JEWISH MONOTHEISM: THE EXCLUSIVITY OF YAHWEH IN PERSIAN PERIOD YEHUD (539-333 BCE)

by

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Abstract

Studies about the origin of monotheism—the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others, have continued to be a matter of debate among Hebrew Bible scholars. The debate has often fallen into two contrasting categories. On the one hand, there are those who argue for an early origin in which it is posited that monotheism must have begun somewhere between the time of Moses and the monarchical period. On the other hand, others have argued for a late date which stretches from the exilic period to the Persian period. In spite of the different explanations given by the proponents of early monotheism, this thesis builds on the hypothesis that exclusive monotheism was only realized during the Persian period. The monotheistic rhetoric that characterized the message of Deutero-Isaiah, only came to be put into practice by the confessional community of faith among the returning exiles in Yehud.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs
BJS	Brown Judaica Studies
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BW	The Biblical World
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FTR	Harvard Theological Review
HAR	Hebrew Annual Review
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JSOR	Journal of the Society of Oriental Research
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
NEA	Near Eastern Archaeology
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NISBE	New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
SCJ	Stone-Campbell Journal
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

(i) Previous History of the Origin of Monotheism in Israelite Religion

The scholarship of the origin of monotheism in Israelite religion has been a matter of theological debate for years. While Israelite religion may be credited for having promulgated the monotheistic faith, its origin has never been determined with certainty. Thus, scholarly research emerged with divergent views, all aimed at discovering when exactly pure or exclusive monotheism was born. The scholarship of monotheism is often discussed within the context of two broad contrasting categories. On the one hand, there are those who argue that monotheism was an early development in Israelite religion.[1] Such a view posits that Israelite religion has almost always been monotheistic, from Israel's very inception. Two terms have often been employed in discussions regarding the early or pre-exilic origin of monotheism–evolution and revolution.[2] Under the evolutionary theory, it is believed that monotheism must have developed in gradual stages over time. The revolutionary theory, however, posits that monotheism was born out of a rebellion and displacement of polytheistic elements that characterized early Israelite religion. Those that subscribe to an early monotheistic origin have often cited specific events in the history of Israel that may have led to its formation.[3] On the other hand, there are those who argue that monotheism must have come into Israelite religion as a much later development. The

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1 For a comprehensive bibliography, see Mark S. Smith, *Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 195-99; William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process,* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 257-72; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 229-31; J. Milgrom, "Magic, Monotheism, and the Sin of Moses," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall* (ed. H.B. Huffmon, F.A. Spina, and A.R.W. Green; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 251-65; I.M. Zeitlin, *Ancient Judaism: Biblical Criticism from Max Weber to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1984); T.J. Meek, "Monotheism and the Religion of Israel," *JBL* 61 (1942): 21-43; Stephen H. Langdon, *Semitic Mythology* (Vol. 5 of *Mythology of All Races;* ed. Canon J.A. MacCulloch and George F. Moore; Boston: Marshal Jones Company, 1931; repr., New York, NY: Cooper Square Publishers 1964), xviii.

2 See the essay by David L. Petersen, "Israel and Monotheism: The Unfinished Agenda," in *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 92-107. cf. Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 23.

3 For example the reforms by the Yahweh-Alone movement led by Elijah, Elisha, and Hosea among others are believed to have led to both the evolutionary and revolutionary origin of monotheism in pre-exilic Israelite religion.

challenge this view continues to experience is the difficulty of determining the specific time period within which monotheism was born; whether exilic, post-exilic or even much later. Israelite monotheism and its origin could include themes too large for consideration in a short study like the present one. This review will, therefore, present a brief survey of those that support either of the views.

Those that argue for an early monotheism have often singled out three major landmarks during which monotheism could have been born. Scholars like Albright, among others, claim that monotheism originated with Moses, arising from his encounter with Yahweh at Sinai. This kind of monotheism is generally referred to as Mosaic monotheism.[4] The first and second of the commandments that Moses received from Yahweh, prohibited the veneration of any other deity apart from Yahweh (Exod 20:1-4). This is probably why it was generally believed that monotheism could have started with the Mosaic age, making Moses himself the first monotheist. For his part, Kaufmann, while believing in an early Mosaic origin, further tends to even downplay the place of polytheism in Israelite religion. He suggests that the perceived evidences of polytheism in Israelite religion were mere practises of magic, which probably filtered into Israel from the surrounding nations including the Canaan.[5] Another scholar who was a proponent of an early monotheism in Israel is Stephen Langdon. Langdon, while admitting that subsequent Israelite religion was no longer monotheistic but rather syncretistic or polytheistic, argued that Israelite religion was monotheistic from Israel's earliest existence in the ancient Near Eastern world. In his view, Langdon believed that the history of religion was a decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism. He cited the Sumerian religion dating back to 3000 BCE, and argued that the Sumerians back then had a total of 750 gods but that they ended up having about 5000 gods a millennium later. This phenomenon according to him is evidence that Israelite religion has been declining from its early monotheism to polytheism. The problem with this view, however, is that we do not find Judeo-Christianity increasing the number of gods any more. Instead, what we find is a more

4 Albright, *Stone Age to Christianity,* 257-72.

5 Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel,* 136; cf. Robert K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (*JSOTSup* 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 66.

refined monotheism than before. In defence of his position, Langdon wrote:

> I may fail to carry conviction in concluding that both in Sumerian and Semitic religions, monotheism preceded polytheism. . . . The evidence and reasons for this conclusion, so contrary to accepted and current views, have been set down with care and with the perception of adverse criticism.[6]

Some of the proponents of the early monotheistic view have argued that monotheism was born during the monarchical era. This includes scholars like Smith, Lang and McCarter.[7] Some of the monotheistic rhetoric in the monarchical period occurred during the time of the reforms of kings Hezekiah (715-687 BCE) and Josiah (640-609 BCE) who advocated for an exclusive worship of Yahweh.[8] It was also during the monarchical period that the "Yahweh-Alone" movement which advocated for an exclusive worship of Yahweh emerged. Among other practices, the Yahweh-Alone movement condemned the use of images in Israelite religion.[9]

A number of other scholars have argued in favor of a relatively late development of monotheism in Israelite religion.[10] Most of those that believe in the late development of monotheism tend to argue for the Persian and Hellenistic periods as being the time when exclusive monotheism was realized. Notable among them, are three scholars who have gone so far as to question the historicity of biblical Israel. These scholars include Thompson, Whitelam, and Davies. Thompson, for example, claims that it is difficult to compose the history of Israel, saying that the 'Israel' recorded in the Bible may be a scholarly construct of the Persian and Hellenistic periods.[11] For his part, Whitelam went on to say, "the

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6 Langdon, *Semitic Mythology*, xviii; cf. Arthur C. Custance, *Evolution OR Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 113-14.

7 See Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 23; Bernhard Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority: An Essay in Biblical History and Sociology* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 13-59; P.K. McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarchy: Biblical and Epigraphical Data," in *Ancient Israelite religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore* (ed. P.D. Miller, Jr., P.D. Hanson, and S.D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 139-43.

8 Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 60-61.

9 See Dirk J. Human, "Aspects of Monotheism: A Continued Debate," *OTE* 12.3 (1999): 498-500.

10 For a partial bibliography, see T.L. Thompson, "The Intellectual Matrix of Early Biblical Narrative: Inclusive Monotheism in Persian Period Palestine," in *The triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. D.V. Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 107-26; P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel:A Study in Biblical Origins* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2-10.

11 See Thompson, "The Intellectual Matrix," 107-112.

'ancient Israel' of biblical studies is a scholarly construct based upon a misreading of the biblical tradition and divorced from historical reality."[12] Davies argues that 'ancient Israel' is "a scholarly creation deemed essential to the pursuit of biblical studies."[13] Davies has also challenged the historicity of Persian period figures like Ezra and Nehemiah, whom he regards as mere products of post-redactional rationalizations.[14] All in all, Davies and his colleagues challenge the reality of themes that biblical readers have upheld on the basis of religious faith. Not only do they place the origin of monotheism into uncertainty, but they also question the biblical portrayal of the Hebrew God himself, whom they equate with the Babylonian and Persian gods Marduk and Ahura Mazda respectively.[15]

Some of the proponents of late monotheism have marked the exilic period as the "formative" stage of what would later become pure monotheism.[16] For his part, Mark Smith has gone on to argue that the exilic period was the time during which "Israel explicitly denied the power of all other deities."[17] As it will be pointed out later in the study, the exile had exposed the Judahites to the outside world in which their deity, Yahweh, was subordinated to other gods. Through the teachings of Deutero-Isaiah, the Judahite exiles endeavored to make Yahweh not only the god of the Judahites but also of the whole world. Baly, for example, believes that pure monotheism only became a reality under Deutero-Isaiah in the exilic period. However, he believes that monotheism was born out of a gradual process which began at Sinai in which Israel formed a covenant with Yahweh. Subsequent prophets like Elijah and Amos continued to build on the Sinaitic foundation which was eventually polished up by Deutero-Isaiah in the exile.[18] Although they differ on details, most of the proponents of late monotheism agree

[12] Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel,* 2-10; Thompson, "Intellectual Matrix," 107-26; cf. Human, "Aspects of Monotheism," 497.
[13] Davies, *In Search,* 29.
[14] Davies, *In Search,* 80.
[15] Human, "Aspects of Monotheism," 497.
[16] For those who consider the Babylonian exile to have been the formative period of Israelite monotheism, see Baruch Halpern, *From Gods to God: The Dynamic of Iron Age Cosmologies* (ed. M.J. Adams, FAT, 63; Tubigen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 13-56; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (vol. 1, trans. J.A. Bakker, OTL; London: SCM, 1961), 220-27, 363-64; and Smith, *Early History,* 3.
[17] Smith, *Early History,* 3.
[18] Denis Baly, "The Geography of Monotheism," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May* (eds. H.T. Frank and W. Reed; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 253-78; cf. Gnuse, *No Other*

with Baly that exclusive monotheism was finally achieved after a series of events. Morton Smith argues that monotheism was preceded by several reforms aimed at the exclusivity of Yahweh in pre-exilic Israel. Some of these reforms included those promulgated by prophets and the Deuteronomists, the Yahweh-Alone movement, as well as the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah. Smith further argues, however, that pure monotheism only came during the exilic and post-exilic periods following the initial influence of Deutero-Isaiah.[19]

Mark Smith, who is probably by far the most explicit on the development of monotheism, traces its origin through the processes of convergence and differentiation.[20] Under the concept of convergence, he makes it clear that we almost cannot discuss any aspect of Israelite religion in isolation from Israel's Canaanite background. Israelite religion in its early stages included some Canaanite features including the veneration of El, Baal, and Asherah; as well as other cultic practices at the high places, and devotion to the dead. Subsequently, through the ancient practice in which deities were elevated to state or national deity status in most cultures, Israelite religion tended towards monolatry—worshiping one god while believing in the existence of many. Examples of deities that were elevated in this manner include Marduk in Babylon, Ashur in Assyria, and Amun-Re in Egypt, and of course Yahweh in monarchic Judah and Israel. Through the process of differentiation, Israelite religion went through a transformation, in which it had to be separated from its Canaanite past. Differentiation operated through what Petersen has earlier characterized as "evolution" and "revolution."[21] Israel had to reject some Canaanite practices as her religion gradually grew towards monolatry and ultimately monotheism. It was ultimately Israel's insistence on a single deity that eventually distinguished her from all the surrounding traditions. Describing the development of monolatry and monotheism, and

Gods, 74-75.

19 Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952): 135-47; *idem, "*Religious Parties Among the Exiles Before 587,*"* in *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 15-56.

20 See Smith, *Early History,* 195-99.

21 Petersen, "Israel and Monotheism," 92-107.

how they were achieved through the processes of evolution and revolution, Smith summarizes as follows:

> It was an "evolution" in two respects. Monolatry grew out of an early, limited Israelite polytheism that was not strictly discontinuous with that of its Iron Age neighbors. Furthermore, adherence to one deity was a changing reality within the period of the Judges and the Monarchy in Israel. While evolutionary in character, Israelite monolatry was also "revolutionary" in a number of respects. The process of differentiation and the eventual displacement of Baal from Israel's national cult distinguished Israel's religion from the religions of its neighbors.[22]

Overall, what may be characterized as pure monotheism according to Smith only came to be realized sometime around the sixth and fifth centuries. This came as a result of all that has been stated, including reforms such as those by the Yahweh-Alone party, together with prophetic polemics against syncretism through Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah. Like the other scholars have noted, formative monotheism would have only come during the exile; but Smith is open to the view that monotheism continued to be refined in subsequent centuries.[23] From this brief presentation, it is evident that monotheism—the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others, has been the subject of a long standing debate, and we might add that it continues to be a contentious issue. However, except for scholars like Stephen Langdon who sees things differently, it seems to be unanimously agreed that in its early history, Israel's religion was polytheistic just like that of her neighbors. Through differentiation, Israelite religion gradually underwent a transformational process that slowly purged it of its Canaanite polytheistic heritage. This transformation did not immediately change Israelite religion into a monotheistic one. Rather, it was monolatry that was first achieved; in which Yahweh was worshiped without denying the existence of other deities. While recognizing that formative monotheism emerged during the exile (Is 40-55), this thesis will build on the hypothesis that exclusive monotheism was only realized in Persian period Yehud.[24]

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22 Smith, *Early History,* 198

23 See Smith, *Memoirs,* 119-123.

24 "Yehud" was a designation by which Judah was called during the Persian period. See Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 40.

(ii) Thesis Overview

Karen Armstrong writes, "Men and women started to worship gods as soon as they became recognizably human; they created religions at the same time as they created works of art. Like art, religion has been an attempt to find meaning and value in life."[25] Armstrong goes on to elaborate:

> The idea of god is formed by each generation or culture with a meaning connected to that society; and the meanings of different cultures may be incomprehensible, contradictory or even mutually exclusive of one another. For example, within the same culture, conceptions of god change over time. Every idea of god has a history. In every culture god is known by different names and worshiped in different ways.[26]

These observations are quite representative of the Israelites. Their religion was shaped by different circumstances in different time periods. Religion, like culture, including such human components like language, is dynamic and never static. The Israelite religion has experienced change and continuity from the earliest times of its existence in the ancient Near Eastern world, through the monarchical era, the Babylonian exilic period, the Persian Periods and beyond. Likewise, Israel's concept of god has never been a single one, consistent or even universal.[27] The Persian period around which this study is centred, is a significant one in the religious history of the Jews. This period has been described as seminal in Jewish history. That is to say, it influenced the developments of subsequent religious events.[28] An evaluation of the religious developments of this period as related to the conceptions of god is, therefore, not only significant to Second Temple Judaism, but to the New Testament times and beyond.[29]

In Chapter One, I shall evaluate the religion of pre-exilic Israel in light of Israel's polytheistic neighbors in the ancient Near Eastern world. In spite of the view by some scholars that Israelite religion

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[25] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000 – Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), xix.

[26] Armstrong, *A History of God,* xix.

[27] See the discussion by Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period* (Vol. 1; New York, NY: T and T Clark International, 2004), 240.

[28] Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to the Yavneh* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 13. Also see, Raymond F. Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 16.

[29] The designation "Second Temple" covers the period from 516 BCE to 70 CE; which is marked at the beginning by the dedication of the Second Temple that was rebuilt after the Jews came back from the Babylonian exile. See Philip E. Goble, ed., *The Orthodox Jewish Bible: Tanakh and Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha* (New York, NY: AFI International Publishers, 2003), 751.

was monotheistic from an early date, or from the earliest times of its existence, I shall argue to the contrary that Israelite religion before the exile was polytheistic. I will go on to elaborate that while the Israelites worshipped Yahweh as their sole deity, they did not altogether resist the temptation to worship the gods of their polytheistic neighbors in the ancient Near East. I will therefore contend that monotheism if anything, must have come as a late development in Israelite religion. It is probably true that monotheism was born during the Babylonian exile, through the work of a relatively unknown 'priest' referred to simply as Deutero-Isaiah. However, I shall attempt to prove that exclusive monotheism and other major religious developments that distinguished the Jews from the rest of the ancient world, were only realized later in the Persian period (539-333 BCE).[30] In Chapter Two, I shall evaluate the monotheistic statements in post-exilic Yehud. I shall outline the factors that led to an exclusive worship of Yahweh, leading to a monotheistic faith. In Chapter Three, I will present Exclusivism, one of the major developments in the Persian period. I will discuss the concept of Exclusivism, clearly stating how the Yehudites viewed themselves as being different from all other people because of their monotheistic relationship with Yahweh. I will demonstrate how Exclusivism, through the concepts of "Covenant Theology" and "Remnant Theology," made the Yehudites to be special and separate from all other peoples of their time. Ultimately, the idea in this Chapter is to discover how Yehudite exclusivity might have facilitated the emergent monotheistic faith in post-exilic Yehud. In Chapter Four, I will discuss another major religious development in Yehud–Angelology. Through Angelology, I will attempt to describe how the gods that comprised pre-exilic Israel's pantheon, came to be identified as angels. The discussion on angelology will describe the process in which Yahweh ended up becoming the only legitimate God worshiped by his people without any competitors; as all the other deities were 'demoted' to the status of angels.

[30] Deutero-Isaiah (40-55) is normally assigned to the exilic period. On this, see Grabbe, *Judaic Religion*, 34.

CHAPTER ONE
POLYTHEISM IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WORLD

1.1 Polytheism in the Ancient Near Eastern World

The ancient Near Eastern traditions including Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan among others, were highly polytheistic.[31] For these ancient cultures, god was viewed in terms of divine plurality, which biblical scholars have come to designate as "Divine Council," "Assembly of gods," or "Pantheon.[32] While the ancient Near Eastern traditions had a bearing on Israelite religion in one way or the other, this Chapter will focus more specifically on Canaanite religion which had a lot in common with that of Israel. Consequently, we will therefore simply reference Mesopotamian and Egyptian religions in passing, giving the reader a brief bibliography for further research. Mesopotamia, for example, which only came to have an impact upon Israel much later, had an assembly or pantheon of fifty great gods, which was headed by Anu, the chief god. It is said that over 2100 deities, consisting of both male and female, were worshiped in Mesopotamia.[33] Like Mesopotamia, a pantheon of gods also characterized ancient Egyptian religion, which operated under the chief deity, Amun-Re, the Sun god. Deceased pharaohs were believed to be divine, and occasionally, certain commoners such as Imhotep for

[31] For a comprehensive bibliography on the ancient Near Eastern gods, see S. Bertman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New York: Facts on File, 2003); G. Leick, *A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology* (London: Routledge, 1991); T. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); E. Hormung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); L.K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 87, 103-04; cf. J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1-3; J. Bottero, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 72-77; S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 164; M.C.A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine,* (UBL 8; Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 165-85; Assmann, *Search for God,* 101.

[32] See A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 171-227; Jean Bottero, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning and the Gods* (trans. Zainab Bahran and Marc van de Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 201-286; Brian Peckham, "Phoenicia and the Religion of Israel: The Epigraphic Evidence," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds. Patrick D. Miller Jr., et. al; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 79-99.

[33] Jean Bottero, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 45; T. Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz* (ed. W.L. Moran; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 404 n.50. For more on the gods that characterized the Mesopotamian pantheon, see: Gwendolyn Leick, *Mesopotamia: The Invasion of the City* (New york, NY: The Penguin Press, 2001), 20; John L. Mackenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 541; Karen R. Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Press, 1998), 182.

example, also became deified. One of the major developments in the Egyptian religious system was the process of Syncretism. Under Syncretism, different deities of the pantheon were combined together into a single deity. Consequently, the two gods–Re and Amon, were brought together, thus leading to the single god, Amon-Re, the head god.[34]

1.1.1 Polytheism in Canaanite Religion

Concerning the Canaanites, their religion exhibited polytheism of a complex and yet orderly character. Canaanite religion was characterized by a pantheon of different gods under the leadership of the three leading deities–El, Asherah and Baal.[35] El, the head of the pantheon was believed to be the creator and father of the gods. The creatorship of El is well attested in the Ugaritic texts. For example, he bears the epithet “bniyu binwti,” which means "creator of the created things."[36] Next to El in a hierarchal order is the goddess Asherah who is also referred to as Athirat and Ilat (i.e., goddess of the god El).[37] She is the wife/consort of El. She is usually associated with the sea, which is what probably earned her the title “Lady (or Asherah) of the Sea”[38] While El is considered to be the father of the gods on the one hand, Asherah on the other hand is often referred to as the "mother of the gods." Both El and Asherah participated in the work of creating the earth. Moreover, after El and Asherah comes Baal, a principal

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[34] For a comprehensive bibliography on ancient Egyptian pantheon see: See C.J. Bleeker, “The Religion of Ancient Egypt,” in *Religions of the Past, Historia Religionum: Handbook for the History of Religions* (eds. C. Jouco Bleeker and Geo Widengren, vol. 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 51-76; Helmer Ringgren and Ake V. Strom, *Religions and Mankind: Today and Yesterday* (ed. J. C. G. Greig; trans. Niels L. Jensen; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), 43-49; Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 30, 32, 89; E.O. James, *The Ancient Gods: The History and Diffusion of Religion in the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean* (New York, NY: Capricorn Books, 1960), 209; David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (ed. Byron E. Shafer; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 55–58; Françoise Dunnad and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE* (trans. David Lorton, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 27-8; John A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 209; Hugh Tobias, “Monotheism in Isaiah 40-55,” (Th.D. diss., University of Florida, 1982), 20; Dominic Montserrat, *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2000), 36.

[35] For detailed studies regarding the Divine Council or the Assembly of Gods in Canaan, see Mullen, *Divine Council*, 9-22; 113-209; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 115-152; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and the Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 13-225.

[36] Mullen, *Divine Council*, 13-14.

[37] Michael David Coogan, ed., *Stories From Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 13.

[38] Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 492.

deity in the Canaanite pantheon who was regarded as the storm and fertility god. Both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ugaritic texts the term "Baal" is used in a generic sense, meaning "lord," as well as in the sense of a proper name.[39] ‘‘Aliyn Baal’’ is one of the most common designations for Baal; a compound translated as “Most high Baal.”[40] Baal is said to have been worshipped as a god in many places that were often subsequently named after him.[41]

1.1.2 The Divine Council in the Ugaritic Texts

Until 1929, much of what was known about religion in the ancient Near East was dependent upon the testimony of the Hebrew Bible. However, from a historical point of view, the Bible is a document that has its own limitations. Goldenberg makes a very elaborate observation to that effect:

> From the historian’s point of view, the Bible presents a very difficult problem. Many, perhaps most, of its narratives were written long after the occurrences they describe (the story begins with the creation of the world!), and almost nothing in the Bible can be confirmed from any other ancient source of information. As always, with uncorroborated information, the modern reader is in no position to judge the Bible’s historical reliability, in no position to measure the distance between description and event, in no position to read the Bible’s stories and figure out what (if anything) really happened. . . . The Bible’s religious message is loud and clear, but we cannot always know how the described events would have appeared without the religious purpose that now shapes the narrative, or indeed how the authors of the Bible learned about those events in the first place.[42]

Of interest is the observation that whereas Asherah is identified as the consort of El in the Ugaritic texts, the Hebrew Bible instead associates her more with Baal.[43] This may have been an attempt by the scribes to avoid associating her with El, a designation that is often given to the Hebrew God, Yahweh. By implication, such an attempt would be avoiding the idea of portraying Yahweh as having had a consort or wife. Evidently, textual redaction is a common practice in the Hebrew Bible. As it will become evident, it seems to have been a way of 'purging' whatever was conceived as remnants of

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39 Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Baal in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 58.

40 See Oldenburg, *Conflict Between El and Baal*, 51; G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends: Old Testament Studies Series Number III* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 75.

41 See K. G. Jung, "Baal," *NISBE* I: 377-78.

42 Robert Goldenberg, *The Origins of Judaism: From Canaan to the Rise of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5, 8-9.

43 For further study on the identity of Asherah in both the Ugaritic and Old Testament texts, see Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *JBL* 105 (1986): 385-408; Idem, *Yahweh and the Gods* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 42-67.

polytheism from the text of the Hebrew Bible.

In light of Goldenberg's observation block-quoted above, what may be inferred is that, to some extent, the Bible may be described as a theological discourse. The editorial scribes who compiled it were more mindful of its theological or salvific content, that is, its relationship to the salvation of man rather than its historical essence.[44] Consequently, with the discovery of the Ugaritic texts in 1929, more information regarding the religions of the ancient past, including that of Israel, came to light. Craigie has given an elaborate summary of how these texts were discovered.[45] This discovery has brought enthusiasm and passion to scholars of ancient Near Eastern studies and the Hebrew Bible. Heiser, for example, observes that the discovery "marked a watershed in the study of the religious worldview of the Hebrew Bible."[46] Smith, says, "Thanks to the Ugaritic texts, scholars finally have a native Canaanite source to help reconstruct the relationship between Canaanite and Israelite religion."[47] Ever since the concept of "divine council" was exposed through the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, scholars have passionately embraced the opportunity to dig deeper into what the phrase entails and how it may have impacted the early Israelite understanding of God.

The enthusiasm regarding the discovery of the Ugaritic texts lies in part, in what they might reveal about Israelite religion and the Hebrew Bible in light of Israel's Canaanite polytheistic background. Among the earliest studies that sought to discover the relationship between the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible are the studies of Morgenstern, Pope, Obermann, Robinson, Kingsbury and

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44 Chapter One of this study has discussed in detail the editorial dynamics of the Hebrew Bible text.

45 In the spring of 1928, a farmer was ploughing some land on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. His name was Mahmoud Mella az-Zir, and he lived close to a bay called Mine el-Beida. The tip of his plough ran into stone just beneath the surface of the soil. When he examined the obstruction, he found a large man-made flagstone. He cleared away the earth, raised the stone, and beneath it he saw a subterranean passageway leading into an ancient tomb. Entering the tomb, he discovered a number of objects of potential value, which he sold to a dealer in antiquities. Though he could not have known it at the time, the agricultural worker had opened up more than a tomb on that spring day. He had opened a door, which was to lead to extra-ordinary discoveries concerning ancient history and civilization, and even to a new appraisal of the Old Testament.

46 Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2004), 1.

47 Mark S. Smith, *Early History*, 2.

Mullen.[48] Mullen, has been credited for being the first to have put the "divine council" material into book form.[49] More recently, authors like Smith, Heiser and McGinn have also substantially contributed to the conversation on "Divine Council."[50] The findings of the Ugaritic texts have revealed that the ancient Near Eastern concept of a pantheon is also evident in the Hebrew Bible. No one can fully appreciate the Hebrew Bible without knowledge of the world that produced it. Specific comparisons in this regard have been noted between the god of Israel and the two Canaanite deities, El and Baal.[51] In what follows, this study will investigate the dynamics of pre-exilic Israel religion in light of Canaanite traditions.

1.2 Polytheism in Pre-exilic Israelite Religion

1.2.1 Israelite Religion in light of its Canaanite Heritage

Attempting to understand the religion of pre-exilic Israel and all its intricacies can be a complicated undertaking. What makes it so complex is the fact that Israel was situated in the midst of a highly polytheistic world in which she had to compete socially, economically and religiously. It is almost impossible to understand the status of ancient Israel in isolation from her neighbors—particularly the Canaanites with whom she shared much in common. To that effect, Gaster's statement could not be truer, "A knowledge of Canaanite religion is an indispensable prerequisite for the proper understanding of the Old Testament."[52] In recent biblical scholarship, there have been some who argue that 'Israel' never existed as an entity distinguishable from its Canaanite context. It has been observed for example,

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[48] J. Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," *HUCA* 14 (1939): 29-126; Marvin Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (VT Sup 2; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955); J. Obermann, *Ugaritic Mythology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS* 45 (1944): 151-7; Edwin C. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *JBL* 83 (1964): 279-286; Edwin C. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *JBL* 83 (1964): 279-286; Mullen, *Divine Council,* 111-278.

[49] For this assertion and more on scholarly responses to the discovery of the Ugaritic texts and the discovery's illumination on the divine council in ANE, see Heiser, "Divine Council," 1-5.

[50] Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41-80; also see the relevant sections in Heiser, "The Divine Council," and Andrew R. McGinn, "Divine council and Israelite Monotheism," (M.Th. Thesis, McMaster University Divinity College, 2005).

[51] For a bibliography on these comparisons, see Smith, *Early History,* 2.

[52] Theodor Gaster, "The Religion of the Canaanites," in *Forgotten Religions* (ed. Vergilius Ferm; New York, NY: The Philosophical Library, 1950), 139; also see Smith, *Early History*, 6-7, 21, 27.

that almost all the attributes associated with Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible can be identified with one or another deity in Canaanite religion.[53] This has made scholars like Coogan, go so far as to view Israelite religion as a subset of Canaanite religion.[54]

1.2.2 Israelite Religion as Canaanite Religion—Identification Between El and Yahweh.

It is generally observed that early Israelite culture, which of course includes religion, cannot be easily separated from the culture of Canaan.[55] Israelite culture and religion of Iron Age I were in some ways a continuation of that of Canaan.[56] One area in which such continuity was apparent lay in the language they spoke. It is said that the Hebrew language sometimes bore the designation "the language of Canaan" (2 Kings 18:26, 28; Isa 36:11, 13; 2 Chr. 32:18; Neh. 13:24).[57] The fact that Hebrew could be designated "the language of Canaan" simply proves how intricately related the two nations had become. In other words, when two nations share a language, it is to be expected that they would also share some aspects of culture, as well as religion. It is in this respect that Canaanite religion may have influenced that of Israel and probably vice versa. Additional religious similarities between Israel and Canaan have also been noted in the terminology for cultic sacrifices and personnel. Examples include "Zebah," a slaughtered sacrifice offered to both Yahweh (Gen 46:1; Ex 10:25; Amos 5:25), and Baal (2Kgs 10:19; cf. KTU 1.11.16; 1.127; 1.148). An example of cultic personnel common to both nations includes "kohen," meaning Priest (2 Kgs 10:19; cf. KTU 4.29.1).[58] Those who argue that pre-exilic

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53 See Walton, *Ancient Near East,* 101.

