Understanding Torah

by

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Foreword 3
The Arrangement and Contents of Torah 6
Exodus 8
Leviticus 10
Numbers 12
Deuteronomy 13
Genesis: 15
God and the Gods 17
Yahweh, the Divine Name 19
Other Divine Names/Titles 20
Yahweh and the Gods of Egypt 21
Who Among the Gods is Like Our God? 25
God and the Covenant 32
Yahweh and the Covenantal Tradition 34
The Sinai Covenant 36
The Form of the Covenant 37
The Decalogue 38
The Book of the Covenant 42
Brief introduction (Ex. 20:22) 42
Covenant Ratification 44
The Covenant God and the Covenant People 45
The Covenant God 45
The Covenant People 51
The Enduring Character of the Covenant 54
Yahweh War 57
The Function of Genesis in Torah 61
Genesis as a Prolegomena to the History of Israel 61
Genesis and God 64
God and the Universe 68
Genesis and Humans 72
Genesis and the Theology of Promise 76

Foreword

This monograph is a brief theology of Torah, the first major section in the Hebrew Bible. It covers the books which in the English Bible comprise Genesis through Deuteronomy, or as the title from the Septuagint lists it, the Pentateuch. The Old Testament has not received an equal amount of attention from evangelicals as has the New Testament. In many evangelical commentary series, for instance, the Books of Genesis through Deuteronomy are some of the last to be completed. No doubt part of the problem is the extensive interaction necessary between evangelicals and historical-critical scholars with regard to these books. In historical-critical circles, pentateuchal studies follow the general format of the documentary hypothesis. For evangelicals, these reconstructions endanger the literary integrity of stories themselves, and in some cases, they may contradict what the Bible says about itself. Non-evangelicals may feel free to disagree with the statements of Scripture, but evangelicals find this to be unacceptable if the Bible is to retain its authority as the Word of God. I suspect, then, that evangelical scholars have found it difficult, if not dangerous, to interact with these books. On the one hand, to disagree with the current majority opinion of Old Testament critical scholars may be a death knell to publication. On the other, to embrace the historical-critical assumptions would be a death knell to acceptance among one's fellow evangelicals.

In the discipline of biblical theology there is yet a further challenge. For the past several decades, one of the primary concerns in the debate about Old Testament theology has been the question of methodology.[1] Among non-evangelical theologians, methodologies have ranged from dogmatic studies[2] to descriptive studies[3] to thematic studies[4] to diachronic studies.[5] All these approaches have their

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[1] For a complete discussion of this challenge, see G. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

[2] Older theologies, such as A. B. Davidson's *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1910), simply approached the Old Testament through the categories of systematic theology, i.e., God, man, sin, redemption, etc.

[3]Edmond Jacob's *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958*)* represents this approach. Here, the task of the interpreter is to describe what the text meant in its ancient context without concerning oneself about future implications, particularly the Old Testament's relationship to the New Testament.

[4]Walther Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament [OTL],* trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) represents this approach. Here, the theology of the Old Testament is built around some unifying principle, and for

respective merits, of course, but one cannot follow them all at the same time. Evangelical scholars, for their part, have also offered different theological approaches. Both dogmatic studies[6] and thematic studies have appeared.[7] More recently, among non-evangelical scholars, the question of whether or not there even exists a unified theology in the Old Testament has been raised. Might there not simply be a collection of diverse theologies?[8] The canonical approach of B. S. Childs is also part of the picture, where the final form of the canon becomes the context out of which biblical theology must work.[9] Thus, it can be complicated, to say the least, for the evangelical who wishes to work in the field of Old Testament theology.

Given this current state of Old Testament theological studies, it seems that most works on the Old Testament are written by scholars for other scholars, technical studies that enter wholeheartedly into the current debates and that presuppose the historical-critical perspective. Presently, there exists a significant gap between the world of scholars and the world of serious laypersons, and worse, this gap seems to be increasing. The present study seeks to partially fill that gap. To be sure, it is not a theology of the entire Old Testament, but rather, a theology of the first major section, the Torah. However, it does seek to draw from the various studies preceding it, both evangelical and non-evangelical. It is not exclusively a work for other scholars, thought it is hoped that other scholars and theological students may find it useful. Neither is it a work for laypersons who want only a devotional guide. Rather, it seeks to bridge the gap between too little and too much, that is, between works directed exclusively toward laypersons, which are too simple, and works directed primarily toward other scholars, which are too technical. It will be left up to the reader to decide how successful the effort has been.

My approach to this theology is diachronic. I seek to break with both the patterns of treating Old Testament theology as a child of dogmatics and treating it as a collection of themes. To be sure, I draw deeply from the wells of those who have

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Eichrodt, that principle is the covenant.

[5] Gerhard von Rad's *Old Testament Theology,* trans. D. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) represents this approach. Here, the scholar integrates his theological study with the progress of Old Testament history

[6] Barton Payne's *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) is such a study.

[7] Walter Kaiser's *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) organizes the theology of the Old Testament around the concept of promise. William Dyrness' *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) breaks with the traditional categories of systematic theology and allows the themes to arise more naturally from the text of the Old Testament.

[8] John Goldingay addresses this question in his *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[9]Two works, especially, are important here: B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) and *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

written in both of these styles. Nevertheless, it seems to me that these approaches have a serious shortcoming in that they both pass over the interplay between the historical progress and the theological progress of the Old Testament. History and theology are inextricably woven together in the fabric of the Old Testament. While the insights of those of who use the paradigms of dogmatic or thematic approaches are valuable, the historical-theological interplay is foundational. This work seeks to emphasize this interplay.

The Arrangement and Contents of Torah

It may seem strange to the casual reader of the Old Testament that the starting place for a theology of Torah is in the second book rather than the first. Torah (= the instruction) is essentially a chronological narrative, running from the creation of the world to the death of Moses. The five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, tell a continuous story, and these books are arranged in both the Hebrew canon and the English Bible in the chronological order in which the events occurred.[10] However, this perspective tends not to give to the event of the exodus its central role in the salvation-history of the Old Testament. From the standpoint of salvation-history, at least, there is merit in addressing these books from the ancient viewpoint of standing within the experience of the exodus itself, a stance that looks both backward and forward, backward to the primeval history of origins and forward to the land which was promised to the patriarchal fathers.

History can be viewed from more than one vantage point. It can be viewed as though the observer stands at the beginning of a series of events. He/she examines the first event and progresses through until the final event. This is the way the books of Torah are arranged in the canon and the way in which one usually reads them. Alternatively, history can be viewed from the perspective of one who stands after the events. All of the events are then recalled as though they had happened in the past. Finally, history can be viewed as though a person were standing in the middle of a series of events. This person can review the past, he/she can also observe the present, and he/she may look ahead to the future. This latter viewpoint is the one followed here and the viewpoint which the people of Israel in the exodus necessarily had to take. The content of Genesis, the first document of the Pentateuch, was thus a recollection and a rehearsal of the ancient traditions as to how the world came to be, how the clan of Jacob began and developed, and how this group of Semitic slaves found themselves in the bondage of Egypt. The second document, Exodus, stands squarely in the midst of the redemptive event itself. To be sure, one need not think of it as a diary being written as each event occurred.[11] In fact, the committing of the

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[10] The title more popular in English than Torah is Pentateuch, which is derived from the Septuagint (commonly abbreviated as "LXX" for the alleged seventy Jewish scholars who translated Torah from Hebrew into Greek in the second century BC). The word Pentateuch, derived from the Greek *pentateuchos* (= five-volumed), thus refers to the five books themselves.

[11] Questions about the literary origins of the Pentateuch loom large in most introductions to the Old Testament. Most critical scholars see Torah as having been stitched together from primarily four independent ancient traditions, either

exodus accounts to writing may have occurred some time after the events themselves occurred.

Nevertheless, to fully appreciate the theology of Exodus, one must mentally place him/herself in the vantage point of standing within the exodus event, not before it or after it. The third and fourth documents in the Pentateuch, Leviticus and Numbers, also should be viewed as part of the present, rather than the past or the future. Finally, while the last document, Deuteronomy, also belongs to the present perspective, its orientation is future. It looks ahead toward the conquest and settlement of the land, and it outlines the covenantal relationship that would affect the very fabric of the nation's existence after it had been rooted in a new home.

The essence of what it meant to be Israel lay in the event of the exodus. While

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oral, written or both, and these four in turn as having been compiled using other independent sources and traditions even more ancient. The Yahwist source (called "J" for Jehovah, because it is the favorite designation for God) is thought to have been a product of the united monarchy of the 10th century BC. The Elohist source (called "E" for Elohim, because it is the favorite designation for God) is thought to have been a product of the northern nation in about the 9th and 8th centuries BC. J and E were thought to have been merged in the southern nation shortly after the collapse of the north in 721 BC, possibly during the religious reform of Hezekiah. The Deuteronomic source (called "D"), roughly corresponding to the book of Deuteronomy, is thought to be a product of the northern nation at about the time of the northern exile but was "discovered' about a hundred years later during the reign of Josiah and became the impetus for the Josianic reforms. The Priestly Code (called "P") is thought to have been composed during the exile of the 6th century BC. By the middle of the 6th century, all the primary histories are thought to have been completed and incorporated into a single work, called Torah, cf. D. Freedman "Pentateuch," *1DB* (1962) 3.711-727.

Against this literary reconstruction, there stands among many conservatives the more traditional viewpoint that Torah is largely the product of one man, Moses, who wrote down the traditions as they were revealed to him by God or as they occurred, cf. G. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 81-118.

The broader scope of evangelicalism, while it remains faithful to the text of the Old Testament in crediting Moses with the origin of the law, is less rigid about the writing process of that law. It has been pointed out that the Pentateuch itself specifically credits a relatively small portion to Moses (i.e., Ex. 17:14, referring to the sacred war against Amalek; Ex. 24:4-8, referring to chapters 21-23; Ex. 34:27-28, apparently referring to the decalogue; Nu. 33:2, referring to chapter 33; Dt. 3 1:9, referring to an unspecified section of law codes; Dt. 3 1:19, 22, referring to chapter 32; Dt. 31:24ff., probably referring to Dt. *5:6-21).* While the rabbinic custom of referring to everything in the Pentateuch as the words of Moses was adopted by the authors of the New Testament as a convention of speech, this convenience does not necessarily support the view that Moses personally penned the entire Pentateuch. Evangelical scholars are not opposed to seeing oral or written sources that may underlie the present form of the Pentateuch, and in fact, they are free to speculate about pre-Mosaic forms or documents provided they do not bring into question the historical claims of the biblical contents, cf. J. Payne, "Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy," *Inerrancy,* ed. N. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 103. At the same time, they would give to Moses the initial stimulus and guiding hand for its composition, and in fact, they remain committed to the Mosaicity of the Pentateuch, cf. D. Clines, "Introduction to the Pentateuch," *The International Bible Commentaiy,* ed. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Marshall Pickering/Zondervan, 1986) 78-83. In the final analysis, conservative scholars, while allowing for some diversity over various critical questions, share some important basic points: they affirm the Mosaicity, historicity, and authenticity of the Pentateuch, E. Carpentar, "Pentateuch," *ISBE* (1986) 111.751. At the same time, they allow for ongoing discussion about those features of Pentateuchal composition for which there is no clear biblical statement, see especially, T. Alexander, "Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. T. Alexander & D. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), pp. 61-72.

the wanderings of Abraham are important in that they gave to the community a sense of historical identity and family roots, the prophets consistently look to the exodus event, far more than to Abraham, when they wish to describe what it meant to be Israel (cf. Eze. 20:5-6; Am. 9:7; Ho. 2:14-15; Mic. 6:4; Je. 2:2-7; Ps. 78; 136:10-16)[12] When Israel was a child, I loved him,and out of Egypt I called my son. (Hosea 11:1)

Exodus[13]

The content of the Book of Exodus may be analyzed in four broad sections. First, the narrative opens with Israel in Egypt (Ex. 1-11). The seventy members of Jacob's family, which originally descended into Egypt as free persons (Ge. 46:27), had been subjected to bitter slavery in the process of time.[14] Moses, a Hebrew slave-child, was adopted by a daughter of Pharaoh, but at the age of forty, he was banished from the kingdom, where he became a shepherd. At the age of eighty, he encountered a theophany of God in a flaming bush on Mt. Sinai[15] and was commissioned by God to deliver the Hebrew people from their bondage. Together with his brother Aaron, Moses became God's spokesman in a fierce contest with Pharaoh. Through the mediation of Moses, God sent ten, terrible plagues upon the land of Egypt as demonstrations of his power and as incentives to induce Pharaoh to free the Hebrew slaves. The final blow, a plague of death, became the effective measure for allowing the Hebrew slaves to leave.

The next section of Exodus describes the journey from Egypt to Sinai (Ex. 12-18). During the final deadly plague, the Hebrews, at God's instruction, performed a sacred ritual of protection called Passover, a ritual which involved the slaying of a lamb and the smearing of its blood on the door frames of their dwellings. That night death swept through Egypt claiming the lives of every firstborn, both human and

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[12] B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament,* 2nd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 8-9.

[13] The Hebrew title for the Book of Exodus is taken from the first line of the text, "And these are the names of...." The Greek title, *exodos,* which comes to us from the LXX by transliteration, means "going out, departure."

[14] The time of the descent into Egypt, the rise of Joseph to be the vizier of Egypt, and the reversal of favor by the Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph" (1:8) cannot be fixed with certainty. Most critical commentaries and histories discuss this problem and attempt to coordinate it with the known history of Egypt, cf. C. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker,1973) 144-149.

[15] To be precise, the biblical narrative records Moses' experience as being on Mt. Horeb (3:1), and it is only later that Horeb is identified as Sinai (19:1-2). However, that the two names refer to the same location is clear in that in the Horeb experience Moses was instructed to bring the people back to the mountain for worship (3:12). The precise location of the mountain is unknown, though Jebel Musa, near the tip of the Sinai Peninsula, is the favored site for most, cf. I. Beit-Arieh, "Fifteen Years in Sinai," *BAR* X, 4 (July/August 1984) 26ff.; A. Perevolotsky and I. Finkelstein, "The Southern Sinai Exodus Route in Ecological Perspective," and "Has Mt. Sinai Been Found?", *BAR* XI, 4 (1985) 26ff. and 42ff.

animal, and the clans of Israel were allowed by Pharaoh to leave.[16] Shortly, though, Pharaoh changed his mind. Pursuing the fleeing Israelites with chariotry, he quickly trapped them between his armies and the banks of the Red Sea.[17]

Here, there occurred the consummate redemptive act of God in saving the terrorized people. In what the Exodus narrative describes as the most stupendous of miracles,[18] God opened a path through the waters of the sea, and his people passed through on dry ground. Just as important, when the Egyptian armies attempted to follow, the sea closed back upon them in a final act of destruction.[19]

The miracle at the sea was followed by other divine acts of preservation. Bitter water, possibly contaminated by mineral salts, was sweetened; manna and quail were provided as food; water was struck from a rock; victory was won in a battle with Amalek, a desert enemy. Finally, two months after leaving Egypt, the company of refugees camped at the foot of Sinai.

The third section of the book describes the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 19-31). For the remainder of Exodus and continuing through Leviticus and up until Numbers 10:11, the text narrates the events that occurred at the mountain of Yahweh. Here, God gave to the people the Torah, mediated through Moses. Torah included the Ten

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[16] The number of Israelites who left is debated. The difficult logistics of the number given in 12:37 (600,000 men), when expanded to include the women, children and aliens which accompanied them, and the fact that the presence of such a large group of people is not as yet archaeologically traceable, has given rise to an effort to readjust the numbers. Critical works will discuss this problem in either the introductions or the commentaries, e.g., R. Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentaiy [TOTC]* (Downers Grove IL:InterVarsity, 1973) 112; J. Durham, *Exodus [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 171-172.

[17]Another critical problem is the location of the Red Sea. It is now well know that the Hebrew term *Yam Suph* is better translated as Sea of Reeds, and should not be identified with the larger body of water to the south known to us today as the Red Sea. However, the exact route of the Exodus is debated as well as the precise body of water against which the Israelites found themselves trapped, cf. J. Mihelic, "Red Sea," *1DB* (1962) 4.19-20 and G. Wright, "Exodus, Route of," *1DB* (1962) 2.197-199.

[18] Expositors have offered various explanations for the described miracle, such as, relating it to the sliding plates theory of the two continents of Asia and Africa, cf. G. Knight, *Theology as Narration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 104-105, or reconstructing the narrative with naturalisic explanations of the wind and water movements, cf. J. Hyatt, *Exodus [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 160. However, even if these explanations proved to be correct, they would not alter the fact that for the ancient Hebrews the miracle at the sea was nothing less than the action of Yahweh who had power over all things.

[19] The date of the exodus has been placed by most scholars as being in the Late Bronze Age, given the historical and archaeological data available, cf. discussions in J. Bright, *A History of Israel,* 2nd. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 121-122; K. Kitchen and T. Mitchell, "Chronology of the Old Testament," *NBD* (1982) 19 1-192. A date of 1290 BC has been generally acceptable since the work of William Albright, cf. Anderson, *Understanding,*32-34. An archaeological redating of the exodus along more traditional lines (i.e., about 1460 BC) has been proposed, cf. J. Bimson and D. Livingston, "Redating the Exodus," *BAR* XJII.5 (Sep/Oct 1987) 40-53, 66-68; J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* Sheffield,England:University of Sheffield, 1981). However, it is unlikely to win the consent of many scholars, cf. B. Halpern, "Radical Exodus Redating Fatally Flawed," *BAR* XJII.6 (Nov/Dec 1987) *56-61*.

Words, the Book of the Covenant, and special instructions for constructing a Tent of Meeting as a center for covenant worship.

The final section of the book details the broken covenant and the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 32-40). While Moses was at the top of Sinai receiving Torah from God, Israel was at the foot of the mountain breaking the covenant by constructing a golden calf-idol. The people's rebellion brought upon themselves punishment and necessitated a covenant renewal. After the covenant renewal was complete, the people constructed the Tent of Meeting under Moses' direction. When the Tabernacle was erected, the glory of Yahweh filled it as the cloud of his presence covered it.

Leviticus[20]

Chronologically, the Book of Leviticus occurs at the foot of Sinai. It may be analyzed in six broad sections. First are the laws regulating sacrifice (1-7).[21] The English word sacrifice covers several underlying Hebrew words which describe the heart of Israel's cultic worship. The *'olah* (= holocaust) and *minhah* (= cereal) offerings, animal and vegetable respectively, were general in nature and served as gifts to Yahweh in order to win his favor. The *zebah selamim* (= slaughter of well-being) was a voluntary offering which served to maintain harmonious relations between the participants and Yahweh by assuring the offerer that what was deficient in him/her would be remedied by coming to Yahweh in faith and penitence. The *hatta't* (= sin offering) was for the purification of accidental transgressions, and the *'asam* (= guilt offering) was for infidelity toward God, though these latter two are almost indistinguishable and in some cases the two terms seem to be used interchangeably.

Next comes the order for the priesthood (8-10). A solemn ritual for ordination was prescribed for Aaron and his sons according to the directives given in Exodus 28-29, 39-40. The divine executions of Nadab and Abihu, who offered unauthorized incense offerings, reinforced the necessity of following the minutiae of cultic ritual with precision.

The third section gives an elaborate distinction between the holy and the profane *(11-15).* A careful distinction was to be made by the Israelites between what

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[20] The Hebrew title for the Book of Leviticus is taken from the first line in the text, "And he called...." *(wa)yiqra').* The Greek title, which comes to us in English by transliteration, derives from the levitical priests and indicates clearly enough that the book is concerned with Israel's cultic ritual. However, the book is hardly about the Levites in general, but only about the priests

[21] See discussion in R. Faley, "Leviticus," *JBC* (1968) 68-72 and R. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and commentaiy [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL**:** InterVarsity, 1980) 39-88.

was ritually clean and ritually unclean. These distinctions affected everyday life with regard to food, childbirth, infectious skin diseases, mildew and personal hygiene.

The fourth section describes Yom Kippur (16). The Day of Atonement was the single most important day in the Israelite religious calendar. On that day, a ritual cleansing was performed on behalf of the whole nation. Two goats were selected, one to be slaughtered before Yahweh and the other to be driven into the desert, symbolically bearing the nation's sins upon it.[22]

The fifth section comprises the holiness code (17-26).[23] Though diverse in content, this distinctive section is united by its emphasis on the holiness of Yahweh. The theme of the whole is, "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy" (19:2; 20:7-8, 26; 21:6, 8, *15,* 23; 22:9, 16, 32). This mandate was to affect the very fabric of Israelite lifestyle, including the sacredness of blood and sex, laws on miscellaneous subjects like worship, justice, charity and chastity, the various penalties associated with particular violations, and special rules for priests and sacrifices. It included a special section on the liturgical year, with descriptions of the annual religious festivals, instructions for the display of holy bread and the burning of holy oil, laws on blasphemy, and the *lex talionis.*[24] A special set of laws regarding the sabbatical year and the Jubilee regulated the periodic reprieve of the land from farming and established a statute of limitations on land contracts as well as on the slavery of Israelite citizens. Blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience conclude the code.

Finally, there appears the redemption laws about vows and offerings (27). This final collection details how vows could be withdrawn by the appropriate payment of a price.

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[22] The meaning of the second goat *('ehad la~za~zel* = the one for Azazel) is debated. Traditionally, going back through William Tyndale, the Latin Vulgate and the LXX, the term has been understood as "scapegoat" (lit., "escape goat"), cf. R. Gordon, "Leviticus," *IBC,* ed. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/ Marshall Pickering, 1986) 203. However, Azazel might also refer to a rocky cliff over which the goat was driven or even to the name of a demon believed to inhabit the desert, cf. T. Gaster, "Azazel," *IDB* (1962) 1.325-326.

[23]The Holiness Code forms a literary unit in itself, beginning with regulations regarding the sanctuary and sacrifice and concluding with blessings and curses. It is thought by many scholars to have circulated by itself as an independent corpus prior to its incorporation into Leviticus, cf. 0. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction,* trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 233-234.

[24] The *lex talionis* is the ancient principle of punishing the wrongdoer with exactly those injuries which he/she has inflicted upon the victim. It has been found in at least one other ancient Near Eastern law code, Hammurabi's (?1792-1750 B.C.), cf. J. Renger, *IDBSup* (1976) *545.*

Numbers [25]

The Hebrew title for the book, "In the Desert," is especially appropriate, for following 10:11, when the Israelites left Sinai, the book largely describes the desert travelogue between Sinai and the edge of Canaan in the transjordan. Periodically in this travelogue, there are inserted discussions of miscellaneous laws. The book may be divided into six broad sections.

First are the preparations to leave Sinai for Canaan (1:1--10:10). The departure from Sinai began with a military census, a necessity for ascertaining the available fighting men if a conquest of Canaan was to be entertained. Various laws for purity were reviewed and explained, and a second Passover, one full year after the first, was celebrated. The final act of preparation was the construction of two trumpets of hammered silver to be blown to muster the assembly, to break camp, to signal troops in battle, and to symbolize joy at festivals.

The second section describes the journey from Sinai to Kadesh (10:11--14:45). This journey, which began in battle order, was punctuated by three traumatic incidents. At Taberah (=burning) Yahweh burned some of the outskirts of the camp because the people complained.[26] At Kibroth Hattaavah (= graves of craving), where the people fretted over their diet of manna, Yahweh sent quail for food but also struck the people with a deadly plague by which some died. At Hazeroth, when Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses for his role of authority, Miriam was temporarily stricken with a terrible skin disease. All these incidents lead naturally to the climax of rebellion when the people rejected the call to war at Kadesh. After twelve spies had reconnoitered the land of Canaan and reported back, the Israelites bluntly refused to go in, even threatening to stone Moses and to return to Egypt under new leadership. In his anger, Yahweh condemned the nation to a forty year sojourn in the desert[27] until a new generation of fighting men could replace the present generation.

The third section describes the sojourn near Kadesh (15:1--19:22). Little information is given about the years during which the Israelites waited for the older generation to gradually die off. Further legal statutes are explained, and the Korah rebellion, which resulted in the divine execution of the offenders and their supporters, is described.

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[25] The Hebrew title for the Book of Numbers is taken from the fifth line in the text, "....in the desert...." *(b'midbar).* The English title "Numbers" comes from the LXX *(Arithmoi)* via the Latin Vulgate *(Numeri),* and it derives from the two censuses recorded in chapters 1 and 26.

