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HEMOTHEISTIC ABERRATIONS  
IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

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A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Old Testament Theology

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
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January 1945

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## HENOTHEISTIC ABERRATIONS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

### (Outline)

Controlling purpose: The purpose of this paper is to show that the dominant patterns of religious thought of the great majority of the ancient Hebrews were consistently henotheistic.

- I. The ancient Israelites inclined toward henotheism.
  - A. Henotheism is the worship of one god, while others are taken for granted. It involves the necessity of worshiping the god of the land where one is.
  - B. Henotheism is characteristic of Semitic thinking.
    1. It is strongest among nomadic Semites.
    2. The nature of the Canaanite Baals as gods of soil-fertility made for henotheism.
  - C. The ancients believed Jehovah God of Canaan only.
    1. This is true even of His Jewish worshipers.
    2. It is also true of foreigners.
    3. Except for a few inspired men, the Jews thought that other gods ruled elsewhere.
    4. They believed Jehovah could exert influence in foreign lands through messengers. Such a messenger may have lived in the Ark.
  
- II. Jehovah was considered the God of southern Canaan.
  - A. He was worshiped here before Abraham by the ancestors of Melchizedek, Abimelech, and perhaps Job.
  - B. This is why God brought the Jews to Canaan.
  - C. Israel, farther removed from south Canaan, suffered more from idolatry than Judah.
  - D. Non-Hebrew tribes in this area were Jehovahists.
    1. The Kenites, Jethro's people, worshiped Him.
    2. The Edomites also worshiped Him.
  - E. The few Jehovah-worshipers from the outside were all directly inspired.
  
- III. The early Hebrews showed henotheistic tendencies.
  - A. In Egypt they worshiped the Egyptian gods, although some perhaps revered Jehovah as a house-god.
  - B. In the desert they did not even think of Jehovah as universal God.
    1. They always feared they might lose Him.
    2. At Sinai they worshiped the golden calf.
    3. After Sinai they were faithful out of fear.



- a. God kept them in the desert to rid them of henotheism.
  - b. Leaving south Canaan, they revolted again.
  - c. In Midian they worshiped Baal-Peor.
- IV. God took measures to keep the Jews from henotheism.
- A. Moses taught the universality of Jehovah.
  - B. Many laws were directed against henotheism.
    - 1. Idolatry was directly prohibited.
    - 2. Alliance and marriage with Canaanites were forbidden to prevent Jews from being misled.
    - 3. Theology was kept in the hands of a few.
    - 4. The ceremonial law had the same purpose.
      - a. It was to keep Israel mindful of Jehovah.
      - b. Baalistic practices were forbidden.
  - C. The Jews later ignored these laws.
  - D. Joshua also taught against idolatry.
- V. Canaanite religion was Baalistic, not polytheistic.
- A. It was developing out of the animistic stage.
    - 1. Relationships between gods were still unstable.
    - 2. Baals of physical objects were worshiped. These were originally spirits inhabiting the objects.
  - B. Baalism was the religion of the earliest Semites.
    - 1. It was brought to Canaan by the Amorites.
    - 2. The Canaanites adopted Baalism when they came.
    - 3. Early Baals were local fertility deities.
  - C. Baals were worshiped on "high places" and under evergreen trees, both the abodes of Baals.
    - 1. Pillars and poles marked male and female elements in the high places.
    - 2. Baalism encouraged sexual license.
    - 3. It also featured infant sacrifice.
  - D. The national god of Canaan was Melek, the great Baal, also identified with Chemosh in Moab.
  - E. Ashtoreth was chief goddess of Canaan - originally she was the feminine counterpart of the Baals.
  - F. Neighboring gods were Rimmon of Syria and Dagon in Philistia.
- VI. In Canaan the Hebrews turned to the worship of Baals.
- A. Fear of Joshua prevented defection during his lifetime.
    - 1. The Jews couldn't comprehend Moses' teachings.
    - 2. Their confidence in Jehovah was very weak.
  - B. After Joshua's death the Jews fell away.
    - 1. Many Canaanites remained to mislead them.
    - 2. They were not sure who was god of the land.
    - 3. They accepted Baalism along with agriculture.
  - C. They turned to Jehovah whenever they were at war - they may have thought Him God of war.



- D. Under the kings Jehovism was established.
- E. Solomon reintroduced idolatry, dooming both Judah and Israel.

- VII. Worship of Jehovah in Canaan was localized in two sections of the country.
- A. The traditional area was stretched a bit by Jacob, who lived slightly to the north.
  - B. Dwellers in this section in the conquest seem to have been Jehovah-worshippers.
    - 1. Rahab certainly was one.
    - 2. Two tribes were not driven out - we think they worshiped Jehovah, also.
      - a. Israel could not expel the Jebusites.
      - b. God permitted the Gibeonites to save themselves by craft.
  - C. Most Jehovah-worshippers come from the section around Gibeon, Jerusalem, and south.
    - 1. Most of the judges come from this area.
    - 2. Many of the prophets do, also.
    - 3. The holy cities were also located here.
  - D. Gilead was another district faithful to Jehovah.
    - 1. The former inhabitants had all been destroyed.
    - 2. Their nomadic life kept them faithful.

- VIII. The kingdom of Israel's record is one of apostasy.
- A. God's purpose in the split was to start anew.
  - B. Jeroboam set up bull-calves as the gods of Israel.
    - 1. Some think these represented Jehovah.
    - 2. We believe they represented Baal (Melek).
    - 3. All the kings continued this idolatry.
  - C. After incessant warning God destroyed Israel.

- IX. In Judah Jehovism and Baalism were syncretized.
- A. Jehovism and heathenism were frequently fused.
    - 1. People were uncertain who was chief god.
    - 2. Men like to worship a god under a visible form.
    - 3. This tendency existed from earliest times.
      - a. Rachel was the first syncretist we know of.
      - b. Even David was one in his early years.
  - B. In Judah syncretism came through the use of the Baalist high places for Jehovah's worship.
    - 1. These high places remained for centuries.
    - 2. This opened the door to the worst idolatry.
  - C. Hezekiah instituted a thorough-going reform.
    - 1. He destroyed all idolatry and Baalism.
    - 2. This reform is reflected in Isaiah's writings.
    - 3. Manasseh undid his father's reform completely.
  - D. God had Judah taken captive to purge her.
  - E. Syncretism did not die with Jerusalem's destruction.



1. The Jews in Egypt were still syncretistic.
  2. Palestinian Mohammedanism is also syncretistic.
  3. The same is true of Catholic saint-worship.
- X. After the Exile the Jews no longer are henotheistic.
- A. Such was God's purpose in exiling them.
    1. The returned remnant was a very select group.
    2. The continuance of prophecy in Babylon probably showed them Jehovah's universality.
  - B. Those who returned possessed a strong faith.
    1. They finally came to realize Jehovah's position.
    2. Their new conception is found in the Apocrypha.
    3. Thus the problem of the Old Testament was solved, and Christ could appear.



## HENOtheISTIC ABERRATIONS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

### I. The Meaning of Henotheism

The term "henotheism" was first used by the late Professor Max Müller, the noted Sanskrit scholar. In a series of lectures on the development of Indian religions delivered in the year 1878 Professor Müller defined henotheism as the religious attitude of an individual who devotes himself to the worship of one supreme being as the guardian of his (the individual's) fate.<sup>1</sup> The word was born, however, at a time when the "higher critics" of the Old Testament were beginning to gain the ascendancy over the more conservative scholars who inclined toward the traditional views of the Old Testament and its theology; and we find that the infant was quickly appropriated by the new school and applied to the entire religious system of the Hebrews. Jehovism was represented as a religion which granted the existence of other gods in other lands and for other nations, but which

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1. F. Max Müller, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899, p. 275.



insisted on sole recognition within its own domain of Palestine. About the turn of the century the word was very frequently met with in writings on the subject of Jewish beliefs, but in late years it has largely fallen into disuse. Perhaps the chief reason for this fact is the conviction of the majority of critics that the religion of Jehovah was actually polytheistic rather than henotheistic - the viewpoint of Hebrews such as Moses, who clearly insisted on "Jehovah alone", is today described as monolatrous or particularistic.

In our present discussion we shall use the term "henotheism" in its generally accepted sense as referring to a belief in the supremacy of one god in a particular locality, while the existence of other gods in other places is taken for granted. It is, of course, not true that Jehovism as a religious system recognized such tenets. Scripture affords ample evidence to the effect that the great, inspired religious teachers of the Hebrews, such as Moses, Samuel, David, the prophets, and others, had a clear knowledge of the sole position of Jehovah as God of the universe. That this knowledge was, however, not always shared by the masses of Israelites is equally well attested in the Bible. It was this deficiency in the religious convictions of the Jews as a whole which was responsible for the constant and wholesale idolatry which we find recorded in the pages of the Old Testament.