54 M.D. Coogan, "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religions of Ancient Israel," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of F.M. Cross* (ed. P.D. Miller Jr. et. al.; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 115.

55 Smith, *Early History*, 19-20; L.E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1-35; C. Meyers, "Of Seasons and Soldiers: A Topographical Appraisal of the Ptemonarchic Tribes of Galilee," *BASOR* 252 (1983): 47-59; J.W. Rogerson, "Was Israel a Fragmentary Society?" *JSOT* 36 (1986): 17-26; E. Block-Smith and B. Albert Nakhai, "A Landscape comes to Life," *NEA* 62.2 (1999): 62-92, 101-27; A. Mazar, "The Iron Age I," in *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel* (ed. A. Bentor; trans. R. Greenberg; New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992), 258-301.

56 For discussions on this subject see J. Callaway, "A New Perspective on the Hill Country Settlement of Canaan in Iron Age I;" in *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages: Papers in Honor of Olga Tufnell* (ed. J.N. Tubb; London: Institute of Archaeology, 1985), 31-49.

57 Smith, *Early History*, 21; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (trans. R.A. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 106-107; R.F. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39: New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; London: Morgan & Scott, 1980), 171.

58 Smith, *Early History*, 22-24.

Israelite religion was a continuation of Canaanite religion have often cited such comparative features like Collar-rim jars, four-room house architecture, cisterns, and burial patterns all of which were common to both religions and cultures.[59]

Continuing with the debate on the relationship between Canaanite and Israelite religions, some scholars have seen some identification between the two gods, El and Yahweh. Contending that El was worshiped in both Israel and Canaan, Smith makes the following observation:

> The original god of Israel was El. This reconstruction may be inferred from two pieces of information. First, the name of Israel is not a Yahwistic name with the divine element of Yahweh, but an El name, with the element, *'el.* This fact would suggest that El was the chief god of the group named Israel. Second, Genesis 49:24-25 presents a series of El epithets separate from the mention of Yahweh in verse 18.Yet, early on, Yahweh is understood as Israel's god in distinction to El. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 casts Yahweh in the role of one of the sons of El, here called Elyon. . . .[60]

From this observation, it is clear that the Israelites may have earlier worshiped El, the Canaanite god. The fact that El epithets such as "El Shaddai" or "Bull of Jacob" could be used in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Gen 49:24-25; Ex 6:2-3) in reference to Yahweh without any conflict, argues in favor of a close identification between the two gods. The biblical El Shaddai is also identified as the god who appeared to Jacob at Bethel (Gen 43:14;48:3), and yet this same Bethel (house of God) could imply not only the house of the Hebrew God, but the house of the Canaanite El as well. This observation makes a case for those who see Israelite religion to have originally been a subset of Canaanite religion. Some scholars have also seen the lack of polemics against El in the Hebrew Bible, as a case in favor of the identity that may have earlier existed between El and Yahweh.[61] According to Dijkstra, the designation YHWH, was etymologically an epithet of the chief Canaanite god, El. It is believed that the meanings associated with the name YHWH, such as "He who shows his presence, makes his support manifest" or something similar, were epithets or attributes associated with El. These epithets later became the proper

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[59] See William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 102-107.

[60] Smith, *Early History,* 32. cf. G.W. Ahlstrom, "Where Did the Israelites Live," *JNES* 41 (1982): 134.

[61] O. Eissfeldt, "El and Yahweh," *JSS* I (1956): 25-37. Also see, F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays on the Religion of Israel* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44; C.E. L'Heureux, "Searching For the Origins of God," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (ed. Baruch Halpern, Jon D. Levenson; Wanona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 33-44.

name of the god of Israel, YHWH.[62] In this sense, it may be argued with Dijkstra who states, "El, was the original god of Israel, who in the process of divergence from other El deities, became elevated as the great and jealous El YHWH (Exod. 20.4; 34:14)."[63]

As the reader may be aware, explaining the origin of Yahweh, and how Yahweh ended up being the only god worshiped in Israel is not an easy endeavor, considering that El and Yahweh were closely associated with each other. However, Dijkstra's explanations are somewhat convincing. Dijkstra suggests that like Baal, Yahweh was possibly originally adopted into the pantheon of El, and that he may have risen to his high position in Israel by identification with El through a process of syncretism which excluded the other deities. It is also presumed that the veneration of the El of Israel as the "Jealous El," only came to be so after Israel was politically and culturally separated from Canaan[64] In this case, because Yahweh was identified or equated with El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, it would be expected for Yahweh to be raised to a high status in Israel after Israel was separated from Canaan. Another way in which the relationship between El and YHWH may be described is through a special kind of syncretism described by Dijkstra as follows:

> Deities receive each other's names and qualities without becoming merged or lost in one another, that is without dissolving the identities of the deities, who lie behind a new deity. Gods may adopt each other's names and epithets, that is absorb each other's essence and qualities and develop into a new divinity by convergence and differentiation, or even a new type of deity.[65]

An example of this syncretistic relationship between El and Yahweh could be that which existed between the two Egyptian deities, Amun and Re, who fused into one supreme deity Amun-Re. They were two separate deities who so functioned harmoniously that they were identified or equated with each other, yet without losing their distinct identities. The identification between the two deities may also be observed from biblical texts like (Ps 68:36, and Deut 33:26) in which El the canaanite god is

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62 Meindert Dijkstra, "El, the God of Israel—Israel, The People of YHWH: On the Origins of Ancient Israelite Yahwism," in Only One God?: *Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (Bob Becking et al; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 92.

63 Dijkstra, "El, the God of Israel," 92.

64 Dijkstra, "El, The God of Israel," 95, 104.

65 Dijkstra, "El, The God of Israel," 96.

also designated as the god of Israel (Jeshurun).[66] It is in this sense that early Israelite religion was as much polytheistic as that of Canaan—making it a subset of Canaanite religion, as some have suggested.

1.3 The Presence of Israel as a People in Canaan

1.3.1 Israel as an Alien Invading Culture

The biblical narrative on how the Israelites emerged in Canaan, is in favor of what has come to be known as the Conquest model or hypothesis. According to this model, the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan and made it their homeland (Josh 1:1-13:7). The earliest known reference to the name "Israel" has been traced to the Merneptah stele, an Egyptian record dating ca. 1209 BCE. It is an inscription produced by the ancient Egyptian king Merneptah, who reigned from 1213 to 1203 BCE. This inscription appears on the reverse side of a granite stele erected by the king Amenhotep III. The stele has popularly become known as the only ancient Egyptian document generally accepted as mentioning the name "Isrir" or "Israel."[67] The testimony of this stele is in agreement with the biblical record, which acknowledges the existence of the Israelites in Egypt; a people delivered by Yahweh out of their Egyptian bondage; who subsequently conquered and settled in the land of ancient Canaan (Exodus 6:1-8). For the purposes of the present study, this stele is significant on two counts. First, it affirms the historicity of Israel, in that they did in fact exist as a people or nation who may have at one time been resident in Egypt before they came to Canaan. Second, the stele also gives us an idea regarding the timeline of ancient Israel.[68] Some scholars argue that the reference to Israel in this stele may have implied that Merneptah, himself could have been the Pharaoh at the time of the exodus,

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[66] See Dijkstra, "El The God of Israel," 104.

[67] For more information about this stele and the circumstances under which Israel was mentioned, see Carol A. Redmount, "Bitter Lives: Israel in and out of Egypt," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael D. Coogan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 97; Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, "Merenptah 1213-1203 BC," in *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 183-184; Margaret Drower & Flinders Petrie, *A Life in Archaeology* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985), 221; Alessandro Bongioanni and Maria Croce, ed., *The Treasures of Ancient Egypt: From the Egyptian Museum in Cairo* (Cairo: Universe Publishing, 2003), 186.

[68] According to the stele, the Israelites were recognizable from the early 1200s BCE. It follows therefore, that the designation "ancient Israel" or "ancient Israelite religion" could be dated to as early as 1200 BCE. In the present study, this designation applies to the period from ca. 1200 BCE to 587 BCE; which marks the beginning of the Babylonian exile.

which would ultimately argue in favor of the Conquest hypothesis.[69] However, as it shall become evident later, this view of the Israelite origin, has not been unanimously accepted by Bible scholars.

1.3.2 Israel as a Subset of Canaanite Culture

Contrary to the biblical testimony in which the existence of the Israelites in Egypt is acknowledged, modern scholarship, inspired by recent archaeological finds, sees it otherwise. Some scholars have come to believe that the Israelites were a community that arose 'peacefully and internally in the highlands of Canaan.'[70] By implication, such a claim denies the story of the exodus, which occupies a central place in the Hebrew Bible. Among the detailed studies examining the idea of an Israelite conquest and occupation of Canaan is the work of Brettler. He observes that the arguments against the Israelite conquest of Canaan as recorded in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Josh 1:1-13:7) include the fact that other than the Israelites, the Philistines are also said to have conquered some cities in Canaan within the same time frame.[71] This by necessity raises the question, "Did the conquest ever take place and by who, Israelites or Philistines?" It has also been argued that the artifactual evidence of the conquering people was not different from those of the natives of the land of Canaan. This fact supports the view that Israel as a nation may have simply originated from within Canaan and not outside, in this case Egypt, as the biblical record states. Moreover, unlike what one would expect to find in a conquered country such as ruins or rubble, to the contrary, it is said that there was nothing of that kind in Canaan. Instead, more intact settlements were actually evident particularly in the northern parts of the country.[72] It has also been argued that had the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites actually taken place, we would have expected to find Canaanite material culture including pottery jugs and housing styles replaced by new ones brought by the conquering nation, Israel. The absence of such evidence has been seen as

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69 P.A. Clayton, *Chronicles of the Pharaohs: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers and Dynasties of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 157.

70 Gnuse, *No Other Gods*, 31; also see, William Stiebing, *Out of the Desert: Archaeology and the Conquest Narratives* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1989), 159-65.

71 Marc Zvi Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95-96.

72 Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible,* 95-96.

discrediting the historicity of the Israelite conquest of Canaan.[73]

Another scholar who has done an in-depth study on the topic of Israelite origin, is Stager. As Stager has rightly observed, one reason why the biblical record of Israelite conquest of Canaan may need a critical analysis in light of archaeological findings, is because the Deuteronomic Historian (DH), the author of the historical books of Joshua and Judges for example, recorded the conquest events more than six hundred years after they happened.[74] This means therefore, that we have every reason to question the accuracy of the biblical record on the subject. Considering the early date of the Deuteronomic Historian's record, it is probably true that his sources were largely oral, handed down from generation to generation. As it may be expected, any information transmitted orally, invariably differs from the original one over time. In the continuing debate of the true origin of the Israelites in Canaan, scholars have devised three hypotheses including the "Conquest Hypothesis," the "Pastoral Nomad Hypothesis," and the "Peasant's Revolt hypothesis."[75] The Conquest hypothesis posits that the Israelites may have come into Canaan as conquering immigrants and thereby making it their homeland. This view is in line with the biblical record (Judg 5). The Pastoral Nomad hypothesis, claims that the Israelites originated as nomads who kept sheep and goats from the eastern desert steppes into Canaan, who then evolved from pastoral nomads to more stable agricultural settlers. While this hypothesis somewhat agrees with the biblical narrative in that the Israelites emigrated from outside of Canaan (possibly from midian), it does not subscribe to the idea of a conquest in which some Canaanite cities and dwellings were destroyed. Rather, these nomadic pastoral people are believed to have established peaceful relations with the Canaanites, and that they for the most part inhabited sparsely populated areas in the wooded highlands. However, this hypothesis too, is not beyond scrutiny. It is unlikely that all the people who came to be identified as Israelites could have originated as pastoral nomads. Arguing

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73 Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible,* 95-96.

74 See Lawrence E. Stager, "Forging An Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael D. Coogan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 93.

75 Stager, "Forging An Identity," 93-107.

against this hypothesis, Stager wrote:

> But it is difficult to believe that all these newly founded Iron Age I settlements emanated from a single source, namely sheep-goat pastoralism. In symbiotic relations, the pastoral component rarely exceeds 10 to 15 percent of the total population. Given the decline of sedentarists in Canaan through out the Bronze Age, it seems unlikely that most of the Iron Age settlers came from indigenous pastoralist backgrounds.[76]

Moreover, the Peasants' Revolt hypothesis, claims that the Israelites emerged as a group of oppressed peasants within Canaan, who revolted against their masters after which they fled the urban cities in search of refuge. According to this hypothesis, these run-away peasants ultimately re-grouped to form the ethnic group that came to be known as "Israel." These peasants were believed to be propertyless people who depended on their superiors whom they served as servants or laborers. They were often identified with the "Apirus" in second-millennium BCE texts from parts of the Near East. Again, this hypothesis too, even if it does not subscribe to the conquest view, equally does not convincingly account for the true origin of the Israelites. The fact that they could be identified with the Apirus, a group of nomadic invaders or raiders who were attested in Egyptian sources among other ancient Near Eastern traditions, may imply that they may have come from outside of Canaan. This would probably make them to have been among Israelite immigrants from Egypt, who according to the biblical narrative conquered parts of Canaan.

Since this research is based on the Hebrew Bible, whose central characters include the Israelites who are believed to have emigrated from Egypt, we will concentrate more on the conquest hypothesis in light of the other two. While some dramatic cultural change is acknowledged in Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1200 BCE), how much of that may have been caused by the invading Israelites is still an open question. Regarding the conquest hypothesis therefore, and as a general rule of verifying a mass movement of people from one homeland to another, Stager has enumerated some helpful criteria which may help in evaluating its authenticity as follows:[77]

[76] Stager, "Forging An Identity," 103.
[77] Stager, "Forging An Identity," 94.

> 1. The implanted cultures must be distinguishable from the indigenous cultures in the new zones of settlements. If the intrusive group launches an invasion (as proponents of the Israelite "conquest" postulate), then there should be some synchronous discontinuities, such as the destruction layers, separating the previous "Canaanite' cultures from the newly established "Israelite" cultures in the zone of contention.
>
> 2. The homeland of the migrating/invading groups must be located, its material culture depicted, and temporal precedence established in its place of origin. In the case of the invading Israel, this should be the Transjordan or in Egypt.
>
> 3. The route of migration/invasion should be traceable and examined for its archaeological, historical, and geographical plausibility. If the new immigrants took an overland route, the spatial and temporal distribution of material culture should indicate the path and direction of large-scale migrations.

Criterion # 1 above, already disqualifies the conquest hypothesis in light of the data presented earlier, which dismissed any cultural change evincing an Israelite occupation. Further, according to the biblical narrative (Num 21:21-31), the Israelites conquered several cities during the Exodus from Egypt to Canaan including Heshbon, Sihon, Medaba in Amon, as well as Dibon in Moab. However, modern excavations are said to have found no evidence of late Bronze Age occupation in most of these places, with only a few remains from Iron Age I. As for Criterion # 2, while the Merneptah stele referenced earlier, mentions the existence of "Israel" in Egypt, most of the Transjordan territories are said to have not been occupied during the time of the Israelite exodus from Egypt. This revelation equally brings the conquest hypothesis into question. Moreover, Criterion # 3 similarly disqualifies the conquest hypothesis. One way in which the Israelite migration/invasion could be traceable, is by scrutinizing the reality of the biblical claim in which some cities are said to have been conquered by the Israelites. These include Jericho and Ai, believed to have been conquered by the Israelites (Josh 6), and (Josh 7:2-8:29) respectively. Through archaeological excavations however, Jericho had not been occupied during the thirteenth century, and Ai had not been occupied even in the second millennium as its ruins dated only from the latter part of the third millennium.[78] From these archaeological/biblical narrative dichotomies and many more, too numerous for a complete elaboration here, the criteria in question tend to discredit the Conquest hypothesis. Therefore, if these archaeological findings which discredit the

[78] Stager, "Forging An Identity," 95-97.

conquest hypothesis are something to go by, then we have no choice but to account for the existence of Israel in Canaan through the other two hypotheses which suggest an indigenous origin. We would thus conclude with Stager (just like Coogan whom we referenced earlier) who says, “The evidence from language, costume, coiffure, and material remains suggest that the early Israelites were a rural subset of Canaanite culture and largely indistinguishable from Transjordanian rural cultures as well.”[79]

Not many scholars have convincingly argued in favor of the Conquest hypothesis. However, some have raised the uncertainty of the actual location of some of the places mentioned in the historical books of Joshua and Judges, in order to support the biblical conquest view. As Merling has observes, the biblical writers' endeavor to qualify Ai for example, by saying, “Ai which is near Beth-aven,” “east of Bethel” (Josh 7:2), may imply that the actual locations of these cities has not been established with certainty; a fact which archaeologists acknowledge. That being the case, according to Merling, the absence of ruins for such cities as Ai or Jericho where they were expected to be found, does not discredit the Conquest hypothesis.[80] In this case the absence of the ruins may imply that archaeologists may have searched in wrong places. Another important observation regarding the limitation of archaeology was raised by Brandfon who wrote:

> It is just as likely that a sequence of events, such as the invasion of Canaan first by Israelites and then [also] by Philistines, would leave many different traces in the stratigraphic record all over the country. It is also possible that a sequence of historical events may leave no traces in the stratigraphic record at all. Or it may be the case that the stratigraphic traces which were originally left behind by events have been eroded by natural forces or destroyed by later stratigraphic processes. It seems most likely that, in excavating strata of the land of Israel at the time of the Conquest or settlement, all of these possibilities will be found as each site yields its own stratigraphic sequence. The archaeologists must therefore contend with the fact that the inference of historical events–invasion of Canaan first by Israelites, then by Philistines, for example–is far from self-evident or self-explanatory from a stratigraphic standpoint. Again, the archaeological evidence does not dictate the historical "story” that can be told from it.[81]

In concluding this section, it is important to state that we cannot exhaust the issues surrounding the relationship between archaeology and the validity of the biblical Conquest hypothesis as recorded

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79 Stager, “Forging An Identity,” 102.

80 David Merling, “The Book of Joshua, Part II: Expectations of Archaeology,” *AUSS* 39.2 (2001): 210-11.

81 Fredric Brandfon, "The Limits of Evidence: Archaeology and Objectivity," *Maarav* 4 (1987): 27,28. Also see, G. Ernest Wright who came to similar conclusions in “What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do," BibZkl Archaeologist 34 (1971): 73.

in the books of Joshua and Judges. Each of the two has its own limitations. It is probably true that the Bible is a record of data pertaining to the salvation of humankind without much focus on historical details, a fact we stated earlier. Archaeology itself cannot be all-sufficient in clarifying details left out from the biblical record due to some of its own limitations already pointed out. Until some overwhelming evidence to discredit the books of Joshua and Judges regarding the Conquest hypothesis comes up, it is probably safe to take the biblical record as accurate as it stands. Moreover, whether the Israelites emerged as invading aliens or simply as people that arose peacefully within Canaan, it remains true that the circumstances of their origin did not change the fact that they were as polytheistic as the native Canaanites. They may have started off as mono-Yahwists from the time Yahweh was revealed to them at Sinai, but once they were settled in Canaan, the evidence we have reviewed shows that they were as polytheistic as the Canaanites.

1.4 The Emergence of Yahweh in Iron Age Israelite Religion and the Midianite Hypothesis

The religion of the Israelites, particularly during Iron Age I (ca. 1200-587), like many religions in the ancient Near East, was based on the cult of the ancestors and the worship of family gods (the "gods of the fathers").[82] These gods included El, Asherah, and Yahweh, with Baal as a fourth god in Israel's early history.[83] By the early monarchy however, El and Yahweh had become identified and Asherah did not continue to exist as a separate state cult, although she may have remained popular until the Persian times.[84] Scholars like Van der Toorn have observed that Yahweh, who later became the national god of both Israel and Judah, may have originated from Edom and Midian in southern Canaan, and that he may have been brought north to Israel by the Kenites and Midianites at an early stage.[85] While equally acknowledging his Midianite origin, other scholars have gone on to postulate that Yahweh was

[82] Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1992), 410-11.

[83] Smith, *Early History*, 57.

[84] See Dever's contribution to the discussions on early Israelite religion in William Denver, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 207.

[85] Karel Van der Toorn, et al., eds., "YAHWEH יהוה," in *DDD*, 911-13.

venerated as a local weather god in Midian, just like Baal in Syria and Palestine.[86] As to how Yahweh became the god of the kingdom of Israel, Van der Toorn observes that with the emergence of the monarchy at the beginning of Iron Age II, the king (Saul) had promoted his own family god, Yahweh, as the god of the kingdom; but that beyond the royal court, religion continued to be both polytheistic and family-centered, as was the case with the other nations in the ancient Near East.[87]

The so-called Midianite hypothesis, put simply, is a theory by which some scholars have attempted to account for the Midianite origin of Yahweh. According to this theory or hypothesis, Yahweh originated from Midian, a land that was located in the North-west Arabian Peninsula, on the east shore of the Gulf of Aqaba near the Red Sea.[88] Midian is the place where Moses had escaped to, after he murdered the Egyptian (Ex 2:11-15). Midian may also have been named after Midian, a son of the patriarch Abraham (Gen 25:2). In talking about the Midianites, or the Midianite hypothesis, we are essentially talking about the Kenites or Kenite hypothesis, as the two are linked with each other genealogically. For example, Exodus 3:1 refers to Jethro, Moses' father-in-law as priest of Midian, while Judges 1:16, refers to him as a Kenite. For this reason, this hypothesis may therefore rightfully be phrased as "Kenite-Midianite Hypothesis," since the kenites were descendants of the Midian. Before coming to Palestine, it is believed that Yahweh was earlier known and revered by the Midianites and Kenites from a very early period. Accordingly, the biblical Moses had acquired knowledge about Yahweh through the Midianites and Kenites. Moses then introduced Yahweh to the emigrants fleeing from Egypt into Palestine. It was this group of emigrants that subsequently acquainted the tribes in Judah with Yahweh, including the frequent immigrants to Canaan as well as those indigenous in Canaan.[89]

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[86] P.E. Dion, "YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god. The Double Legacy of Egypt and Canaan as reflected on Psalm 104," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 48-58.

[87] Karel Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylon Syria and Israel* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1996), 181-82.

[88] See, William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 34.

[89] See Marlene E. Mondriaan, "The Rise of Yahwism: role of Marginalized Groups," (PhD Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2010), 2-3.

What we elaborated above is the Kenite-Midianite hypothesis as it stands to-date. Several Hebrew Bible scholars and authors have somewhat endorsed this hypothesis. For his part, Lemche begins by observing that there is "no evidence of a deity called Yahweh in Palestine prior to the emergence of Israel."[90] Further to this observation, Lemche goes on to say that Yahweh must have therefore been brought to Palestine from the Sinai Peninsula between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the establishment of the Israelite monarchy.[91] Likewise, Albertz also supports the view that Yahweh must have originated from outside of Palestine where he was worshiped by the nomadic Kenites and Midianites before he was worshiped by the Israelites.[92] It is assumed by some scholars that the Kenites and Midians among other nomadic peoples may have later introduced Yahweh to the North.[93] Albertz further elaborates that Moses himself became acquainted with Yahweh through his midianite father-in-law, Jethro, after which he introduced him to the Israelites fleeing from Egypt through the Exodus.[94] On the question of whether or not the Midianites may have earlier worshiped Yahweh before the coming of the Israelites, that question has been answered in the affirmative. The reason for such a conclusion, as it has been postulated, is because both parties, the Midianites and Israelites once participated in a sacrificial meal to Yahweh, which suggests that Yahweh may have been worshiped by the Midianite people long before the Israelites (Ex 18:12).[95]

The Kenite-Midianite hypothesis has not been without criticism. It has been observed for example that, "Yahweh existed before the Hebrew people existed and was worshiped in the land of Canaan when the Hebrew tribes were still practising the cult of their fathers."[96] This view of the Canaanite origin of Yahweh and Yahwism, not only challenges the validity of the Kenite-Midianite

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90 N.P Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 252-55.
91 Lemche, *Ancient Israel,* 253.
92 Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: From the Beginnings to the End of the Exile* (vol. 1; trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1994), 49-55.
93 See Mondriaan, "Rise of Yahwism;" 333.
94 Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion,* 51-55.
95 Albertz, *A History of the Israelites,* 52.
96 Giovanni Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (trans. J. Bowden; New York: Crossroad, 1988), 57.

hypothesis, but the biblical model as well.[97] Jagersma, another scholar who discredits the Kenite-Midianite hypothesis, raises two objections against the theory. First, he argues that we do not find any credible data in the extant sources regarding the actual religion practised by the Kenites and Midianites, thereby linking them to a Yahweh worshiping religion. Secondly, Jagersma also argues that we do not find evidence of the name Yahweh, anywhere outside of Israel before the time of Moses.[98] Another challenge against the Midianite hypothesis, is the one raised by Hyatt. Hyatt observes that although Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, is described as a priest of Midian, he is not specifically referred to as a priest of Yahweh. It is also not stated anywhere that Yahweh was the deity of the Midianites or Kenites.[99] As the reader may have noticed up to this point, the Kenite-Midianite hypothesis, together with the accompanying arguments for and against, can be a whole study on its own, too large for exhaustion in here. However, based on the data we have reviewed so far, it can be argued that even if the kenite-Midianite hypothesis has its own weaknesses, the truth is that the first time we come across the name Yahweh, was in Midian during the exodus. This observation is well substantiated in Ex 6:3 —"and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them" (NASB). Whether or not the god Yahweh (LORD) was known and worshiped by the Kenites or Midianites remains an open question. What we do know however, is that it was during the time Moses was in Midian that this name was first revealed to him. Moreover, if Abba's view is right, in that Moses gained knowledge of the divine name Yahweh, which he later identified with "the god of the fathers" from the kenites or Midianites, then it might be argued that the Kenite-Midianite hypothesis has credibility to it.[100]

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[97] Arguments regarding the origin of Israelite religion have already been discussed in the section, "Israel As An Alien Invading Culture or Subset of Canaanite Culture" above.

[98] Henk Jagersma, *A history of Israel to Bar Kochba* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1994), 39.

[99] J.P. Hyatt, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Exodus* (Rev ed.; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 78-79.

[100] For the argument that Moses gained knowledge of the divine name Yahweh, from the Kenites or Midianites, see R. Abba, "The Divine Name Yahweh," *JBL* 80 (1961): 320-21.

1.5 Inner-Biblical Polemics Against Canaanite Religion

An analysis of early Israelite religion has shown that the Israelites did not altogether resist the temptation to recognize and even worship the gods of their polytheistic neighbors. Intolerant or exclusive monotheism if anything, was only a much later concept which as some scholars have argued, may have first emerged during the exilic period.[101] There is evidence in support of such a position in the Hebrew Bible. Right from the outset, we note that there are many biblical polemics against Baal worship (Josh. 24; 2 Kings 18:1-5, 10:18-28; Jer 2; Ezra 9:6-15). Why would the Bible attack Baal worship if it were not a characteristic feature of Israelite religion? Further, in a survey of passages in which reference is made to Baal worship, such features as the 'high places' at which Baal worship occurred within Israel have been noted (e.g. Num 22:41; Judg 2:11; 3:7; 8:33; 10:6, 10; and Hosea 2:13).[102] It is therefore, no wonder that such Canaanite (pagan) cultic practises were carried out in Israel in order to warrant a strong polemic against them during the biblical period when the text of the Hebrew Bible underwent the redactional process.

Among the other observations evincing Israelite veneration of Canaanite gods, one can be found in Hosea 2, in which this prophet pointed out that Baal had been illegitimately made to take the place of Yahweh, in the affections of his people, Israel, whom he characterizes as harlots. The illegitimacy associated with Baal in this sense indicates a polemic against him in the Hebrew Bible. Elaborating on the character taken on by canaanite paganism in Israelite religion, Kaufman says the following about Second-Isaiah's polemics:

> The classic polemics against idolatry found in the Second-Isaiah express the biblical conception of pagan worship in its most vivid form. No previous prophet ever arraigned idolatry, ever heaped abuse upon it with such zeal and persistence. And yet, this unremitting attack, this stream of taunts and mockery, plays on one theme only: the monstrous folly of believing that idols can be gods. How much energy and poetic artistry are devoted to prove this single point![103]

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[101] Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People,* 89.

[102] It has been suggested that בעל במות probably refers to the "high places of Baal." See Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5; Waco, TX: Word Book Publishers, 1984), 266.

[103] Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (translated and abridged by Moshe Greenberg; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 16.

As Kaufmann has rightly pointed out, the fact that Second-Isaiah could take so much effort, zeal and energy to prove to the Israelites of his time that the idols were anything but real gods, speaks to their being worshiped in Israelite religion. In this sense, Second-Isaiah may therefore be categorized in the ranks of other prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah among others who waged vicious polemics against the polytheism or idolatry that characterized both Canaanite and Israelite religions. Moreover, it is important to stress that even if such polytheism was typically Canaanite, the polemics by Israelite prophets against it imply that it was a characteristic feature of early Israelite religion as well.