[26] Precisely what was burned is not stated, but at least there is no mention of executions.

[27] Actually, the forty year sojourn was reckoned from the time of the exodus, so that the actual time between the Kadesh rebellion and the entry into Canaan was about thirty-eight years, cf. Dt. 2:14.

Then follows a narrative of the journey from Kadesh to Moab (20:1--22:1). Kadesh would no longer be the point of entry into Canaan, and the journey from Kadesh to the new point of entry, Moab in the transjordan, was highlighted by the miracle of water from the rock, the cure connected with the bronze snake, and the victory over Sihon and Og.

The Balaam narratives are the fifth section (22:2--24:25). When Israel was at last in the plains of Moab, near the Jericho fords, the Moabite king determined to thwart them by spiritual means. He summoned a pagan prophet named Balaam from northwest Mesopotamia to curse the Israelites. Though Balaam uttered several oracles, Yahweh would not allow him to curse Israel, but only bless them.

Finally, Numbers concludes with Israel's bivouac in the Plains of Moab (25:1--36:13). During the encampment in Moab, the Israelites again fell into national apostasy at Baal of Peor, where they engaged in sacred prostitution with the Moabites.[28] This in turn brought a disastrous plague from Yahweh in which 24,000 died. A new census was now necessary, inasmuch as virtually all those listed in the old census had died. The new census would be important in figuring the size of land allotments to be given to the various clans as well as in determining the nation's capacity for war. Joshua was selected as the successor to Moses, and further miscellaneous laws were explained. In a special war action, the Midianites were crushed, and all Midianite males were exterminated. The Israelites now controlled the larger part of the transjordan, and two and a half tribes were allowed to settle there with the understanding that they were not to neglect the war effort which would begin shortly on the west bank.

Deuteronomy [29]

The LXX title "second law" is especially appropriate for Deuteronomy inasmuch as the book is structured as three speeches by Moses in which he reviewed the history of the desert sojourn and the Torah which God had given at Sinai.

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[28] Sacred prostitution was a common feature of Canaanite fertility religions. The local deities or Ba'als (= lords) were believed to be owners of the soil, which was the sphere of divine power. The Ba'al had a female consort, a Ba'alath (= lady), sometimes called by her personal name Astarte, and the fertility of the soil was dependent upon the mating of this divine pair. By imitative magic, the ancient Canaanites believed that the mating of Ba'al and Astarte could be assisted. Males, playing the part of Ba'al, and females, playing the part of Astarte, would dramatize the divine mating myth in sacred prostitution and so help bring the divine pair together, cf. Anderson, *Understanding,* 102-104; Pfeiffer, 69-77.

[29] The Hebrew title for the Book of Deuteronomy is taken from the first line in the text, "....these are the words...." *('elleh hadd'var'im).* The English title "Deuteronomy" is a transliteration from the LXX in 17:18, *deuteronomion* (= second law), inasmuch as it is largely a restatement of the Torah contained in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. The Latin Vulgate transliterated it as *deuteronomium,* and from there it passes into the English Versions as Deuteronomy.

Geographically, the setting of the book is in the transjordan Plains of Moab, just opposite the city of Jericho which lay on the West Bank. It is probable that underlying the three speeches given by Moses is a more complex structure, one that directly reflects the now well-known formulary of an ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty.[30]

The first speech of Moses (1:1--4:43) is primarily an historical recollection of the events between the breaking of camp at Sinai and the arrival of Israel in the Plains of Moab. His second address, a rather long one (4:44--28:68), describes the character of covenant faith and Yahweh's demand for total allegiance. The third speech (29:1--30:20) is a recapitulation of the covenant demand. The book closes with appendices that include a description of the last acts of Moses, his parting words, his charge to Joshua, and his death (31: 1--34:12).

When one looks beneath the surface structure of Deuteronomy to examine the underlying treaty structure, the book falls into the semi-standard categories of the ancient Near Eastern suzerainty covenant. It begins with an Historical Prologue (1-3). This antecedent history is a statement of the past relationship of the parties to each other, i.e., Yahweh and Israel. It describes the failure at Kadesh, the sojourn, the conquest of the transjordan, and the preparation for the conquest of Palestine.

Next are the Basic Treaty Stipulations (4-11). Here, the heart of the covenant faith is described, including the suzerain's gracious choice of his vassal in the exodus and his delivery of Torah at Sinai. Special emphasis is given to Israel's primary responsibility of exclusive allegiance to Yahweh, and this exclusive allegiance is reinforced by a recollection of past failures. Israel is called to love and obey her suzerain.

Then follows Detailed Treaty Stipulations (12-26). Added details to the basic responsibilities included directions for worship, qualifications for leaders (judges, kings, priests, prophets), directives for criminal law, regulations for holy war, and miscellaneous other laws.

A Covenant Record was also kept (27). Suzerainty treaties were written or inscribed and deposited at some agreed upon place for future reference when the covenant was renewed. Israel's covenant record was to be set up on the West Bank in the Shechem Pass, between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim.

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[30] A suzerainty treaty was a protectorate agreement made between a powerful overlord (suzerain), the great king of a large state, and a vassal, the weak king of a smaller state. Studies of the suzerainty treaties of the late Bronze Age have thrown great light upon the biblical idea of covenant in general as well as the Book of Deuteronomy in particular, cf. G. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *BA* 17 *(1954)* 26-46 and "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* (1954) 50-76; M. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953). In Deuteronomy, the suzerain is Yahweh, and the vassal is Israel.

A critical part of the covenant formulary was the Blessings and Curses (28). Suzerainty treaties were entered into by a solemn oath before the gods (or in this case, before Yahweh), and covenant violation resulted in a cursed life, just as covenant obedience resulted in a blessed life.

Next came the Recapitulation (29-30). In recapitulating the covenant, Moses briefly reviewed Israel's history from the exodus through the conquest of the transjordan, Israel's responsibility for covenant loyalty, the threat of cursing for covenant violation, the possibility of reconciliation, and an appeal for commitment.

Finally, there was an appeal for Covenant Continuity (31-34). While the closing chapters of Deuteronomy are not part of the suzerainty treaty proper, they do continue the covenant theme in recording the last acts of Moses. Of special covenant significance is the deposition of the treaty document beside the ark of the covenant.

Genesis:[31]

The Book of Genesis is the pre-history of the Israelite people. It describes the origins of the universe and the nations, and particularly, how God began to interact within human history by choosing a particular family with which to establish a relationship.[32] This primordial history would have been very important to the Hebrew slaves who were coming out of Egypt into Canaan. Not only would it have given them a sense of national and theological identity, it would have assured them of their rightful place in Canaan due to the covenantal promises made by Yahweh to Abraham and his family. The scope of the book may be divided into two broad sections.

First comes the accounts of human origins.[33] Genesis begins with two

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[31] The Hebrew title for the Book of Genesis is the first word in the Hebrew text, *bereshith* (= 'in the beginning', or 'when beginning'). The English title comes from the Greek title *genesis* in the LXX and means "beginning" or "origin.

[32] Because the Genesis account intersects at so many points with the hypotheses of science about the origins of the universe and the human race, much discussion has arisen between scientists and theologians concerning scientific data and the record of the Bible. An insightful treatment of this interaction which seeks to do justice both to the discoveries of scientists as well as to the integrity of Scripture may be found in B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954)

[33] All dating before the time of Abraham is very sketchy indeed. The attempt of Archbishop Ussher to fix the date of creation at 4004 BC and of Lightfoot, building upon Ussher's work, to fix the week of creation within October 18-24, Adam being created on the 23rd at 9:00 AM, 44th meridian time, strains credulity and is scientifically hopeless. Valiant efforts to buttress the idea of a young earth (less than 10,000 years old) have been made by some conservatives in an effort to save the traditional dating, cf. J. Whitcomb, *The Early Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972). However, Genesis does not attempt to date itself, and such efforts are more appropriately to be viewed as the attempt to save certain presuppositions rather than the Bible. The evidence for a very old earth is overwhelming, cf. D. Young, *Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); H. Ross, *The Fingerprint of God,* 2nd ed. (Orange, CA: Promise Publishing, 1991). While the Genesis record must be taken seriously as the Word of God, it

complementary stories of creation (1-2). The first (1:1--2:4a) is more general in that it addresses all of the universe, giving fairly equal time to celestial bodies as well as to plant life, animal life, and the human race. This first account is characterized by the use of the name Elohim for God. The second account (2:4b-25) is very human-centered, and while it mentions the rest of the universe, the reader clearly understands that the first humans are the focus of the narrative. This story is characterized by the use of the more personal name Yahweh Elohim for God. In both accounts, the emphasis is that God is the sole originator of the universe and all that is in it.

Then follows the account of human rebellion (3-5). Though humans were made by God as true lords over paradise, they actively chose against God again and again. Disobedience, fratricide, and continual moral degeneracy characterized the human race with only a few exceptions.

The story of the great flood comes next (6-9).[34] Because the world was filled with evil, God determined to destroy the human race by a great deluge caused by incessant rainfall and the breaking open of underground springs. Only Noah and his family were spared in the ark, a great boat which Noah and his sons built at God's direction.

Finally, the first major section of Genesis details the origins and dispersing of the nations (10-11). The proliferation of humans and their division into different language groups is connected to a divine act in which God scattered a rebellious race which was attempting to build a tower into the heavens[35]

The second division of Genesis narrates patriarchal history.[36] First come the stories of Abraham and Isaac (12-26). With the patriarchal stories, the reader enters a

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must also be taken seriously with respect to its genre, the literary form which God chose to give it in the ancient language and culture of the Hebrews, cf. H. Van Till, *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

[34] Some conservatives defend the traditional idea of a universal flood which was global in scope, cf. J. Whitcomb, Jr. and H. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961). Others view the flood in a more limited way so that while it was certainly catastrophic, it was limited to the general area of Mesopotamia, cf. F. Filby, *The Flood Reconsidered* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). Similarly, some espouse what is known as "flood geology," that is, the theory that all the present geological formations are accountable by a single catastrophic deluge, cf. J. Whitcomb, Jr., *The World That Perished* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973). The propagation of this interpretation is made through such organizations as the Creation Research Society, the Creation Science Research Center, and the Institute for Creation Research. Evangelical geologists, however, argue that such an interpretation is inadequate both theologically and scientifically, cf. D. Young, 43-111. For a brief but insightful treatment of these issues, see H. Vos, "Flood (Genesis)," *ISBE* (1982) 316-321.

[35] This tower was probably a ziggurat, an artificial mound with a shrine on top as a representation of a mountain or "high place" associated with ancient worship in Mesopotamia. In Sumeria, for instance, a ziggurat was described as "the Building of the Foundation-platform of Heaven and Earth" whose "top reaches to heaven," cf. D. Wiseman, "Babel," *NBD* (1982) 111.

[36] While the dates of the patriarchs can only be approximated, it is possible to read the narratives against the social, political and cultural background of the ancient Near East in the period 2000--1500 B.C., J. Bright, *History,* 67-102

new era of divine history. Here God began to shape the future by his covenantal relationships with Abraham of Ur. Migrating north and west at Yahweh's command, God promised Abraham posterity and blessing in the land of Canaan. The highlight of the Abraham stories is the birth of Isaac, the son of promise, in Abraham's old age. To Isaac was born Jacob, who became the father of the Israelite clans.

Still against the background of semi-nomadic life, the Jacob stories (27-36) relate how the covenantal promises to Abraham were reaffirmed. To Jacob and his free and slave wives were born twelve sons, who in turn fathered the twelve clans of Israel, the ancestors of the nation that escaped Egypt in the exodus.

One of Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph (37-50), was sold by his brothers as a slave into Egypt. Through the providence of God, Joseph arose to be vizier of Egypt, and from his privileged position, he secured residency rights for his father and brothers in a select part of the Nile Delta. This migration to Egypt of the seventy members of Jacob's family is how the clans came to be in Egypt at the beginning of the Book of Exodus, though of course, their status had drastically changed from being privileged to being oppressed.

God and the Gods

It is a well-known fact that Israelite religion was monotheistic, that is, that the nation gave allegiance to only one God, Yahweh. This is all the more remarkable in that Israel's monotheism arose in a context of thoroughgoing polytheism which saturated the culture of the ancient Near East[37] The cultural exchange through trade, treaties, and war in western Asia spread the names and characters of the ancient gods of Sumer and Accadia among the Hurrians, Hittites, Amorites and Canaanites. Religious ideas were exchanged, modified, adapted and recorded among the various Mesopotamian and Canaanite peoples.[38] Within this world of many gods, the small nation of Hebrew slaves who left Egypt and invaded western Palestine put their faith in only one God whose personal name was Yahweh. It is Torah that describes how this monotheistic faith originated and developed.

Crucial to the development of the Hebrew faith is the idea of revelation. Hebrew epistemology embraced two sources of truth. One was the common knowledge gained from human experience, instinct, custom, feelings, sense perception, observation, experimentation and contemplation. The other was special knowledge gained from God's mighty acts in history and the accompanying divine

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[37] Atheism was not a philosophical option in the ancient world. The question was not so much, "Is there a God?", but rather, "Who is God?", or "What is his name?", cf. B. Anderson, "God, OT View of," *IDB* (1962) 11.417-418.

[38] W. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity,* 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, *1957)* 209-236

interpretation of these acts through specially chosen spokesmen. Torah is permeated with accounts of how this new knowledge from Yahweh about himself was transmitted to key figures, and through them, to the whole nation. Especially important to Yahweh's self-disclosure to his people is the sense of history. Hebrew faith is the story of a people who had a unique memory reaching back into primordial times. It is the record of a series of dialogues between God and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses as well as the record of God's intervention in the plane of history through his divine covenants and mighty acts. Unlike the Canaanite gods and goddesses, who were primarily believed to be revealed in nature, Israel's God was revealed in history. Revelation in the Old Testament, then, was not merely a series of propositions received by intuition nor a body of inferences derived by observing the forces of nature. It was the in-breaking of God into human history by deed and word to unveil himself to his chosen people (cf. Ps. 78). Revelation was dynamic, not merely static.

Some scholars choose to view the emergence of Israelite monotheism as a religious evolution. They argue for a gradual development of religious ideas which began with the animism and polytheism[39] common to the ancient Near East, a gradual progression to henotheism[40] or monolatry,[41] and an eventual development into monotheism.[42] While it must be admitted that in early Israel the theoretical existence of other gods was not addressed, at least in the language of later times, as, for instance, in the Book of Isaiah (cf. 43:10-12; 44:6-20; 45:5-6, 14-18, 20-24; 46:9), still this naturalistic explanation is surely not what Torah itself sets forth. To be sure, there was a progressive understanding of Yahweh in Israel, but Torah still describes such progress in terms of God's initiative to reveal himself, not in terms of human speculation. God chose Israel far more than Israel discovered God. For Israel, God's self-revelation was a product of grace, not human investigation. His self-revelation did not come in a single period or within a single event, but gradually, as new covenants, new relationships, and new divine actions occurred, God continued to demonstrate his identity.

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[39] Animism is the belief that every natural object is inhabited by a supernatural spirit. Polytheism is the belief in many deities, cf. R. Youngblood, "Monotheism," *EDT* (1984) 731.

[40] Henotheism is the worship of one god without necessarily denying the existence or reality of other gods.

[41] Monolatry is the worship of one god while leaving the theoretical question about the existence of other gods unanswered, cf. J. Rylaarsdam, "The Book of Exodus: Introduction and Exegesis," *lB (1952)* 980-981.

[42] Monotheism is the worship of one God and the denial of the reality of any other gods.

May my teaching drop as the rain,[43]

My speech distil as the dew,

As the gentle rain upon the tender grass,

And as the showers upon the herb.

Dt. 32:2 (RSV)

Yahweh, the Divine Name

When Moses turned aside to examine the bush that was ablaze but not consumed, he was introduced to the divine name Yahweh (Ex. 3:15)[44] God informed Moses that the patriarchs were not familiar with this name (Ex. 6:2-3)[45] They had known God as *El Shaddai*,[46] but now they were to know him as Yahweh. After the patriarchal period, the name *El Shaddai* gradually faded out of common usage, and Yahweh became the dominant name for the God of Israel. It is significant that the name Yahweh sounds similar to the expression, "I am who I am."[47] Because the name

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[43] While this "teaching/speech" refers specifically to the Song of Moses which follows, the Song describes the self-revelation of Yahweh to his people in mighty acts of history. The progressive teaching of the Song reflects the progressive revelation of which the Song speaks.

[44] It has become traditional in English Versions of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew name *Yahweh* as LORD (in all capitals) so as to distinguish it from *Adonai,* the title of respect which also means Lord (in upper and lower case letters). Yahweh is a personal name; Adonai is not. The name Yahweh is sometimes referred to as the tetragrammaton, because it is composed of four consonants in Hebrew (YHWH).

[45] Of course, the name Yahweh appears throughout the Genesis accounts, but this usage is probably to be taken as a scribal retrojection of the name that was familiar to the author when the actual documents reached their finished form. It is possible, of course, to interpret Ex. 6:2-3 as simply indicating that a new content to the name Yahweh was revealed. If so, then it was not the name itself which was new, but the significance of the name which was new, cf. R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 578-582.However, this solution is not the most natural and may unduly strain the grammar, cf. R. Gordon, "Exodus," *IBC* (1979) 151-152

[46] The meaning of the compound older name *El Shaddai* (usually rendered God Almighty in the English Versions) is debated. The name *El* (= God in Semitic language groups) is clear enough, but the name *Shaddai* is ambiguous. It may be related to the Accadian word for mountain *(sadu),* and if so, may mean "God of the mountain", cf. B. Anderson, "God, Names of," *1DB* (1962) 11.412. Other suggestions, though generally less accepted, are that *Shaddai* is derived from the Semitic word for breast *(shad),* hence, "God the Nourisher", or from the root *shadad* (= to devastate), hence, "God my Destroyer", cf. discussion in M. Pope, *Job (AB)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973) 44. A satisfactory solution has yet to be proposed, but the traditional idea of self-sufficiency, which goes back to rabbinical interpretations, is at least adequate. Contextually, the name seems to emphasize the might of God over against the frailty of humans, cf. D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1967) 128-129; V. Hamilton, *TWOT* (1980) 11.907.

[47] The Hebrew expression, "I am what I am," is in the imperfect or uncompleted tense and hence can also be rendered, "I will be what I will be." Another possibility is that the expression, "I am what I am," promises a continued presence, and as such, should be rendered, "I will be there, as I am here," cf. T. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology,* 2nd ed. (Newton, MA: Charles T. Bradford, 1970) 180. Phonetically, the name Yahweh in Hebrew sounds similar to and may be derived from the expression, "I am" *('ehyeh,* as a simple *qal* verb). If so, then the name Yahweh carries the idea, "the One who is," i.e., the absolute and unchangeable One. However, it is also

Yahweh was revealed to Moses and subsequently to Israel, the name came to be associated with the exodus itself. From the time of Moses onward, Yahweh was always the one who had heard Israel's cry of oppression and who graciously intervened in the nation's behalf.[48]

While the name Yahweh may not have been known before the time of Moses, the compiler of the Genesis narratives has offered a Yahweh compound based upon an Elohim compound name. In the story of the binding of Isaac, Abraham says to Isaac, "God will provide *(Elohim yir'eh)* a lamb" (Ge. 22:8). Later (22:14), this statement is translated into a Yahweh compound name, *Yahweh yir'eh* (= the LORD will provide)[49]

With the revelation of Yahweh's personal name and common usage after the exodus, other Yahweh compounds appear. When the bitter water at the Marah oasis was sweetened (Ex. 15:26), God declared himself to be *Yahweh Roph'ek* (= the LORD who heals you). After the victory over Amalek, in which Moses', with the assistance of Aaron and Hur, held up his staff during the entire battle (Ex. 17:9-13), Moses named a shrine in honor of God by the compound *Yahweh Nissiy* (= the LORD my banner). Later in Israel, other Yahweh compounds were formed (cf. Jg. 6:24; Ps. 23:1; Je. 23:6; Eze. 48:35).

Other Divine Names/Titles

The significance of divine names did not begin with the disclosure of the name Yahweh, however. In addition to the ancient name *El Shaddai* and the revealed name Yahweh, several other names were used for God in Torah. In Hebrew thought, a person's name was inextricably bound up with his/her existence, personality and reputation.[50] This dynamic is also true for God.

El was the generic name/title for God among Semitic peoples, probably carrying the root meaning of power or might. In Canaanite religion, *El* was the head of the divine pantheon of gods. For the Israelites, however, *El* is used alternatively

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possible that the name is derived from a *hiph'il* stem, which carries a causative nuance, and if so, then the name includes the more dynamic idea, "I cause to be,' i.e., the Creator and Lord of history, cf. Anderson, *1DB* (1962) 11.410-411.

[48] Anderson, *Understanding*, 41-42

[49] It may be noted that the Hebrew verb here is the common expression "to see," but it is used idiomatically to indicate selection or choice. Thus, to say that God would "see" a lamb meant that he would select or provide a lamb. The final sentence in 22:14 may be rendered either, "On the mountain of Yahweh it will be provided," or "On the mountain of Yahweh it will be seen (or made clear)." It is not unlikely that both meanings are intended in a double entendre, for not only did God provide a lamb, he also provided understanding when Abraham was on the verge of slaying his son.

[50] R. Abba, "Name," *1DB* (1962) 501-502.

with the personal name Yahweh. *Elohim* or *Elim* (= gods) was used by the Canaanites to refer to the divine pantheon itself, but in Israel, the plural *Elohim* took on the character of a plural of majesty or intensity and roughly corresponds to our English word "godhead," that is, the fullness of deity.[51] *Elohim* is also used alternatively with the name Yahweh, and in some cases (e.g., Ge. 2:4ff.), it is combined in a single expression *Yahweh Elohim* (= LORD God).

Just as *El Shaddai* is a compound, so also other *El* compounds are to be found in Torah, particularly in the patriarchal period prior to the revelation of the personal name Yahweh, where each compound describes a particular aspect of God's personality. God is *El Elyon* (= God Most High, Ge. 14:18-19), *El Olam* (= Eternal God, Ge. 21:33), *ElRoi'* (= God who sees, Ge.16:13), *El Bethel* (God of the House of God, Ge. 31:13), and *El Elohe-Israel* (= God, the God of Israel, Ge. 33:20).

Adon was a title of honor in Semitic languages, and it could be used of either humans or gods. In ordinary speech, it was used as a courtesy to superiors (i.e., "my lord", "sir"), but in Israel, the title was frequently used in apposition to Yahweh (Ex. 23:17; 34:23).[52] *'Adonai* (= my lords), as a plural form, functioned in much the same way as Elohim, that is, as an intensive plural of majesty with the approximate meaning "my lordship"[53]

Beyond the names associated with Yahweh and Elohim, other descriptive designations for God appear. Some of these names are primitive and reach back into patriarchal history before the name of Yahweh was known, such as, *Phahad Yitsehaq* (= Fear of Isaac, Ge. 31:42, *53), Avi'r Ya'aqov* (Mighty One of Jacob, Ge. 49:24), *Roeh* (Shepherding One, Ge. *48:15;* 49:24), and *Even Yisrael* (= Rock of Israel, Ge. 49:24). Others, like the title *Melek* (= King), probably reflect the suzerain/vassal relationship between Yahweh and Israel (Nu. 23:21; Dt. *33:5;* cf. Ex. *15:18).* Moses also calls God *Tsur* (= the Rock, Dt. 32:18).

Yahweh and the Gods of Egypt

The events preceding the exodus were an intense contest between Yahweh and

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[51] Anderson, *1DB* (1962) II.411, 413-414; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,* trans. J. Baker Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) I.185.

[52] The Hebrew apposition *Adon Yahweh* is problematic for English translation in that both names are normally rendered by the same English equivalent. A translation such as "Lord LORD" would be awkward, so the NIV translators render the compound as "Sovereign LORD." This is superior to the KJV rendering of "Lord God," since there is no justification for using the title "God" which implies *Elohim.* For a summary of how the NIV committee renders the various names for God, see the preface written by the Committee on Bible Translation.