It is only natural that the common religious psychology of the Hebrews should be in conformity with that of the heathen peoples among whom they lived and from whom they were descended. That the thinking of the latter was thoroughly henotheistic can easily be demonstrated - indeed, this may be considered the distinguishing feature of Semitic religions.<sup>1</sup> We find that the Babylonians of ancient times had a particular god for each city - their henotheism seems later to have led to polytheism as certain cities began to dominate others politically and their gods were declared to be more powerful than those of the subjugated towns.<sup>2</sup>

Nomadic Semites such as the Arabs and the Hebrews prior to the conquest of Canaan were particularly conscious of what was popularly regarded as their religious duty over against the deities of the land where they dwelt. It is still custom among Arab nomads, when they pitch their camp in a new site, to sacrifice first to the gods that dwell in that particular spot.<sup>3</sup> An inscription uncovered at Teima in western Arabia reveals the quandary of a nomad stranger by the name of Salmsézab, who, in making a sacrifice to his own tribal god, assures the gods of Teima that he recogni-

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1. A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament, p. 61.
  2. Carl Clemen et alii, Religions of the World, A. K. Dallas, tr., London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1931, p. 43.
  3. Henry Thatcher Fowler, The Origin and Growth of the Hebrew Religion, p. 10.



zes their supremacy in their own territory and begs them to consider his sacrifice as being offered to them.<sup>1</sup> This idea of a god being bound to a particular area and of the necessity of worshiping that god in that area was especially strong in Canaan, where local deities (Baals) were originally worshiped as spirits of the fertility of the soil.<sup>2</sup> That Moses was well aware of the grave dangers which faced the Hebrews in Canaan as a result of their innate henotheistic inclinations is indicated in Deuteronomy 12:30: "Take heed....that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise!'"

We are not surprised, therefore, to find that the religion of the average worshiper of Jehovah was dominated by the idea that his God was God of Palestine alone and that He was a national deity, interested only in the Jews.<sup>3</sup> Illustrative of this attitude are the words of Saul's soldiers to young David as they drive him out of the country: "Go, serve other gods!" (I Samuel 26:19) - they had no conception of the possibility of worshiping Jehovah in any other land save Palestine. Significant also is the question of the Jews exiled to Babylon; when bidden to sing "from

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1. James Robertson, The Early Religion of Israel, p. 197.
  2. W. O. E. Cesterley & Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development, p. 174.
  3. William Frederic Bade, The Old Testament in the Light of Today, p. 56.



the song of Zion", they replied, "How shall we sing Jehovah's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:4). In Leviticus 25:38 bringing the Hebrews to the land of Canaan and becoming their God are represented as synonymous: "I am Jehovah, your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God." (God here accomodates Himself to His hearers' modes of thought.) The well-known answer of Ruth to Naomi's plea that she go back to her own family: "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God!" (Ruth 1:16), also serves to illustrate the prevalent idea that each people has its own god, people and god being inseparable.<sup>1</sup> Interesting in this connection is the fear expressed by the men of Gilead in

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1. It may be noted here that the advice of Naomi to her daughter-in-law: "Thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods - return thou after thy sister-in-law!" (Ruth 1:15) is usually quoted as the locus classicus on henotheism in the Old Testament. We are of the opinion, however, that it cannot fairly be used in this connection. Naomi's prayer in verse 8 that Jehovah might bless the girls on their return to Moab indicates that she herself realized that His power was not limited merely to Palestine. It is also interesting to note that in Ruth 1:20-21 Naomi refers to God as "the Almighty". This phrase assumes significance in view of the fact that a god in ancient times was not conceived of as omnipresent or omnipotent except by those who were directly inspired of the true God. The words "God Almighty" are used elsewhere in the Old Testament only by Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Balaam, David, the prophets, and in the book of Job - it is always used by men of whom we know that they were inspired. The suggestion may not be out of place, therefore, that Naomi may have been similarly inspired. Indeed, we feel that there is reason to suggest that she may have written the book of Ruth - the last few verses could easily have been added by a later chronicler.



Joshua 22:24-25 that the day might come when the Jews in Canaan would even go too far in their henotheism and deny that Jehovah ruled on the east bank of the Jordan River.

The belief that Jehovah could rule only over His own territory is exemplified in Naaman's request for some of Palestine's soil on which to build an altar to Jehovah on his return to his native Syria (II Kings 5:17). It lies at the bottom of the Syrian theory that they were defeated by the Israelites because they had attempted to make war on them in the Palestinian hill-country, but that they could conquer them if they could fight in the plains of Coele-Syria, where Jehovah was no longer ruler (I Kings 20:23).<sup>1</sup> We know from I Samuel 4:7-8; 5:7 that the Philistines realized and believed in the power of Jehovah, but there is no thought of changing the worship of their god, Dagon, for that of Jehovah - they would never have dreamed of worshipping the God of another land. They referred to Him only as the "God of Israel" (I Samuel 5:8). The Persian king, Darius, in his decree regarding the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem refers to Jehovah as "the God who has caused His name to dwell there", i. e., in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:12), as

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1. The word "hills" in this connection evidently refers to the hill-country, i. e., mountainous Canaan, as a whole, as in Joshua 10:40. To describe Jehovah as God merely of the tops of the hills would have been just as incongruous to the ancient mind as it would be to the modern. The spot chosen by the Syrians in which to fight Israel was at Aphek, a place across the Jordan and a little to the north, just within the boundaries of Syria.



"the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 7:15), and as the "God of Jerusalem" (Ezra 7:19).

The average Hebrew, while he himself worshiped Jehovah, was quite ready to admit that other gods ruled in other places. Thus we find the judge Jephthah trying to convince the king of the Ammonites that Israel had a right to the lands which formerly had belonged to the Amorites: "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh, thy god, giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever Jehovah, our God, shall drive out before us, them will we possess!" (Judges 11:24). Jephthah here sets Chemosh on the same plane with Jehovah, the latter being considered only as the stronger of the two. The popular proverb quoted in Numbers 21:29 refers to the Moabites as the "people of Chemosh" - such a phrase assumes the genuineness of the divine character of Chemosh. An interesting story in this connection is that reported in II Kings 16:10-13 of King Ahaz, who, having gone to Damascus to pay homage to his overlord, the king of Assyria, and having seen there the altar of the Syrian god Rimmon, proceeded to erect an altar to that god in Jerusalem and to worship at it in the belief that, since the Syrian hordes had defeated his armies, their god must evidently be supreme in his land also.

In a religious community dominated by henotheism a god was allowed the possibility of changing or enlarging his domain by the conquest on the part of his proteges of other



peoples with other gods. The accepted theory was that the god of the defeated land or city must have been subjugated by the more powerful god of the conquerors. An example of this process is to be found in the imposition of the worship of the Babylonian god Tammuz on the Jews described in Ezekiel 8:14. The braggadoccio of Sennacherib in his warning to Hezekiah not to trust in Jehovah for help is to be explained by the fact that he considered Jehovah as a deity inferior in strength to his own god and easily to be conquered (II Kings 18:29-35; II Chronicles 32:10-17; Isaiah 36:14-20). The conviction that their gods had conquered Jehovah was the basis for the action taken by the colonists of Shalmaneser in Samaria in bringing their idols with them to their new home and in refusing to give heed to the worship of Jehovah, the traditional Ruler of the land (II Kings 17:26). It is interesting to note the reaction of this group to the punishment which God visited on them - they petitioned the king immediately that he might send them one of the captive priests of Jehovah to teach them the proper worship of the "God of the land".

While Jehovah's private domain was generally considered to be restricted to the land of Palestine, it was nevertheless a matter of common belief that He was able to wield some influence and help His partisans in foreign lands through His messengers. Thus we find Abraham sending his servant, Eliezer, to far-off Haran with the reassurance:



"Jehovah....will send His messenger with thee and prosper thy way." (Genesis 24:40). In writing to the king of Edom to ask passage through his land Moses informs him that Jehovah "sent a messenger" to bring the Jews out of the land of Egypt (Numbers 20:16) - this phraseology is not to be found elsewhere in Scripture. It was, however, language that the Edomite king, who identified Jehovah with his own land, could understand - it would have been incomprehensible to him that Jehovah Himself should have risked going down to Egypt. The result was that even the people of the foreign nations around Palestine were aware of and feared the might of Jehovah - we find frequent indications of this in Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

The recognized ability of Jehovah to help His followers through messengers or "angels" even in areas which were not considered to be directly under His control may have been an important factor in encouraging many of the Jews to cross the Jordan with Joshua and attempt the conquest of the land of Canaan. Their previous hesitancy to enter the land and give battle to its inhabitants seems to indicate that there must have been a large faction of them who were not persuaded that Jehovah, the God who had been with them

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1. Genesis 41:38-39; Exodus 7:5; 9:20; 10:7; 12:31-33; 14:25 - the Egyptians; Joshua 2:9,11; 5:1 - the Amorites; I Samuel 4:8 - the Philistines; II Kings 8:8 - the Syrians; II Chronicles 14:14 - the Ethiopians; II Chronicles 17:10; 20:29 - all of the surrounding countries.



throughout their desert wanderings, could also cross the river with them into Palestine. The prominence given the Ark of the Covenant in all of their battles, however, leads us to suspect that their confidence was in a large measure due to the presence of that object among them. They seem to have considered it as the dwelling-place of some powerful messenger of Jehovah, through whom He could still help them. I Samuel 4:3 reports the theory of the Jews on being defeated in battle by the Philistines that their failure to conquer was due to the absence of the Ark in their midst - hence they immediately send for it and dismay their enemies with the news of its arrival.

