

Fear, Fear of God, God-Fearers

Edited by
BENEDIKT HENSEL and
PHILLIP MICHAEL LASATER

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Philological and Historical Perspectives on the World
of Ancient Judaism and Christianity

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Phillip Michael Lasater

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Preface

Interest in the history of the self, including the history of psychological ideas, and their overlap with philosophy and theology continues to receive attention in academic research. Philological disciplines aim to figure out how best to account for and describe the details of surviving texts and objects in conjunction with the assumptions, and the related analytical toolkits, that modern scholars bring to their study of the ancients. To this end, the present volume contributes to discussions of the history of psychology based on texts and artifacts from Jewish and Christian antiquity, tending specifically to notions of “fear.” A concept as complex and widespread as “fear” requires openness toward which sources of data are used in the study. Notably, then, as a volume of *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* / II, the papers we include go beyond those writings that became the Old Testament or the Bible more widely, though biblical texts are indeed addressed. Thinking about the history of psychological and theological concepts is best done when we cast a wide net, bringing in what we can gather from Egyptian, Rabbinic, Greco-Roman, and epigraphical sources. We do not wish to convey the idea that theorizing human feelings is at home only in Greek and Latin registers, so this set of papers continues to problematize the alleged disjunctions between “Hebrew” as opposed to “Greek” thought. We wanted to include still more contributions, but weren’t able to do so in this book. The papers which are published here approach “fear” as a feeling, yes, but also as a concrete activity, a way to articulate hierarchies, a manifestation of otherworldly encounter, a translational problem, a mark of communal identity, and part of the basis for divinizing or perfecting the self through privileged relations. Like the history of the word “emotion,” therefore, “fear” requires that we look beyond the realm of individual experience, individual bodies and their brains, individual languages, and so on.

The present volume gives a representative sampling of how fear is presented in ancient sources and how studying fear can lead to productive, cross-disciplinary work. Such research can bring exciting, unexpected insights and enrich what is done in fields that sometimes say too siloed off from each other. It is an excellent example of how biblical scholarship can and should engage more widely with the humanities – not only as a way to benefit biblical scholarship, but also as a way for biblical scholarship to benefit other fields.

The project organizers sincerely thank all who contributed to the book, as well as the editors of *FAT* for accepting this volume. We also thank the team at Mohr

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Benedikt Hensel
Phillip M. Lasater

Table of Contents

Preface	V
---------------	---

BENEDIKT HENSEL and PHILLIP MICHAEL LASATER Fear, Fear of God, God-Fearers. Philological and Historical Perspectives on the World of Ancient Judaism and Christianity	1
---	---

Part I: Fear and Fear of God: Conceptions and Contexts

MICHAEL DORMANDY Is God-Fearing Good Fearing? What the Greek Reception of Hebrew Fear-Terms Tells Us about Biblical Concepts of Fear	19
--	----

PHILLIP MICHAEL LASATER What “Fear” Promises. The Dialogue on Ethics and Perfection between Job and Eliphaz	43
---	----

KATJA WEISS Fear (of and for God) and Strategies for Coping with Fear in Ancient Egypt after the Amarna Period	67
--	----

JOEL GEREBOFF Fear of God in Early Rabbinic Judaism	89
--	----

CHARIS JO Fear and Fear of Deities in Latin-speaking Contexts. How novel was Augustine’s view?	113
--	-----

DANIEL JAMES WALLER Frightening Forms. The Physical Reality of the Demonic Body in Jewish Aramaic Magic Bowls	131
---	-----

Part II: God-Fearers

BENEDIKT HENSEL

The “YHWH-fearing” Sailors in Jon 1:5–16 as a Model for the Classification
of the “Nations” in Early Judaism. A Search for Literary and Historical
Traces in the Book of Jonah 151

JÖRG LANCKAU

Fear of God as the Beginning of Obedience? Genesis 22 in Light of
Various Conceptions of “Religion” in the Tanakh 171

D. CLINT BURNETT

Jewish Sympathizers. A Reappraisal of Luke’s “God-Fearers” 189

KINDALEE PFREMMER DE LONG

God Fearers as Characters in Luke-Acts and their Real-World Analogs 215

List of Contributors 253

Index of Ancient Sources 255

Index of Subjects 261

Fear, Fear of God, God-Fearers

Philological and Historical Perspectives on the World of Ancient Judaism and Christianity

BENEDIKT HENSEL and PHILLIP MICHAEL LASATER

Fear, fear of God, and God-fearers are topics which are receiving renewed attention in biblical scholarship.¹ Given the recent studies of relevant philological, concept-historical, and anthropological issues,² we need together with these dimensions a sense of how fear and fear of deities took shape in practice, including textually represented practice. Due to the language of fear's place in contexts which emphasize authority, greatness, and power, it seems clear that submission and subordination play a role in motifs about "fear" and "fear of God." But what sets of experiences and practices were understood to emerge here? And granting that submission and subordination could be tied to forms of violence, was violence or a denial of agency a necessary condition in contexts of "fear?" Could fear also help fortify selfhood and identity? How did agency and group dynamics undergird conceptions of "God-fearers" – a practical sense of being god-fearing – in writings of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, be it among the Yahad known through the Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament scribes, Rabbinic writings, the Aphrodisias inscriptions, or Jewish communities of Mesopotamia in late antiquity? While this book's central focus of "fear" and "fear of God" is well-known from the history of research, a fresh framework is needed for thinking about these concepts, as well as for deepening, expanding, and problematizing ways in which scholars have navigated the concepts.