[53] Anderson, *1DB* (1962) 11.4 14; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament,* trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 58-59.

the gods of Egypt.[54] Not only were the mighty acts of Yahweh convincing signs to the Hebrews that they were the object of his choice (Ex. 4:1-9, 17, 29-31; 6:2-8), these signs were given in order to convince the Egyptians that Yahweh was truly God (Ex. *7:1-5;* 9:16). Moses and his spokesman Aaron represented Yahweh. Pharaoh represented the gods of Egypt as the god-symbol of the state.[55] Thus, the conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh was a kind of divine battle--a battle of divine wills and divine powers.[56] The initial sign, the miracle in which Moses' staff became a snake[57] which swallowed up the staff/snakes of the Egyptians,[58] was only the beginning of the contest which continued throughout the ten plagues and the climactic miracle at the sea.

In passing, it is worth noting that this divine contest is paradigmatic for at least three other such contests in biblical history, the contest between Elijah and Ba'al (1 Kings 17-18), the contest between Jesus and Beelzebub (the synoptic gospels), and the contest between the Lamb and the great dragon (the Apocalypse).

The ten plagues loom large in the divine contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh. They are described by cognate Hebrew words meaning "blow" or "stroke"

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[54] For different perspectives of interpretation, see Z. Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues," *BR* (June 1990), pp. 16-23, 42.

[55] The term "Pharaoh" is technically a title, sometimes prefixed to a proper name in Egyptian history. In the biblical story of the exodus, however, the title is used as a name. In Egyptian religion, Pharaoh was himself a god who was believed to have come from the realm of the gods, not from any province or town in Egypt. There was no need to codify law since the word of the god-king was present to make law, cf. J. Wilson, "Pharaoh," *1DB* (1962)III.773-774.

[56] Some readers have sensed a moral problem in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart by Yahweh, as though Yahweh infringed upon Pharaoh's rights as a human being. It should be pointed out that there are three kinds of phrases and three distinct verbs in these passages. In some, Pharaoh hardens his own heart (e.g., *kaved* = to make heavy or dull, Ex. 8:15). In some, Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart (e.g., *qashah* = to be heavy, hard or fierce, Ex. 7:3). In some, the phrase is passive and neutral (e.g., *hazaq* to become strong or stubborn, Ex. 7:13).

This hardening of Pharaoh's heart must be viewed against the background of the divine contest. It is the sovereign power of Yahweh that is at stake, and Yahweh will brook no rival from any other "deity," including the god-king of Egypt. The hardening of Pharaoah's heart is another sign of Yahweh's control, and it is against this hardness of heart that Yahweh demonstrates his power as the true God (cf. Ex. 10:1-2; 14:4).

[57] Traditionally, we read "snake" here in the English versions, and it may well have been a snake. However, it is not the same word as used, for instance, in Ex. 4:3 *(nahash* = snake), and it might even refer to a young crocodile, some other kind of lizard or water creature, or even a dragon-monster. The word *tanni'n* (= sea monster, dragon or snake) is most often found in mythological contexts, and Pharaoh himself is later symbolized as such a sea monster by Ezekiel (32:1-2), cf. Hyatt, 104. The power of Yahweh's staff/snake over Pharaoh's staff/snakes suggests the power of Yahweh over Pharaoh himself and the gods of Egypt.

[58] The Book of Exodus does not name the magicians who opposed Moses (Ex. 7:11-12,22), but later Jewish tradition developed their names, Jannes and Jambres, and their characters as false prophets inspired by Belial (a pseudepigraphical name for Satan), cf. *1DB* (1962) 11.800-801; *TDNT* (1965) 111.192-193. This tradition was apparently known by some early Christians, because it is alluded to in 2 Ti. 3:8.

as well as by words meaning "sign."[59] Of course the element of power is uppermost in the contest. Pharaoh and his court were impotent against the mighty hand of Yahweh. At a deeper level, some of the plagues struck at several nerves in Egyptian religion.[60]

Although the first two plagues were imitated by Pharaoh's court magicians, by the third plague, their powers were exhausted. The first plague (Ex. 7:14-21) was aimed at the Nile River, which was considered to be a deity. In fact, all Egypt was, in the words of an ancient maxim, the "gift of the Nile," and Hapi was the Nile god.[61] The god Khnum was considered to be the creator of water and life, while the Nile was the mythological bloodstream of Osirus. The second plague (Ex. 8:1-6), the uncontrollable frogs, were also associated with the Nile god Hapi as well as with the goddess Heqt, who was believed to assist women in childbirth and who was represented as a frog. Frogs were symbols of fertility and considered to be the embodiment of a life-giving force.[62] Piles of dead frogs could hardly fail to impress the Egyptians with the power of Yahweh and the impotence of their own deities. At the third plague (Ex. 8:16-19),[63] Pharaoh's court magicians were ready to concede that the disasters were caused by the "finger of God."

At the fourth plague, the flies (Ex. 8:20-24), Yahweh made a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians so that the Israelites were spared. At this plague, Pharaoh even offered to allow the Israelites to perform ritual sacrifices, providing they did not leave Egypt, but Moses refused because the very animals which Israel would have used as sacrificial victims had been deified by the Egyptians (Ex. 8:25-27).[64] The fifth plague (Ex. 9:1-7), which struck the Egyptian livestock, also had religious overtones. The goddess of mother and sky, Hathor, was represented as a cow, and the Apis Bull of Memphis, the symbol of fertility, had for centuries been an object of veneration throughout Egypt.[65]

In the sixth plague (Ex. 9:8-11),[66] the court magicians of Pharaoh were so

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[59] These words are *maggephah* (= plague, torment), *nega'* (= assault, blow), *nakah* (to strike, batter), *'oth* (= sign, mark), *mopheth* (= portent, omen), *pele'* (= something extraordinary, marvelous, wonderful).

[60] While there are more ways than one to look at the significance of the ten plagues, the one most clearly identified in the biblical text is that the plagues were an attack upon Egypt's gods, cf. Z. Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues," *BR* (Vol. VI Nu. 3/June 1990) 21.

[61] Gordon, 161.

[62] Hyatt, 108; Cole, 91.

[63] There is some ambiguity about the Hebrew word *kinnim.* It may mean gnats (NIV), mosquitos, maggots (NEB) or lice (ASV).

[64] D. Stalker, "Exodus," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible,* ed. M. Black and H. Rowley (Hong Kong: Nelson, 1962) 217.

[65] Pfeiffer, 136, 157.

[66] The exact nature of the sixth plague is unclear, other than that it was some kind of severe skin irritation. Scholarly

afflicted that they could not appear to oppose Moses. As a preface to the seventh plague, the hail (Ex. 9:13-26), Yahweh informed Pharaoh that up until this point divine restraint had been shown, but no longer. Seth, the god of wind and storm, was completely at the mercy of Yahweh. After the seventh disaster, Pharaoh for the first time acknowledged his sin in opposing Yahweh (Ex. 9:27), though he stubbornly continued to enslave Israel (Ex. 9:33-35). At the eighth plague, the locusts (Ex. 10:3-6, 13-15), Yahweh declared that these signs would become legendary in Israel so that future generations could tell their children how Yahweh "made sport with the Egyptians" (Ex. 10:2, RSV).[67] Both the seventh and eighth plagues may have been directed toward Seth, the god who manifested himself in wind and storm. They may also have been aimed at Isis, the goddess of life and/or the god Min, the deity of fertility and vegetation who protected the crops.[68] The ninth plague (Ex. 10:21-23) struck at the various deities associated with the sun, Amon-Re, Aten, Atum and/or Horus, but particularly Re, the Egyptian sun god, the most popular of all the cosmic gods of Egypt. Re was believed to leave the subterranean world at dawn to enter the upper world and travel by day across the celestial ocean in a bark.[69] For three days Yahweh blotted out Re in the land of Egypt.

Finally, Yahweh informed Moses that there would be one plague more, the death of all Egypt's firstborn sons (Ex. 11:1, 4-7). This plague struck at Pharaoh himself, as the patron deity, and Osirus, the judge of the dead. What was to be Egypt's darkest hour was to mark the beginning of Israel's redemption. The plagues represent Yahweh's judgment on the gods of Egypt. As each devastating blow fell, Yahweh demonstrated his sovereign power and exposed the impotence of the opposing deities.

The final plague compelled Pharaoh to release the Israelites (Ex. 12:31-33). Shortly, however, Pharaoh once more changed his mind. With the Egyptian army, he trapped the fleeing Israelites against the banks of the sea (Ex. 14:5-9). It is here that the great redemptive event of the Old Testament reached its climax, when Yahweh divided the sea, destroyed the Egyptian army, and led his people to safety.

That day Yahweh saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the

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guesses range from Nile-scab, to leprosy, to skin anthrax, to prickly-heat.

[67] The Hebrew expression *hit'allaltiy* probably means to make a fool of someone, W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 274 (cf., "I made fools of the Egyptians," *JB).*

[68] Note that in Ex. 9:31, the plague comes between the harvest of flax and barley and the maturity of the wheat and spelt. A widely celebrated "Coming out of Min" was held in Egypt at the beginning of the harvest, and in effect, these plagues devastated Min's coming-out party, cf. Zevit, 21.

[69] Pfeiffer, 137-138, 143.

Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power Yahweh displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared Yahweh and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Ex. 14:30-31 (NIV)

In later Jewish poetry, the victory at the sea would be recited in the language of symbolism. Pharaoh and the sea are depicted as a mythological monster whom Yahweh crushed in the divine contest of power (Ps. 74:12-14; Is. 5 1:9-10). This imagery of Pharaoh as a great water monster became an enduring symbol (Eze. 29:3-6; 32:2). The depiction eventually becomes an eschatological symbol for the great contest between God and the powers of evil at the end of the age (Is. 27:1; Rv. 12, 19).

Who Among the Gods is Like Our God?

The revelation of Yahweh to Israel in his acts of divine power against the gods of Egypt produced a refrain that was to be echoed throughout Israelite history, particularly when they confronted the gods of the Canaanites.

Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.

Ex. 18.11 (NIV)

For who in the skies can compare with Yahweh?

Who resembles Yahweh among the gods?

Ps. 89:6 (AB)

What god is so great as our God?

Ps. 77:13b (NIV)

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way Yahweh our God is near us whenever we pray to him?

Dt. 4:7 (NIV)

This refrain, which may be found in various places in the, Old Testament (cf. Dt. 33:26; 1 Ki. 8:23; Ps. 35:10; 71:19; 89:8; 95:3; 96:4; Je. 10:6; etc.), compares Yahweh with the gods of the nations that surrounded Israel. To fully appreciate this comparison, it will be helpful to survey the nature of ancient Near Eastern religion, particularly Canaanite religion. Until this century, knowledge of ancient Near Eastern religion was scant. However, the archaeologist's spade has uncovered considerable information about how the nations of Mesopotamia and Western Palestine

worshiped.[70]

Though Torah does not expressly say so, it implies that Abraham was an idolater prior to his call by God, and this is made explicit in later Israelite literature (Jos. 24:2). In the Genesis narratives, the patriarchs brushed shoulders with various peoples and their religious faiths. This environment is evident not only in personal names, which often carried religious significance, such as, Abimelech (= my [divine] father is king), Eliezer (= my God is a help [to me]), Melchizedek (= my [divine] king is righteous), Potiphera (= he whom Re has given) and Asenath (= belonging to [the goddess] Neith),[71] but also in actual stories. Abraham, out of acute embarrassment over the lie he had told a pagan king, blamed his predicament on "the gods." "The gods had me wander from my father's household," he said (Ge. 20:13).[72]

Laban, Jacob's uncle, practiced divination (Ge. 30:27), and Jacob himself was not above using ancient magic in building his breeding stock (Ge. 30:25-43).[73] Rachel stole her father's *terepim* (Ge. 31:30-35), small cultic figurines (sometimes shaped as a human) which were used for divination (cf. Zec. 10:2). Laban, Rachel's father, specifically refers to them as his "gods" (= elohim).[74] When Laban caught up to Jacob after Jacob had fled south, the two relatives cut a covenant in the name of a deity from both sides (Ge. 31:51-53).[75] Later, Jacob called for a purge of the various household gods and fetishes from among his clan members (Ge. 35:2-4).[76] Judah, one of the twelve Israelite clan heads, became involved with a woman whom he thought

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[70] A.Halder, "Canaanites," *1DB* (1962) I.497.

[71] Bright, *History,* 98.

[72] Usually, the name Elohim is used with a singular verb when referring to the God of the Hebrews. Here, however, the verb is plural, and many translators have missed the significance of the grammar. The plural verb probably infers that the subject must also be translated in the plural, cf. Kidner, 138-139.

[73] G.von Rad, *Genesis,* rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 301-302.

[74] Why Rachel stole these gods is not explained. It could have been for religious reasons (cf. Ge. 35:2-4), but even more likely, it may have been an effort to reclaim part of her bride price inheritance which her father had spent. The Nuzi tablets (20,000 clay tablets in cuneiform from an excavated city in Northern Mesopotamia reflecting life in patriarchal times) inform us that possession of the family gods strengthened one's claim to the family inheritance, cf. J. Thompson, "Nuzi," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology,* ed. Blaiklock and Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 342.

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[76] Ge. 31:53 is probably best translated, "May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor (their respective ancestral deities) maintain order between us," cf. E. Speiser, *AnchorBible: Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 243; Kidner, 166-167.

to be a Canaanite cult prostitute (Ge. 38:13-26).[77] It is clear that the descendents of Abraham were not isolated from the religions of the ancient Near East.

In Egypt, Joseph was believed by Pharaoh to be possessed with the "spirit of the gods" (Ge. 41:38).[78] During his rise to power, Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priestess from Heliopolis (Ge. 41:45). Later, we discover that Joseph used a divination cup (Ge. 44:3-5).[79]

This interaction of the patriarchs with other members of society in a polytheistic world must not be removed from its pre-Mosaic setting. The Genesis record makes no moral comment on what, by later standards, might seem to be particularly reprehensible acts, such as divination and cult prostitution (cf. Lv. 19:31; Dt. 18:10-13; Nu. 25:1-9). Rather, this patriarchal picture frankly describes the religious naiveté of the patriarchs as they began assimilating the new faith given to them by revelation--a faith that was progressive and that would be given with increasing clarity throughout the unfolding of sacred history.

The Canaanites,[80] by contrast, worshiped a divine pantheon of gods. El, the nominal head and father of the pantheon, was a remote god who interfered little with the affairs of the world. He presided over the assembly of the gods who gathered on Mt. Zaphon in the far north. El's female consort, Asherat, was the "lady of the sea," and she leaves traces of her name some forty times in the Old Testament in the term *Asherah,* a kind of shrine to the goddess, probably referring either to a wooden pole-image or a sacred tree with the branches lopped off which was erected beside an altar to Ba'al. El and Asherat produced a family of seventy *elim*, gods and goddesses.

The most important of these offspring and next in rank after El was Ba'al, celebrated as lord of the gods, creator of humans, and the master of rain, storm and fertility. His title, Ba'al, means "master" or "lord" (and, in domestic contexts, "husband"), and it is similar to the Hebrew term Adonai. Ba'al's personal name was Hadad, and as the storm god, he was responsible for the germination and growth of crops as well as the fertility of breeding stock and humans. In Canaanite art, Ba'al takes the form of a bull, an animal of strength and fertility, or is depicted as riding

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[77]That Tamar was playing the role of a cult prostitute is clear from the fact that in 38:21-22 Judah calls her a *qedeshah* (= a consecrated one), cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50,*trans. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) *54.*

[78] Kidner, 196 (see NIV footnote).

[79] A divination cup was a special utensil in which objects where thrown or liquid was poured. The pattern formed by the objects or the way in which the liquid was disturbed in the cup by the objects was interpreted so as to predict the future (not unlike reading tea leaves). Such a practice was widespread in ancient times, cf. von Rad, 392.

[80] The following description of Canaanite religion is drawn primarily from four works:Anderson, *Understanding,* 102-108; Bright, 115-117; Pfeiffer, 69-77; H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East,* trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

upon the back of a bull. Ba'al's consort-sister was the warrior goddess Anath (also called Astarte or Ashtaroth), famous for her violent sexual passion and sadistic brutality. Other gods and goddesses, usually conceptualized as deifications of natural phenomena, filled out the pantheon.

Important to Canaanite mythology was the death and resurrection of Ba'al. Mot, the god of summer drought, killed Ba'al and carried him to the underworld. While the other gods grieved over the loss of their brother, Ba'al's consort-sister was seized with a great passion for her missing lover. Finding Ba'al in the possession of Mot, Anath engaged Mot in a ferocious struggle, finally killing him, with the result that Ba'al was resurrected and enthroned once again as lord of the earth. Anath and Ba'al were reunited as lovers. This myth corresponded to the Canaanite notions of the seasons. Ba'al personified the fertilizing forces of springtime. Mot personified the destructive powers that bring drought and death to vegetation and animal life. Anath represented the powers of fertility which gave rise to the astonishing revival of nature in the change of seasons.

The Canaanite worship of these gods involved a reenactment of the mythology which, by imitative magic, was believed to insure the fertility of the land, the herds and the people themselves. Devotees brought wine, oil, first fruits, and firstlings of their flocks to the "high places."[81] Here, before the *mazzebah* (= sacred pillar), which represented the male element, and the asherah (= sacred tree?),[82] which represented the female element, the worshipers would engage in sacred prostitution, homosexuality, and various orgiastic rituals. A male playing the part of Ba'al and a female playing the part of Anath paired for sacred intercourse to ensure the wealth and prosperity of the land. It was believed that the whole natural sphere was governed by the vitalities of sex. Canaanite religion gave to the devotees a way of controlling nature and of manipulating the gods into action. When the Old Testament speaks of Israel "whoring after idols," it is far more than just a figure of speech!

Beyond the Ba'al cult there was the deity Molech, the god of vows and solemn promises, to whom children were sacrificed and made to pass through the fire. The name Molech is related to the Semitic word for king *(melek),* and it is not far removed the meaning of Ba'al or "master."[83]

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[81] A fascinating review of unearthed cultic stands may be found in L. DeVries, "Cult Stands: A Bewildering Variety of Shapes and Sizes," *BAR* XIII, 4 (July/August 1987) 26-37.

[82] For an exploration of the cryptic term "asherah", see A. Lemaire, "Who or What Was Yahweh's Asherah?," *BAR* X, 6 (November/December 1984) *42-51*; J. Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *JBL* (Sept. '86/Vol. *105* No. 3) *385-408.*

[83] Pfeiffer, *75-76.* Ancient Canaanite practices of war sometimes called for the burnt sacrifices of children as an offering to the gods, cf. B. Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *BAR* XII, 6

The Canaanite mythology was woven into the very fabric of Canaanite life. Place names as well as personal names frequently reflected religious ideals.[84] Israel's first direct encounter with Canaanite religion was at Baal Peor in the land of the Moabites during the sojourn (Nu. 25), a tragic covenant failure that was forever remembered with deep shame (cf. Dt. 4:3; Jos. 22:17; Ps. 106:28-31; Ho. 9:10).

In the laws of Torah, a number of injunctions directly address the dangers of Canaanite religion. These kinds of laws begin in the Book of the Covenant[85] and are repeated throughout Torah. Carved or cast images of gods were strictly forbidden (Ex. 20:4, 23; 22:20; 34:17; Lv. 19:4; 26:1; Dt. 4:15-26; 5:8; 16:21-22; 27:15; 29:16-18) as were dressed stones for altars or indecent exposure during worship (Ex. 20:24-26).[86] In fact, the express command of Yahweh for Israel in the conquest of Canaan was to totally destroy the Canaanite shrines and their devotees (Ex. 23:24; 34:13-14; Dt. 7:5-6, 16, 25; 12:2-4; 20:16-18). The dangers of syncretism were repeatedly held forth in dire warnings (Ex. 23:32-33; 34:11-12; Dt. 7:1-4; 12:29-31; 13:1-15; 29:25-28; 30:17-18; 31:14-22). The worship of the Canaanite deities, far from procuring the blessings of fertility, would result in Yahweh's judgment consisting of terrible drought (Dt. 11:16-17). Sorcery and related practices were also forbidden (Ex. 22:18; Lv. 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Dt. 18:9-14). Sexual intercourse was carefully regulated (Ex. 22:19; Lv. 18; 19:29; 20:10-23; Dt. 22:13-30; 23:17-18; 27:20-23). Practices which seem obscure to us, such as boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Ex. 23:19; 34:26),[87] self-laceration, certain mourning rituals (Lv. 19:27-28; Dt. 14:1),[88] and the practice of transvestitism (Dt. 22:5)[89], were strictly forbidden, since they were associated with Canaanite worship. The worship of Molech and its detestable practice of child-sacrifice was also expressly forbidden in Torah (Lv. 18:21; 20:1-5; Dt. 18:9-10).

(November/December 1986) 62-63.

[84] Ba'al (or his consort) was often identified with the localities in which he was worshiped, hence giving rise to Old Testament place names like Baal Gad, Baal Hamon, Baal Hazor, Baal Hermon, Baal Peor, Baal Perizim, Baal Shalishah, Baal Tamar, Baal Zaphon, Baalah, Baalath, Baalath Beer, and Beth Anath. The oasis at Elim was undoubtedly named after the pantheon of local deities. Personal names compounded with the names of gods are also found in Old Testament literature, such as, Jerub-Baal, Esh-baal and Merib-baal, as are compound names for other Canaanite-type deities, such as, Baal Zebul and Baal Berith.

[85] The title, "Book of the Covenant," comes from Ex. 24:7 and is usually agreed upon as consisting of the section Ex. 20:22--23:33, cf. F. Fensham, "Covenant, Book of the", *ISBE* (1979) 1.793.

[86] Forbidding dressed stones was probably an anti-Canaanite measure, cf. Hyatt, 226.

[87] Ugaritic texts describe boiling a kid in its mother's milk as a sacrificial practice of the Canaanites, cf. Hyatt, 249-250.

[88] Ugaritic texts also indicate that shaving a bald spot on the head was a Canaanite ritual for the dead, and self-laceration was a practice associated with mourning as well as with the seasonal fertility rituals, P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 229-230.

[89] A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 307.

One of the most powerful statements about Yahweh as contrasted with the Ba'al cult is the repeated affirmation that Yahweh is the "living God" (cf. Dt. 5:26). While this description is only developed later in the Old Testament, it stands diametrically opposed to the dying/rising mythology of Ba'a1[90]

Yahweh demanded exclusive worship. The opening commandments in the decalogue set forth the fundamental order for Hebrew worship, and the Israelites heard the voice of Yahweh declare the ten words out of the burning mountain (Ex. 19:16--20:1).

> *I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other elohim before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, Yahweh your Elohim, am a jealous Elohim.*
>
> *Ex. 20:2-5a*

Moses obtained the written version of the decalogue when he was on the mountain for forty days and nights (Ex. 24:15-18). During this period, the Israelites violated the most important directives in Torah by constructing a golden young bull (*'egel* = bull calf), an idol with which they credited their release from Egypt (Ex. 32:1-6). Ba'al worship was widely known and Ba'al was worshiped in the Delta area of Egypt, as archaeology demonstrates. While there is no suggestion of contact between Israel and any Canaanites this early in the narrative, it is likely that the golden bull-calf incident was a terrible lapse into Ba'al worship just the same?[91] This lapse resulted in immediate executions (Ex. 32:27-29), and it was ever held up to Israel as a bitter memory (cf. Dt. 9:7-17; Ne. 9:16-18; Ps. 106:19-20; Ac. 7:39-41; 1 Co. 10:7).

The story of the golden calf thus becomes a glaring example of Israel's susceptibility to the Canaanite Ba'al cult. When Israel first encountered actual Canaanites in Moab, they capitulated again (Nu. 25), and throughout Israelite history until the exile, Ba'al worship was a perennial threat.

Without attempting to excuse Israel's apostasies, it is still fair to point out that there were some similarities between certain aspects of Yahwehism and the Ba'al cult which, to the naive worshiper who lacked instruction, might have become confusing. Ba'al belonged to a divine pantheon, and Yahweh had a heavenly assembly.[92] Various words are used for these attendants of Yahweh, such as, *'elohim*

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[90] Jacob, 38-39.

[91] Cole, 213-215.

