



The Alumnae of Northwestern University Continuing Education Program

Summer 2015

Dr. Claire Sufrin

Between Stories and Beliefs: The Complicated Partnership of Religion and Literature

June 25: Storytelling and Meaning Making: The Bible

Additional texts:

Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*

The larger theological point is that the trials of the righteous serve to demonstrate not God's injustice, as many think to be the case, but quite the opposite, the fairness of his choices. For those choices are not mere whims, evidence of the arbitrariness of providence, and the proof is that those chosen, like Abraham, for exaltation, are able to pass the brutal tests to which God subjects them and thus to vindicate the grace he has shown them. The trials that appear to be their humiliation are, in fact, the means of their exaltation, proof positive that their special destiny is based on other than caprice. The trials of the righteous mediate the contradiction between God's grace and his justice. They also make sense of the combination of humiliations and exaltations in the lives of the chosen (139).

from Elie Wiesel, "Ani Maamin, A Song Lost and Found Again"¹

Abraham: You commanded me, O Lord,
 In the beginning
 The very beginning
 To leave my country,
 My home,
 And that of my father.
 To start anew in the land of Canaan.

¹ "Ani Maamin" is the title of a Hebrew song stating belief in the coming of the Messiah. The words of the song are based on a list of thirteen principles of Judaism composed by the philosopher Maimonides (1135-1204): "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming." Bibliographic information for the poem may be found in the Further Reading section of the handout.

I did not know, my Lord, I did not know
That one day, one night,
The road would end in Treblinka.

Isaac: You made me climb, then descend
Mount Moriah —
Crushed and silent.
I did not know, my Lord, I did not know
It was to see my children,
Old and young,
Arrive in Majdanek.

Further Reading and Resources

Websites:

Images of biblical stories
www.artandthebible.info
<http://www.thebricktestament.com/home.html>

Biblical texts
<https://www.biblegateway.com/>
<http://mechon-mamre.org/>

Fox, Everett, trans. *Five Books of Moses*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

Books:

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Basic Books, 1981.

Alter, Robert, and Frank Kermode. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Harvard University Press, 1990.

Kanarek, Jane L. *Biblical Narrative and the Formation of Rabbinic Law*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Levenson, Jon D. *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*. Yale University Press, 1995.

Wiesel, Elie. "Ani Maamin." In *Holocaust Poetry*, edited by Hilda Schiff, 194–204. New York: Macmillan, 1995.