Many writers on the subject of Hebrew religion are of the opinion that the Ark was believed to be the dwelling-place of Jehovah Himself. This, however, while it is possible, does not seem to be the likely explanation. Throughout the forty years in the desert the Jews had also had the Ark with them, but the dwelling-place of Jehovah during that time had been in the heavens, in a cloud during the daytime and in a pillar of fire by night. It does not seem probable that the people, after leaving the desert, would assume that Jehovah had now taken up His abode in the familiar Ark of the Covenant. It is rather to be expected that they would connect in their minds the presence and power of the Ark with Moses' promise in Exodus 23:23: "My (Jehovah's) messenger shall go before thee and bring thee in unto the



**Amorites and the Hittites, etc." Similar statements are to be found in Exodus 23:20; 32:34; 33:2.**

## II. The Land of Jehovah

Having established the fact that the worship of the true God held to the common belief that their God, Jehovah, was God only of a particular territory, we are next confronted with the problem of identifying and locating that territory where Jehovah was supreme. To answer merely "the land of Canaan" or "Palestine" is an over-simplification. The whole history of the Jewish nation as recorded in the Old Testament may be described as the unending struggle of the religious leaders from the time of Moses down to the last days of Jerusalem to convince the Jews that Jehovah was the true God even of Palestine. The uncertainty which remained in their minds on this score is well evidenced in the countless idolatries into which they allowed themselves to sink.

In attempting to fix the traditional domain of Jehovah we must first recognize the basic fact that the worship of the true God was not carried on in pre-Abrahamic times by the descendants of Adam. The statement of Joshua that the ancestors of Abraham down to his father, Terah, were not worshippers of Jehovah (Joshua 24:2) is borne out by the fact that we can find no trace of the true Jehovah in any of the early Semitic languages (except in so far as the word was later borrowed from the Jews by the surrounding



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In attempting to fix the traditional domain of Jehovah we must first recognize the basic fact that the worship of the true God was not carried on in pre-Abrahamic times by the descendants of Shem. The statement of Joshua that the ancestors of Abraham down to his father, Terah, were not worshipers of Jehovah (Joshua 24:2) is borne out by the fact that we can find no trace of the term Jehovah in any of the early Semitic languages (except in so far as the word was later borrowed from the Jews by the surrounding



peoples).<sup>1</sup> Abraham himself was made a believer by direct revelation (Isaiah 51:2). We are, therefore, forced to ask ourselves whether or not Jehovah was worshiped at all during the centuries between the confusion of Babel and the calling of Abraham and, if He was, by whom.

We believe the answer is to be found in three men - they are Melchizedek, king of Salem, Abimelech, king of Gerar, and - an uncertain third - long-suffering Job. The first two men are of importance because the Bible names them as non-Jewish worshipers of Jehovah before the captivity of the Hebrews in Egypt. If, as many students of the Bible believe, the story of Job antedates the conquest of Canaan, then he must be considered in the same category. Melchizedek, the man whom Abraham met while homeward-bound after his defeat of the five invading kings and to whom he gave a tithe of the spoils of battle, is designated in Genesis 14:18 as "the priest of the most high God". The faith of Abimelech is indicated in Genesis 20:4, where he addresses Jehovah as "Lord". Abraham, we read, was surprised to find that he was a worshiper of the true God (Genesis 20:11). We are told of Job that he was "perfect and upright" and that he "feared God" (Job 1:1). Since the Biblical account rules out the possibility of their having been converted only by and in the time of Abraham, we realize that we have in

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1. Davidson, op. cit., p. 53.



these men a clew to the identity of the earliest worshipers of Jehovah.

Salem, Gerar, and Uz, the home of Job, are all located in the south of the land of Canaan. Salem is commonly identified with the later Jerusalem - indeed, the meaning of the name Jerusalem is "city of Salem". This identification is supported by the statement of Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, who says that Salem is an older name for Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> The couplet of Asaph in Psalm 76:2 suggests the identity of Salem with Mount Zion, which was located in Jerusalem: "In Salem also is His (God's) tabernacle, and His dwelling place is in Zion." Gerar was a Philistine city about sixty miles to the southwest of Jerusalem, and Uz, as we learn from Lamentations 4:21, was to be identified with the later Edom, lying south of the Dead Sea about sixty to one hundred miles from both Jerusalem and Gerar. If we draw lines between these three points on the map, we obtain a more or less equilateral triangle of some 3000 square miles in area within which we can be reasonably certain that the worship of Jehovah in pre-Abrahamic times was localized. The desert and semi-desert regions to the south of the triangle were also included in His domain; this is indicated by the fact that the Kenite tribe, which inhabited that section, still worshiped Jehovah at the time of the Exodus

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1. William Whiston, The Works of Flavius Josephus, Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, n. d., p. 44.



(Exodus 18:11).

This territory in the far south of the land of Canaan, then, was the province which a henotheistically-minded society assigned to Jehovah in the most ancient times. Archaeological proof for this thesis has recently been brought to light in the discovery that the inscriptions found at Ras Shamra in Syria in the last decade mention "Yav" or "Yo" as the God of Elath<sup>1</sup> - this is the city of Ezion-Geber, located at the head of the Aelanitic Gulf, a little to the south of Edom.

The realization of this fact immediately begins to make clear much that is otherwise obscure in the history of God's chosen people. It is probable that we have here the determining factor in the choosing of Canaan as the "promised land" where the worship of Jehovah was to be especially fostered and His great promise to all mankind was to be fulfilled. For such a man as Abraham it was, of course, not necessary that he live in the land which was traditionally Jehovah's in order to keep his faith, but it was most necessary in the case of Abraham's descendants. God realized that, if the Hebrews were permitted to live in Ur or in Egypt or in Haran or in any other land which had not from time immemorial been thought of as the possession of Jehovah, their strong henotheistic inclinations would pre-

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1. Cesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 153.



vent them from worshipping any other than the traditional gods of the land.

This is precisely what happened after the entry of the Hebrews into Canaan. Their great number made it necessary that a larger section of Canaan to the north be appropriated in addition to the extreme southern part where Jehovah ruled. The purpose of God's command that all of the Canaanite inhabitants of the land be driven out by the Jews was that the latter might remain ignorant of the former gods of the land and that their henotheistic tendencies might thus have nothing on which to feed. It was the failure to carry out this order of Jehovah which became the source of all of the later woes of the Jewish people.

This would explain, too, why in later history northern Israel always suffered more from idolatry than southern Judah - it was farther removed from the traditional home of Jehovah. It seems fair to assume that King Jeroboam, while he set up his idols primarily for political reasons, was probably also afraid that Jehovah's power in north Canaan would not be sufficient to keep his throne secure. As for God's anger at his sin, he seems to have been of the opinion that Jehovah could not harm him where he was. Thus in I Kings 13:4 he did not hesitate to order the seizure of Jehovah's prophet when the latter displeased him. The belief that God had His home in the far south around Edom is shown in the case of the woman judge, Deborah, who pictured Jeho-



vah as coming up from Edom to help His people (Judges 5:4). It is also the reason why, when King Jehoram of Israel went to Edom, he confessed Jehovah as having authority there, although he would not worship Him in his own country (II Kings 3:10,13).

If Jehovah was originally thought to be God of the Jerusalem-Gerar-Edom triangle and the desert area to the south, we would expect to find that the non-Hebrew tribes dwelling in that country in later times were also worshipers of the true God. Nor are we disappointed in this expectation. The people known as the Kenites, a Midianite tribe, one of whose daughters Moses married, appear at the time of the Exodus as worshipers of Jehovah. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who in Exodus 2:16 is mentioned as a priest of his people, made one of the finest confessions of Jehovah to be found in the early writings of Scripture (Exodus 18:9-11). No doubt this is why the Kenites showed kindness to the Jews when they escaped from Egypt (I Samuel 15:6) and why they are spared in Balaam's prophecy of the destruction of the surrounding peoples (Numbers 24:21-22).<sup>1</sup>

Another nation which inhabited this section after the time of Abraham was the Edomites, who were descended from Esau, the twin brother of Jacob. The faith of the Edomites

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1. The translation of verse 22 in the Authorized Version is a direct negation of the intended sense of the passage. The proper rendering is "Indeed, shall the Kenite be unto destruction?" (G. V. Schick, Ph. D.).



is indicated in a number of passages of Scripture. It first comes to the fore in the tone of Moses' letter to the Edomite king requesting passage for his people through Edom's territory (Numbers 20:14-16). The fact that the Edomites worshiped Him is probably the reason why God had the Hebrews pass around Edom rather than conquer it, as they did with other nations that refused them passage. The fact that the Edomites were not excluded from the covenant of Jehovah in Deuteronomy 23:3 along with the Moabites and Ammonites, although they had treated the children of Israel fully as badly (Numbers 20:18-21), would also seem to indicate that they must have been Jehovah-worshippers - in the divine injunction of Deuteronomy 2, which precedes the mistreatment of the Hebrews by Moab and Ammon, the protection of Jehovah is extended to all three nations alike. The deference paid by the king of Edom to the prophet Elisha in II Kings 3:12 and the latter's recognition of him also show that he was a servant of the true God.