[92] Some scholars understand the frequent title *Yahweh Tsebaoth* (= Lord of Armies) against the background of a

(= gods; cf. Ps. 82:1, 6), *mal'akim* (= angels, messengers; cf. Ge. 19:1; 28:12; 32:1), *Mal'ak Yahweh* (= messenger of Yahweh; cf. Ge. 16:7; 22:11; Ex. 3:2; Nu. 22:22),[93] *qedoshim* (= holy ones; cf. Dt. 33:2-3; Ps. 89:5-7), *bene 'elohim* or *bene 'elim* (= sons of God; cf. Ge. 6:1-2, 4; Dt. 32:8; Jb. 1:6; 2:1; 38:7),[94] *abadim* (= servants; cf. Jb. 4:18), *mesharetim* (= ministers; cf. Ps. 103:21; 104:4), *kerubim* (= adoring ones; cf. Ge. 3:24; Eze. 10:3-22),[95] and *seraphim* (= burning ones; cf. Is. 6:2, 6).[96]

It would have been relatively easy for uninformed Israelites to mingle elements from Ba'al worship with Yahwehism, and in fact, such syncretism is precisely what happened in the later monarchy (cf. 2 Ki. 21:3-9; Je. 19:13). The bull calves of Bethel and Dan erected by Jeroboam I, while ostensibly shrines to Yahweh, became syncretistic snares to the northern nation Israel (1 Ki. 12:26-33; 2 Ki. 10:28-29; 17:16-17; Ho. 8:5; 10:5; 13:1-2). It is apparent that among some Israelites in the 8th century BC, even the name Ba'al had come to be used of Yahweh (Ho. 2:16).[97]

It is against this ever-present danger of syncretism that the Shema[98] stands as the quintessence of Yahwehism.

Hear, 0 Israel! Yahweh is our God! Yahweh is one!

Dt. 6:4[99]

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divine assembly, cf. Jacob, *54-55.* While it is clear that in many cases the *tsebaoth* refer to the celestial bodies (i.e., Ge. 2:1; Dt. 4:19), and in many other cases the word refers to the military forces of Israel (i.e., Ex. 6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 41, *51),* on some occasions the *tsebaoth* seem to include the heavenly beings (Ps. 148:2; 1 Kg. 22:19; cf. 2 Kg. 6:17).

[93] It is worth observing that the *Mal'ak Yahweh* is a somewhat paradoxical figure inasmuch as on some occasions he seems to represent Yahweh (i.e., Ge. 16:11) and on other occasions he seems to be Yahweh (i.e., Ge. 48: 15-16; Ex. 3:2-6). Sometimes, there is fluidity between the two sides of this paradox in the same passage (i.e., Ge. 16:11, 13).

[94] While the Masoretic Text has "sons of Israel" in Dt. 32:8, both the LXX and the Qumran scrolls read "sons of God," and this reading is correctly reflected in the RSV, NAB, and NEB, cf. Mayes, 384-385.

[95] There is doubt concerning the root of the term *kerubim,* but the Akkadian cognate verb means to bless, praise or adore, and hence, the notion of adoration is suitable, cf. R. Harris, *TWOT* (1980) 1.454-455.

[96] G. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1950) 30-41.

[97] There is a play on words in this passage between the two titles *'ish* (= husband, man) and *ba'al* (= husband, master), cf. J. Mays, *Hosea [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 48.

[98] The title *Shema* is a transliteration of the first word in the verse, "Hear." Of the 613 commandments in Torah, Jesus said this was the single most important one (Mk. 12:28-34).

[99] There are several possible English translations of the Hebrew words in Dt. 6:4:

Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one! (NIV)
Yahweh our God is one Yahweh! (RSV)
Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone! (NAB)
Yahweh is our God, one Yahweh! (NEB)
Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one! (NA SB)

The crux of the translational problem is whether the Shema is a prohibition of poly-Yahwehism, that is, the notion that Yahweh, like Ba'al, is divisible among the various cultic settings, or whether he is the unique and only lord, cf. S. Driver, *Deuteronomy [ICC]* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902). There exists some evidence that poly-

Unlike Ba'al worship, Israel was to worship at only one shrine, not many (Dt. 12:13-14). The exclusivism of Yahweh worship was affirmed over and over (Dt. 6:13-16; 8:19-20, etc.). Though Israel was surrounded by the gods of the Canaanites, the nation was constantly reminded of the uniqueness of Yahweh as well as his exclusive right to be called God. When Israel lapsed into Ba'al worship, it was understood to be a lapse into demon worship (Dt. 32:15-18), a worship of what was not truly divine at all (Dt. 32:21). Thus, the essential character of Israelite religion was the exclusive worship of one God, Yahweh!

> *Has any other people heard the voice of an elohim speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any elohim ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things Yahweh your Elohim did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? You were shown these things so that you might know that Yahweh is Elohim; beside him there is no other.*
>
> *Dt. 4:33-35*

> *For Yahweh your Elohim is Elohim of elohim and Adonai of adonim, the great El, mighty and awesome....*
>
> *Dt. 10:17a*

> *See now that I myself am He! There is no elohim beside me.*
>
> *Dt. 32:39a*

> *For Yahweh's portion is his people,*
>
> *Jacob his allotted inheritance.*
>
> *Yahweh alone led him,*
>
> *No foreign el was with him.*
>
> *Dt. 32:9, 12*

God and the Covenant

The idea of *berit* (= covenant) was woven throughout the woof and warp of

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Yahwehism was known in ancient Israel, and if so, then the prohibition in the Shema would be aimed at eliminating this "parceling out" of Yahweh to various cultic sites.

In Deuteronomy, with its underlying structure of a suzerainty treaty, the Shema probably expresses covenantal monotheism, that is, it is the command to worship Yahweh as Israel's sole suzerain.

ancient Near Eastern life. A covenant was a solemn promise between individuals, clans, or states made binding by an oath (either a verbal formula or a symbolic action) which both parties recognized as sacred. Such an oath called upon the gods to punish any breach of the covenant. The obligations accepted by someone in such a covenant relationship carried the force of law. Covenants regulated the social behavior of ancient peoples so that a certain level of predictability and trust could be counted on. Even before the time of Abraham, well-formed covenantal patterns for the regulation of international affairs had been established in the Sumerian and Akkadian cultures. By the time Israel was coming out of Egypt, the Hittites, who built a vast empire in Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine in the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1400-1200 BC), had left an indelible impression on their vassal cultures in what scholars call the Hittite suzerainty treaty, examples of which are well-known to archaeologists. Other than blood ties, the covenant was perhaps the single most important social relationship between ancient Near Eastern peoples, and it controlled both domestic and political life.[100]

The reader of the Old Testament will see many examples of how the covenantal ideal impinged upon normal life. Abraham's refusal to accept the spoils of war was due to a covenant oath (Ge. 14:21-24). Abraham entered into covenant with Abimelech of Canaan over water rights (Ge. 21:22-32), a covenant later renewed by his son (Ge. 26:26-31), and he also entered into covenant with his senior slave regarding the securing of a bride for his son (Ge. 24:1-9, 37-38, 40-41). When Esau sold his birthright, he did so under covenant oath (Ge. 25:29-34). Jacob cut a covenant with his uncle Laban regarding clan boundaries (Ge. 31:43-54). In his old age, Jacob ensured that he would be buried in Canaan rather than Egypt through a covenantal oath (Ge. 47:29-31; 50:4-6), and Joseph, also, called upon his clan to enter into a similar covenant (Ge. 50:24-25). The force of Joseph's covenant lasted hundreds of years (Ex.13:19)!

Because covenants in the ancient Near Eastern were so basic to the lives of its peoples, certain stereotypical language patterns and generally recognized symbolic actions developed around the idea of covenant. The idiom for covenant-making was *karat berit* (= to cut a covenant), an idiom taken from the fact that in many such covenants an animal or animals were slaughtered and cut up as sacrificial victims at the covenant ceremony (cf. Ge. 15:7-21)?[101] The *shevu 'ah* (= oath), the *nishba'* (= act of swearing), the *mitswot* (= covenant stipulations), the *berakah* (= covenant blessing), and the '*ala* (= curse) all form part of the distinctive language of

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[100] G. Mendenhall, "Covenant" *IDB* (1962) I.714-715.

[101] M. Weinfeld *TDOT* (1975) 11.259-260.

covenant.[102] Oath-taking was a serious matter, for the security of society demanded that its members speak the truth in critical situations. A standard oath gesture was the lifting of the hand toward heaven (cf. Ge. 14:22), and even Yahweh himself swore an oath in this way (Ex. 6:8). Those who broke a covenant oath were considered to have a "deceitful right hand" (cf. Ps. 144:7-8).

Other symbolic actions were also used, such as, sacred meals or laying hold of some sacred and potent object, like the genitals of the patriarch.[103] In time, the words, "May God (or the gods) deal with me, be it ever so severely," became a standard oath formula for calling down upon oneself a divine curse if a covenantal promise was breached (cf. Ru. 1:17; 1 Sa. 3:17; 14:44; 20:13; 25:22; 2 Sa. 3:9, 35; 1 Ki. 2:23; 19:2; 20:10). Similarly, calling God (or the gods) as one's witness, sometimes by the expression, "As Yahweh lives," was another common expression for oath-taking (cf. Ge. 31:49-50, 53; Jg. 8:19; 1 Sa. 12:5; 14:39, 45; 19:6; 20:3, 21, 23; 25:26, etc.). God himself swore oaths, but when he swore an oath to Abraham, he swore by himself, since there was no one greater (Ge. 22:16). The fact that God (or the gods) were guardians of such oaths was treated with the utmost seriousness (cf. Nu. 5:19-22; Ps. 7:3-5; 137:5-6)[104]

Yahweh and the Covenantal Tradition

That God used the institution of ancient Near Eastern covenants by which to establish his own relationship with the people of faith is everywhere attested in Torah. The flight from Egypt and the journey toward Canaan, that central redemptive event in Torah, was the direct result of Yahweh's ancient covenantal oath to the patriarchs.

> *And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am Yahweh.*
>
> *Ex. 6:6-8*

The earliest covenant on record is the one made by God with Noah after the great flood, a covenant guaranteeing protection from another such deluge (Ge. 6:18; 9:1-17).[105] The most important covenant in the patriarchal narratives, however, is the

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[102] J. Thompson, "Covenant (OT)", *ISBE* (1979) 1.790-791.

[103] Holding the genitals of the patriarch in oath-taking is the ancient Near Eastern background of Ge. 24:2; 47:29. The Hebrew *yarek* refers to the fleshy part of the upper thigh, the area of the sexual organs, cf. Holladay, 144; M. Pope, "Oaths", *1DB* (1962) 111.576. The Hebrew text of Ge. 46:26 and Ex. 1:5, for instance, reads that the descendants of Jacob came "out of his thigh" *(yarek).*

[104] M. Pope, "Oaths", *1DB* (1962) III.575-577; F. Fensham, "Oath", *ISBE* (1986) III.*572-574.*

[105] Of course, it may be argued that there were earlier covenants. Covenant theologians, for instance, describe a

covenant God made with the patriarchs regarding their clan and the land of Canaan.

God's covenant with Abraham is stated, for the most part, in very unconditional language in the form of a promissory oath (Ge. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:2-5; 17:3-22; 18:17-19; 22:15-18). It was reaffirmed to Isaac (Ge.26:2-5) and later to Jacob (Ge. 28:13-15; 35:11-12). Ishmael, Abraham's slave-son, was pointedly excluded from the covenant (Ge. 17:20-21). The patriarchal covenant consisted of a complex of interrelated promises. It guaranteed *zera* (= seed, posterity) to Abraham in very great numbers, personal blessing for Abraham along with an enhanced *shem* (= name, reputation), blessing for those who favored Abraham and disfavor for those who did not, land rights to Canaan for Abraham's clan, and divine blessing for all nations of the earth.[106] A most important factor for the Hebrew slaves in Egypt was that they were themselves the descendents of this same Abraham and that the land of Canaan was to be theirs by a divine grant. The land was to be theirs "forever" (Ge. 13:15; 17:8), though to be sure, the fulfillment of the land grant was to be some four centuries or so after the time of Abraham (Ge. 15:13-16). When Israel came out of Egypt to go into the land of Canaan, the assumption was that they would be established in their promised land so that they might live there perpetually (Ex. 6:2-8).

Early on, no particular conditions were attached to the Abrahamic covenant; there were no stipulations to obey and no obligations to fulfill. In fact, in the covenant ceremony (Ge. 15), Abraham was completely passive. However, a hint of conditionality is introduced as the covenant explanations were progressively given. Abraham and his descendants must "keep" the covenant through the ritual of circumcision, otherwise they would be "cut off" (Ge. 17:9-14). Furthermore, conditional language is later introduced with a "so that" clause.[107]

> *I have chosen him [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing what is right and just, so that Yahweh will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.*
>
> *Ge. 18:18-19*

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covenant made between the Father and the Son even before the creation of the universe as well as a covenant between God and Adam in Eden, cf. M. Osterhaven, "Covenant Theology," *EDT* (1984) 279-280. However, these ideas are theological constructs retrojected back into pre-Genesis and Genesis history from the perspective of the New Testament. It should go without saying that an ancient Hebrew would never have developed such a conception, and the language of covenant is absent prior to the story of the great flood.

[106] For an insightful discussion of these promises and their implications for the future of Israel as well as their use by New Testament writers, see T. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 15-58.

[107] The text uses the infinitive form of *ma'an* (= in order that), Holladay, 207.

While the covenant is unconditional in the sense that God would never forget his covenantal promises, it still remained true that the individual blessings of these promises were contingent upon the response of faith and obedience. Even those who were of the covenantal family could be "cut off," and a graphic illustration of this tragic possibility is to be found in the story of how Yahweh tried to kill Moses because he neglected the important ritual of circumcision (Ex. 4:24-26).[108] Furthermore, the rebellion at Kadesh by the people of Israel meant that the covenantal promises regarding the land would not be fulfilled to them, but only to their descendants (Nu. 14).

> *Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home.... They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die.*
>
> *Nu. 14:30a, 35b*

The Sinai Covenant

At Mt. Sinai (also called Horeb) the reader of Torah is introduced to one of the two mountains that dominate the geographical and theological landscape of the Old Testament.[109] Mt. Sinai, Torah and Moses are so closely tied together in Israelite history that, as symbolic names, they are almost interchangeable. Sinai is the mountain of the covenant, first mentioned in connection with the burning bush (Ex. 3:1). Here, Moses heard the voice of Yahweh, received his commission to go to Egypt in order to lead out the Israelites (Ex. 3:7-10), was told the identity and meaning of Yahweh's name (Ex. 3:13-15), and was notified that the Israelites would come to worship on that same mountain for a sign (Ex. 3:12; cf. 7:16; 8:1, 20, 27; 9:1, 13; 10:3). After the dramatic and terrible contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh, just as Yahweh had promised, the Israelites came to Sinai to worship (Ex. 19:1-2). From the mountain, Yahweh defined the purpose for Israel's existence (Ex. 19:3-8) and determined to speak to his people directly (Ex. 19:9-15). In power and majesty he descended to the top of Sinai and spoke to Moses face to face (Ex. 19:16--20:21). At Sinai, Moses was privileged to see the glory of God as a confirmation that Yahweh's presence[110] would travel with his people to Canaan (Ex. 33:1-3, 12--34:9,

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[108] This story is the most obscure in the Book of Exodus due to its brevity of detail and the ambiguity of several personal pronouns in the Hebrew text (which could refer either to Moses or to Gershom). Nevertheless, the story is sufficiently clear on the main point, that is, that if Moses or his son remained uncircumcised, they would be excised from the covenantal promises.

[109] The other mountain, Mt. Zion, would only become prominent from the time of David and afterwards.

[110] The Hebrew idiom for the presence of Yahweh is the *panim* (= face). Quite literally, God says, "My face will go with you," cf. Jacob, 77-79.

27-35).

The Form of the Covenant

The ancient Near Eastern treaties, of which we are aware through the archaeologist's spade, are somewhat fluid in form, but there is a general sequence of steps in the covenant formulary which, though not always conducted in the same order, are usually present in the formation of such an international treaty.[111] It is now universally accepted among scholars that the Sinai covenant was in large part modeled upon the existing suzerainty treaties of the ancient world. Just as God related to Abraham in the form of an ancient Near Eastern covenant, so he related to Israel in the form of a suzerainty treaty. Yahweh, the great Suzerain, established his covenant with Israel, his vassal. By a free and gracious act, Yahweh chose for himself a people who had no necessary claim upon him.

The covenant *preamble* introduces the "great King" as the one who initiates the covenant. Clearly, this type of treaty is not between equals (i.e., a parity treaty), but rather, it is a proclamation initiated by the great king for the good of his vassal (i.e., a suzerainty treaty) and expected to be wholeheartedly accepted.

I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery

Ex. 20:2

This introductory section, the *historical prologue*, calls attention to the previous relationships between the vassal and the suzerain, sometimes emphasizing that the suzerain has already been serving as the vassal's protector.

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself

Ex. 19:4

The heart of the treaty was the list of *stipulations* or requirements which the vassal must perform out of deference to the suzerain. These stipulations included the demand for undivided allegiance as well as the regular payment of tribute and the periodic renewal of the covenant. For Israel, the Decalogue forms the heart of the covenant stipulations.

You shall have no other gods before me *Ex. 20:3*

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[111] A general description of the covenant formulary may be found in various sources, but one helpful source which assists in making the connections between the Hittite suzerainty treaty and the Torah narratives is J. Plastaras, *Creation and Covenant* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1968) 166-169. It will be remembered that the Book of Deuteronomy seems to have the Hittite Suzerainty treaty underlying its structure.

Such treaties usually contained a specific clause calling for a *deposition*, a written record of the treaty to be deposited in a safe place, often in the temple of the vassal's capital city.

> *When Yahweh finished speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God*
>
> *Ex.31:18*

The *witnesses*, the gods of both the suzerain and the vassal, were called upon to confirm the covenant and make binding the covenant oath. In the case of Yahweh and Israel, of course, this part of the formulary necessarily had to be altered. Some expressions in Torah, however, seem to call for the elements of nature to witness the words of the covenant.

> *Listen, 0 heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth*
>
> *Dt. 32:1*

Finally, the consequences of covenant-keeping on the part of the vassal, the *blessings and cursings*, were clearly spelled out, both in terms of promises of blessing in return for obedience as well as dire warnings against a breach of duty.

> *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*
>
> *Ex. 19:5-6*

> *See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse--the blessing if you obey the commands of Yahweh your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of Yahweh your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.*
>
> *Dt. 11:26-28*

The Decalogue

The Hebrew description for what has traditionally been called the "ten commandments" is *'esereth haddevarim,* or the "ten words" (Ex. 34:28; Dt. 4:13; 10:4).[112] That the decalogue was the covenant charter *par excellence* is suggested both

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[112] The term "decalogue" is a transliteration of the Greek *hoi deka logoi (*= the ten words) from the LXX and means the same as its Hebrew counterpart.

by the fact that the ten sayings were inscribed on stone and deposited in the sacred ark and by the fact that together they were simply described as "the covenant" (Ex. 19:5; Dt. 4:13). The decalogue gave concrete expression to the Israelites' relationship with Yahweh and their relationship with each other in a social context. As a free people, redeemed from the bondage of Egypt, it guaranteed their human rights, freedoms and responsibilities.

Altogether, the ten words were given three times, once orally by the voice of God out of the burning mountain (Ex. 19:9, 18-19; 20:1, 18-20; Dt. 4:10-15), once written in stone by God's own finger (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; cf. Dt. 9:9-11), an edition that was shattered by Moses in anger (Ex. 32:19; cf. Dt. 9:15-17), and once as reissued during a second stay by Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:1, 4, 28; cf. Dt. 10:1-5, 10). There are two complete lists in Torah of the ten words (Ex. 19:3-17; Dt. 5:7-21).

The *First Word* calls for exclusive fidelity. This commandment has the highest priority in that it calls for absolute loyalty to Yahweh alone. The worship of all deities other than Yahweh was strictly forbidden. As the divine suzerain, Yahweh would tolerate no rivals. The *shema,* discussed earlier, has its roots in this first commandment.

The *Second Word* seeks to preserve the mystery of God. Torah is very clear that there is a mystery to God. When Yahweh spoke to Israel out of the burning mountain, there was only a voice--they saw no form (Dt. 4:12, 15-18). No representations of Yahweh were to be made in any form, therefore. Humans must not think that they might control God, as idolatry invariably implies. This commandment does not forbid sculpture *per se* (the cherubim on the ark as well as many other sacred symbols were sculpted at Yahweh's direction), but it expressly forbids trying to create an object of worship which tries to depict God. God's mystery must be protected.

The *Third Word* warns against presuming on God's power. It is popular to understand the third commandment as a prohibition against bad language. While such an ideal is worthy, the third commandment is really concerned with a much more serious matter, the use of God's name in oath-taking and prophecy. To speak in God's name in taking oaths (i.e., "as Yahweh lives") or to speak as a spokesman for God (i.e., "thus says Yahweh") was not a matter to be taken lightly, for the divine name was uttered in order to gain the power of the deity invoked or to secure his validation for a prophetic word. The rule of prophethood was that anyone who presumed to speak in Yahweh's name without Yahweh's accreditation was to be executed (Dt. 18:20). Similarly, the commandment forbids using the divine name to flippantly invoke curses or blessings or to reinforce one's own false oaths.

The *Fourth Word* requires special reverence for God's grace. The Hebrew concept of the sabbath derives from the verb *shavath* (= to cease, stop working, be at a standstill). The fourth word calls for a ceasing from work every seventh day in order to rest and to reflect upon God's good creation as well as his redemptive acts in delivering his people from the bondage of Egypt. The notion that sabbath was a day for formal religious worship is a later ideal and not a part of the original commandment.

The *Fifth Word* urges the preservation of family. It calls for honor and respect by younger people toward older people, children toward parents, and it must not merely be restricted to infants and adolescents. Among people who lived together in an extended family, sometimes with three or more generations in a single household, this injunction ensured proper deference to aged parents as well as to younger parents. It called for young children to show respect and obedience to their parents, and it called for adult children to support and care for their aging parents.

The *Sixth Word* establishes respect for human life. This commandment, only two words in the Hebrew text *(lo' tiretsah* = don't murder), is a terse prohibition against vengeful life-taking.[113] The verb used here is only one of several Hebrew verbs that may be translated "to kill;" however, this one implies the killing of humans, and it is not the same as the one used for killing in war. Rather, it is a word used in the context of the violent slaying of a personal enemy. God alone had the right to terminate life, and, inasmuch as humans were made in God's image, to attack another human being was implicitly to attack the image of God in that person (cf. Ge. 9:5b-6). Criminal executions were permissible, of course, but these were in effect executions ordered by God and carried out by the whole community only after a judicial trial. Special conditions were stipulated regarding involuntary manslaughter (Ex. 21:12-14), assault and battery (Ex. 21:18-19), and accidental infanticide or abortion (Ex. 21:22-25).

The *Seventh Word* requires the sanctity of marriage. The Hebrew verb in the construction *lo' tina'ph* (= you shall not commit adultery) specifically means to have sexual intercourse with the wife or fiancée of another man. Such an act is fundamentally an act of unfaithfulness to the spouse of someone else. Adultery was not merely an illicit act between two consenting adults; it was also the violation of a third person's rights, a breaking of covenant in which the innocent spouse's rights had been usurped. Socially, adultery was equivalent to the spiritual crime of worshiping other gods. Furthermore, it would be a defiant denial of the unity established by Yahweh between a married man and woman (cf. Ge. 2:24).

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[113] The seventh and eighth commandments are also only two words in the Hebrew text.

The *Eighth Word* calls for respect for personal ownership. Inasmuch as the same Hebrew verb is used for both theft and kidnapping, most scholars understand this commandment to include both, and as such, do not make the eighth commandment duplicate the tenth one.[114] In either case, the essence of the commandment has to do with taking what is not one's own, whether it be material property or the freedom of another person. In Hebrew thought, personal possessions were holy in that they were gifts from God. A human was born naked in the world, and personal possessions were, more or less, considered to be on loan from God.[115] Especially in business transactions, this commandment was protected by later legislation. Collateral on a personal loan could not be kept more than one day (Dt. 24:10-13). Wages had to be paid to workers daily before sunset (Dt. 24:14-15). Passersby were allowed to eat a handful of grapes from a neighbor's vineyard, but they were forbidden to put any in a basket (Dt. 23:24). Similarly, they were allowed to pick kernels of grain by hand, but they were forbidden to use a sickle (Dt. 23:25). Debts had a seven year tenure, no longer (Dt. 15:1-2). Land contracts had a fifty year tenure, no longer (Lv. 25:8-55). All these laws were aimed at preventing one Israelite from gaining power over the person and property of another Israelite. Furthermore, they were an encouragement to the Israelites to give gifts rather than to make loans (cf. Dt. 15:7-11).

