

# How God Describes God

*The Use of Anthropomorphisms in Scripture*

By: Tim Kelley

# anthropomorphism

“The attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a deity, animal, or object”.

Oxford Dictionary

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“The attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a deity, animal, or object”.

Oxford Dictionary

anthropos = “man”  
morphe = “form”

# anthropomorphism

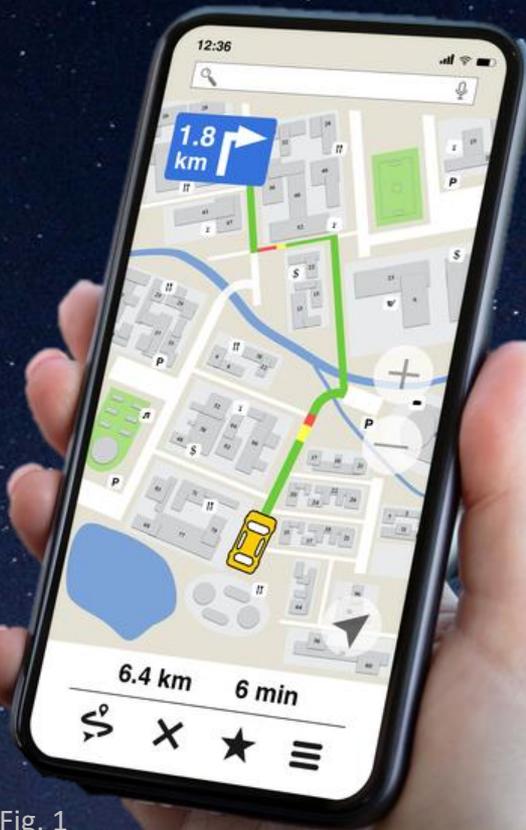
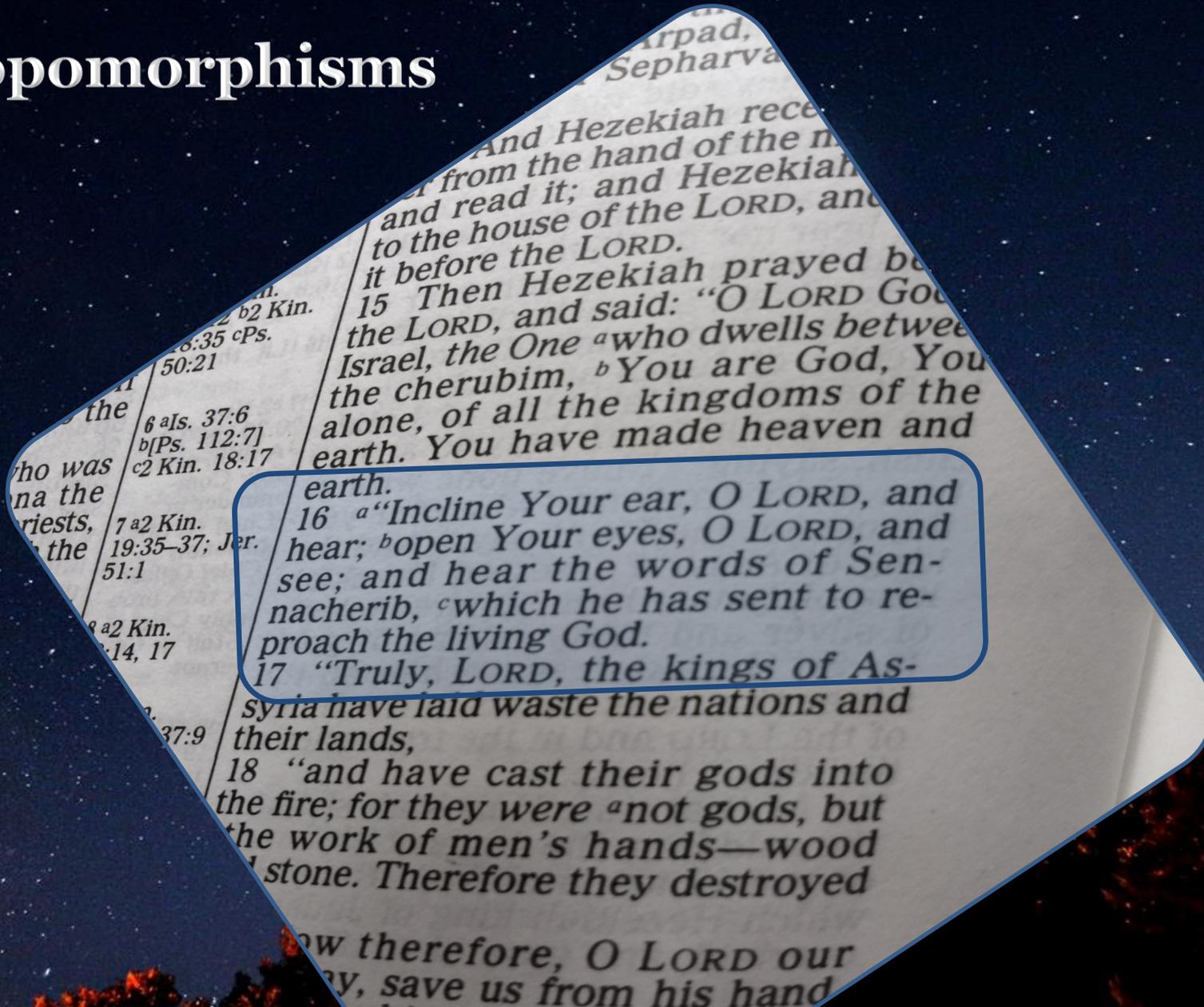


