

greatly expanded the Jewish martyrological sources and because rabbinic Judaism was much more concerned with regulating the internal life of the Jews than dictating their political behavior (and martyrdom was the supreme act of public piety). If the rabbis collected and preserved these stories at all, it was not to promote martyrdom but simply to show how the pious should face death and how eulogies should be delivered. Similarly, the Akiba legend was imbedded within a larger talmudic discussion of the requirement to bless God for the evil in the same way as for the good.

Just how reluctant the rabbis were to promote the martyrological tradition can be seen from the legal discussion recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 74a-b). Here the rabbis strictly limited the applicability of *Kiddush Hashem* to a "time of [religious] persecution"; otherwise, Jews were required to sacrifice their lives only if forced to commit idolatry, adultery or murder. Even idolatry, it was argued, could be practiced under duress, so long as it was not performed in public (defined as the presence of ten other Jews). Try as they might, however, the rabbis could not shake themselves free of the martyrological tradition, perhaps because it was so dear to the hearts of the Jewish laity, who loved nothing better than a good story.

Enter: The Afterworld

world following catastrophic judgment & resurrection
life of the soul after death; still incarnate, unnamed

Kiddush Hashem/Martyrdom 41

9 Eleazar the Priest

(2 Maccabees 6)

In 167 B.C.E.
An Athenian
expert on the
Jews.

The Samaritan
temple.

Either practice or
petition, in
reference to the
Samaritans.

Either admitting
to practicing
Judaism or reciting
the Shema.

Vv. 10-31:
Martyrs are
classified according
to the principles
for which they
gave up their lives.
In Jerusalem,
hurling from a
height may have
been a preferred
method for
executing women.

6 ¹ Not long thereafter,^o the king sent Geron the Athenian^{oo} to compel the Jews to depart from their ancestral laws and to cease living by the laws of God. ² He was also to defile both the temple in Jerusalem and the temple on Mount Gerizim^o and to proclaim the former to be the temple of Zeus Olympios and the latter (in accordance with the . . . ^o of the inhabitants of the place) to be the temple of Zeus Xenios. ³ The execution of the wicked project brought suffering and indignation to all. ⁴ The gentiles filled the temple with debauchery and revelry, as they lolled with prostitutes and had intercourse with women in the sacred courts and also brought forbidden things inside. ⁵ The altar was filled with prohibited offerings excluded by the laws. ⁶ No one was allowed to observe the Sabbath or to keep the traditional festivals or even to confess he was a Jew.^o On the monthly birthday of the king Jews were cruelly compelled to partake of the meat of pagan sacrifices. When a festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were forced to put on wreaths of ivy and march in the procession in honor of the god. ⁸ A decree was published in the neighboring Greek cities, on the proposal of the citizens of Ptolemais, that they proceed against the Jews in the same manner and compel them to partake of the meat of pagan sacrifices ⁹ and that they butcher those Jews who refused to go over to the Greek way of life.

It was clear that a time of trouble had come. ¹⁰ Two women were brought to trial for having circumcised their children. Their babies were hanged from their breasts, and the women were paraded publicly through the city and hurled down from the walls.^o ¹¹ Other Jews hastily assembled nearby in the caves to observe the Sabbath in secret. On being denounced to Philip they were all burned to death because they refrained from defending themselves, out of respect for the holiest of days.

(¹² I beg the readers of my book not to be disheartened by the calamities but to bear in mind that chastisements come not in order to destroy our race but in order to teach it. ¹³ If the ungodly among us are not left long to themselves but speedily incur punishment, it is a sign of God's great goodness to us. ¹⁴ With the other nations the Lord waits patiently, staying their punishment until they reach the full measure of their sins. Quite otherwise is His decree for us, ¹⁵ in order that He should not have to punish us after we have come to the complete measure of our sins. ¹⁶ Consequently, God never lets His mercy depart from us. Rather, though He teaches us by calamity, He never deserts His people. ¹⁷ Let this be enough as a reminder to my readers. Now we must quickly return to our story.)

¹⁸ One of the leading sages was Eleazar, a very handsome man, now of advanced age. Repeatedly they tried to force him to open his mouth and eat pork. ¹⁹⁻²⁰ He, however, preferred death with glory to life with defilement. He spat, as one should when standing fast to resist the temptation to let love of life bring him to taste what religion forbids, and of his own free will he began to march to the whipping drum. ²¹ The meat was part of a sacrifice, and to eat it was a

violation of the Torah. The men appointed to compel him to do so had known Eleazar for many years. They took him aside and in secret urged him to fetch meat which he was permitted to eat, prepared by himself, and pretend that he was eating the meat from the sacrifice as ordered by the king,²² for in so doing he would escape death and would receive from them the kindness due an old friend.²³ Eleazar came to a lofty resolution, one worthy of his years, worthy of the authority of old age, worthy of his conspicuous well-earned white hair, and of his way of life, which had been exemplary from childhood. More important, it was worthy of the sacred legislation established by God. Eleazar showed himself consistent: he told them to send him off to the netherworld without delay.²⁴⁻²⁵ "Such pretense is unworthy of my advanced age. My pretense for the sake of a brief transitory span of life would cause many of the younger generation to think that Eleazar at the age of ninety had gone over to the gentile way of life, and so they, too, would go astray because of me, and I would earn the defilement and blemishing of my old age."²⁶ Indeed, even if I should be released for the present from punishment at the hands of men, alive or dead I would not escape the hands of the Almighty.²⁷ Therefore, if I now bravely give up my life, I shall show myself worthy of my old age,²⁸ as I leave to the young a noble example of how to go eagerly and nobly to die a beautiful death in the defense of our revered and sacred laws." Having spoken those words, he went straight to the torture instrument.

²⁹ What he had just said turned the men who shortly before had shown him friendship into enemies, because they viewed it as perversity.³⁰ As he was about to expire under the lashing, he groaned forth, "The Lord, Who possesses sacred knowledge, perceives that, though able to escape death, in my body I submit to cruel torment under the lash, and that yet in my soul I am glad to suffer it, out of reverence for Him."³¹ So he died, leaving his death as an example of nobility and as a precedent of valor to be remembered not only by the young but by the multitudes of his nation.

10 The Mother and Her Seven Sons

(2 Maccabees 7)

¹ At that time seven brothers, too, with their mother were arrested, and the king tortured them with whips and thongs in an effort to force them to partake of pork contrary to the prohibitions of the Torah.² One of them as spokesman for all said, "What do you expect to learn from questioning us? We are ready to die rather than violate the laws of our forefathers."³ The king, enraged, ordered griddles and cauldrons to be heated red-hot.⁴ As soon as they were red-hot, the king gave the order to cut out the tongue of the one who had acted as spokesman and scalp him and cut off his hands and feet while his brothers and his mother look on.⁵ The body was now completely helpless, but the king ordered that he be

Set-piece: How to comport oneself before death

Heroic utterance

differentiated response

body vs. soul

- ① Quoting Scripture, enlisted as martyrological proof-text
- ② Political message in Greek; theological message in Hebrew

Title of the song derived from Deut. 31:21.

Quoted verse from Deut. 32:36, which ends "... when He sees that their might is gone."

Hellenistic

Based on Dan. 12:2.

Vv. 16-19 allude to Dan. 8:24-25.

Antiochus IV suffered a wasting illness and had a miserable death. His son was executed.

procreation / resurrection

Paraphrase of Eccles. 11:5. Eccles. 8:17.

responds to effect, not content

brought, still breathing, to the fire and fried. As the odor of frying began to spread widely, the brothers and their mother exhorted one another to die nobly, saying, "The Lord God looks on and truly is relenting concerning us, as Moses declared in the Song Which Confronts as a Witness: 'And He will relent concerning His servants.'"⁶

⁷ When the first of the brothers had passed away in this manner, they brought the second to be wantonly tortured, and after ripping off his scalp by the hair, they asked him, "Will you eat before your body is torn limb from limb?"⁸ He answered in the language of his forefathers, "No!" And so, he, too, in turn was tortured.⁹ With his last breath he said, "You, you fiend, are making us depart from our present life, but the King of the universe will resurrect us, who die for the sake of His laws, to a new eternal life."

¹⁰ After him, the third was subjected to wanton torture. On demand, he promptly put forth his tongue and cheerfully held out his hands.¹¹ His words were noble: "I received these from Heaven, and for the sake of His laws I hold them cheap. From Him I hope to receive them back."¹² The king himself and his men were astonished at the spirit of the young man who set torments at naught.

¹³ When he, too, had passed away, they tortured the fourth with similar tortures.¹⁴ At the point of death, he said, "Better it is to pass away from among men while looking forward in hope to the fulfillment of God's promises that we will be resurrected by Him, for you shall have no resurrection unto life."¹⁵

¹⁶ Forthwith they brought the fifth and began to torture him.¹⁷ Gazing at the king, he said, "You wield power among men and work your will, but you are mortal. Think not that God has abandoned our people.¹⁸ You wait and see His great might when He puts you and your seed to the torture!"