The present volume is organized conceptually and thematically, with attention to how these concepts may have shaped group dynamics in antiquity. It considers widespread and recurring overlap between "fear" and submission or subordination, with those who embody "fear" being positioned at the lower end of some hierarchical arrangement. Sources are considered from a range of linguistic and cultural contexts, where subordination is acknowledged, enforced, and disputed. Inscriptions, sapiential texts, and legal traditions can all speak to this

¹ See, e.g., Mermelstein 2021; Lasater 2020; and idem 2019; and idem 2017.

² E.g., Dietrich et al., eds. 2023; Dietrich 2022; Newsom 2021; Mirguet 2019, 557–603; see further Janowski 2019; Frevel 2015, 65–89.

matter, and we hope the volume's multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural character will strengthen its contribution to the field.

Fear's relationship to concrete, practical relations leads to another focus of this volume, which contextualizes conceptions of fear in sets of experiences, practices, and notions of selfhood. These conceptions of fear align only roughly with what many modern scholars often have in mind with fear as an "emotion," an issue that can add intellectual-historical clarity and depth to this discussion. This step is important for sensing how ideas like "fear," which may seem straightforward as an emotion, can be part of very different conceptual networks in which conceptions of feelings, the paranormal, visionary experience, and selfhood differ from the social imaginaries of today's scholars. This approach can problematize overly simple associations of fear with violence or a reduction of agency, helping us understand and contextualize fear in generative ways.

In order to orient readers, some introductory remarks will hopefully illustrate how methodological and conceptual issues confront historical and philological studies of "fear" in the humanities inasmuch as fear is inseparably entangled with wider philosophical, psychological, theological factors.

1. Historical and Conceptual Issues in Studies of Human Affective Capacity

For understanding ancient Jewish and Christian contexts, notions of "fear" belong to conceptions of human affective capacities or the passions. In historical and philological research, it is important to ask what was involved in the actual terminology from antiquity that we habitually translate as "fear?" To what degree does it line up with what, for 21st century scholars, might seem to be more matter-of-fact psychological frameworks for understanding the dynamics of one's "interior" life?

1.1 The Familiarity and Unfamiliarity of "Fear": An Example from the 8th Century BCE

A brief illustration from the book of Amos brings together several factors. Rooted in the 8th century BCE within a West Semitic scribal environment, Amos 3:7–8 points to ways in which ancient talk of "fear" is both like and unlike what we might have in mind when we think of "fearing" this or that (here, Heb. אָרַע, "to submit, be subordinate; to fear, be afraid"; OG φοβέομαι).³ Generally, the context of אָרַע-derivatives is hierarchical with aspects of assessing, knowing, feeling, and acting; semantically, affect and submission or subordination are fused. Using

³ Lasater 2019, 23–25.

a widely recognized scribal convention of poetic seconding, the passage organizes its statements in this case as two-part *meshalim* where Line A is seconded or developed by Line B, which is where the emphasis or punchline lies.⁴

MT Amos 3:7–8

7. כי לא יעשה אדני יהוה דבר (A) Indeed, the lord YHWH does not do anything/a word,
כי אם-גלה סודו אל-עבדיו (B) unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets.
הנביאים:
8. אריה שאג מי לא יירא (A) The lion roars, who can but יירא?
אדני יהוה דבר מי לא ינבא: (B) The Lord YHWH speaks, who can but prophesy?

These lines address a cluster of relations. One finds the relation between deity and prophet, as well as implicitly a relation between prophet and non-prophet, on the issue of knowledge or access to heavenly secrets. A prophetic privilege is the ability to access or know such secrets, which he or she might then mediate to others. The suggestion in 3:8 is that YHWH does not act alone but only in mediated fashion, namely, through prophetic media grounded in oral performances. The issue of a divine matter or דבר (“speech, word, issue”) that initiates v. 7a conceptually corresponds to the roaring of a lion that initiates v. 8a; prophets and prophecy appear respectively in the second part of each verse (v. 7b and 8b). What seconds the verb “to fear” is the verb “to prophesy,” hinting at active nuances for both (v. 8).

