival of Weeks in Jerusalem. The mocking (*χλευάζω*) answer insinuates the speaking in tongues to derive from enjoyment of wine and a resulting drunken babbling (Acts 2:13). Even if the mockers are touched by the Pentecostal experience, they either precautionously or self-protectively dissociate themselves from a growing enthusiasm throughout the witnesses.

One group of people displaying general openness for the Christian testimony while another showing rejection is a common motive in Acts (5:33–35; 14:4; 17:18, 32; 23:6–9; 28:24). Those who keep themselves distanced occasionally show their discontent by mockery (Act 17:18, 32; 26:24). Mockery also displays rejection in Luke 16:4; 22:63–65; 23:35–37. While the description of the mockers in Acts 2:13 forecasts a cleavage of the audience in Acts 2:41, it also serves Peter as connection to the topics he negotiates within his following sermon. In Acts 2:15 he refutes the mockers opinion and offers an explanation for those who show general openness.

In Acts 17:32 mockery, similarly to 2:13, is used to describe a reaction of discontent. This time as a result of a Pauline sermon located in Athens on the resurrection of the dead.

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### III. Judaism

■ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval Judaism

#### A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

Mocking and related acts are represented in the LXX by an array of verbs, including *ἐκγελάω/ἐπιγελάω/καταγελάω* (“to laugh at,” Ps 2:4; Tob 2:8; Gen 38:23), *ἐμυκτηρίζω/μυκτηρίζω* (“to turn the nose up at,” Ps 2:4; 2 Chr 36:16), *ἐπκαίω* (“to mock,” 1 Esd 1:49, *harpax*), *ἐμπαίζω* (“to make fun of,” Gen 39:14; Prov 23:35), *καταμωκάομαι* (“to make a fool of,” 2 Chr 30:10; Jer 45:19), *κολαβρίζω* (“to deride,” Job 5:4, *harpax*), *ὀνειδίζω* (“to subject to humiliation,” Jer 15:9), *σκώπτω* (“to make a mockery of,” Sir 10:10, *harpax*), and *χλευάζω* (“to scoff at,” 2 Macc 7:27; 4 Macc 5:22). By far, the most commonly used verbs are *ἐμπαίζω* and *καταγελάω*. Sev-

eral related substantives are also used, including *ἐμπαγμία* (“misrepresentation, mockery” Isa 66:4), *ἐμπαίκτης* (“mockery,” Isa 3:4, *harpax*), *ἐμπαγμιός* (“the act of mocking,” Ps 37:8), *μωκάομαι* (“something to be mocked,” Jer 28:18 [substantival participle], *harpax*), and *παροβολή* (“mocking proverb,” Mic 2:4; Tob 3:4). The primary Hebrew verb for the act of mocking, *lā’ag*, is translated in a variety of ways, though the related noun *herpā*, “a taunt, reproach,” is consistently translated with *ὄνειδος/ὄνειδισμός*.

Biblical material related to mocking occasioned inventive interpretations by later authors. In Gen 9:24, Ham is called Noah’s “younger son,” a description which, according to Philo (*Sobr.* 6–7), concerns not Ham’s age but his inclination toward ridiculing what instead ought to be grieved (Noah’s nakedness), a trait coincident with a vicious penchant for “innovation” (*νεωτεροποιαν*). Genesis 18:12–15 reports that at the news of Isaac’s conception Sarah laughed but then denied laughing, thus implying that actually she scoffed. But later interpreters offer more flattering portraits: according to Josephus (*Ant.* 1.198), Sarah merely “smiled” (*μειδιασάσης*), whereas Philo (*Leg.* 3.218; cf. *Abr.* 206) allows that she laughed, but only out of rejoicing. Concerning again the covenant with Abraham, Philo (*Spec.* 1.1–3) defends the practicality of circumcision in the face of ill-informed “childish ridicule” (*παιδικὴν χλευήν*) (cf. 1 Macc 1:11–15). Moving forward in the patriarchal narrative, Levi’s terse response to Jacob’s criticism of Levi’s revenge for Dinah’s rape (Gen 34:31) is expanded in *T. Levi* 7:1–3 to include a prediction of the despoiling of Canaan and the saying, “as someone mocks a fool, so we mocked [the city of Shechem].” This expansion frames the killing of the men of Shechem not merely as retribution, but also as a like-for-like punishment – just as Shechem made a mockery of Dinah, so Jacob’s sons made a mockery of him (Kugel: 25) – which itself is a parable of the conquest of Canaan. Finally, Adcock argues that although the LXX and 4Q71 interpret the Aramaic gibe of Jer 10:11 as Jeremiah’s instruction to curse pagan gods, the phrase as it is contextualized in the MT is best understood as a “war taunt” by the nations, mocking Judah’s own idolatry.

**Bibliography:** ■ Adcock, J. S., “Does Jeremiah Dispel Diaspora Demons? How Septuagint Jeremiah and 4Q71 (4QJer<sup>b</sup>) Rewrote Their Text Structures around an Aramaic War Taunt which Mocks Zion’s Idolatry,” *JSOT* 43 (2019) 395–416. ■ Kugel, J. L., “The Story of Dinah in the *Testament of Levi*,” *HTR* 85 (1992) 1–34.

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#### B. Rabbinic Judaism

The terms for mockery, ridicule, and derision found in the HB/OT appear in rabbinic literature as well, along with their Aramaic equivalents and a few new additions (such as *b-d-h*, *g-h-k*, *h-w-k*). While some

terms unambiguously denote derision and mockery (especially *l-y-š/l-w-š*, *l-š-g*, *l-g-l-g*), others exhibit a diversity of meaning (especially the very frequent *š-h-q*, the much less frequent *š-h-q*, and *b-d-h*) ranging from smiling and laughing, to innocent jesting, to gentle mockery (of others or self), to cruel humiliation. Thus, context is important for identifying instances of mockery. As noted by Ohali, the distribution of these many terms among the various works in the rabbinic corpus is uneven: *b-d-h*, *h-w-k*, *t-l-l*, *l-g-l-g*, and *g-h-k* do not appear at all in Tannaitic collections, the first three terms occurring primarily in the Babylonian Talmud and the last term in Palestinian texts. Similarly, *l-y-š/l-w-š*, and *l-š-g* occur rarely in Tannaitic texts and more frequently in Amoraic texts, with the highest incidence in the late midrashim. The attitude towards the activities signified by these many terms shifts over time as well, with a negative attitude towards the more aggressive forms of mockery (*l-y-š/l-w-š*, *l-š-g*, *l-g-l-g*) appearing more frequently in later works, especially late midrashim like *DevR*, *ShemR*, *Tan*. Rather than examine each term separately, this article summarizes the motif of mockery in rabbinic literature with particular attention to the rabbinic interpretation of biblical instances of mockery, the subjects and objects of mockery, and the rise of new usages and new attitudes towards mockery in the rabbinic corpus.