¹⁹ Thereafter they brought the sixth, and as he was about to die, he said, "Do not indulge in vain delusions! Through our own fault we are subjected to these sufferings, because we have sinned against our God. They pass belief!²⁰ You, however, think not to escape unpunished after having dared to contend with God!"

²¹ Most remarkable was the mother. She deserves to be held in glorious memory, for she looked on as her seven sons perished in the course of a single day and bore it bravely because of her hopes in the Lord.²² Each one of them in turn she exhorted in the language of their forefathers. Filled with noble resolution, she took her womanly thoughts and fired them with a manly spirit, as she told them, "I do not know how you came to be in my womb. It was not I who gave you spirit and life, nor did I determine the order of the composition of the elements of each of you."²³ Surely, then, the Creator of the universe, Who shaped man's coming into being and fathomed the fashioning of everything,²⁴ with mercy will restore spirit and life to you, inasmuch as you now hold your very selves cheap for the sake of His laws."

²⁵ Antiochus sensed he was being treated with contempt. (The reproachful voice roused his hostility.) Nevertheless, there was still the youngest, and Antiochus not only addressed appeals to him again and again, he even made repeated promises on oath to make him rich and prosperous and admit him to the Order of the King's Friends and entrust important functions to him, provided he would depart from the ways of his forefathers.

²⁶ When the youth paid him no heed, the king called upon the mother and urged

2nd Hebrew

3rd

4th

5th

6th

Meshach, and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb, and his house confiscated, for there is no other God who is able to save in this way."

³⁰ Thereupon the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the province of Babylon.

³¹ "King Nebuchadnezzar to all people and nations of every language that inhabit the whole earth: May your well-being abound! ³² The signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me I am pleased to relate. ³³ How great are His signs; how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion endures throughout the generations."

12 Rabbinic Martyrs

(from Tractate "Mourning," chap. 8)

8 When Rabban Simeon and Rabbi Ishmael were seized and sentenced to be executed, Rabbi Ishmael wept.

"Son of the noble," said Rabban Simeon to him, "you are but two steps away from the bosom of the righteous," and you weep?"

"Is it because we are about to be killed that I weep?" he replied. "I weep because we are being executed like murderers and like Sabbath breakers."

Rabban Simeon then said to him: "Perhaps while you were dining or while you were sleeping, a woman came to ask for a ruling about her menses, her defilement, or her cleanness, and the servant told her, 'He is sleeping.' Whereas the Torah states: *If thou afflict them in any wise...* (Exod. 22:22). And what is written after this? *My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword...* (ibid. 22:23)."

Some say: "It was Rabban Simeon who wept, and it was Rabbi Ishmael who spoke to him in this way."

When the news reached Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Judah ben Baba that Rabban Simeon and Rabbi Ishmael had been killed, they rose, girded their loins with sackcloth, rent their clothes, and said: "O Israel, our brethren, hear us! If good has been destined to come to the world, the first to receive it would have been Rabban Simeon and Rabbi Ishmael. But now that it has been revealed to Him^o who spoke and the world came into being, that dire punishments are ultimately destined for the world, they, therefore, have been taken from the world."

The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart, and godly men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come (Isa. 57:1).

And it also says: *He entereth into peace, they rest in their beds, each one that walketh in his uprightness* (ibid. 57:2).

9 When the news that Rabbi Akiba had been executed in Caesarea reached Rabbi Judah ben Betera^a and Rabbi Hanina ben Tardion, they rose, girded their loins with sackcloth, rent their clothes, and said: "O Israel, our brethren, hear us! Rabbi

Akiba has been executed not because he was suspected of robbery or because he did not put all his strength into the study of Torah. Rabbi Akiba has been executed only as a sign. For it is written: *Thus shall Ezekiel be unto you a sign, according to all that he hath done shall ye do; when this cometh, then shall ye know that I am the Lord God* (Ezek. 24:24)."

"In a short time from now no place in the Land of Israel will be found where bodies of the slain have not been cast. For it is written: *Speak: Thus sayeth the Lord—And the carcasses of men shall be dung upon the open field* (Jer. 9:21)."

Not long thereafter, it is said, Roman armies attacked and put the entire world into chaos. Within twelve months the councils of Judah came to an end. For it is written: *Tremble, ye women that are at ease. Be troubled, ye confident ones* (Isa. 32:11). *Ye women that are at ease* refers to the councils. *Ye confident ones* refers to the circuses.

It is said that twelve months had not gone by before everything that had been foretold happened to them.

12 When Rabbi Hanina ben Tardion was seized for heresy, they sentenced him to the stake; his wife, to the sword; and his daughter, to life in a pavilion of harlots.

"To what did they condemn the poor woman?" said he to them.

"To the sword," they replied. At this point he cited these verses for her: *The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and gracious in all His works* (Ps. 145:17). *The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice* (Deut. 32:4).

"To what did they condemn the master?" said she to them.

"To the stake," they replied. At this point she cited this verse for him: *Great in council, and mighty in work, whose eyes are upon all the ways of sons of men, to give every one according to his way, and according to the fruit of his doing* (Jer. 32:19).

At the time of his execution, they wrapped him in a Torah Scroll and set fire to him and to the Torah Scroll, while his daughter, throwing herself at his feet, screamed: "Is this the Torah, and this its reward?"

"My daughter," he said to her, "if it is for me that you are weeping and for me that you throw yourself to the ground, it is better that a fire made by man should consume me, rather than a fire not made by man." For it is written: *A fire not blown by man shall consume him* (Job 20:26). But if it is for the Torah Scroll that you are weeping, lo, the Torah is fire, and fire cannot consume fire. Behold, the letters are flying into the air, and only the parchment itself is burning."

15 Now when Trajan executed Pappus and Julianus, his brother, in Laodicea, he said to them: "If you are from the nation of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,^o let your God come and rescue you the way He rescued them."

They said to him: "Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were perfectly righteous men, and Nebuchadnezzar was a proper king. Because of him it was fitting that a miracle should be performed. But you are a wicked king, and for you it is not fitting that a miracle should be performed. As for us, we have incurred the death penalty before the Lord. If you do not kill us, the Lord has many executioners, the Lord has many destroyers: many bears, many tigers, many lions, that can fall upon us and kill us. The Holy One, blessed be He, delivered us into your hands, however, only because He intends to exact payment for our blood at your hands."

Nevertheless Trajan ordered them killed. It is said that they hardly stirred from there before they saw his eyes being gouged out.^o

Martyrological term.

Mishnah Sanhedrin, 7:4, 9:1.

Rabban Simeon suggests that Rabbi Ishmael was perhaps inadvertently derelict in his rabbinic duties.

I.e., God foresaw the consequences.

They were punished not for their sins but as a warning to the world.

Variants read Judah ben Baba.

A fire not fanned by man is the fire of Gehenna.

I.e., the scroll is mere flesh, but its spirit is indestructible. See 11.

"His" eyes presumably refers to Trajan, whose head, according to another variant, was thereupon bashed in by deputies who arrived from Rome.

13 Rabbi Akiba

(B. Berakhot)

I.e., Rome.

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked Government^o issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practice the Torah. Pappus ben Judah came and found Rabbi Akiba publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: "Akiba, are you not afraid of the the Government?" He replied: "I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of a river, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: From what are you fleeing? They replied: From the nets cast for us by men. He said to them: Would you like to come up on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors? They replied: Art thou the one that they call the cleverest of animals? Thou art not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die! So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, *For that is thy life and the length of thy days*,^o if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall be!"

Deut. 30:20.

It is related that soon afterwards Rabbi Akiba was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappus ben Judah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him: "Pappus, who brought you here?" He replied: "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiba, that you have been seized for busying yourself with the Torah! Alas for Pappus who has been seized for busying himself with idle things!"

It is related that when Rabbi Akiba was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the *Shema*, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he directed his mind to accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven with love.^o His disciples said to him: "Our teacher, even to this point?" He said to them: "All my days I have been troubled by this verse, '*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul*,'^o [which I interpret,] 'even if He takes thy soul.' Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it?" He prolonged the word *ehad*^o until he expired while saying it.

The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Such Torah, and such a reward? [He should have been] *from them that die by Thy hand, O Lord*."^o He replied to them: "*Their portion is in life*."^o

A *bat kol*^o went forth and proclaimed, "Happy art thou, Rabbi Akiba, that thou art destined for the life of the world to come."

I.e., reciting the
Shema (Deut.
6:4-9).
Deut. 6:5.
"One" in Hear,
O Israel. . .

Ps. 17:14.

Ibid.

Oracular voice.