Fig. 1

# Anthropomorphisms



And Hezekiah received it from the hand of the messenger, and read it; and Hezekiah said, "Blessed be the name of the LORD, and you are in the house of the LORD, and you are before the LORD.

15 Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: "O LORD God of Israel, the One <sup>a</sup>who dwells between the cherubim, <sup>b</sup>You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

16 <sup>a</sup>“Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; <sup>b</sup>open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, <sup>c</sup>which he has sent to reproach the living God.

17 “Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands,

18 “and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were <sup>a</sup>not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed

# anthropomorphism

- God often used anthropomorphisms to describe Himself
- What Jewish writers have to say about the use of anthropomorphisms
- What the sages and scribes have done to correct God's use of anthropomorphisms
- How giving "human" attributes to God causes problems with their understanding of Messiah

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- God is “qadosh” – set apart - Holy

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<sup>NKJ</sup> **Leviticus 11:45** 'For I *am* the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy.

# How Does God Describe Himself

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 40:28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

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<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 145:3** Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness *is* unsearchable.

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<sup>NKJ</sup> **Isaiah 54:5** For your Maker *is* your husband, The LORD of hosts *is* His name; And your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.

# Anthropomorphisms:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 3:20** "So I will stretch out My **hand** and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 89:20** I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him, with whom My **hand** shall be established; Also My **arm** shall strengthen him.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **2 Samuel 22:16** Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were uncovered, At the rebuke of the LORD, At the blast of the **breath** of His **nostrils**.

# Anthropomorphisms:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **2 Kings 19:16** "Incline Your **ear**, O LORD, and **hear**; open Your **eyes**, O LORD, and **see**; and **hear** the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 33:20** But He said, "You cannot see **My face**; for no man shall see Me, and live."

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Deuteronomy 4:30** "When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His **voice**

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Numbers 6:25** The LORD make His **face** shine upon you, And be gracious to you;

# Anthropomorphisms:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 1:3** Then God **said**, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 3:8** And they heard the sound of the LORD God **walking** in the garden in the cool of the day . . .

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 9:14-15** "It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud and I will **remember** My covenant which *is* between Me and you . . .