Contextually, there is a theological analogy between a lion and YHWH. For the moment, however, let us ignore this analogy and look more narrowly at Amos 3:8a. The verb יירא, whose meaning is not intrinsically theological, is a prophet’s envisioned response to hearing a lion roar. It is hard to deny that a feeling is taken for granted in the rhetorical question מי לא יירא “who can but יירא?” To encounter a lion may well be frightening. Yet with יירא more than feeling is in view, and it would be inadequate to suggest that the only or primary thing in view is an individual’s own feeling. As is the case elsewhere, יירא is an acknowledgement of or a response to discernments of greatness: the lion is matter-of-factly presented as a greater force than any human onlooker (most frequently collocated with יירא are in fact derivatives of גדל, “to be great”).⁵ A person’s effort at resisting the lion would be futile. The assumption is that, if conflict were to ensue between them, the lion would win. Fundamentally, a mode of submission or a recognition of no contest is involved in v. 8a’s use of יירא, which is something that someone not only feels but also does in view of how they would normally evaluate a lion in relation to oneself. In this respect, יירא indicates as well an intellectually grounded assessment or judgment.

⁴ Berlin 2008; Kugel 1998.

⁵ Lasater 2019, 34–43.

Amos 3:8b broadens our focus to the contextual analogy between YHWH and a lion, accentuating the relation between the deity's oral revelation and a prophet's mediating activity. Again, unequal positioning and a response of submission are in view, though Line B further defines Line A's oral component as divine "speech" (Piel דבר ; cf. דבר in v. 7a) and specifies right submission (i. e., יראה) as carrying out prophetic mediation of divine secrets (i. e., נבואה). Acknowledging Line A's lion component that led up to Line B suggests that, just as it would be futile for a human to oppose a lion when it roars, it would be futile for a prophet to oppose the divine דבר . However, a flat, "downward" exertion of divine power does not appear to capture what is involved here when a prophet embodies יראה . Speaking for the sake of convenience of Amos as the referenced prophet in v. 8b, Amos's *submission* nonetheless *elevates* him, marks him as godlike insofar as he is someone privy to divine secrets otherwise unknowable to a non-prophet, someone able to engage with and translate the divine. With similar examples elsewhere too, ירא here involves complex dynamics of subjectivity; practice; and evaluation of "higher" versus "lower" focused on elements beyond the one who either does or does not ירא . Its usage presupposes a plurality of agents and converging activities and norms. These considerations all factor into what יראה is. It envelops intentional activity; particular types of relations; modes of thought; normativity; and more.

1.2 Conceptions of Human Nature as Frameworks for Psychological Categories

Ways of thought and evaluation, practices, and sociological classification (e. g., "... his servants the prophets" in Amos 3:7) are important for understanding conceptions and dynamics of "fear." Furthermore, in antiquity, whether in West Semitic or other environments, to speak of human affective and related capacities tended to be associated with notions of the self or "soul" or analogous dimensions of human nature.⁶

Historically in many Jewish and Christian contexts, such multifaceted aspects of "fear" and related matters were captured by speaking of the "passions," understood as the soul's inclinations or "movements" that were discussed in connection with virtue and vice, goodness and badness (for discussions of the passions, see, e. g., Philo of Alexandria; 4 Maccabees; etc.). Comparable framings are not limited to Greek or Latin registers (e. g., Augustine of Hippo's *City of God*, Book 14). As just one example of such ideas in a Semitic register, Proverbs 1–9 is a text where יראה marks the initial step of the quest for wisdom as well as

⁶ For recent treatment of subjectivity and selfhood in ancient Jewish contexts, see the special issue "Formation of the Subject" in *Dead Sea Discoveries* 28.3 (2021); see further Steiner 2015; Schüle 2012, 483–501; and for an influential critique of the idea that the "soul" is a particularly "Greek" idea, see Barr 1992.

a higher level of understanding or “divine knowledge” (e.g., Prov 1:7; 9:10; and 2:5; :אז תבין יראת יהוה ודעת אלהים תמצא). This ethical and intellectual scribal project was about rightly ordering pupils and their desires, leading ideally to unity with a divinely grounded wisdom. One may choose not to ירא, and thus flout “knowledge” (דעת) or “wisdom” (חכמה) (in Prov 1:29, יראה is something chosen). But near the end of Proverbs 1–9, Wisdom tells pupils that opting to forego יראה, and by extension foregoing higher knowledge and the ethical discipline that it requires, is to commit “violence” against the נפש, “soul” (Prov 8:36; :והטאי חמס נפשו כל־משנאי אהבו מות: “he who sins against me does violence to his soul // all who hate me love death”). In this text block, יראה is part of a development from uninformed to wise, from mundane to semi-divinized, from deficient to perfected.