IV

Rabbinic Theodicy in Midrash

After the destruction of Herod's Temple in 70 C.E., the touchstone of reality became, once and for all, God's word as recorded in Scripture and as interpreted by the rabbis. Whereas the practical application of the Torah to everyday life was debated among the scholars in the houses of study, its moral application was the subject of rabbinic sermons delivered in the new synagogues. Because sermons and Torah readings were linked to the cycle of Sabbaths and Festivals, it should come as no surprise that the Midrash on Lamentations should contain some of the most vivid and theologically radical rabbinic responses to the trauma of history, since it was a fifth- to seventh-century distillation of hundreds of sermons given during the summer months, when the destruction of the Temple is commemorated. In this Midrash the rabbis spoke openly of the pathos of God. They imagined Him weeping and finding no solace, calling on all the patriarchs to help Him mourn and they, in turn, taking up the defense of Israel (14). Soon the entire heavenly host, a gallery of patriarchs, matriarchs and prophets, and even the letters of the alphabet were drawn into the act (15-16). History was personalized. Abstract concepts of guilt-retribution-restoration were translated into dramatic vignettes. And the time-bound chronicle of Lamentations was systematically reread as a time-less document of Jewish suffering.

The simplest way of personalizing history was to fill in some of the

missing characters: the Roman villains Vespasian, Hadrian and Trajan (17–18) and the victims, usually drawn from the Jewish aristocracy (19). One biblical proof-text, "... For these things do I weep ..." (Lam. 1:16), could cover these and many other tales of gratuitous cruelty and exemplary heroism.

One of the central functions of Midrash was, in fact, to fill in the gaps in the biblical account, and especially in Lamentations proper, where nothing was so glaring as the almost total absence of God. The rabbis' favorite way of implicating God without touching the text was through royal parables in which the king (patterned, ironically enough, on the Roman emperor) was an obvious stand-in for the divine ruler. Through a subtle parable of a king and his *ketubbah* (20), the rabbis sought to prove that the Torah bound God to Israel even when He absented Himself without cause. And the words of that *ketubbah*, if properly interpreted, were still the ultimate and only proof of God's mercy—even in defiance of the physical ruins (21). (For more on this Midrash, see Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* [New York: Columbia University Press 1984], chap. 2.)

The rabbis cut history down to manageable size by disassembling the Great Destruction into archetypes and moral lessons and by coding the memory of catastrophe into the liturgical calendar. Once ritual practice and the conceptual guidelines were in place, they left ample room for further elaboration. The *payyetanim*, or liturgical poets, adapted the themes and methods of the Midrash for synagogue use and their *kinot* for Tish'a b'Av became a veritable anthology of Jewish liturgical responses to catastrophe (27). Meanwhile, at the end of the Byzantine period in Palestine, a group of mystics drew together all the disparate sources on martyrdom to create a coherent Midrash of their own (22). In this radical retelling, rabbis, scribes and high priests who had lived at different times were imagined as dying together at the hands of an archetypal tyrant. The real drama, moreover, was shifted from this world to the next as the story's hero, Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest, ascended to heaven to argue his case before God. There, in heaven, he was shown an altar where the souls of the righteous were sacrificed daily. He learned that the Ten Martyrs, including himself, were to die for the purification of Israel as a vicarious atonement. This doctrine, so strikingly close to that in Christianity, could have been conveyed only through mystical fancy and elaborate storytelling. A motley of rabbinic heroes was recast into a mythical group of intercessors whose memory was invoked at the most solemn moment in the calendar—on Yom Kippur morning, in the *Seder Ha'avodah* section of the liturgy.

Anthropomorphic to a fault

14 Jeremiah and the Patriarchs

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Pathos of God ↔ God's cruelty in
Lam.

e beg/end
Isa. 22:12

The messianic era.

Isa. 2:3.

Hos. 5:15.

Archangel who
defends the
interests of Israel.

Jer. 13:17.

REN

Another interpretation of *And in that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation*:^o at the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to destroy the Temple, He said, "So long as I am in its midst, the nations of the world will not touch it; but I will close My eyes so as not to see it, and swear that I will not attach Myself to it until the time of the end^o arrives." Then came the enemy and destroyed it. Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, swore by His right hand and placed it behind Him. So it is written, He hath drawn back His right hand from before the enemy.^o At that time the enemy entered the Temple and burnt it. When it was burnt, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I no longer have a dwelling-place in this land; I will withdraw My Shekhinah from it and ascend to My former habitation; so it is written, I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their guilt, and seek My face."^o

At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, wept and said, "Woe is Me! What have I done? I caused My *Shekhinah* to dwell below on earth for the sake of Israel; but now that they have sinned, I have returned to My former habitation. Heaven forfend that I become a laughter to the nations and a byword to human beings!" At that time Metatron came, fell upon his face, and spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe, let me weep, but do Thou not weep." He replied to him, "If thou lettest Me not weep now, I will repair to a place which thou hast not permission to enter, and will weep there," as it is said, But if ye will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret for pride.^o

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Ministering Angels, "Come, let us go together and see what the enemy has done in My house." Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Ministering Angels went, Jeremiah leading the way. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw the Temple, He said, "Certainly this is My house and this is My resting-place into which enemies have come, and they have done with it whatever they wished." At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, wept and said, "Woe is Me for My house! My children, where are you? My priests, where are you? My lovers, where are you? What shall I do with you, seeing that I warned you but you did not repent?" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jeremiah, "I am now like a man who had an only son, for whom he prepared a marriage-canopy, but he died under it. Feelest thou no anguish for Me and My children? Go, summon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses from their sepulchres, for they know how to weep." He spake before Him: "Sovereign of the Universe, I know not where Moses is buried." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied to him: "Go, stand by the bank of the Jordan, and raise thy voice and call out, 'Son of Amram, son of Amram, arise and behold thy flock which enemies have devoured.'"

There and then Jeremiah went to the cave of Machpelah and said to the patriarchs of the world.^o "Arise, for the time has come when your presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He." They said to him, "For what purpose?" He

See Gen. 17:14.

Described in B.
Shabbat 88b.

[Isa. 22:12]

15 Abraham and the Alphabet

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Isa. 33:8.

Pilgrims to
Jerusalem.
According to
Genesis Rabba
59:8, Abraham
was the first to
proclaim Him as
God of the earth
as well as the
heaven.

answered, "I know not," because he was afraid lest they say, "In thy lifetime has such a thing happened to our children!" Jeremiah left them, and stood by the bank of the Jordan and called out, "Son of Amram, son of Amram, arise, the time has come when thy presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He." He said to him, "How is this day different from other days that my presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He?" Jeremiah replied, "I know not." Moses left him and proceeded to the Ministering Angels whom he recognized from the time of the giving of the Torah. He said to them, "O celestial ministers, know ye why my presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He?" They replied, "Son of Amram, knowest thou not that the Temple is destroyed and Israel gone into exile?" He cried aloud and wept until he reached the patriarchs. They immediately also rent their garments, placed their hands upon their heads, and cried out and wept until they arrived at the gates of the Temple. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw them, immediately "In that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping, and to lamentation, and to tonsuring, and to girding with sackcloth." Were it not explicitly stated in Scripture, it would be impossible to say such a thing, but they went weeping from one gate to another like a man whose dead is lying before him, and the Holy One, blessed be He, lamented saying, "Woe to the King Who succeeded in His youth but failed in His old age!"

Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman said: When the Temple was destroyed, Abraham came weeping before the Holy One, blessed be He, plucking his beard, tearing his hair, striking his face, rending his garments, with ashes upon his head, and walked about the Temple, lamenting and crying. He spake before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Why have I been treated differently from every other people, that I have come to this shame and contempt!" When the Ministering Angels saw him, they also composed lamentations arranging themselves in rows [like mourners] and saying, "The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth, etc." What means "the highways lie waste"? The Ministering Angels spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: "How have the ways become a desolation which Thou didst plan for Jerusalem so that travellers should not cease therefrom!" "The wayfaring man ceaseth": the Ministering Angels spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: "How have the ways become deserted in which Israel used to pass to and fro on the pilgrimage Festivals!" "He hath broken the covenant": the Ministering Angels spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe, broken is the covenant made with their patriarch Abraham through which the world is peopled and through which men acknowledge Thee in the world that Thou art God, Most High, Maker of heaven and earth." "He hath despised the cities": the Ministering

Playing Scripture in reverse

Jer. 14:19.

Gen. 4:26 is
interpreted: "Then
began men to
profane the name
of the Lord."

Jer. 11:15.

There are twenty-
two letters in the
Hebrew alphabet.
Dan. 11:11.

נ ו ז

Mekhilta on Exod.
20:2.

א ב ג

Anokhi (I) begins
with an aleph.
Exod. 20:2.

ד ה ו

Breishit.

ז ח ט

Num. 15:38.
Gedilim.
Deut. 22:12.