**1. Rabbinic interpretation of Biblical Mockery.** Biblical references to mockery are given contemporizing interpretations by the rabbis. Second Chronicles 36:16 blames the destruction of the First Temple on the fact that the people mocked (*mal'ibim*) the messengers of God, despised (*bōzim*) his words, and scoffed at (*mitta'tē'im*) his prophets; applying this verse to the Second Temple period, R. Judah blames the later destruction on the fact that the people despised (*bizu*) scholars – presumably, the latter day equivalents of the messengers and prophets of God (*bShab* 119b). Numbers 15:31's condemnation of the one who has “despised (*bāzā*) the word of the Lord, and broken his commandment” is read as a reference to heretics who mock the Torah on the model of Manasseh (*bSan* 99b). The latter is said to have ridiculed Scripture for its mundane contents, declaring “Had Moses nothing better to write?” Proverbs 17:5 (“He who mocks [*lō'ēg*] the poor blasphemes his Maker”) is the basis for the rabbinic prohibition against walking in a cemetery while wearing *tefillin*, carrying a Torah scroll, or reciting the *Shema*, since to do so mocks the dead – the “poor” mentioned in the verse – because they are unable to perform these commandments (*bBer* 18a).

Biblical prayers, petitions, and laments uttered by those who are mocked are also given contemporary content by the rabbis. Linking Lam 3:14 (“I have become a derision [*šēhōq*] to all my people”)

with Ps 69:13 (“they that sit in the gate talk of me; and I am the song of the drunkards”), *EkhR* concludes that the verses refer to the nations of the world who sit in theaters and circuses, become intoxicated, and scoff at the Jews, mocking their dress, their Sabbath observance, and their poverty. In its commentary on Lev 18:4, “You shall observe my judgments (*mišpāṭay*) and keep my laws (*hūqqōṭay*) to follow them,” *Sifra*, Aḥarei Mot 9:13 differentiates “judgments” from “laws”: the former are rational provisions (such as prohibitions against murder and theft) while the latter are arbitrary or non-rational laws (such as the dietary laws, purity laws, and certain peculiar rituals) that are ridiculed by the evil impulse and the idolatrous nations of the world because they are incongruous in a system of divine law (Hayes 2015: 246–64). These and other depictions of Jews as the victims of mockery align with evidence from classical sources (Horace, Petronius, Martial), Josephus (*C. Ap.* 2.137), and Philo (*Spec.* 1.2), attesting that Jews were ridiculed in late antiquity for resting every seventh day, for circumcision, and for other observances and customs (Cohen: 13; 21, n. 82).

In addition, biblical episodes containing elements of mockery are magnified in rabbinic interpretation. According to Kovelman, the rabbis develop the book of Esther into a true farce, especially in their elaboration of the humiliation of the wicked Haman who not only must bathe and groom Mordecai but bends down so that the latter can step on him to mount his horse (*bMeg* 16a). As Haman leads the horse through town, his daughter empties a chamber pot on her father's head, believing him to be Mordecai. Realizing her error, she falls to her death before his eyes, explaining why “Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered” (*Esth* 6:12), i.e., covered in filth from the chamber pot and mourning his daughter's death. Polzer (277) sees in this story of “death by chamber pot” a covert anti-Zoroastrian polemic mocking the Zoroastrian view of bodily waste as ritually impure, a belief alien to Jewish purity law. The rabbis also magnify the element of mockery in biblical accounts of rebellion. Korah's challenge to the authority of Moses in Num 16 consists of his mocking the legal teachings of Moses as paradoxical and absurd (*ySan* 10:1, 27d–28a). Even biblical heroes do not escape this treatment, especially those whose behavior is already criticized within the biblical text itself. Perhaps taking a cue from Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Sam 12 and from Shimei ben Gera's curse in 2 Sam 16, the rabbis depict David as derided for his sins by malicious mockers (*bSan* 107a) in fulfillment of Ps 35:15, “But at my stumbling they gathered in glee, they gathered together against me; ruffians whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing.” A parody in *bPes* 119b mocks the hubris of David: in this representation of the eschatological feast,

each of the patriarchs excuses himself from the honor of reciting the blessing over the wine owing to some minor blemish, until David, a confessed adulterer and murderer, declares himself worthy and takes up the cup (J. Diamond). Finally, the rabbis insert episodes of mockery into biblical narratives where none exists. Thus, in the rabbinic elaboration of Abraham's departure from his father and homeland in *BerR* 38:13, Abraham ridicules the idolatrous beliefs of his father and neighbors, while his servant Eliezer, in a satirical tale that draws on the stock character of the clever slave (*servus callidus*) popular in Roman theater, mocks the perverse citizens and corrupt judges of Sodom (*bSan* 109b; see Segal).

At the same time, the rabbis do not ignore biblical condemnations of mocking, scornful behavior. Psalm 1:1 refers to scornful persons (*lēšīm*) in parallel with sinners and wicked persons (*rešā'im* and *ḥaṭṭā'im*) and in contradistinction to those who delight in the Lord's Torah: "Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the path of sinners, nor sat in the seat [or assembly] of the scornful (*mōšab lēšīm*); but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night." This verse inspires the rabbinic view of *letsanut* (mockery, sarcasm, scoffing) as incompatible with Torah: "R. Hananiah ben Teradion said: if two sit together and there are no words of Torah between them, then this is an assembly of the scornful (*mōšab lēšīm*) ... but if two sit together and words of Torah are between them, then the Shekhinah abides among them" (*mAv* 3:2). The mutually exclusive nature of Torah and *letsanut* is emphasized in *ShirR* 1:2, which states that for every word of *letsanut* that enters the heart, a word of Torah exits. Stadiums and theaters are identified as instances of Ps 1:1's "assembly of the scornful" (see *tAZ* 2:6–7; *yAZ* 1:7, 5a; *bAZ* 18b) and on the view of some rabbis, attendance at them is prohibited because it causes neglect of Torah (*bAZ* 18b). E. Diamond (35) hypothesizes that *letsanut* was strongly denounced because of its potential to undermine the master-disciple relationship by subjecting the master, his teachings, and/or the authority and validity of the entire rabbinic enterprise to ridicule.

**2. Targets of Rabbinic Mockery: Idolaters, Heretics, Sectarians, and Sinners.** Nevertheless, despite general condemnations of mockery and ridicule as inconsistent with Torah, the rabbis inherited a polemical Scripture replete with prophetic and even divine mockery of sinners and foreign nations (Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal in 1 Kgs 18 and numerous passages in the literary prophets mock idolatrous and enemy peoples). They therefore approved its parallel polemical use in their own day (E. Diamond: 35). One authority states that all *letsanut* is prohibited except for the mocking of idolatry, which is permitted on the strength of the precedent

set by the mocking of Bel and Nebo in Isa 46:1 (*bMeg* 25b). This permission is extended from idolatry as an activity, to the concrete individuals and nations who engage in it and/or deny the God of Israel (*ibid.*; see also *bAZ* 2a–3b which bases its mockery of the nations on Ps 2:4), including heretics (*bBer* 10a). In fact, however, the list of the targets of rabbinic mockery is considerably larger. This mockery can be covert, lacking specific verbs of mockery, or overt and hostile, depending on the circumstances. Indeed, rabbinic texts deploy the full array of literary genres associated with mockery and ridicule: parody, satire, and irony. Episodes of mockery feature heavy sarcasm (*yTaan* 3:4, 66d; *bBer* 58a); cacophemistic puns on names (e.g., *bShab* 152a; *bAZ* 46a; and see Lifshitz); insults ("Vinegar, son of Wine" in *bBB* 83b; "those foolish Babylonians" in *bYom* 57a; "Reqa!" [Fool!] in *bHul* 87a; *bBer* 10a; *bEr* 101a; *bYev* 102b; "Shoteh/Shotim" [Imbecile/s] in *bBB* 115b; *bMen* 65a–b); "Tipsha'ei" [Idiots] in *bSan* 46b; "Howling Yarod-bird" in *bSan* 59b); as well as ethnic caricatures (see, e.g., the discussion of Samaritans and Athenians below).