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 2:24** So God **heard** their groaning, and God **remembered** His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

# Anthropomorphisms:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **2 Chronicles 12:7** Now when the LORD **saw** that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves;

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 139:5** (O LORD) You have hedged me behind and before, And **laid Your hand** upon me.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Isaiah 59:15** So truth fails, And he *who* departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the LORD saw *it*, and it **displeased** Him That *there was* no justice.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 20:5** you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a **jealous** God . . .

# Anthropomorphisms:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalm 37:13** The Lord **laughs** at him, For He sees that his day is coming.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Judges 2:18** And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to **pity** by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Deuteronomy 1:37** "The LORD was also **angry** with me for your sakes, saying, 'Even you shall not go in there

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Isaiah 61:8** "For I, the LORD, **love** justice; I **hate** robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant.

# Anthropomorphisms:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Jeremiah 3:14** "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for **I am married to you**. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

NKJ **Genesis 1:26-27** Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness . . ." <sup>27</sup> So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

NKJ **Genesis 1:26-27** Then God said, "**Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness . . .**" <sup>27</sup> So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

" . . . it is accepted as a major axiom of Judaism, from the biblical period onward, that **no material representation of the Deity is possible** or permissible.

**Encyclopedia Judaica**

## Judaism 101 –

“Although many places in scripture and Talmud speak of various parts of G-d's body (the Hand of G-d, G-d's wings, etc.) or speak of G-d in anthropomorphic terms (G-d walking in the garden of Eden, G-d laying tefillin, etc.), **Judaism firmly maintains that G-d has no body.** Any reference to G-d's body is simply a figure of speech, a means of making G-d's actions more comprehensible to beings living in a material world. Much of Rambam's Guide for the Perplexed is devoted to explaining each of these anthropomorphic references and proving that they should be understood figuratively.

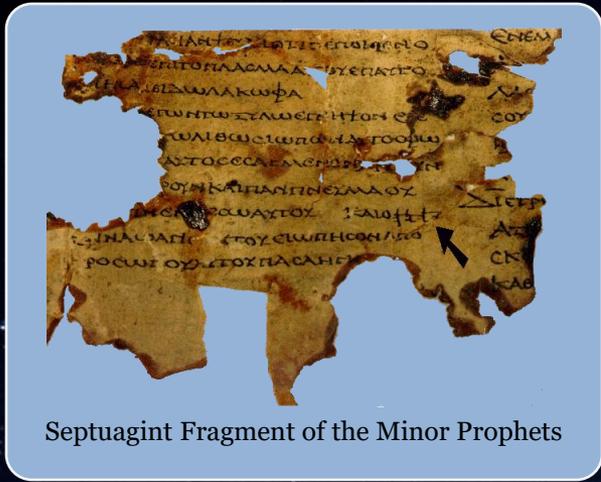
**We are forbidden to represent G-d in a physical form. That is considered idolatry.** The sin of the Golden Calf incident was not that the people chose another deity, but that they tried to represent G-d in a physical form.”



Fig. 2

“Ultimately, every religious expression is caught in the dilemma between, on the one hand, the theological desire to emphasize the absolute and transcendental nature of the Divine, thereby relinquishing its vitality and immediate reality and relevance, and on the other hand, the religious need to conceive of the Deity and man's contact with Him in some vital and meaningful way. **Jewish tradition has usually shown preference for the second tendency**, and there is a marked readiness to speak of God in a very concrete and vital manner and not to recoil from the dangers involved in the use of apparent anthropomorphisms.”

Encyclopedia Judaica



<sup>JPS</sup> **Exodus 29:45** And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.

Fig. 3



Septuagint Fragment of the Minor Prophets

**JPS Exodus 29:45** And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.

**LXX Exodus 29:45** And I will be called upon among the children of Israel, and will be their God.



Septuagint Fragment of the Minor Prophets

<sup>JPS</sup> **Isaiah 54:5** For thy Maker is thy husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and the Holy One of Israel is thy Redeemer, the God of the whole earth shall He be called.