1.6 Israelite Polytheism in Light of Archaeological Finds

Some archaeological finds have supported the presence of Baal worship in pre-exilic Israel. Such finds include temples dedicated to Baal worship, including smaller shrines, open-air sanctuaries, as well as cultic altars excavated at Zorah, Megiddo and Tell en Nasbeh. Cultic objects have also been found including libation bowls, pottery incense stands, steles representing deities, as well as other artifacts relating to pagan worship.[104] Of interest also, is the role of the goddess Asherah in Israelite religion. Asherah has some forty references in the Hebrew Bible, sometimes in the plural and other times in the singular. Her identification is divided between the Asherahs in the plural, thus referring to the wooden images prevalent in Canaan or in Israel as well, and the single Asherah with reference to the living goddess herself (Judges 3:7; 1 Kings 14:13, 18:19; 2 Kings 21:7, 23:4). Many scholars have been more comfortable with the identification of Asherahs as in wooden images rather than a goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible.[105] Understandably, this is in an effort to avoid venerating the goddess Asherah that would otherwise make her an equal or competitor of Yahweh.

However, the fact that some cult objects dedicated to the goddess Asherah could be found in the

[104] For more on these archaeological finds, see William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1942), 36-67. For a further description of the finds up until the early 1960's, see Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament* (trans. G. W. Anderson; Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 3-16.

[105] See Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 42.

Jerusalem temple itself (1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:4, 7; 2 Kings 21:7; 1 Kings 18:19) argues for polytheism in pre-exilic Israelite religion. For example, the fact that a statue of Asherah is reported to have stood in Solomon's temple for about two-thirds of its existence, may suggest that she was worshiped in some form of polytheism along with Yahweh.[106] The passages cited above contain references to cultic objects dedicated to Asherah, including her image and cultic personnel or prophets. The presence of such objects in the Jerusalem temple itself can only imply that Asherah occupied a prominent place in Israelite religion, which has prompted some scholars to argue that Asherah "must, then, have been a legitimate part of the cult of Yahweh."[107]

While arguments about the true status of Asherah in Israelite religion may be inconclusive, what further complicates the situation, are the more recent archaeological findings, which have been perceived as implying that the Israelite god had a consort.[108] This is a case in which some excavated inscriptions, one in the heartland of Judah, the other in the northern Sinai contains controversial blessing phrases with possible translations of "Yahweh and his Asherah."[109] Further, other inscriptions have also been reported in Sinai, which read, "I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah;" while two other inscriptions use the formula: "I bless you by Yahweh of Teman (the South) and his Asherah."[110] Again, literature on this discussion is abundant. What comes out clearly however, is that like that of El, the status of Asherah in Israel was often treated with a divine undertone. In other words, as much as Asherah was considered a 'legitimate' goddess in Canaan, so was she in Israel. Understandably, the Yahweh-alone party, believed to have participated in the compilation of the Hebrew Bible, had actually rejected Asherah's divine legitimacy. This has been seen as a possible

[106] For discussions about the statue that was reported in the Jerusalem temple, see Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 50; and Saul Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 13.

[107] Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult*, 13.

[108] Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 86-102.

[109] Karel van der Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* (ed. L. Goodison and C. Morris Madison; Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1998), 88-89.

[110] Toorn, "Goddesses in Early Israelite," 89.

explanation of why the Hebrew Bible does not have the language associating Yahweh to a consort.[111]

While questions have been raised on whether the "Asherah" was a reference to a cult object or to a goddess, the general consensus tends to support a goddess Asherah being a consort of Yahweh.[112] Obviously, the implication of such a conclusion would be that Yahweh, the god of Israel, had a consort or wife; thus equating him to El the head god of the pantheon at Ugarit who had Athirat (cognate of Hebrew Asherah) as his consort. All these observations, in spite of the debates around them, continue to argue against an exclusive or pure monotheism in pre-exilic Israelite religion. Moreover, through more archaeological finds, a considerable number of small, clay, female statuettes, which archaeologists usually call "pillar figurines," have also been excavated across Israel.

These figurines date to the 8th and early 7th centuries BCE; that is, to the height of the Israelite monarchy.[113] The abundance of such figurines excavated in the heartland of Judah has led some scholars to conclude that they are "a characteristic expression of Judahite piety."[114] By implication, such figurines may argue in favor of some form of aniconism in pre-exilic Israelite religion. If such an implication is to be refuted, the challenge for Hebrew Bible scholars is to find an explanation for why such figurines would be found in the heartland of Judah, the home of the presumed monotheistic people. Unfortunately, no convincing explanation exists to date, leaving it an open question for further research. Byrne, while recognizing the characterization of Judahite religion with pillar figurines, has gone further to suggest why they proliferated particularly during the late Iron II Judahite period. He observes that during that time period, Judah was under constant attacks and threat of invasion from the Assyrians. As a result, under King Manasseh who himself was a depraved king (2 Kgs 21:1-7), Judah found herself promoting the fertility cult in which pillar figurine goddesses such as Asherah meant to

[111] Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 42.

[112] See Grabbe, *Judaic Religion*, 214; Idem, *Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian: The Persian and Greek Periods* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 54-55; and Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israe*l (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 281-82.

[113] Raz Kletter, *The Judaean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah* (London: Tempus Reparatum, 1996), 4, 40-41.

[114] Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses,* 327.

procreate the national population were venerated.[115] Again, it is clear that pre-exilic Israelite religion was either syncretistic, aniconic or polytheistic, and not monotheistic.

1.7 Problematic Texts in the Hebrew Bible

Gen 6:1-4 makes a strong case in favor of a polytheistic pre-exilic Israelite religion.[116] This passage describes a time in the history of the world when the "sons of the god(s)" saw that the daughters of men (female humans) were beautiful and took for themselves some of them for wives as they chose. A complete analysis of this passage can be a study on its own too large for a comprehensive analysis here.[117] We will therefore limit ourselves to an analysis of the Hebrew phrase בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים. The phrase, בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים or literally "sons of the god(s)" poses an exegetical challenge, and yet ultimately makes an argument that early Israelite religion was not monotheistic but rather polytheistic. To begin with, scholars have never been in agreement on whether the noun, אלהים, is singular or plural. As Rollston observes, the Hebrew noun, אלהים (Elohim) is morphologically plural, which by implication renders it as "gods."[118] However, he further observes that this noun could also be semantically singular, "god," and that this is probably the context in which it is used in the Hebrew Bible in reference to Yahweh, the God of Israel.[119] It has been observed that the ambiguity of the expression (ha) אלהים was actually sensed by ancient Israelites who occasionally substituted it with both "'elim" (plural) and Elyon (singular).[120] It would seem that for the most part, they probably depended on the context to determine

[115] Ryan Byrne, "Lie Back and Think of Judah: The Reproductive Politics of Pillar Figurines," *NEA* 67.3 (2004): 148-49.

[116] For an exegetical analysis of this passage see Ronald S. Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4," *JBL* 106 (1987): 13-26.

[117] For further discussions on the phrase including 'Elohim's etymology and grammatical plural form, see Helmer Ringgren, "Elohim," *TDOT* 1 (1974): 267-284. For discussions on Elohim's theological significance, see Abraham Kuenen, *An Historical-Critical Inquiry into the Composition of the Hexateuch* (trans. Philip H. Wicksteed; London: Macmillan, 1886), 55-8; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), 184; and Joel S. Burnette, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 1-152.

[118] Christopher A. Rollston, "The Rise of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: Biblical and Epigraphic Evidence," *SCJ* 6 (2003): 102. Also see Helmer Ringgren, "Elohim," *TDOT* 1 (1974): 267-284.

[119] Rollston, "Rise of Monotheism," 102.

[120] See S.B. Parker, "Sons of (The) God(s)," *DDD*, 794.

whether it was singular or plural. One passage in which we have elohim function both as singular and plural is Ps 82:1 in which "Elohim has taken his place in the divine council." Steussy notes:

> Here, *elohim* has a singular verb and clearly refers to God. But in verse 6 of the Psalm, God says to the other members of the council, "'You [plural] are *elohim.*'" Here, *elohim* has to mean gods. In a few places, the meaning is unclear. In Gen 3:5, the snake tells the woman that when she and her man eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, "'you [plural] will be like *elohim*.'" Will they be "like God" (*New Revised Standard Version*) or like "gods" (*King James Version*)? We cannot say for certain.[121]

The real problem therefore is in those instances where elohim carries a plural connotation. How can the God of Israel refer to more than one divine being? Who are the other members who share in his divinity? Questions like these may only be answered in light of Israel's conception of the divine council which we earlier alluded to.

Based on the fore-going discussions in which we established that Israelite religion was comparable to that of polytheistic Canaan in many ways, we may treat Elohim both as singular and plural for two reasons. As some scholars have observed, it could be singular in reference to the head god of the pantheon, that is, the Israelite national god.[122] Secondly, the plural aspect of the designation אלהים (god or gods), may also simply be a remnant of the polytheism evident in early Israelite religion in which there was not only one god but many.[123]

As for the Hebrew בְּנֵי (sons) in בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of (the) God(s), which is masculine, plural, construct, definite), it is proper that we analyze them in light of the divine council already alluded to. It may be inferred that the deities referred to are "male offspring" or sons ("male children") of the head of the pantheon, comparable to the sons of El in the Ugaritic paradigm. These sons to the god or gods were themselves gods serving under the head god, Yahweh. This characterization is in line with a number of scholars who argue that ancient Near Eastern motifs of the assembly of divine beings are replete in the Hebrew Bible. For example, there are those who consider Gen 6:1-4 as being a "fragment

[121] Marti J. Steussy, ed., Chalice Introduction to the Old Testament (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2003), 11.
[122] Christopher A. Rollston, "The Rise of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: Biblical and Epigraphic Evidence," *SCJ* 6 (2003): 102.
[123] See Helmer Ringgren, "Elohim," *TDOT* 1 (1974): 267-284.

of mythical narrative" originating from Ugarit.[124] In his analysis of this Hebrew phrase, Hendel, sees some parallels in terminology with Ugaritic and other Semitic mythology in which such divine beings comprise a divine council under the rulership of a head god. In a long footnote, Hendel elaborated on the identity of the "sons of the God(s)" as follows:

> The identity of the *bene-ha-elohim* is clear from their frequent occurrences in biblical and other West Semitic lore. They are the lesser gods who meet in Yahweh's assembly (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1; Ps 89:7; with the older form *bn 'lm* [compare the Ugaritic *bn ilm*]. They were present with Yahweh at the dawn of creation (Job 38:7), and they were shortly thereafter apportioned among the nations (Deut 32:8, Q: *bn 'lhym*). The *bn il* or *bn ilm* occur dozens of times in Ugaritic mythology, with a similar range of functions as their Israelite counterparts. The chief god of the pantheon, El, is called *ab bn il,* "father of the sons of El," which indicates that the term *bn il* originally included the notion of the patrimony of El. . . .[125]

In his commentary on the book of Genesis with special attention to Gen 6:1-4, Brueggemann is in agreement with the other scholars that the "sons of the god(s)" are reminiscent of the Canaanite sons of El as reflected in the Ugaritic texts. He argues that the sons in question refer to "lesser gods in a polytheistic understanding of the world."[126] Likewise, Westermann argues that the sons of the gods were divine beings in a mythological sense, saying that only in their divine status could they have been distinctly superior to humans as in the context of Gen 6:1-4.[127] Westermann, criticizes the view that the "sons of the god(s)" are angels and not lesser gods wondering how renowned scholars like Delitzsch for example, could uphold such a belief. He remarks, "It is surprising that . . . these scholars, who otherwise are so careful and precise, have not noticed that the two words are concerned with very different phenomena and occur in completely different contexts . . ."[128] With all that we now know from the divine council and the similarities between Israelite and Canaanite religions, we would probably agree with Westermann that any attempt to deny the prevalence of mythological motifs not only in the passage here under consideration but the entire Hebrew Bible is somewhat ridiculous.

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[124] See H. Haag, "Son" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (trans. J.T. Willis; ed. G.J. Botterweck and H. Riggren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 157.

[125] Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge," 16 (footnote 16).

[126] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*: *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 71. Also see B.S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1960), 49.

[127] *Clause Westermann, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion S.J.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 371.

[128] Westermann, "Genesis 1-11," 371.

Obviously, if the phrase "sons of the god(s)" were in reference to angels, the scribe would have employed the word מלאך (angels) instead of בְּנֵי (sons). In the context of the present chapter, our interest is to trace the polytheism that characterized pre-exilic Israel. While we might not have sufficient room to address all the exegetical implications of Gen 6:1-4, it suffices to say that pre-exilic Israel believed in a council of gods just like her neighbors in the ancient Near East. While her religion has undergone a transformation over the centuries, still, it is not uncommon to find remnants of such polytheism in the Hebrew Bible just like the case in Gen 6:1-4. Just as the Ugaritic *bn ilm* were understood to be "gods" or "divine beings" under El, so were the "sons of the god(s)" in Gen 6:1-4 under Yahweh.[129] It has been argued that the biblical identification of Elohim with Yahweh means that the *bene-ha-elohim* were closely related to the god of Israel in the divine council paradigm.[130] The unity or closeness between the god of Israel and the "sons of the god(s)" in the divine council has been traced in biblical passages where Yahweh speaks in first person plural such as Gen 1:26—"Let us make man in our image," and Gen 3:22—"The human has become like one of Us."[131]

Again, in all this, the point to be noted is that early Israelite religion comprised a pantheon just like the other religions in the ancient Near East. Yahweh was considered to be the national god of Israel in a divine council paradigm similar to the one at Ugarit. However, as Rollston observes, "Certain segments of Judaism and Christianity have been slow to embrace the idea that early Israelite religion originally accepted a pantheon of deities (but with Yahweh as the national deity of Israel)."[132] The tendency in Judeo-Christianity has been one of denial in which the idea of a polytheistic pre-exilic Israelite religion is suppressed in favor of a monotheistic one. This probably explains why renowned Hebrew Bible scholars like Delitzsch and Ross would support the idea that the "sons of the God(s)" are

[129] See Parker, "Sons of (the) Gods," 794-95.
[130] Parker, "Sons of (the) Gods," 794.
[131] Parker, "Sons of (the) Gods," 797.
[132] Christopher A. Rollston, "The Rise of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: Biblical and Epigraphic Evidence," *SCJ* 6 (2003): 103.

angels and not gods.[133] Like Gen 6:1-4, a similar concept of a divine council may also be found in Job 38:7; Ps 29; 82; 89; and Dan 3.

Another passage that evinces polytheism in the Hebrew Bible is Deut 32:1-9. This passage equally reveals how scribes, in their effort to make the biblical text sound theologically correct, ended up deviating from the original reading of the text. Deut 32:8 is a text of particular interest in this regard, because of the text-critical challenges it poses. We shall first quote the Hebrew text of Deut 32:8 as it appears in the Hebrew Bible, and then give the English translation:

בְּהַנְחֵל עֶלְיוֹן גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יַצֵּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

The Hebrew rendering presented above is the reading of the Masoretic text. Deut 32:8 can be translated in two different ways depending on how the last word is rendered. Some biblical translations have the last word as (אלהים) and others have (ישראל). Therefore, the translation could be, "When the most high (עֶלְיוֹן) gave the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of humankind, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of the 'god' or sons of 'Israel.'" The sources that opted for the אלהים reading include the Oxford Hebrew Bible (OHB) and Qumran 4QDeut^{j}. Those that have the "Israel" reading include the Biblia Hebraica Stuttergartensia (BHS), the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). It has been argued by Emmanuel Tov, that the reading in the Qumran source (4QDeut^{j}, בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים) may be the original reading of Deut 32:8.[134] Interestingly, the Septuagint (LXX) reading, unlike the other readings, renders it as (ἀγγέλων θεοῦ), that is, "Angels of God." It is possible as we saw earlier that at the time the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (LXX), there may have been a tradition in which (בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים) were believed to be Angels. However, this reading is not consistent with the Hebrew vorlage, בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים—to be translated

[133] See F. Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1888), 226; A. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 182.

[134] For more information on the evaluation of the variant readings of Deut 32:8, see Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 269.

simply as "sons of the god(s).[135]

An analysis of this passage indicates that the presence of the "most high" god (עֶלְיוֹן)) in early Israelite religion means that there were other lower ranking gods who operated under him. That being the case, like in the case of Gen 6:1-4, it may therefore be concluded that there was a concept of a pantheon in early Israelite religion like the one at Ugarit. Further, going by the Qumran (4QDeut^{j}) rendering "sons of the god(s)" (בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים), it may be argued, as stated earlier, that the sons of the "most high" god are themselves gods. In this case, Yahweh the god of Israel may have been one of the sons of El according to Deut 32:9; and Israel was his inheritance. As Rollston sums it up, "In short, this text demonstrates that at a very early stage of Israelite religion (1) Yahweh was understood as a "national deity," and Israel was his "assigned nation." (2) Significantly, however, at this stage in Israelite religion, Yahweh was not yet the head of the pantheon, עֶלְיוֹן) was."[136] Further evidence of a pantheon in early Israelite religion is evident in Ps 89:7-8 in which Yahweh is portrayed as one of the sons of El in the divine council. The idea of a divine council is also evident in Ps 82:1, which speaks of God judging among the gods. The בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל variant reading for example, may have been an attempt by scribes to convert what was perceived as a polytheistic text into a monotheistic one. All these facts contribute to the argument that early Israelite religion was polytheistic and not monotheistic.[137] It would seem that every attempt to alter the text of Deut 32:8 from its perceived original reading for the sake of theological correctness, has not altogether removed its polytheistic undertone. To that effect, Joosten observes:

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[135] The German word "vorlage" refers to the original manuscript or the original language version of the text from which a translator works out a translation. For more information, see Jonathan D.H. Norton, *Contours in the Text: Textual Variation in the Writings of Paul, Josephus and the Yahad* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark International, 2011), 4; David Noel Freedman and Pam F. Kuhlken, *What Are the Dead Sea Scrolls and Why Do They Matter?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 10.

[136] Rollston, "Rise of Monotheism," 105. Cf. Smith, *Biblical Monotheism,* 47-53; and Day, *Yahweh and the Gods,* 20-25.

[137] For related arguments, see P. Skehan, "A Fragment of the 'Song of Moses' (Deut. 32) from Qumran," *BASOR* 136 (1954):12-15; and Rollston, "Rise of Monotheism," 105-106.

> In fact, the polytheistic background of Deut. xxxii is manifest whichever reading is adopted in verse 8. The author of the song knows of other gods, mentioning their existence in verses 12, 17, 21, 31 and 37. He underlines YHWH's superiority over them: the other gods are non-gods, . . ., their force doesn't match that of the God of Israel. When YHWH himself declares: "I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me" (verse 39), this should not be taken as a declaration of theoretical monotheism, but of YHWH's incomparable might and sovereignty.[138]

1.8 Conclusion

By way of concluding this chapter, it is important to highlight a few outstanding characteristic features of pre-exilic Israelite religion. First, the Israelites were bound up in a covenantal relationship with Yahweh as their national god. However, like other religions in the ancient Near East, the Israelites acknowledged and even worshiped other gods throughout the history of their early existence. The evidence is clear from some of the passages already presented in this chapter. Secondly, a pantheon typical of the one at Ugarit characterized the early Israelite concept of god. Scholarly exegetical analysis of Gen 6:1-4 and the other passages already presented elaborate that fact. Thirdly, it is a generally observed phenomenon that the scribes who initially received the text of the Hebrew Bible had repeatedly attempted to purge the text of its polytheistic remnants; albeit in order to dissociate the biblical text from its Canaanite origins. A typical example can be found in the variant readings of "sons of Israel" versus "sons of god(s)" in the analytical discussion of Deut 32:8 presented earlier in the chapter. Fourthly, monotheism, if anything, must have only arisen later in Israelite religion. What we find in early Israelite religion, all the way to the monarchic era, is at most monolatry—worshiping one god without denying the existence of other gods.[139]

As this study has observed, exclusive monotheistic claims only became evident during the Babylonian exile dated to the sixth century BCE. To that effect Lester Grabbe has observed, "It has commonly been accepted that it is in Second Isaiah that we first find a monotheistic view in which other gods are not only denigrated but even have their existence denied (Isa. 41:21-29; 43:10-13; 44:6-

[138] Jan Joosten, "A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy XXXii: 8," *VT* 57 (2007): 553.

[139] For the definition of monolatry, see Frank E. Eakin Jr., *The Religion and Culture of Israel* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), 70.

8; 45)."[140] While exclusive monotheistic rhetoric has been assigned to the exilic period, this study will build on the hypothesis that the actual practice of monotheism by a confessional community was only realized in post-exilic Yehud. The returning Jews in post-exilic Yehud comprised the first known community to have practised exclusive monotheism which also denied the existence of other gods. Chapter Two, will present among other issues, the factors which led to Israel's transitioning from a polytheistic religion to a monotheistic one.

[140] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 217.

CHAPTER TWO
FROM POLYTHEISM TO MONOTHEISM IN YEHUD

2.1 Continuities and Discontinuities in Israelite Religion

Up to the end of the previous chapter, efforts to trace exclusive or pure monotheism in pre-exilic religion failed. Religion in all the ancient cultures we examined was polytheistic. When it came to pre-exilic Israel, the worshipers of Yahweh who would have been the champions of monotheism, they equally did not exhibit an exclusive worship of Yahweh. Instead, they worshiped Yahweh along with other gods. In order for us to discover the extent to which monotheism was practised in Yehud, we will have to evaluate the features that characterized Yehudite religion. However, religion itself is a complex concept that needs to be defined from different perspectives and with specific terms. As Becking observes, such perspectives may include doctrinal, theological, historical and sociological components among others; while identifying features may include rituals, conventions and codes.[141] The present chapter will discuss the factors that contributed to the development of monotheism in Yehud.[142] The idea is to discover how the post-exilic Jews transitioned from a faith of what seemed to be either polytheistic or syncretistic in pre-exilic Judah, to an exclusive worship of Yahweh in post-exilic Yehud.

In transitioning from monarchic Judah to post-exilic Yehud, Jewish religion had undergone a process of change and continuity. First and foremost, it is important to mention that the concept of continuity was very significant in the minds of the returnees. Continuity was considered to be a way of identifying themselves as a remnant of the pre-exilic chosen people of God, Israel.[143] The list of names in Ezra 2, which genealogically links the returnees to pre-exilic Israel, has thus made scholars like McConville argue, “the central question [in Ezra 2] is: who belongs to 'Israel'? . . . The idea of Israel is preserved in order to make the argument that the returning exiles are the legitimate descendants of old

[141] Becking, “Continuity and Discontinuity,” 3.

[142] “Yehud” was the Aramaic name for post-exilic Judah. As will be stated in this chapter, when the exiles returned home under the Persian authorities, Aramaic became the official language of communication and consequently Judah popularly became known as Yehud.

[143] The significance of the concept of “remnant” in Yehudite religion shall be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Israel, and therefore the covenant community and heirs to God's promises."[144] From this observation, it can be inferred therefore that the idea of "Israel" or Israelite identity, was one of the major continuities from the pre-exilic era. Continuity with pre-exilic Israel is also discernible in the area of worship. For example, in several places in Ezra, Yahweh, who was the God of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms before the exile, is equally identified as the God of the returnees.[145]

Another continuity lay in the returnees' commitment to upholding the significance of the temple in their spiritual lives. Not only were they to re-build the temple that was destroyed at the time of the exile, rather, they were to re-built it at the exact cite where the former temple once stood (Ezra 2:68; 5:15; 6:7). The temple occupied a very significant role in the spiritual lives of the returning Jews. As Becking observes, the temple gave post-exilic Jews a religious identity and ". . . a home to gather and to worship YHWH in a world where other religions and other forms of Yahwism were present."[146] The exclusive dedication of this temple to Yahweh in a world that had other forms of religion, argues in favor of the fact that monotheism—the exclusive belief and dedication to one god, Yahweh was the faith of the Yehudites in post-exilic Yehud. Along with the re-building of the temple, it was also ensured that the worship vessels that were once removed from the temple be restored to it. Two authors, Kalimi and Ackroyd, have separately stressed why there had to be continuity in the use of the original temple vessels. Kalimi for his part says, "The purpose of stressing continuity in the use of the same vessels was to demonstrate that the holiness of Zerubbabel's temple can be comparable to that of Solomon's.[147] Ackroyd, while noting that the restoration of these temple vessels signified a vital cultic continuity with pre-exilic Israel, summarizes his views as follows:

> Restoration of the vessels implies re-establishment of that continuity of the cultus which was in some measure interrupted by the disaster of 597 [BCE]. . . . Thus across the disaster of the exile, in which the loss of the temple might seem to mark an irreparable breach, there is a continuity established which enables the later

[144] J.G. McConville, "Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy," *VT* 36 (1986): 203-224. Cf. Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies* (2 ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 43-43.

[145] See, Ezra 1:3; 3:2; 4:1, 3; 5:1; 6:14, 21, 22.

[146] Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity," 269.

[147] Isaac Kalimi, *An Ancient Israelite Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place and Writing* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 46; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 122.

> worshipper to know, through the actual vessels in use, that he stands with his ancestors in the faith. This theme makes its contribution to the wider one of continuity in priesthood and in worship as ordered by the Levitical officials of various kinds.[148]

Along with the continuities, a few religious discontinuities have also been noted between the two Jewish eras. First, before the exile, the kingdom of Judah was under the leadership of a monarchy (Davidic dynasty) which "functioned as a symbol of divine presence and protection."[149] However, the Persian period Jewish community was under the leadership of a priesthood.[150] Some scholars have suggested that Ezra may have served as a continuation of the priesthood that was started by Aaron before the exile.[151] In light of the present discussion, the priesthood may have spiritually guided the Yehudites into a better relationship with Yahweh than was the case with the monarchy that had become politically corrupt. This discontinuity may have therefore facilitated the developing monotheism in that sense. Secondly, the prophetic office had also been discontinued by the mid fifth century BCE, giving way to the priesthood.[152] The fact that Yehud was under the leadership of priests from the fifth century BCE onward, has led some scholars to argue that it had in practise become a theocratic nation.[153] Under a theocracy, it is probably to be expected that the community was to receive better guidance regarding the will of Yahweh for them, than was the case under the monarchy. With the end of the Davidic kingship in this period, we also note that this was the time when the Princes, *nasi* came on the stage as future representatives of Israel (Ezek 43). Thirdly, while Yahweh was worshiped in both monarchic Judah and post-exilic Yehud, the discontinuity lay in the fact that in Yehud, Yahweh came to be without a consort.[154] Along with the many pre-exilic tribal gods that were done away with, the goddess

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[148] Peter Ackroyd, "The Temple Vessels—A Continuity Theme," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (VTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 175, 180.

[149] Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity," 4.

[150] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 17.

[151] See Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series; ed. D.J. Wiseman; Downers Grove: Inter-Vasity Press, 1979), 62.

[152] Lee I. Levine, *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Persian Period (538 BCE-70 CE)* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 34.

[153] Stephen M. Wylen, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 25.

[154] Lester L. Grabbe, "Israel's Historical Reality after the Exile," in *The Crisis Of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 31.

Asherah, who was closely associated with Yahweh, was also eliminated. This means that Yahweh had become the sole God of worship in post-exilic Yehud. In some sense, this discontinuity has been understood as a change from a faith of polytheism to one of monotheism.[155] Fourthly, while the temple and its cultic activities were continued in the post-exilic period, under what Friedman has categorized as "The Age of Mysteries," the Ark of the covenant which existed in Solomon's temple was missing in the Yehudite temple.[156] It is not clear how the loss of this item might have impacted religion in Yehud. Moreover, another major discontinuity occurred in the area of language. Whereas Hebrew was the official language in pre-exilic Judah, Aramaic instead came to be the official language in post-exilic Yehud.[157]

2.2 Monotheistic Language in Yehud

We established in Chapter One, that Israelite religion before the exile was typically polytheistic; which was characterized by the worship of familial protective deities.[158] Yahweh happened to be just a warlike god that would protect his people in times of war; and had subsequently become their national god.[159] The exile has therefore been considered by some scholars as the formative period of Israelite emergent monotheism.[160] This emergent monotheism was made possible through the message of Deutero-Isaiah, a prophet of the exilic period, who advocated for a monotheistic faith.[161] However, several Hebrew Bible scholars have argued that only in Persian period Yehud do we first find an exclusive monotheism

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155 Grabbe, "Israel's Historical Reality," 31.

156 Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 155-56. There has not been any convincing explanation for where the Ark of the covenant was taken following the Babylonian invasion, and why it has never been restored to the Second Temple. There is no evidence that the Ark was among the vessels that were carried away from Solomon's temple by the Babylonians, which further compounds the question.

157 Levine, J*erusalem: Portrait of the City,* 36-37.

158 See for example, Van der Toorn, *Family Religions,* 4-7.

159 See Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period* (vol. 1; London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 240-44; D.V. Edelman, ed., *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (CBET 13; Kampen: Kok, 1995); 18-25. B. Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity," 5-6; Smith, *Early History of God,* 185-86.

160 Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 220-27, 363-64; Christopher B. Hayes, "Religio-Historical Approaches: Monotheism, Morality and Method," *Morality Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (ed. Joel M. Lemon and Kent H. Richards; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 178-81.