Some rabbinic mockery of idolaters is scatological, including Rabban Gamaliel's seemingly cordial exchange with a philosopher in *mAZ* 3:4 in which the rabbi describes a statue of Aphrodite as a mere decoration before whom none are afraid to urinate, a covert insult to the cult of Aphrodite in general. A mocking reference to urine is also featured in the inter-religious exchange between the Babylonian sage Amemar and a magus in *bSan* 39a. In a similar vein, a story in *bSan* 64a tells of one Savta of Alas who defecates before an idol of Peor and wipes himself on the idol's nose, fooling the obtuse priests who view his deed as an unusual but sincere act of worship rather than mockery. Other instances of mocking idolaters for their idolatry are openly hostile. The names of foreign deities are obscenely cacophemized in *bAZ* 46a.

Like idolaters, heretics (*minim*, *apiqorsim*) come in for heavy abuse. The rabbis' mocking of heretics is considered tit for tat since one of the identifying features of heretics is their tendency to mock the god of Israel, Israel's scripture, rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, and rabbinic authority generally. Often the *min*'s mockery is directed at Scripture itself, particularly when its form or content violate grammatical and stylistic conventions, or norms of logic (Hayes 2011; 2015). *Minim* point out verses that appear nonsensical in *bShab* 152b (reading "*minim*" with MSS), and verses that can be interpreted irreverently in *bSuk* 48b or to the detriment of Israel in *tMeg* 4(3):37. In *bSan* 39a, a heretic in dialogue with the Palestinian sage R. Abbahu accuses the Jewish god of being a mocker (*gaḥqan*), based on God's absurd instructions to Ezekiel (Ezek 4:4–6). The same page of Talmud contains additional stories in which R. Abbahu engages in

sharply mocking exchanges with heretics who cite Scripture (especially verses from Isaiah) in a derisive manner. The same rabbi is featured in several other stories involving the mocking perversions of Scripture by *minim* (*bSuk* 48b; *bSan* 99a). In all of these instances, *minim* ridicule – by poking holes in – the logic, language, and contents of divine revelation and law implying that a genuinely divine revelation would not contain material that is poorly written, misleading, illogical and even hostile to the very people to whom it was given.

Bar-Asher Siegal discusses a subset of heretic narratives in the Talmud that engage with demonstrably Christian ideas. These narratives (*bHul* 87a; *bBer* 10a; *bEr* 101a; *bYev* 102b) share a specific literary structure and common terminology: a *min* asks a foolish question or makes an easily refuted claim and is ridiculed and refuted by a rabbi (or rabbinic ally) who insults the heretic as a fool in the process (Bar-Asher Siegal: 4). Bar-Asher Siegal argues that while these stories are literary creations intended for inner rabbinic debate, they grapple with known Christian readings of biblical verses as well as Christological claims and arguments for the rejection of Israel (*ibid.*: 23). Christian texts and ideas are also the subject of rabbinic satire and parody in other sources. Jesus is the target of satirical stories in the Talmud (*bShab* 104b; *bSan* 67a; *bSan* 103a; *bShab* 104b; *bGit* 56b–57a; see Schäfer; see “Mocking of Jesus III. Judaism”). A parody of the depiction of the last judgment may be found in *Matt* 25:31–46 (Amit) while *bShab* 116a–b and *BerR* 79:6 appear to be separate parodies on the Sermon on the Mount (Zellentin). Sectarions (sometimes interchangeable with heretics) are also mocked in debates over the proper interpretation of Scripture. R. Johanan ben Zakkai dismisses the competing views of Sadducees in *bBB* 115b and *bMen* 65a–b with insults: “Fools! From where do you derive this?” and “May our perfect Torah not accord with your worthless prattle!”

Mockery and denigration in rabbinic literature extend beyond idolaters, heretics, and sectarians to the nations en masse (*SifDev* 343; *WayR* 13:2) and to specific nations (in *MekhY* *Shirata* 2 each nation is punished for its obtuse failure to recognize the one god), especially Persia and Rome. Scatological humor is used to mock both a Persian and a Roman in *bBer* 62b who meet their death after thrusting a Jew from the privy. Several rabbinic texts contain derisive references to Rome as a pig (*QohR* 1.1.9; *yTer* 8:11, 48b–c; *BerR* 63:8) based on an exegesis of *Ps* 80:14 (*WayR* 13:5; *bPes* 18b), as well as mocking depictions of Esau, the ancestor of Rome (*BerR* 65:1), and parodic representations of victorious Roman conquerors such as the *parodia sacra* featuring Titus in *WayR* 22:3 (Levinson). Other stories depicting interactions between rabbinic sages and Roman emperors mock the emperor by underscoring his intellectual and/or moral inferiority. R. Gamaliel uses

somewhat specious logic to deflect the emperor’s attempt to ridicule the Jewish God through uncharitable interpretations of Scripture (*bSan* 39a). R. Joshua ben Hananiah figures in a number of stories defending the Jews, their Scripture, and their God from the mockery of a Roman dignitary or emperor (sometimes identified as Hadrian). In *bHul* 59b–60a, he rebukes both the emperor and the emperor’s daughter for their attempts to ridicule the God of Israel and in *bHag* 5b he deflects the emperor’s implicitly mocking question regarding the odor of Sabbath food with the result that the mocker is in turn mocked. Because of the rabbinic figure’s relative powerlessness in these fictionalized dialogues, their retaliatory mockery is often covert. Similarly, Persians are covertly mocked in *bBer* 58a by R. Shila’s clever use of a double entendre to insult Gentile women and by his insincere flattery of the Persian authorities. The depiction of rabbis employing the covert mockery of “hidden transcripts” when in dialogue with imperial and government figures aligns with a rabbinic awareness of the danger entailed in mocking non-Jewish authorities. This awareness is expressed in rabbinic stories that depict Roman violence as a hyper-reaction to entirely unintended mockery by the Jews. When Nahum of Gamzu unintentionally presents a worthless gift to the emperor, the latter declares “The Jews mock me!” and orders Nahum’s execution (*bPes* 113a), while Trajan’s brutal massacre of the Jews is attributed to his mistaken interpretation of Jewish festival observances as acts of mockery directed at him (*ySuk* 5:1, 55b).