Angels spake before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Thou hast despised Jerusalem and Zion after Thou hast chosen them"; and so it is stated, *Hast Thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath Thy soul loathed Zion?* "*He regardeth not man*" (Enosh): the Ministering Angels spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Thou hast not regarded Israel even so much as the generation of Enosh who were the foremost idolaters."⁹⁰

Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, turned upon the Ministering Angels, saying to them, "Why do you string dirges together over this incident, standing rows upon rows?" They answered before Him: "Sovereign of the Universe, because of Abraham Thy friend who came to Thy house, and lamented and wept; why didst Thou disregard him?" He said to them, "From the day My friend departed from before Me to his eternal home, he came not to My house; but now, *What hath My beloved to do in My house?*"⁹¹

Abraham spake before the Holy One, blessed be He, "Sovereign of the Universe, why hast Thou exiled My children and delivered them over to heathen nations who have put them to all kinds of unnatural death, and destroyed the Temple, the place where I offered my son Isaac as a burnt-offering before Thee?" The Holy One, blessed be He, replied to Abraham, "Thy children sinned and transgressed the whole of the Torah and the twenty-two letters in which it is composed"; and so it is stated, *Yea, all Israel have transgressed Thy law.*⁹²

Abraham spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe, who testifies against Israel that they transgressed Thy law?" He replied to him, "Let the Torah come and testify against Israel." Forthwith the Torah came to testify against them. Abraham said to the Torah, "My daughter, art thou come to testify against Israel that they transgressed thy commandments and hast no shame before me! Remember the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, handed thee about to every nation but they refused to accept thee until my children came to Mount Sinai, accepted thee and honoured thee; and now thou comest to testify against them in the day of their trouble!" When the Torah heard this, she stood aside and gave no testimony against them.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, "Let the twenty-two letters come and testify against Israel." Forthwith the twenty-two letters appeared. The aleph came to testify that Israel had transgressed the Torah. Abraham said to it, "Thou, aleph, art the first of all the letters, and thou comest to testify against Israel in the day of their trouble! Remember the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself upon Mount Sinai and opened with thee, '*I am the Lord thy God*' and no nation accepted thee but my children, and thou comest to testify against my children!" The aleph immediately stood aside and gave no testimony against them. The beth came to testify against Israel, and Abraham said to it, "My daughter, thou comest to testify against my children who were zealous about the Pentateuch of which thou art the first letter, as it is written, *In the beginning God created.*"⁹³

The beth immediately stood aside and gave no testimony against them. The gimel came to testify against Israel, and Abraham said to it, "Gimel, thou art come to testify against my children that they transgressed the Torah! Is there a nation which observes the commandment of fringes,⁹⁴ of which thou art the first letter, except my children; as it is written, *Thou shalt make thee twisted cords*!"⁹⁵ The gimel immediately stood aside and gave no testimony against them.

When the remainder of the letters saw that Abraham silenced these, they felt ashamed and stood apart and did not testify against Israel. Abraham thereupon

began to speak before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying, "Sovereign of the Universe, when I was a hundred years old Thou gavest me a son, and when he reached years of discretion and was a young man of thirty-seven, Thou didst order me, 'Offer him as a sacrifice before Me.' I steeled my heart against him and I had no compassion on him; but I myself bound him. Wilt Thou not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on My children?" Isaac began, saying, "Sovereign of the Universe, when my father said to me, 'God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son,' I raised no objection to the carrying out of Thy words, and I willingly let myself be bound on the top of the altar and stretched out my neck beneath the knife. Wilt Thou not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on my children?" Jacob began, saying, "Sovereign of the Universe, did I not stay twenty years in Laban's house? And when I left his house, the wicked Esau met me and sought to kill my children, and I risked my life on their behalf. Now they are delivered into the hands of their enemies like sheep to the slaughter, after I reared them like chickens and endured for their sakes the pain of child-rearing. For throughout most of my days I experienced great trouble on their account. Now, wilt Thou not remember this on my behalf to have mercy on my children?" Moses began, saying, "Sovereign of the Universe, was I not a faithful shepherd to Israel for forty years, running before them like a horse in the desert? When the time arrived for them to enter the promised land, Thou didst decree against me that my bones should fall in the wilderness. Now that they are exiled, Thou hast sent for me to lament and weep over them. This bears out the popular proverb, 'I derive no benefit from my master's good fortune, but suffer from his bad fortune.'"

Gen. 22:8.
According to Gen.
Rabba 56:4, Isaac
knew that he was
to be sacrificed.

Based on Gen.
33:2.

16 Moses and Rachel

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Thereupon Moses said to Jeremiah, "Walk before me, so that I may go and bring them in and see who dares to touch them." Jeremiah replied, "It is impossible for me to walk along the road because of the slain." He said to him, "Nevertheless let us go." Forthwith Moses went, Jeremiah leading the way, until they arrived at the rivers of Babylon. When the exiles beheld Moses, they said one to another, "The son of Amram has come from his grave to redeem us from the hand of our adversaries." A *Bat Kol* issued forth and announced, "This is a decree from Me." Moses at once said to them, "My children, it is not possible to take you back [now] since it is so decreed, but the All-present will soon cause you to return"; and then he left them. Thereupon they lifted their voices in loud weeping, until the sound of it ascended above. So it is written, *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept.*"

When Moses came to the patriarchs of the world, they asked him, "What did the enemy do to our children?" He replied, "Some of them they killed; the hands

As a priest he
could not have
physical contact
with the dead.

That they remain
in captivity.

Ps. 137 (3).

of others they bound behind their backs; others were fettered with iron chains; others were stripped naked; others died by the way and their carcasses were food for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of earth; and others were exposed to the sun, hungry and thirsty." Forthwith they all began to weep and utter lamentations: "Woe for what has befallen our children! How have you become like orphans without a father! How you had to sleep at noon during summer without clothing and covering! How you walked over rocks and pebbles stripped of shoes and without sandals! How were you laden with heavy bundles of sand! How were your hands bound behind your backs! How were you unable to swallow the spittle in your mouths!"

Moses lifted up his voice, saying, "Cursed be thou sun! Why didst thou not become dark when the enemy entered the Temple!" The sun replied, "By thy life, O Moses, faithful shepherd, how could I become dark when they did not permit me and did not leave me alone? But they beat me with sixty whips of fire and said to me, 'Go, pour forth thy light.' " Moses again lifted up his voice, saying, "Woe to thy brilliance, O Temple, how has it become obscured! Woe that its time has come to be destroyed, for the edifice to be reduced to ruins, for school children to be massacred, and their parents to go into exile and captivity and perish by the sword!" Moses again lifted up his voice, saying, "O captors, I charge you, if you kill, do not kill with a cruel death; do not make a complete extermination; do not slay a son in the presence of his father nor a daughter in the presence of her mother; because a time will come when the Lord of heaven will exact a reckoning of you." But the wicked Chaldeans refused to comply with his request, and they brought a son into the presence of his mother, and said to his father, "Arise, slay him!" His mother wept, and her tears fell upon him, and his father hung his head.

He further spake before Him: "Sovereign of the Universe, Thou hast written in Thy Torah, *Whether it be a cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day;*" but have they not killed many, many mothers and sons, and Thou art silent!" At that moment, the matriarch Rachel broke forth into speech before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, "Sovereign of the Universe, it is revealed before Thee that Thy servant Jacob loved me exceedingly and toiled for my father on my behalf seven years. When those seven years were completed and the time arrived for my marriage with my husband, my father planned to substitute another for me to wed my husband for the sake of my sister. It was very hard for me, because the plot was known to me and I disclosed it to my husband; and I gave him a sign whereby he could distinguish between me and my sister, so that my father should not be able to make the substitution. After that I relented, suppressed my desire, and had pity upon my sister that she should not be exposed to shame. In the evening they substituted my sister for me with my husband, and I delivered over to my sister all the signs which I had arranged with my husband so that he should think that she was Rachel. More than that, I went beneath the bed upon which he lay with my sister; and when he spoke to her she remained silent and I made all the replies in order that he should not recognize my sister's voice. I did her a kindness, was not jealous of her, and did not expose her to shame. And if I, a creature of flesh and blood, formed of dust and ashes, was not envious of my rival and did not expose her to shame and contempt, why shouldst Thou, a King Who liveth eternally and art merciful, be jealous of idolatry in which there is no reality, and

Lev. 22:28.

exile my children and let them be slain by the sword, and their enemies have done with them as they wished!"

Forthwith the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He, was stirred, and He said, "For thy sake, Rachel, I will restore Israel to their place." And so it is written, *Thus saith the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not.*^o

Jer. 31:15.

This is followed by, *Thus saith the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded . . . and there is hope for thy future, saith the Lord; and thy children shall return to their own border.*^o

Jer. 31:16-17.

17 The Fate of the Survivors

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Lam. 1:16.
9-79 C.E.; Roman
emperor 70-79.

For these things do I weep.^o Vespasian^{oo} filled three ships with eminent men of Jerusalem to place them in Roman brothels. They stood up and said, "Is it not enough that we have provoked Him to anger in His Sanctuary, that we shall do so also outside the Holy Land [by consenting to immoral practices]?" They said to the women [of Jerusalem who were in the ships], "Do you desire such a fate?" They replied, "We do not." They then said, "If women who are formed by nature for coition refuse, how much more must we [refuse to be used for an unnatural purpose]! Think you, if we throw ourselves into the sea, will we enter into the life of the world to come?" Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, enlightened their eyes with this verse, *The Lord said: 'I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea.'*^{oo} "I will bring them back from Bashan," i.e., I will bring them back from between the teeth of (*bein shinnei*) lions; "I will bring them back from the depths of the sea" is to be understood literally.^o

Ps. 68:23

I will bring them
back to life at the
resurrection.