161 See Isaiah 45:5-7; Smith, *Early History*, 191-96.

which equally denies the existence of other gods.[162]

Gerstenberger, in agreement with the other scholars, writes, "But it is in the nature of things that the constitution of the Yahweh communities fully began around their religious backbone, the Torah, only after the liberation by the Persians in 539 B.C.E., concurrent with the origin of the holy Scriptures."[163] From this observation, two facts may be inferred. First, while formative monotheism may have originated with the Babylonian exile, the actual community of people that practised an exclusive worship of Yahweh (thus monotheism) may have begun only after the exile, in this case, the Persian period. Secondly, the Torah was an important religious symbol in Persian period Yehud. Not only did the Torah bear a unifying factor through an enlightened knowledge of Yahweh, it also gave a sense of identity to all those that professed Yahwism in Yehud.[164]

Writing in 1905, Crawford stated, "The evidence goes to show that under Nehemiah the little Judaean community was definitely Yahwist and so continued; . . . The century 550-450 thus witnessed a noteworthy cultic evolution or reorganization—the final triumph of Yahweh in Israel"[165] The final triumph of Yahweh, as Crawford observes, was achieved through the dedicated effort of the Yahwist minorities returning from exile.[166] For his part, Trotter goes a step further than the generalization made by Crawford in his characterization of post-exilic religion. Trotter observes that the religion of post-exilic Yehud, especially as practised by the literate elites, was exclusively a monotheistic form of Yahwism.[167] What comes out clearly from Trotter's observation, is that while monotheism was characteristic of post-exilic Yehud, such a faith was not shared by all people groups. This is an indisputable observation considering that when the returning Jews arrived in Yehud, they found

[162] Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity," 1; Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 318. Also see Michael D. Coogan, *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.
[163] Gerstenberger, *Israel,* 387.
[164] Some insights on the role of the Torah in Yehud may be gleaned from Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999), 60.
[165] Troy H. Crawford, "Triumph of Yahwism," *JBL* 24.2 (1905): 103. In a footnote, Crawford referenced Zech 10:2 and 13:2, both passages in which Zechariah denounced the pre-exilic household gods whom he characterized as deceitful idols.
[166] Crawford, "Triumph of Yahwism," 105.
[167] James M. Trotter, *Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Yehud* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 154.

different kinds of people living in Jerusalem and beyond, whose religions were different from their own–mostly syncretistic. Monotheism—the exclusive worship of Yahweh while denying the existence of all other gods, was originally a religion of the returnees. It was only later that it would be embraced by the other Jewish communities resident in Yehud. It is with this kind of understanding in mind that Gnuse wrote, "Ultimately, we must admit that monotheistic Yahwism became a reality only after the exile in the Second Temple period, and our past stereotypes of that age as dull and legalistic must give way to characterizations which stress its brilliance and creativity."[168] Gnuse's observation continues to build a case in favor of the argument that the Second Temple period, and in particular the Persian period, was seminal to Israelite religion. It was the cradle of the major Israelite beliefs including monotheism.

It has also been observed that most of the monotheistic rhetoric in biblical books like Deut 6:4 and Isa 45:5-7 among other passages, all came to triumph in the Persian period. In other words, these monotheistic statements came to be translated into the actual practice of monotheism only in the Persian-Period. By way of substantiating this claim, Grabbe has pointed out that there is no documented evidence of a persistent polytheism after the Persian period in any Jewish texts or any other sources.[169] If Grabbe's observation is to be taken as true in every detail, in that there was no evidence of polytheism in Jewish texts after the Persian period, then we have no reason to doubt that monotheism truly triumphed in the Persian period.

Monotheism is also well attested in the biblical literature of the Persian period. For example, proclaiming Yahweh's presence in the city, Ezra states that "Yahweh is the God who is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3). Zechariah, for his part, notes Yahweh himself proclaiming, "I have returned to Jerusalem," and that the temple is "my house" (Zech 1:16; 3:7). In referring to those in the diaspora, Zechariah further testifies that, "Those who are far off shall come (יָבֹאוּ) and build the house of Yahweh" (Zech

[168] Gnuse, *No Other Gods,* 194.
[169] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 318.

6:15). We also find in Zechariah people calling upon each other saying, "Come, let us go (נֵלְכָה הָלוֹךְ) to entreat the favor of Yahweh, and to seek Yahweh of hosts" (Zech 8:21). Because they broke their covenant with Yahweh in pre-exilic Judah, the Yehudites are called to return (שׁוּבוּ) to Yahweh (Zech 1:3), not to be like their ancestors (Zech 1:4), and to pursue diligently "truth and Peace" (Zech 8:19). In Trito-Isaiah, Yahweh promises to "come to Zion as Redeemer" (Isa 59:20); and he refers to Jerusalem and the temple as "my glorious house" (Isa 60:7); and "my sanctuary....where my feet rest" (60:13). Those in Yehud who take the counsel to return to Yahweh are eventually referred to as the "remnant."[170] These testimonies demonstrate that Yahweh was both prominent and that he was solely worshiped in post-exilic Yehud.[171] Again, all these religious dynamics could be charaterized as evincing nothing but monotheism.

Alongside the testimonies found in the biblical literature of the post-exilic period, monotheism has also been attested in some non-Jewish early writings. Both Jewish texts and Greco-Roman testimonies have testified to the fact that Yehudite religion was centred on the worship of Yahweh, while denying the existence of other gods.[172] Such writers often portrayed the Jewish god as being singular and exclusive. The contributions of such writers as Hecateus of Abdera have led to the conclusion that Jewish religion after the exile was unambigously monotheistic. Writing about 300 BCE, Hecateus made the following statement about Jewish religion (*apud* Diodorus of Sicily 40.3.4): "But he [Moses] had no images whatsoever of the gods made for them, being of the opinion that God is not in human form; rather the Heaven that surrounds the earth is alone divine, and rules the universe."[173] It is important to clarify that while this testimony covers the period all the way from Moses' time, the fact that a non-Jew could testify to an aniconic (absence of images) in Jewish religion around 300 BCE

[170] For this elaboration on the return of Yahweh to Jerusalem, follow the discussion in Kessler, "Diaspora and Homeland," 148-49. The concept of covenant or "covenant theology" will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

[171] For a more detailed discussion on the status of Yahweh in Yehud, see Melody D. Knowles, "Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Persian Period," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (ed. Jon Berquist; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 7-12.

[172] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 219.

[173] Cf. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 218.

after the Persian period, means that aniconism was characteristic of Yehudite religion. By all accounts, this statement suggests that the religion of post-exilic Yehud was essentially monotheistic. The absence of images for the god worshiped by the Jews at that time, suggests that their faith was exclusively centred on one God–Yahweh. Based on what we now know, this absence of images or idols in Jewish worship, only became evident in post-exilic Judaism. This is because as already elaborated in Chapter One, pre-exilic Israelite religion was both syncretistic or polytheistic, and iconic.

Moreover, it has also been observed that Greco-Roman writers unanimously proclaimed the Jewish worship of one God; although they identified him with their Greek and Roman chief gods. For example, Augustine writing about Varro, a Roman writer who testified to Jewish aniconic religion wrote as follows:

> He states, also, that for more than 170 years the ancient Romans worshiped gods without any image. 'If this custom,' he says, 'had endured to the present, the gods would have been revered by purer worship.' In favor of this opinion, he brings forward as witness, among others, the Jewish nation, and he does not hesitate to conclude that passage by saying that those who first set up images of the gods for the people took awe away from their fellow citizens and added to their errors.[174]

This observation clearly points out that in Varro's lifespan (116-27 BCE), the Jewish people were known for their aniconic religion and the worship of one God. Augustine further observes that the Greco-Romans often identified the Jewish God with their own gods. An example in this case can be seen among the Romans who identified the Jewish god with their head deity , Jove (Jupiter).[175] The comparison between Yahweh and the major Greco-Roman gods speaks to the exclusivity and prominence of Yahweh as perceived by these non-Jewish people. What we have seen so far makes a case in favor of the argument that the religion of post-exilic Yehud was characteristically aniconic and therefore monotheistic. By way of concluding this segment, Grabbe's observation summarizes it all:

> Throughout the Second Temple period our sources indicate an exclusive worship of Yahwh and an iniconic cult. Whether one wants to use "monotheism" in its most radical sense might be debated, but there are certainly Jewish texts and Greco-Roman testimonies that the Jews deny the existence of other

[174] Saint Augustine, *The City of God* [Electronic Resource] (Book IV; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 236.
[175] Augustine, *City of God,* 202; cf. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 218.

gods.[176]

Despite all the perceived arguments in favor of a monotheistic faith in post-exilic Yehud, some scholars have still questioned the reality of such claims. Niehr, for example, has questioned what exactly must have happened to the gods that were worshiped along with Yahweh before the exile. He challenges the texts in Deutero-Isaiah which claim a monotheistic faith, saying that they are mere theologically exagerated statements aimed at exalting Yahweh while denying the existence of all other gods. He goes on to argue that the texts in Deutero-Isaiah cannot prove that monotheism was actually practised in post-exilic Yehud.[177] He observes that if anything, the Persian authorities' expansion of trade routes could have actually opened floodgates to the importation of foreign gods into Yehud, thereby ending up with a complex polytheism instead of monotheism.[178] Since it is no longer possible to argue against Niehr's views on the basis of the major monotheistic texts (Deutero-Isaiah) which he discredits, the only other way to prove him wrong is through an evaluation of the archaeological finds of Yehud, which shall be presented later in the present chapter. Further, Niehr has used the case of Elephantine religion, which was syncretistic, as being representative of Yehudite religion. That the Elephantine community in Egypt once asked for permission from the authorities in Jerusalem to rebuild their temple, according to Niehr, constitutes evidence enough to argue that the Yehudites must have equally worshiped the gods worshiped at Elephantine.[179] As it shall be stated later, contrary to Niehr's claims for using Elephantine as a case in favor of polytheism or syncretism in Yehud, most scholars have found Elephantine to be a case in contrast between the two Jewish religious communities.

2.3 Factors that Led to Yahweh's Monotheistic Exclusivity in Yehud

With everything that has been said so far about the exclusivity of Yahweh in Yehud, it is now important

[176] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 219; cf. Larry W. Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by 'First-Century Jewish Monotheism,'?” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (ed. E.H. Lovering; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 348-68.
[177] Herbert Niehr, “Religion-Historical Aspects of the 'Early Post-Exilic' Period,” in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 239.
[178] Niehr, “Religio-Historical,” 239
[179] Niehr, “Religio-Historical,” 240.

that we discover the factors that led to Yahweh's monotheistic status. The starting point in the quest for answers, lies in the perceived theology regarding the Babylonian exile. We note that the Northern Kingdom of Israel had just been conqured by the Assyrians. The Deuteronomists and prophets like Jeremiah, had repeatedly warned the Kingdom of Judah against a possible Babylonian invasion.[180] They persuaded King Josiah to urge his people to worhip no other deity but Yahweh, as he alone would save Judah from an imminent Babylonian invasion. While King Josiah co-operated and further instituted some mono-Yahwistic reforms, it was monolatry and not monotheism that was achieved. In defining monolatry, Becking notes, "'Monolatry' means that the existence and value of other gods are recognized but their veneration by the members of the community is dissuaded."[181] As for the use of the expression 'mono-Yahwism,' he observes that it presupposes the possibility that the veneration of YHWH differed from place to place in ancient Israel.[182] Exclusive monotheism was only realized after the exile. Because the Judahites continued to worship Yahweh along with other gods, they were subsequently taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, destroying Jerusalem and the temple in the process. Understandably, the theology behind the exile, was construed as Yahweh's punishment for his people which was aimed at correcting their disobedience. To that regard, Barton notes:

> Disaster and sorrow compel either a soul or a nation to seek anew the foundations of life. Times of sorrow are accordingly times of religious growth. The Babylonian exile was no exception. Indeed, the influence of this exile upon the religion of Israel was enormous. This was in part due to the fact that the exile was the external event necessary to crystallize the results of prophetic influences which had been at work for a long time, but it was also in part due to the deepening and clarifying of religious perception which disaster and sorrow bring.[183]

In retrospect of the deportations, it became clear to the exiles, that their fate was in the hand of Yahweh and not any of the other tutelary deities they worshiped before the exile. It was their disobedience of Yahweh that led to their captivity; and it was their obedience that would lead to their

[180] These Deuteronomists belonged to the group of people that some scholars like Morton Smith have referred to as the "Yahweh-Alone Party." See Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, 24-30.

[181] See Bob Becking, "Only One God: On Possible Implications for Biblical Theology," in *Only One God?: Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (ed. Bob Becking et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 192.

[182] Becking, "Only One God," 192.

[183] George A. Barton, "Influences of the Babylonian Exile on the Religion of Israel," *The Biblical World,* 37.6 (1911): 369.

deliverance and restoration. When they were finally restored to their homeland, Yahweh was therefore the only deity they considered worthy of their worship–making him a monotheistic God in the preocess. The belief system of the Yehudites asserted that it was Yahweh who "stirred the spirit of Cyrus" thereby compelling him to issue a decree of release and restoration to their homeland.[184] The fact that Yahweh could be obeyed by foreign emperors, like king Nebuchadnezzar whom he used as a disciplinary tool against the disobedient Judahites, and king Cyrus who was instrumental in the restoration of the exiles, speaks to Yahweh's sovereignty. These two events (deportation and resstoration) are a demonstration of Yahweh's supreme greatness over the nations and their acclaimed gods. Yahweh was not only the supreme deity of the united kingdom of Israel, but the whole world. When Yahweh spoke, the nations obeyed–thus the Egyptian pharoahs complied with the release of the Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar led the Judahites' captivity at Yahweh's command; and Cyrus, through Yahweh's empowerment, conquered Babylon, after which he implemented the release of the exiles. And so, once the Yehudites were restored to their homeland, they had no other deity to venerate but Yahweh. They vividly recalled that it was Yahweh, and not any other deity, who led them into captivity and subsequently restored them to their homeland. It is in light of this background, that exclusive monotheism came to characterize the religion of the returning Jews in post-exilic Yehud.[185] Trotter further highlights the same line of thinking as follows:

> The introduction of Persian rule, the return of the exiles to Palestine and the rejection of idolatry are all connected in Deutero-Isaiah. There is only one God, Yahweh; this one God has chosen Cyrus to be annointed, and as Yahweh's chosen, Cyrus will be the means of returning the exiled community to Jerusalem. The interconnection of these three elements in the theology of Deutero-Isaiah reveals an early relationship between the theology of return and monotheistic Yahwism.[186]

In the same vein, the dualistic nature of Yahweh's ontological being, as described in Deutero-Isaiah may have also contributed to the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh in Yehud. Deutero-Isaiah presents Yahweh as being the originator of both light and darkness, prosperity and disaster;

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[184] See Becking, "Continuity and Community," 268; Cf Ezra 1:1.
[185] See the discussion by R. Norman Whybray, *The Second Isaiah* (London: T and T Clark International, 2003), 45-52.
[186] Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, 136. Also see Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow,* 32-33.

emphasizing that it is Yahweh who is responsible for everything that happens on earth (cf. Isa 45:7). When the Yehudites formulated their Yahwistic theology, it is to be expected that one of the guiding questions in mind, was to discover the difference between Yahweh and all other deities. With the dualistic nature of Yahweh that they learnt in exile in mind, they would have asked questions like, which other deity possesses Yahweh's dualistic nature? Which other deity apart from Yahweh, would have been responsible for both the exilic disaster and the subsequent Judahite restoration? At most, this question would have been a rethorical one; as none of the pre-exilic deities they had previously worshiped had such a dualistic character. It is in light of this kind of understanding that Trotter wrote:

> [T]he attribution of good and ill, and the destruction and salvation to Yahweh functions at one level to eliminate possible competitors. No other deity could be responsible for the disaster of 586 BCE, nor could any other deity be a source of hope for restoration. There is only one deity who is responsible for both [Yahweh]."[187]

While this dualistic nature of Yahweh was clear in the minds of the exiles, it probably became even clearer once they were restored to their homeland, as it evidently testified to Yahweh's fulfilled promises. In that sense, this dualistic nature of Yahweh may have therefore contributed to his exclusivity in Yehud.

Another factor that contributed to Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity in Yehud may be found in the nature of things in pre-exilic Judah. While the natives of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel did not practice a monotheistic faith, still, they had Yahweh as their national deity. The tradition that resulted in the national status of Yahweh may be traced back to the days of Saul, the first King of the united kingdom. Before King Saul ascended to the throne, each Israelite clan or tribe worshiped their own tribal deity.[188] As some scholars have observed, Saul promoted his tribal deity, Yahweh, to a national status, in order to bring unity in the kingdom.[189] After the exile, the Yehudite returnees, now without the leadership of a king, had only Yahweh to look up to for guidence. In all

[187] Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, 141.
[188] Karel Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 275.
[189] Van der Toorn, *Family Religion,* 266-67.

matters of morality, faith and practice, it was Yahweh who readily presented himself for guidance. Arising out of such a background, therefore, Yahweh became the only deity of Yehud, resulting into his exclusive monotheistic status. By way of elaborating, Gerstenberger, a renowned Persian-period scholar makes the following observation:

> Since Yahweh had not grown out of popular religion but as the official deity of the state of Judah and of the Davidic royal house, he had become the best known deity [in Yehud]. Yahweh represented the totality of the political whole. If they wanted to preserve a smidgen of cohension in the period without a king, only Yahweh presented himself as a deity serving as a role model. For the clans and towns, no local numina could have the uniting aura that Yahweh brought from the national tradition.[190]

Another factor that contributed to the developing monotheism in post-exilic Yehud, may be derived from the belief system of the Judahites in Babylon. Our understanding of the exilic religion comes, for the most part, through the message of Deutero-Isaiah, who has been described as the prophet of the exile.[191] Deutero-Isaiah's message was explicitly monotheistic in nature. He mocked the Babylonian gods, whom he portrayed as man-made and impotent (Is 41:6-7; 44:6-20; 46:1-13). To the contrary, he portrayed Yahweh as the only creator God, who presides over the affairs of humankind (Is 45:1-8). He also portrayed Yahweh as the redeemer of his people, Israel (Isa 43:14-15; 44:6, 24; 48:17; 54:5). Assuming that Deutero-Isaiah's message was believed by the exiles, and that it in all probability characterized their belief system, it may be argued that they returned to Yehud as monotheists. To that effect, Trotter has argued, "[the Yehudites] were most likely representatives of the normative monotheistic Yahwism produced in Deutero-Isaiah and the texts of the Hebrew Bible of the Persian period and later."[192] The conventional wisdom in this case argues that, like our physical bodies are made of what we eat, our minds likewise are shaped by what we are taught or learn. The exiles, coming from the teachings of Isaiah, would have probably returned home believing that they had no other legitimate God but Yahweh, as that is exactly what they were taught. Along with Deutero-Isaiah, the teachings of both Ezekiel and Jeremiah who equally advocated for a monotheistic faith in the exilic

[190] Gerstenberger, *Israel,* 436.
[191] See Arvid S. Kapelrud, "The Main Concern of Second Isaiah," *VT* 32.1 (1982): 50.
[192] Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 136.

period would have contributed to the monotheistic resolve of the returnees.

The concept of redemption, repeatedly articulated in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 43:14-15; 44:6, 24; 48:17; 54:5), meant a lot to the returning Yehudites. Historically, the concept of redemption was understood by the term "go'el" (Hebrew "gal'al") meaning 'to redeem.' In ancient Israelite tradition, a go'el ("kinsman redeemer") was usually a relative whose duty among others, was to bail out family members who were deep in debt, to the point of risking being sold into slavery (Lev 25).[193] To the returning Yehudites, therefore, Deutero-Isaiah's characterization of Yahweh as "go'el" ("kinsman redeemer") reminded them of the traditional role of a go'el in their history. Yahweh was therefore concieved to be their go'el not only from the exile, but also from any other future calamities. It is no wonder therefore, that, after their release from exile, an act they attributed to Yahweh's intervention as go'el, the Yehudites elevated Yahweh to an exclusive monotheistic status.

Another factor that led to Yahweh's elevation to a monotheistic status, may be found in the role of the Torah, which Gerstenberger describes as the religious back-bone of the Yahweh communities in post-exilic Yehud.[194] One of the most important achievements of the Yehudites was their bringing together of all the traditions of Yahweh, which thus far had been predominantly oral, into written form. As Berquist observes, these traditions were later bound into the canonized text of the torah.[195] The canonization of the Torah and scripture as a whole, provided a stable foundation for the religion practised by Yahweh's people.[196] The Torah was a source of knowledge about Yahweh. Through the Torah, the will of Yahweh for his people both for their daily life and conduct in worship was revealed. Earlier in the History of Israel, God spoke to his people in person. In Yehud however, the Torah came to be Yahweh's voice to his people. To that effect, Berquist notes, "The priestly influence within Yahwism emphasized that the past times of God's direct interaction with the people were times in the

[193] Kapelrud, “Second Isaiah,” 54.
[194] Gerstenberger, *Israel,* 387.
[195] See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 209.
[196] Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow,* 236.

past. God no longer delt directly with human individuals. Instead, God spoke to subsequent generations through the scriptures and through those qualified to interpret the scriptures."[197] How then did the Torah contribute to the consolidation of the monotheistic faith in Yehud? By bringing all the facts we have noted together, it is evident that the main character of the Torah is Yahweh and not any other deity. The Torah was a source of knowledge about the proper worship of Yahweh, more than anything else. It is in this sense that the Torah could be said to have promoted a monotheistic faith. Gerstenberger summarizes this role of the Torah as follows:

> Of the five books of Moses, the [T]orah, only the first is predominantly devoted to narrative material. With the exception of Ex 1-15, the Exodus pericope, the other four books contain almost exclusively rules for life and worship. Expressed in terms of the number of chapters, that means that in this part of the Pentateuch (Exodus to Deuteronomy) the fifteen chapters of the liberation from Egypt (Ex 1-15) contrast with 121 chapters of cultic and ethical instruction (Exodus-Deuteronomy).[198]

Further, the manner in which the Babylonian Empire treated the gods of the states they conquered must have contributed to Yahweh's monotheistic status in post-exilic Yehud. When the Babylonians (like the Assyrians) conquered foreign nations, they demoted the vanguished gods to a second-tier status in their imperial pantheon. Both Sennacherib and Nabopolassar, once kings of Assyria and Babylon respectively, are said to have stated (in a rather boasting manner) that they carried with them the gods of the states they conquered.[199] By implication, this made the Babylonian god, Marduk, assume the title "king of the gods;" as he was believed to be above every other god in Babylon.[200] We would imagine that this situation must have been humiliating to the Judahite exiles; considering how much they venerated Yahweh as their national deity before the exile; whether or not they did so with full devotion. Tigay's comment on this situation is worth noting, "The need to emphsize the monotheistic idea in this peirod was probably due to the increased exposure of Israel to the triumphant Assyrian and Babylonian empires, which attributed their victories, including victories

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[197] Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow,* 238.
[198] Gerstenberger, *Theologies,* 210.
[199] Franz Rosenthal, “Canaanite and Aramaic Inscriptions,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 302, 304.
[200] Diana V. Edelman, ed., “Introduction,” in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishings Company, 1996), 21.

over Israel, to their gods."[201]

After their restoration, it is to be expected in all probability that the Yehudites would have endeavored to elevate Yahweh back to his "national" status; but of course this time, without other associate deities. The reasons behind this phenomenon are to be assumed. First, the fact that they suffered humiliation in which they helplessly watched their deity subjected to a secondary status, must have motivated them to elevate Yahweh once the opportunity availed itself. This observation further builds on the understanding that their liberation was due to Yahweh's intervention. Secondly, and in a rather related circumstance, the years of exile should have been dark, gloomy and perhaps even depressing. The exiles, like most home-sick emigrants, must have yearningly looked forward to returning home and witnessing the promises of Yahweh fulfilled in their lives. This is the point Gerstenberger is emphasizing when he writes, "the zeal for Jerusalem and the promises of Yahweh for his people must have been extraordinarily intense among the exiles."[202] Because the returning Yehudites zealously looked forward to the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises for their lives—including restoration to their homeland, it is without question that they would not have venerated any other deity but Yahweh once their restoration was realized. This, too, may have facilited the developing monotheism.

Moreover, further explanations may be found in the major shift which occured in the Persian conception of the imperial pantheon. When the Persians conquered Babylon, two things happened. First, the nations under Babylonian dominion were given the freedom to woship their gods as they pleased. Secondly, the gods of the foreign nations assumed a new status in the Achaemenid pantheon. Unlike the Babylonians, who demoted such gods to a lower level, the Persians equated such gods with the new empire god, Ahura Mazda, through the use of a new abstract title, "God of (the) heaven(s)." Edelman elaborates that in the new Persian system, "head deities of national pantheons all became

[201] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publishing Society, 1996), 435.
[202] Gerstenberger, *Israel,* 437.

manifestations of a single category of deity, אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם, which served as a general descriptive designation for the head of the emperial pantheon."[203] Moreover, unlike the gods of Assyria and Babylon, who were known by the designation "king of the gods," the Persian Ahura Mazda instead, came to be known as "the great god who gave [us] this earth, who gave us this sky, who gave us humanity and who gave his worshipers prosperity."[204] Under the religion of Zoroastrianism, the god Ahura Mazda ("god of the heavens") had divine manifestations, also known as "Amesha Spenta" or "divine Sparks." These Amesha Spenta, six in number, were emanations of Ahura Mazda, through whom all creation was made. It is important to emphasize that these divine sparks were not divinities that would be characterized as gods in themselves. They were mere attributes of the great god, Ahura Mazda.[205]

How all these developments in Persia impacted Yehudite religion, continues to be a matter of theological speculation. However, first of all, the fact that the Persian overlords gave freedom of religion to all foreign nations including Yehud, itself, was an incentive for the already resolved Yehudites to worship Yahweh in an exclusive monotheistic manner. Secondly, the Persian belief in a single god (Ahura Mazda) with whom the gods of the foreign nations were equated, could have all the more united the Yehudites in their desire to promote Yahweh to an exclusive status. Thirdly, the manner in which the Persian pantheon was restructured, fusing the major tiers of the active gods into the top tier occupied by the divine couple (leading to one deity), and converting the lower tiers into non-divine messengers, may have contributed to how the Yehudites concieved of their own deity. In light of these developments, the Yehudites could have reflected on how their own pre-exilic pantheon had collapsed, leading to Yahweh's emergence as the only legitimate God.[206] Moreover, the concept in which all the

[203] Edelman, ed., "Introduction," 22

[204] A. Jamme, "South-Arabian Inscriptions," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 316.

[205] See Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: The Early History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), 181-228.

[206] The The transformation of the pre-exilic Israelite pantheon from one of many gods headed by Yahweh, to one in which Yahweh became the only legitimate deity, with the rest as angels has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

other gods in Persia were "tolerated" as mere manifestations of the one god, Ahura Mazda, was equally significant to the emerging Yehudite faith. Like the "Amesha Spenta" who were Ahura Mazda's manifestations and emanations through whom he created the universe, the Yehudites may have considered all their pre-exilic familial deities as mere manifestations of the only god, Yahweh. This would later become even clearer, when the former deities once worshiped by Israel came to be concieved of as angels or messengers of Yahweh. From all these observations, what comes out clearly is that the emergent monotheism in Yehud was not born out of a single incident or theme. Rather, Yehudite monotheism was born out of a convergence of several factors.

As the reader may be aware by now, this brief analysis of the Yehudite religion under Persian rule tends to leave us wondering whether or not what we find here is a case of borrowing from the Persians by the Yehudites. Did the Yehudites borrow their religious conception of the deity or was it vice versa? Apparently, even great Persain period scholars like Grabbe have raised similar questions:

> Two questions remain, however: the first is whether we have borrowings or only parallel developments that arose from some internal logic within Judaism itself. The second question concerns the lateness of much Zoroastrian literature which is a millenium or more after Achaemenid times. . . . At this stage of study, much is uncertain and a decisive judgment is hard to make. The question must remain open for the time being.[207]

Determining a Zoroastrian influence upon Yehudite monotheism can be a difficult endeavor. And yet to completely deny it, would be an irresponsible option. The plight of the Judahites in exile, as we have already seen, was attributed to their disregard of the prophetic injunction that required them to worship Yahweh in an exclusive relationship. After the exile, presumably because of the lessons learnt out of it, the Yehudites zealously promoted a monothiestic faith.[208] This has already been discussed in detail in the previous pages. We only bring it here to make a point that even before Zoroastrianism was introduced by the Persians, the Yehudites were long determined to promote monotheism all the way from the exile. Having said that, it would not be irrational to assume that Zoroastrianism may have somewhat encouraged the Yehudites to continue promoting and guarding their monotheistic faith. How

[207] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 319.

[208] On how the exile may have brought about a repentance in the Judahites, see the discussion in George A. Barton, "Influence of the Babylonian Exile on the Religion of Israel," *The Biblical World* 37.6 (1911): 369-78.

this may have happened, we cannot say for sure.

Tracing Persian remnants in the Hebrew Bible has never been a difficult affair. For example, the Zoroastrian designation אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם "God of Heaven," is prevalent in the Hebrew Bible texts of the Persian period. This designation is found in both the original writings (Jon 1:9; Ezra 1:2; Neh 1:5, 2:4; and 2 Chr 36:22-23) and the old revised writings (Gen 23:4; Jer 10:11).[209] Further, it has also been observed that the Persian period's developing belief in a resurrection after death, may find its best parallel in Zoroastrianism. Likewise, the developing Persian period angelology in Judaism has also been seen to be paralleled in Zoroastrianism. [210] In spite of these observations that seem to favor a Zoroastrian influence in Yehudite religion, some scholars like Trotter, have argued to the contrary. Trotter argues that if Zoroastrianism had influenced Yehudite monotheism, Persian religion itself would have demonstrated an explicit monotheistic faith, which arguably it did not.[211] He further observes that while the other nations under Persian rulership may have also been subsumed under Ahura Mazda, they never demonstrated a monotheistic faith like the Yehudites.[212] The argument therefore, is that, in light of the two facts cited above, Yehudite monotheism could not have emerged as a result of Zoroastrian influence. The question of Persian influence will continue to attract scholarly speculation. The call is upon all biblical scholars to take it as an opportunity for further research.