One rabbinic tradition extends the permission to mock to include all persons of ill-repute and sinners (*bMeg* 25b); other traditions warn that those who mock sinners will in turn be brought low by the tempter, Satan. In *bQid* 81a–b, a student who mocks R. Tarfon for his scrupulosity on a matter of potential sexual sin ends up committing the very transgression himself. In the same passage, the rabbinic heroes R. Meir and R. Aqiva are put to the test by Satan after they mock those who fail to resist sexual temptation. These scholars fail miserably and are spared ultimate humiliation only because of their reputations. The idea that even the “righteous” should not mock sinners underlies expressions of rabbinic discomfort with the idea that God engages in mockery. On three occasions in the Bible, God is said to mock the nations or the wicked: *Ps* 2:4; 37:13; and 59:8/9. While many rabbinic sources elaborate on the theme of divine mockery of the wicked (e.g., *MekhY* *Shirata* 2), others express reservations. *Psalm* 2:1, 4 (“why are the nations in an uproar and why do the peoples mutter in vain? ... The one who sits in heaven laughs [*yishāq*], the Lord derides [*yil’ag*] them?”) is supplied a narrative context in the form of an extended rabbinic fantasy of the final judgment, when God will sabotage the ef-

fort of the nations to redeem themselves and laugh cruelly while consigning them to their eternal punishment (*bAZ* 2a–3b). However, as Wasserman (38–43) shows, the text is deeply conflicted: the final redactor signals discomfort over the depiction of God as capable of cruel and mocking laughter by asking “does God laugh like a tyrant?” (i.e., derisively and cruelly) and concludes that God’s derisive laughter is confined to this one moment in history. This story is the only story in the Talmud in which God, as one of the *dramatis personae*, laughs derisively; the only other instance of divine laughter in the Talmud is the laughter of humble delight (*bBM* 59a; Hayes 2019). In contrast to *bAZ* 2a–3b, God refuses to act the mocking victor in *bSan* 39b, rebuking the angels for rejoicing over the drowned Egyptians at the time of the Exodus.

**3. Rabbis as Targets of Mockery.** Some instances of ridicule directed at rabbis are reported neutrally (*berR* 30:8), but often the consequences are severe, even fatal. A midrashic interpretation of Eccl 12:12, “much study [*lahag*] is a weariness of the flesh,” yields the following warning to would-be scoffers: “This [verse] teaches that he who scoffs [*mal'ig* from *l'-g* – a pun on *lahag*] at the words of the sages will be condemned to boiling excrement” in the afterlife (*bEr* 21b; *bGit* 57a). In *bBB* 83b, the clever laundryman who mocks and outsmarts a rabbi (a *topos* of talmudic legend as noted by Boyarin 1993: 200, n. 5) comes to a gruesome end, and many a mocker is reduced to a heap of bones by a glance from an offended (usually Palestinian) rabbi (*bSan* 100b; *bBer* 58a), or is otherwise struck dead (*yShevi* 9:1, 38d; *yMSh* 4:11, 55c). By contrast, Rabban Gamaliel is gentle with the student who scoffs at his absurd interpretations of Scripture but who ends up accepting the rabbi’s teaching (*bShab* 30b), while Hillel is famously patient with non-Jews who deliberately seek to provoke and mock him with insulting or insincere questions (*ibid.*).

The mocking Samaritan appears to be a stock character in many rabbinic stories (Kalmin: 93), especially those of Palestinian provenance. In *berR* 32:10, a Samaritan mocks Jerusalem as a dungheap in comparison with blessed Mt. Gerizim, and although R. Jonathan fails to muster a response, his donkey driver succeeds (a second jibe at R. Jonathan!). In several instances, Samaritans plot to embarrass (*afle*, to fool or deceive) a rabbi. They not only fail, but they generally pay with their lives (*yShevi* 9:1, 38d; *yMSh* 4:11, 55c; *yTaan* 4:6, 68d–69a; *yMQ* 3:7, 83b; *yAZ* 3:1, 42c and 5:3, 44d; *ySan* 2:5, 20d). *LamR* 1:1 uses the same verb (*afle*) to describe not only Samaritans but also Athenians who come to Jerusalem to outwit and embarrass Jerusalemites. The tables are inevitably turned and the vaunted wisdom of the Athenians is mocked as they are outwitted by their rabbinic interlocutors (many such stories are collected at the beginning of *LamR*). In

one lengthy and fantastic tale, sixty Athenian sages are fooled by R. Joshua ben Hananiah, uprooted from their homes, and consigned to filling a bottomless ditch (an echo of the myth of the Danaides and a mocking allusion to the futility of the Athenians’ sophistry) until they perish from the labor (*bBekh* 8b–9a).

Many stories involving mockery that targets the rabbis revolve around their highly nominalist approach to biblical law. This approach is deemed absurd by those who assume that a divine law must align with rational, empirical, and metaphysical truth (Hayes 2015: 223–86), a view largely rejected by the rabbis (*ibid.*). The rabbis were fully aware that their construction of divine law as the particular written legislation of the people of Israel was out of step with the widespread Hellenistic understanding of divine law as a universal, unwritten, true, rational order; this deviation from a broader cultural norm makes them the object of ridicule in several rabbinic stories (Hayes 2015).

The debate over the nature of biblical law was also a matter of sectarian dispute, and Sadducees are often depicted in rabbinic stories as objecting to nominalist elements of Pharisaic laws and teachings because they lack verisimilitude, are paradoxical, counterintuitive, or fictive (*mYad* 4:6–8; *tHag* 3:35/ *yHag* 3:6, 79d; see *mEr* 6:2; *yEr* 1:1, 18c, and *bEr* 61b concerning the legal fiction of the ‘*eruv*). The reaction of these Sadduceean opponents ranges from incredulity to impatience to mockery (Hayes 2011), and is represented as the primary reason for their rejection of the Pharisaic-rabbinic elaboration of the divine law *in toto*, prompting the rabbis to identify the scofflaw condemned in Num 15:31 (*SifBem* 112) as a Sadducee. The same incredulity and ridicule featured in rabbinic characterizations of Sadducees is echoed in eight texts in the Babylonian Talmud (*bBets* 14a; *bBB* 16b and 102b; *bSan* 17b and 109a; *bShevu* 26a and 34b; *bYev* 88a; *bNaz* 42a; *bZev* 15a; *bKer* 4a), but attributed to an anonymous collective of “western rabbis” who are said to mock an unrealistic teaching or legal fiction typical of the pronounced nominalism of rabbinic law (“In the west [i.e., in the land of Israel], they laughed at/ mocked him/it”). Unlike the derision leveled by the Sadducees, derision by these “internal” critics often bears fruit, leading to a reduction or elimination of the unrealistic character of the teaching in question (Hayes 2013). The parallel passages in the Palestinian Talmud, when they exist, contain the same units of tradition and dialectic, but no element of mockery, suggesting a greater sensitivity in Babylonia to critiques of nominalism (*ibid.*).

