

Jewish Apologetics

We learnt elsewhere: R. Eliezer said: Be diligent to learn the Torah and know how to answer an Epikoros. R. Johanan commented: They taught this only with respect to a Gentile Epikoros; with a Jewish Epikoros, it would only make his heresy more pronounced. (Sanhedrin 38b)¹

Jewish apologetics attempts to defend Jews, their religion, and their culture from critics. The history of Jewish apologetics reflects a complicated relationship between Jews and Gentiles throughout the millennia. Jewish apologetics formed as a response to the challenges of pagans and – eventually – as a response to the challenges of Christianity.²

The Jewish apologetics are intended to defend the Jewish religion and the Jewish social and national life against the direct attacks from the world around the Jews. Jewish apologetics is also intended to attack the internal doubts that were rising up from comparing Jewish life and the life of the Gentiles surrounding the Jewish community. In addition, Jewish apologetic literature is also written “in the hope of proving to the Gentiles the virtues of the Jewish religion and thereby influencing their outlook on, and attitudes toward, Judaism.”²

The Talmud Bavli speaks about the Minim and the Epikoros who attempt to use Jewish sources – especially the Tanakh – to try and prove their own beliefs. Rabbi Yohanan said that all the passages which the Minim use as grounds for their heresy have a refutation to their heresies close by in the Scripture. There are multiple examples throughout the Tanakh. Here are but two examples:

1. And God said: Let us [plural] make man in our image, after our likeness ... (Genesis 1:26)
And God created [singular] man in His own image... (Genesis 1:27)

2. Come, let us [plural] go down, and there confound their language ... (Genesis 11:7)
And the LORD came down [singular] to see the city and the tower ... (Genesis 11:5)

R. Nahman said: He who is as skilled in refuting the Minim as is R. Idith, let him do so; but not otherwise. Once a Min said to R. Idith: It is written, And unto Moses He said, Come up to the Lord [Exodus 24:1]. But surely it should have stated, Come up unto me! — It was Metatron [who said that], he replied, whose name is similar to that of his Master, for it is written, For my name is in him. But if so, [he retorted,] we should worship him! The same passage, however, — replied R. Idith says: Be not rebellious against him, i.e., exchange Me not for him. But if so, why is it stated: He will not pardon your transgression? He answered: [We hold our belief] we would not accept him even as a messenger, for it is written, And he said unto him, If Thy [personal] presence go not etc [Exodus 33:15]. A Min once said to R. Ishmael b. Jose: It is written, Then the Lord caused to rain upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord [Genesis 19:24]: but from him should have been written! A certain fuller said, Leave him to me, I will answer him. [He then proceeded,] It is written, And Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech [Genesis 4:23]; but he should have said, my wives! But such is the Scriptural idiom — so here too, it is the Scriptural idiom. (Sanhedrin 38b)¹

Jewish apologetics is the attempt to disprove the challenges of the non-Jewish world and the Epikoros Jews. Jewish apologetics also attempts to bring back to lost people of the Jews. Read and study Torah and learn that there are always answers to the challenges of the Minim and the Epikoros.

¹Epstein, I. *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*. London: Soncino Press, 1949. [<http://halakhah.com/pdf/nezikin/Sanhedrin.pdf>]

²American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. "Apologetics." jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Jewish Virtual Library, 2012. [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0002_0_01187.html]