Concerns including ethics, perfection, knowledge, and also the demonic could characterize how Jewish and Christian writers conceptualized and contextualized the passions, as well as how they spoke of the need to eschew (e.g., aspiring to ἀπάθεια, “dispassion”; see e.g. Moses in Philo’s *Legum* 3:129) or at least rightly manage passions (e.g., Aaron in *Legum* 3:128) if passions were seen as a definite albeit error-prone aspect of human nature when left untutored.⁷ Either way their place was understood relative to faculties of the soul like the intellect or reason and the will. Passions were not all classified together as members of a single taxon, but could be differentiated based on how they related to, say, reason as distinct from a range of desires that were likewise discreet from one another. The writer of 4 Macc 3:1, for instance, states that reason has “its own passions” (τῶν ἑαυτοῦ παθῶν), which could be handled rightly or wrongly. Such considerations were combined in reflections on how practical rationality or prudence was developed through habits, whether virtuous or vicious. The dynamics of passions could thus manifest in all sorts of practical or bodily ways.

It is true that contemporary discussions of “the emotions” use “emotion” in ways that seek to acknowledge the more intellectual and normative and practiced dimensions we briefly saw in Amos 3.⁸ Yet for historical and philological work, it is hardly insignificant that the category of “the emotions” was only introduced well into the modern period (i.e. 18th–19th centuries CE), and that it was introduced as a psychological category by consciously revisionist theorists who wished to displace not only ideas of the passions and the soul, but also ideas that human subjectivity is subject to forms of normative evaluation, often grounded in teleological conceptions of human nature (i.e., some version of natural

⁷ On issues surrounding the demonic in late-antique Jewish contexts, see Daniel Waller’s contribution in this volume; relatedly, see Molin 2023, 609–631; for roughly contemporaneous Christian monastic contexts, see, e.g., the late 6th or early 7th century writing of Climacus 1982; relatedly, see the discussion of “dispassion” in Zecher 2022, 67–68.

⁸ Mirguet 2019, 557–603.

goodness and natural law).⁹ The normative dimension of feelings is why Alasdair MacIntyre observed that, classically, “Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways.”¹⁰ Whether or not a passion was virtuous depended upon, say, whether reason governs the passions in accordance with goodness as a gauge not equitable with any individual or collection of individuals. Many people today may find non-intuitive the very possibility that one might “fear” or “love” or “desire” wrongly, or the idea that one ought to “fear,” “love,” or “desire” in particular ways. One of the earliest emotion theorists David Hume (1711–1776) is known for holding that there is no objective fact of the matter about how one should feel this or that. It was part of a revision of moral psychology. Hume in 1738 argued that reason is and should only be the slave of the passions, which in the same publication he also reframed as the emotions (*Treatise of Human Nature*, II.iii.3). Historically, then, emotions were a rival category over against passions. For Hume, reason adopts a subordinate function of enacting or pursuing what an individual desires, with desire detached from any *telos* for human life as such. Culturally, there seems to be a well-tailored “fit” between the category of the emotions and the emergence of a modern consumerist West. Be that as it may, when emotion theorists aimed to detach human affective capacity from the soul and its inclinations, and from normative dimensions or teleological conceptions of the human person, this reframing quickly created major questions about what exactly was even meant by “emotion.”¹¹ If the passions had been defined as “inclinations” of the soul, the emotions became mental “states” of nothing in particular (static ideas become entrenched despite the etymology of “emotion”).¹² More consequential than Hume was Thomas Brown (1778–1820), whose *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, with twenty editions between 1820–1860, never really defined the newly psychologized term “emotion.”¹³ As a feature of modern psychology, the emotions were from the outset and to this day remain rather ill-defined, which appears to be one reason why there is talk of reinstating the passions.¹⁴ Therefore, especially if we retain the term “emotion” in studies of antiquity, this category’s revisionist history cannot be bracketed. Methodologically, the situation resembles the issues with applying to antiquity the similarly homogenizing

⁹ That is to say, the English term “emotion” was around this time being used in rather novel fashion as a psychological term. Earlier usages from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries mostly had to do with various sorts of public agitations or commotions, ranging from political upheaval to earthquakes. Movement and objectivity were presupposed. See the entry, “emotion,” in Oxford English Dictionary, where before and contemporaneous with Hume, “emotion” was used non-psychologically to indicate, “political agitation, civil unrest; a public commotion or uprising.”

¹⁰ MacIntyre 2007, 149.

¹¹ See already James 1884, 188–205.

¹² Lasater 2017, 520–540, here 528.

¹³ Dixon 2003, 119.

¹⁴ See, e. g., Dixon 2012, 238–244; Charland 2009, 238–260.

concept of “religion,”¹⁵ a concept which until recently worked in conjunction with emotion to dominate biblical scholars’ considerations of “fear” as a non-rational, religious, personal experience (particularly in relation to holiness).¹⁶

However scholars choose to navigate these historical divergences, our hope is that this all too brief summary illustrates the complexity of understanding “fear” in ways that would be more recognizable to ancient scribes.