The same fact is suggested in Amos 2:1, where God's wrath against Moab for the desecration of an Edomite royal tomb is referred to; God would hardly have cared unless the sanctuary in which the tomb was located was dedicated to Him. Isaiah's well-known description of the Messiah as He "that cometh from Edom" (63:1) affords another link in the chain of evidence - it is hardly likely that the Messiah would have been pictured as coming from Edom if that land



had belonged to a heathen people. The prophet Jeremiah informs us that the Edomites in later times followed Israel's example and forsook the worship of Jehovah, probably under the influence of the Assyrians. In chapter 49:7 he indicates their apostasy as well as their former faith: "Concerning Edom thus saith Jehovah of hosts: 'Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom vanished?'" The prophets Ezekiel (32:29) and Malachi (1:4) announce God's anger at Edom's defection.

Since the worship of Jehovah in ancient times was so closely restricted, it is logical to assume that anyone living outside His territory could come to the worship of the true God only through a direct inspiration. We find that this is indeed true. In addition to Abraham, who believed in God in Ur and in Haran, Jacob and his son, Joseph, who kept their faith even though they went to live in Egypt, and Moses, who became a child of God while still a youth in Pharaoh's court,<sup>1</sup> we can cite only the case of Balaam as a Jehovah-worshiper from the outside. His inspiration is indicated in Numbers 24:16. Even in the case of Balaam, however, it may be quite possible to connect him with the land of Jehovah - thus we are inclined to identify him with the Bela, son of Beor, mentioned in Genesis 36:32 as an early king of Edom.

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1. This is merely an assumption on our part. There is no Scriptural proof for it.



### III. Pre-Canaanite Religious Tendencies of the Hebrews

As we have pointed out in an earlier discussion, the great patriarch of the Jewish race, Abraham, was brought to the worship of Jehovah by direct revelation. The members of his family who settled in Haran, far to the north, remained idolaters (Genesis 31:30), although Abraham had very probably told them of the true God. That the two patriarchs who followed him, Isaac and Jacob, enjoyed a similar direct contact with God is indicated in Genesis 26:2 and 31:3, respectively. Isaac's blessing on Jacob as he is about to leave for Haran to find himself a wife shows that he was fully aware of Jehovah's position as universal God (Genesis 28:3-4).

We have in Jacob a rather interesting case of progressive development. In his early years he evidently believed with all his neighbors that Jehovah was to be found only in His own restricted domain. Thus while he was camping in Bethel one night on his trip to Haran, he was surprised when God spoke to him in a dream and awoke to exclaim, "Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not!" (Genesis 28:16). The words of his vow in Genesis 28:20-21: "If God will be with me and will keep me....so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall Jehovah be my God!"



suggest a glimmer of the truth infiltrating itself into his mind, but he still does not appear to have had a clear idea of God's universality. During the years in Haran Jacob continued to feel the guiding presence of God (Genesis 31:3) - probably this fact impressed Jehovah's true position on his mind to a great extent. Yet towards the end of Jacob's sojourn in Haran Jehovah still found it expedient to identify Himself as the same God whom Jacob had known in Bethel (Genesis 31:13). In later life Jacob had a perfectly clear conception of Jehovah as the only God (Genesis 43:14), but even then God thought it useful to reassure him that He would continue to be with Jacob even in the land of Egypt (Genesis 46:4).

As long as Jacob and Joseph, who, being inspired, also knew that Jehovah was still God in Egypt (Genesis 40:8 and many more), were alive, the children of Israel doubtless remained faithful to their God. How much longer they may have been so is difficult to say. We do know, however, that they had ceased to worship Jehovah by the time of the Exodus. In Ezekiel 20:7-8 God, speaking of the call which He extended to the Jews in their Egyptian captivity, tells us: "I said unto them, 'Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt - I am Jehovah, your God.'" But they rebelled against me and would not hearken unto me." This corroborates the testimony of Joshua, who declares in chapter 24:14 that the



Jews in Egypt did not serve Jehovah, but other gods. In Psalm 106:7 we read the Psalmist's confession: "Our fathers understood not thy (God's) wonders in Egypt - they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies." In fact, we must admit that there is not even any actual evidence that Moses himself worshiped Jehovah prior to God's revelation of Himself on Horeb - it is certainly true that he had not performed the religious observances which were demanded by Jehovah (Exodus 4:25-26).

While their chief worship was directed toward the gods of Egypt, we have suggestions in Exodus 4:31 and elsewhere to the effect that the Hebrews still possessed some knowledge of the God whom their fathers had worshiped. In Exodus 1:17,21 we are told that at least a few of them still attributed some power to Him and feared His wrath. It may be that they considered Him as just another god in their pantheon, although this seems rather unlikely, particularly in view of the fact that they had no name for Him (Exodus 6:3). The resolution of the problem is not easy, but it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that perhaps they revered Him as a family or house-god on the order of the Roman Penates. Ordinarily the house-god was the one type of god that could be transferred from one place to another,<sup>1</sup> and Jehovah, since He certainly was not indigenous to the

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1. Compare the journey of Aeneas from fallen Troy to Rome with his Penates.



soil of Egypt, would seem to have come into this category. It should not have been a great step in their confused religious thinking from the concept of the God of their fathers to that of a god of their family. If God actually was conceived of as a house-god or as the spirit of a departed ancestor, there would have been no difficulty in maintaining His worship - rather the ghost of it - in Egypt; where such worship does exist, it is never merged with or displaced by the worship of the public gods - the two types of deities are assigned to entirely separate spheres.<sup>1</sup>

The picture was changed with the coming of Moses. No one of the Hebrews could continue to doubt Jehovah's power when His emissaries wrought such tremendous and impossible deeds as the ten plagues which were visited upon the stubborn Egyptians. We read in Exodus 14:31 that as a result of His wonderful works "the people feared Jehovah and believed Jehovah and His servant, Moses". The confidence of these early Hebrews in their God finds its high-water mark in the magnificent song which is recorded in Exodus 15:1-19, yet even in this song we can discover the seeds of henotheism in the question: "Who is like unto thee, Jehovah, among the gods?" (verse 11). The faith of the people is expressed in the solemn promise of Exodus 24:3: "All the words which Jehovah hath said we will do!"

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 21.



It is almost startling to realize the tragic rapidity with which these promises and confessions of faith were forgotten by a henotheistically-minded people. We find that, as soon as they had made their crossing of the Red Sea and had proceeded a short distance inland, the thought began to trouble them that perhaps Jehovah was no longer able to be with them. In Exodus 17:7 is recorded the question which Moses was to hear so frequently: "Is Jehovah among us or not?". Each time the people began to murmur as they moved south toward Sinai the chief point at issue was the question of Jehovah's continued presence in each of their successive new locations. The culmination of this fear of the possibility of moving out of Jehovah's domain and being left god-less finally came at Mount Sinai. As long as Moses had remained among them and had continued to perform miracles to convince the doubters, their fears seem to have been allayed; but when at Sinai Moses went up on the mountain to speak with God and did not return for over a month, they finally were persuaded that Jehovah was no longer present. In Exodus 32:1,4 we read of their insistent demand for a god and of the golden bull-calf which Aaron, Moses' brother, cast for them.

It is hardly possible to make a positive identification of the calf-idol of Sinai. In view of the fact that their fathers for the past four centuries had been living in near-by Egypt, it seems likely that the calf may have been



a representation of some Egyptian god. The consideration that, so far as we know, they had up to this time not yet come in contact with any of the peoples of the Sinai peninsula except the Jehovah-worshipping Kenites would lend support to this theory. (The peninsula was inhabited only by a few nomadic tribes, anyway.) There are two Egyptian candidates that present themselves. The more probable of the two is Mnevis, the ox-god of the district surrounding the city of On (Hieropolis) in Goshen. It seems extremely plausible that the Hebrews, who had lived in Goshen, should have come in contact with the worship of this god. Another theory which has been advanced is that the calf represented the god Apis - however, the object of veneration of the Apis cult seems to have been a live bull rather than an image.<sup>1</sup> The other possibility is that the Hebrews may have learned to worship Jehovah under the form of a calf from the Kenites. This explanation seems highly improbable, however, because in that case Moses would hardly have approved of the sacrifice of Jethro, his Kenite father-in-law, in the midst of the Israelite camp (Exodus 18:12). We would also expect to find Judah contaminated in later times with such calf-worship, since they came in contact with the Kenites quite regularly, but there is no indication of such a situation in the Bible.

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1. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 217f.



At any rate, the worship of the golden calf was idolatrous, and it incurred the wrath of God to such an extent that He had Moses and the Levites kill some three thousand of the offenders. This incident seems to have had a great effect on the Hebrews. They evidently did not dare to doubt Jehovah's supremacy on the Sinai peninsula again. They were extremely careful not to slight His worship (Exodus 33:10), and they were very assiduous in following His directions, as we read in Numbers 9:23: "They kept the charge of Jehovah at the commandment of Jehovah by the hand of Moses." In Psalm 78:34-37 Asaph informs us that the Hebrews worshiped God after Sinai only outwardly and out of fear: "When He slew them, then they sought Him....and they remembered that God was their Rock....Nevertheless....they lied unto Him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with Him."