Ps. 44:21.

Ps. 44:23.

Ps. 44:22.

The first company [in the first ship] stood up and said, "Surely we had not forgotten the name of our God, or spread forth our hands to a strange god,"^{oo} and they threw themselves into the sea. The second company stood up and said, "Nay, but for Thy sake are we killed all the day,"^{oo} and they threw themselves into the sea. The third company stood up and said, "Would not God search this out? For He knoweth the secrets of the heart,"^{oo} and they threw themselves into the sea. Then the Holy Spirit cried out, "For these things do I weep."

Strategic points in
preventing Jews
from escaping the
country.

Hadrian the accursed set up three garrisons, one in Emmaus, a second in Kefar Lekatla, and the third in Bethel of Judea.^o He said, "Whoever attempts to escape from one of them will be captured in another and vice versa." He also sent out heralds to announce, "Wherever there is a Jew, let him come forth, because the king wishes to give him an assurance [of safety]." The heralds proclaimed this to them and so captured the Jews. That is what is written. *And Ephraim is become like a silly dove, without understanding.*^o [The heralds taunted the captured Jews with

Hos. 7:11.

Cf. 2 Kings 5:18.

these words,] "Instead of trying to restore the dead to life, pray that those still living shall not be seized." Those who understood [the ruse] did not come out [from their hiding places], but those who did not understand it all gathered in the valley of Beth Rimmon.^o [Hadrian] said to the captain of his army, "By the time I eat this slice of cake and the leg of this fowl, I must be able to look for a single person of all these [alive] without finding him." He immediately surrounded them with his legions and slaughtered them, so that their blood streamed [to the coast and stained the sea] as far as Cyprus. Then the Holy Spirit cried out, "For these things do I weep."

Those Jews who were hidden [in the caves] devoured the flesh of their slain brethren. Every day one of them ventured forth and brought the corpses to them which they ate. One day they said, "Let one of us go, and if he finds anything let him bring it and we shall have to eat." On going out he found the slain body of his father which he took and buried and marked the spot. He returned and reported that he had found nothing. They said, "Let somebody else go, and if he find anything let him bring it and we shall have to eat." When he went out he followed the scent; and on making a search, he discovered the body [of the man who had been buried]. He brought it to them and they ate it. After they had eaten it, they asked him, "From where did you bring this corpse?" He replied, "From a certain corner." They then asked, "What distinguishing mark was over it?" He told them what it was, and the son exclaimed, "Woe to me! I have eaten the flesh of my father!" This is to fulfill what was said, *Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers.*^o

Ezek. 5:10.

18 The Irrational Hatred of the Goyim

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Ca. 53-117 C.E.;
Roman emperor
98-117.

The wife of Trajan^o the accursed gave birth to a child on the night of the Ninth of Av while all the Israelites were mourning [the destruction of the Temple]. The child died on Hanukkah. The Israelites said, "Shall we kindle the lights or not?" They decided to light them and risk the consequences. They lit the candles, and persons slandered them to Trajan's wife, saying, "When your child was born the Jews mourned, and when it died they kindled lights!" She sent a letter to her husband, "Instead of subduing the barbarians, come and subdue the Jews who have revolted against you." He boarded a ship and planned to do the voyage in ten days, but the winds brought him in five. On his arrival he found the Jews occupied with this verse, *The Lord will bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as the vulture swoopeth down.*^o

Deut. 28:49 (1).

He said to them, "I am the vulture who planned to come in ten days, but the wind brought me in five." He surrounded them with his legions and slaughtered them. He said to the women, "Yield yourselves to my troops, or I will do to you

what I did to the men." They replied to him, "Do to the inferiors what you did to the superiors." He forthwith surrounded them with his legions and slaughtered them, so that their blood mingled with that of the men, and streamed [to the coast and stained the sea] as far as Cyprus. Then the Holy Spirit cried out, "For these things do I weep."

19 The Children of the High Priest

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Zadok, whose life straddled the end of the first century B.C.E. and the beginning of the next, is reputed to have fasted for forty days to prevent the Destruction that he foresaw; known to have officiated at the Temple. Joel 4:3.

It is related that the two children of Zadok^o the High Priest, one a boy and the other a girl, were taken captive, each falling to the lot of a different officer. One officer resorted to a harlot and gave her the boy [as a slave]. The other went to a store-keeper and gave him the girl for wine; to fulfill the text which is written, *And they have given a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine.*^o

After a while the harlot brought the boy to the shopkeeper and said to him, "Since I have a boy who is suitable for that girl, will you agree that they should marry and the issue will be divided by us?" He accepted the offer. They immediately took the two of them and placed them in a room. The girl began to weep, and the boy asked her why she was crying. She answered, "Should I not weep when the daughter of a High Priest is given in marriage to a slave?" He inquired of her whose daughter she was and she replied, "I am the daughter of Zadok the [High] Priest." He then asked her where she used to live and she answered, "In the upper market-place." He next inquired what was the sign above the house and she told him. He said, "Have you a brother or sister?" She answered, "I had a brother and there was a mole upon his shoulder; and whenever he came home from school I used to uncover and kiss it." He asked, "If you were to see it, would you know it?" She answered that she would. He bared his shoulder and they recognized one another. They embraced and kissed until they expired. Then the Holy Spirit cried out. "For these things do I weep."

20 The Parable of the Ketubbah

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Lam. 3:21.

This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope.^o Rabbi Abba ben Kahana said: This may be likened to a king who married a lady and made a large settlement upon her (lit., wrote her a large marriage contract [ketubbah]), "So many state-apartments

I am preparing for you, so many jewels I am preparing for you, and so much silver and gold I give you." The king left her and went to a distant land for many years. Her neighbors used to vex her saying, "Your husband has deserted you. Come and be married to another man." She wept and sighed, but whenever she went into her room and read her *ketubbah* she would be consoled. After many years the king returned and said to her, "I am astonished that you waited for me all these years!" She replied, "My lord king, if it had not been for the generous *ketubbah* you wrote me then surely my neighbors would have won me over."

So the nations of the world taunt Israel and say to them, "Your God has no need of you; he has deserted you and removed his Shekhinah from you. Come to us and we shall appoint commanders and leaders of every sort for you." The Children of Israel enter their synagogues and houses of study and read in the Torah, *"I will look with favor upon you, and make you fertile and multiply you. . . . I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you,"*^o and they are consoled. In the future when the redemption comes the Holy One Blessed Be He will say to Israel, "I am astonished that you waited for me all these years." And they will reply before the Master of All Worlds, "If it had not been for the Torah which you gave us . . . the nations of the world would have led us astray." That is what is written, *"If the Torah had not been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction."*^o Therefore it is stated, "This do I recall to mind and therefore I have hope."^o

Lev. 26:9-11.

Ps. 119:92.
Lam. 3:21.

21 Akiba's Laughter

(Midrash on Lamentations)

Lam. 5:18.

For the mountain of Zion which is desolate.^o

Once Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elazar, Rabbi Azariah, and Rabbi Akiba came up to Jerusalem. When they reached Mount Scopus, they tore their clothes. When they reached the Temple Mount, they spied a jackal coming out of the Holy of Holies. They began to weep, yet Rabbi Akiba laughed. Rabban Gamliel said to him, "Akiba, you always astonish us. Here we weep and you laugh!" He replied, "Why do you weep?" Rabban Gamliel said to the others, "Look what Akiba asks us! A jackal emerges from the place about which it is written *Any common man who encroaches upon it shall be put to death,*^o and we should not weep? It is precisely through our situation that the verse is fulfilled: *Because of this our hearts are sick, . . . Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate, / Jackals prowl over it.*"^o Replied Akiba, "For the same reason I rejoice. It is written, *I shall call reliable witnesses, Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah.*^o Now what connection has Uriah with Zechariah? [Uriah lived in the time of the First Temple, while Zechariah lived in the time of the Second! But note well] what Uriah said and what Zechariah said. Uriah prophesied:

Num. 1:51.

Lam. 5:17-18.
Isa. 8:2.

Jer. 26:18.

Zion shall be plowed as a field,
Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins,
And the Temple Mount a shrine in the woods."

Zechariah prophesied:

Zech. 8:4-5.

Thus said the Lord of Hosts: There shall yet be old men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares."

The Holy One Blessed Be He said, 'Behold, I have two witnesses; if the words of Uriah are fulfilled then so will be the words of Zechariah. If the words of Uriah prove vain then so will be the words of Zechariah.' I have rejoiced because since the words of Uriah have come true then the words of Zechariah will also come true in the Future Time." [The rabbis] replied to him in these words: "Akiba, you have consoled us. May you be consoled by the heralds of the redemption!"