2. Designating and Conceptualizing a Group or Groups: God-Fearers

In view of the semantic considerations from the previous discussion, “fear” could have normative sociological applications, which themselves exhibit development. At least a two-part distinction could be warranted.

2.1 God-Fearers as a Group within the “Israel” of the Hebrew Bible

Conceptions of fear and associated practices are expressed in terminology regarding a particular social group in Jewish antiquity, the so-called “God-fearers.” One finds this terminology in the Hebrew Bible in references to those who “fear god/Elohim”; display “fear of god/eloheim” (יראת אלהים; cf. Gen 20:11); or “fear YHWH” (יראי יהוה; cf. Ps 115:11; Jon 1:16). Within the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible these designations are represented with the terms φοβέομαι, σέβομαι, and related verb forms. Psalm 115 supplies an example. The text opens with a dichotomy between gods of the Gentiles (vv. 2–8), dismissed as impotent artifacts, and Israel’s God, affirmed as master of creation. The “biblical Israel” insinuated in Psalm 115 includes not only the “house of Israel” (Ps 115:9) and the Aaronide priesthood (v. 10) but also a third group called “God-fearers” (יראי יהוה; v. 11a). God-fearers are here a kind of grouping *within* “biblical Israel.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Batnitzky 2011; Asad 1993, 27–54.

¹⁶ There is in fact no text in the Hebrew Bible or Ben Sira or the Dead Sea Scrolls where “holiness” triggers “fear”; furthermore, a repeated suggestion across a range of texts is that, instead of triggering fear, divine nearness is a reason to relinquish fear. On the lack of philological evidence for fear’s relation to holiness and related matters, see Lasater 2019; a recent paper that continues this discussion is Uusimäki 2024, 1–14.

¹⁷ Our use of the phrase “biblical Israel” is intended to indicate that this profile of Israel is first and foremost a literary phenomenon. It is separate from the question of whether and to what extent it reflects a historical Israel and/or Judah or, from the Persian period onwards, an emerging idea of Judaism. For conceptions of “fearing” God or “God-fearers” in MT’s texts, there is no obviously corresponding external evidence, which is why we maintain this distinction. Reinhard G. Kratz uses a comparable terminological distinction in *Historical and Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah* 2015. In contrast to Kratz, however, it seems appropriate to emphasize the plurality of identity constructions that claim to be “biblical Israel.” There is neither historically nor literarily only one or “the” biblical Israel (in contrast to “a”

It must remain open whether the group(s) of “God-fearers” in the Psalms are a literary-liturgical construction or a tangible, religious-sociologically entity. There is no extra-biblical evidence surrounding these traditions that inclines us to conclude a concrete community was necessarily denoted, and efforts to read liturgical texts with reconstructive aims may hinge on particular and contestable conceptions of psalmic form (cf. later, written evidence such as the well-known Aphrodisias inscription).¹⁸

2.2 God-Fearers as a Group Outside Judaism

A shift in meaning seems observable in later layers of traditions that ended up in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in other Jewish and early Christian traditions. The New Testament most prominently designates a group with the phrase ὁ φοβούμενος/σεβόμενος τὸν θεόν, which appear in the Acts of the Apostles (10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7, 13). A corresponding Greek noun is θεοσεβής, which does not appear in Acts, but does appear once in the New Testament in John 9:31. In this literary context, it appears that such “god-fearers” are a group *outside* Judaism albeit positively oriented towards Judaism. In the late 19th and into the 20th centuries, scholars debated whether this group was a historically tangible group or a literary device used by Luke in order to describe a transition from Judaism to Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles; this was A. T. Kraabel’s thesis.¹⁹

However, the Aphrodisias inscription requires scholars to reconsider the possible historical significance of a group of people deemed “god-fearing.” In 1987 Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannebaum published the inscription²⁰ containing lists of a total of fifty-four pagans who were associated with a Jewish synagogue in Aphrodisias and who were labeled θεοσεβεῖς, “God-fearers,” distinguishing them from both Jews and proselytes who are likewise referenced in the inscription. At least in this case, they seem to comprise a group of Gentiles, a group outside Israel, but who are positively oriented towards Judaism.

historical Israel); one can speak of “biblical Israels.” The various notions of Israel at a literary level are quite different in terms of their factual, literary and theological profiles and must therefore not be conflated. Historically, this point is due to the fact that, by the Persian period with emerging notions of Judaism, there is a plurality of documented Jewish identities or varieties of Judaism (in Hensel’s terminology: the term Yahwisms is preferred over “Judaism[s]”). Different traditions and social groups behind MT’s texts established a range of things that “biblical Israel” might be in response to questions of who does and does not (anymore) belong. These texts’ formation thus comprises the counterpart to historical processes of the formation of Judaism within the authoritative literary traditions of various Yahwistic groups. See Hensel 2023, 11–23; and idem 2020.