Septuagint Fragment of the Minor Prophets

**JPS Isaiah 54:5** For thy Maker is thy husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and the Holy One of Israel is thy Redeemer, the God of the whole earth shall He be called.

**LXX Isaiah 54:5** For *it is* the Lord that made thee; the Lord of hosts is his name: and he that delivered thee, he is the God of Israel, *and* shall be called so by the whole earth.

The image shows the title page of a book. The text is centered and reads: "THE MASSORAH AND THE MASSORETIC TEXT." The background of the page is a light, aged paper color. The text is in a serif font. There is a faint circular stamp in the top right corner of the page.

THE MASSORAH  
AND THE  
MASSORETIC TEXT.

- Basis for “Old Testament” in protestant Bibles
- Compiled between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century CE
- Added vowel points, pronunciation marks, stress accents
- Made changes to the text to “correct” previous copyists “
  - Noted them as “Emendations of the Sofarim”

THE MASSORAH  
AND THE  
MASSORETIC TEXT.

<sup>JPS</sup> **Genesis 18:22** And the men turned from thence, and went toward Sodom; but **Abraham stood yet before the LORD.**

THE MASSORAH  
AND THE  
MASSORETIC TEXT.

<sup>JPS</sup> **Genesis 18:22** And the men turned from thence, and went toward Sodom; **but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.**

**Genesis 18:22** And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: **but YHVH stood yet before the Abraham.**

THE MASSORAH  
AND THE  
MASSORETIC TEXT.

<sup>JPS</sup> **2 Samuel 16:12** It may be that **the LORD will look on mine eye**, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing of me this day.'

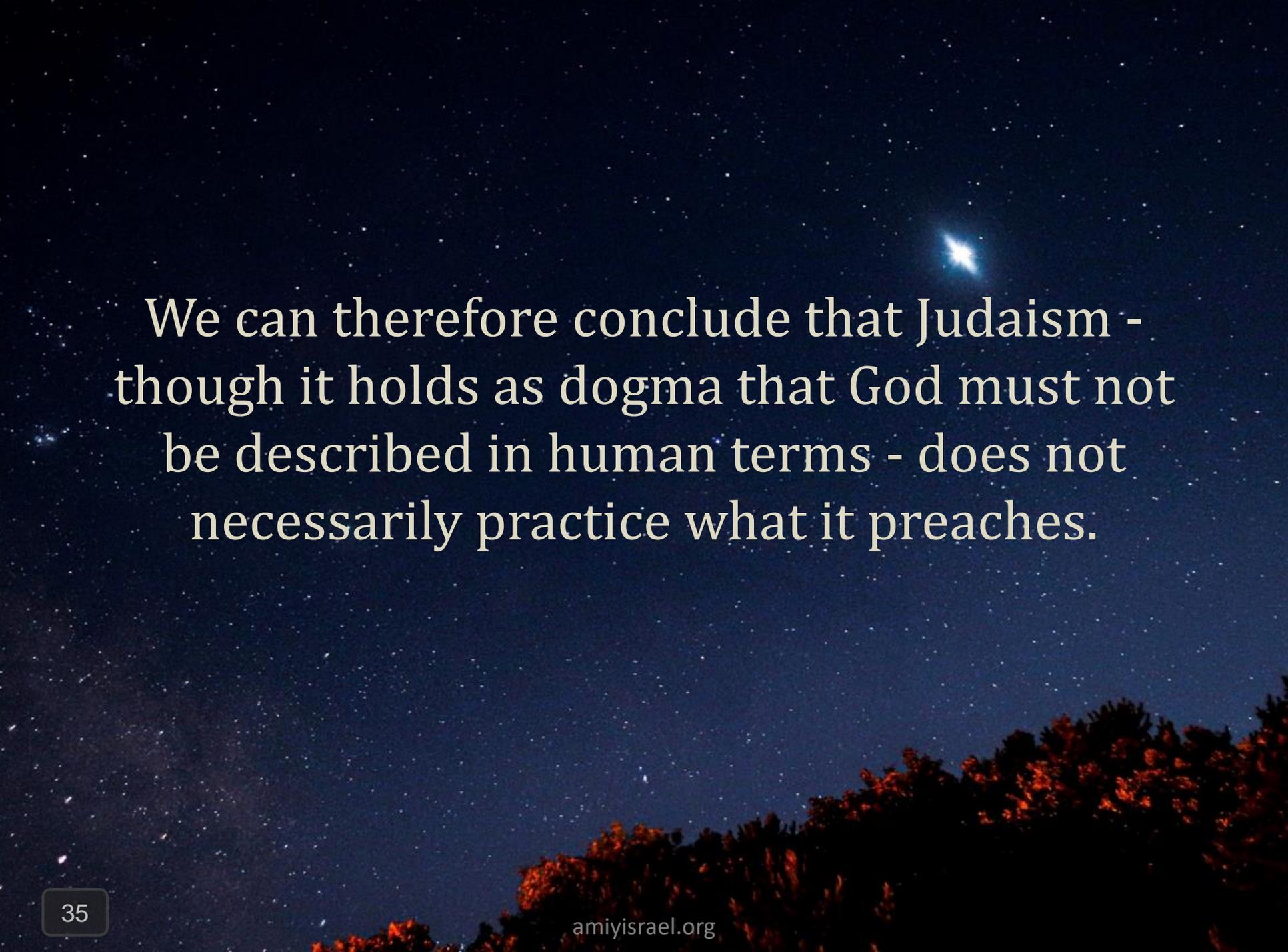
THE MASSORAH  
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<sup>JPS</sup> **2 Samuel 16:12** It may be that **the LORD will look on mine eye**, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing of me this day.'