Other stories involving mockery of rabbis revolve around the latter’s non-contextual methods of scriptural exegesis. In some sources, this ridicule comes from within the rabbinic estate. Rabbis in Roman Palestine who employed the extreme

methods of non-contextual exegesis traditionally associated with the school of R. Aqiva met with the objections and ridicule of other rabbis who favored the contextual interpretive approach traditionally associated with the school of R. Ishmael (*Sifra*, Zav 8:1; *Sifra*, Nega'im 13:1; Hayes 1998). Several stories feature the derisive reactions of students and even rabbinic colleagues to the far-fetched expositions of the sages. Students scoff (*ligleg*) at the fantastic eschatological exegeses of both R. Johanan (interpreting Isa 54:12 in *bSan* 100b/*bBB* 75a) and Rabban Gamaliel (interpreting Jer 31:7; Ezek 17:23; and Ps 72:16 in *bShab* 30b). However, mockery of midrashic methods of exegesis and their outlandish results is frequently attributed to figures outside the rabbinic estate – various non-rabbis (both Jewish and non-Jewish) and especially heretics (Hayes 1998; Kalmin). Thus, in *BerR* 30:8, the congregation mocks R. Abbahu for interpreting a verse as teaching that Mordecai developed breasts to nurse Esther. However, although both Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis are depicted as being mocked for the absurdity or unreliability of their teachings, in stories involving Babylonian rabbis, those responsible for the mockery are not heretics, Samaritans, or non-rabbinic Jews (as they are in stories involving Palestinian rabbis), but other rabbis or disciples of rabbis (Kalmin: 101). Accordingly, in *PesRK* 18, a work of Palestinian provenance, R. Johanan's mocker is identified as a heretic, rather than a disciple as in its Babylonian parallel in *bSan* 100b (Hayes 1998: 283).

Kalmin sees this distinction as evidence that mockery by students or colleagues in the presence of other rabbis was a greater source of anxiety for Babylonian sages than the prospect of humiliation by a non-rabbi and indeed the fear of mockery within the context of the study house was quite real. According to *bBer* 28b, the prayer to be recited before entering the study hall expresses the desire not to make an error that will cause others to laugh or jeer (*shq*), and in *bShab* 75b, Rav hastens to explain a statement he made earlier so that later generations will not laugh at him. Derision for academic failure or intellectual setbacks within the rabbinic milieu turns on the status of the sage in question. As Kaye has shown, higher status sages are treated more sympathetically when they fall short academically than are lower status sages, who are more likely to encounter derision within brief narratives as well as criticism from the editorial voice. The greatest shame for a higher status sage is the inability to answer at all (see *bHor* 13b–14a for a plot to humiliate the Patriarch by exposing his ignorance of a particularly obscure area of law before the learned assembly), though a sage who remedies this inability is not mocked (*bShab* 37b–38a; *bShab* 72a; see Kaye: 327). Sages who give a weak or obvious answer may be ridiculed by colleagues (*bNid* 27a), even if subsequently rescued by another sage

or by the editor's intervention to propose a reason for the ostensibly weak or obvious answer (*bRH* 15b; *bYev* 57a). After being ridiculed for making an obvious statement, R. Pappa defiantly asserts that it is better to take the risk of being mocked than remain silent, citing Prov 30:32 for support (*bNid* 27a; see Kaye: 306). In some stories, a higher status sage makes a statement that seems at first blush to be trivial, ill-informed, or mistaken. Colleagues laugh, but are immediately silenced by being reminded that when a great man speaks there is usually something to what he says and one should not laugh; and indeed, the wisdom of the speaker is subsequently revealed (see, for example, *bBer* 19b; *bGit* 55b; *bNid* 50b). While peers may express a derisive incredulity at one another's academic failings (*bNid* 70a: "a great man like Shmuel said that?"; see also *bEr* 66a), mocking a superior sage is dangerous, and students who cause offense by ridiculing or embarrassing a teacher with odd questions or difficult objections risk serious consequences, including divine punishment (*bBB* 9b). When R. Shimi bar Ashi overhears his master Rav Pappa praying to be spared the embarrassment of his objections, he resolves to remain silent (*bTaan* 9b) and R. Johanan's sensitivity to ridicule leads to the undesired death of R. Kahana whose facial deformity made him appear to be mocking the great sage when he wasn't (*bBQ* 117a). In contrast to higher status sages, whose failings are often defended or excused, lower status sages meet with insults, jeering, and sharp retorts when they pose a question or make a statement that is deemed unacceptable in some way. Thus, in *bBets* 38a–b, R. Abba, newly arrived in Palestine and eager to make a good impression, is ridiculed when he attempts to participate in the proceedings of the house of study. Though he protests his discourteous treatment, Rav Hoshayah endorses the mockery, an endorsement later mitigated by the anonymous editorial layer (Kaye: 313).

Zellentin (25–26) argues that the rabbis use satire and parody not only to target non-rabbinic texts and ideas (external parody) but also to criticize their own tradition. He notes that intrarabbinic parody is often carried out by the redactor of a rabbinic text in order to preserve or counter a segment of the polyvalent rabbinic tradition (*bBM* 97a; *WayR* 12:1) while interrabbinic parody targets rabbinic texts external to the author's own community, i.e., Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis parody each other (*bBer* 56a–b). In addition, scholars have noted the rabbis' capacity for self-mockery and self-criticism in texts that parody or ridicule their own methods and scholastic excess (Zellentin; Kovelman; Boyarin 2009). In *bBB* 23b, R. Yirmiyah asks a question that results in his expulsion from the schoolhouse because his intention was to ridicule another rabbi by asking a parodic version of the latter's question, not the only time this particular sage asks a mocking question in

apparent seriousness (E. Diamond: 41–45). Similarly, in *bMen* 37a, a figure aptly named Polemo (argumentative/warlike) asks Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi: “A man who has two heads, on which one should he place his tefillin?” Rabbi Judah rebukes him, presumably for the implied mockery, and readies to ban or expel him, only to be interrupted by the arrival of a man who asks how much redemption money he should give the priest for his new-born, two-headed son! This wonderful twist simultaneously erases the mockery in Polemo’s question (by bearing out its practical application) and doubles it (by posing a second absurdly scholastic question). While the Talmud contains hundreds of impractical scholastic debates containing no hint of mockery, the rabbis were clearly not incapable of self-criticism and self-parody. This combination of serious and comic elements has been compared by Kovelman and Boyarin (2009) to the “serio-comic” discourse of many late ancient Hellenistic texts, particularly Menippean satire (q.v.), which Boyarin describes as “a kind of spoofing in which the heroes of an intellectual community are the spoofed heroes” and which aims “to call into question the very seriousness and authority of the practice of the intellectual themselves” (Boyarin 2009: 26).

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### C. Medieval Judaism

Medieval Jewish Bible commentators have tackled from a theological approach those expressions in which derision relates to God, either as its subject or its object. Passages which refer to God as “mocking” (as Pss 2:4; 59:9) are interpreted metaphorically (see Abraham Ibn Ezra [1089–1167], David Kimchi [ca. 1160–1235], and Menahem Hame’iri [1239–1315] on Ps 4:2) meaning that the object of mockery has no significance whatsoever in the divine view, or that God will reduce that object to ridicule and mockery. The object of “mockery” in Ps 80:7, according to Ibn Ezra and Kimchi, is God, but out of deference to God, the text deflected it to “the enemy.” Others have explained that, a priori, the object of “mockery” is indeed the enemy and not the Lord (Menahem Hame’iri and Isaiah di Trani [13th–14th cent.], ad loc.).

Ibn Ezra notes (Pss 4:2; 22:8), as a point of grammar, that the root *la’ag* is always followed by a functional “lamed” (indicating the object). Many of the medieval commentators have noted the semantic affinity between the root *‘alag*, meaning incomprehensible language, and *la’ag* (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, and Eliezer of Beaugency [12th cent.] on Isa 28:11; Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Isaiah di Trani on Isa 33:19). Ibn Ezra (ad loc.) explains the connection between the two roots thus: “Any incomprehensible verbiage excites ridicule in a person.”