Their fear of offending Jehovah and of bringing down on themselves a new visitation of His wrath is illustrated in the interesting fact that, while the Jews continued to complain after the debacle at Sinai, they no longer murmured against Jehovah or questioned His presence, as they had done so consistently before. Their murmurings and seditions after Sinai are directed solely against Moses, and we find that the seditionists are frequently rather careful to affirm their faith in Jehovah (Numbers 12:2; 14:3; 16:41; 20:3). It is not to be thought, however, that the children of



Israel had come at last to a true knowledge of their God. Their ingrained henotheism reasserted itself when they arrived at the southern borders of Canaan and all with the exception of Joshua and Caleb were afraid to enter the new land for fear that Jehovah, their Protector, might not go in with them. The decision of God to keep the Hebrews in the wilderness for another forty years was probably not meant as a punishment so much as a weeding-out process in the hope that a new generation would be less inclined to fall into henotheism and become polluted with the idolatry of Canaan.

In their retreat from the Canaanite boundary the Hebrews turned southeast to travel around the land of Edom (Numbers 21:4).<sup>1</sup> In making this journey they had to leave the Sinai peninsula and the territory south of Canaan for the first time since the incident of the golden calf. Significantly, we find that in their complainings in this area God is again included. Numbers 21:5 tells us that "the people spoke against God and against Moses" - a phrase which has not occurred since before Sinai. As soon as they had come through the desert into an inhabited region - that of the northern Midianites - the children of Israel turned immediately to the worship of Baal-Peor, the god of that particu-

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1. The phrase translated "Red Sea" in this passage actually refers to the arm of the Red Sea known as the Aelanitic Gulf, which forms the eastern shore of the Sinai peninsula.



lar land (Numbers 25:2-3). Such action is thoroughly characteristic of a henotheistic people. It certainly boded no good for the future of the Jews in Canaan. Before Moses died, God told him how the Hebrews would turn to the service of the gods whom they would find in their new home: "Thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up and go a-whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land whither they go." (Deuteronomy 31:16).

There is no suggestion in this passage that Moses had done anything that was morally possible to show them that Jehovah was the Universal God, who alone was to be worshiped - in Israel, in Canaan, or in any other land. The later apostasy of the Jews undoubtedly cannot be laid at Moses' door - he himself bears witness in Deuteronomy 4:5-14 of the constancy with which he adhered to his duty of teaching the people.

The chief warnings of Moses against henotheistic practices are to be found in the first half of his farewell speech to the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 4 - 11). We have in these ten chapters a most powerful presentation of Jehovah's sole position as God and an earnest exhortation to remain faithful to Him alone. Moses urges the Hebrews to remember for all time the countless mercies of Jehovah and His marvelous protection throughout the decades in the desert. He emphasizes again and again the necessity of keeping Jehovah's laws before them at all times and in all



#### IV. Preventive Measures

We have gone to some pains in a former chapter to show why the Jews were constantly inclined toward the henotheistic conception of Jehovah as God of a comparatively small tract of land in southern Canaan. It has not been our purpose in this discussion to attempt to excuse their remissness in any way. Moses had done everything that was humanly possible to show them that Jehovah was the Universal God, who alone was to be worshiped - in Sinai, in Canaan, or in any other land. The later apostasy of the Jews certainly cannot be laid at Moses' door - he himself bears witness in Deuteronomy 4:5-14 of the constancy with which he adhered to his duty of teaching the people.

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places (6:6-9; 11:18-20), and he warns the people vehemently of the dangers that will face them in Canaan and of the temptations that will seduce them to the worship of the gods of the surrounding peoples (6:10-14; 12:30). The gods of the land of Canaan he denounces in the most violent terms - they are to be abhorred and detested, "a cursed thing" (7:26). These gods must under no circumstances be worshiped; Moses drives this point home with incessant repetition (12:30-31; 13:2-10; 16:22; 18:14; 27:15; 30:17-18). In chapter 8:19-20 he swears that the Jews will perish from the face of the earth if they refuse to heed his words and worship Jehovah. The speech comes to a close (Deuteronomy 28) with a blessing and a curse - the richest of blessings are promised if the Jews will remain faithful to Jehovah, but the direst curses are pronounced on any that turn away from serving Him. In his last utterances before his death Moses warns Israel that it will desert Jehovah despite Moses' warnings, and he describes in very graphic language the bitter consequences of its future sin (Deuteronomy 32:15-25).

The warning testimony of Moses, however, was but one of the measures taken by God during the wanderings in the desert to strengthen His people against their own inclinations toward henotheism. It is interesting and instructive to realize that very many of the laws and observances which Jehovah transmitted to the people through Moses had the di-



rect purpose of preventing or counteracting the influence which Canaanite Baalism was to exert on the worshipers of the true God. The most obvious of these are, of course, the direct prohibitions of idolatry, of which there are many - the first commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3-5) may be taken as characteristic - the purpose of these was, naturally, to prepare the people against the day when idolatry would beckon. The penalty for their infraction is most severe - death for the individual (Deuteronomy 17:2-5) and dispersal for the nation (Deuteronomy 28:64). The fate of those who serve other gods will be the same as that of Sodom and Gomorrah! (Deuteronomy 29:18-28).

Certain other laws also seem to have been designed to forestall the inroads of idolatry. The forbidding of prostitution in Leviticus 19:29 is probably directed as much against the danger of Baalism as it is against the evil of sexual immorality - we find that both male and female temple-prostitution are a regular feature of the worship of Baal (e. g., Numbers 25:1).<sup>1</sup> The injunction of Deuteronomy 12:4 against the use of holy places which had been dedicated to idols for the worship of Jehovah is interesting; such a practice could be - and later was - the opening wedge for the infiltration of the worst forms of idolatry. The setting up of a pole or "asherah"<sup>2</sup> in the vicinity of

1. John P. Peters, The Religion of the Hebrews, p. 113.

2. The translation "grove" of the Authorized Version is in-



any altar of Jehovah was dangerous for the same reason and was likewise forbidden. Such poles were used in the worship of Ashtoreth as representations of the goddess. The practice of spiritism and witchcraft is also forbidden as opposed to the worship of Jehovah (Leviticus 20:6) - it is probable that spiritists were wont to worship the spirits with whom they were in contact. Thus in I Samuel 28:13 the witch of Endor speaks of the spirits she sees as "gods".

It is a fact that is perhaps not always realized fully that the whole of the Hebrew cultus as instituted by God through Moses was also shaped for the direct purpose of counteracting the henotheistic tendencies which were later to lead the Jews to the worship of Baal. God's purpose in keeping Israel a unique nation religiously and politically was definitely to stop up the seams and cracks through which the pollution of idolatry was liable to seep. In Exodus 34:15-16 this consideration is named as the purpose of the injunction against political alliances and intermarriage with the Canaanites. In Deuteronomy 20:17-18 Moses gives the Jews the explicit command that they are utterly to destroy the old inhabitants of the land "that they teach you not to do after all their abominations which they have done unto their gods". It is self-understood that such was also the purpose of God's command that the idols and altars

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correct.



of the heathen should be destroyed (Exodus 34:13). A similar preventive measure was the order given in Numbers 15:14-16 to the effect that even temporary sojourners must be made to worship Jehovah while they are on Jewish soil. God did not want the idea to arise among His people under any circumstances that some other "god" could also be worshiped in their land.

Most interesting is the fact that the elaborate Mosaic ceremonial legislation was to serve the same purpose. In Deuteronomy 6:1-2 Moses points out that the purpose of all his commandments and statutes is that the people might come to fear Jehovah alone and that thus they might have prosperity in the promised land. The devotion of all the first-born to God and the setting aside of the tribe of Levi as priests in place of the human firstborn was commanded for this reason (Numbers 3:12-13). It seems most probable that the forbidding of the common people to perform for themselves as priests (Numbers 17:13), which at first glance seems to be opposed to the New Testament principle of the universal priesthood of believers, was actually made necessary by the same consideration - the reins of Jewish religion had to be kept in the hands of a relatively small number of teachers and priests if anything like purity of religion and worship was to be maintained. The same reason underlies the injunction against sacrificing in any but the one central holy spot which God should choose (Deuteronomy



12:13-14 and the command to all males to appear before Jehovah three times a year (Exodus 34:23). The almost absolute authority given to the Levites, even in civil matters (Deuteronomy 17:11-13), was probably to strengthen their hand in preserving religious unity.

The same basic purpose may be pointed out in connection with the Jewish sacrificial and ritual system. God says as much in Exodus 29:46 following His description of the entire sacrificial order: "And they shall know that I am Jehovah, their God....that I may dwell among them." That the sacrificial system had certainly not been instituted merely for the sake of the sacrifices is pointed out by David in Psalm 51:16-17: "Thou desirest not sacrifice....thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit!". The fact that the Passover observance was intended to keep Israel mindful of Jehovah's power and protection and keep them from the worship of other gods is frequently stated in Scripture (Exodus 13:6-10; Deuteronomy 5:15; 16:1-3). This is also the stated purpose of the keeping of the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:10-12) and of the Sabbath (Exodus 31:13). Of the latter God says in Ezekiel 20:12: "I gave them (the Jews) my Sabbaths to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah, that sanctify them."