2.4 Archaeological Evidence in Support of Monotheism in Yehud.

2.4.1 Monotheism and the Archaeology of Yehud

Archaeology may be defined simply as “the study of the material remains of man's past.”[213] Such material remains include ancient language texts, iconographic materials including stones, clay, papyrus, buildings, sculpture, weapons, household items, and religious artefacts.[214] Archaeology covers different

[209] Edelman, ed. “Introduction,” 22.
[210] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 319; Cf. Idem, *Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian,* 100-102.
[211] Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 138.
[212] Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 138.
[213] G.W. Van Beek, “Archaeology,” *IDB*, 195.
[214] Van Beek, “Archaeology,” 195.

disciplines including but not limited to material culture such as texts and objects, immaterial culture such as religion; as well as the environment (e.g. Flora).[215] Admittedly, it has been observed that monotheism was not the religion of all the people in Achaemenid period.[216] In his analysis of two Achaemenid period seals, Morton Smith was able to verify the use of theophoric names, which signified a degree of monotheistic Yahwism in the religion of the people.[217] However, the same seals have also revealed that some people in the Persian period venerated other deities along with Yahweh.[218] Also, of the only two temples discovered in Palestine from the Persian period, one in Makmish and another in Lachish, the material remains indicate that these temples were dedicated to the worship of deities other than Yahweh.[219]At this point, one begins to wonder whether what we find here is a case of contradiction to the monotheistic assertions we have already established in Yehud or not?

However, as Trotter observes, "While these temples provide evidence of the continuation of non-Yahwistic cults in Palestine, they do not furnish any direct information regarding cultic activity within the province of Yehud."[220] What this means therefore, is that, because these non-Yahwistic temples were not directly linked to Yehud, it may be argued that the Yehudites did not worship any other deity but Yahweh. Although non-Yahwistic figurines (including Baal, 'Pillar Asarte' and horse-and-rider), were prevalent in Palestine as a whole, their absence in Yehud suggests that the Yehudites were probably exceptionally consistent with the exclusive monotheistic worship of Yahweh.[221] In spite of several excavations and surveys carried out in Yehud, the findings have shown that no cultic figurines have ever been found in the areas where the Yehudites lived. To this end, scholars have

[215] See Karel J.H. Vriezen, "Archaeological Traces of Cult in Ancient Israel," in *Only One God?: Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (ed. Bob Becking, Meindert Dijkstra, Marjo C.A. Korpel and Karel J.H. Vriezen; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 45.

[216] See Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 145.

[217] Morton Smith, "Jewish Religious Life in the Persian Period," in *Cambridge History of Judaism* (eds. W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein; 4 Vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1: 236-37.

[218] Cf. Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 145.

[219] Ephraim Stern, "The Archaeology of Persian Palestine," in *Cambridge History of Judaism* (eds. W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein; 4 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1: 88-114.

[220] Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 145.

[221] Ephraim Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period, 538-332* BCE (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982), 179-81.

observed, ". . . during the Persian period, we find a very strange phenomenon: in the areas of the country occupied by Jews *not a single cultic figurine* has been found! Also, archaeologists failed to locate any sanctuaries dedicated to the worship of other deities . . . [in] Judah and Samaria while many have been found elsewhere."[222] Rather, what they found instead, are two sanctuaries—the temple in Jerusalem (at the center of Jewish worship) and the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. These were special sanctuaries in which the exclusive worship of Yahweh was conducted.[223] Further, Stern characterizes Persian period archaeology as follows:

> Generally, the archaeological finds of the Persian period reflect three major types of figurines that occur simultaneously in all assemblages: an adult male, represented as a king either sitting or standing; or as a warrior on a horse; a fertility goddess holding either her breasts or a child, and sometimes she is pregnant; and young boys. These figurines are made in local, Phoenician, Egyptian, Persian and Greek styles.[224]

From this characterization, it may be argued that these figurines, scattered across Persian-Period Palestine, were associated with the foreign nations of the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Persians and Greeks who lived in Palestine. It follows therefore that these figurines had nothing to do with the religion of the returning Yehudites who were characteristically monotheists. The peoples associated with the figurines in question, were consistent with the religion of the pre-exilic period which was either syncretistic or polytheistic.

Moreover, the archaeological evidences we have reviewd so far testify to a monotheistic faith in Persian period Yehud. It is undeniable that some non-Yahwistic cults continued in the Persian period. However, in following the contributions of Stern and other scholars, such cultic practises were mostly associated with geographical areas occupied by foreign ethnic groups of people. In the rare cases in which some isolated evidence of non-Yahwistic cultic objects are found within the borders of Yehud, Trotter's observation is significant. He notes that such cultic objects "may reveal a degree of resistance

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[222] Ephraim Stern, "Religion in Palestine in the Assyrian and Persian Periods," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel; OTS 42; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 254-55; cf. Y. Magen, "Mount Gerizim and the Samaritans," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents* (eds. F. Manns and E. Allianta; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 91-148.

[223] Stern, "Religion in Palestine," 255; cf. Magen, "Mount Gerizim," 91-148.

[224] Stern, "Religion in Palestine," 253; cf. Idem, *Material Culture,* 158-82.

to the official monotheistic policies of the central authorities of the province.[225] In other words, it was possible that some people within Yehud may have opted to perpetuate the syncretistic religion practiced before the exile, which was still practiced by 'the peoples of the land.'[226] There is no doubt that in any community there is always a minority that choose to resist the generally accepted code of conduct; and this may have been the case we find in Yehud. However, if Stern's analysis is correct in that non-Yahwistic cultic objects were exclusively found outside the borders of Yehud, such a finding convincingly stands to support the view that Yehudite religion was monotheistic.

2.4.2 Elephantine Papyrus in Support of Monotheism in Yehud

Before we conclude this chapter, we will briefly evaluate the religion of the Jews who lived on the island of Elephantine, Egypt. Because our knowledge about Elephantine religion was discovered from material remains preserved in texts recovered from fragmentary pieces of papyrus, we have decided to discuss it under archaeology. In particular, the Passover papyrus has been of special significance in this regard.[227] The similarities and differences in religious practice between these two Jewish communities– Yehud and Elephantine, will significantly contribute to our understanding of monotheism in Yehud. Elephantine Judaism is of interest on four counts. In noting the similarities between the two Jewish communities, first, both the Jews in Yehud and those in Elephantine had originated from pre-exilic "Israel;" which essentially made them the same people who shared a common ancestry.[228] Second, both groups are associated with having built a temple to Yahweh after the temple of Solomon was

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[225] Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 147.

[226] The designation “People of the land” shall be discussed in detail in Chapter Four; which will address the concept of monotheistic exclusivism in Yehud.

[227] For a partial bibliography on the religion practised on the Island of Elephantine, and the relationships between the two Persian period Jewish communities, see Gerstenberger, *Israel,* 126-39; Gabriele Boccaccini, “Elephantine Papyri,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Ed. David Noel Freeman, Allen C. Myers, Astrid Biles Beck; Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 391; H.H. Rowley, “Papyri from Elephantine,” *Documents from Old Testament Times* (ed. D. Winton Thomas; New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1958), 257; and Bezalel Porten, "The Jews in Egypt," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:386.

[228] The true origin of these Jews is still speculated, though some believe that they may have originated from Judah, which they fled just before the Babylonian invasion. See Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (rev. David O'Brien; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 348.

destroyed.[229] Third, both Jewish groups claimed allegiance to Yahweh, which essentially made them Yahwists.[230] As far as their differnces are concerned, what comes out first is that the Yehudites had gone through the Babylonian exile, which those at Elephantine did not. This means that the Elephantine Jews missed the 'purifying' lessons which the returnees gained from the exilic crucible. Consequently, it probably explains why Deutero-Isaiah's plea of return to a monotheistic faith did not have any effect upon them. Secondly, although both communities claimed to worship Yahweh, the Elephantine Jews worshiped Yahweh together with other deities, unlike the Yehudites who practised monotheism.[231] It would seem that the Jews of Elephantine still practised the syncretistic religion that characterized pre-exilic Israel. To that effect, Trotter has described their religion as "a continuation and development of the traditional Yahwistic cult of manarchic Judah and Israel."[232] Thirdly, of interest also is the fact that, whereas the Yehudites believed that the cause of the exile was their worship of other deities along with Yahweh, the Elephantine Jews on the contrary, believed that the cause of the exile was the Judahites' rejection of the goddess Asherah. Writing in 1905 on the elevation of Asherah by the Elephantine Jews, Toy observes:

> It appears, also, if we may trust the account in [Jer] 44:15-19, that the cult of the queen of heaven was no mere passing fit of devotion–it had become almost the reigning cult: when, after the fall of the city, some of the people had gone down to Egypt, the women, backed by their husbands, stood up stoutly for their goddess against the prophet [Jeremiah], and made an argument (exactly parallel to his argument for Yahweh) that doubtless seemed to them decisive: when, said they, we worshiped the queen of heaven, as we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, had been in the habit of doing, we had plenty to eat and were in all respects well off, but since we have ceased to worship her, we have wanted all things and have been consumed by sword and famine.[233]

As Toy has observed, it means that whatever their religion might have been, the Elephantine Jews had a stronger propensity towards syncretism than monotheism. This proves that the Elephantine Jews, unlike the Yehudites, still practised syncretism or some form of polytheism. Thus, what we find between the

[229] The evidence for a Yehudite temple in Yehud has already been referred to in the previous sections. For evidences regarding the temple at Elephantine, see Porten, "Jews in Egypt," 1:386

[230] Wood, *Survey of Israel's History,* 348

[231] At least one deity named "Anath," believed to have been a consort of Yahweh, thus "Anath-Yahweh," has been found. For this finding, see Boccaccini, "Elephantine Papyri," 391.

[232] See Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 143-44.

[233] Crawford H. Toy, "Triumph of Yahwism," *JBL* 24.2 (1905): 91-2.

two Jewish communities is that the Elephantine Jews represent monarchic religion before the exile; and by implication before Deutero-Isaiah's exclusive mothesistic message. Perhaps the best description of Elephantine religious character is the one by Kidner who calls them an example of "unreformed Judaism, to set alongside that of the reformed community which came back chastened from Babylon."[234] It is no wonder therefore, that their religion was poly-Yahwistic—worshiping Yahweh along with other deities. Yehudite Jews on the contrary, based on the lessons learnt out of exile, had practised an exclusive monotheistic faith. Another way to characterize the Elephantine Jews is to say that they had an unbroken tradition of syncretism founded on monarchic "official" religion. In reading Smith and other scholars, it seems that the "official" religion is one that was practised by the elite in pre-exilic Israel, which probably included the monarchies. This religion was characterized by syncretism which Smith says, "was dominant in the cult of Yahweh at Jerusalem to the very last days of the first temple."[235] Olyan observes that the goddess Asherah was worshiped within the official religion.[236] As for "popular religion," Noth observes that it was the faith practised by the masses in pre-exilic Israel.[237] Just like the official religion, popular religion equally had at its core, the worship of the goddess Asherah.[238] This topic and all its detailed aspects may be too large for exhaustion here, and the reader may pursue it in other contexts.

Further, we need to highlight some matters of principle that may have contributed to the conflicts that existed between the two commuities. The very idea of constructing a temple outside of Jerusalem at Elephantine, was considered to be an apostate act by the Yehudites. In keeping with the biblical directives (Exod. 20:24; Deut. 12:5-6; Ezra 6:12; 1 Kings 9:3), no Yahwistic temple should have been built anywhere outside of Jerusalem. As Porten puts it, "foreign soil was ritually unclean

[234] David Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (ed. D.J. Wiseman; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Vasty Press, 1979), 143.
[235] Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 19-21, 35.
[236] Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh,* 13.
[237] See Robert Noth, "Yahweh's Asherah," in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.* (eds. M.P. Horgan and P. Kobelski; New York: Crossroad, 1989), 118-37.
[238] See Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 109, 129.

precluding erection thereon of a temple."[239] Conflict between the two communities was to be expected because of the perceived defiance of a long standing principle on the part of Elephantine. Along with the temple, it was also detailed in these texts that no animal sacrifice was to be offered in any temple outside the Jerusalem temple, a directive which the Elephantine Jews equally defied.[240] When their temple was destroyed, the Elephantine Jews had writen a letter to the Jeruslaem Jewish establishment, requesting their support. The Yehudites had initially ignored the letter, but when they responded in what we have come to know as the "passover papyrus," they detailed how the Passover feast was to be observed; which specifically included the none usage of beverages.[241] Putting all these observations into perspective, Elephantine is representative of the Jews who did not go into exile; whose religion was as syncretistic as was pre-exilic Israel. Yehudite religion, unlike the religions of the Jews who did not go into exile, evinces an exclusive monotheistic faith. It could be argued in this sense therefore, that post-exilic Yehudite religion served as a role model to the proper worship of Yahweh, which those at Elephantine and probably other Jews in diaspora were to emulate.

2.5 Conclusion

When we began this chapter, we reviewed statements that suggested that exclusive monotheism, only came to be evident in post-exilic Yehud. This claim came to be substantiated through the contributions of several Persian-period scholars as well as the archaeological finds of Yehud by individuals like Stern. In Stern's studies of the material remains of Yehud, it became clear that figurines of pagan gods were not found in the places inhabited by the returning Jews; which argues for the practice of exclusive monotheism in Yehud. That such figurines were found in places resided by the 'people(s) of the land'

[239] Porten, “Jews in Egypt,” 1:386.

[240] An attempt to explain the cause of the defiance by the Elephantine Jews has been given by Talmon who wrote that “Egyptian Jewry had adjusted to their Diaspora conditions. They had accepted life 'away from the land' as final and did not entertain any hope of a restoration, or at least did not believe in the possible realization of such hope in historical times." See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Emergence of Jewish Sectarianism in the Early Second Temple Period," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 595.

[241] William R. Arnold, “The Passover Papyrus from Elephantine,” *JBL* 31.1 (1912): 7; also see Trotter, *Reading Hosea,* 144.

who did not go into exile, makes the case that monotheism was practised by the returning Yehudites. We also discovered that as one of the discontinuities in Yehud over against monarchic Judah, Yahweh had assumed a new status in which he was now without a consort. This development meant that Yahweh could now be worshiped as the sole deity, which consequently made him a monotheistic God.

According to the dominant view of emergent monotheism, "the exile provoked a crisis in Yahwistic religion" that later led to its reformulation.[242] Following this reformulation, Yahweh was to become the only legitimate God while denying all others. Stern observes:

> Apparently, pagan cults ceased to exist among the Judaeans who purified their worship and Jewish monotheism was at last consolidated. And from this newly established monotheism also sprang the Samaritans. In any case, it seems that this development occurred among the Babylonian exiles and was transferred to the land of Israel by the returning exiles such as Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak who rebuilt the second temple in Jerusalem, or Ezra and Nehemiah. . . . In Egypt, unlike in Babylon, the Jews continued their pagan customs and, as we know from Papyri found on the island of Elephantine in the Nile, [they] even built their own temple and adopted Egyptian and Canaanite pagan names.[243]

Moreover, this chapter has outlined a number of factors that led to the exclusive worship of Yahweh in post-exilic Yehud. By the same token, it is important to distinguish between the factors that led to the development of monotheism, which was the subject of the present chapter, and those that came as a result of the developing monotheism, which will be the subjects of Chapters Three and Four —"exclusivism" and "angelology" respectively.

[242] Becking, "Continuity and Discontinuity," 4; Also see Heiser, "Divine Council," 17.
[243] Stern, "Religion in Palestine," 255.

CHAPTER THREE
MONOTHEISM AND EXCLUSIVISM IN YEHUD
(Ezra 9-10; Neh 13: 23-29)

3.1 Exile and Restoration

The Babylonian exile of 586 BCE resulted in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the deportation of high ranking officials including Priests and the more wealthy citizens.[244] The Babylonian exile was construed as a divine instrumentality through which Yahweh sought to 'create an ideal people' acceptable in his sight. Thus, the exile was some kind of a crucible through which the characters of God's people were to be purified, removing the dross of disobedience and leaving the pure gem that would transform them into the remnant people of God.[245] This conception of the role played by the exile had predominantly influenced the mindset of the returning Jews in Yehud; to the extent that the exile became the main event that distinguished post-exilic Yehud from all other Jewish people groups. As will become clear, it was this exilic identification that made the Yehudites label all the other people living in post-exilic Palestine as "Peoples of the land." Ben Zvi has noted that the exile provided a point of self-definition for the Yehudite community "as an ethnic, unified group with a particular past and whose life ought to be centered on divine teachings on which its fate depends."[246] The exilic experience was therefore some kind of identity marker or boundary by which the returning Jews identified themselves. Davies summarizes the impact of the exile as follows:

> (a) [M]onarchic Judah was punished by banishment from its land by its deity, and so non-banishment meant non-membership of the nation; (b) those left behind had been mixed with other racial groups and had abandoned the ethnic practices of Judah and; (c) the land was in fact empty anyway, and had to be because it had needed rest from its previous pollution (2 Chr 36:21).[247]

In retrospect of the exilic experience, including the lessons learnt out of it, post-exilic Judaism

[244] George A. Barton, "The Significance of the Babylonian Exile on the Religion of Israel," *The Biblical World* 3.6 (1911): 369.

[245] Cf. Barton, "Significance of Babylonian Exile," 369-78.

[246] Ehud Ben Zvi, "What is New in Yehud: Some Considerations," in *Yahwism After the Exile* (ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2000), 36.

[247] Philip R. Davies, "Exile? What Exile? Whose Exile?" in *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 278: European Seminar in Historical Methodology 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 136.

began to appeal to a deeper commitment, and an exclusive worship of Yahweh than was the case in monarchic Judah. The canonical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles among others, are a record of the religious experience of the returning Jews following their restoration in 539 BCE. In any discussion involving the Jews in the post-exilic period, one has to be mindful of the different and yet related people groups that comprised Judaism. Six Jewish people groups have been observed as follows: (1) golah Returnees in Yehud; (2) the golah Remainees in Babylonia; (3) Yehudite Remainees; (4) Israelite/Judaean residents in Egypt (Elephantine); (5) Israelite/Judaean inhabitants in the province of Samaria and; (6) other Israelite/Judeans in the various regions of the Levant.[248] Apparently, even the biblical authors themselves had a variety of ideas in their definition of "Israel" in the post-exilic period. For example, while Ezra and Nehemiah would limit "Israel" to Judah and Benjamin, that is, the descendants of the kingdom of Judah who were exiled to Babylon in 586 BCE, Chronicles instead includes the Samaritans and all the non-Judean peoples in Yehud.[249] By necessity, this study will only consider the Jews in Egypt (Elephantine) discussed in Chapter Two, along with the returnees in Yehud, and those who had remained in Judah.

Arguably, the most important religious development in post-exilic Yehud was probabably the promotion of Jewish exclusivity, which by necessity claimed that the returning Jews were special and separate from all others.[250] The returning Jews (Yehudites) were exclusively separated to Yahweh with whom they had a covenantal relationship. In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh identifies himself as אֵל קַנָּא (a jealous God), which explains why his people needed to be distinct from 'other peoples' including their

[248] For this insightful elaboration, see John Kessler, "Diaspora and Homeland in the Early Achaemenid Period: Community, Geography and Demography in Zechariah 1-8," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (ed. Jon L. Berquist; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 141-42. Golah is a Hebrew term which refers to "the children of the exile," or the "returned deportees" See Herbert R. Marbury, "The Strange Woman in Persian Yehud: A Reading of Proverbs 7," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (ed. Jon L. Berquist; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 172-73.

[249] See Peter R. Bedford, "Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *VT* 52 (2002):148; R. Braun, "A Reconstruction of the Chronicler's Attitude Toward the North," *JBL* 96 (1977): 59-62; S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Books of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (trans. A. Barber; New York: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 267-395.

[250] Lee I. Levine, *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period 538 BCE-70 CE* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publishing Society, 2002), 37.

religions and deities (see for example Ex 20:5, 34:14; Num 25:11; Deut 4:24, 5:9, 6:14; Zeph 3:8; and Zech 1:14, 8:2). Yehudite exclusivism is the single most widely presented subject in the post-exilic books of Ezra-Nehemiah, so much so that some scholars have considered it to be the theme of these books.[251] It is with this background that we find the leadership, Ezra and Nehemiah, endeavoring to cut all associations between the returning Yehudites and all other people groups. According to Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13:23-29, when Ezra arrived in Yehud, some leaders had approached him and informed him about how some of the people had married women from among "the people(s) of the land." Of interest is the fact that some of the culprits of this perceived unfaithfulness were the very leaders of Yehud, including Priests and Levites (Ezra 9:1-4).

Upon hearing this report, Ezra is said to have engaged in a season of prayer and fasting, tearing his clothes, and pulling the hair from his head and beared, which was probably a sign of mourning according to Jer 7:29. Later on, the people gathered in Jerusalem before the house of the Lord weeping, in acknowledgment of their sin. As a remedy against this unfaithfulness, it was suggested that all בְּנֵי הַגּוֹלָה (sons of the exiles) be separated from 'the peoples of the land,' in which the foreign wives were to be divorced along with their children (Ezra 10:7-12). For his part, Ezra criticized the intermarriages with non-Yehudites who were supposedly not exclusive Yahweh worshipers; while Nehemiah had even gone to the extent of refusing the request of the Yahweh-worshiping Samarians to help in rebuilding the Temple.[252] Over all, Ezra-Nehemiah limits being 'Israelite' to the descendants of Judah and Benjamin, the victims of the 586 BCE exile, along with the holy tribe of Levi. Chronicles however, opens the worship of Yahweh to all twelve tribes and even to foreigners.[253] Arising out of this call for Yehudite

[251] David Janzen, *Witch-hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries: The Expulsion of the Foreign Women in Ezra 9-10* (JSOTSup 350; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 90; cf. Saul M. Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community," *JSJ* 35 (2004): 1-16; Matthew Thiessen, "The Function of a Conjunction: Inclusivist or Exclusivist Strategies in Ezra 6:19-21 and Nehemiah 10:29-30?" *JSOT* 34.1 (2009): 64.

[252] Levine, *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City,* 37.

[253] Cf. Steven L. McKenzie and Matt Patrick Graham ed. *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 204; Peter R. Bedford, "Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah," *VT* 52:2 (2002): 148. Cf. R. Braun, "A Reconstruction of the Chronicler's Attitude Toward the North," *JBL* 96 (1977): 59-62; H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

separation and divorce of the foreign wives, two questions will drive the discussions of the present Chapter. The first question regards the identity of the 'peoples of the land.' Who were they, and where did they come from? The second question queries the rationale for divorcing the foreign women together with their children. What danger if any, was posed by the intermarriage with such foreign women? In short, the idea is to discover how the concept of Yehudite exclusivism contributes to our knowledge about the emergent monotheism in Yehud.

3.2 Identity of the "Peoples of the Land" and the Foreign Women (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13)

Based on the list of nations in Ezra 9:1 (which identifies them as the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites), it has been suggested that the foreign women in question could have been some non-Jewish pagans who lived near the geographical location of the returned exiles.[254] These people, as the biblical text elaborates (9:1), are also associated with abominations; that is, displeasing in the sight of Yahweh. While such an identification may seem to be obvious from the biblical text itself, some scholars have questioned such an identification. The objection to this kind of identification has mostly questioned the reality of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perezites, Jebusites, and Amorites' still being in existence at the time of Persian period Yehud.[255] The unlikelihood of such peoples' existence in the Persian period, the time of Ezra's mission and reforms in

2007), 87-140; Idem, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 24-26; S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Books of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (trans. A. Barber; New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989), 267-395; Idem, *1 & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 46-7; Idem, "Exile and Restoration in the Book of Chronicles," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion* (ed. Bob Becking and M.C.A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 33-44.

254 C.F. Keil, "Ezra," in *Old Testament Commentary* (trans. Sonia Taylor; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 4:73-74; Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 71; F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 125, 134; J. G. McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*: *The Daily Study Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 60; L. H. Brockington, *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1977), 75; Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (AB 14; Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1965), 77; Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 57; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "From the Bible to the Talmud: The Prohibition of Intermarriage," *HAR* 7 (1983): 36; David Bossman, "Ezra's Marriage Reform: Israel Redefined," *BTB* 9 (1979): 34-35; W. J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Books of Chronicles," *JETS* 27 (1983): 259.

255 For those who have raised this objection see Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 125; Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 4:662.

Yehud, continues to complicate the identification of 'the peoples of the land.' However, Smith-Christopher offers a somewhat convincing explanation for the usage of the ethnic titles in Ezra 9:1. He states that the designations by which the foreigners are identified in Ezra 9:1 are "old terms that almost surely have become stereotypically pejorative slurs referring to those ethnic groups who have long since either disappeared or assimilated."[256] Accepting this observation, the identification of the peoples of the land with those categorized in Ezra 9:1 is simply a case of comparison by association. Thus the list of ethnicities in Ezra 9:1, which is associated with abominations, is compared to the perceived sinfulness of 'the peoples of the land' in Ezra-Nehemiah's time.

Further, 'the peoples of the land' could also designate all those Jews who had remained in pre-exilic Judah when a segment of their population was taken into the Babylonian exile.[257] While this observation makes a lot of sense, especially bearing in mind that not all the inhabitants of pre-exilic Judah were taken into the Babylonian exile, the troubling question is why Ezra is seemingly contemptuous of those Jews who had remained in the land. After all, both those taken into exile and those who had remained in the land shared a common ancestry; and none of them had chosen the outcome of their circumstances—to go into exile or remain in the land. Why then is it that those that went into exile seemed preferred over those who did not? What sin did they commit to be identified simply as 'the peoples of the land,' foreigners, or worse still, pagans? Again, in order for this separatistic ideology to be fully understood, we will have to bear in mind what we discovered earlier. The returning Jews (Yehudites) were exclusively separated to Yahweh with whom they had a covenantal relationship following their restoration to their homeland. Anyone who did not share in this

[256] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judaean Community," in *Second Temple Studies: Temple Community in the Persian Period* (vol. 2; ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 257.

[257] See Lester L. Grabbe, "Triumph of the Pious or Failure of the Xenophobes? The Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms and their *Nachgeschichte*," in *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. Sin Jones and Sarah Pearce; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 50-65; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "The Mixed Marriage Crisis," 243-65; and Tamara C. Eskenazi and Eleanore P. Judd, "Marriage to a Stranger in Ezra 9-10," in *Second Temple Studies:Temple Community in the Persian Period* (vol. 2; ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 266-85.

renewed covenantal relationship with Yahweh was, therefore, believed to be a foreigner or pagan.

Among the scholars who have attempted to offer further explanations on this seeming unjustified marginalization of the Jews who had remained in the land (remainees) is Grabbe. He asserts that Ezra's silence regarding "the bulk of the Jews [who] remained in Palestine and were still there half a century later . . . [suggests that] . . . the only proper Jewish community was that formed of the returnees; the descendants of those who remained in the land were apparently considered illegitimate."[258] One way to understand Grabbe's observation is to make a simple analysis of the situations pursued by the two people groups. On the one hand, we have the Judahites who had remained in the land. This group had basically continued with the pre-exilic religious ways of life—principal among them, being the worship of Yahweh along with other tutelary familial deities. We have come to know this observation through some insights drawn from the religion of another Jewish strand who did not go through the exile, those at Elephantine, Egypt, who are said to have continued the pre-exilic practice of worshiping Yahweh along with other gods. This means that the Jews at Elephantine, like those who had remained in Judah, did not have the faith in god which those that had gone through the exilic experience acquired. And so, while the returnees and the remainees shared a common ancestry, just like those at Elephantine, the truth is that they were ideologically no longer the same people. The returnees were monotheistic while the remainees were polytheistic. The religion of the Elephantine community has already been discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. As we have come to understand, the pre-exilic syncretistism was condemned in all uncertain terms, as it was believed to have been the sole cause of the exile. On the other hand, and to the contrary, it was believed by those returning from exile that their religion was non-syncretistic and exclusively centered on Yahweh in a monotheistic relationship. In light of this understanding, the returnees were the legitimate Jews because they were monotheistic, while the remainees were illegitimate because of their syncretism.

Smith-Christopher has argued that probably the reason why Ezra was concerned about the

[258] Grabbe, "Triumph of the Pious," 57.

returning Jews, almost to the exclusion of the remainees, was because his focus was on the survival and definition of the golah community. He argues:

> Ezra's orientation reflects the Priestly writer's obsession with 'separation' between the pure and impure. Such concern with separation and identity maintenance in much of the Priestly legislation is consistent with a group under stress. . . . The Ezra texts reveal a profound consciousness of 'us' and 'them', and describe a group intent on its internal affairs and survival. Terms such as 'the holy seed' clearly indicate a *group* xenophobia. . . . Ezra's action was an attempt at inward consolidation of a threatened minority. . . . Essentially, the only basis for Ezra's objection is that the foreigners were simply Jews who were not in exile."[259]

As Smith-Christopher has rightly pointed out, the predominant ideology at play in the minds of Ezra and his people is the conviction that the Jews who returned from exile were the ideal people of Yahweh. The exile in some sense was perceived to have been a 'qualifying' experience that made the exiled Jews stand out as the 'Jews Proper.' It is no wonder, therefore, that these returning Jews could self-identify with such terms as 'separate' and 'pure,' in contrast to the identification of the remainees who were characterized as 'impure,' 'foreigners' or pagans.

Another possible identification of 'the peoples of the land' together with the foreign women, is that they were Judahites or Israelites who may have developed religious beliefs different from those of the returnees.[260] In this case, the marginalization of such people would have been purely for religious reasons. They may have persisted in some kind of syncretistic religion in which they worshiped both Yahweh and other deities, a religion which the returnees condemned. In this case, as Eskenazi and Judd observe, "The conflict would thus revolve around Judaism as a religion rather than peoplehood. The origin of the women would be less significant than their actual religious practices."[261]

The role played by religious beliefs in humanity cannot be overemphasized. We have been witnesses to many wars that have often erupted in the 20th and 21st centuries between Christians and Moslems, all because of religious disagreements. Religious difference could, therefore, have been a distinguishing factor of identity for those whose religious pursuit was different from that of the returnees. Moreover, in view of the foregoing identifications of the peoples of the land and the foreign

[259] Smith-Christopher, "The Mixed Marriage Crisis," 256-57.
[260] Eskenazi and Judd, "Marriage to a Stranger," 270.
[261] Eskenazi and Judd, "Marriage to a Stranger," 270.

women, it seems that the issue is more about religious differences than ethnic identity. For the returnees, Yahweh was to be worshiped in an exclusive monotheistic manner. For the peoples of the land, as we have argued in Chapter Two, they may have worshiped Yahweh, but in a poly-Yahwistic manner.