The *Ninth Word* forbids perjury. The Hebrew verb *'anah* (= to answer) is used here in the technical sense of giving testimony in a court of law. In a simple desert society, where many crimes were capital offenses, a successful perjury was often equivalent to murder, and in fact, capital witnesses were required to be the primary executioners (Dt. 17:6-7). Even if such perjury was made for a lesser offense, the reputation of the accused was seriously compromised.

The *Tenth Word* guards against materialism. Unlike the first nine commandments, which deal with overt acts, the final commandment addresses internal desires.[116] As such, the tenth word was not capable of being enforced in a human court; it could only be enforced by the God who reads human hearts. At the same time, it relates to several of the other commandments, since it addresses motives. Coveting another person's spouse or property certainly underlies any overt action to violate his/her rights through adultery or theft. Spouses, land, houses, slaves

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[114] Craigie, 161; Mayes, 170-171.

[115] Knight, 140.

[116] There is some debate, here, inasmuch as some scholars understand the Hebrew verb to mean not only avaricious desire but also the means to secure the desired object, cf. W. Harrelson, 'Ten Commandments," *IDB* (1962) IV.571-572. However, there is sufficient reason to reject this proposal and to follow the more traditional definition, cf. Hyatt, 216.

and farm animals were the typical indications of wealth for the peasant or the nomad in the Bronze Age. As such, then, this list was not intended to be exhaustive, but suggestive, and the final phrase, "or anything that belongs to your neighbor," is all-inclusive.

The Book of the Covenant

The expression "Book of the Covenant" derives specifically from Exodus 24:7. The use of the term *sepher* (= inscription, writing, document or scroll) denotes its written form and was never used to describe oral tradition. As such, the Book of the Covenant is the oldest extant codification of Hebrew law. It speaks of the earliest days of Israelite society before the rise of urban centers. Its laws address Israel's farmers who kept sheep, oxen and donkeys, but not horses and camels. The monetary system was primitive, based on weighing out silver rather than the exchange of minted coins. No mention is made of a king or a court.[117] Most scholars recognize the Book of the Covenant as consisting of Exodus 20:22--23:33, a section of Torah which is self-contained and internally consistent in its treatment of the problems of bronze-age agrarian society.[118] The Book of the Covenant contains the following sections:[119]

Brief introduction (Ex. 20:22)

Group of cultic regulations regarding acceptable worship (Ex. 20:23-26)

A title introducing various laws (21:1)

Group of laws regulating slavery, personal injury, the protection of property, social responsibility, justice and mercy, Sabbath, and the three most important annual festivals (Ex. 21:2--23:19)

Closing promises and exhortations (Ex. 23:20-33)

Of special importance to the Book of the Covenant are the two kinds of law found within it, namely, apodictic and casuistic law.[120] Apodictic laws are framed in an absolute manner using one of three styles. Some are direct prohibitions, i.e., "You shall/You shall not/You must/You must not...." (cf. 20:23, 26; 22:18, 21-22, 28-29; 23:1, 13 etc.). Others are participles (cf. Ex.21:12, 15-17; 22:19-20).[121] Still others are

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[117] The mention of a *nashi'* (= ruler, chief) in 22:28 probably refers to a tribal representative rather than a monarch, Hyatt, 218; Holladay, 247.

[118] R. Harrison, "Exodus, Book of," *ISBE* (1982) 11.229; W. Harrelson, "Covenant, Book of the," *IDB* (1962) 1.723; Cole, 162.

[119] Here, I have followed the analysis of Hyatt, 217.

[120] Fensham, *ISBE* (1979) I.793.

[121] The English Versions do not reproduce participles due to the difference of syntax between Hebrew and English.

framed in the form of a curse, that is, the threat of divine judgment upon the one who transgresses (cf. 22:22-24, 26-27; 23:7). Casuistic laws (case laws), on the other hand, are conditional laws stated in the "if" style, that is, if such and such condition exists, then such and such a response is appropriate (cf. 21:2-6; 22:25; 23:4-5, etc.). If the nature of the case law involves a transgression, then the transgression is placed immediately following the "if" clause [protasis], and the penalty is placed immediately following the "then" clause [apodosis], (cf. 21:18, 22-36; 22:1-4, etc.).

Case law was quite familiar to ancient Near Eastern societies, both Hebrew and non-Hebrew alike. Since the discovery of Hammurabi's code in 1901-1902, our knowledge of such law has rapidly advanced with the discovery of other such codes. Comparisons between the Mosaic code and other ancient Near Eastern codes often reveal similar approaches:

If a son has struck his father, his hands shall be cut off.

Hammurabi, 195

Anyone who attacks his father or mother must be put to death.

Ex. 21:15

If a man has knocked out the eye of a patrician, his eye shall be knocked out. If he has broken the limb of a patrician, his limb shall be broken.

Hammurabi, 196-197

If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise .

Ex. 21.23-25

f a bull has gone wild and gored a man, and caused his death, there can be no suit against the owner. If a man's ox be a gorer, and has revealed its evil propensity as a gorer, and he has not blunted its horn, or shut up the ox, and then that ox has gored a free man and caused his death, the owner shall pay half a mina of silver.

Hammurabi, 250-251

If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. If however, the

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Thus "the one attacking his father or his mother must certainly die" becomes "anyone who attacks..." (21:15, NIV).

bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.

Ex. 21:28-30

Codes from the Eshnunna Laws, Hammurabi Laws, Hittite Laws, Ur-Nammu Laws, and Assyrian Laws all have biblical parallels in their treatment of such things as illegal entry and theft, murder, adultery, slavery, the sale of property, the return of lost articles, mixed seeding in the same field and incest.[122]

Covenant Ratification

The covenant ratification at Sinai (Ex. 24), like many other elements in the covenant, was carried out in the form and spirit of ancient Near Eastern patterns. Moses acted as a mediator of the covenant between Yahweh and the people (Ex. 24:1-2). He read the stipulations of the covenant, after which the congregation of Israel, similar to a bride at a wedding, repeated the vow in unison, "Everything Yahweh has said we will do" (Ex. 24:3). The symbolic actions that formed the oath of the covenant were carried out by Moses, who set up an altar, representing Yahweh, along with twelve pillars, representing the clans of Israel. Holocausts ('*olah*) and fellowship sacrifices (*zebah selamim*) were offered, and the blood of the sacrificial animals was drained off in bowls for the blood ceremony (Ex. 24:4-5). Half of the collected blood was dashed against the altar representing Yahweh. After reading the Book of the Covenant to the congregation, and after the people had repeated the vow in unison, Moses dashed the remainder of the blood over the people (Ex. 24:8). The life's blood of the sacrificial victims now covered the two contracting parties. Yahweh and Israel were blood-brothers, bound together by oath-taking words and actions.[123] The covenant was sealed with a sacred meal (Ex. 24:11). Later in Israel, this covenant ratification would be understood in the sense of a marriage between Yahweh and Israel (cf. Is. 54:6-7; Je. 3:1; Eze. 16:8; Ho. 2:7--3:1; Mat. 2:11). The ritual of the covenant was completed by the eating of a sacred meal before the theophany of Yahweh (Ex. 24:9-11).

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[122] S. Greengus, "Law in the OT," *IDBSup* (1976) 534.

[123] This sort of blood ceremony is known to have been practiced among the ancient Arabs in making covenants, either by mingling blood, dipping the hands into an animal's blood, or applying blood to sacred stones representing the deity, cf. Hyatt, *256;* see also, M. Weinfeld, *TDOT* (1975)11.262-263.

The Covenant God and the Covenant People

From the time of the Sinai experience, the remainder of the Old Testament is governed by the idea that Yahweh and Israel are bound together in covenant by solemn oath. Virtually every aspect of Israel's future--the experience of the tribal confederacy, the rise of the monarchy, the Zion tradition of Judah, the anti-Zion tradition of Ephraim, the fortunes and misfortunes of the kings in the north and the south, the eventual exile of both nations, the prophetic interpretation of the exile, the returning remnant to Palestine, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the second temple--all of these aspects of Israel's future flow out of the fundamental institution of covenant. Yahweh is a covenant God, and Israel is a covenant people. Yahweh is to be known in the context of the covenant, and Israel is to be defined in the context of the covenant.

The Covenant God

As the covenant God, Yahweh is one who reveals himself to his people, who chooses his people by sovereign grace, and who demonstrates his character as the beneficent Great King, the suzerain of Israel, who is his vassal. The capacity of God to reveal himself is fundamental to the possibility of covenant. It is because God reveals himself that he can enter into covenant with Israel. As Moses says, "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way Yahweh our God is near us...?" (Dt. 4:7).

Early in the patriarchal narratives, God takes the initiative to reveal himself. God is not known because men and women seek him; he is known because he graciously condescends to them. At the same time, the pure essence of God is not immediately accessible to humans, for as God declares, he "lifts his hand" in oath (Ex. 6:8), he "walks in the garden" (Ge. 3:8). Furthermore, he expresses a wide range of human emotions. He "snorts" in anger (Ex. 15:8),[124] "regrets" actions (Ge. 6:6a), experiences "jealousy" (Ex. 20:5), feels "heart-pain" (Ge. 6:6b), appreciates "goodness" (Ge. 1:31) and "hates" (Dt. 16:22) and "abhors" detestable things (Lv. 20:23). Such expressions, termed anthropomorphisms,[125] should probably be understood as poetic metaphors, particularly in light of the fact that God, in his pure essence, was considered to be invisible and transcendent. They express the fact that

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[124] The standard Hebrew expression for anger, *'aph (*= snorting, anger) actually doubles and is derived from the Hebrew word for nose, cf. E. Johnson, *TDOT* (1974) 1.351. The English translation, "My anger will be aroused" (NIV), may quite literally be rendered, "My nose will become hot" (cf. Ex. 22:24; 32:10-11, 22).

[125] Technically, a distinction can be made between anthropomorphism and anthropopathism. The former is the depicting of God in human form, particularly in terms of visible elements. The latter is the depicting of God with human emotions or passions.

God is personal as opposed to impersonal; he is a divine Someone, not merely a divine Something. By speaking of God anthropomorphically, Torah describes God as coming to humans on their level. At the same time, it must be remembered that such metaphors are limited and carry with them the inherent danger that God might come to be understood as made in the image of humans with their vices and failures. Anthropomorphisms of God in Torah are carefully balanced by the affirmations of God's invisibility, his hiddenness and mystery, and the prohibition of carving any likeness to him.[126]

Besides the general theophanies and anthropomorphisms of God in Torah, there are three other recurring manifestations which should be treated. The *Mal'ak Yahweh* (= messenger of Yahweh),[127] a special theophany of God, appears first in the Hagar stories (Ge. 16:7-13; 21:17), later in the Binding of Isaac narrative (Ge. 22:11-18), and later still in the burning bush account (Ex. 3:2). At times the *Mal'ak Yahweh* seems to be distinguishable from God and at other times the figure merges into God. The figure can speak on behalf of God in the third person, i.e., "Yahweh has heard of your misery" (Ge. 16:11; 21:17), and he can speak as God in the first person (Ex. 3:4). On his deathbed, Jacob could summarize the activities of God during his own life, as well as during the lives of his father and grandfather, as being the providential care of "the Angel," and the term *hammal'ak* (= the angel) stands in apposition to the term Elohim (Ge. 48:15-16). In the trek through the desert, the Israelites were led from Egypt by this same figure (Ex. 14:19), and the promise was held forth that God's "Angel" would lead them all the way to Canaan (Ex. 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). Finally, it was the *Mal'ak Yahweh* who confronted Balaam on his way to curse the Israelites (Nu. 22:22-35).

Not only can one who has see the *Mal'ak Yahweh* say that he/she has looked upon God (Ge. 16:13),[128] it is also significant that the *Mal'ak Yahweh* always appears in a protective or redemptive role. As such, this figure seems to particularly express the nature of the covenant God who reveals himself to save his people.[129]

Just as the Angel of Yahweh becomes the primary recurring theophany, so the *panim* (= face) of Yahweh becomes the primary recurring anthropomorphism.[130] The

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[126] See discussion in G. Bromiley, "Anthropomorphism," *ISBE* (1979) I.136-139.

[127] An alternative but equivalent expression is the *Mal'ak ha'Elohim (*= messenger of God).

[128] It may be significant that the Hebrew phraseology can be translated, "I saw the back of the one who saw me," thus emphasizing the mystery of God, cf. Kidner, 127. The phraseology is very similar to that in the story of Moses on Sinai, who saw the back of God (Ex. 33:23).

[129] It is this redemptive aspect of the *Mal'ak Yahweh* that led many of the earliest Christians to view the figure as a manifestation of the preexistent Son of God, and in fact, this concept was broadened to include the other theophanies as well, cf. A. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1910) 298-299.

[130] The traditional English translation of *panim* with respect to the face of Yahweh is "presence".

entire personality of Yahweh, his love as well as his anger, is concentrated in his face. The displeasure of God is expressed when his face is against someone (Ge. 3:8; 4:14, 16; Lv. 10:2; 22:3). The approval of God is expressed when his face is turned toward someone (Ge. 27:7; Nu. 6:25; Dt. 12:7, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20, etc.).

In a special sense, the *panim* represents the presence of God without reservation. At Sinai, Yahweh instructed Moses to depart with the people for Canaan, but he said that he himself would not accompany them because of their stubbornness (Ex. 33:1-6). Moses, however, pleaded with God so that God promised to send his *panim* with the Israelites (Ex. 33:12-17). Later, Moses could say that God brought the entire company out of Egypt by his *panim* (Dt. 4:37; cf. Is. 63:9). Because God was so powerfully present in the Tent of Meeting, the sacred bread, which was to be displayed at all times, was quite literally the "bread of the face" (Ex. 25:30; 39:36). Similarly, the table upon which the sacred bread was placed was called the "table of the face" (Nu.4:7).

The final manifestation of God to be discussed, his *kavod* (= glory), derives from the notion of heaviness.[131] There is a double meaning for *kavod* in Hebrew thought in that it not only refers to the weightiness (or dignity) of the object or person, it also refers to the feeling which is evoked by the object or person as one confronts it/him.[132] God not only has glory, glory is to be ascribed to him as well. It is probable that the *kavod* was visible, since it is constantly associated with light phenomena and/or a cloud (*'anan*),[133] or as one scholar described it, the "incandescent ectoplasm of the invisible spirit".[134]

The reader first encounters the *kavod* of Yahweh in the desert account of the supply of manna and quail. The *kavod* of Yahweh appeared in the cloud as Yahweh explained to Moses how he intended to respond to the grumbling Israelites (Ex. 16:7, 10-12). Even more impressive is the *kavod* of Yahweh in the cloud which covered Sinai (Ex. 24:16-17) and in the residence of Yahweh in the Tent of Meeting (Ex. 29:42-43; 40:34-35). At the induction of the priests to begin their duties, the *kavod* of Yahweh appeared to them in fire and consumed the sacrifices (Lv. 9:5-6, 23-24). In the rebellion at Kadesh, the *kavod* of Yahweh appeared, and out of it judgment was

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[131] The verb *kaved* (= to weigh heavily) and its cognates are used both literally and figuratively, literally to refer to such things as the weight of burdens or the heaviness of the eyes, and figuratively to refer to honor, respect, and dignity, Holladay, 150-151.

[132] Jacob, 79; Dyrness, 42-43.

[133] The Hebrew word *'anan* (= cloud) is from a root which means to appear or intervene (clouds appear and intervene between the viewer and the sky), *BDB,* 777-778. As such, it is a particularly appropriate word for the visible glory of God.

[134] P. Humbert, "Les prophetes d'Israel ou les tragiques de la Bible", *RThPh* (1926) 229 (as quoted in Jacob, 80).

pronounced upon those who refused to go into the land (Nu. 14:10, 21-23). Similarly, judgment was pronounced out of the *kavod* cloud upon Korah and his dissenters (Nu. 16:19-21), and the day after, Yahweh spoke out of the same *kavod* cloud, threatening to destroy the entire congregation because of their grumbling (Nu. 16:42-45). When the congregation was bereft of water, Yahweh spoke from the *kavod* cloud to Moses in order to have him speak to the rock (Nu. 20:6-8). Most famous of all, Moses requested that Yahweh would allow him to see the divine *kavod* (Ex. 33:18). Though Moses was not allowed to see it in its full essence (Ex. 33:22), he was privileged to see at least a veiled expression, and the experience was so forceful that when he returned to the congregation, his face was radiant to the point that it had to be veiled (Ex. 34:29-35).[135]

Through his concrete actions in history, God's character was revealed to ancient Israel. The Hebrew Bible contains surprisingly few abstract or philosophical reflections on God's nature. Rather, God is known from his works. The Old Testament person of faith understood God precisely through his mighty acts and what was implied about God through such acts. The following divine attributes are central to Torah's vision of God, and while they may be distinguished, one must always keep in mind that the various categories are somewhat overlapping.

All of God's works demonstrate his power. His power is never capricious, but it is always at the service of his will. Torah's introduction to God's power comes in the creation narratives. It was because God was the Creator that he could use the elements of nature to plague the Egyptians, part the waters of the Red Sea, and halt the sun and moon for Joshua. It was because Israel knew Yahweh as the Creator-God that the people could know him as the Redeemer-God.[136] Yahweh himself poses the question to Abraham against the background of Sarah's doubt, "Is anything too hard for Yahweh?" (Ge. 18:14). For Israel, the supreme demonstration of God's power was the liberating acts of the exodus (Ex. 9:16; 14:31; 15:6; 32:11; Nu. 14:13; Dt. 9:26, 29). A common synecdoche for God's power is the imagery of his right hand or

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[135] A curious anomaly has arisen over the exact meaning of the Hebrew expression which says the "skin of his [Moses'] face was *qaran"* (Ex. 34:30). The word *qaran* is a *hapax legomenon* (only appears once in the Bible), and since it is derived from the same root as the Hebrew word for "horn," St. Jerome rendered it in the Latin Vulgate that Moses' faced was 'horned." In Medieval art, there are many depictions of Moses with horns. The LXX, on the other hand, defined the word contextually and rendered it that Moses' face "shone", a rendering that is now reflected in most English Bibles, and which seemed to be the opinion of Paul (2 Co. 2:13, 18). Another possible interpretation is that Moses' skin became deformed or scarred by his exposure to the *kavod* of Yahweh, cf. W. Propp, "Did Moses Have Horns?" *BR* (Feb. 1988/IV.1) 30-37.

[136] Against the tendencies of scholars since von Rad's assessment that Israel's creation-faith developed relatively late, George Landes convincingly argues that the creation faith was the crucial presupposition underlying redemptive-faith, cf. G. Landes, "Creation and Liberation," *Creation in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 135-151.

arm, and in Torah this imagery is invariably related to the mighty acts demonstrated in the exodus (Ex. 6:6; 15:16; Nu. 11:23; Dt. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8).

The *qodesh* (= holiness) of Yahweh is the most intimate quality of God's character. The Semitic root *qdsh* probably derives from the stem *qd* (= to cut), and it refers to that which is marked off, separated or withdrawn from ordinary use.[137] It is very similar to and sometimes synonymous with the word *herem* (= ban) as used in holy war, that is, the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to Yahweh, and it is the antithesis of the word *hol* (= profane, in common use) and its cognates.[138]

The primordial encounter of a human with God's holiness was Moses' experience at the burning bush on Sinai, where he was told that he stood on holy ground (Ex. *3:5).* Such an encounter with Yahweh's holiness produced a sense of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (= mystery tremendous and fascinating). It was an experience of religious dread, overwhelming creatureliness, yet compelling attraction. Moses was both drawn and repelled. He turned aside to see, but he hid his face from the awesome presence. For Israel, the holiness of God was the qualitative difference that set him apart as "wholly-other."[139] Persons, physical objects, places, ceremonies, and days could not be holy in themselves, but they had a derived holiness to the degree that they were dedicated to Yahweh. Holiness, then, is defined by dedication to God, not merely by a list of taboos. Thus, Israel was God's holy people (Ex. 22:31; Lv. 11:44), the Sabbath was a holy day (Ex. 20:8), and the people and objects dedicated for cultic service were holy.[140] Ultimately, however, it was only Yahweh who was truly holy in himself (Ex. 15:11; Nu. 20:13).

The root *tsdq* (= righteousness) describes a quality of relationship so that the one who is righteous is the one who has fulfilled the demands laid upon him/her by the relationship, whether of God or other persons.[141] In the story of Judah and Tamar (Ge. 38), Judah was forced to admit that Tamar was more righteous than himself in that she had acted within her rights according to the levirate marriage customs.[142] In the dispute between Jacob and Laban over livestock breeding, Jacob asserted his

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[137] Eichrodt, I.270-271.

[138] N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 38-41.

[139] The seminal work regarding this experience of the holy, a phenomenological study which is widely acclaimed and which has placed within the scholarly working vocabulary the Latinism *mysterium tremendum,* is Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy,* trans. J. Harvey (1923 rpt. London: Oxford University, 1977).

[140] There are scores of passages that contain the word *qodesh* with reference to holy things, particularly in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers

[141] E. Achtemeier, "Righteousness in the OT', *1DB* (1962) IV.80.

[142] Several ancient cultures practiced levirate marriage (brother-in-law marriage) designed to perpetuate the name of a deceased husband and to keep his property intact. From Hittite codes, we know that when no brother-in-law was available, the father-in-law was responsible to perform levirate duty, cf. Pfeiffer, 88-89.

integrity by saying, "My righteousness [i.e., my right actions] will testify for me" (Ge. 30:33). Because Abraham's faith was in line with God's promise, God credited his faith as *tsedeqah* (Ge. 15:6).

Within a covenantal relationship, to be righteous was to act within the covenant norms. Righteous scales were those that gave honest measurements of weight (Lv. 19:36). To return a borrower's collateral before sunset was an act of covenantal righteousness (Dt. 24:12-13). The careful observance of the laws of Torah was *tsedeqah* (Dt. 6:24-25).

Similarly, God's righteousness was also a conformity to norms, both the internal norms of his own moral character (Dt. 32:4) and the external norms called for in a covenant relationship. When Abraham stood before God and said, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Ge. 18:25), he was appealing to God's perfect conformity to his own moral nature. God could not act out of character. When God threatened to destroy Israel due to her rebellion, he still was obliged to raise up another generation in order to be true to his covenant promises (Ex. 32:10; Nu. 14:12). Even in the case of wholesale defection on Israel's part, God confirmed his covenant loyalty to restore her if she repented (Dt. 30:1-10). Thus, righteousness can be expressed in both judgment and mercy. Closely associated with the righteousness of God is *mishpat* (= judgment), and the two words *mishpat* and *tsedeqah* are often found together.

There are two very significant words for love in Torah, and both are very much related to the notion of covenant though each has a distinctive meaning. One is *'ahavah* (= election love), and the other is *hesed* (= covenant love, covenant loyalty or covenant faithfulness).[143]

'Ahavah and its cognates express the unconditional love that arises from the will or nature of the lover, and it does not depend upon previous experiences or events to strengthen its resolve. Rather, it is the love that chooses purely as a conscious act on behalf of the one who is loved.[144] As such, *'ahavah* is the cause of the covenant. It is the ground from which the suzerain s initiative arises to establish the covenant in the first place, and in turn, it is the humble, dutiful love which the vassal returns to his suzerain.[145] Thus, it was Yahweh who "loved Israel's forefathers and chose her descendents" (Dt. 4:37). Yahweh's choice of Israel was not based upon any external attributes which the band of Hebrew slaves might have exhibited, but he chose her purely "because of love" (Dt. 7:7-9). As the great suzerain who chose

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[143] See especially the distinction between *'ahabah* and *hesed* in Snaith, 118-182

[144] G. Wallis, *TDOT* (1974) I.105.

[145] Snaith, 119-120, 167ff.

Israel, Yahweh expected *'ahavah* in return.

The second concept of love, represented by the noun *hesed,* is the kind of love that proceeds after the covenant is made, and in fact, has no meaning apart from the covenant already instituted. *Hesed* is covenant love or love that is loyal to the demands of the covenant.[146] This character of *hesed* is especially to be seen in the syntactical usage of the word, for the Hebrew idiom is "to do love," "to perform love," or "to keep love."

Thus, *ahavah* is election love, that is, love that chooses without preconditions. *Hesed* is covenant love, the loyal devotion that maintains faithfulness to the covenant obligations. The interplay of the two concepts is striking in the covenant theology of Israel, as the Deuteronomic edition of the decalogue shows. The exclusive worship of Yahweh is grounded in the fact that Yahweh "shows love *(hesed)* to thousands who love *('ahav)* him" (Dt. 5:8-10). Similarly, Yahweh "keeps his covenant of love *(hesed)* to a thousand generations of those who love *('ahav)* him" (Dt. 7:9).