One bit of ceremonial legislation intended to forestall any turning to the worship of the Canaanite deities has



been explained only recently - that is the command found in Exodus 34:26 that a kid should not be boiled in its mother's milk. The recently discovered Ras Shamra inscriptions have revealed that the highest honor that could be paid to the Canaanite and Phoenician fertility gods was the offering of a kid boiled in its mother's milk.<sup>1</sup> That the eating of animals with the blood still in them, which is forbidden in Leviticus 17:10-14, was common in the worship of the deities of fertility has long been known. Even certain features of dress were ordained to keep the Jews in mind of Jehovah's deliverance and guidance (Numbers 15:38-41). It is evident that God took every possible measure short of instruction by means of irresistible grace to prevent the Jews from suffering the consequences of their own lack of insight.

It is difficult to realize today how deeply ingrained the attitudes of henotheism must have been in the ancient Israelites. That it was so deeply planted as to be practically impossible to uproot is evident from the fact that, after they had settled in Canaan, the Jews did turn to the worship of the gods who had held sway there before their coming. That they could do this despite the crystal-clear teachings of Moses, the observance of a cultus whose every

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1. Nelson Glueck, The Other Side of the Jordan, p. 4. This dish is still considered a great delicacy among modern Arabs.



feature pointed to Jehovah as the only God, and the many wonders which God had performed to help them to believe in Him alone (Numbers 14:11) shows us how completely foreign to their thinking was the idea that a god could hold sway over a country which was not traditionally his. Of course, it becomes evident in their later history that their defections from the worship of Jehovah were due in part to their neglect of the precepts which we have here described. Thus it became the regular thing in the early days for those who still were loyal to Jehovah to worship Him in the high places which had been dedicated to Baal (I Kings 3:2). The finding of the Law of Moses, which had been written down to perpetuate his teachings on the monotheism of Jehovah (Deuteronomy 31:13,26), in the Temple-rubbish in the time of Josiah (II Kings 22:8) indicates how little those teachings were handed on to later generations. The various ritual observances also were neglected for many centuries (II Kings 23:22 - the Passover).

God's preventive measures against idolatry were not only taken in the time of Moses. The book of Joshua reveals how that great successor of Moses made it his policy to read the writings of the Law to his people in the early days of the conquest (8:34-35). He, too, preached to them the truth that Jehovah was Lord of all the earth (3:11). Probably the metal objects mentioned in Joshua 6:19 included many idols (the golden wedge which Achan stole is referred to in Jo-



shua 7:1 as an "accursed thing") - Joshua wisely directed that all these things be brought to the Lord's treasury, where they could not be circulated among the people (6:19). Before his death Joshua also preached a powerful farewell sermon to the children of Israel (24:2-18), in which he reviewed the great miracles and the mercies of Jehovah and exhorted them to continue steadfast in His service. The people made a solemn promise that they would serve Jehovah faithfully (24:20) - they kept it until Joshua's death.

In the Canaanite religion, if they had been left undisturbed by their more warlike neighbors, would have evolved a full-fledged system in which each local god was given his proper place, but at the time of the Israelite conquest the country was too disunited politically for such a development to occur.

During the period of the Jewish occupation of the land the Canaanite religion was gradually developing from the idolatrous to the henotheistic stage. This immaturity of Canaanite worship accounts for the rather striking fluidity with which the spheres of influence of and the interrelationships between the various deities may be changed or transferred. Even the sex of the gods changes with disconcerting ease.<sup>1</sup> Thus a goddess may appear in one text as the

<sup>1</sup> William Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel, p. 71.



## V. The Gods of Canaan

The pre-Israelite religion of Canaan was not polytheistic in the usual sense of the word. It is characteristic of polytheistic systems that they have well-developed pantheons containing a large number of gods, each of whom possesses a clearly defined sphere of operation. Canaanite theology never had a chance to reach this point. It may be that in time the Canaanites, if they had been left undisturbed by their more warlike neighbors, would have evolved a full-fledged system in which each local god was given his proper place, but at the time of the Israelite conquest the country was too disunited politically for such a development to occur.

During the period of the Jewish occupation of the land the Canaanite religion was gradually developing from the animistic to the henotheistic stage. This immaturity of Canaanite worship accounts for the rather striking fluidity with which the spheres of influence of and the interrelationships between the various deities may be changed or transferred. Even the sex of the gods changes with disconcerting ease.<sup>1</sup> Thus a goddess may appear in one text as the

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1. William Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel, p. 71.



mother, in another as the sister, and in a third as the wife of a particular god, while in a fourth she may become a male deity.

The animism of Canaanite religion is strongly evidenced in the references made to it in the pages of Scripture. The use of evergreen trees and of stone pillars in connection with their worship indicates their belief that these objects were inhabited by some supernatural being - evidently the hills on which their "high places" were built were also thought to be spirit-dwellings. It has been observed that still today people of Palestine and Syria are wont to worship countless lesser divinities inhabiting trees, rocks, hills, and fountains.<sup>1</sup> Eventually the spirits with which such natural objects were endowed came to be looked upon as the owners of the objects in which they dwelt - thus they began to take on the aspects of gods. It is in this fact that we find the roots of Canaanite Baalism. The spirits were designated as the "Baals"<sup>2</sup> or "owners" or "lords" of the natural objects or phenomena which they were supposed to inhabit.

Numerous examples may be found in the Old Testament of such Baals considered as the owners of various manifesta-

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1. Henry P. Smith, The Religion of Israel, p. 16.
  2. The old idea that Baal was supposed to be god of the sun and Ashtoreth goddess of the moon has been discarded for some years by students of Canaanite religion - Albright, op. cit., p. 83.



tions of nature. Thus we have Baal-Peor, mentioned in Numbers 23:3, the owner of Mount Peor; Baal-Hermon (Judges 3:3), the divinity of Mount Hermon; Baal-Tamar (Judges 20:33), the owner of a palm-tree; and in Joshua 19:8 Baalath-Beer, the female divinity of a certain well. We learn from II Kings 23:5 that the Jews also learned the worship of the sun, moon, planets, and other heavenly bodies from their Canaanite neighbors - no doubt it was the Baals of these objects that were actually worshiped. One of these is mentioned in Amos 5:26 as the god Chiun; Gesenius' lexicon informs us that the planet Saturn is probably meant. It would seem from Ezekiel 8:10 that the Baals of animals and insects were also worshiped.<sup>1</sup> According to Professor Max Müller, a similar religious system may be observed today in some of the native African religions, which feature a belief in individual spirits inhabiting rivers, lakes, springs, plots of ground, trees, certain animals, and carved images and talismans.<sup>2</sup>

The religious system of Baalism is met with among the earliest Semitic peoples, who also believed in certain supernatural powers inhabiting various physical objects, as Baal-Shamem, the owner of the sky, Shemesh, the Baal of the sun, Sin, the Baal of the moon, and other Baals of animals, trees, springs, mountains, etc. It seems to have been

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1. Compare Baal-Zebub, the "fly-divinity" (II Kings 1:2).

2. Müller, op. cit., p. 107.



brought into the land of Canaan by the Amorites, the earliest inhabitants of whom we have historical record. These people, who occupied the land about 2000 B. C., were of the same race as those who had set themselves up as the ruling dynasty of Babylonia a century earlier. Thus it is that we find the related worship of Ishtar in Babylon and Ashtoreth in Canaan.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to ask one's self whether the extreme wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah might not perhaps mark the entry into Palestine of Baalism with its characteristic sexual license - Isaiah (1:9-10) compares Judah in the period of Baal-worship to Sodom and Gomorrah, and Ezekiel (16:46-49) speaks of Sodom as the sister of Judah and Israel. The particular sex aberration of which the Sodomites were guilty (Genesis 19:5) is mentioned frequently as one of the sexual excesses connected with the worship of Baal (I Kings 14:24; II Kings 23:7).

The Canaanite tribes, who entered the land of Palestine about 1800 B. C., seem to have taken over the worship of the Baals from the original Amorites.<sup>2</sup> Many of the latter were pushed across the Jordan, where they established the kingdoms of Bashan and Heshbon. Excavations in these regions have uncovered numerous representations of Ashtoreth dating from before the Hebrew occupation.<sup>3</sup> The name of Ash-

1. George Barton, Archaeology and the Bible, p. 107. Ashtoreth was the feminine counterpart of the Baals.

2. Ibid., pp. 109f.

3. Glueck, op. cit., p. 153.



toresh also occurs in Joshua 9:10 as the capital city of Og, king of Bashan.

Baalism among the Amorites and Canaanites centered originally in the belief that every plot of fertile ground owed its fertility to the fact that some supernatural being, the "Baal" or "owner" of the plot, dwelt there.<sup>1</sup> These local Baals were believed to be supreme in their own localities, although in later times there were other Baals over them who possessed a wider, even a national authority.<sup>2</sup> These early Baals fulfilled the same functions among the Canaanites as did tribal gods among other peoples - the Baal was considered to be the king, the father of the inhabitants, the leader in battle, the final judge in all disputed matters, and the giver of rain and crops.<sup>3</sup> The institution of local Baals is indicated in Jeremiah 2:28, where the prophet says that Judah has a god for each city. In the city of Jerusalem there was even a Baal for each street (Jeremiah 11:13).

Some of these local Baals are mentioned by name in the Bible. Thus in II Kings 1:2-6 we have the name of the Baal of the town of Ekron, one Baal-Zebub, so named either because he was personified as a fly or because he was supposed to have some particular power over flies. Baal-Berith

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 57.