Kimchi explains why the phrase “One who mocks the poor” (Prov 17:5) is regarded as “insulting their Maker” (ibid). According to him, “one who mocks a person who is unskilled and is poor, insults, as it were, their Maker, for he denies God’s power and the loving kindness which God bestows on God’s creatures, thus making it appear that their successes are the result of their own efforts and are achieved by their wisdom.” Kimchi there also points out the “appropriately apportioned punishment”



for the mocker, as given in Prov 3:34: “Surely he scoffs at the scoffers,” explaining: “For God will scoff at them when they mock people, as we find: The One who sits in the heavens laughs” (Ps 2:4).

Miriam Sklarz

#### IV. Christianity

The most frequent reference to mock in the Christian tradition arise from scenes in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that recount the passion of Jesus as he was abused verbally by the Roman Empire’s puppet King Herod, priests, scribes, and some of the crowd, and physically by the temple guard and Roman soldiers. The takeaway from the events leading up to the crucifixion point to the insult that mockery hurls at the righteous. Moreover, the synoptic authors were sufficiently versed in Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the wisdom literature to draw upon their references to and confirmation of Jesus’ trial and the mockery that accompanied him to Golgotha.

Likewise, from Tacitus we read of an explicit use of mockery added to the torturous spectacle of Christian deaths at the behest of Emperor Nero (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44). Perhaps with the identification that Christians sought in imitation of Jesus, they were brave in the face of these and other dangers that, by the 4th century, the virtuous are routinely persecuted by the wicked and mocked by them: “For this [mockery] is the natural course of things, and everywhere virtue is wont to engender hatred from [the] wicked” (John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 82).

Augustine in his *Confessions* wrote of a number of ways that mockery challenges those who suffer scorn. He wonders if God mocks him for his pitiable condition and bemoans the jibes of his parents against him (*Conf.* 1.6.9). He recognizes the multiple purposes of the mock to reproach or injure, as a response to fear or envy, or as a spectator taking pleasure in another’s pain witnessed, for example, in the spectacle of gladiator contests (*Conf.* 3.8). He considered as well the near lust of “fleeting mockeries of things temporal” among the Manicheans and others (*Conf.* 5.12 and 6.5). And when remembering what was a source of solace in a protegee who turned from virtue to “the madness of the Circus,” Augustine taught those gathered in language “seasoned with biting mockery of those whom that madness enthralled” (*Conf.* 6.7) such that the young fool was delivered from vanity. Near the end of this work he wonders again if God mocks not only Augustine himself but all those who seek to know the truth; on the matter of time and eternity Augustine asks, “O my Lord, my Light, shall not here also Thy Truth mock at man?” (*Conf.* 11.15). Rhetorical though these investigations are, Augustine sets the tone and the vocabulary for much of what follows in the tradition.

Augustine’s recognition of the multiple ways that mockery serves its users intentions may have influenced Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas locates his brief consideration of mocking in the treatise on the vices in the matter of injustice “inflicted by words uttered extrajudicially,” such as by reviling, railing, and mocking (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 72). While Aquinas identifies the terms as synonymous, he is careful to note how mocker, closely related to wittiness, can be engaged for praiseworthy or malicious ends. When amusement or correction is intended, there no sin is incurred if “due circumstances be observed”; however, where one’s witty repartee is performed to intentionally dishonor another, there even “slight mockery” may fall afoul.

Charles H. Spurgeon offered his 19th-century British Baptist co-religionists at least three considerations of the intent of the “fool” who mocks the righteous. He is concerned that those who are the subjects of this scorn will continue in their trust of the Lord and be thankful to suffer the derisions hurled in ways that Christ and the saints endured. Moreover, he desired that they then pray for their persecutors with “extra kindness” toward them (“Are you Mocked”). He also cautioned those who mock of the great sin that is idolatry, to which (referencing the Anglican and Catholic communions) many a high churchman falls (“Mocking the King”). And in a somewhat fanciful manner, he turned to a meditation on Christ’s gaze into what would be his “triumphant ... future glory, [pondering what to Christ appears as] the unintentional homage [from the soldiers] to which [their] falsehood pays to truth” (“Mocked of the Soldiers”).

Another 19th-century Baptist preacher, Alexander Maclaren, was a more careful and skilled exegete. Building on the momentum of an historical critical approach to biblical interpretation, Maclaren noted that mock attends to how “sin tempts men into its clutches, and then gibes and taunts them” (Maclaren). Broken promises, enslaved seduction or a bait and switch of the naive by “Sin the Mocker” personified, and the unforeseen consequences of habituated practices, all turn us away from God. The Christian, however, has the blood of Christ to “set us free from the mockery of our sin.”

To mock is clearly to insult, whether that insult rises from within the agent to debase another or as a prompt from external sources that goad potentially in repartee or to tangible harm. When intended for harm, there sin mocks the dignity that belongs to God’s image in humankind. In contemporary versions, since mocking can be verbal or performative (e.g., in mime), the mocked subject is “bullied,” “othered,” and “stigmatized” – sinned against in the line of these authors – in derogatory, discriminatory, and often racist ways (Schwartz).

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## V. Islam

Mockery is generally seen in Muslim culture as a negative action, with the issue centering on the making light of things that are deeply serious. The principal Arabic words for mockery, *haz'* or *mahza'a* and *sukhriya* appear frequently in the Qur'an (forty-three times) and are most often used in response to prophetic messages. Mockery is also linked to *la'ib* ("play" or "jest") in S 5:57–58 (see Toorawa: 100), which indicates the sense that, at its heart, mockery involves making light of the serious and weighty material of the Qur'an.

Mockery is a recurring theme within the Qur'anic view of prophethood: prophets are rejected by the majority and scorned for their beliefs, while a few faithful accept the message given them (see Welch). This, in many respects, is tied to the derision that Muḥammad was experiencing in his proclamation of the Qur'an to the Meccan community (see Saleh). In *Surat al-Anbiyā'* which recounts God's sending of a number of different prophets throughout history, God comforts Muḥammad by reminding him that "messengers indeed were mocked at before thee, but those that scoffed at them were encompassed by that they mocked at" (S 21:41; Khalidi: 260). This phrase, and slight variants of it, appear a number of times in the Qur'an (S 6:5; 11:8; 16:34; 39:49; 40:83; 45:33; 46:26) illustrating the importance of this concept. Above all, the rejection of Muḥammad establishes a connection between his ministry and the rejection and mockery of prophets and God's work in the Jewish and Christian traditions (cf. 2 Chr 15–16; Ps 89:50; Jer 6:19; Matt 27:29; Mark 6:4). As the Qur'an does not believe in the crucifixion of Jesus (S 4:257), Jesus' mocking (e.g., Matt 27) is not seen in Muslim tradition. The Qur'an also uses the concept of mockery to describe the eschatological treatment of the unbelievers, who are mocked (and punished) by God in return for their own mockery of God's messengers (e.g., S 11:38; cf. Prov 3:34; Zeph 2:10).