3.3 Separation From the Peoples of the Land and Divorcing the Foreign Women

Now that we have identified 'the peoples of the land' and the 'foreign women,' we will now seek to discover the reasons why the returnees needed to be separated from such people including the divorce of their foreign wives. Admittedly, the challenge that the scholarship of Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13 is faced with, lies in the explanation of why the Yehudites needed to separate from the peoples of the land to the extent of divorcing their foreign wives. From here on, we shall evaluate all the possible reasons that may have necessitated the separation. However, we first need to discover the contextual usage of one key Hebrew term in Ezra 9:1, which will significantly bear upon the discussion. This is the word בָּדַל which may be translated as "to separate" or "separation." The word בָּדַל carries the sense of separating something for a specific purpose. For example, the Levites were separated or set aside from the rest of Israel and were designated to be the carriers of the Ark of the Covenant (Deut 10:8; Num 8:14). It also denotes a physical kind of separation, like when Yahweh warned Israel to separate themselves from the rebellious followers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, whom Yahweh was about to consume with fire (Num 16:21). This is also the kind of separation called for in Ezra 9-10; and Neh 13.[262]

It must be stressed that this idea of separation in Ezra-Nehemiah can best be understood in relation to God/Yahweh. In other words, the returning Yehudites were to be separated from the rest of the people around them for the sake of Yahweh who demanded that they be holy. As Stern has elaborated, "This separation is always from some type of uncleanness, usually related to foreigners; sometimes the

[262] Also see Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup 294; ed. David J.A. Clines, Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 311-316.

emphasis is placed on the act of separation itself, while in other cases one separates oneself *from* the impurity of the nations *to* or *for* obedience to YHWH and/or the Torah."[263]

From this contextual usage of בָּדַל, we can infer several possible reasons that may have necessitated Yehudite separation from the peoples of the land. First, separation was necessary in order to prevent apostasy from getting into the spiritual lives of the returnees.[264] As Janzen observes, "[T]he presence of the foreign women threatened widespread apostasy or syncretism, and that the future existence of Yahwism was at stake."[265] What may be deduced from this observation is that by engaging in the most intimate of human relations (mariage) with someone of a different belief system, the Yehudites would be forfeiting their monotheistic covenantal relationship with Yahweh. We need to remind ourselves that the returnng Jews in Yehud understood fully well that it was in keeping with the covenant they had re-established with Yahweh that they were permitted to return to their homeland. When their ancestors previously violated the terms of this covenant (agreement), exile was the consequence. Their return was, therefore, understood to be dependent upon a continued maintance of their covenant-relationship with Yahweh. That being said, it was important for them to discontinue all inappropriate relations that would potentially breach their mutual relationship with Yahweh, including marriages with foreign women. Probably this explains why the concept of holiness and separatism is abundant in the book of Ezra (2:58-63; 4:1-3; 6:20-22; 8:24-30; 9-10).

However, regarding apostasy as the reason for divorcing the foreign wives, Janzen raises an important observation that may be of benefit to our discussion. He argues that while the foreign wives may have been a potential source of apostasy and foreign religious ideas being introduced into the camps of the returnees, certainly such women could not have been the only avenue through which apostasy may have entered the community. He further argues that there was no particular evidence of

[263] Stern, *Emergence of Yehud,* 312. Also see Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless:The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (York Town Heights, NY: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 145-49.
[264] See David Jansen, *Witch-hunts,* 10.
[265] Jansen, *Witch-hunts,* 11.

such charges levelled against these women who only made up a tiny percentage of the population.[266] Janzen's observation is something to think about. For example, when he talks about possible sources through which apostasy could have entered the community, it is true that there could have been many other avenues other than marriage with the foreign women. Internal prostitution among the returnees, either through adultery or fornication, could have been another source of apostasy, without having to go outside of the Yehudite boundaries. And so this observation, along with the fact that the population of the foreign women was relatively small, increases the need for further research.

Several other scholars have elaborated on why intermarriages with foreign women would lead to apostasy in Yehudite commitment to the one and only God, Yahweh. Williamson observes that while marriage with foreigners in itself was not forbidden in the Mosaic law, citing some Israelite patriarchs who had contracted such marriages (e.g. Gen 16:3, 41:45; Ex 2:21; Num 12:1; 2 Sam 3:3 etc), it was most likely to be the case that marriages with the indigenous people of Canaan, for example, would lead to apostasy or syncretism (cf. Exod 34:11-17; Deut 7:1-4, 20:10-18).[267] Deuteronomy 34:12 warns the Israelites to avoid any covenantal relationships with the peoples of the land of Canaan, as that would be a "snare" that would lead them into apostasy. Thus, Williamson argues that since such marriages had the potential of leading into apostasy, it was wise not to allow them in the first place. They posed a snare into which the Yehudites would fall, and thus be separated from Yahweh unsuspectingly. Thus Ezra's call for divorce could have been preventive rather than curative, whether or not there were any incidents of apostasy resulting from such marriages among the Yehudites.

Keil observes that the reason why the mixed marriages were discouraged was in order to prevent the returnees from indulging in the idolatry practiced by the foreign women; a sin which had earlier led them into exile.[268] By uniting in marriage with such idolatrous women, the Yehudites would have ended up being idolators themselves, a sin that was committed in the pre-exilic period against

[266] Janzen, *Witch-hunt,* 45.
[267] H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 130.
[268] C. F. Keil , "Ezra," in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (vol. 4; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 73.

Yahweh's will for their religious life. It has also been suggested that by condemning the marital associations with the peoples of the land, Ezra may have attempted to re-enact a second Exodus and conquest. Among the proponents of such a view is Koch, who says, "Ezra's march from Babylonia to Jerusalem was a cultic procession which Ezra understood as a second Exodus and a partial fulfillment of prophetic expectation."[269] To elaborate on this view, the return of the exiles in this case was compared to the Mosaic Exodus in which the Israelites marched from Egypt to Canaan. Like the returnees, the ancient Israelites were warned against associations with the Canaanites, "Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods" (Deut 7:1-5).

This tendency of drawing some parallels between the return of the exiles and the mosaic Exodus together with the conquest of canaan, has been further explored in detail by Throntveit:

> A recurrent reason for the people's failure to comply with the stipulations of the covenant at the time of the first exodus was the attraction the ways of Canaan held for them and the degree to which they willingly adopted those practices and incorporated them into their own religious life. The report of the problem of intermarriage, which describes the people's failure to "separate themselves from the peoples of the land" (9:1), echoes the same tendency on the part of Israel in Ezra's day. That this parallel is in fact intended may be seen in the character of the list of peoples indicted by the officials. The Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites were no longer in existence at this time. By taking actions specifically against marriages with Israel's old enemies of the wilderness and conquest periods, the narrative seeks to reestablish in Ezra's day the "conquest" of the promised land. The otherwise inexplicable addition of "the Egyptians" to this list strengthens the reader's perception that the list is a "flashback" to the similar situation that existed at the time of the first exodus (cf. Exod 3:8; 13:5; Deut 7:1; 20:17).[270]

The argument in favor of a parallelism between the two historical events, return and Exodus, is a strong one, in spite of what those that see it to the contrary might say. As the saying goes, "History repeats itself." Though the circumstances surrounding the two events were different, in principle, it was possible for the Yehudites to draw some lessons from the experience of their ancestors. For example, as Throntveit has argued, the references to "slavery" and "slaves" in Ezra 9:8, 9 could have recalled the misery of the Israelites in Egypt that prompted God's deliverance through the exodus.[271] Moreover,

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[269] K. Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *JSS* 19 (1974): 184.
[270] Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 51.
[271] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 51.

Throntveit has further shed light when he says, “Ezra's identification with the people throughout his confession of their national sin (“*our* guilt*,”* “*our* iniquities,” “we have forsaken thy commandments,” “*our* evil deeds”) recalls Moses' identification with the people and their sin in Exodus 34:9.”[272] The case of parallelism between the two events seems to be a real one. However, whether or not this parallelism is in fact exegetically relevant to the situation in post-exilic Yehud, it stands to argue that the two events had a lot in common. Both events involved a Yahweh worshiping people who had relocated from foreign lands to their homeland. Also, both the Israelites and the Yehudites were warned against syncretistic alliances with the Canaanites, and the 'peoples of the land' respectively. All said, it therefore makes a lot of sense for Ezra or the readers of Ezra to draw some lessons from the experience of the Exodus in order to understand the issues being dealt with in Ezra's reforms. They were dealing with old themes that became applicable under a new context.

A number of other scholars have contributed significantly to the discussion regarding the possible reasons why mixed marriages were condemned. For example, Hayes argues,

> Ezra viewed intermarriage as profaning the holy status of God conferred upon Israel at Sinai. Therefore, in contrast to the limited Mosaic prohibitions of intermarriages that were intended to safe-guard Israel from idolatry, Ezra forbade intermarriages to all Gentiles because they are, by definition, unholy.[273]

What can be inferred from Hayes' view is that by virtue of God's holiness, those that worship him are by implication imputed holy. Therefore, Yahweh's people were to dissociate themselves from all and everything that was conceivably unholy, let alone such an intimate relationship as marriage with unbelieving 'foreigners.' This belief system will become clearer later in the chapter. Dobson, for his part, contends that Ezra’s primary concern was the preservation of the messianic line. In his view, the ‘holy seed’ is a reference to the line of the Messiah, established when God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.[274] Again, this idea is in line with the

[272] Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 51-52.
[273] Christine Hayes, “Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 6-7; cf. David Bossman, “Ezra’s Marriage Reform: Israel Redefined,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 9 (1979): 32-38.
[274] Edward Dobson, “Divorce in the Old Testament,” *Fundamentalist Journal* 10 (1985): 28.

concepts of covenant and remnant, which shall be discussed later. Overall, it builds on the conception that through exclusivism, in which the Yehudites were to be preserved as the holy seed (remnant), the promise of the messiah would ultimately be fulfilled. Jewish religion was hinged around the hope in a messiah who would come and redeem his people (Micah 5:1-6). We can, therefore, appreciate the efforts taken by Ezra and Nehemiah in seeking to preserve the holy seed from the apostasy of the peoples of the land, including the foreign wives.

Of further interest is the observation by Epstein, who notes that the "holy seed" referenced in Ezra 9:2 reflects the racially exclusivistic mentality of the returnees. According to him, the marriages with the foreign women or the peoples of the land were perceived as defiling the purity of the nation.[275] Of course, we can argue that ethnicity or race does not count in matters of faith and God's ultimate salvation. However, the actions carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah, in which they wanted the returning Jews to separate from the peoples of the land among whom were different ethnicities, has led some scholars to suspect some racial intent. For example, Ludemann argues, "The Nazis shamelessly directed ideas which were similar to those developed by Jews under Ezra and Nehemiah."[276] However, it must be understood that God was not in need of a race, but a people group through whom he would accomplish his mission in the salvation of mankind. The emphasis is on the people themselves and not their race. Even if race was indeed a major factor in the selection of Israel, it is probably true that the conception of 'race' back then could not compare to its discriminatory aspect that later centuries have made out of it. We would not expect race or ethnicity in biblical times to have created such barriers as we have seen in the cases of White Americans versus African Americans, or the discrimination against the Jewish people through the holocaust. As Kaminsky has noted, the issue that Ezra and Nehemiah were dealing with was not racially motivated: "They were not trying to eliminate a threatened minority.

[275] Louis M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 162.

[276] Gerd Ludemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 75. For a similar negative assessment, see Lester Grabbe, "Triumph of the Pious or Failure of the Xenophobes? The Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms and their Nachgeschichte," in *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. Sian Jones and Sarah Pearce; JSPS 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 50-65.

They were trying to preserve a threatened minority."[277]

Moreover, Hoglund offers a rather interesting explanation on why Ezra condemned the mixed marriages. He argues that Ezra's real concern was the Jews' right of land ownership to the Judean territory. He says that the situation in Ezra 9, in which the foreign women were to be divorced, was a mere re-working of the final redactor of the text.[278] Hoglund goes on to say, "[T]he Persian system of territorial allocation was based on a discernible ethnic homogeneity, which would be endangered by intermarriage. Ezra's reform was, therefore, designed to safeguard the Returnees' ethnic identity and thereby assure continued land-tenure rights in Judah from the imperial government."[279] Two facts ensue from this observation; first is the issue of textual redaction or re-working. There is no doubt that the text of the Hebrew Bible, as we presently have it, is an editorial product. Whether or not this is the case we find in Ezra 9-10 remains a matter of theological speculation. Questions of this kind would normally fall under a different category entitled "The Historicity of Ezra-Nehemiah," for which we have little room in the present discussion. Secondly, we also find the assertion that the motivating factor for the divorce of the women was due to a claim to land ownership. In principle, none of these factors is to be taken in isolation of the rest, as each one serves an integral part of the whole. Land ownership certainly was a factor, because for them to be able to build a temple in which the exclusive worship of Yahweh would be conducted, they needed ample space, thus land. They equally needed enough land for living space and for cultivation. But such need for land had to operate within the framework of other factors—foremost among them being the need for an ideal relationship with Yahweh. Their proper relationship with Yahweh was foremost in that it was this relationship that led to their restoration, the basis upon which everything else would follow–land ownership, temple worship etc.

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[277] Joel S. Kaminsky, "Did Election Imply the Mistreatment of Non-Israelites," *HTR* 96.4 (2003): 417.

[278] Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 34-5.

[279] Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration,* 239-40.

Furthermore, some scholars have argued that it was the notion of redefining the identity of true Israelites during the early post-exilic period that may have led to the labeling of the women as foreigners, who needed to be divorced.[280] The question of identity is something we discussed in Chapter Two. Self-identity was very crucial for the newly constituted community of faith in Yehud. They needed some kind of boundaries or markers by which they would ensure their distinctiveness. It is no wonder therefore, that mixed marriages, perceived as an easy path to getting mixed up with the peoples of the land, thereby indulging their apostasy, were condemned outrightly. The returnees needed to be identified as people bound into an exclusive, monotheistic relationship with Yahweh, who alone held their destiny in his hands. To that effect, Washington observes, "Religious self-definition must have been an urgent concern for the exiles, and this would have remained an issue in its own right for the post-exilic community."[281] Further to the possible reasons that necessitated a separation from the foreign women, Maccoby's contribution needs to be highlighted. He states, "The real problem is that intermarriage had taken place with syncretists . . . who because of polytheistic worship, were regarded by Ezra as idolators despite the fact that they regarded their worship as consistent with Judaism."[282] It must be emphasized that even if the remainees claimed to worship Yahweh, which they probably did, the fact that they combined such worship with other deities meant that their religious practice was incompatible with that of the returnees. For the Yehudites, whose resolve was to worship Yahweh in a monotheistic relationship, the syncretism of the peoples of the land would have necessitated a separation from them. Syncretism as a form of apostasy seems to have been at the core of what motivated Ezra to campaign against the marriages with the foreign women. Moreover, while the Bible does not sanction divorce except on grounds of unfaithfulness and death, it has been proposed by some scholars that the reason why Ezra's call for divorce may be justifiable, is because Ezra did not regard

[280] Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: Routledge, 1998), 138.

[281] Harold Washington, "The Strange Woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה/נָכְרִיָּה) of Proverbs 1-9 and Post-Exilic Judaean Society," in *Second Temple Studies: 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period* (ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 238.

[282] Hyam Maccoby, "Holiness and Purity: The Holy People in Leviticus and Ezra-Nehemiah" in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (ed. John F. A. Sawyer; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 162.

the marriages with foreign women as legitimate marriages. It has been argued that Ezra was not mandating divorce, as he was only calling for separation from illegitimate marriages. This is the point emphasized by Heth and Wenham who argue, "[I]n Ezra's eyes this was not a question of breaking up legitimate marriages but of nullifying those which were contrary to the law."[283] We can only imagine that probably some of these marriages may have occurred under circumstances in which some Yehudites may have divorced their actual wives from exile, and remarried from the peoples of the land. This may have been a possibility, and if indeed such a thing happened, then Ezra's call for divorcing such 'illegitimate' women could be justified.

As a way of synthesizing and reflecting on the different views regarding the peoples of the land including the foreign women, and how they all impact the Yehudite concept of exclusivism, Janzen's observation sets the stage for an analytical conclusion. The following is his observation:

> [A] society that wants to engage in acts of purification must have boundaries that are clear and strong enough to distinguish it from other societies. There must be a fairly clear idea of who belongs if a society is going to purify itself of a group it singles out as foreign. These external boundaries, however, must be permeable enough if they are to allow foreign influences through in the first place, assuming that the integrity of a society weakens because foreign influences have entered in the first place.[284]

In light of this observation and what we now know about Yehudite exclusivity, it gives us a clue as to why Ezra's reforms implemented such drastic measures that ended up in the painful separation between husbands and wives; and fathers and children. The Yehudites were careful not to engage in any kind of apostasy similar to what had earlier led them into exile in the first place. While the consequences of separation were painful especially to those involved, it stands to argue that such measures were inevitable considering what was at stake. The choice was between separation and divorce of the foreign women, thus exclusivism, on the one hand; and inclusivism and toleration of such people on the other, in which case they would have risked another exile.

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[283] William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 163.

[284] Janzen, *Witch-hunt,* 57, 58; cf. R.K. Fenn, *The End of Time: Religion, Ritual, and the Forging of the Soul* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1997), 128.

However, with the consequences of disobeying God still fresh in their minds as they had just returned from exile, it is no wonder that the returnees opted for an exclusivist position. Exclusivism was, therefore, a safe measure for the returnees, as that would guarantee their identity preservation, prevention of apostasy, and upholding of the exclusive monotheistic faith. Blenkinsopp's remarks are informative in this regard, "[T]he problem the marriage program was designed to confront [was] how to maintain the characteristic way of life, the religious traditions, even the language (cf. Neh. 13:23) of a community, against the threat of assimilation."[285] Again, we cannot overemphasize the need for exclusivism among the returning Yehudites, if their relationship with Yahweh was to be preserved. In concluding this segment, it must be stressed that the real issue in Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13 is the preservation of the relationship between Yahweh and the returning Jews. To the Yehudites, Yahweh was the only legitimate God, not only for Yehud but for the whole world. By our definition, this is monotheism—the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others.

3.4 Exclusivism and Covenant Theology

3.41 Etymology of the Covenant Theme

Closely related to Yehudite exclusivism are two concepts—covenant and remnant theologies. In what follows, we shall discuss each one separately in order to discover how they might have impacted the concept of exclusivism and by necessity, monotheism in Yehud. The idea of a covenant is tied to that of Israel's salvation history. The Hebrew Bible is a story of God's dealing (covenant) with his people, Israel. Segal has argued that the main subject of the Pentateuch is the story of the covenant, which first began between God and Abraham (Gen 15, 17), and was later confirmed with his successors—Isaac (Gen 26:3,4) and Jacob (Gen 28:13, 14).[286] Israel is closely associated with Yahweh through the bond of this concept that we have come to know as covenant.[287] Covenant entails a more binding relationship

[285] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1988), 201.
[286] M.H. Segal, *The Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magness Press, 1967), 29.
[287] Grabbe, *A History of the Jews,* (2004), I:246.

than that based on kinship (blood ties).[288] Amidst varying opinions, the etymology of the covenant motif may be traced to the Assyrian noun '*binlin'* (Hebrew 'berit') which denotes either a 'bond' or fetter.[289] The idea that comes out is one in which both parties, God and Israel, bind (commit to) each other in a tight covenantal relationship, 'fastened' with the tightest possible means comparable to chains or fetters. Such a relationship is meant to last; with either party fostering loyalty to the other.

In the early history of the Barotse people of the African country of Zambia, a covenant between two people was normally a sign of friendship that would last until the two are dead. In a simple but important ceremony, each would cut a small mark on the other's arm from which he would suck blood and swallow. By swallowing the blood, each one signified to the other that the two had essentially become one and forever inseparable. Such friends would normally cherish each other jealously. When time came for the two to look for marriage partners, they would normally consult each other's approval. In short, it was a mutual relationship, based on trust and love. Likewise, God's covenant with 'Israel' was meant to last forever, that is, both in this world and the glorious kingdom to come. This point is well elaborated by Rendtorff who writes, "That Yahweh is Israel's God and Israel Yahweh's people are one of the central statements in the Old Testament. . . . I will be God for you and you shall be people for me."[290] Yahweh guarantees to take care of Israel including all her needs, while Israel was expected to keep Yahweh's commandments, with emphasis on the first commandment which forbids the worship of any other god beside Yahweh (Exod 20:3, 4).[291] While the idea of a covenant stretches all the way from the original covenant between Yahweh and Israel, its significance was all the more applicable to the returnees in Yehud who were essentially experiencing a renewed covenant.

3.4.2 The Significance of the Covenantal Motif

The importance of the covenant between Yahweh and his people cannot be overemphasized.

[288] See George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17.3 (1954): 51.
[289] See W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Capetown: Oxford University Press, 1984), 16.
[290] R. Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998), 11.
[291] Rendtorff, *Covenant,* 11.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Mosaic covenant has been described as the "covenant par excellence" which dominates all known covenant traditions.[292] Perhaps even more relevant to the situation of the Jews returning from exile, an experience perceived to be a consequence of an abrogation of the covenant, is Ringgren's observation. He writes, "The covenant idea then was so basic to Israel that even the restoration of a broken relationship was conceived as a covenant. The covenant idea became the normal form for Israel's association with God."[293] As Ringgren has rightly stated, the idea of a covenant is the single concept that tied Israel to Yahweh. Throughout her salvation history, Israel's relationship with Yahweh was characterized by the repeated experience of falling and rising. The fall and rise 'syndrome' can be traced all the way from the time they landed in what should have been their ideal home of Canaan. In spite of being warned against the worship of the Canaanite gods, Israel broke the covenant by doing exactly what she was warned against. In the monarchical era, just before the exile, in spite of repeated warnings against syncretism, 'Israel' still failed to keep the terms of her covenant with Yahweh. As we have already stated, the exilic experience came as a correctional measure, in which Yahweh sought to reclaim Israel for his own. Thus, as Ringgren has elaborated above, Israel's restoration to her homeland after the exile was Yahweh's attempt to bring her back into the confines of the covenant.

Thus, the actions carried out in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13) were meant to prevent the covenant from being jeopardized. To that effect, Craigie observes, "[The] prohibitions have in mind the preservation of the covenant relationship with the Lord by forbidding any relationship that would bring that first and most important relationship into danger."[294] The concept of covenant (ברית) is well attested in the literature of the Persian period. The post-exilic biblical authors employed the covenant

[292] M.L. Newman, *The Sinai Covenant Traditions in the Cult of Israel* (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1960), 61.

[293] Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (London: S.P.C.K, 1966), 119.

[294] Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 179. Ezra's polemics against what were conceived as illegitimate marital associations with unbelieving pagans were probably reminiscent of those in Deut 7:1-5 in which the Israelites were not to marry from among the Canaanites.

motif to describe the ideal relationship between Yahweh and the newly formed community of faith (cf. Neh 1:5; 9:8, 32); Malachi (2:10; 3:1) and Zechariah (9:11). Of interest is the observation that for Ezra, the use of ברית ". . . refers only to a covenant made to separate from and expel the 'foreign wives (10:3)."[295] This observation enables us to understand that the real motive behind Ezra's reforms was the preservation of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the returnees. In addressing his concerns about the illegitimate marriages, Ezra was essentially reminding his people about the significance of their covenant with Yahweh. Covenant theology after the exile served to remind the Yehudites that they had an obligation to Yahweh in which they were to worship him in an exclusive monotheistic relationship. It is in this sense that the two ideologies, 'exclusivism' and 'covenant theology,' are closely tied to the overall concept discussed in this thesis, monotheism. Moreover, another concept equally related to covenant, and by necessity both to Jewish exclusivism and monotheism, is that of remnant or 'remnant theology' which shall be discussed in what follows.

3.5 Exclusivism and Remnant Theology

Remnant entails that which remains of something. Meyer defines remnant as what is left of a community after it undergoes a catastrophe.[296] This definition fits well in the situation of the Yehudites following their deportation to Babylon and ultimate restoration to their homeland. The concept of remnant has been expressed in Ezra 9:8-15 with different Hebrew words including the following: פליטה in (9:8, 15) which carries the meaning of "one who escapes" or "one who is delivered;" and שׁארית in (9:14) which includes meanings such as the "rest" of something, "residue" or "remainder" from the root word שאר. Considering what we now know about the returnees, these definitions correctly describe their situation. They were the remains, remainder or residues of God's people who had survived the exilic catastrophe. There was a general understanding within the temple community in Yehud in which it was claimed that those who descended from the Babylonian exiles were different from all other

[295] Grabbe, *A History of the Jews,* (2004), I: 246.
[296] Lester V. Meyer, "Remnant," *ABD* 5 (1992): 669.

people, as they comprised the remnant. The concepts of 'remnant' and 'remnant theology' were well attested in the works of both the exilic and post-exilic periods. As Janzen notes, remnant theology posits that YHWH "dwelt with the group in exile in Babylon and not those left behind in Judea, and that the land really belongs to the remnant and no one else. In the postexilic period, it asserts that only the remnant belongs in the temple assembly, and only they are responsible for the temple."[297]

Though paradoxially, it is those that were taken away from home that ended up being conceived as the remnant of Yahweh's people. We can only speculate that by being in exile, these deportees had the opportunity of reflecting on the possible causes of their deportation more than those that remained home. As some have observed, it is usually in adversity that life's most precious lessons are learnt.[298] The ideological concept of 'remnant' seems to have become clearer through the works of exilic prophets like Ezekiel. In Ezek 33:23-29, we find a situation in which the claims of land ownership by those that had remained in Judah was denied by YHWH because they had worshiped idols and shed blood, which would consequently lead to their destruction. By way of rebuking the claim of the inhabitants of Judah during the exile, Yahweh made it clear that it was the exiles instead, who would be gathered from the nations and restored to the land of their ancestors. They would purge themselves of all idolaterous abominations (Ezek 11:17-21).[299] It was in this context and background that Ezekiel came to designate the exiles as the 'remnant of Israel' (11:13). The value placed upon the exiles in the sight of God is further amplified by the fact that Yahweh had actually left Jerusalem in order to dwell among the exiles (Ezek 10:1-22; 11:22-25). Janzen's elaboration on the true character of the remnant is worth noting:

> If we claim the existence of such a thing as remnant theology, it would appear to state that the true Israelites were the exiles, not those who remained behind, and that the land belongs to those who went into exile as their inheritance from YHWH. They are the only group of Israelites with whom God will interact. Jeremiah 29:16-20, an editorial insertion into the letter from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon, also distinguishes between the exiles in Babylon–who in the letter receive the assurance that God will restore them to the land (29:10-14)–and those who remain in the land, whom God destines for destruction because of their disobedience (29:17-29).[300]

[297] Janzen, *Witch-hunt,* 90.
[298] See Barton, "Babylonian Exile," 369.
[299] Cf. Janzen, *Witch-hunts,* 91.
[300] Janzen, *Witch-hunts,* 91.

It is important to mention however, that the exile in itself did not automatically qualify every exiled Jew being counted among the remnant people of God. When it came to being identified with the remnant, it was no longer a corporate issue as in simply being Jewish or just because one was in exile. Rather, qualification into the remnant was on an individual basis, depending on one's obedience and faithfulness to Yahweh.[301]

Remnant theology asserts that the people, (in this case the Judahites) had transgressed against Yahweh. In response, Yahweh was to destroy the evil doers while sparing the righteous remnant who would be restored.[302] The concept of remnant runs all through the Hebrew Bible. When God judged the antediluvian world with the flood, it was Noah's obedient family that comprised the remnant who were saved (Gen 6:5-8; 7: 1-23). When God destroyed the city of Sodom, it was the faithful Lot who was delivered as the remnant (Gen 18:17-33). When many Israelites sinned against God by worshiping Baal, it was Elijah and some 7,000 faithful remnant who were delivered from divine judgment (1Kgs 19:17-18). For his part, Isaiah is said to have named one of his sons "Shear-Jas-hub," meaning "A Remnant Shall Return" (Isa 7:3). It is this theological understanding of the remnant that characterized the temple community in Yehud. They considered themselves to be the remnant people of Yahweh, a concept which separated them from the peoples of the land. The remnant concept caused the returnees to consider the religion of those who did not have the exilic experience as idolatrous.

At the time of the events in Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13:23-29, inclusion in the 'commonwealth of Israel' was determined by whether or not one belonged to those returning from the Babylonian exile. We would emphasize that this segregating identification disregarded both ethnicity and geographical affiliation with Judaism. In other words, it was irrelevant for anyone to claim being Jewish on the basis of race or just because one was living within the geographical confines of Judah. It was also not enough

[301] See the discussion by R.E. Clements, "A Remnant Chosen by Grace" (Romans 11:5): The Old Testament Background and Origin of the Remnant Concept," in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Professor F.F. Bruce on His 70th Birthday* (ed. Donald Alfred Hagner and Murray J. Harris Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 106.