2. Ibid., p. 190.

3. Ibid., p. 175.



is mentioned in Judges 8:33 as the Baal of Ophrah. The name "Baal-Berith" seems to have been an appellation of the god Hauran, who was the overseer of all contracts and covenants in addition to being Baal of the underworld.<sup>1</sup> His name is included in the local name of Beth-Horon (Joshua 16:3).<sup>2</sup> The Baal of the town of Beth-Shemesh (Joshua 21:16) seems to have been Shemesh, the personification of the sun.

The places and manner in which the Baals were worshiped were wholly in keeping with the animistic conception of their origin. The places chosen for their worship were usually "high places", although in later centuries, as Baalism developed into polytheism, some temples were also built for them (II Kings 10:21). These high places seem to have been an institution of the pre-Canasnite Amorites - some of the high places which have been excavated date back to before 2000 B. C.<sup>3</sup> The high place was originally located on a hill, which was chosen probably because it was thought to be the abode of a deity; it may also be that Baal's worshippers felt that he wanted to be high up, withdrawn from men.<sup>4</sup> Later, however, the term came to mean any sanctuary, so that in Jeremiah 7:31 we even read of a high place built in a valley. Excavations in Palestine at Megiddo, Taanach, and Gezer have revealed that most of these high places were

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1. Albright, op. cit., p. 113.

2. Ibid., p. 81.

3. Barton, op. cit., p. 170.

4. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., pp. 58f.



furnished with a stone altar flanked by two or more upright stone pillars, which were also thought to be the abodes of Baals. Beside the altar a pit was frequently dug, into which the sacrificial blood was poured and offerings could be thrown.<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 16:16 indicates that the high places were decked with bright-colored draperies by the devotees of Baal.

The Baals of ground-fertility, which came to be worshiped as the chief Baals of Canaan, were also worshiped under evergreen trees (the "green trees" of Scripture), which by reason of their eternal greenness were thought to be the special dwelling-places of the fertility deities.<sup>2</sup> Cypress, myrtle, and palm seem to have been the most popular trees for such worship. Even today it is not unusual for the traveler in Palestine to come upon one of these holy trees, its branches hung with bright-colored rags as a sign of homage.<sup>3</sup> These trees were frequently planted on the high places, but this was not necessarily so.

An essential feature of the worship of the Baals of fertility was the representation in the places of worship of both the male and female elements of the deity. The male element was represented by the upright stone pillar mentioned above - some have thought this to be a phallic sym-

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 43.

2. Ibid., p. 59.

3. Ibid., pp. 24f.



bol. The female element was thought to be present in the evergreen trees. Where there were no such trees, a wooden pole or "asherah" was set up to take its place.<sup>1</sup> The pillars and poles of the high places are both mentioned in II Kings 23:14. The idols of the Baals to be found in Canaan after the Hebrew conquest are usually considered to have been a development towards polytheism from these original stone pillars and wooden poles.<sup>2</sup> These objects were carved to represent the being which was supposed to be the personification of the particular Baal. Some of these are mentioned in Deuteronomy 4:16-18, where Moses says that the Canaanite idols take the forms of human beings, of animals, birds, creeping things, and fishes.

The grossest sexual license seems to have been practised in connection with the worship of the Baals - this is especially true of the worship of Ashtoreth, the Baals' feminine counterpart, who later became the chief goddess of Canaan. Oesterley & Robinson have shown that this is generally true of those agricultural religions which center about the worship of the deities of fertility.<sup>3</sup> No doubt it was this fact that prompted the comment of the sage who wrote the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon that "the devising of idols was the beginning of fornication" (14:12). Religious

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., pp. 59f.

2. Ibid., p. 59.

3. Ibid., p. 237.



prostitution, both male and female, figured largely in the worship of Ishtar in Babylon as well as in the worship of Ashtoreth. Archaeologists, excavating the high places of Canaan, have discovered a number of Ashtoreth-plaques of the most lewd and suggestive design - these were evidently intended to incite the worshiper to immorality.<sup>1</sup> It is probable that this situation first gave rise to the Biblical phrase "go a-whoring after strange gods", found in Exodus 34:15, Judges 2:17, etc. A similar institution is to be met with in the hierodules of the later Greek and Roman temples.<sup>2</sup>

The most repulsive feature of Canaanite worship was its regular practice of infant sacrifice, a sin which some of the Jews also committed (II Kings 16:3; 21:6). Such sacrifice was usually offered to the great Baal, Melek (Milcom, Molech, Melkart), "the king", who in time became the national Baal of all of Canaan and Phoenicia. Roman witnesses attest the fact that the Carthaginians, who came from Canaan and Phoenicia, continued to practice human sacrifice down to the time of the destruction of their city. The custom did not wholly die out in Phoenicia itself until the fifth or sixth century of the present era.<sup>3</sup>

The early conception of the Baals as lesser deities, ma-

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1. Barton, op. cit., p. 172.

2. Badé, op. cit., p. 198.

3. Albright, op. cit., p. 93.



ny of them not far removed from mankind, explains the custom of offering them food and drink, which is referred to in Jeremiah 7:18. These offerings usually consisted of grain, wine, and oil (Hosea 2:8). It has been maintained that this custom also indicates a remnant of ancestor-worship.<sup>1</sup> This theory seems to be substantiated by the suggestion of Deuteronomy 26:14 that the Canaanites buried money and goods with their dead. Other features of Canaanite worship, mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:9-11, were sorcery, divination, witchcraft, spiritism, and necromancy.

The worship of the Baals should be distinguished from the worship of the great Baal, who was coming into prominence as a national deity already at the time of the Israelite conquest. The name of this god was Melek, and as such he was known in Phoenicia and in Ammon<sup>2</sup> - in the former country he was also known as Melkart.<sup>3</sup> In Moab this god was identified with the national god, Chemosh, who had originally been a solar deity<sup>4</sup> - the identity of the two is shown in Judges 11:24, where Jephthah refers to Melek, the

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

2. The name of the god of Ammon, which occurs as "Molech" in our Bibles, should properly be read "Melek". The present vocalization is due to the fact that the Jews regularly read it as "bosheth", meaning "shame", and therefore pointed it with the vowels of that word. Robert Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, New York & London: Harper & Bros., 1941, p. 87.

3. Oesterley & Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

4. C. P. Tiele et alii, *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 12. Chemosh was represented in antiquity as an eagle, the bird of the sun.



god of the Ammonites, as Chemosh. In I Kings 11:17 we read that King Solomon built one high place for the both of them. This identification is corroborated by recent archaeological finds which have established the fact that the Moabites and Ammonites possessed the same sort of religion and worship as did the Canaanites.<sup>1</sup> In Canaan Melek was usually designated merely as "the Baal"; the two are identified in Jeremiah 32:35, where we read that the Jews "built the high places of the Baal....to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Melek". It is usually thought that this particular god was originally Baal of the storm; in later times he was identified with Baal-Shamem, the god of the sky.<sup>2</sup>

Another deity with whom we meet frequently in the Old Testament is Ashtoreth, who was widely worshiped throughout the Semitic world as goddess of fruitfulness and therefore of sensual passion.<sup>3</sup> In Canaan she was first accepted as the feminine counterpart of the masculine Baals of fertility - thus we find the plural of her name, Ashtaroth, in the Old Testament, corresponding to the many Baals of the soil. Her worship in Moab alongside of Chemosh is testified to in the Moabite stone of King Mesha. Ashtoreth was usually personified as a cow-divinity - many of her images have been

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1. Glueck, op. cit., p. 127.

2. Albright, op. cit., p. 73.

3. H. Smith, op. cit., pp. 68f.



found with two horns<sup>1</sup> (cf. Ashtaroth-Karnaim, Genesis 14:5). On certain Hittite seals she is represented as a goddess with the head of a cow and the body of a woman.<sup>2</sup> The suggestion has been made in this connection that the golden calves set up by King Jeroboam in Israel may have been representations of Ashtoreth; since they were male calves, however, it seems more likely that they were meant to be images of Baal, although Hosea 10:5 makes it clear that female calves, probably representing Ashtoreth, were worshiped in at least one place in Israel. Another goddess worshiped in Canaan was Anath, mentioned in a place-name in Judges 1:33. She seems, however, to have been fused with Ashtoreth at a very early period. In the Tell-el-Amarna tablets the same ideogram is employed to write both names.<sup>3</sup> The word "asherah", used in Biblical times with reference to the poles that were set up in the high places as representations of Ashtoreth, was originally also the name of a separate goddess.<sup>3</sup>

Two other important gods with whom the Jews came into contact in the land of Canaan were Rimmon, the god of the neighboring Syrians, and Dagon, the Philistine grain-god. The fact that the name of Rimmon, who corresponds to the Babylonian-Assyrian Ramanu, god of thunder and lightning,<sup>4</sup>

1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 13.

2. Tiele et al., op. cit., p. 12.

3. Albright, op. cit., p. 74.

4. Edwin Bissell, Biblical Antiquities, 9th ed., Philadel-



is found in at least six Canaanite place-names mentioned in Scripture would seem to indicate a considerable influence of his in that country. The point cannot be pressed, however, inasmuch as "rimmon" is also a perfectly good Hebrew word meaning either "exalted" or "a pomegranate".