The Covenant People

When El-Shaddai appeared to Abraham and gave to him the ritual of circumcision for a covenant sign, he expressed a rubric which was to characterize the nation of Israel for all of her history: "I will be their God," [and, by implication, they shall be my people] (Ge. 17:8). This kind of relationship between Yahweh and Israel, God and his people, comes to fruition in the exodus event in which Yahweh begins consistently to speak of the Israelites as "my people" (Ex. 3:7, 10; 5:1; 7:4, 16; 8:1, etc.). It is here that Yahweh expressly declares, "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). In the exodus, Israel becomes the covenant people of God, chosen not because of numbers or excellence, but because of divine love (Dt. 4:37; 7:7-9). The covenantal bond between Yahweh and Israel was graphically symbolized in the dashing of covenant blood on the altar, which represented Yahweh, and on the heads of the people (Ex. 24:6-8). Moses would later explain:

> *Yahweh your Elohim has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*
>
> *Dt. 7:6*

Two recurring expressions in Torah as well as in the rest of the Hebrew Bible tend to differentiate between Israel and the surrounding nations. The first is the term *'am* (= people), a word that has cognates in all Semitic languages. This term is predominantly used to express the unity of a large group, often larger than a clan or a

146 Snaith, 118-166.

tribe but smaller than a race. It particularly views the group from within its warm and personal relational structure.[147] Israel is repeatedly designated by this term *'am.* The nations surrounding Israel were usually referred to by the term *goyim* (nations), a unique western Semitic term. While both terms are at times synonymous, as is especially evident in poetic parallelisms, and while on some occasions both terms are used of the same group,[148] there is frequently a semantical distinction, a distinction that tended to become sharper as Israel's history progressed.

In the Song of Moses (Dt. 32:8-9), God's division of the seventy nations of the world, described more fully in Genesis 10, is said to correspond with the *bene El* (= sons of God).[149] Apparently, each of the nations of the world is conceived as being under the jurisdiction of a patron angelic being (cf. Dt. 4:19; Da. 10:13; Sir. 17:14). God chose Israel, however, as his own people without any intermediate patron.[150] Thus, Israel was God's "people" in a sense that the nations were not (Dt. 32:8-9).

In God's covenant with Israel's great ancestor, Abraham, he promised that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Ge. 12:3).[151] This extension of divine blessing to the *goyim* (cf. Ge. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4) is the first suggestion that Israel's election by God was not merely to be interpreted in a selfish way, but rather, in a priestly way. Israel was not chosen that all the other nations should be consigned to hopelessness. Israel was chosen so that through her election God's blessing might come to the nations. At Sinai, Yahweh's choice of Israel as his treasured possession was in order that she would become a kingdom of priests among the nations of the world, and by implication, a representative to and for the nations of the world (Ex. 19:5-6). Unfortunately, this aspect of Israel's mission was only rarely realized in the occasional proselytisms (e.g., Ru. 2:12).

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[147] *TWOT* (1980) II.676.

[148] Moses, for instance, when referring to Israel, says to God, "This *goy* is your *'am"* (Ex. 33:13).

[149] There is a textual discrepancy at this point. The MT reads "sons of Israel," apparently comparing the seventy nations mentioned in Genesis 10 with the seventy Sons of Jacob who descended into Egypt (cf. Ex. *1:5),* and this reading is followed by the NIV and KJV. However, both the LXX and the Qumran documents read "sons of God," apparently corresponding to the seventy *bene elim* which formed the divine council in ancient Near Eastern thought, and this reading is followed by the RSV and NEB, cf. P. McCarter, "Sons of God (OT)," *ISBE* (1988) IV.584. In either case, the nations of the world are divided along the lines of a paradigm, but Israel is unique in that she exists apart from the paradigm.

[150] D. Block, "Nations," *ISBE* (1986) 111.495.

[151] There is some question about how the Hebrew phrasing should be rendered. The NIV and KJV understand the verb as a niphal (passive), as is quoted above. However, if the verb is taken as a hithpael (reflexive), then the phrase means that all people will point toward Abraham as their ideal, either in blessing themselves or in blessing one another. If the latter, then the phrase may be rendered, "....all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (RSV) or "all the families on earth will pray to be blessed as you are blessed" (NEB). Here we follow the passive translation inasmuch as this is the way the LXX and the New Testament understand the verb (cf. Ac. 3:25; Gal. 3:8), cf. Kidner, *Genesis,* 114.

When Moses confronted Pharaoh in Egypt, he was to tell him on behalf of Yahweh, "Israel is my firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22-23). Like other images of Israel in the Old Testament, such as *mishpahah* (= family), *'am* (= people), *goy* (= nation), wife, flock and vineyard, this image expresses the solidarity of Israel as a corporate unit. For Israel, as for many ancient peoples, corporate identity was more significant than individualism. To be "cut off" from one's people was the worst of tragedies (cf. Ge. 17:14; Ex. 12:15, 19; 31:14; Lv. 7:20-21, etc.). On the other hand, to be included was a great blessing. The election of Israel as a corporate whole was well expressed in an ancient credo which each Israelite farmer was to recite when bringing an offering of firstfruits to Yahweh, a credo which began with the declaration, "My father was a wandering Aramean....," and which described the descent into Egypt and the exodus (Dt. 26:1-11). In this way, Israel could express that her sense of solidarity extended not only to the rest of the living nation, but also, to the departed faithful.[152]

It is probably fair to point out that the essence of corporate identity for Israel was the nation's religious faith more than merely blood ancestry. Blood ancestry, of course, was important, but there are numerous examples of non-Israelite people who were included in the national stock because of faith. In the patriarchal narratives, the wives of Judah (Ge. 38:2) and Joseph (Ge. 41:45) were certainly non-Israelite. In the exodus, a large "mixed multitude" also escaped with the Israelites into the desert (Ex. 12:38), and while the origins of these people are unknown, they are obviously distinguished from the Israelites themselves. The essence of corporate identity for Israel was the faith of Yahweh, and this faith is well epitomized in the declaration of the Moabite Ruth: "Your *'am* will be my *'am,* and your *Elohim* will be my *Elohim* (Ru. 1:16).

Closely related to the concept of corporate identity is the concept of a remnant. While the eschatological idea of remnant does not come to full fruition until the time of the writing prophets of Israel, there are certainly threads of the idea already implicit within Torah.[153] The idea of election in Israel must always be balanced with the idea of the remnant. In Torah, at least, the idea of election is always corporate in character, and this is true even in the election of Abraham, whose election was destined to flower into a posterity as numerous as the sand and the stars (Ge. 22:17, etc.).[154] The election of Israel as God's people was a corporate election. At the same

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[152] For a full discussion of this corporate solidarity, see H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel,* rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[153] The idea of remnant as a small, surviving community was well known throughout the ancient Near East, appearing in the literature of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Syria-Palestine and Egypt. Much of this literature even predates biblical literature, cf. G. Hasel, "Remnant," *ISBE* (1988) IV.132.

[154] W. Klein, *The New Chosen People* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990) 25-42.

time, the concept of the *she'ar* (= what is left over) qualifies the concept of election so that election does not equal some sort of blind acceptance. In the great flood, only Noah and his family were "left" (Ge. 7:23). Hence, the idea of being cut off from corporate solidarity with one's people is closely associated with the notion of a remnant (Ge. 17:14).

Other ancient traditions in Genesis reinforce this concept of remnant. Of Abraham's sons, only one was the son through whom the promises were to be fulfilled (Ge. 17:15-22; 21:13), and here the concepts of election and remnant overlap. The elect son is also the remnant son. Similarly, of Isaac's two sons, only one was the son through whom the promise was passed (Ge. 25:22-23, 29-34; 27:1-40; 28:10-15; 35:9-13). When the clan faced natural disaster, God's providence provided that one son, Joseph, would be instrumental in the clan's survival, and in his own words he said, "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth" (Ge. 45:7a).

At Sinai, the Deuteronomic blessings and cursings served to warn Israel that election did not guarantee unconditional protection. Various judgments upon Israel resulted in the loss of lives due to Yahweh's anger. At Sinai, 3000 were executed at the debacle of the golden bull-calf (Ex. 32:27-28). Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's Sons, were consumed by fire because of their improprieties (Lv. 10:1-2). Korah, Dathan and Abiram and 250 others were executed because of rebellion (Nu. 16). Most significant, after the rebellion at Kadesh, only two Israelites of the entire desert community survived to enter Canaan (Nu. 26:65).

It is this concept of remnant that prompted Paul, the Jewish Christian, to exclaim,

> *For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. It is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.*
>
> *Ro. 9:6b-8*

The Enduring Character of the Covenant

That the Sinai covenant between Yahweh and Israel was to continue for succeeding generations is clear. The law was intended to regulate the entire lives of the people of Israel, particularly after the conquest of Canaan. The generation that received Torah at Sinai passed it along to their children, and this second generation, some forty years later, in turn was instructed to pass the tradition to their children and grandchildren (Dt. 4:9-10, 40; 5:29; 6:1-2, 6-9; 29:29).

Precisely because the Sinai covenant appeared in the form of a suzerainty

treaty, the potential for breaking covenant was real. Consequences for covenant violation were not left to the imagination of the vassal in the ancient Near East, and they were not ignored by Yahweh either. The rewards for covenant faithfulness and the penalties for covenant breaking are spelled out in vivid detail. If the nation was faithful to the covenant, Yahweh promised fertility, peace, and general favor (Lv. 26:3-13; Dt. 11:13-15; 28:1-14; 30:15-16). On the other hand, if the nation broke covenant they could expect disease, drought, invasion, devastation and exile (Lv. 26:14-39; Dt. 11:16-17; 28:15-68; 30:17-18). Longevity in the land was entirely dependent upon covenant faithfulness (Dt. 4:25-28; 8:19-20; 28:36-37, 64-68).

If the covenant had been violated, however, and if the severest penalties of the divine suzerain had been exacted upon the disobedient nation, the opportunity for covenant renewal would still be held forth (Dt. 4:29-31). Even if the nation had been driven into exile because of its unfaithfulness, Yahweh promised to restore the nation and the land if his people turned to him in repentance (Dt. 30:1-10). In actual fact, Yahweh had no illusions about the future, and he frankly explained to Moses that the people would most certainly break the covenant. He even gave to Moses a song that anticipated the fearful eventualities of the covenant curses (Dt. 31:16-22, 30; 32).

To reinforce the solemnity of the covenant, a special covenant renewal ceremony was mandated for the nation after the people had crossed the Jordan. A covenant altar was to be set up in the Shechem Pass between the mountains Ebal and Gerizim in central Canaan, and there the twelve clans were to renew the covenant (Dt. 27:1-8). In this ceremony, the tribes were to be divided upon the slopes of the two mountains, and in antiphony, as the Levites called out to them the blessings and curses of the covenant, they were to respond with a corporate, "Amen" (Dt. 27:14-26).

The Tent of Meeting served as a visible symbol of Sinai. While the nation was camped at the holy mountain, Yahweh instructed Moses to build a shrine for worship. It was not merely a public meeting place for the nation, though on special occasions the people would assemble in the courtyard, but more important, it was a dwelling place for Yahweh himself, a place where his cultic worship could be conducted (Ex. 25:8-9). If worship was the response of the believing heart to God, the cult was the formal and ritual aspect of that worship. The Tent of Meeting was a portable, enduring and visible symbol of Yahweh's self-revelation at Sinai that the nation could take with them to Canaan. Though a temporary structure, as are all tents, it served to maintain the character of the Sinai covenant throughout the sojourn and conquest until a permanent site could be found and a permanent sanctuary could be erected (Dt. 12). The Tent of Meeting was to be built with scrupulous attention to the details given by Yahweh to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 26:30).

At one point in the narrative, after the debacle of the golden calf, the stubborn waywardness of the people induced Yahweh to threaten to send the nation away while he remained behind at Sinai (Ex. 33:1-5). Eventually, however, Yahweh consented to send his *panim* (= face, presence) with the Israelites as they left the holy mountain (Ex. 33:12-17). His *panim*, that mysterious presence at Sinai (Ex. 33:20, 23), and his *kavod*, the heaviness of his glory that hovered over the Ark of the Testimony, served as enduring expressions of the Mt. Sinai experience.

Thus, the Tent of Meeting became the sanctuary which enclosed Sinai's glory and the divine epiphany. Just as Moses had once ascended the mountain to enter the immediate presence of Yahweh, so now Moses could enter the Tent of Meeting and confront the same divine presence (Ex. 25:22; 40:34-35). The details for the Tabernacle's construction move outward in concentric circles, beginning with the ark, the supreme symbol of Yahweh's post-Sinai presence, and the furniture closely associated with Yahweh's presence (Ex. 25). Moving outward, instructions were then given for the sanctuary itself (Ex. 26), and finally the forecourt to the Tabernacle (Ex. 27). These three circles were perpetually joined by the movement of the priests through them.[155] At the center of all was the sacred ark, which served as Yahweh's throne (Ex. 25:22) and as a depository of the covenant containing the tables of stone (Ex. 25:16;40:20).

Since Israel was in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, and since God was holy, the people of Israel were also holy (Lv. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). The corporate responsibility for maintaining this unique relationship with Yahweh was largely vested in the priests and Levites, the members of the special tribe selected out by God for cultic service because of their faithfulness in the episode of the golden calf (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 10:8-9).

The family of Aaron was chosen for dynastic priesthood (Ex. 28:1-4; 29:29-30; 40:12-15). The entire Book of Leviticus is dedicated to the instruction of the priests with respect to behavior, ritual, purity, and so forth. Of course, it should be pointed out that only a few laws are reserved for the priests alone (i.e., Lv. 6:1--7:21; 10:8-15; 16:2-28). The covenant concerns the entire nation, not just the priesthood. Still, the priests were especially concerned to lead the people in cultic worship. They were appointed to guard the covenant, teach the precepts of the covenant to the nation, and offer incense and offerings on the altar (Dt. 33:8-10).

Along with the priestly family of Aaron, the clan of Levi was selected to also perform special cultic tasks, such as, carrying the Ark of the Covenant and attending to the duties of the Tent of Meeting (Nu. 8:24-26; Dt. 10:8). The Levites served as

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[155] J. Durham, *Exodus [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 350-351.

symbolic figures representing the firstborn males of the entire nation (Nu. 3:11-16, 39-43). In general, they assisted the priests (Nu. 1:50-53; 3:6-10), though they were not permitted to serve as priests themselves (Nu.16:8-11, 40).

The formal aspects of cultic worship involved daily and weekly rituals, annual festivals, and occasional rituals. Precise rules were laid down for these rituals, and nothing was left to caprice. A calendar of sacrifices and offerings regulated the frequency of the rituals, whether daily, weekly, monthly, annually or occasionally (Nu. 28-29). Daily sacrifices of lambs, cereal and oil were offered morning and evening (Nu. 28:3-8; Ex. 29:38-42). On the sabbath, the daily sacrifice was doubled (Nu. 28:9-10). Monthly offerings included animals, cereal and oil (Nu. 28:11-15). Annual festivals celebrated harvest, the new year, national atonement, and so forth (Lv. 16, 23; Nu. 28-29). Also, certain rituals for purification or celebration were occasional, such as, the purification ceremony for lepers (Lv. 14), the ceremony for the release from vows (Lv. 15), or the celebration of firstlings and first fruits (Dt. 26).

In summary, two covenants dominate the landscape of Torah, the covenant God made with Abraham and the covenant he made with Abraham's descendants at Sinai through Moses. In both of these covenants, the land of Canaan is central. To Abraham and his family, God promised Canaan as a land grant forever (Ge. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-19; 17:8; 22:1Th; 26:3-4; 28:13; 35:12). The later event of the exodus is treated as a fulfillment of these same land promises, given on oath by Yahweh to Abraham (Ex. 3:16-17; 6:2-4, 8; 32:13; 33:1; Nu. 32:11; Dt. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 30:20; 34:4). However, while both covenants concerned the same land, they were not given in quite the same way. The covenant between Yahweh and Abraham is essentially a unilateral covenant, given without apparent conditions. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel was a bilateral suzerainty treaty which was overtly conditional, accompanied by the blessings and cursings for obedience or disobedience. The former guaranteed the land forever, while the latter gave no guarantee at all, and in fact, envisioned the loss of the land if the covenant was violated.

The tension between these two covenants is not resolved in Torah, nor in fact, in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible. The tension continues throughout the history of Israel and extends into the Christian New Testament.

Yahweh War

The concept of Yahweh War[156] is based upon the fact that Yahweh himself is

[156] Any study of the concept of war in the Old Testament must take into consideration the seminal work of G. von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (1958 rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). While much of von Rad's theory and

depicted as an *'ish milhamah* (= man of war) in Israel's primordial redemptive event, the exodus (Ex. 15:3).[157] On that day, God fought for Israel (Ex. 14:4, 14). Yahweh is the one who has the power to win victories (Dt. 1:30; 20:1-4), and he is the one who declares war for Israel (Ex. 17:16; Nu.31:3). One of the common epithets for God in the Old Testament is *Yahweh Tsabaoth* (= Lord of Armies).[158] The ark of the covenant was an instrument for war, the symbol of Yahweh's warrior-like presence among his people (Nu. 10:35-36*),* and the refrain in the Psalms, "Rise up, O Yahweh," is a prayer for God's warrior-like intervention based upon his warrior presence with the people during the sojourn (Nu. 10:35-36). An ancient record of war accounts was simply entitled, "Book of the Wars of Yahweh" (Nu. 21:14). When God had given victory to Israel over an enemy, Moses coined a new name for him, *Yahweh Nissiy* (= the LORD my [battle] standard), and the battle itself was considered to be a prelude to an ongoing conflict between not merely Israel and Amalek, but Yahweh and Amalek (Ex. 17:15-16).

Among nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples, such as Israel, there was no distinction between the army and the people. Every able-bodied male was to be prepared to defend the clan's property and rights against an enemy. There were some stated exceptions, however, for persons who were newly married or who had other domestic responsibilities (Dt. 20:5-9). Israel, of course, had limited personal property as a nation of slaves, but they left Egypt with the promise that they would be given the land of Canaan. Thus, when the Israelites marched out of Egypt, they marched out armed, for the entire nation was the army of Yahweh (Ex. 12:37; 13:18; 14:19-20). In the desert, they marched in formation by military divisions (Nu. 1:3, 20-46; 2:1-34; 10:11-28). Since the exodus was the prelude to the conquest of Canaan, it is not too surprising that the nation of Israel was depicted in such military fashion.

The activity of Yahweh in war was what determined the psychological attitude of Israel as well as that of the enemy. Israel must trust in Yahweh and not fear (Ex. 14:13-14; Dt. 7:21; 20:3), and the enemy would lose courage (Ex. 15:14-16; 23:27-28; Dt. 2:25; 7:23; 11:25). If Israel did not remain faithful to the covenant, the Israelite soldiers would experience the same fear as the enemies of Yahweh (Lv. 26:36-39; Dt. 32:30-31).

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reconstructive history concerning Israel has been challenged, the significance of his work cannot be discounted.

[157] The term Yahweh War is probably more appropriate than the term Holy War, though the latter is more commonly used by scholars. War for Israel in the Old Testament is envisioned as a religious act, but since the term Holy War may imply that war itself is holy, a better designation is Yahweh War, which conveys the religious character of Israel's wars without implying that the conduct of war had moral or religious worth, cf. P.Craigie, "War, Idea of," *ISBE* (1988) IV.1019. For the fullest discussion of the ethical problem of war in the Old Testament, see P. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

[158] It may be noted, however, that this name does not appear in Torah.

It is clear that for Israel war had a marked religious character. It involved the making of vows to God (Nu. 21:2). In a military census, an offering was to be given to God for each soldier numbered (Ex. 30:11-12).[159] When a soldier was mustered, he "stood armed before Yahweh" (Nu. 32:20, 27, 29, 32). It was clear that any success in a war venture was directly contingent upon the nation's faithfulness to Yahweh (Dt. 6:18-19; 11:22-25). When the army had been mustered for war, they were sent off by a priest who charged them with the solemn duty of war before God (Dt. 20:2-4). When the army was in bivouac, ceremonial purity was mandatory, since Yahweh himself moved in and about the camp as the divine leader in war (Dt. 23:9-14). As the nation prepared to invade Canaan, Yahweh declared to them that their mission was a form of judgment on the wickedness of the Canaanites (Dt. 9:1-6). All these factors mark the religious character of war.

To refuse to participate in Yahweh War was a serious breach of covenant responsibility, as was demonstrated by the clans at Kadesh Barnea. Here, at Yahweh's instructions, the clans sent an undercover group to reconnoiter Canaan prior to invasion (Nu. 13). When ten of the twelve spies gave a discouraging report, the nation as a whole refused to engage in conflict, and it was only Moses' intercession on behalf of the people that prevented Yahweh from turning them over altogether (Nu.14:1-25). As a judgment, God consigned the nation to sojourn in the desert until every one of the rebels had died (Nu.14:26-35). When the people then tried to reverse God's decision and invade Canaan anyway, they were terribly defeated (Nu.14:39-45). This failure at Kadesh was held up to succeeding generations as a warning not to fail in the responsibilities of Yahweh War (Dt.1:19-46).

This religious character of war in the Old Testament is not unusual in the ancient Near East. Normally, the chief god of any given Canaanite state was also a war god, and numerous minor deities in the pantheon might also serve as war gods. As warfare was an instrument of the state, so the state was the possession of the god or gods. Victory in warfare was usually followed by a ceremony in honor of the gods who had given victory.[160] Thus, Israel's warlike character under Yahweh, her divine suzerain, falls into place as one more example of how God broke into human history and human society to reveal himself in the contemporary forms of culture and life.

Torah envisions three possible results of Yahweh War. The first two concern enemies not within the boundaries of the Holy Land proper. Such a city under attack might be offered terms of peace in which its citizens could be enslaved rather than

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[159] It is generally agreed by scholars that the census in view is a military one, Durham, 402.

[160] Craigie, *ISBE* (1988) IV.1018.

exterminated (Dt.20:10-11). If such terms were refused, then all males were to be put to the sword for slaughter, and all other occupants and property became the booty of the victors (Dt.20:12-15). However, if the enemy was within the borders of the Holy Land itself, the land which was given to the Israelites in a covenantal grant, then the procedure was to exterminate everything that breathed--men, women, children, and animals (Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18; Nu. 21:1-3). All such entities within the borders of Israel's inheritance were to be *herem* (= irrevocably given over to Yahweh, often by total destruction).[161]

The most extensive record of Israelite warfare, of course, is found in the books of the Former Prophets of the Hebrew Bible (Joshua through 2 Kings). However, the initial conflicts between Israel and the nations are recorded in Torah, and these conflicts become ancient paradigms for instruction to later generations about Yahweh War. First, of course, is the war between Israel and the Egyptians on the banks of the Red Sea. Israel may have left Egypt armed (Ex. 13:18), but in the actual confrontation, it was Yahweh, the divine "Man of War" *par excellence*, who actively defeated Pharaoh's armies (Ex. 14:4, 13-31; 15:1-21). The presence or absence of Yahweh as the divine warrior, then, became the decisive factor for all Yahweh War.

The next conflict occurred in the desert near Sinai. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites in the rearguard (cf. Dt. 25:17-18), and in this case, war was a defensive effort rather than an invasion. Nevertheless, it was Yahweh whose presence was decisive. In this encounter, the Israelite armies were personally engaged under the direction of Joshua (Ex. 17:8-9). Moses stood high on a plateau with his staff raised toward heaven, while Joshua and the troops engaged the Amalekites in the valley below. The lifting of Moses' hands was symbolic of the nation's dependency upon Yahweh in the war effort (Ex. 17:10-13).

At Kadesh Barnea, the nation failed in its most important call to Yahweh War. Though Yahweh permitted the reconnaissance mission of the twelve spies (Nu. 13:1-3), it is later made clear that the initiative for the mission came from the people (Dt. 1:19-25). This mission, in itself, may have been an indication of reluctance. In any case, when the report had been given, the people refused to respond to the call for invasion and were consigned to sojourn in the desert for forty years as punishment for their breach of duty (Nu. 13-14). When they tried to reverse their sentence by carrying out the invasion contrary to Yahweh's judgment, they discovered that in their own military strength, they were no match for the Canaanites (Nu. 14:39-45).