[302] Cf. Antti Laato, *Who Is Immanuel?: The Rise and the Foundering of Isaiah's Messianic Expectations* (Abo: Abo Academy Press, 1988), 88-94.

for anyone to claim membership in the remnant on grounds of professing belief in Yahweh. Obviously a mere claim of belief in Yahweh, as this study has already pointed out, was not enough for anyone to be considered a remnant. For one thing, whereas Yahweh was worshiped along with other deities by the peoples who lived in Palestine at large, the returning exiles (the remnant) emphasized an exclusive monotheistic faith in Yahweh. Remnant theology, therefore, demanded that there be a clear boundary separating the returning remnant from the rest of the peoples in the land. The peoples of the land were considered impure or unholy, which explains the strong action that was taken to "crack down" on all marital relations with the foreign wives. This is the message we find in Ezra 9:1, 2; in which Ezra describes the marriages in question by saying that 'the holy seed' (remnant) has mixed itself with them (the peoples of the land). Janzen's insightful analysis on the status of the remnant in relation to the peoples of the land and the foreign wives offers a comprehensive conclusion on the real situation going on in Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13:

> The remnant, established by means of God's righteousness, is threatened through its own inattention to its purity. The simple presence of impurity, the presence of foreign women, and their children who have no claim to the pedigree of the remnant community, is enough to endanger its existence. In the ideology of the text, the nature of the community is to be separate (*bdl*) from all impure influences. The women are expelled from the community not because of what they have done, but because of who they are (impure) and who they are not (members of the exile community). . . . The women are in a place that they simply should not be. The point appears to be that despite boundaries established by ideology and genealogy, foreigners have crept in. Their presence endangers community, and so they must go.[303]

3.6 Conclusion

The belief system behind exclusivism, covenant and remnant theologies, was that the returning Jews were different from all other people living in the wider post-exilic province of Palestine. They were different in that in light of the developing monotheism, they had resolved to uphold an exclusive monotheistic relationship with Yahweh. They no longer worshiped the familial deities of the pre-exilic period. This conception made them believe that all people are heathen until they belong to this one God, the God worshiped by the Yehudites. It is this newly found religious worldview of the Jewish

[303] Janzen, *Witch-hunts,* 96.

believer that Soares has summarizes as follows, "With the definite acceptance of the universality of God, a change took place in the Jew's conception of his own religious status. He was no longer simply the favorite of his own God . . . The Jew was the favorite of the only God, united with him by covenant, and all other peoples were without the divine mercy."[304] Exclusivism, therefore, was born out of the peoples' adherence to a monotheistic faith. In that sense, it could be said that exclusivism, together with covenant and remnant theologies, both of which were revisions of old pre-exilic themes, all served as testimonies to the developing monotheism in Yehud.

In all the reforms in Ezra-Nehemiah, the real issue is the preservation of the relationship between Yahweh and the Yehudites. Prior to the exile, the Judahites had broken their covenant with Yahweh through their indulgence in syncretism and polytheism. The exile was some kind of correctional measure which was aimed at cleansing the Yehudites' spiritual lives, leading to a renewed relationship with Yahweh.[305] Following their restoration, Yahweh made a covenant with the Yehudites once again, in which they were required to abide by the requirements of this covenant. Among other requirements, the terms of the covenant included but not limited to an exclusive monotheistic worship of Yahweh. Furthermore, remnant theology served to remind the Yehudites that they were the remains or continuity of Yahweh's original covenant people through Abraham.

Putting all this into historical perspective, it explains why Ezra and Nehemiah took the drastic measures they did—enforcing a separation from the peoples of the land and mandating the divorce of the foreign wives. As stated earlier, all the factors that necessitated Yehudite exclusivism need to be taken as integral parts of the whole. Thus, whether it is land ownership, religious-identity, racial purity, preservation of the messianic lineage, or whatever factor it is, they all complemented each other in promoting exclusive monotheism. It is in this sense that post-exilic exclusivism (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13) qualifies to be part of the broader narrative of monotheism in Persian period Yehud.

[304] Theo G. Soares, "The Religious Ideas of Judaism from Ezra to the Maccabees," *The Biblical World* 13.6 (1899): 384.
[305] Barton, *Babylonian Exile,* 369-78.

CHAPTER FOUR
MONOTHEISM AND ANGELOLOGY IN YEHUD

Angelology may be defined as the study of angels. The term "angel" is derived from the Greek (angelos) which renders the Hebrew, מלאך (messenger). The study of angels in Yehud seeks to answer the question, "What happened to the gods that comprised the divine pantheon in Israelite religion before the exile?" In other words, how did Yahweh end up being the only deity worshiped by the Yehudites after the exile? We already discovered in Chapter One that while the pre-exilic Israelites worshiped Yahweh as their national deity, they equally paid homage to other familial deities. In Second Temple Judaism, and in particular the Persian period, Grabbe observes that the gods of the pre-exilic Israelite pantheon were 'demoted' to the status of angels and demons.[306] Elaborating on this origin of angels, Grabbe observes, "With the developing monotheism, the angelic figures alongside God are probably derived from the original sons of God in the divine council."[307] Like in the original divine council which was subsequently adopted by pre-exilic Israel, in which the sons served as assistants to the head god, angels were equally to serve as assistants to the Jewish God on behalf of humankind. In light of these observations, angelology is understood as a consequence of the developing monotheism, and not that it preceded the development of monotheism. Yahweh therefore, became the only legitimate deity worshiped by his people in an exclusive monotheistic relationship.

In what follows, we will begin by tracing the concept of angels in ancient Near Eastern cultures. By necessity, we will also investigate how angels were conceived of in Israelite religion, in which case the Hebrew Bible itself will be our main source of information. Further, some post-exilic non-canonical literature including the Dead Sea Scrolls, will also be examined for some evidence of the doctrine of angelology. Ultimately, the idea in this chapter is to discover how angelology testified or evinced the developing monotheism in Yehud.

[306] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion*, 224.
[307] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 224.

4.1 Angelology in the Ancient Near Eastern World.

4.1.1 Angelology in Ancient Egypt

Angelology is well attested in ancient Near Eastern cultures. As O'Callaghan observes, Angels may be classified under three categories: (1) Semi-divine figures that make up the divine court; (2) individual custodians of humans or other natural elements including the heavens, fire, air, etc; and (3) messengers of god or intermediaries between God and humans.[308] From this observation, it is evident that the concept of angels is dependent on the worldview of the respective religious adherents. Each religion will have an angelic perception based on its adherents' religio-traditional beliefs. As O'Callaghan further observes, the perception of angels varies "principally in accordance with their [the people's] respective understanding of God, of the world, and of human beings."[309] In the complex ancient Egyptian religious system, for example, one and the same god could function both as a regional god and yet also serve as a subordinated deity in reference to another god. Likewise, the same deity could also function as the superior unit for another deity. In this case, the god Amun could be worshiped as a local god (under the designation "Amun-Re of Hibis" or "Amun of the southern Heliopolis"); and yet at the same time he could also be worshiped as a "supra-regional deity of the whole land."[310] Egyptian gods were also characterized by a dualistic nature, in which the same god could function both as a god of love and of destruction. A typical example is that of the goddess Hathor, who sometimes appeared as a goddess of love and fertility, and at other times as a goddess of destruction.[311] Further, in the mythological tale "The Destruction of Mankind," it has been observed that it was the goddess Hathor who was sent by the sun god Re, to punish mankind. This punishment was in response to a circumstance in which mankind plotted against the sun god, who is said to have been growing old. In

[308] Paul O'Callaghan, "Angels," in *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia Beliefs and Practices* (ed. J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann; Santa Barbara, California: ABC Clio, 2010), 114.

[309] O'Callaghan, "Angels," 114.

[310] Bernd U. Schipper, "Angels or Demons?: Divine Messengers in Ancient Egypt," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings—Origins, Development and Reception.* Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook (ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schopflin; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 2-3.

[311] Schipper, "Angels or Demons," 3; cf. R.H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 140.

the text of the ancient Egyptian literature, a dialogue between the sun god Re and a council of gods is recorded:

> "They said to his majesty:
> Let your eye go and smite them for you, those schemers of evil!
> No eye is more able to smite them for you.
> May it go down as Hathor!"[312]

In the dialogue quoted above, it is evident that the goddess Hathor, like many other deities, sometimes served as a divine messenger, in addition to her role as goddess. It is also to be noted that after the goddess Hathor accomplished the mission for which she was sent, that of slaying mankind, she returned to Re to give a report. After the report was rendered, Re is said to have responded, "Welcome in peace, Hathor, Eye who did what I came for!"[313] In the context of the present discussion, what may be drawn from this experience of Re and the goddess Hathor, is that in the ancient Egyptian pantheon, the messenger role was sometimes interchangeable among the gods. While the more superior gods could send those that were subordinate to them as their divine messengers, it would seem that, in a rather complicated manner, the messenger role was assumed by different gods at different times depending on the circumstance demanding the need for a messenger. A superior god under a particular situation could serve as messenger, under another god. It seems true also that the messenger deity assumed absolute authority in representing the sending god. From the same dialogue above, Hathor is characterized as Re's eye; meaning that she was as much a part of Re as Re himself. Again, we note here that Re identifies himself with Hathor in her mission as messenger, in a way that suggests that there was mutual collaboration between the two, sender and the one being sent.

In the tale of "The Destruction of Mankind," it is also evident that, in Egyptian religion, there was a difference between the world of the gods (probably heaven), and the world of mankind (earth). As needs arose, gods normally dialogued in order to determine which deity would function as

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[312] M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: The New Kingdom* (vol. II; Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 197-98; cf. Schipper, "Angels or Demons?," 3-4.

[313] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 199; cf. Schipper, "Angels or Demons?," 4.

"messenger deity" in order to communicate the will of the gods with mankind. It is also evident that messenger deities normally brought reports back to the sending deities concerning the mission for which they were sent. Of interest in ancient Egypt, is the observation that the designation "messenger deity" was not exclusively reserved for any specific deities, as even those at the top of the pantheon sometimes could function as messenger deities as well. Schipper summarizes this somewhat complex relationship between the operations of the gods and mankind as follows:

> To sum up, we can conclude firstly that the received concept of divine messengers is combined with those of 'intermediate beings.' It stands for deities, who communicate between the gods and man. Where the distance between the main and often 'distant' deities becomes larger, these messengers become important in order to assure communication between the world of god and the world of man. From a more theoretical point of view, the main function of divine messengers seems to overcome both the spatial as well as the temporal 'interdependence-interruption' which occurs in the wake of increased hierarchization of a religion. According to this, divine messengers need not be subordinate deities in general, rather they are a functional concept, to be determined as the case arises. The example of the goddess Hathor merely shows that also deities at the top of the pantheon can act as divine messengers and therefore appear in a subordinate role.[314]

In all this detailed and somewhat complicated Egyptian religious system, the idea is to discover how it might have influenced Israel and later post-exilic Judaism, in their understanding of angelology. In other words, as nations that co-existed in the contemporary world of the ancient Near East, how might the two nations have shared the concept of angels? The same question will apply to the other traditions considered in this study, that is, Mesopotamia and Ugarit.

4.1.2 Angelology in Mesopotamian Religion

In Mesopotamia, like in ancient Egypt and Ugarit, messenger deities have equally been attested. Observing the nature of angels in Mesopotamia, Meier notes, "Those gods who cluster near the upper echelons of the pantheon typically dispatch as their envoys a single messenger, who is a high official, often a *Sukkal* (a Sumerian term which designated a position of intimacy and authority second only to one's lord or mistress)."[315] This observation in Mesopotamia adds another aspect to the nature of messenger deities in the ancient Near East, which was not evident in both ancient Egyptian and

[314] Schipper, "Angels or Demons?," 5.
[315] Samuel A. Meier, "Angel," *DDD*, 46.

Ugaritic religious systems. As one of the qualifications of being a messenger deity, Mesopotamians stressed that one had to be highly esteemed. Perhaps even more informative is the description of such a messenger deity by the Sumerian designation "Sukkal," which by implication meant that they were considered to be counsellors and viziers who rendered special services to their superior gods. The point to be noted from the "superior god–messenger god" relationship is that the messenger deities did not construe themselves as competitors with the higher ranking, sending deities. Rather, these messenger deities served their superiors as envoys or servants. It would be of interest to know how this Mesopotamian intimacy between the sending god and the messenger-god, may have featured between Yahweh and his angelic messengers.

Under exceptional circumstances, some Mesopotamian gods had more than one messenger deity (Sukkal) in their employ. For example, up to between seven and eighteen messenger deities are said to have once been at the service of a single high-ranking god.[316] Most of the high-ranking gods who normally had more than one messenger at their disposal would include the war or storm god."[317] Some of the well known messenger deities in Mesopotamia included Ninishubur—who was Anu's messenger; Papsukkal—the messenger of Ilbaba, and Nusku—the messenger of Baal.[318] There also existed a class of messengers in Mesopotamia, who were responsible for the custodianship of individual human beings, which O'Callaghan has compared to the messengers designated as מלאך in the Hebrew Bible. It is believed that these messengers looked after humans during their life time, but that they abandoned them when they sinned or were in some sense defiled.[319] Also attested was a class of messengers who watched over temples and holy places with arms uplifted in prayer. These messengers were known as "Kuribu," from which the Hebrew word "cherubim" was probably derived.[320]

316 Meier, "Angel," 46.

317 The reason why the war or storm god needed more than one messenger was probably due to the nature of the work involved in attending to such forces of nature. In the words of Meier, the high-ranking god may have needed more than one messenger "perhaps [considering] safety or strength in numbers being a concomitant of his more belligerent profile." See, Meier, "Angels," 46; cf. L. Ginzberg, "Baal's Two Messengers," *BASOR* 95 (1944): 25-30.

318 O'Callaghan, "Angels," 114.

319 O'Callaghan, "Angels," 114.

320 O'Callaghan, "Angels," 114.

4.1.3 Angelology in Ugaritic Literature

In the religious system at Ugarit, the highest level (tier) of the pantheon was occupied by the presiding gods who were in charge of the activities of the universe. These higher ranking gods ensured that order was carried out through a subordinate class of gods who occupied the lowest level in the pantheon, generally referred to as "messenger gods."[321] The messenger gods were employed by the higher-ranking gods to carry messages from one god to another. As Handy has elaborated, "In performing this function the messengers delivered the text of their superiors' speeches without amplifying the content, adding their own comments, or in any way inserting themselves into the job."[322] This means that it was expected of the messenger deities to do exactly what the high ranking gods ordered them to do. In this case, the messenger deities existed to serve the gods in the higher levels of the pantheon.[323] Human messengers in ancient Near Eastern cultures, just like their divine counterparts, were ideally supposed to act only on the basis of the orders of their superiors. However, it is generally observed that human messengers failed to comply with this expectation.[324] Of further interest regarding the messenger deities at Ugarit, is the observation that they were nondescript and that they were usually not treated in detail as individual beings. Rather, their status was defined by their role as messengers, whose authority was derived from the high-ranking sending gods.[325] As Handy further observes, Ugaritic messenger gods whose responsibility was to convey messages from one god to another (or to humans), showed no individual volition.[326] That is to say, the messenger gods at Ugarit did not have the freedom to express their personal will. They operated solely under the direction of the

[321] See Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon As Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994, 1994), 149.

[322] Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 149.

[323] Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 149.

[324] For more on the role of human messengers in ancient Near Eastern cultures, see W. Ahl, "Epistolary Texts from Ugarit: Structural and Lexical Correspondences in Epistles in Akkadian and Ugaritic" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1973), 200; W.F. Leemans, *The Old Babylonian Merchant: His Business and Social Position* (Studia et Documenta ad 3; Leiden: Brill, 1950), 35; John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in Ancient Near East* (BJS 169; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); A.D. Crown, "Messengers and Scribes: The ספר and מלאך in the Old Testament," *VT* 24 (1974):366; Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (HSM 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 168-79.

[325] Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 151.

[326] Handy, *Host of Heaven,*151.

high ranking gods.

At this point, it is worth noting the clear contrast between the two religious systems—ancient Egypt and Ugarit, in their conception of the nature of messenger deities. Whereas messenger deities in ancient Egypt could come from any level in the pantheon, they almost always belonged to the lowest level in the Ugaritic pantheon. In ancient Egypt, any deity irrespective of his or her status, whether from the highest or lowest level in the pantheon, could serve as a messenger deity depending on the need or circumstance at hand. Being a messenger deity in ancient Egypt was based upon function, which meant that a god would only be designated "messenger deity" if he or she carried on the function of a messenger. It would seem to the contrary that at Ugarit, only those gods who occupied the lowest level (tier) were categorized as messenger deities. Further, the observation about the nondescript nature of messenger deities at Ugarit will be of interest later in the discussion, when we come to review the concept of angels in Israelite religion. This will be particularly true when we discuss the relationship between Yahweh and the divine being often designated, מלאך יהוה "the messenger of Yahweh."

4.2 Angelology in Israelite Religion

4.2.1 Angelology in the Hebrew Bible

Like in the other ancient Near Eastern cultures that we have already evaluated, the concept of angels is equally well attested in the Hebrew Bible. More often than not, the word מלאך in the Hebrew Bible designates a human messenger (e.g. 1 Sam 11:4; 1Kgs 19:2). Out of its more than 200 occurences in the Hebrew Bible, only a small number designate "divine" or supernatural beings, who function as a representative extension of Yahweh's presence, authority and activity (see Ps 103:20).[327] In spite of the differences in usage, the basic meaning of the term *malak,* is generally associated with someone or a being who is a "lesser agent" of a master.[328] In the Hebrew Bible, this would imply an agent or servant of Yahweh. In Israelite religion, מלאך did not designate God's assistants or servants in general. Rather, it

[327] Meier, "Angel," 81.
[328] G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1895), 185.

more specifically designated only those that God sent on special missions as messengers.[329]

Yahweh's messengers have different responsibilities. There are those who bless and praise him (Ps 103:20); others communicate between heaven and earth (Gen 28:12); while some protect God fearing travellers from harm (Ps 91:11-12). As Cho observes, when divine messengers in the Hebrew Bible arrive at their destination, they do not pay homage to their recipients, considering that such recipeints are mortal and thus subordinate to them (Ps 8:6)[330] The primary task of the messenger in the Hebrew Bible was not just to convey a memorized message; the messenger was also to explicate the intent of the sender. God's messengers in the Hebrew Bible entertained questions from humans, and they explained and clarified some aspects of God's message to humans (Zech 1:9; 2:2; 4:1-6; 5:5-11; 6:4-5). These divine messengers also represented human beings before God (Job 33:23-24). The actual role of messengers in the Bible may best be explained by Mendenhall's statement, "[they are] manifestations by which a deity becomes functional in human experience."[331]

4.2.2 Angelological Differences between Israel and other ancient Near Eastern Traditions

The concept of angels in the Hebrew Bible parallels that of other ancient Near Eastern traditions in some ways, especially Ugarit. One way in which this observation is particularly true can be found in the Hebrew word for "messenger" (מלאך), which derives from the Ugaritic root *l'k,* meaning "to send".[332] Thus, the Hebrew Bible writers may have possibly borrowed the word and probably the concept itself from Ugarit. While there were some similarities regarding the conception of Angels in the Hebrew Bible and the other traditions, it is probably more beneficial to point out their differences. In reviewing such differences, a guiding principle can be found in Meier's statement, "Some features of

[329] Meier, "Angel," 83, 84.
[330] Sang Soul Cho, *Lesser Deities in Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Study of their Nature and Roles.* Deities and Angels of the Ancient World 2 (Piscala, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), 188.
[331] G.E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth's Generation* (Baltimore, MD: John's Hopkins University Press, 1973), 59.
[332] See Matthias Kockert, "Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men in the Patriarchal Narratives of the Book of Genesis," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings—Origins, Development and Reception* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 51; Also see W.R. Smith, *The Religion of the Semites: the Fundamental Institutions* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 445-46.

divine messenger activity elsewhere in the ancient Near East are not duplicated in Israel's religion by the very nature of Israel's monotheism."[333] As Meier has rightly stated, it is to be expected that most of the diferences that may have existed between Israel and the rest of her neighbors in their conception of angels, came as a result of Israel's developing monotheism. In their promulgation of a monotheistic faith, the leaders of Israel particularly in the Persian period, ensured that anything that associated them with the polytheism of the ancient past was to be removed from the text of the Hebrew Bible.

Five major differences between Israel and her neighbors in the ancient Near East will be considered in this study. First, at Ugarit for example, the use of messengers was restricted to the divine realm, in which gods comunicated with other gods through the messenger deities. When the gods had a message for humans, the gods themselves rather than messengers appeared before them.[334] In the Hebrew Bible, to the contrary, it is Yahweh's messengers who represent him before humans; without himself having to appear before them.[335] It has generally been observed however, that in early Israelite religion, Yahweh used to appear before humans in person just like the other ancient Near Eastern gods did.[336] The decision to make Yahweh invisible in later texts of the Hebrew Bible may have been a way of preserving his monotheistic exclusivity. This invisibility of Yahweh, as it may be expected, often made it difficult to distinguish an angel from other human servants like prophets and priests, who were sometimes called messengers as well (cf. Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7).[337] This phenomenon of Yahweh's invisibility may be in agreement with Ex 33:20, in which God warns that no man can see him and live.

However, it is generally believed that it is out of Israel's promulgation of a monotheistic faith, in which they promoted his uniqueness and exclusivity that they sought to make him invisible. For

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[333] Meier, "Angel," 49.

[334] For example, when El and Baal needed to contact humans (e.g., the kings Danil and Kirta) they appeared in person. See Matthias Kockert, "Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men," 74.

[335] Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 154.

[336] Meier, "Angel," 97.

[337] Erik Eynikel, "The Angel in Samson's Birth Narrative–Judg 13," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings—Origins, Development and Reception.* Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature (ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schopflin; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 110-11.

example, Judg 13 records that Manoah and his wife had seen the angel of Yahweh. Some have argued that the couple actually saw God except that for the same reason, the textual redactors may have interpolated מלאך (messenger) in the place of אלהים (God).[338] This view is in agreement with Manoah's confession when he says to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (Judg 13:22). The role of what has been characterized as "Interpolation theory" seems to have featured prominently in the text of the Hebrew Bible after the exile. As will be demonstrated in various places, it was a common practice among Jewish rabbis to insert the word מלאך (angel or messenger) where it might have originally read אלהים (God) especially when it seemed theologically inconvenient. This tendency was often under circumstances in which the transcendency or exclusivity of Yahweh was construed as being somewhat compromised.

Distinguishing between a human and an angelic messenger was usually a difficult endeavor as both appeared in human guise. However, two key differences may be cited in helping one to make this distinction. First, it is understandable that angelic messengers had their abode with God in heaven and would only come to the earth to execute their mission; while human messengers lived on earth among the people. Secondly, human messengers, unlike their angelic counterparts, tended to have some level of autonomy in the way they executed their tasks. Thus, the messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah, for example, took the initiative of adding his own pursuasive words; something an angel would never do.[339] As the concept of monotheism continued to grow in the minds of the Israelites, so did God's transcendency—which meant that the distance between man and God grew even wider, thus necessitating the mediatory role of the מלאך.[340]

The second difference between Israel and the other ancient Near Eastern traditions regarding their concept of angels may yet be traced through a contrast with Ugarit. Whereas angels were believed

[338] See Meier, "Angel," 106; Marjo Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Muenster: Ugaritic-Verlag, 1990), 296; Nahum M. Sarna, Genesis בראשית *The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 383.

[339] Eynikel, "Angel in Samson's Birth Narrative," 111-12. Also see Cho, *Lesser Deities*, 13-55.

[340] This point has been elaborated by Garr, who states, "Angels can therefore appear as contact between divinity and

to be divine in Ugaritic literature, they were not considered so in the Hebrew Bible, which portrayed Yahweh as the only divine being.[341] This, without question, would have been a result of Israel's continuing endevor to present Yahweh as the one and only legitimate God above every other deity. However, the problem comes in view of those passages in the Hebrew Bible in which the distinction between Yahweh and messenger becomes confusing. One example is the case in which Moses meets the deity in the burning bush:

> There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush;
> he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.
> Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight,
> and see why the bush is not burned up."
> When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see,
> God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"
> And he said, "Here I am." (Exod 3:2-4, NRSV).

The problem here is that in verse 2 we read that an angel (messenger) of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush; and yet in verse 4 it is God himself who calls out to Moses out of the same bush. The challenge in this case is to determine whether or not the angel (מלאך) and God (אלהים) are one and the same being; which if so, would essentially suggest that both are divine. Admittedly, this sudden shift from angel to god has caused confusion in the minds of many biblical scholars regarding the messenger-God relationship in the Hebrew Bible.[342] Again, it would seem that earlier on the God of Israel himself, just like the gods of the other ancient Near Eastern cultures, may have physically appeared before human beings whenever it was necessary to do so.

Another passage in which the identity of messenger and God in the Hebrew Bible is somewhat confusing is in the story of the three visitors who came to Abraham at Mamre. The passage reads:

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humanity . . . They act as intermediaries between God, whom they represent, and humankind, whom they address . . ." See W. Randall, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity Divinity and Monotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 53.

[341] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2.201; H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (trans D.E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 100. Some of the examples in which angels in Ugaritic literature are referred to as angels include: Baal's messenger (s) who at one point were addressed as gods (see, K. Merling Alomia, "Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East and Some Comparisons with Heavenly Beings of the Old testament," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 1987), 237. Also, Asherah's messengers are closely associated with key Ugaritic deities (see Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 157; KTU 1.123.26)

[342] For a comprehensive discussion, see Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 40.

> He looked up and saw three men standing near him.
> When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them,
> and bowed down to the ground. (Gen 18:2; NRSV).

In this passage, the text tells us that Abraham saw three men, whom he greeted by bowing down to the ground, perhaps as a sign of respect. If the narative had ended there, we would probably have no reason to question anything. However, when we continue reading all the way up to 19:1 (18:33-19:1), we discover that when the three visitors are about to leave, Yahweh suddenly comes into the picture:

> And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham;
> and Abraham returned to his place. The two angels came to Sodom in the
> evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw
> them, he rose to meet them,and bowed down with his face to the
> ground. (Gen 18:33-19:1; NRSV).

It is interesting to note that, to start with, it was three men that Abraham saw. Later on, it turned out to be that when they departed, it was no longer three men (messengers) but Yahweh himself in the company of two messengers whom he subsequently instructed to go and destroy Sodom (19:13). In this case, Yahweh seems to be indistinguishable from his messengers in the Hebrew Bible. However, as Handy argues, at no time does the biblical material define the "malakim" (messengers) as gods or God.[343]

Thirdly, another difference between Israel and her neighbors regarding the concept of angels was that whereas ancient Near Eastern gods were known for dispatching specific messengers to run their errands, it has not been determined with certainty if this was ever the case with Yahweh. As Meier points out, it is only in later texts that Yahweh has been known to have the preference of sending a particular supernatural being on missions.[344] The only time we find Yahweh seemingly associated with a specific angel is in the case of the angelic being described simply as מלאך יהוה (messenger of Yahweh); but which, as we shall discover later, has equally posed an exegetical challenge. Fourthly, while angels are given names in the ancient Near East, angels in the texts of the Hebrew Bible before

[343] Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 158.
[344] Meier, "Angel of Yahweh," *DDD,* 53-54.

the exile are without names. Angels only came to be named in the book of Daniel during the Babylonian exile (Daniel 8-12).[345] Fifthly, whereas messenger deities at Ugarit for example, did not have the freedom to express their volition as it has already been stated, messenger deities in the Hebrew Bible were free to express their will. With such independence for messenger deities in the Hebrew Bible, it is said that an angelic faction revolted against Yahweh, the divine supreme power, consequently ending up with the class of beings known as Demons.[346] Yahweh's tendency to grant freedom of choice to his subordinates seems to be typical of his character. In Genesis 2:16-17, he is recorded to have given freedom of choice to the ancestors of the human race, Adam and Eve. While he commanded them against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, still, he offered them the freedom of choice.

4.2.3 Angelology and מלאך יהוה in Context

The phrase מלאך יהוה has attracted much debate and speculation among Hebrew Bible scholars. The question is whether we should translate this designation as "The angel of the Lord," in which case we would be refering to a specific angel, or alternatively translate it as "an angel of the Lord," which does not call attention to any one angel in particular. Adding to the confusion, is the fact that the designation מלאך יהוה can sometimes refer to a human messenger sent by God (e.g. priests and prophets in Mal 2:7 and Hag 1:13 respectively). This phrase has never been clear in almost all its occurences in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Judg 2:1, 5:23; Gen 16:7-11; Ex 3:2; Num 22:22-23; 2 Sam 24:16 // 1 Chr 21:12-30). The Septuagint (LXX) in most cases addresses the figure as indifinite, that is "an angel of the Lord" (E.g. Gen 16:7; Ex 3:2, 4:24; Isa 37:36). Likewise, the Masoretic Text (MT) has equally shown that this figure is addressed in indefinite terms (2 Chr 32:21). Consequently, it has been observed that the designation "mal'aki Yahweh" does not apply to a specific angel, but rather to any number of different

[345] See Meier, “Angel of Yahweh,” 53.