22 The Ten Harugei Malkhut

(Midrash Eileh Ezkerah)

$$\frac{\text{Iron}}{\text{Trees}} = \frac{\text{Roman}}{\text{sages}}$$

I. The Trial & the Sentencing

I. The Trial

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the trees, they grew haughty because they were so tall, and they raised themselves ever higher and higher. But once the Holy One, blessed be He, created iron, the trees humbled themselves, saying, "Alas! The Holy One, blessed be He, has created the instrument that will fell us."

Likewise, after the destruction of the Temple, the arrogant members of that generation boasted, "So what if the Temple has been destroyed! There are still sages among us, and they can instruct the world in the study of the law and the observance of the commandments."

Thereupon, the Holy One, blessed be He, set it in the mind of the Roman emperor to study the Torah of Moses directly from the sages and the elders. The emperor began with the Book of Genesis, and he studied until he reached the chapter in Exodus that begins, "And these are the rules,"¹⁰ When he came to the verse, "He who kidnaps a man—whether he has sold him or is still holding him—shall be put to death,"¹¹ he immediately ordered his palace to be filled with shoes,¹² and summoned the ten foremost sages of Israel. They came before him, and he seated them upon thrones of gold, and said, "There is a grave matter of law about which I must question you. Tell me the law, only the law, and the truth."

"Speak," the sages said.

"If a man has kidnapped one of his brothers from the children of Israel, and treated him cruelly and sold him," the emperor asked, "what is the law concerning that man?"

"According to the Torah," the sages answered, "that man must surely die."

"If so," the emperor said, "you are guilty of death."

Exod. 21:1.

Exod. 21:16.

Cf. Amos 2:6.

II. R. Ishmael in Heaven

Rabbi Ishmael ben Elasia, along with Rabbi Akiba, founded the two most important exegetical schools in the first half of the second century C.E. Here he is conflated with an earlier figure by that name whom the Talmud (B. Berakhot 7a) identifies as a High Priest.

Flashback to R. Ishmael's miraculous birth

"Tell us why," they asked.

"Because of Joseph," the emperor answered, "whom his brothers kidnapped and sold. If his brothers were still alive, I would judge them. Since they are not, you will bear the sin of your forefathers."

The sages beseeched the emperor, "Grant us three days' reprieve. If we can find a merit by which to acquit ourselves, then good. And if we can't, do as you wish."

They agreed upon this. The sages departed, and persuaded Rabbi Ishmael, the High Priest, to pronounce the Ineffable Name and thereby to ascend to heaven in order to learn whether the decree against them had been issued by the Holy One."

Rabbi Ishmael purified himself through ritual immersion. He wrapped himself in his prayer-shawl and in his phylacteries, and distinctly pronounced the Ineffable Name of the Lord. Immediately, a wind bore him to the sixth heaven. There he met the angel Gabriel who said to him, "Are you Ishmael in whom your God prides Himself every day? Because He has a servant on earth who so resembles His own brilliant countenance!"

Ishmael replied, "I am that man."

Gabriel questioned him, "Why have you ascended here?"

He answered, "Because the wicked kingdom has decreed that ten sages of Israel must die. I have therefore ascended to learn whether that decree has gone forth from the Holy One, blessed be He."

Gabriel asked, "If the decree has not been signed, can you nullify it?"

"Yes," Ishmael answered.

"How?" Gabriel asked.

"[By pronouncing] the Ineffable Name."

"Blessed art thou, children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!" Gabriel immediately exclaimed. "For to you the Holy One, blessed be He, has revealed matters He has not disclosed even to the angelic host."

(It was said about Rabbi Ishmael, the High Priest, that he was one of the seven most handsome men in the world, and that his face resembled an angel's. When Rabbi Yosi, Rabbi Ishmael's father, reached the last days of his life, his wife said to him, "My dear husband and master, why do I see that many people manage to have children, while we have not? For we have no heir, neither a son nor a daughter.")

Rabbi Yosi replied, "The reason is this: When other men's wives leave the ritual bathhouse, they watch themselves very closely. If anything unseemly happens to them, they return to the bathhouse and immerse a second time, and so they succeed in having children."

His wife said, "If this is what has prevented me, then I promise to be very scrupulous in these matters."

The next time she went to immerse herself, after she left the ritual bathhouse, a certain dog crossed her path. So she returned to the bathhouse, and reimmersed herself. [But when she left] the dog crossed her path again: she returned once more and reimmersed herself. Eight times this happened, until the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel, "How much trouble this righteous woman takes upon herself! Go and appear to her in the form of her husband."

Gabriel immediately went and sat at the door of the ritual bathhouse, where he appeared to the woman in the form of her husband, Rabbi Yosi. He took her

[by the hand] and led her home. That same night she conceived Rabbi Ishmael, and he was as handsome as Gabriel himself.

For this reason, Gabriel encountered Rabbi Ishmael when he ascended to heaven. The angel said to him, "Ishmael, my son, I swear to you that I overheard from behind the heavenly partition: ten sages are to be handed over to the wicked kingdom to be executed."

"For what cause?" Ishmael asked.

"[As atonement] for the transgression Joseph's brothers committed when they sold him. Every day Justice^o argues in accusation before the Throne of Glory, saying, 'Hast Thou written in Thy Torah a single superfluous letter? And yet, the fathers of the tribes sold Joseph, and Thou still hast not punished them or their descendants!' It has therefore been decreed that ten sages must be handed over to the wicked kingdom to be executed."

"And till now," Rabbi Ishmael asked, "The Holy One, blessed be He, could find no way to exact punishment except through our lives?"

Gabriel answered, "I swear to you by your own life, Ishmael my son! From the day his brothers sold Joseph [until now] the Holy One, blessed be He, has not found ten men in a single generation so righteous and pious as the fathers of the ten tribes. Because of this, the Holy One, blessed be He, will exact payment through your lives. But the truth is with you."

When Samael^o, the wicked angel, realized that the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to seal His signature upon the decree to hand over the ten sages to the wicked kingdom, he rejoiced and boasted, "I have triumphed over the archangel, Michael."

The Holy One, blessed be He, thereupon burned with anger against Samael, and said, "Samael! If you wish, you may release the ten sages from death, or you must agree to suffer leprosy for all time to come. But one of these [decrees] you must accept."

Samael the wicked replied, "I refuse to release those ten sages from death. Let me accept the other decree just as you have spoken."

The Holy One, blessed be He, immediately raged in fury, and even before Samael had finished speaking, He summoned Metatron^o, the master scribe and archangel, and commanded him, "Write this and seal it: for six whole months, plague and leprosy, tumors, sores, burning inflammations, jaundice, every sort of evil boil, shall afflict Edom^o the wicked. Brimstone and fire shall fall upon man and beast alike, on their gold, their silver, and all they own, until a man shall say to his neighbor, 'I will give you Rome and everything in it for free!' and the other will answer him, 'What do I need these things for? There is no profit in them for me.'"

When Rabbi Ishmael heard this decree, his mind was finally set at rest. He began to stroll to and fro in heaven when he saw an altar next to the Throne of Glory. "What is this?" he asked Gabriel.

"An altar for sacrifice," the angel told him.

"What sort of sacrifice do you offer upon it each day?" Ishmael asked. "Are there bullocks and sacrificial animals here?"

"Every day we sacrifice the souls of the righteous on this altar," Gabriel answered.

"Who offers the sacrifices?" Ishmael asked.

"The archangel Michael," Gabriel responded.

Justice, literally the principle of justice (midat ha'din), is an attribute of God in rabbinic literature alongside His parallel attribute of mercy (midat ha'rahumim).

Samael-Satan; Guardian angel of Rome.

Guardian angel of Israel.

Metatron-Enoch; records deeds of mankind.

Esau-Edom-Rome.

vicarious atonement

sired him!

Also spelled Tardion. Head of the yeshiva at Sikhrin in the Galilee. Cf. 12.

Probably a conflation of Shimeon ben Gamliel I and II, both of whom occupied the office of patriarch, or Nasi. The first, according to the Tractate on "Mourning" (12), died a martyr; the second survived the Bar Kochba revolt.

= Salome, daughter of Herodias, who wants John the Baptist's head on a platter

Rabbi Ishmael thereupon descended to earth, and told his fellow sages that the decree against them had already been issued, written down, and sealed. On the one hand, his colleagues felt that they had been wronged to have such a grievous decree issued against their lives. On the other hand, they rejoiced that the Holy One, blessed be He, had judged them to be equal to the fathers of the tribes in righteousness and piety.

II Death of the First 4

This was the order in which the sages sat in pairs: RABBI ISHMAEL and RABBI SHIMEON BEN GAMLIEL; RABBI AKIBA and RABBI HANINA BEN TERADION;^o RABBI ELIEZER BEN SHAMUA' and RABBI YESHIVAV THE SCRIBE; RABBI HANINA BEN HAKHINAI and RABBI YUDA BEN BABA; RABBI HUTZAPIT THE TRANSLATOR and RABBI YUDA BEN DAMA.

The Roman emperor now entered, with all the noblemen of Rome following him. He addressed the sages, "Who shall be executed first?"

Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel spoke, "I am patriarch, son of a patriarch, descendant of David, the king of Israel, may he rest in peace. I shall be executed first."

Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest spoke, "I am High Priest, son of a High Priest, descendant of Aaron the Priest. I shall be executed first—and not see my colleague die."

Said the emperor, "This one has said, I shall be executed first, and this one has said, I shall be executed first. If so, cast lots between them."

The lot fell upon Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel. The emperor ordered his head cut off, and his servants decapitated Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel. Then, Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest took the head and, placing it between his thighs, he lamented with a bitter heart, "Where is Torah? Where is its reward? Here lies the tongue that once explained the Torah in seventy languages! And now it licks the dust!"

So Rabbi Ishmael mourned and wept over the body of Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel. The emperor said to him, "What is this? You, an old man, weeping over your fellow sage! You should be weeping over yourself!"

Rabbi Ishmael replied, "I am weeping over myself! For my fellow sage was greater than me in knowledge of Torah and wisdom. And now he has joined the heavenly academy before me. This is why I am weeping."

While Rabbi Ishmael was still giving voice to his grief, weeping as he lamented, the daughter of the emperor looked out her window and saw how handsome Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest was. Compassion for him seized her, and she sent to her father asking him to grant her one request. He sent back to her, "My daughter, whatever you ask I shall do—so long as it does not concern Rabbi Ishmael and his colleagues." She sent back, "I request you to allow him to live." The emperor replied, "I have already taken an oath." She responded, "Let me then request that you order to have the skin stripped off his face that I may have it to use instead of a mirror to look upon myself."

The emperor immediately ordered his servants to strip the skin off Rabbi Ishmael's face. When they reached the spot on his forehead where he used to place his phylacteries, Rabbi Ishmael groaned with such terrible bitterness that the heavens and the earth trembled. He groaned a second time, and the Throne of Glory trembled. The host of angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, "A righteous man like this, to whom Thou hast revealed all the mysteries of the upper world and the secrets of the lower one—shall this man be murdered cruelly by so wicked a man? This is Torah? This is its reward?"

World founded on the death of these rabbis

1) God's private statement $\rightarrow$ contradicted by bat-kol, God's public voice.

God's hands are tied

Bat kol.

The Holy One, blessed be He, answered, "Leave him to his fate. The merits of his deeds shall stand for the generations following him." Then He added, "What can I do to help my children? The decree has gone forth, and there is no one to annul it."

An oracular voice² declared from heaven, "If I hear one more word in protest, I shall destroy the entire universe and return it to chaos and void!"

When Rabbi Ishmael heard this, he became silent. The emperor said to him, "Until now you never wept or cried out. Yet now you do!"

Rabbi Ishmael replied, "Not for my own soul am I crying out—but for [the privilege of observing] the precept of laying phylacteries [upon my forehead], which now is lost to me."

"Yet you still trust in your God!" said the emperor.

"Let Him kill me if He will," said Rabbi Ishmael. "I shall still hope in Him."

Thereupon, his soul departed from Rabbi Ishmael.

Job 13:15.

50-135 C.E.; cf. ③ 12-13, 21.

Next they brought forth Rabbi Akiba, the son of Joseph.³ Rabbi Akiba was able to offer interpretations for the crownlets upon the letters of the Torah, and he revealed meanings in the Torah just as they had been transmitted to Moses at Sinai. When they brought him forth to be executed, a letter to the emperor arrived informing him that the king of Arabia had invaded his territory. The emperor hastened to depart, and ordered that Rabbi Akiba be imprisoned until his return from war. After he returned, he ordered Rabbi Akiba to be brought forth, and they carded his flesh with steel combs. Each time the steel comb entered his flesh, Rabbi Akiba proclaimed, "Righteous is the Lord. The Rock—His deeds are perfect; yea, all His Ways are just; a faithful God, never false; true and upright is He."⁴

Deut. 32:4.

וְיָ-וְיָ

Akiba's miraculous burial

An oracular voice came forth and declared, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Akiba. For you were righteous and just, and now your soul has departed you, righteous and just."

student - disciple relationship

After he died, Elijah the prophet, of blessed memory, took Rabbi Akiba's corpse on his shoulders and carried him a distance of five parasangs. On the way, Elijah met Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer. He asked Elijah, "Are you not a priest?" Elijah answered, "The corpse of a righteous man does not impart impurity." Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer accompanied Elijah until they came to a certain cave of extraordinary beauty. They entered the cave and found inside it a handsome bed and a burning candle. Elijah, of blessed memory, lifted Akiba by his head, and Rabbi Joshua the Grits-Dealer took him by his feet, and they laid the body upon the bed. For three days and for three nights the angelic host wept over Rabbi Akiba. Afterward, they buried him in that cave, and the following day Elijah, of blessed memory, took Rabbi Akiba and brought him to the heavenly academy where he interpreted the meaning of the crownlets upon the letters of the Torah. And all the righteous and pious souls gathered to hear Rabbi Akiba's interpretations.

Akiba's student, who attended his teacher while he was in prison and was present when Titinius Rufus condemned Akiba to death. See B. Erubin 21b.

④

After Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion was brought forth. It was said about Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion that his behavior was equally becoming to the Holy One, blessed be He, and to his fellow men. Never did a curse against his neighbor rise upon his lips. When the Roman emperor forbade the study of Torah, what did Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion do? He arose, convoked public assemblies, and sat in the marketplace of Rome where he taught and occupied himself with interpreting Torah. The emperor commanded that Rabbi Hanina be wrapped in

⑤ The purity of righteousness overpowers any impurity brought about by death

S-10: extremely formulaic

the scroll of the Torah and burned. The executioner seized Rabbi Hanina. He wrapped him in the Torah scroll, kindled the fire, and took tufts of sheep's wool which he soaked in water and placed upon Rabbi Hanina's heart so that he would not die too quickly. Rabbi Hanina's daughter was standing nearby, and cried to her father, "Oh, oh, father! Must I watch you [die] this way?"

He answered her, "It pleases me, my daughter, to have you see me now."

His students stood next to him, and asked, "Our teacher, what do you see?"

He replied, "I see scrolls of parchment aflame and letters flying up [through the air]." Then he began to weep, and his students asked him, "Why are you weeping?"

He answered, "If I alone were being burned, it would not grieve me. But the scroll of the Torah is now being burned with me."

The executioner addressed Rabbi Hanina. "Rabbi! If I were to remove the tufts of wool from above your heart and let you die quickly, would you promise to bring me to eternal life in the world-to-come?"

Rabbi Hanina answered, "Yes."

The executioner said, "Swear to me." Rabbi Hanina took an oath, and as soon as he had, the executioner fanned the flames, removed the tufts of wool, and Rabbi Hanina's soul departed him. Likewise, the executioner threw himself upon the flames and was consumed by the fire.

An oracular voice thereupon declared, "Rabbi Hanina and his executioner have both gained entrance to eternal life in the world-to-come."

About this incident, Rabbi Judah lamented, "Some men gain eternal life for themselves in a single moment, like that executioner, while others work all their lives to win this reward and then lose it in a single moment, like Yohanan the High Priest who served in the High Priesthood for eighty years and became a Sadducee at the very end of his life."⁵

וְיָ-וְיָ

Judah the Prince, redactor of the Mishnah.

Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus. A second-century sage, known for his piety.

וְיָ-וְיָ

Next they brought forth Rabbi Yuda ben Baba.⁶ From the time he was eighteen years old until he was eighty, Rabbi Yuda never tasted the pleasure of sleep for longer than a nap. The day he was brought forth for execution was a Friday, late in the afternoon, and Rabbi Yuda beseeched his captors, "Wait for me just a little until I fulfill one precept the Holy One, blessed be He, has commanded me."

They said to him, "You still trust in your God!"

He answered, "Yes."

"Does this God in whom you trust," they asked Rabbi Yuda, "still have any strength left him?"

"Great indeed is the Lord," he replied, "and very exalted, and to His greatness there is no end of searching."⁷

Ps. 145:3.

"If your God still has strength," they asked, "then why has He not saved you and your colleagues from this kingdom?"

Rabbi Yuda answered, "A great and awesome king requires our deaths. He has merely handed us over to your ruler so as later to requite our blood from his hands."

Those men went and told the emperor what Rabbi Yuda had said. The emperor summoned him and asked, "Is it true or not what my men have told me you said?"

Rabbi Yuda replied, "It is true."

copy-cat deaths

The emperor said, "How insolent you people are! You stand upon the threshold of death, and you still keep up your insolence!"

Rabbi Yuda responded, "O Caesar! Wicked man! Son of a wicked man! Did the Lord not see His temple destroyed, His righteous and pious servants murdered? And yet He did not make haste to avenge them at once."

Rabbi Yuda's students said, "Our teacher, you should have flattered the emperor with words of cajolery."

He answered, "Have you not learned that any one who flatters a wicked man is destined to fall into his hands." Then he said to the emperor, "By your life, Caesar, permit me to fulfill one commandment. Its name is the Sabbath, and it is [like] the world-to-come."

The emperor replied, "Was it to fulfill *this* request I agreed to listen to you!"

Gen 2:1.