Mockery of the prophet Muḥammad (*sabb al-rasūl*) is regarded by Muslims as blasphemous and for many theologians constituted unbelief (see Wagner; cf. Exod 22:28; Rev 13:6). Similarly, in the Ḥadīth literature mocking Muslim rituals is also seen as a sign of unbelief (see Juynboll: 529). A number of controversies in the contemporary period have arisen over the issue of blasphemy and mocking the prophet, most famously the Danish Cartoons affair

in 2005–2006 (see Zafar). The attacks in 2015 against the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* after it published cartoons depicting Muḥammad, as well as the murder of the French teacher Samuel Paty in 2020 (who showed the cartoons to his students), renewed similar debates concerning Western society, blasphemy laws, and *sabb al-rasūl* (see also Moe; and various articles in Andre and Esposito). The Qur'an tells the members of the community not to associate themselves with those that mock or reject God's prophet or God's message (S 4:140; 5:57–58). The Qur'an also states that divorce should not be mocked (S 2:231), by which it means that it should not be considered a light or inconsequential matter. The Qur'an includes a passage which forbids people from mocking others (S 49:11; cf. 1 Cor 4:13; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:32), as well as prohibiting defaming one another. However, this did not stop the development of satirical literature in classical Islam, with authors of *belles-lettres* like al-Jāhīz (d. 868/869), who teases and mocks members of his community in works such as his *Kitāb al-Bukhālā'* (*Book of Misers*; see Cooperson).

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Stephen R. Burge

## VI. Literature

The mocking of Elijah at 2 Kgs 2:23 was a scene in several of the European mystery plays and became an influential trope in literature. Eric Ziolkowski traces its progress through literature as "the Bethel boys" theme, noting its influence on medieval hagiographic literature surrounding the figure of Francis of Assisi, on Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and on works by Dostoevsky, James Joyce, A. M. Klein, Franz Kafka, Hermann Hesse, Jerzy Kosinski, Eli Wiesel, Shūsaku Endō, William Golding, Yukio Mishima, Doris Lessing, and others. He argues that it operates as the antithesis of Jesus' exaltation of children.

Curiously, the figure of Elijah provided the central trope for the Hungarian writer Gyula Illyés' im-

portant autobiographical poem, “The Prophet,” recounting the author’s childhood experiences:

Back in my childhood  
I put up with much mocking  
because of my surname, “Ilyés,”  
I felt the burden of it:  
the whole schoolyard teasing me for bewailing  
the world like my namesake,  
Elias, the old prophet.  
(Quoted Dávidházi: 14)

Jesus himself is presented as mocking the Pharisees (Matt 15:14) in the parable of the blind. The phrase “the blind leading the blind” is a commonplace European proverb. Gert Hofmann’s novella of 1985, *Der Blindensturz* (*The Parable of the Blind*) uses Breughel’s painting of 1568 as the starting-point for a Samuel-Beckettesque exploration of claustrophobia and futility.

In T. F. Powys’ whimsical novel *Mockery Gap* (1925) the inhabitants of the eponymous village make a mockery of human virtues and aspirations until the Christ-like figure of the visiting fisherman brings healing to the community.

Other biblical figures involved in mockery include Nebuchadnezzar who in Dan 4:33 was forced to mock himself by eating grass, and who becomes in Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s play *Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon* (1953, *An Angel Comes to Babylon*) a ruler who has to alternate experiences of abasement and regal dignity as he time-shares the throne with Nimrod.

Biblical stories have sometimes been the object of mockery. The mocking of the Exodus story by the Graeco-Egyptian writers Maneto and Lysimachus offers an early example of the hostile use of biblical material in polemics (Gruen: 201). During the 18th century, the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22) was the object of satirical attacks on conventional ideas of divine providence by the Deists. Henry Fielding’s novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742) plays with this by having Parson Adams give a diatribe on providence, invoking Gen 22, only to be interrupted by the news of his youngest son’s drowning, news which is then quickly reversed: “Within a few lines ... his son appears, wet and dripping, but very much alive” (Stewart: 19).

The French surrealist writer Jacques Prévert famously mocked the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2–4; Matt 6:9–13) in his poem “Pater Noster”:

Notre père qui êtes au cieux  
Restez-y !  
(Our father who art in heaven  
Stay there!  
French quoted in Hammond: 64).

Several of the short stories of Machado de Assis revolve around the urbane mockery of biblical set-pieces. “Adão e Eva” (1885, “Adam and Eve”) finds the Genesis story gently mocked by a judge at a dinner party, while “A Igreja do Diabolo” (1883, “The Devil’s Church”) sees the devil institute the seven

deadly sins as virtues on a visit to the earth in a burlesque on Job 1:6–12.

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Anthony Swindell

## VII. Visual Arts

In visual arts it certainly is Jesus who has most frequently been portrayed as a target of mockery. According to the canonical Gospels (Mark 14:65; 15:17; 29–32; Matt 27:29; Luke 22:63; 23:36–39), the mocking of Jesus occurred several times after his trial and before his crucifixion (see also “Mocking of Jesus V. Visual Arts”). It was considered as part of the passion cycle, which was in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance immensely popular in the regions under the spell of the Byzantine artistic tradition. The episode stands for God himself being mocked in the person of Jesus.

Early examples of the scene occur in the fresco cycle in the south Italian church of Sant’Angelo in Formis (11th cent.), in a recently discovered panel attributed to Cimabue (1280, private collection), and in the fresco cycle painted by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (1305). All of them depict Jesus mocked by priests and teachers, and by the soldiers respectively.

Somewhat later, in 1503, the German artist Matthias Grünewald showed *The Mocking of Christ*, now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, in which he emphasized the violence of the crowd overwhelming Jesus. Around 1510, in the painting which is part of the collection of the National Gallery in London, Hieronymus Bosch went in the opposite direction. He showed Jesus, amid his tormentors, looking directly at the viewer to impart both his kindness and his suffering.

This motif of eye contact returned in Carl Bloch’s 1880 painting from the Brigham Young University Museum of Art, in which the artist provided a close up of the scene, reduced to two figures only – Jesus and single tormentor.

Jesus’ vulnerable humanity is central to Manet’s somewhat earlier picture, *Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers* (1865), now in the Art Institute in Chicago. In sweeping, visible brushstrokes, Manet portrayed idealized, pale, and denuded Jesus, who is surrounded by gruff, yet ambivalent characters. These

pictorial devices lent Manet's painting a compelling and contemporary character, which was in line with the demands of the Realist movement.

Jesus mocked is not a frequent subject of sculpture, but a rendition of the soldiers mocking him does appear on the memorial for Antonio Bernocchi created by Alessandro Minali in Milan in 1936.

When it comes to the HB/OT, while Job has been depicted many times in different media, images specifically related to him being mocked by his wife are comparatively rare. However, around 1630, Georges de la Tour did paint a striking picture of that moment (Job 2:8–10), now in the Musée Départemental d'Art Ancien et Contemporain in Épinal, France. He portrayed the power dynamics very clearly: Job's wife is towering over him, fully clothed in red and holding a candle, the only light source, while Job is sitting beneath her, in his underwear, in the half-dark. De la Tour perfectly captured the wife's unimpressed expression as she mocks her husband, and the apparent disbelief on Job's face at hearing such words.

Mockery in the Bible is also directed towards non-believers and their false gods. A good example of this would be Elijah mocking the priests of Baal in 1 Kgs 18:25–27. However, most depictions of this scene focus on God's power over the false god rather than the mockery, as seen in the 1545 panel *Elijah and the Priests of Baal* in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden from the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Younger.

