

## Empirical arguments for God in the Hebrew Scriptures

Berel Dov Lerner

*Western Galilee College, Akko, Israel*

berell@wgalil.ac.il

<https://wgalil.academia.edu/BerelDovLerner>

The Hebrew Scriptures openly adopt an empiricist religious epistemology which leaves their claims susceptible to disconfirmation by historical and archaeological research. The Hebrew Scriptures not only contain historiographical accounts of miraculous events; they also directly utilize these events theologically, discrediting foreign gods as impotent and/or non-existent in comparison with the observably active God of Israel. Accordingly, Elijah is described as performing a kind of public experiment on Mount Carmel, demonstrating the reality and power of the God of Israel and the unreality and impotence of Baal (I Kings 18). Some claim that it would be anachronistic to assume these texts were meant to be read as historically accurate, since their composition predates Thucydides' "invention of scientific history." However, biblical historiography was written in the light of a different, but no less critical, epistemic practice: the overseeing of contracts. Even societies which have not developed any notion of "scientific" truth in their historiography or writings on nature need some notion of objective *legal* truth, and methods of ascertaining that truth to enforce contracts and punish wrongdoers. Biblical historiography, including the miracle-filled narratives of the Exodus, the wanderings in the wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan, is covenantal; it records the process of consent to the covenantal *contract* between Israel and the God of Israel and the checkered history of its implementation. Thus, it subjects itself to legal norms of factuality. Those norms are strong enough to leave it open to the threat of disconfirmation by modern historical and archaeological research.