¹⁸ On the need to reflect more fully on notions of psalmic form, see Lasater 2024, online advance article; on the Aphrodisias inscription see Reynolds/Tannebaum 1987.

¹⁹ Kraabel 1981, 113–126.

²⁰ Reynolds/Tannebaum 1987.

These God-fearers seemingly do not or cannot fully convert to Judaism like the proselytes. Their precise religious-sociological status remains debated to this day, as papers in this volume demonstrate. However, one can count them with some certainty among what Martin Hengel once called “sympathizers” with respect to Judaism (in Hengel’s words, “Sympathisanten”).²¹ In this period, there were different, perhaps regionally diversified, sorts of affiliation with Judaism. Regardless of whether we see them as a definite community or more of a hypothetical, these actual references to “God-fearers” evince the conceptual range of how ancient scribes recognized a spectrum of affiliations with Judaism.

2.3 Tracing the Shift of Meaning Back to Late Literary Layers of the Hebrew Bible

This shift in meaning can be observed in the book of Jonah, which probably dates to the Ptolemaic period. “Fear” is the terminology of choice for identifying and designating a group as “god-fearers.” Moreover, it is a *Leitmotiv* in the first chapter of the book of Jonah. Non-Israelite sailors accompany Jonah on his flight “away from YHWH” (Jon 1:3) on a ship that crosses the Mediterranean Sea.

After YHWH sends a storm upon the sea in Jon 1:2–4, the characters’ situation is developed (Jon 1:5–16). The sailors react to this life-threatening storm with “fear” (Jon 1:5a: וייראו) and “each cried out to his god” (Jon 1:5b: ויזעקו איש ויזעקו אל-אלהיו). A feeling of fear is likely involved, but, like the lion’s roar in Amos 3, the immediate association with deities and an activity of connecting to them illustrates the complexity of ירא here as well. As the scene progresses, the sailors react to Jonah’s confession to YHWH with even greater יראה. They recognize intellectually that the storm was the work of YHWH. It is the rationale behind their fearing “very greatly” (יראה גדולה; v. 10a). Life-threatening circumstances are skillfully combined with יראה as a link between human beings and YHWH. That is, they embody “fear of YHWH.” And interestingly, the qualification of doing so “greatly” conveys a sense that not all יראה is the same: it exists in degrees or grades – i. e., lesser and greater, or partial and perfected, varieties of יראה. Compositionally, a combination of such factors was anticipated in the designation of Jonah’s own status through reference to his “fear” of YHWH (את-יהוה אלהי השמים אני ירא; Jon 1:9). Both facets of ירא are then combined in the climax of the scene, which introduces ritual activity:

(Jon 1:16)

וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה את-יהוה
ויבחו־זבח ליהוה וידרו נדרים

Then the men ירא a great יראה, (namely) of YHWH; they offered sacrifice to YHWH and made vows.

²¹ Building on Hengel’s model cf. Wander 1998.

The emphasis on formerly pagan sailors' "great" fear of God draws on a larger "fear" motif that the narrative constructs gradually. The sailors' *יראה* in v. 5 and their "great *יראה*" in v. 10, intensified by their recognition of *YHWH*, are developed in a sense of *יראה* as right submission through ritual and vowing. In this way, their *יראה* is intensified literarily, involving the conversion of the sailors in v. 16. This generates the sailors' turn towards *YHWH*, a process that grows and deepens throughout the narrative. In this skillfully composed scene the pagan, foreign sailors, who each cried out to their respective gods, become "*YHWH*-fearers" who call unanimously upon *YHWH* (Jon 1:15). From the pragmatics of this scene, as well as from the overall composition of the Book of Jonah,²² these God-fearers are non-Israelites who are positively orientated towards "Israel" and thus towards Judaism at the time the text was written.

Something comparable may be found in Genesis 22 at MT's latest editorial stage (early Hellenistic period). A conceptual distinction is made between Abraham as a *YHWH*-fearer (the example for Jewish faith) and a non-Israelite "Elohim-fearer."²³ The distinction between the divine nomenclature Elohim and *YHWH* is significant for the narrative's arc of tension. We would resist treating the difference of names literary-critically as the documentary hypothesis did.²⁴ It serves a hermeneutical purpose in the book of Genesis. Here and in other, related cases like Gen 20:11, Elohim seems to be a kind of "international" translation of *YHWH* for foreigners or non-Israelites. In this respect, fear of Elohim (instead of *YHWH*) is an inclusive concept that situates non-Israelites within the horizon of Judaism, doing so not as an "in-group" but an associated external group.

The reasons and historical dimensions behind this shift in meaning are still debated, as is the question of the extent to which the terminology reflects a firmly defined group; or a specific conception of associating with ancient Judaism; or a literary strategy for opening up Judaism towards "the peoples." But according to the very narrative logic we have been emphasizing, the scope of *יראה* bridges the world of ancient Judaism with wider intellectual, linguistic, and geographic contexts.