[346] R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2.163; L.R. Wickham, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men: Genesis VI.2 in Early Christian Exegesis,” *OTS* 19 (1974): 135-39.

angels.[347] The figure in question has sometimes been identified with Yahweh in ways that make it difficult to distinguish one from the other. In Judg 6:21-23, for example, instead of the angelic being addressing Gideon, it is Yahweh who comforts Gideon. Again, the only satisfactory explanation regarding the identity of the figure referred to simply as מלאך יהוה may be found in the "interpolation theory" which we have already alluded to. Under this theory, the rabbis, for different reasons, inserted the word mal'aki "messenger" or "angel" wherever it may have originally read אלהים (God). The reasons for such an innovation have been summarized by Meier as follows:

> The word *mal'ak* was inserted in certain contexts because of theological discomfort with Yahweh appearing as a *satan* adversary (Num 22), or in visible form or with the actions of a man (Gen 16:13; Judges 6; 13; cf. Gen 22:14), or in contexts where the actual presence of God was otherwise theologically troublesome (Ex 4:24). In many passages, inadequate data hinder confidence in determining if the *mal'ak YHWH* is in fact an envoy or an interpolation.[348]

In light of the above observation by Meier, it is important to clarify that while the interpolation process might have begun as early as the pre-exilic times (probably by the Yahweh-Alone party), it seems true also that it continued alongside the developing monotheism through the exilic and post-exilic periods. In the context of this study, the interpolation or redactional process would have reached its zenith in the Persian period when the books of the Hebrew Bible were assembled into their present form. Gerstenberger's observation in this regard is informative:

> In most instances the precise dating of biblical writings is difficult. This also applies to the compositions that can be placed in the Persian period with some confidence. We need to differentiate between texts that emerged in the period under discussion and others that originated in earlier periods in their basic substance but later experienced a significant revision, in other words, that led to their final form. . . . It remains to be assumed that in that fifth century, when Nehemiah and Ezra literally constituted the community of Yahweh in Jerusalem, almost all the texts still assembled in the Pentateuch today were brought together and codified. The most sacred piece of the Hebrew Bible is a work of that Persian period in which the community of Yahweh was formed. They originated together. . . . But it is in the nature of things that the constitution of the Yahweh communities fully began around their religious backbone, the torah, only after the liberation by the Persians in 539 B.C.E., concurrent with the origin of the Holy Scriptures. This was brought to a a good conclusion in the fifth century B.C.E. . . .[349]

4.3 Angelic Language in Post-exilic Yehud

4.3.1 Angelology—A compromise Between Polytheism and Monotheism

[347] Meier, "Angel of Yahweh," 54.
[348] Meier, "Angel of Yahweh," 58.
[349] Gerstenberger, *Israel,* 141, 384, 387.

In any discussion of angelology in the post-exilic period, the idea of a supreme deity has to be borne in mind.[350] This can be illustrated through the imagery of a court setting in which you have the judge, his assistants and the people. In this case, the supreme God works through his messengers, the angels, who implement his biddings to the people. Soares' comment summarizes it well, "[T]he Supreme monarchy must have messengers to do his biddings, . . ."[351] By the time of the exile, the Israelites had experienced repeated warnings against the worship of other gods along with Yahweh. The reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah were designed to lead the Israelites into an exclusive worship of Yahweh. The prophet Jeremiah (Jer 25) warned the people about an impeding siege by the Babylonians as a result of their persistence in worshiping other deities along with Yahweh. Further, Deutero-Isaiah continued the campaign for the exclusive worship of Yahweh during the exilic period (Isa 40-55), while denigrating all other gods. After the exile, the leaders of the Yehudites, were bent on a decided effort to exalt Yahweh as the only deity worth of worship.

Bearing in mind that the Jewish people worshiped other familial tutelary deities along with Yahweh before the exile, the question to be expected is what might have happened to such gods after the exile. It is in the development of angelology that such a question is to be answered. In the post-exilic period, the gods of the pre-exilic pantheons came to be identified as angels and demons. This meant that there was only one legitimate God, making all the other deities his servants and messengers. Grabbe's elaboration is probably the most explicit on this transition from gods to angels:

> The Persian period saw considerable changes in the concept of the spirit world, though this was mainly the development of themes already begun in pre-exilic times. Other heavenly beings were acknowledged in the form of angels and demons. Angelology has its roots in the old Israelite religion (some have suggested they were simply the old gods demoted to an inferior status), though some have also detected some Persian influence here. The development of a complex angelology and demonology is a characteristic of Second Temple Judaism as a whole but with strong roots in the Persian period.[352]

Thus, the gods of the pre-exilic pantheons had to be demoted to some subordinate status, because even as monotheism was the official faith of the Jewish people after the exile, still, they had not altogether

[350] Theo G. Soares, "The Religious Ideas of Judaism from Ezra to Maccabees," *The Biblical World* 13.6 (1899): 385.
[351] Soares, "Religious Ideas of Judaism," 385.
[352] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 34-35.

forgotten their previous relationships with those gods. In other words, there was still a likelihood for the people to continue venerating such gods. As Rappoport notes, "Constantly the Jewish people showed a hankering for the polytheism of Egypt and Canaan; constantly the people forgot the worship of the One God and prostrated themselves before the many gods of antiquity."[353] Angelology therefore came in as a compromise between the two opposing theological ideologies of polytheism (or syncretism) and monotheism.

Since pre-exilic Israel was used to the idea of a pantheon, which comprised a hierarchy of gods with different roles from top to bottom, the development of angelology by necessity meant that the structure of the pantheon had to change. Based upon some insights drawn from ancient Near Eastern scholars like Handy and Smith, the pre-exilic Israelites were familiar with the four tier pantheon.[354] At the top of this pantheon was Yahweh the head god, together with Asherah, believed to have been his consort.[355] Next to them were the gods characterized as "sons of the gods," or the children. Below the sons of the gods was another unclassified group of lower ranking deities, who were then followed by the angels (messengers) in the lowest tier of the pantheon. The pre-exilic Israelite pantheon probably looked like the following:[356]

Fig 1: Pre-exilic Israelite Pantheon

The Four Tier Pantheon
Yahweh and his Asherah
gods /children of the gods
Other lower ranking gods
angels /Messengers

[353] Angelo S. Rappoport, *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel* (vol. 1 of *Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel*; London: Gresham Publishing, 1928), 30.

[354] See Lowell K. Handy, "The Appearance of a Pantheon in Judah," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. D.V. Edelman; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 27-34; Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History , Memory and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 110-14.

[355] Like in the early Ugaritic pantheon, in which Asherah was the wife of El–the head of the universal pantheon, she continued to be the consort of Yahweh even after the Israelites had their own pantheon, which made Yahweh the overall head of the pantheon.

[356] The hierarchal order of this pantheon in based on a careful analysis of the material presented by Handy, "The Appearance of a Pantheon in Judah," 27-43; and Smith, *Memoirs of God,* 110-14.

After the exile, based on the data we have reviewed thus far, the developing monotheism meant that Yahweh was the only legitimate God to be worshiped, and that all the other pre-exilic gods came to be classified as angels. Smith has summarized this transitional change of events as follows: "With its middle tiers removed, the new Judean pantheon consisted of the one omnipotent God and the lower divinities. In the newly configured heaven, there were lesser powers subordinate to this one supreme deity, and their power ultimately derived from this "One Power."[357] Perhaps even more insightful on how angelology clearly defined the developing monotheism of the post-exilic period is Handy's observation. He reminds the reader that unlike the two levels (tiers) of divinities that were removed from the pre-exilic pantheon, including the sons of the gods and the other lower ranking beings below them, the messengers (angels) could only do as they were ordered by Yahweh.[358] The fact that the angels only acted or did that which Yahweh commanded them, meant that Yahweh was truly the only legitimate, supreme and universal God in existence at that time. He was without competitors, and did not have to ask for permission from any being in existence other than himself, in order to do whatever pleased him. Figure 2 tabulates what the post-exilic monotheistic driven pantheon could have probably looked like:[359]

Fig. 2: Post-exilic Yehudite Pantheon

The Two Tier Pantheon
Yahweh
Angels/ Messengers

With the disappearance of the other deities in the pantheon, it became inevitable that the messengers had to assume all the roles that were previously performed by the other minor deities.[360]

[357] Smith, *Memoirs of God,* 119.
[358] Handy, "Appearance of a Pantheon," 42-43.
[359] This tabulation is based on the statements made earlier by both Smith and Handy in which the two middle tiers of the pre-exilic pantheon were done away with in the post-exilic period. See Handy, "Appearance of a Pantheon," 42; and Smith, *Memoirs of God,* 119.
[360] See Handy, *Host of Heaven,* 166; J. W. van Henten, "Angel II ἄγγελος," *DDD*, 51-52.

Thus we find angels in the post-exilic period performing roles including but not limited to: being guardians of faithful humans (Gen 19:15; Ex 23:20); serving as warriors (Ex 23:23; Josh 5:13-15); acting as executioners (1Chr 21:15-16); conveying the mandates of God to men (Gen 31:13); heralding special events (Gen 16:16); serving as instruments of divine displeasure against sinners (Num 22:22); as well as assuming all the roles previously performed by the deities identified as "sons of the gods" or "children of the gods."[361] Angels acted as representatives and yet subordinates of God.[362] Garr has rightly summed up the angelic mediatory role: "They act as intermediaries between God, whom they represent, and humankind, whom they address (Gen 28:12).[363] All these observations make it clear that angelology provided a definition for monotheism in which there was only one supreme being (Yahweh), while the rest were his subordinates.

Another way to explain the subordination of angels to the universal God of the Yehudites may be found in the etymological context of the Hebrew term מלאך. As we saw earlier, this term derives from the Ugaritic root *l'k,* which means "to send."[364] This means that angels are not entirely independent beings, for they only function in the service of the sovereign God whom they serve as his envoys. Again, being the only agents between God and man, this made them subservient to Yahweh, and not his competitors. Furthermore, several Hebrew grammatical phrases also serve to define the interealtionship between angels and God. First, is the phrase we have already discussed at length, מלאך יהוה "angel of the Lord" (cf. Judg 6:22; Ps 34:7). This phrase entails that the angel in question or angels in general, belong to God in a possessive sense; that is, they are owned by God. Likewise, we also find phrases like מלאכי, "my messenger" (Ex 32:34; 23:23), which is the name given to the author of the book of Malachi, implying that angels belong to God as his messengers. The same is also true for מלאכו

[361] For more on the Angelic role, see Garr, *His Own Image,* 53. For an elaboration on how the previous "sons of gods" came to be identified as angels, see Saul M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism.* (Texte Und Studien zum antiken Judentum 36; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 15-16. According to Olyan, the former "sons of gods" came to be identified as different classes of angels including–Seraphim and Cherubim among others.

[362] See Westermann, *Genesis*, 2: 243. cf. Garr, *His Own Image,* 53.

[363] Garr, *His Own Image,* 53.

[364] Kockert, "Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men," 51.

"his angel or messenger," which implies that angels either belong to God or they are owned by God. The suffixes in each of these Hebrew phrases can therefore "indicate a possessive relationship between an angel and God."[365] Again, the development of angelology in post-exilic Yehud, bearing all these factors in mind, meant that Yahweh reigned supreme–making monotheism a welcome faith.

The task of tracing the concept of mal'aki (messenger) in pre-exilic Israel has shown that it originated from the commonly held belief in a pantheon of gods that existed in the ancient Near Eastern world. Here the classification of the deities that comprised the pantheon included a class designated as "messenger deities" who run errands on behalf of their superior gods. Arguably, the religion of pre-exilic Israel, whose practitioners would later become Jews (Yehudites) in the post-exilic period, was originally like that of her neighbors. The Israelites back then had a pantheon that was headed by Yahweh. Likewise, the concept of "messenger" must have characterized Israel's religion in the same way it was conceived of by her ancient neighbors. We have already argued in the previous sections that the beings who are identified as angels in the Hebrew Bible may have been deities in the early Israelite pantheon.[366] Following Israel's drive for a monotheistic faith, the "interpolative theory" served as a tool by which the remnants of polytheism were purged from the text of the Hebrew Bible. Thus we find ambiguous appearances of the word אלהים (God) for example, (that did not specifically refer to Yahweh but possibly to some other divine being) being replaced by the now familiar מלאך (messenger). By this action, angelology can be seen as a compromise, to borrow Rappoport's term, between the polytheism of the past and the developing monotheism of post-exilic Yehud:

> The angelology of the Jews has always been the result of the conflict constantly waged between monotheism and the polytheism of the oriental past, which never ceased and still lingered on in the imagination of the people. Before the Babylonian captivity the struggle was one between the one God–Unique and Universal, the God of the Hebrew prophets–and the national, local Gods of Oriental antiquity. Constantly the Jewish people showed a hankering for the polytheism of Egypt and Canaan; constantly the people forgot the worship of the One God and prostrated themselves before the many gods of antiquity.[367]

[365] See Garr, *His Own Image,* 52.
[366] See for example Handy, *Host of Heaven*, 152; W.R. Smith, *The Religion of the Semite: The Fundamental Institutions* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 445-46.
[367] Rappoport, *Myth and Legend,* 30.

4.3.2 Angelic Names and Monotheism in Yehud

We already established that before the exile, angels were never known by names, and that they only came to be named in the book of Daniel during the exile. Bearing in mind that the purpose of our study is to discover how angels (angelology) impacted the developing monotheism in Yehud, we will analyze the relationship that exists between God and the angels. To accomplish this, we will analyze the names of the angels and their meanings. It has generally been noted that angels were named after the name of the Jewish God. Rappoport has summarized the significance of angelic names as follows:

> The names of the angels are always a composition of the name of God and the special commission entrusted to them. And thus the name of each ministering angel depends upon his message and often varies with it. On his breast, each angel has a tablet in which the name of God and that of the angel is combined.[368]

From this observation, it gives the reader the clue that the angels do not exist in isolation of God. Their existence is dependent upon their relationship with God. The fact that the name of each angel is revelatory of God's name and attributes signifies the close bond that exists between God and the angels. Their authority is derived from God; they are not God's equals or competitors; and they cannot be worshiped as if they were God himself. Rather, angels are a manifestation of God, and they extend his presence and ministry to mankind. It is in this sense that the polytheism of pre-exilic Israel came to be replaced by monotheism through the development of angelology. Whereas pre-exilic Israelite religion was characterized by the worship of many tutelary gods, post-exilic Yehud had Yahweh as their object of worship. Thus the gods of pre-exilic Israel came to be identified as angels in the service of the one and only God of Israel.

In keeping with the observations above, we will discuss four great angels, also known as 'angel princes,' including: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael. In terms of hierarchy, these angels are considered to be above all others. They are the closest to God and they continually live in his presence. The name “Michael” means Who is like God? or simply one who is like God.[369] In the Hebrew Bible,

[368] Rappoport, *Myth and Legend,* 32.

[369] See George A. Barton, “The Origin of the Names of Angels and Demons in the Extra-Canonical Apocalyptic Literature to 100 AD,” *JBL* 31.4 (1912): 157-58.

Michael appears as a personal name (Num 13:13; Ezra 8:8; 2 Chr 21:2). The origin and function of the name "Michael" has been associated with the Canaanite deity Mikkal. This name derives from the root *yk'l,* from which we get our English to be able or one who is able. The angel Michael therefore testifies to God's attributes of greatness and might. Whatever abilities he possesses are attributed to God. He also carries responsibilities of guardianship (Dan 10:18, 21). "Gabriel" means strength of God. This essentially means that whatever strength Gabriel possessed belonged to God. This is the angel who explains visions to Daniel (8:16; 10:4). "Uriel" means the Splendour of God or My light is God. Tradition says Uriel presides over thunder and trembling. "Raphael" means Healing from God or simply "God is a healer." Thus, God's healing power is extended to humankind through his servant, Raphael.[370] Again, through the angelic names and functions, it is evident that angels exist entirely to serve God. They run errands in the service of the only God of the universe, Yahweh. Thus through the meanings of their names and functions, the angels declare that they function to serve God and not his competitors.

4.3.3 Angelology in Biblical Literature of the Second Temple Period (1st and 2nd Chronicles)

In a study that elaborates on the features that commonly characterize angels, O'Callaghan suggests that post-exilic angelology was a consequence of the Jewish perception of God. He states, "It may be said, therefore, that the nature of angelic beings varies considerably from religion to religion, principally in accordance with their [the people's] understanding of God, of the world and of human beings."[371] From this, it may be inferred that post-exilic angelology was basically a result of the Jews' perception of their God. Because Yahweh was conceived to be the only legitimate God, there had to be an explanation for the existence of the other gods who once comprised the pre-exilic pantheon. Based on the Yehudite monotheistic conviction which led to the re-structuring of the pantheon already elaborated above, angelology was developed—in which all other deities came to be identified as angels.

[370] See Barton, *Names of Angels and Demons,* 156-59; Rappoport, *Myth and Legend,* 32-69.
[371] O'Callaghan, "Angels," 114.

The Jews' monotheistic conception of God greatly influenced the content of post-exilic canonical literature. For example, we find a case of text-redaction in the books of Chronicles, prompted by the Jewish perception of God. We find a clear text redactional situation in which the original text was altered for a theological desire to emphasize the Yehudite evolving monotheistic perception of God. This redactional process has been clearly illustrated by Beentjes. Using the following diagrams we shall first review 2 Chr 32:21 in light of its original reading in 2 Kgs 19:35/Isa 37:35. We will also consider 1 Chr 21:15 in light of 2 Sam 24:16. Elaborated below is a tabulation of the two sets of contrasting passages:

Fig. 1

2 Kgs 19:35 / Isa 37:35 (Vorlage Text)	2 Chr 32:21 (Redacted Text)
That very night the angel of the Lord (YHWH) set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians . . . (NRSV).	And the Lord (YHWH) sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. (NRSV).

What is evident from a comparison of these passages is that the Chronicler, who composed his text after the exile, altered the text from its vorlage in such a way that instead of the angel being seen as the agent of annihilation (2 kgs 19:35), it is Yahweh himself who cut off the warriors and commanders in the Assyrian camp. In the Jewish mind of the post-exilic period, Yahweh was the only God who was sovereign and almighty. Yahweh alone had the power to do whatever he purposed to do. There was no other being comparable to Yahweh, whether divine or human, in heaven on earth, or in the underworld. Beentjes, notes:

> The Chronicler had adapted his source text in such a way that the real agent of the assyrian defeat was not the angel, but YHWH himself. In other words, the Chronicler has adjusted his *Vorlage* for theological reasons: the angel indeed acts as God's messenger.[372]

[372] Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Satan, God, and the Angel(s) in 1 Chronicles 21," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings–Origins, Development and Reception* (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature; ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schopflin; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 150.

The same observation can also be made from fig. 2 below. In the original text, it was an angel that stretched out his hand in order to destroy Jerusalem, yet in the re-worked text in 1Chr 21:15, it was Yahweh who is seen to have sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem.

Fig. 2

2 Sam 24:16	1 Chr 21:15
But when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it.... (NRSV)	And God (YHWH) sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it.... (NRSV)

Again, post-exilic Jewish framework of thinking, as observed from the books of Chronicles, was predisposed on portraying Yahweh as the supreme authority in the universe. Any other being, angelic or otherwise, was considered subordinate to Yahweh. Thus Yahweh alone had the power to save or to destroy. Angelic power or authority was believed to derive only from Yahweh. From this, it is evident that the relationship between Yahweh and the angelic beings did not in any way conflict with the developing monotheism. Angelology did not compromise the divinity of the One true God, Yahweh. Instead, "the activities of the myriads of angels found in some writings were the means by which God's uniqueness was maintained; they were merely vehicles for his divine rule."[373]

4.3.4 Angelology in the Non-Canonical Literature of the Second Temple (Dead Sea Scrolls)

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly the sectarian scrolls, the development of angelology was believed to be a way of bridging the distance between an increasingly transcendent God and his humanity. Angels acted on behalf of God as his agents, in the work of maintaining the universe and executing judgment.[374] Unlike the view that angels played the role of interpreting prophecy (cf. Daniel 7-12)

[373] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 318-19.

[374] Cecelia Wassen, "Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings–Origins, Development and Reception* (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schopflin; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 519.

through dreams and visions, the sectarian scrolls do not testify to such a practice. Instead, "The scrolls at Qumran testify to a rather optimistic view on the humans' ability to reach the divine sphere in a direct way, and, conversely, also to a belief in God's direct, unmediated revelation to humans."[375] It is not crystal clear how this was done, but in the Judaism of the common era, this would have been done through prayer and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who reveals all things to believers in God. A question then might be asked, why emphasize the place of angels in the scrolls if they were not necessary for the revelation of God's will to man? It has been asserted that the role of angels in the sectarian literature was tied to an apocalyptic worldview, in which God would unleash his angels in future in order to punish evil.[376] This apocalyptic worldview was also associated with the concept of dualism which divided all human beings as well as supernatural beings into two contrasting categories– good and evil (1QS 3:13-4:26). Thus on the one hand, the sons of god (angels), together with the earthly women with whom they prostituted (Gen 6:1-4), were both pronounced as evil. On the other hand, the righteous ones (angels), as well as human beings deemed sinless, would enjoy God's favor by living in his eternal presence.

While angels were believed to be "eternal spirits" (1QH 9:11), they had limited knowledge when compared to God (11Q5 [11QPs^{a}] 26:12). For example, Angels could not fully explain the wonders of God (1QHa 20:29-30).[377] Attested in the sectarian scrolls also, is the hierarchization that exists among the angels. Angels functioned in an orderly, descending manner, inside out from the holy of holies where God dwells. Seven such hierarchal divisions are recorded in the sabbath songs.[378] Moreover, as Wassen observes, unlike the use of such expressions as בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of the gods), and

[375] Wassen, "Angels in Dead Sea Scrolls," 519. Also see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69-71.

[376] Wassen, "Angels in Dead Sea Scrolls," 519.

[377] See M. Weinfield, "The Angelic Song Over the Luminaries in the Qumran Texts," in *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness: Papers on the Qumran Scrolls by Fellows of the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989-1990* (STDJ 16; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 154; cf. Wassen, "Angels in Dead Sea Scrolls," 502.

[378] Cf. (4Q405 7 7), (4Q403 1 i 23), (4Q400 3-5 ii 2). For a detailed study, see Carol A. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HSS 27; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 32-36.

קדישם (the holy ones) for angels in the Hebrew Bible, which originally had polytheistic connotations, the scrolls at Qumran rather opted for such expressions as בְּנֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם (sons of the heavens). Examples in this regard include (1QS 4:22; 11:8; 1QH^{a} 11:22).[379] It is generally observed that by the use of these metaphorical expressions for angels, the scrolls "emphasize the divine nature of the angels rather than a father-son relationship with God."[380] In this case, it may be argued that these changes found in the scrolls, may have been a way of promoting a monotheistic faith over against the remnants of polytheism still evident in the text of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, while the angels possessed some divine nature, it did not make them gods in the sense that it applied to the sons of the gods in the divine council. Again, this continues to make a case in favor of the argument that the Persian period saw a transformation of Jewish faith from pre-exilic polytheism to post-exilic monotheism.

Moreover, in the context of the present study, the concepts of angels in the sectarian scrolls still make a case in favor of monotheism. The fact that angels were believed to be Yahweh's agents in carrying out his dealings with mankind, culminating into their apocalyptic role of punishing evil and evil doers, portrays a picture in which the One sovereign God who shall marshall the angelic forces, has absolute control over the entire universe. The angelic hierarchization described in these scrolls also testifies to the omnipotency of the One God from whom they all draw their authority. Angelology, in this sense, thus contributed to the exclusivity of Yahweh in the sectarian community at Qumran. Angels were, therefore, not seen as competitors against God, but as servants, agents, and messengers whose duty it was, to carry out his biddings. Davidson's observation summarizes these ideas:

> The angelic praise of God, which is a dominant motif in the *Sabbath Shirot,* implies the exalted status of God over the angels. He is the one through whom all things have come into being (4Q402 4 12 = MassShirShabb i 2), including all the everlasting spirits (4Q403 1 i 35). He is 'the king of the heavenly beings' (4Q402 3 ii 12) and 'the god of the angels' (11QShabb 5-6 5-6). There is no suggestion in the Shabbath Shirot that there is any angel who could be thought to equal God.[381]

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[379] Wassen, “Angels in Dead Sea Scrolls,” 500.

[380] Wassen, “Angels in Dead Sea Scrolls,” 500.

[381] Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels At Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 245-46.

4.4. Summation

In view of the discussions covered in the present chapter, we have seen that angelology was largely a consequence of the gradual development of monotheism. It would seem that the religion of Israel and her concept of the deity, was initially just like that of her neighbors in the ancient Near East. The point of departure came as a result of Israel's promulgation of a monotheistic faith. The Yehudite monotheistic drive subsequently led to a restructuring of the pre-exilic pantheon. From the four tiers of the pantheon, the developing monotheism led to the removal of the two middle tiers, leaving Yahweh at the top and the angels who serve him as messengers at the bottom.[382] The long and gradual journey to an exclusive monotheism probably began with the Yahweh-alone party before the exile.[383] However, as we have seen, exclusive monotheism only came to triumph in the Persian period. Thus, as this chapter has demonstrated, angelology, just like exclusivism, was born as a result of the developing monotheism in this period. This is bearing in mind that there cannot be a king without subjects or servants. In this case the angels therefore played the role of rendering service to the Yehudite God Further, through the interpolation theory, any record of a deity (elohim) other than Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, was replaced by the term angel (messenger). By so doing, the scribes responsible for the editorial work, ensured that there was no other legitimate god worth of worship beside Yahweh, thereby designating all others simply as angels.

Moreover, the names and functions assigned to the angels, reflected the close relationship they held with Yahweh. It was a relationship of subordination and servitude. Thus we find Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael all signifying that they existed in the service of El, who later became the exclusive god of Israel. The meanings of their names are also reflective of the attributes possessed by Yahweh. The various missions carried out by the angels are essentially the works of the supreme God through them. The angels did not in any way consider themselves competitors or equals with Yahweh. Rather,

[382] Smith, *Memoirs,* 114-19.
[383] Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics,* 24-30.

they served him in subordinate capacities, receiving marching orders from him. Again, all these factors testify to the fact that monotheism was characteristically the faith practised by the Yehudites in Persian period Yehud.

CONCLUSION

The origin of monotheism, that is, the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others, continues to be a subject of disagreement in Hebrew Bible scholarship. As this study has revealed, some scholars argue in favor of an early or pre-exilic origin while others support a post-exilic or even a much later origin. Throughout this study I have argued that the actual practise of exclusive monotheism only came to be realized in the post-exilic period when Israel was under the leadership of the Persians. Based on the discussions in Chapter One, it became clear that monotheism was not a characteristic feature of pre-exilic Israelite religion. The comparison of Israelite religion with that of other ancient Near Eastern traditions showed that Israel was as much polytheistic or syncretistic as her neighbors. Specific parallels in this regard included similarities between the Canaanite god El and Yahweh the god of Israel. Each of these deities headed a pantheon including several gods that were worshiped within their respective traditions.

In Chapter Two, we reviewed the monotheistic features that characterized Yehudite faith, which was backed up by some archaeological finds. We also outlined the key factors that led to the transformation of Yehudite faith, from pre-exilic polytheism to post-exilic monotheism. The case for an exclusive monotheism in Yehud became even clearer when contrasted against the religion of the Jewish community at Elephantine, Egypt. These Elephantine Jews did not go through the Babylonian exile, and their religion was typically that of monarchic Judah before the exile. Theirs was a syncretistic religion, in which they worshiped Yahweh along with other deities. Their syncretistic religion posed a great contrast against that of the Yehudites, which was exclusively monotheistic.

In Chapter Three, we discussed one of the greatest religious developments in Yehud—exclusivism. Through the concept of exclusivism, the returning exiles believed that they were a special people, exclusively "separated" to Yahweh in a monotheistic relationship. Thus, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, they endeavored to separate themselves from the "peoples of the land," that is,

those who did not go through the Babylonian exile. The separatist drive also entailed that the Yehudites were to divorce all the foreign wives who were not part of the returning exiles including their children. This study has outlined several factors that are believed to have necessitated the separatist reforms. However, I have also argued that the underlying motive behind these reforms was the preservation of the monotheistic relationship between Yahweh and the Yehudites. Exclusivism was a clear testimony to the developing monotheism in Yehud.

In Chapter Four, we discussed yet another important religious development which facilitated the developing monotheism in Yehud—angelology. Angelology for its part, served to offer some kind of compromise between Israel's pre-exilic syncretism or polytheism, and the post-exilic developing monotheism. Through angelology, Yahweh emerged as the only legitimate God, while all the other deities who once comprised the pre-exilic pantheon became identified as angels or messengers. Yahweh, therefore, became the only legitimate God worshiped by the Yehudites, without any competitors. Like exclusivism, it is also to be noted that angelology emerged because of the developing monotheism. The names of the angels signified a subservient relationship to Yahweh, making them agents or aspects of Yahweh's operations on behalf of humankind.

Along with the other factors already presented, the role of textual redaction in the promulgation of monotheism cannot be overemphasized. The biblical text as we presently have it is a product of a long period of editorial work. The authors of the Hebrew Bible were monotheists whose mission was to present a monotheistic view of the Hebrew God. As it may be expected, they ensured that any remnants of the polytheistic past were to be purged from the text of the Hebrew Bible. Edelman's elaboration in this regard is informative:

> It is important to realize that the text of the Hebrew Bible is the product of a long, editorial process. Its final shapers were monotheistic and they wanted the inherited traditions to reflect their own religious beliefs in a single creator deity, Yahweh, who had at his command various lesser divine beings who also populated heaven, the angels. Had they created the texts themselves, they almost certainly would not have included the scattered references to Asherah, Nehushtan, Plague, Pestilence, Death Sun, Moon and other lesser deities, which they have gone out of their way to turn into cultic objects used in the worship of Yahweh or turn into mere abstract qualities. . . . Earlier generations may have had more freedom to edit such texts more

> extensively and delete direct references to deities other than Yahweh that were not easily understood within an emerging monotheistic framework, before certain texts became "classics."[384]

While the date of this editorial work may not be certain, as it might have been done over an extended period of time, there is no question that much of it was probably done in the Persian period. The monotheistic themes that characterized the Persian period would undoubtedly have reflected in the biblical text written by the final redactors of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, it is in light of these religious developments and all the other factors we have already reviewed, that this study has argued not only in favor of the late origin of monotheism, but that exclusive monotheism was a characteristic feature of the Persian period. Thus, we may agree with Grabbe who writes, "By any reckoning the Persian period was a seminal episode in Jewish history."[385]

[384] Edelman, "Introduction," 16, 17.
[385] Grabbe, *Judaic Religion,* 13.

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