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## VIII. Music

For centuries, singing, or chanting biblical psalms were a fundamental part of Jewish as well as Christian liturgical and devotional practices (Gillingham

2008: 40–55; 68–71; 120–23; see also “Cantillation” and “Chant”). Thus, notions of mocking or mockery have been present in such contexts through the numerous references in Psalms. In the Western Christian monastic world, all 150 psalms were chanted through every week, and psalms were set by composers in Jewish, Christian, as well as secular contexts.

The notion of mockery or taunting appears in two distinctively different contexts in psalms. Most often a psalm refers to the derision by enemies, countered by praying to the Lord for help, as in Ps 22:7–11, 19–21. But in Ps 2:4, it is God who is claimed to scorn and deride his enemies, “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision” (Ps 2:4). Susan Gillingham has traced the Jewish as well as Christian reception history of Pss 1 and 2, including a chapter on the musical reception of these two psalms. In the 20th century, for instance, Ps 2 was set by Lazar Weiner in a Jewish-American context and Ps 2:1–4 was also included in Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* (1965), composed for the Chichester Cathedral Festival. In a Protestant Christian context, Gillingham points, e.g., to the use of “metrical psalms” in the Reformed Church in Geneva (see also “Calvin, John II. Music”) and further mentions settings of Ps 2 by Thomas Tallis, Henry Purcell, G. F. Handel, and Mendelssohn Bartholdy (Gillingham 2013: 192–233).

As she points out, one of the most famous settings of (part of) Ps 2 is the one Handel (and Charles Jennens) included in the *Messiah* (1741). Here, Ps 2:4 was sung in a tenor recitative leading into a tenor aria on Ps 2:9, emphasizing the revenge of the Lord more than the Lord's derision. Interestingly, the Swedish composer Sven-David Sandström (1942–2019) in his commissioned oratorio setting Jennens' *Messiah* libretto (see “Messiah [Oratorio]”), made a different musical choice in setting Ps 2:4 for a soprano in a slow lyrical cantilena accompanied gently by deep as well as high-pitched instrumental sounds. In the middle of the lyrical cantilena, however, the soprano sings short abrupt notes on “shall laugh them to scorn” (Sandström). For the following text, Ps 2:9 (as for the beginning of Ps 2), the full and loud orchestra sets in.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy composed a cappella settings of both Ps 2 and Ps 22, using the Luther Bible (in his *Drei Psalmen* [*Three Psalms*] Op. 78, 1844–45; Todd: 465–68). In Ps 2 he especially highlighted the “lacht” (laughs), but also the “spotter” (mocks) in v. 4, “Aber der im Himmel wohnt, lacht ihrer, und der Herr spottet ihrer” (He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision). His setting of Ps 22 is in three parts, omitting some verses; however, the first part sets vv. 1–8, including the words about the “I” of the psalm being mocked by enemies (vv. 6–7). The first part of the setting is

sung responsorially with a tenor singing the beginning of each verse and the chorus responding. Verse 7, however, is sung throughout by the tenor, leading into the forceful continuation with the prayer in v. 8.

Also the Jewish American composer Ernest Bloch set Ps 22 for baritone and orchestra in 1914 (Kushner).

A possible narrative reception of how Job's friends scoff at him, cf. Job 11 and 12:4, is found in Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf's oratorio *Job* (1786, *Job*; see also "Job X. Music"). Two friends of Job sing a recitative (Baldad) and an aria (Elifaz), where they reproach him for being a hypocrite, only feigning his piety, since God seems to have abandoned him. It is not unequivocally clear, however, whether the music actually conveys scorn or just a negative feeling, also since no precise words of scorning or scoffing are used in the context.

Altogether, the musical reception of scorn and derision may sometimes depend on Bible translations and the interpretation of an individual word. Psalm 42:10 reads, "As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, 'Where is your God?'" In the Vg. this is given as *Dum confringuntur ossa mea exprobraverunt mihi qui tribulant me inimici mei, dum dicunt mihi per singulos dies, 'Ubi est Deus tuus'* (Ps 41:11). The early modern Douay-Rheims translation of the Vg. (reasonably) renders the verse as "Whilst my bones are broken my enemies who trouble me have reproached me, whilst they say to me day by day, 'Where is thy God?'" (Edgar and Kinnney). Marc-Antoine Charpentier's setting (1679–80) of Ps 41 (Vg.) thus cannot be considered a reception of biblical mockery.

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See also → Humor and Wit; → Irony; → Mocking of Jesus; → Scoffer

## Mocking of Jesus

- I. New Testament
- II. Christianity
- III. Judaism
- IV. Literature
- V. Visual Arts
- VI. Music
- VII. Film

### I. New Testament

Mockery followed much of Jesus' ministry. When villagers mock Jesus as "out of his mind" (ἐξέστη) and operating by evil powers (Mark 3:21–22), Jesus' embarrassed family failed to stop him and save family honor (Mark 3:20–35; similarly, Matt 12:46–50; Neufeld: 144–45). When Jesus told mourners Jairus' daughter was merely sleeping, they "laughed scornfully" at him (κατεγέλων, Mark 5:40; Matt 9:24; Luke 8:53). Later, Jesus was pejoratively labelled "son of a carpenter," both to shame him personally and to discredit his teaching, authority, and healing ministry (Mark 6:1–6; Matt 13:54–58). Money-loving Pharisees sneered at Jesus' teaching about serving two masters (ἐξέμυκτηρίζον, Luke 16:14).

The theme of mockery climaxes at Jesus' trial and crucifixion (though only the third of Jesus' three passion predictions mentions mockery; Mark 10:33–34; Matt 20:18–19; Luke 18:31–33). In these closing chapters Jesus is mocked both for failing to prove himself a true prophet and Messiah by saving himself (Mark 15:30; Matt 27:40; Luke 23:35–39) and for allegedly failing to be the true king of the Jews (Mark 15:2, 9; Matt 27:11; see also Matt 2:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:39; 19:21).

The derision of Jesus, both at the hands of Jews and Romans, is verbal and physical. Mockery by antagonistic Jews begins with the judgment of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:64; Matt 26:65; see also Luke 5:21; John 10:33); court members mock Jesus' prophetic ministry by spitting on him then striking his (blindfolded) face (compare Matt 26:67 and Mark 14:65). The Jewish trial is construed by the Synoptic Gospels as a mock trial: the intense provocations contrasting Jesus' silent acceptance enhance Jesus' innocence as it punctuates the mockery and condemns his accusers (Neufeld: 154, 180). In both Matthew and Mark, Roman soldiers mock Jesus after Pilate's trial, dressing him with a robe and crown of thorns in mock homage as to the emperor (Matt 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20), then beat him with a "reed" or "staff" (κάλαμος, Mark 15:19; Matt 27:29). More dramatically, John moves the soldiers' mockery to the center of his carefully constructed Roman trial (John 19:1–3), while Luke understates their mockery theme, relocating the soldiers' contempt to Herod's court (Luke 23:11). Pilate's questions to Jesus about kingship, then to the crowds about their "king of the Jews," have a mocking and ironic aura (Mark 15:6–15; John 18:28–19:15).