These initial conflicts impressed upon the people the character of Yahweh

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[161] N. Lohfink, *TDOT* (1986) V.183-184.

War. When after the sojourn a new generation was once again instructed concerning the invasion, they approached Canaan by a different route, this time from the transjordan rather than the Negev. While en route, they encountered an aggressive Canaanite nation, and after making vows to Yahweh, they carried out the war in the prescribed manner with the prescribed results (Nu. 21:1-3). In the transjordan, they confronted two kings, Sihon of the Amorites and Og of Bashan. In both cases, the presence of Yahweh was decisive, and Israel dispossessed these peoples and settled in their land (Nu. 21:21-35; 32; cf. Dt. 2:31; 3:2). The victory of Israel over Sihon and Og became the paradigm of war for the new generation of fighting men as they prepared to invade Canaan proper (Dt. 31:1-6).

The Function of Genesis in Torah

As the reader is now aware, the Pentateuch, as a larger complex of material, can be approached from the perspective of one who stands squarely within the exodus itself, that great redemptive event of the Old Testament. It tells of Moses' decisive role in the collecting and writing of the records, from his documentation of the curse of Amalek (Ex. 17:14) to his final draft of the law which was to be placed alongside the ark of the covenant (Dt. 3 1:24). The core and substance of the books Exodus through Deuteronomy directly concern the life and times of Moses. However, the Book of Genesis nowhere gives any information concerning its author. The rabbinic assumption was that it also belonged to Moses, and this assumption was adopted in the New Testament as well. The Book of Genesis has always been read in both Jewish and Christian traditions as part of the "Books of Moses," and this being so, the theological function of Genesis in Torah should be addressed in this light. If the books Exodus through Deuteronomy describe what happened in the redemptive experience of the exodus, Genesis tells what went before.

Genesis as a Prolegomena to the History of Israel

In a special sense, Genesis is a prologue to the history of Israel which properly begins with the election of the nation while its people were slaves in Egypt. The stories of the patriarchs are centuries older than Moses and the exodus, and they were more than likely a part of the tribal lore of the slaves in Egypt, maintained through oral tradition. However, the bringing together of these stories into a unified whole gave to the fledgling nation a sense of manifest destiny and historical perspective. The God of the exodus was not some strange new deity, but he was the God of their fathers (Ex. 3:5-6, 15; 4:5). The move from Egypt to Canaan was not a trek to some unexplored frontier, but rather, it was a return to the ancestral home that God had promised to the covenant sons, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 2:23-24; 6:2-8; 33:1; Dt. 1:6-8).

A recurring term in Genesis is the word *toledot* (= generations, variously rendered in the NIV as "account," "written account," "lines of descent," and "order of birth"). This word punctuates the Genesis record some thirteen times, and it is used either to round off a collection of stories already recounted[162] or to anticipate a collection of stories about to begin[163] (Ge. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 25:12-13, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). In either case, however, the various blocks of historical record provided the slaves in Egypt with a full account of the origins of the universe, the origins of humankind, the division of the nations, and their own family pedigree.

The Genesis record also oriented the nation of slaves to the concept of sacred history. The Israelites in Egypt were continually exposed to the Egyptian mythologies and world view, but the accounts in Genesis were quite different from the religious beliefs of the other peoples of the ancient Near East. The gods of the Egyptians, Mesopotamians and Canaanites were gods of nature, personifications of the mysterious forces of thunder, rain, fertility, the celestial bodies and the various landforms and bodies of water. The pagan festivals were the reenactment of sacred myths in which people celebrated the never-ending cycles of life, death and rebirth in nature, the changes of the seasons and the fertility of the soil.

The patriarchs, by contrast, came to know God by his mighty acts within history, his self-revelations and interventions. Yahweh had made himself known through a series of extraordinary events and self-disclosures. He appeared in visions

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[162] It is possible that each of the *toledot* in Genesis functions as a colophon, that is, as an inscription placed at the end of a series of narratives similar to a pattern common in many Mesopotamian tablets, R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1982) II.436-437. If so, there are eleven distinct literary units (or tablets) in Genesis:

Origins of the universe (1:1--2:4)
Origins of humankind *(2:5--5:2)*
Family of Adam *(5:3--6:9a)*
Family of Noah (6:9b--10:1)
Table of Nations (1O:2--11:lOa)
Family of Terah (11:lOb-27a)
Family of Abraham *(11:2Th--25:12)*
Life of Isaac *(25:13-19a)*
Family of Isaac *(25:19b--36:1)*
Life of Esau (36:2-9)
Family of Jacob (36:10-37:2)

These *toledot,* which might even have had an independent existence as cuneiform tablets, may have been brought together and rounded off with the Joseph narratives to create what we know as the Book of Genesis. The author-compiler is unnamed, but if this editorial theory has merit, there is no reason why the author-compiler might not have been Moses, to whom Genesis has been traditionally ascribed.

[163] For reservations about the *toledot* theory described in the foregoing footnote, see D. Kidner, *Genesis [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1967) 23-24.

(Ge. 15:1), dreams (Ge. 28:12-13) and theophanies (Ge. 32:24-30). God himself interpreted and anticipated history so that his people could understand its meaning (Ge. 6:5-7; 11:5-9; 12:1-3; 15:13-16; 16:9-12; 18:20-21; 25:22-23; 26:2-5; 28:12-15; 35:9-12; 45:4-8; 50:19-21).

All these Genesis narratives focus upon the action of Yahweh. In the annals of other nations of the ancient Near East, the national histories tell of the glories of the nation and her military victories. Defeats were rarely recorded. In the stories of the patriarchs, the success of the clans depended upon the grace of God. The Genesis record quite graphically depicts the failures of the patriarchs. Some of them were little more than scoundrels. Yahweh is the one who did great things, and he kept his promises in spite of the patriarchs as much as because of them. Thus, the history of Genesis is sacred history.

Etiology is the use of a story to explain an ancient name, place or custom, and the Genesis record has a considerable number of them.[164] When the Israelites made the trek from Egypt to Canaan, they encountered a variety of place names in the land of promise that recalled particular events in the Genesis record. Also, certain customs had been handed down for generations. Many of the stories of Genesis are etiological in nature, that is, they give historical explanations as to why certain places and people were named as they were (cf. Ge. 32:1-2, 7-10; 17:17; 18:11-15; 21:3-7) or why certain practices were observed (Ge.32:32). Explanations found later in the Pentateuch look backward to patterns found in Genesis (e.g., Ex.20:8-11). Such stories would have given the nation in the exodus a special sense of identity, and particularly, such stories would have assured them that the land of Canaan was rightfully theirs, since it was the land of their ancestors deeded to them by divine decree.

The power to name persons, objects and places was for the ancient person equivalent to holding power over that which was named, since the name was inextricably bound up with existence. Thus, to know that Jacob named Bethel (Ge. 28:16-19) and Peniel (32:29-30), for instance, or that Abraham and Isaac named Beersheba (Ge. 21:27-31); 26:32-33) would have enabled the Israelites in the conquest to regard these places as their own.

Because Israel's faith was grounded in history, her creeds were historical in nature rather than abstractions of theology. They did not begin, "I believe in God, the

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[164] Some scholars use etiological literary criticism to suggest that answers to questions were invented by writers much later than the events they describe and thus are a-historical. The term is not being used here in that way. Rather, etiological motifs assist in interpreting biblical passages without injuring their historicity. For a fuller discussion of etiology, see J. Priest, *IDBSup* (1976) 293-295.

Father Almighty..." Rather, they began, "Yahweh freed us from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage..." (Ex. 20:1; Dt. 5:6; 6:21; Ps. 81:10). One of the oldest confessions, which depends upon the Genesis stories and which the Israelites were instructed to recite after entering the land, stressed that the patriarchs themselves did not see the fulfillment of the promise for numerous progeny and the full possession of Canaan (Dt. 26:1-11). Rather, their ancestor Jacob was a wandering Aramean. It was his descendents that Yahweh delivered from Egypt and brought into this good land. Such a recitation was to remind them that the proper fulfillment of the covenant in Genesis was accomplished in the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan.

Genesis and God

Inasmuch as Genesis is the beginning of sacred history in the Hebrew Bible, it is the beginning point of the understanding of God for the readers of the Bible. The Genesis description of God was also extremely important for the Israelites in the exodus. If they were to be led out by the God of their fathers (Ex. 3:6, 13-15), they needed to know something about him and his relationship with their ancestors. Many of the primary characteristics of the Divine Nature, then, are first introduced in this book.

From the outset, God is pictured as personal and living. He is not an "it" as though he were a force within nature. He is strictly a "Thou" when humans speak of him, and an "I" when he speaks of himself. Unlike the Canaanite and Mesopotamian pantheons, which were populated with gods and goddesses that were little more than personified forces of nature, the weather and fertility,[165] Yahweh God was personal. He was one with whom humans could have a personal relationship. Humans, who were created in the Divine Image, shared this same personal character in that they, too, were created in the "I/Thou" category. God personally communicated with Adam (Ge. 2:16ff.; 3:9), both instructing him and calling him to account. He called Abram (Ge. 12:1), appeared to him periodically (Ge. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1), spoke to him in critical situations (Ge. 13:14), even confided in him and debated with him (Ge. 18:17ff.). The gripping story of the binding of Isaac is the account of how God tested, not only Abraham's faith, but also the relationship that bound them together (Ge. 22:1ff.). Similarly, Yahweh appeared to Isaac (Ge. 26:2, 24) and Jacob as well (Ge. 28:10ff.; 32:24ff.; 35:1, 9). Such relationships between humans and God continue to characterize the remainder of Torah and the Bible as a whole.

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[165] To be sure, El in the Canaanite pantheon was viewed as the father of the human race, but at best he maintained a remote distance from his earthly children. Ba'al, on the other hand, was largely connected with the cycles of the seasons, fertility and death, cf. P. Craigie and G. Wilson, *ISBE* (1988) IV.98-100.

While the poetic character of the creation chapters in Genesis restricts the reader from a precise analysis of the creation to the degree hoped for by most modern readers, at the same time the Genesis record affirms emphatically that the universe did not appear by chance. It came into existence at God's initiative. The verb *bara'* (= to create) is used exclusively of God, and there is no suggestion of pre-existing material.[166] Poetically, the description of the creation is simply, "And God said, 'Let there be'--and there was..." Word and event are inseparable. The Word of God was not merely the abstraction of an idea, but the incarnation of an event. The Hebrew noun *dabar* means not only "a word" but "a thing", "an affair", "a matter" and "an event."

The Genesis record consistently asserts that God is the master of history, time and space. Sometimes he invaded history with obvious miracles, particularly in the birth of Isaac (Ge. 15:1-6; 17:1-2, 17-18; 18:10-15; 21:1-2), and at other times he remained hidden in the outworkings of providence, as evidenced in the Joseph theology (cf. Ge. 45:4-8; 50:19-21; 48:12-20). On occasion, he revealed in advance how the future would turn out (Ge. 25:23; 40:8, 12-22; 41:15-32), yet on other occasions he was open to negotiation about specific events (Ge. 18:23-33). Furthermore, while there is a freedom to history, the purposes of God were surely to be worked out within history (Ge. 15:13-16; 25:23).

The question of monotheism does not specifically arise in Genesis, at least in the way it does in the later literature of the Hebrew Bible, as in for instance, the Book of Isaiah. While Terah and Abraham were originally pagans (cf. Jos. 24:2), the Genesis account does not dwell upon this fact. The Canaanites among whom the patriarchs roamed were certainly polytheistic, though at times even they were induced to appeal to the God of Abraham (Ge. 20:3-7). The Genesis narratives include both explicit and implicit references to other faiths and other gods (cf. Ge. 11:4; 31:19, 30, 53; 35:2-4; 38:21; 41:38). On occasion, magic and superstition enter the narratives (cf. Ge.30:27, 37-43; 41:8; 44:5, 15). However, such occasions are incidental, and the text has little to say about the reality or non-reality of such deities. The overwhelming testimony is that Yahweh God is the true divine reality. In contrast with the Mesopotamian and Canaanite deities, Yahweh God created and acted alone without assistance. He was not part of a pantheon of equals, he had no consort or divine progeny, no mythological origins, and no depicted image or form. He controlled all the universal forces, but he was personally identified with none of them. At the same time, the appearance of the *Mal'ak Yahweh* [Angel of the Lord]

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[166] The New Testament affirmation that "what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (He. 11:3b), while not a quotation from Genesis, certainly summarizes a straightforward reading of the creation account.

(Ge. 16:7-11, 13; 18:1-2, 13, 17-26, 33; 28:13; 31:11, 13; 32:24, 30; 48:15-16), the reference to the *Ruah Yahweh* [Spirit of the Lord] (Ge. 1:2; 6:3), and the use of plural pronouns to refer to God (Ge. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7) hint at a complexity to God's nature that is not fully defined.

The sociological viewpoint, of course, is that monotheism was an evolutionary idea which progressed from primitive animism (the worship of natural phenomena) to polytheism (the worship of many gods) to henotheism (the worship of one God without denying the existence of other gods) to monotheism (the worship of the only existing one true God).[167] However, such a reconstruction says more about Western rationalism than about the primitive conception of the Divine Reality among the patriarchs of Israel's faith.[168] Certainly the Genesis record shows none of this evolutionary pattern. Quite to the contrary, it demonstrates that instead of humans developing on their own their ideas about God (or the gods), Yahweh God took the initiative to reveal himself in personal ways to the patriarchs.

While humans were created with an awareness of the Divine Reality in the beginning, their rebellious flight away from God ended in the disastrous deluge of Noah. Though awareness of God is to be found in the lives of a few individuals, such as Enoch (Ge. 5:22, 24), Noah (6:8) and the descendents of Seth (Ge. 4:26),[169] it did not characterize the human race as a whole in its downward plunge in headlong flight away from God. It is in the life of Abraham that God took the initiative to disclose himself. Such self-disclosure was progressive. The modern reader should not expect the patriarchs to have known God to the same degree as the people of the exodus, the later Israelite community who heard the classical prophets, or above all, the believers who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. God's interaction with the patriarchs was the beginning of his self-disclosure, not the fullness of it. Nevertheless, in the various names for God in Genesis, names which were vitally linked to events of divine self-revelation, there is reflected the growing awareness of God's character and being.

El Elyon (= God Most High, Ge. 14:18-20) was linked to Abram's tithe to the priest-king of Salem, the city which later would become the place chosen for the enshrinement of Yahweh's name (cf. Dt. 12). *El Roi* (= God of Seeing, Ge. 16:13)

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[167] R. Youngblood, *EDT* (1984) 731.

[168] D.Lewis, "The Shema," (Unpublished paper: University of Detroit, 1985) 8; cf. B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament,* 2nd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 412-413.

[169] There is much discussion, of course, as to just what Ge. 4:26 means. It may be intended as no more than simply noting the beginning of public worship, not necessarily even of Yahweh personally, cf. G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15 [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987)116. Yet even if it refers directly to Yahweh worship, the larger context of the early chapters of Genesis indicate that such worship was rare. (For further discussion, see comments, footnote 36, page 17.)

was linked to Yahweh's providential care of Hagar. *El Shaddai* (= God Almighty, Ge. 17:1; 48:3) was linked to Yahweh's establishment of the covenant of circumcision for Abraham's family. *El Olam* (= God Eternal, Ge. 21:33) was linked to the treaty at Beersheba concerning water and grazing rights in southern Canaan in the territory of the Philistines. *Yahweh-Yireh* (= the LORD who sees, provides or makes clear, Ge. 22:14) was linked to Yahweh's provision of a substitutionary sacrifice in place of Isaac. *Phahad Yitsehaq* (= Fear of Isaac, Ge. 31:42, 53) is more obscure, though it seems to refer to Isaac's sacred awe of Yahweh. It may be that this name has some reference to Isaac's ordeal on Mt. Moriah (cf. Ge. 22).[170] *El Elohe Yisrael* (= God, the God of Israel, Ge. 33:20) was linked to Jacob's safe arrival from Paddan Aram to Shechem, the later site of the covenant renewal ceremony (cf. Dt. 11:26-30; 27). *El Bethel* (= God of Bethel, or God of the House of God, Ge. 35:7) was linked to Jacob's return to Bethel, the site where Yahweh originally appeared to him when he fled from Esau (cf. Ge. 28:10ff.) In addition to these names specifically associated with events and places in the Genesis record, there appear the names *Avi'r Ya'aqov* (= Mighty One of Jacob, Ge. 49:24), *Roeh* (Shepherding One, Ge. 48:15; 49:24) and *Even Yisrael* (Rock of Israel, Ge. 49:24). The three previous names, which all appear together in Jacob's blessing of his sons, combine to describe God's providential care over his chosen people throughout the patriarchal narratives.

The God of Genesis was also a covenant making God. He established relationship with the patriarchs through the standard vehicle of the ancient Near Eastern *berit*. A *berit* (= covenant) is a solemn promise made binding by an oath before God or the gods. The oath might be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action. Covenant was at the core of ancient Near Eastern civilization, and it figured significantly in everyday existence as evidenced by its frequent appearance in the partriarchal narratives (Ge. 14:13; 21:22-24, 27-32; 24:2-9; 26:26-31; 31:43-54; 47:29). Covenant was the primary vehicle which Yahweh God used to establish his relationships with the patriarchs. Based upon his earlier promises (Ge. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:2-5), God formally entered into covenant with Abram by using an ancient ritual of covenant making (Ge. 15:7-21).[171] He instructed Abram in the proper ritual for perpetuating the covenant among his descendents (Ge. 17:1-14). It was the patriarchal covenant that provided the basis for the eventual event of the exodus itself (cf. Ex. 2:24; 6:2-5; 33:1-2; Dt. 9:5).

The accounts of the covenant that God made with the patriarchs show that the

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[170] E. Speiser, *Genesis [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 247.

[171] Though the earlier promises rightly belong to the Abrahamic Covenant, the term *bent* does not appear until Ge. 15:18.

initiative for covenant lay with Yahweh. Covenant was Yahweh's gift. It came by divine prerogative and as a product of sovereign grace. It was by the covenant that Yahweh established his relationship with the patriarchs and created a bond of communion. The covenant was God's way of affirming his continued faithfulness to his promises (cf. Dt. 4:31; 8:18). Thus, when Israel came to Sinai during the exodus, they already were conditioned to respond to the God who revealed himself by covenant.

Genesis reveals God in his essence as both love and holiness. God is love, but his love exists in tension with his holiness, and neither should be emphasized to the exclusion of the other. God's holiness is his sacredness, awesomeness, majesty, otherness from creation and moral perfection. As such, God is separate from all that is unclean and sinful. In Genesis, the demonstration of God's holiness in a moral sense is to be seen in his curse upon the snake (Ge. 3:14-15), in his expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden (Ge. 3:16-24), in the cursing of Cain (Ge. 4:9-14), in the great deluge (Ge. 6:1-3, 5-7), in the destruction of Sodom (Ge. 18:20-21; 19:24-25) and in the execution of Er and Onan (Ge. 38:7-10). His holiness in the sense of the Wholly Other is to be seen in his creative activity and in the awesomeness of his self-revelations to the patriarchs (Ge. 15:12, 17; 28:16-17; 32:30).

Divine love, on the other hand, is clearly demonstrated in the hints toward redemptive hope (Ge. 3:15; 49:10), in Cain's protection from unlimited vengeance (Ge. 4:15), in Noah's gracious preservation (Ge. 6:8), and above all, in the election of the patriarchs. Such election love was not grounded in the worthiness of its object, but in the essential nature of the God who extended it. Abraham, the pagan, as well as Jacob, the deceiver, were objects of this election love. God's love was of such a nature that he could be expected to spare even the wicked for the sake of the righteous (Ge. 18:23-32). Furthermore, the character of his love is demonstrated in his compassion toward the helpless Hagar (Ge. 16:7-14; 21:15-20).

Both the holiness of God and the love of God work together to change the character of those whom God chose. It was the cognizance of God's loving justice that effected the reformed attitudes of Joseph's brothers (Ge. 42:21-22, 28; 44:16, 18-34; 50:16-21).

God and the Universe

As is well known, the Book of Genesis contains the first biblical cosmogony. Most of the discussion in the 19th and 20th centuries concerning the creation accounts has focused on the scientific theories and evidences and their relationship to the biblical stories. Unfortunately, this discussion has often obscured or even ignored the theological import of the creation stories. Both scientists and theologians have

brought to the text of Genesis questions which it did not seek to answer,[172] while at the same time, they have often failed to sufficiently consider the ancient Near Eastern background of the text and how it related to the other cosmogonies of the Canaanites and Mesopotamians. Those who did treat the Genesis record in light of the ancient Near East generally reduced the record to an Israelite borrowing of other ancient pagan cosmogonies, leaving a very human document that was difficult to uphold as a divine revelation from God. In the end, the Genesis accounts on the one hand, and scientific evidence along with archaeology on the other, came to be viewed as mutual enemies, particularly by conservative theologians.[173] A few conservatives took a more integrative view of science and Scripture, though they often paid the price of being ostracized by their more conservative fellows.[174]

That there are some striking similarities between the biblical creation accounts and the mythologies of the ancient Near East cannot be denied. Direct parallels include the story of Yahweh's battle with a dragon monster, the story of creation and paradise, and the story of the great flood. However, Gordan Wenham is probably correct in saying that the Genesis record is a polemic against the then current cosmogonies of the ancient Near East.[175] While Genesis contains many parallels with the extrabiblical cosmogonies, and in fact uses the metaphors and poetic images of that culture as the contemporary *lingua franca* of creation-talk, it at the same time contains many disagreements and corrections to that commonly accepted view.

In Mesopotamian mythology, particularly in the Ugaritic *Myth of Baal,* Ba'al (= the Master) wages a victorious fight with Yam, the god of seas, alternately called Nahar, god of rivers. The gods of the primeval chaotic waters were overcome by the

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[172] These questions include such things as the age of the earth, the procedure of creation (evolution, progressive creation, divine fiat, etc.), the evidences of prehistoric humans and animals, and so forth.

[173] Witness the concerted efforts of John Whitcomb and Henry Morris to buttress conservative positions of a young earth (less than 10,000 years), a 72 hour creation, and a global deluge which accounts for all the geological configurations in the world, cf. J. Whitcomb, Jr. and H. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961); J. Whitcomb, Jr., *The World That Perished* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) and *The Early Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972); H. Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) and *Evolution and the Modem Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) and *Studies in the Bible and Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966).

[174] One of the earliest conservative works to attempt an integration of science and the Bible without doing violence to the scientific evidence was B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, *1954).* F. Filby's *The Flood Reconsidered* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) defended a local, limited flood in the Mesopotamia Valley. Davis Young's *Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) rejected the flood geology of Whitcomb and Morris as scientifically naive. More recently, H. Van Till's *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) defends the poetic character of the creation narratives and the great antiquity of the universe, though his work created a storm of controversy in the Christian Reformed Church. Even more recently, Hugh Ross' work, *The Fingerprint of God,* 2nd ed.(Orange, CA: Promise Publishing, 1991), defends an ancient universe and earth on the basis of astrophysics without capitulating to Darwinian biology.

[175] G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15 [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) xlvii-I.

gods of order. Order triumphed over chaos. In the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* (= when on high), Marduk, god of the sun, defeated the monster Tiamat in the creation epic. Before the world's creation, the powers of the deep were in control; water and darkness were everywhere. Marduk conquered Tiamat, splitting her carcass into the waters above and the waters below. The same basic story occurs in Sumerian, Egyptian and Phoenician literature.[176]

Quite a number of Old Testament passages use this same extended metaphor of a great battle fought between Yahweh and a dragon-like creature at the creation. The monster is variously called Leviathan, Rahab, Tannin (= dragon), Yam (= sea), Nahar (= river) and Nahash (= snake).[177] The monster had several heads (Ps. 74:13). Yahweh subdued it and killed it with his sword (Is. 27:1; Job 40:19) by cutting it to pieces (Job 26:12; Is. 51:9), by piercing it through (Job 26:13; Is. 51:9), by crushing it (Ps. 89:10) and by bludgeoning its heads (Ps. 74:13-14). He also defeated the monster's allies (Job 9:13; Ps. 89:10). Thus, in the various creation accounts of the Old Testament, it should come as no surprise to see that Yahweh's mastery over the primeval sea was described in terms of a conflict. At the creation, the waters fled at God's divine rebuke (Ps. 104:7) and were confined within boundaries (Ps. 104:8-9; Job 38:8-11; Pro. 8:29; Je. 5:22). Yahweh stilled the roaring waters (Ps. 65:6-7).