3. The Scope of this Volume

The complexity of approaching "fear" with attention to such preliminaries convinces us that we need to expand our historical and linguistic scope across the humanities. We cast a wider net than what has typified biblical scholarship. Notions of "Bible" and "canon" are not helpful or historically appropriate

²² On the God-fearers in the Book of Jonah see Hensel (in this volume); and idem 2025 (*forthcoming*).

²³ Cf. Lanckau (in this volume).

²⁴ Cf. Jacob 1934/2000, 949–1049; see Blum 1984, 471–475.

Index of Ancient Sources

Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

<i>Genesis</i>		18:21	176
1	158	19	57
6–9	161	19:3	22, 101
6:5 ff.	161	19:13	103
10:12	161	19:30	183
12	180	20:2	177
12:1	175	25	57
15:6	160	26:3	94
16	175		
18	184	<i>Numbers</i>	
20:11	10	10:23	96
20:11a	182	14:22	172
21	173, 175, 180	18:20	93
22	10, 1, 171–176, 179–182, 184	35:15	237
22:1	172–173, 180	<i>Deuteronomy</i>	
22:12	106	1:15	96
22:17–18	179	5:26	94
23	175	6:1–2	92
35:7	34	6:2	93
35:17	22	6:4	108
42:18	185	6:5	108
		6:16	172
<i>Exodus</i>		9:9	161
9:6	96	10:12–13	92
9:20	96	10:20	108
14:7	96	13:4	172
14:16	154	14:22–23	94
14:31	21, 154, 160, 163, 166	17:14–20	95
14:31b	163	17:19	96
15:25	172	18:10–11	176
16:4	172	18:13	105
17:2	172	25:18	93
17:8	93	31:6	38
18:2	96	32	108
20:12	101	32:29	101
20:20	172		
22:21–23	92	<i>Judges</i>	
34:6 ff.	160, 166	2:22	172
		6:39	172
<i>Leviticus</i>		11:30–31	180
4:22	96	11:31	179
10:4	102	11:39	180

<i>Ruth</i>		22:4	62
1:16 ff.	164	22:1-7	60-61
		27:1	106
<i>1 Samuel</i>		27: 3-4	105
12:18	183	27:5	105
21	21	28:28	46
21:13	21	32:6	22
28	179	32-37	46
28:13	179	37	46
		37:21-24	47
<i>2 Kings</i>		37:22-24	46
3:27	179	42:7-8	47-48
16:3	177		
21:6	177	<i>Psalms</i>	
23:10	177	19	114
		19:9	113
<i>2 Chronicles</i>		19:10	184
28:3	177	25:14	100-101
33:6a α	177	26:2	172
		31:9	125
<i>Iob</i>		32	193
1:1	49, 104-105	40:4	21
1-2	176	70:7	30
1:1-2:13	50	85:9	194
1:1-3	48-50	97:1	28
1:6-12	49-50	101	193
1:9	50	111:10	92
1:13-19	50	113:19,21	193-194
2:1-6	50	117:4	194
2:3	50	130:4	21, 23
2:4-6	50	134:20b	194
2:9-10	50	135:19	96
4:1-11	51-52	146:11	231
4:17-21	53, 57, 62		
4-28	46	<i>Proverbs</i>	
6:8-15	55-56	1-9	4-5
6:14	56-57	1:7	21, 92
6:14b	57	2:1-6	58
6:15	56	8:15-16	93
6:8-17	55	8:36	5
6:17	56	9:10	92
12:16	58	31:30	96
13:15	104		
13:16	106	<i>Ecclesiastes / Qoheleth</i>	
14:6	58	6:9	29
14:19	58	12:5	24
15-21	57	12:13	93
15	57		
15:4	58	<i>Isaiah</i>	
15:1-6	57-58	7:12	172
21:7-13	48	8:19	178
21:15-16	60	29:13	184
21:19	60	30:33	177
21:31	60	44:5	97