Rabbi Yuda at once began to sanctify the Sabbath with the verses, "The heaven and the earth were completed," and so forth.⁶ He uttered them in a pleasing and loud voice, and all who stood around him were amazed. But when he reached the end of the last verse, "Which in creating God had done," they did not let him complete it. The emperor ordered that Rabbi Yuda be executed, and his servants executed him. Rabbi Yuda's soul departed him just as the sage pronounced "God."

An oracular voice came forth and declared, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Yuda! You resembled an angel, and your soul departed you with the name of God."

The emperor gave his servants commands. They cut Rabbi Yuda's limbs apart and threw them to the dogs, and Rabbi Yuda was never brought to funeral or given burial.

Lived in mid-second century. Celebrates the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

After him, Rabbi Yuda ben Dema was brought forth.⁷ That day was the eve before the holiday of Shavuot,⁸ and Rabbi Yuda said to the emperor, "Upon your life! Grant me a short reprieve until I can fulfill the commandments of Shavuot. Allow me to sanctify the day in order to praise the Holy One, blessed be He, who gave us the Torah."

The emperor said to him, "Do you still hold trust in the Torah and in the God who gave it?"

"Yes," Rabbi Yuda replied.

"What reward will you receive for this Torah of yours?" the emperor asked.

Ps. 31:20.

"It is what David, may he rest in peace, said," the sage answered. "How great is Your goodness, reserved for those who fear You."⁹

The emperor exclaimed, "No fools in this world are like you people—if you believe in a world-to-come!"

"And no fools in the world are there like you," Rabbi Yuda responded, "who deny the Eternal Lord. Oh, oh! The shame, the disgrace you will feel when you see us united with the Holy Name in light eternal, while you reside in the lowest, deepest depths of hell!"

The emperor burned with anger against Rabbi Yuda, and ordered that he be tied by the hair upon his head to the tail of a horse and dragged through Rome in all its expanse. After this was done, he gave orders for the sage to be cut up limb by limb.

Elijah of blessed memory, then came, gathered Rabbi Yuda's limbs, and buried him in a certain cave near the river that descends to Rome. For thirty days, the Romans all heard the sound of lament and weeping from inside that cave, and they went and informed the emperor.

The elder who protests converts is killed

Exod. 34:6; Deut. 7:10.

Cf. Isa. 5:25, 9:11 and elsewhere. Lived at beginning of second century. Called "the translator" because as the official spokesman of Rabban Gamliel of Yavneh, he transmitted the sage's opinions to the public.

He said to them, "Even if the entire universe were to be turned back to chaos and void I will not rest, not until I have satisfied myself with those ten sages just as I have sworn to do."

One of the wise men of Rome happened to be present, and he said to the emperor, "My lord, O Caesar! Recognize the folly of your acts, how completely you have erred in sin by sending forth your hand against the people of God without compassion. Know that a bitter end awaits you, for it is written in the Jewish Scriptures, *God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger*; yet it is also written there, *But He instantly requites with destruction those who reject him*."¹⁰

When the emperor heard this, his anger burned against that elder and he ordered him to be strangled to death. When the elder heard this, he immediately rushed to circumcise himself, and once he had been strangled, his corpse vanished and could not be discovered anywhere.

The emperor was seized with violent trembling. Nonetheless, he did not relent in his anger, and his hand was still stretched forth.¹¹

Rabbi Hutzapit the translator was brought out next.¹² About Rabbi Hutzapit, it was said that he was a hundred and thirty years old the day he was brought to be executed, yet he was so handsome in appearance he resembled an angel of the Lord of Hosts. [The emperor's] men went and told him about Rabbi Hutzapit's beauty and old age, and said, "We beseech you, our lord, pity this old man."

The emperor asked Rabbi Hutzapit, "How old are you?"

The sage answered, "Tomorrow I will be a hundred and thirty years old. Allow me, I beseech you, to complete my days."

The emperor asked, "What difference does it make if you die today or tomorrow?"

Rabbi Hutzapit responded, "The chance to observe two more precepts."

"And which commandment do you wish to observe now?" the emperor asked.

"The recitation of the *Shema* in the evening and in the morning," Rabbi Hutzapit replied, "whereby I will crown as king over me the name of the great, awesome, and sole Lord."

The emperor exclaimed, "Shameless and greedy people! How long will you trust in your God? He has no power to rescue you from my hands. My ancestors destroyed His temple. They strewed the corpses of His servants around Jerusalem. No one was there to bury them. And now your God Himself is old, He has no more strength to save you. For if He had any strength, would He not already be avenging Himself, His people, His temple, as He once did to Pharaoh, Siserah, and all the kings of Canaan?"

When Rabbi Hutzapit heard this, he let out a terrible cry of lament, seized his clothes, and rent them in mourning over the blaspheming of the blessed name and its shame. "Woe unto you, Caesar," he said. "What will you do on the final day when the Blessed One judges Rome and your gods?"

The emperor said, "Am I to haggle with this man forever?" He commanded that Rabbi Hutzapit be executed, and his servants stoned him to death and hung him. Later, the emperor's officers and counselors came and beseeched him to permit Rabbi Hutzapit to be buried because they had taken pity upon the sage's elderly age. The emperor allowed the sage to be buried, and Rabbi Hutzapit's students came and buried him, making a great and solemn lament over their teacher.

130

A student of Akiba's who lived in the late second century.

95

Gen. 2:13.

יְיָ - אֱלֹהֵינוּ

A colleague of Akiba's who lived in the latter half of the second century.

90

Next they brought forth Rabbi Hanina ben Hakhinai. That day was Friday, the Sabbath eve, on which Rabbi Hanina used to sit in fasting from the time he was twelve until now when he was ninety-five. His students asked him, "Our teacher, do you wish to taste something before your execution?"

He said, "All my life until now I have fasted [on this day], never eating or drinking. And now that I do not know where I am going, you tell me to eat and drink!" He began to recite the blessing that sanctifies the Sabbath day, "*The heaven and the earth were completed,*" until he reached "*and He made it holy,*" but even before the sage was able to complete that verse, he was executed.

An oracular voice came forth and proclaimed, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Hanina ben Hakhinai! For you were holy, and now your soul has departed you in holiness just as you pronounced the word 'And He made it holy.'"

After Rabbi Hanina, they brought out Rabbi Yeshivav the Scribe. It was said that Rabbi Yeshivav was ninety years old on the day he was brought forth to be executed. His students came and asked him, "Our teacher, what will be the fate of the Torah?"

Rabbi Yeshivav replied, "It is destined that the Torah will be forgotten from Israel because this wicked nation has shamelessly plotted to destroy our most precious jewels [the sages] among us. If my death could only serve as atonement for our generation! Yet I behold [this vision]: No street in Rome will be without a corpse slain by the sword. For this wicked nation is fated to shed the innocent blood of Israel."

His students asked, "And what will be our fate, our teacher?"

He answered, "Hold fast to each other. Love peace and justice, perhaps there will be hope."

The emperor asked Rabbi Yeshivav, "Old man, what is your age?"

Rabbi Yeshivav replied, "This day I am ninety years old, and even before I came forth from my mother's womb, it was decreed by the Holy One, blessed be He, that my colleagues and I would be handed over into your hands so as to avenge our blood from them."

"And does there exist another world [when this act of vengeance against me will take place]?" the emperor asked.

"Yes," the sage answered. "And woe to you! Woe to your shame when He will requite the blood of His righteous creatures from your hands."

The emperor commanded, "Quickly kill this one, too. And let me behold the power and strength of this God. Let me see what He will do to me in another world." So he commanded, and they burned Rabbi Yeshivav to death.

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamu'a was brought forth next. On that day, it was said, Rabbi Eleazar was a hundred and five years old, and from his infancy until the end of his life no one had ever heard him utter a frivolous word, nor had he once quarreled with his neighbor, not in word or in deed. He was a humble and modest man, and he had fasted for eighty years of his life.

The day of Rabbi Eleazar's execution was Yom Kippur. His students came to him and asked, "Our teacher, what is it you behold?"

He answered, "I behold Rabbi Yuda ben Baba whose bier is raised aloft, and the bier of Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph is next to it. The two are disputing with each other over a point of law."

One of Akiba's last pupils. He was ordained by Judah ben Baba and lived in the middle of the second century. It is doubtful whether he was actually martyred.

10

Back to the beginning

"And who is there to decide the law between them?" Rabbi Eleazar's students asked.

"Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest," he replied.

"And who wins the dispute?" they asked.

"Rabbi Akiba," the sage said. "Because he has toiled with all his strength over the Torah." Then he said to them, "My children, I also behold the soul of each and every righteous creature purifying itself in the water of Shiloah in order to enter the heavenly academy in purity this day and to hear the sermons that Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph will preach on the matters of the day. Each and every angel will bring golden thrones upon which the righteous souls will all sit in purity."

The emperor ordered the sage to be executed. Then an oracular voice came forth and proclaimed, "Blessed art thou, Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamu'a! You were pure and your soul has departed you in purity."

יְיָ - אֱלֹהֵינוּ

liturgical book