While none of these poetic descriptions are explicit in the Genesis narratives, there are several places where they shed light on the creation story. The primeval condition was certainly not ordered at first. It was formless and empty, full of watery darkness (Ge. 1:2). Yet order was imposed upon it. Light was separated from darkness (Ge. 1:3-5), the waters were brought under control (Ge. 1:6-10), and rulership over day and night was ordained in the celestial bodies of the sun, moon and stars (Ge. 1:14-18). However, though order triumphed over chaos, the creation was not the result of a battle between the preexisting gods. Instead, the *tanni'nim* were merely the sea creatures that God had created, not a collection of other gods who opposed him (Ge. 1:21). The separation of the upper and lower waters was not due to a struggle between the gods. Rather, God ordered the separation by divine command (Ge. 1:6). The celestial bodies were not gods and goddesses, as was typical in the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies. Instead, the sun, moon and stars were

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[176] M. Horsneli, *ISBE* (1986) 111.459; P. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 62-63; H. Gunkei, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Creation Story," *Creation in the Old Testament,* ed. B. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 34; W. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu,* ed. 1. Maier and V. Toilers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 285-297.

[177] Leviathan (Job 3:8; 41:1; Ps. 74:14; Is. 27:1; cf. 2 Esdras 6:49, 52); Behemoth (Job 40:15-24; cf. 1 Enoch 60:7-9; 4 Ezra 6:49-52); Rahab (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps. 89:10; Is. 30:7;51:9); Tannin (Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 27:1; 51:9); Yam (Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 51:10; Hab.3:8); Nahar (Ps. 93:3; Hab. 3:8); Nahash (Job 26:13; Is. 27:1), cf. Horsnell, 459; Gunkel, 35- 40.

created entities, and the creation text of Genesis does not use the normal Hebrew words for sun *(shemesh)* and moon *(yareah),* possibly intentionally so, in order that they would not be mistaken for deities (Ge. 1:14-16).[178]The creation of humans was not an afterthought, as in the Babylonian mythologies, but rather, the entire creative process was a stage setting for God's most significant creative work, the making of man and woman (Ge. 1:26-30). Finally, unlike the ancient Near Eastern myths in which creation was effected through magical incantations, God created the universe by his spoken word (Ge. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24).[179]

Another parallel between Genesis and the literature of the ancient Near East is the story of Yahweh and the Great Flood.[180] The most important flood stories in ancient Near Eastern literature are the Sumerian *Deluge Myth,* the Akkadian *Gilgamesh Epic,* and the Akkadian *Myth of Atrahasis.* Of these three, the *Gilgamesh Epic* bears the closest affinity to the Genesis narrative of the great flood, especially Tablet XI.[181] Just as in the cosmogonies, however, there are striking differences as

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[178] These Hebrew words were cognate with the Mesopotamian and Canaanite words for sun and moon, and in these other cultures, they were considered to be deities

[179] G. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Gen 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *AUSS* 10 (1972) 1-20 and "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *EvQ* 46 (1974) 81-102, summarized in Wenham, 9.

[180] For the various hermeneutical problems connected with the flood, see H. Vos, *ISBE* (1982) II.316.

[181] Detailed points of contact may be traced in A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 1949). Wenham, 163-164, summarizes the biblical and Mesopotamian parallels as follows with citations from the relevant literature:

1) Divine decision to destroy humankind
2) Warning to the flood hero
3) Command to build an ark
4) Hero's obedience
5) Command to enter the ark
6) Entry
7) Closing of the door
8) Description of the flood
9) Destruction of life
10) End of the rain
11) The ark grounds on a mountain
12) The hero opens the window
13) Birds are released to reconnoiter
14) Exit from the ark
15) Sacrifice offered
16) Divine smelling of the sacrifice
17) Blessing on the hero

The text of Tablet XI in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, with biblical parallels cited in the margin, can be found in J. Pritchard,

well as similarities. Most important is the difference between monotheism and polytheism. In the Mesopotamian myths, the pantheon of gods, often competing with each other, control the destiny of the world. In Genesis, it is Yahweh God alone who is sovereign over all. In the biblical narratives, the flood is a moral judgment visited upon humans because of their violence and evil, whereas in the extrabiblical accounts, the gods petulantly destroy humans because they make too much noise. In the Bible, Yahweh God is always in full control, but in the Mesopotamian myths, the gods lose control of their own flood. Finally, in Genesis the survival of humans through the flood is directly due to God's gracious preservation, but in the Mesopotamian myths, Enlil, the chief god, is surprised that anyone came through it alive.

In summary, then, the Mesopotamian mythologies depict the gods as limited in personal power, greedy, fearful, ignorant and jealous, while Genesis depicts Yahweh God as all-powerful, omniscient, personal, holy, and gracious.[182] In the Mesopotamian mythologies, the elements of nature, the sun, moon, stars, waters and so forth, are little more than personifications of the gods. In Genesis, everything and everyone is created by preexisting Yahweh God and is under his direct control. Since the Israelites were migrating from Egypt to Canaan in the exodus, they would doubtless encounter such mythologies if they had not already done so in Egypt during the Amarna period.[183] Thus, the Genesis story of creation served as an apologetic and a polemic for the Israelites in the face of such conflicting mythologies.

Genesis and Humans

Not only is Genesis the beginning point of the understanding of God, it is the beginning point of the understanding of humanness. The early chapters in Genesis assert that humans are not what they were created to be. They were created in the image of God, partners complementing each other and fulfilling each other (1:26-27; 2:18, 20-25). Human nature was not something to be overcome, as in Greek philosophy, in which material things were inherently evil. Rather, all of God's creation was "good" (1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). However, the first humans were created to be responsible to their Creator, and God placed before them a test of their responsibility (2:16-17). In their failure and disobedience, the first humans marred the image of God in themselves and opened the path to mutual exploitation,

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ed., *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1958) I.65-70.

[182] Wenham, 164-166

[183] The evidence seems to suggest that such cosmogonies moved westward during the Amarna Period (ca. 1379-1300 B.C.) and reached the Hebrews in oral form, cf. Lambert, 296.

corruption and despair (3:7). This estrangement from their Creator was not final, however, for God promised blessing to the entire human family through the posterity of one man, Abraham (12:3). Thus, while the Genesis record tells of tragedy, it also holds forth hope.

The Genesis account of the creation of the first humans stands at odds with both the ancient polytheism of Mesopotamia, where the creation of humans is an afterthought (a device to relieve the gods of work),[184] and modern secularism, where humans evolve as accidents of time, matter and chance. The bisexuality of the human race reflects the capacity for personal relationship within God's own person (1:26-27), for it is as male and female that the man and the woman were made in the divine image.[185] As such, humans are social creatures, and the most intimate of human relationships is between mates who were created for each other.

There are two passages that describe the creation of humans. In the first (Ge. 1:26-27), the word '*adam* (= human), derived from the word '*adamah* (= soil), is generic. While often translated by the English equivalent "man," it is not strictly a male word but primarily denotes a human person, or in a collective sense, the human race. There are two categories which belong to humankind, *zakar* (= male) and *n'qevah* (= female). Both are fully human, and both bear the image of God.

The second account of human creation brings the humans into more direct focus (2:7, 18-25). The naming of the animals is sandwiched between the announcement by God that human aloneness was "not good" and the actual creation of the first human's mate. After a series of divine value judgments in which God saw that his creation was good (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), the reader abruptly faces something that was "not good." Theologically, this sharpens the aloneness of the human, for this creature of all God's creatures was truly alone. All other creatures had their corresponding mates, and it is in the naming of the animals that the human realized just how alone he was. The language of this account is quite egalitarian. God began with one flesh, and he formed a human who is described in generic terms.[186] He separated this human into a man and a woman so that as husband and wife they might be brought back together into one flesh.[187]

In most ancient societies which were dominated by patriarchalism, the

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[184] Wenham, 9

[185] The divine image is not described in Genesis, but it is usually assumed to refer to the various human potentials, such as, personality, volition, transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness, creativity, sensibility, altruism, self-awareness, self-contemplation, and the like.

[186] This is not to say, of course, that the first human was without gender; it is only to say that maleness without corresponding femaleness has no particular meaning.

[187] G. Rad, *Genesis,* rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 85.

differences between maleness and femaleness were automatically assumed to imply a hierarchy of value. Men were more important than women, because they were different and physically stronger. Women frequently were devalued as the property of men. Against this commonly held assumption in the ancient Near East, the creation account of man and woman is all the more striking for its evenness. As in the first creation account, the primary word used to designate the human which God created is the generic '*adam*, or "soil-creature" (2:5, 7-8, 15-16, 18-23, 25).[188] It was not until the actual creation of the corresponding partner that the biblical author used the strictly male and female terms of *'ish* (= man) and *'ishshah* (= woman). The woman was taken from the man's side to demonstrate that she was truly part of him, not isolated from him. She was, as he said, "Bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh," a complimentary partner. This complementary character is implicit in the description that she was a "helper suitable for him" (2:18), or quite literally, "like his counterpart."[189]

Though the man and woman were created as true lords over paradise, they fell from this lofty status by actively choosing to disobey God. The description of the human race's fall and consequent dilemma extends from chapter 3 through chapter 11. The fall was not so much a stumble as it was a headlong plunge. The full story includes details of exploitation (3:16b),[190] jealousy (4:3-7), fratricide (4:8), polygamy (4:19), vengeance (4:23-24), rampant worldwide violence *(6:5),* and religious rebellion (11:3-4).

The human dilemma, then, is a breaking of fellowship with God. Sin entered human history by a free decision on the part of the first humans (3:1-7), and they were both fully involved.[191] It produced a passing of blame (3:12-13), an upsetting of the ecology (3:17-18), an alienation from God (3:22-24), and a trail of disaster (chapters 4-11). Human potential, which developed in the civilized arts and crafts (4:20-22), was a mixture of benefit and distortion. It could serve in the building of an ark for God (6:14-16) or the building of a ziggurat to defy him (11:3-4). The great

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[188] In 2:20, the Masoretic Text has pointed the consonants so as to make the proper name Adam. This pointing, however, is unlikely to be correct, and in any case, the Hebrew unpointed text is at best ambiguous and contextually probably should not be rendered as a proper name, cf. E. Speiser, 18.

[189] For the male/female theology of this section, see the stimulating exegesis by P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) *75-105.*

[190] The verb *ma.shal* in 3:16 should probably be taken in the sense of domineering. This hierarchical exploitation was not so much inherent in the creation, nor was it a divine judgment *per* ***se.*** Rather, it was a distortion caused by human sin. While the woman longed for that lost relationship with her corresponding mate, the man indulged in the will to power by lording it over her.

[191] The emphatic word *'immah* (= with her) in 3:6 makes clear that the woman was not deceived in solitude. Yet though the man was there the whole time, he raised no voice of objection, but fully participated in her disobedience.

flood in the days of Noah epitomized the human estrangement from a holy Creator and the justice that depraved humanity deserved (6:6-7).

It is within the matrix of this human dilemma that Yahweh began his redemptive work by calling a pagan to forsake his old country and journey to a new one (12:1).[192] It began with the promises of divine grace in which Yahweh demonstrated his faithfulness by fulfilling his covenant to Abraham (21:1). Yahweh's grace to Abram began with a sixfold promise:

His posterity would become a great nation,

He would be blessed,

His name would be greatly magnified,

He would be a blessing (or, "Be a blessing"),[193]

Those who blessed Abram would be blessed, and those who cursed him would be cursed, and

In Abram all the families of the earth would be blessed.[194]

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[192] Normally, the Hebrew perfect verb in 12:1 would simply be rendered "said" (so NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV). However, with only two tenses in Hebrew (perfect and imperfect), any pluperfect construction must be written as a perfect verb; the translator's decision is purely contextual. While there is nothing in the immediate context to suggest that Abram's call came while he was in Ur, and while one might assume from 11:34 and 12:4 that the call came while he was at Haran in northwest Mesopotamia, the Genesis record later asserts that it was out of Ur that Abram had been brought by Yahweh (Ge. *15:7),* and later writers confirm this same idea (Ne. 9:7; Ac. 7:2). Thus, while the pluperfect is not grammatically demanded, it is certainly defensible (so NIV, KJV).

[193] The construction here is an imperative, which is admittedly problematic. However, the statement may hold the germ of a mission statement. It is very closely linked with the main sentence, "I will bless you," and the effect of the blessing is that while Abram is blessed by God, he in turn will dispense this blessing upon others, cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis 12-26,* trans. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, *1985) 150.*

[194] Grammatically, the niphal form can be taken as either a passive (so LXX, Targums, Sirach 44:21; Vulgate, NIV, ASV, KJV, RSVmg) or a reflexive (so NASB, NEB, NABmg, RSV, AB). If the former, then the idea intended is that God would work through Abram to extend the blessing given to him and his family to all the other families of the earth. If the latter, then the nations would point toward Abram as their ideal, either in blessing themselves or in blessing each other (i.e., "may I/we be blessed as Abram is blessed") so that Abram, because of his famous blessing by God, would become the standard by which all others would measure themselves.

The choice between the two options is complicated by the fact that in the New Testament (probably based upon the LXX) the understanding is clearly passive (Ac. *3:25;* Ga. 3:8), while in other restatements of the covenant in Genesis 22:18 and 26:4, the verb appears as a hithpael, a form that is nearly always reflexive. The theological question, of course, is simply what did God actually promise here? Is there a promise of universal blessing, or is the promise merely that Abram's name would became an oath formula for blessing? It may well be that the theological distinction has been overplayed and that in either case the intention is to express the idea that universal blessing would be mediated through Abram, the passive and reflexive meanings being two sides of the same coin. The context certainly is compatible with the idea of universalism (cf. 11:9), cf. G. Rad, 160-161; C. Westermann, 15 1-152. The recommendation of Keil and Delitzsch is a good one that the niphal in 12:3 be translated passively and the hithpael in 22:18 and 26:4 be translated reflexively. As such, the promise not only meant that all families of the

Later, the promises were expanded to include a grant of the land of Canaan (12:7; 13:14-17).

However, the redemptive work of God was not to be hurried, and it was not without human difficulty. Yahweh called upon those whom he chose to trust him to the point of believing against the probable. Though Abram was childless in his old age, the promised progeny was guaranteed to be from his own body (15:2-5). Abram's name was changed from "exalted father" to "father of a crowd" (17:4-6), even though the promised son had not yet been born. The promised heir was to come directly through Abraham's wife, Sarah, who was also past childbearing (17: 15-19, 21; 18:10-15). Various challenges threatened the promise. Abram contemplated that in the absence of a natural heir, he might be dispossessed by his slave Eliezer (15:1-3).[195] Sarah was almost taken into the harem of a foreign king (20). A slave son threatened to usurp the rights of the free son after he was born (21:8-21).

Not only this, but God tested Abraham's faith, both by requiring that he cut off his past and by demanding that he surrender his future (22:1-2). In all this, the promises which were fulfilled to the partriarchs were not the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant (15:13-16). They were the building of a reputation in the memories of those whom God chose so that they could understand that Yahweh was to be fully trusted to complete his word, regardless of how dim the prospects. In this is the revelation of divine grace and the response of human faith.

The ultimate aim of the covenant promise went far beyond Abraham's family so as to embrace the nations of the earth (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). While the grace of God began in the particular, it pointed beyond to the universal. The nature of God's election was primarily a corporate concept involving Abraham's family, and ultimately, the families of the earth.[196]

Genesis and the Theology of Promise

If the Book of Genesis is a prolegomena to the history of Israel, it is also fair to

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earth would wish for the blessing which Abram possessed, but also, they would actually receive the blessing itself through Abram and his posterity, cf. C. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch,* trans. J. Martin (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) I.193-195.

[195] The verb *yarash* in 15:3 quite literally means to dispossess. In at least two of the Nuzi tablets, a collection of some 20,000 clay tablets from a Mesopotamian town of largely Hurrian population at roughly the time of Abram, there are clear references to slaves being adopted in the absence of a son, cf. F. Bush, *ISBE* (1986) 111.569; J. Thompson, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology,* ed. E. Blaiklock and R. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 342. In Nuzi law, two kinds of heirs were distinguished, the *aplu* (= direct heir) and the *ewuru* (= the indirect heir). This latter could come from even outside the family, cf. Speiser, 112.

[196] See the insightful discussion in W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990) *25-44.*

say that the focus of the prolegomena is a theology of promise. The creation of the universe (1-2) that is followed quickly by the human estrangement from God (3-5) becomes the stage setting for Yahweh's redemptive action. To be sure, the great redemptive event in the Old Testament is the exodus from Egypt, but this redemptive event did not arise spontaneously. Rather, it was carefully brought about by a sovereign God who made promises and covenants to the ancients.

The theology of promise begins in Genesis 1-11 at three critical junctures. The first occurs in the original account of Adam and Eve's disobedience and judgment. Here, although the snake was cursed (3:14), and although the woman's future was to be filled with oppression and pain (3:16),[197] and while the man's farming efforts were to be plagued by difficulties and hard labor (3:17-19), a glimmer of hope also shines forth in the promise about the woman's offspring (3:15). Even though the woman had allowed herself to be deceived by the snake, she would not join the snake as a collaborator. Instead, she and the snake would be hostile to each other, and her offspring and the offspring of the snake would also be hostile.[198]

The details of this promise are not described. In fact, the term *zera'* (= seed) is a collective, and it is not immediately clear whether an individual or a line of descendants is intended. Furthermore, at a superficial level the saying in 3:15 appears to be an etiological explanation as to why people try to kill snakes and snakes try to bite people. However, the passage probably contains a double entendre, so that the snake also represents the power of evil, just as in the temptation narrative.[199] One must wait for the New Testament before the *sensus plenior* is developed, for it is here that the snake is specifically unmasked as Satan (Ro. 16:20; Re. 12:9; 20:2).[200]

The second crucial juncture occurs in the prophetic words of Noah concerning

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[197] The fact that the woman would be dominated by the man was not so much a curse from God as it was the exploitation of the woman by the man, an exploitation that could be expected in a fallen world. The basic intention of the passage seems to be to point up the sharp contrast between the original egalitarian roles, that is, the interdependence and mutuality of the man and woman, as opposed to the present distortion in which the man would seek to dominate the woman and strip her of her equal personhood. Yet even though the woman's hardship was to increase and the man would seek to lord it over her, she longed for that lost relationship in which she was a mate corresponding to him--a mate who stood on equal ground. The irony is that even though the created relationship was spoiled by disobedience, the woman was still incomplete without the man. She sought the lost relationship, while he indulged in the will to power.

[198] While Donald Barnhouse's schematic of redemptive history may be questioned at several points, his assessment that the serpent was not able to attach the man and woman to himself and that this fact is theologically significant is certainly correct, cf. *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965) 89-103

[199] Wenham, 80.

[200] Of course, it is popular to dismiss altogether the idea of a protoevangelium, cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentaty,* trans. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984). Yet, while it must be conceded that viewing the statement in its primitive context may yield no more than a hope that the representative human (or race) would crush the representative of evil, the fact remains that even so general a concept has overtones of hope.

his three sons following the great flood. Canaan, the son of Ham, was cursed as a slave to his brothers, an etiological explanation of why Yahweh would favor the future Israelites in their invasion of Canaan under Joshua (cf. Jos. 9:23; 1 Kg. 9:20-21).[201] Shem, on the other hand, was to be associated with Yahweh.[202] As the ancestor of Abraham's family (Ge. 11:10-26), Shem is designated as the one through whom the line of blessing would pass. Japheth, the third of Noah's sons, was singled out for dwelling in the tents of Shem.[203] The meaning of this expression is never made clear in the Old Testament, but it fairly leaps to the eye in the New Testament in the ingathering of the Gentiles (Ep. 3:6), predominantly from the west.[204]

The third crucial juncture is the migration of Terah and Abram from Ur to Haran and from Haran to Canaan (11:31-32). This migration was directly initiated by Yahweh, who commanded Abram to leave Ur and travel to a new land (12:1).[205] Here, the promise hinted at in the protoevangelium of 3:15 and the prophetic word of Noah in 9:25-27 is directed yet more specifically to Abram that through his posterity all nations would be blessed (12:2-3). This concept of promise, then, carries over from the prepatriarchal period into the patriarchal period and dominates the remaining narratives of Genesis.

The stories of the four main characters of Genesis 12-50, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, all are built upon the concept of the promise. Again and again the promise was reaffirmed to Abram (12:7; 13:14-17; 15:2-5; 17:3-22; 18:17-19; 22:15-18). It was equally reaffirmed to Isaac (26:2-5) as well as to Jacob (28:13-15; 35:11-12).

The specific stories in the life of Abraham directly bear upon the promise itself. When Sarai was threatened with inclusion in Pharaoh's harem, Yahweh

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[201] Incidentally, the interpretation that this passage has anything to do with Blacks, that the Hamites in general were cursed, or that Africans were destined by God to be slaves is a particularly egregious misrepresentation of the Bible. Such a position arises out of white supremacist ideology, not Holy Scripture.

[202] There may well be a play on words here, since the name Shem also doubles for the Hebrew word *shem* (= name). Since Shem alone is associated with the sacred name of Yahweh, this fact anticipates the revelation of the sacred name to Israel in the exodus

[203] The idea that it was God who would dwell in the tents of Shem, based on the indeterminate grammar "he will dwell" in 9:27, has a following in both Jewish theological traditions as well as Christian, cf. W. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 82. If so, then the prophetic word would simply be another affirmation of Yahweh's elective blessing toward the Semites. However, it is more generally agreed that it was Japheth who would dwell in Shem's tents (the NIV even makes this explicit in the translation), and this reads more naturally in the Hebrew text.

[204] D. Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1967) 104.

[205] To be sure, in the narrative of 11:27--12:1 it appears that the call may have come in Haran itself. However, Ge. 15:7 certainly understands the migration from Ur to have been initiated by Yahweh as well, and other biblical passages make the same assumption (cf. Ne. 9:7; Ac. 7:2-4). See further discussion in footnote 31, page 103.

intervened to protect his promise (12:10-20). When Lot and Abram separated, with Lot willing to abandon the promised land as inadequate, Abram rose to the occasion of faith by choosing the broken hills of Yahweh's promise (13:1-8). For many years Abram waited on Yahweh to fulfil his promise of a son--twenty-five years between the departure from Haran (12:4) and the birth of Isaac (21:5).

The marriage of Isaac (24) makes the theological transition between Abraham, the man to whom the covenant promises were made, and his posterity, the people through whom the promises would be established. While Abraham's slave son, Ishmael, was also promised a future (21:13, 18; cf. 17:20), it was Isaac, the son of promise born through Sarah, who was to be the heir to the covenant (21:12; cf. 17:15-19, 21). Similarly, when Isaac had two sons, the birthright and blessing that anticipated the promise were conferred upon Jacob, not Esau (25:19-34; 27). Esau even married outside the patriarchal clan, an action that was fatal to any aspirations regarding the promise (26:34-35; 28:6-9), but Jacob found a wife in the clan of his mother and father, for this was critical to the fulfillment of the blessing promised to Abraham (27:46--28:5). Jacob's wives and slave wives from his own clan bore to him the twelve patriarchs of the children of Israel (29-30). At Peniel, a theophany of God wrestled with Jacob and blessed him, for he was the covenant son (32:22-32).

In the Joseph stories (37-50), the covenant ceased to be individualized as it had been previously. While the theology of promise passed through the family line of Abraham to Isaac, but not to Eliezer or Ishmael, and while it passed to Jacob, but not to Esau, from Jacob it passed equally to his twelve sons. Though Joseph was surely the favored son, he could lay no exclusive claim to the covenant promise. Rather, the promise passed to the entire twelve sons as a clan. The Joseph stories continue the theme of how Yahweh intervened to protect his promise and his covenant people. Though the brothers of Joseph mistreated him and sold him into slavery (37), Yahweh worked through their evil intentions to bring about good (45:4-11; 50:18-21). He preserved the chosen family from extinction in the great famine (39-47). When one son's posterity was threatened due to the lack of offspring, the clan was preserved by the resourceful Tamar (38). Jacob's blessing upon Ephraim over Manasseh was programmatic for the eventual rise of Ephraim as supreme among the northern tribes during the divided monarchy (48). His prophetic words over the entire group of his sons was equally programmatic for their future (49). Judah was especially singled out as a tribe of royalty with universal dominion (49:8-12). Finally, the Joseph stories conclude with the anticipation of the exodus from Egypt and the trek back to Canaan, the land of promise (50:24-26).