45:25	31	1:16a	154, 163, 166,
56:1	93	2	158–159
<i>Jeremiah</i>		2:1–11	151, 152
7:31	178	2:11	158
32:35	178	3	13, 159, 162, 164, 167
<i>Ezekiel</i>		3–4	152
2:5,7	38	3:1	157
47:22	237	3:1–3ab	151
<i>Daniel</i>		3:2–3a	157
3:33	33	3:3a	162
<i>Joel</i>		3:3b	157, 158–159
2	161	3:4	151
2:12–17	166	3:4b	159, 160
2:13b	160–161	3:4–10	157, 162–163
2:13b–14	166	3:5–19	13, 153
2:14b	160–161	3:5–10	151, 159
<i>Amos</i>		3:5–4:4	159
3	5	3:5a	154, 160, 163, 166
3:7–8	2–3	3:5b–8	160
3:8a	3	3:7	162
3:8b	4	3:8	161–162
<i>Jonah</i>		3:9b	160
1–2	152	3:9 ff.	161, 166–167
1	13, 157, 159, 164	3:10	159, 161
1:1	153	4	158–159, 162
1:1–2	157	4:1–10	151
1:1 ff.	151	4:2	160, 166–167
1:2–4	9, 153	4:2b	161
1:3	9	4:6–11	152
1:3 ff.	151	4:10–11	159
1:4–16	153	<i>Micah</i>	
1:4a	153–154	4:11–13	167
1:5–15	151	6:6–8	179
1:5–16	9, 13, 151–152, 160, 163	6:6	179
1:5	166	6:8	181
1:5a	9, 153	<i>Nahum</i>	
1:6–7	153	2:2–2:19	167
1:8	166	<i>Habakkuk</i>	
1:9	153–154, 165, 193	1:5	238
1:10	166	3:7	38
1:13–14a	156	<i>Zechariah</i>	
1:14	166	7:9	93
1:14b	157	8:16	93
1:14, 16	164	<i>Malachi</i>	
1:15	10, 154	2:5	102–103
1:16	9, 13, 22, 151–152, 154–155, 166, 193	3:5	96
		3:13–21	185
		3:16	94, 195

New Testament

<i>Matthew</i>		9:21	229
17:9	30	10-19	232, 248
		10-18	215, 219-220
<i>Luke</i>		10-11	233, 234
1-2	225	10	229, 232, 246
1:1-4	216, 235	10:2	209, 210
1:50	220, 229, 234-235, 245-246	10:4	209, 229-230
2-4	225	10:22	209, 210
2:25	27	10:25-26	209
4-17	225	10:28	209
7	235	10:30-33	209,
7:9	230	10:31	209
7:25	32	10:35	209, 210, 230, 241, 245, 247
8-11	227	10:46	230
8:35-37	224	11	236
12	220, 230-231, 247	13-19	247
20-24	227	13-14	236
21:9	39	13	247
23:40	229	13:14-16	209
23:42-43	230	13:16	209-210, 236
23:42	230, 234	13:26	209-210, 237
23:47	230	13:42	238
24:37	39	13:43	209
		13:50	210
<i>Galatians</i>		14:1	239
53	113	15	236
		16-19	247
<i>2 Thessalonians</i>		16	239
1:12	32	16:9-10	30
		16:13-14	209
<i>1 Timothy</i>		16:14	210
2:10	25	16:14-15:40	241
4:8	37	17	242
5:4	37	17:1-4	209
		17:4	210, 242
<i>Titus</i>		17:17	209-210
2:11	36	17:23	37
		18	244
<i>John</i>		18:4-7	209
9:31	8, 25, 189	18:7	209-210
88	125	19	245
		19:8-10	245
<i>Acts</i>		27:20	35
1-9	228	<i>Romans</i>	
1-5	229	1:25	33
2:11	209, 238	8:15	23
6:5	209	<i>Hebrews</i>	
9:4	229	11:17-19	173-174
9:20	229		

<i>James</i>		<i>1 John</i>	
2:21	173	4	114
		4:18	113
<i>1 Peter</i>		<i>Revelation</i>	
3:6	39	15:1	29
5:6	31		

Deuterocanonical Works and Septuagint

<i>Wisdom</i>		<i>Psalms 115</i>	
6	62	115	7, 157
		115:3	157
<i>Sirach/Ecclesiasticus</i>		115:9	157
1:11–21	91	115:11a	166
7:6	26		
11:6	31	<i>3 Maccabees</i>	
		3:4	33
<i>1 Maccabees</i>		<i>4 Maccabees</i>	
5:6	30	3:1	5
		7:21–22	25
<i>2 Maccabees</i>			
6:23	34		
12:22	34		

Index of Subjects

- Demonic
 - Body 134–138
 - Diet 139–141
 - Shapeshifters 138–139
- Elihu 45–48
- Eliphaz 51–54, 60–62
- Fear
 - as acquiring wisdom 92–95
 - as fright 182–183
 - as obedience 100, 183–185
 - as tool of the gods 69
 - Augustine's view of 123–125
 - Biblical concepts of 27–28, 229–232
 - Strategies for 71–82
- in ancient Egypt 69–71, 75–76
- in Rabbinic texts 89–108
- Of other deities 119–122, 201–203
- φοβέομαι 23–40, 194–198, 221–224
- אר' 20–22, 45
- God/Yhwh fearers 156–157, 185, 192–194, 198–200
- Jewish Aramaic Magic Bowls 132–134
- Jewish sympathizers 165–166, 204–208, 208–210, 224–229, 232–246
- Jewish-Gentile Onomastics 217–220
- Ninevites 156–162
- Selfhood/identity 1–2