**2 Samuel 16:12** **The LORD will behold with His eye**, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing of me this day.'

“At times the rabbis resort to anthropomorphic language in order to drive home a moral lesson. Thus God's "descent" on Mount Sinai is used for the following exhortation: "Let a man always learn from his Creator, for here the Holy One blessed be He forsook all of the mountains and high hills and caused His presence to rest on the lowly Mt. Sinai" (Sot. 5a). Similarly, on the third day after the circumcision of Abraham, "the Holy One blessed be He said to the ministering angels: Let us go down and visit the sick man."”

Encyclopedia Judaica



We can therefore conclude that Judaism - though it holds as dogma that God must not be described in human terms - does not necessarily practice what it preaches.

# Judaism



# Anthropomorphisms



# And The Messiah

## *Renewed Efforts to Stone Jesus*

31 Then <sup>a</sup>the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

32 Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works ~~do you stone Me?~~”

33 The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for <sup>a</sup>blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, <sup>b</sup>make Yourself God.”

34 Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, <sup>a</sup>*I said, “You are gods”*?”

35 “If He called them gods, <sup>a</sup>to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture <sup>b</sup>cannot be broken),

36 “do you say of Him <sup>a</sup>whom the Father sanctified and <sup>b</sup>sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ <sup>c</sup>because I said, ‘I am <sup>a</sup>the Son of God’?”

37 <sup>a</sup>“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

38 “but if I do, though you do not believe Me, <sup>a</sup>believe the works, that you may <sup>a</sup>know and <sup>b</sup>believe <sup>b</sup>that the Father is <sup>a</sup>in Me and <sup>b</sup>He sent Him.”

39 <sup>a</sup>Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

John 10

אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה אֶהְיֶה

"ehya - asher - ehya"

"I will be what I will be"

Exodus 3:14

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שְׁלוֹם אֲלֵיכֶם  
SHALOM ALECHEIM

*Peace be Unto You*