The Philistine worship of Dagon was unique among the Canaanite religions in that it did not feature sexual immorality (Ezekiel 16:27). The burning of the temple of Dagon by Jonathan, brother of Judas Maccabeus, which is related in I Maccabees 10:83-84, indicates that his worship survived at least until the century before Christ. According to I Samuel 31:10 there was also a temple of Ashtoreth among the Philistines.

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phia: The American Sunday-School Union, 1888, p. 373.



## VI. Defections in Canaan

As long as Joshua lived, the children of Israel remained faithful to the God whom he represented. Joshua, in taking on himself the mantle of Moses, also seems to have been invested by the people with the same awe and reverence with which they had looked upon the great leader of the Exodus. Joshua 4:14 tells us that the people feared him "as they feared Moses". There is little doubt that this fear of the strong-minded Joshua played the determining role in keeping the children of Israel faithful to Jehovah during the first years in Canaan. According to Judges 2:7, the Israelites continued to worship their God so long as Joshua and the other elders who had seen Jehovah's power in the wilderness lived to hold them in check. The seeds of corruption were deeply sown, however, and it was no more than a generation before the apostasy which Jehovah had lamented already at Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:29) began to crop out.

As we look back today on the history of the Jewish people and their religion, it seems to have been almost inevitable that they would turn to Baalism after they had crossed the river. Although the generation that made the crossing had never known any other worship than that of Jehovah, it is very apparent that the attitudes of henotheism



must have been so deeply ingrained as to have been an almost ineradicable feature of their religious thinking. The fact that both Moses and Joshua taught a clear monotheism of Jehovah never seems to have made much of an impression on them. If they reflected at all on Moses' teachings, they probably suspected him of having made some rather extravagant claims for his God - very similar statements were, after all, made by some of the more over-zealous prophets of the other gods of those times.

At any rate, we know that the confidence of the Jews in Jehovah was never very strong. This is why they had doubted Jehovah's presence as soon as they had journeyed around to the east of Edom and why, when they had come into the land of the northern Midianites, they had immediately turned to the worship of Baal-Peor.<sup>1</sup> While they did allow themselves to be persuaded to cross the river and make war on the Canaanite inhabitants, it is interesting to note that their first tiny defeat, in which they lost only thirty-six men, made them faint with fear (Joshua 7:5). That some of them had begun to worship the idols of the Canaanites already in the lifetime of Joshua, at least alongside their worship of Jehovah if not in place of it, is indicated in Joshua's dying injunction to the people to "put away the strange gods which are among you" (Joshua 24:23).

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1. Cf. supra, pp. 27-28.



After the death of Joshua the next generation of the children of Israel turned to the worship of the Baals, the "gods" of their new homeland. Judges 2:10-12 informs us that after Joshua's death "also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers, and there arose another generation after them which knew not Jehovah....And the children of Israel....served Baalim, and they forsook Jehovah." This forsaking of Jehovah by the younger generation does not necessarily mean that the Hebrews no longer recognized Him as the God who had led them through the wilderness.<sup>1</sup> The fact that during oppression they turned to Him again and again for help would seem to indicate that they still remembered Him and His marvelous protections in the desert.

There were, however, several important factors which caused the Jews to turn from their worship of Jehovah to Baalism. Probably the basic reason was their failure to obey God's command to completely drive out the heathen Canaanite tribes that inhabited the land. Judges 1:19-36 gives a long list of peoples who were permitted to remain. Their presence in the land was fatal to the maintenance of Jehovahism. The Psalmist says as much: "They (the Jews) did not destroy the nations, concerning whom Jehovah commanded them, but were mingled among the heathen and learned their works; and they served their idols." (Psalm 106:34-36). Al-

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1. Fowler, op. cit., p. 41.



ready during Joshua's lifetime the Jews had begun to make the alliances with the Canaanites which God had forbidden (Judges 2:2), and it was not long before they began to live among them and intermarry with them (Judges 3:5-6).

The resultant commingling of two so completely different religious cultuses evidently created a vast amount of confusion in the minds of the Hebrews. The account given in the book of the Judges of the early years in Canaan would seem to indicate that they never were quite sure whether the old Canaanite gods still ruled or Jehovah had taken over the land. This vacillating position is illustrated in Judges 6, where the story of Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal in Ophrah is told. The people of Ophrah, although they were at first extremely incensed, were satisfied when Gideon's father pointed out to them that, if Baal were really god of the land, he ought to be able to defend his own altars (verse 31). The continued presence of the Canaanites in the land worked to the detriment of Jehovah in another way in that it made communication between the various groups of Hebrews very difficult. This separation tended to weaken the loyalty of the several groups to the God of the confederation.<sup>1</sup>

Another cause which prompted the worship of the Baals was that they were considered to be the ones who knew how

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1. Fowler, op. cit., p. 43.



to grow crops in Canaan.<sup>1</sup> The early Hebrews knew nothing of agriculture; what they knew they learned from the Canaanites, and they accepted Baalism as a necessary feature of a successful agricultural community. This seemed quite natural to them, because they had never thought of Jehovah as an agricultural God, anyway - He ruled in the wilderness.<sup>2</sup> As late as the time of Hosea many Jews still thought that the Baals were in charge of the produce of the soil. Jehovah says of Israel: "She did not know that I gave her corn and wine and oil....which they prepared for Baal." (Hosea 2:8). Since most of the Jews turned to agriculture for a living, they did not dare incur the anger of the Baals, the divine owners of the land, by neglect of their worship.<sup>3</sup> The fact that agriculture and Baalism were thought to be necessary concomitants of each other is shown in the fact that the sect of the Rechabites, which purposed to cling to Jehovah, also insisted on a completely nomadic way of life (Jeremiah 35:8-10).

During the period of the judges seven separate defections of the Hebrews from the worship of Jehovah are described in Scripture (Judges 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 8:33, 10:6, and 13:1, respectively). The invariable pattern which all seven follow is the Jews' forsaking Jehovah for Baal,

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 192.
  2. J. M. Powis Smith, The Origin and History of Hebrew Law, p. 54.
  3. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 191.



God's sending of an enemy oppressor to punish them, the repentance and cry of the oppressed people to Jehovah, and His raising up of a deliverer for them - whereupon the entire process is repeated. This pattern was followed so closely that it is correct to say that the worship of Jehovah during the period alternated with the worship of the Canaanite gods. A close examination of the time element involved in each of the defections reveals that each new generation in turn left the worship of Jehovah until it was forcibly called back by the exigencies of enemy oppression. After being delivered, the people seem ordinarily to have continued in the worship of the true God until the rise of another generation, although we know of some that they immediately returned to their idolatry (Judges 8:27).

The ease with which the Jews could turn away from Jehovah and back to Him again prompts us to inquire just what concept they must have had of him. It may be suggested, of course, that they saw in their oppression a punishment for their wickedness in forsaking Jehovah and that they thus recognized in Him their true and only God. Such a view would make it difficult to explain, however, why they always left Jehovah again after a time. It is interesting to note that the book of Judges does not indicate any realization on the part of the Jews that their apostasy was sin until the time of the sixth (next to last) defection (Judges 10:10). It seems a feasible suggestion, therefore, that



they actually may have looked upon Him as the God of a particular sphere of activity, who was to be invoked only under special circumstances. The idea has been proposed by a number of modern writers on the subject of Hebrew religion that Jehovah was originally a Semitic storm and war-god.<sup>1</sup> Such a conception is, of course, incompatible with the God of the Scriptures, but it does not seem unlikely that the early Jews in Canaan, remembering His mighty protection throughout the years in the wilderness and His leadership during the conquest of Canaan, may have considered Him as such. This would explain why in time of war they turned to Jehovah for aid in driving out their oppressors and then turned back again to the worship of the gods of fertility when the warfare was ended and they once more resumed their peacetime occupations.

The picture changes after the institution of the kingdom among the Jews. During the time of the undivided kingdom - that is, in the reigns of Saul and David and in the early years of Solomon - Jehovah seems to have been quite generally recognized throughout the land of Canaan. The Biblical account offers no examples of the forsaking of His worship in this period; we are told, on the contrary, that "with perfect heart they (the Jews) offered willingly to Jehovah" (I Chronicles 29:9). The increased recognition of

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1. For example, H. Smith, op. cit., p. 58.



Jehovah is indicated by the fact that before the time of David we find only six personal names mentioned in Scripture of which the word "Jehovah" in one of its forms ("Jo-", "Jeho-", "-lah", "-jah") constitutes a part. In the eighth and seventh centuries, however, more than half of the names met with are of this type.<sup>1</sup>

While the majority of the Jews, as we have pointed out above, forsook Jehovah in the centuries during which the Judges ruled, there was evidently a small nucleus that remained faithful to Him. Some of those who continued to worship Jehovah are mentioned in Judges 3:10; 13:8; 19:18; 20:1; 21:2; Ruth 1:8-9; 4:11; I Samuel 1:3 and elsewhere. David tells us in Psalm 44:1-4 that he was descended from a family that had stayed faithful to the true God. We shall attempt to identify these people a little more closely in the next chapter.

This was the group that preserved the worship of Jehovah while their neighbors were plunging themselves into the slough of Baalism. They made possible the restitution of that worship at the time of the establishment of the kingdom. The spread of the true worship throughout the whole of the land was made possible by the political unity which the early kings were able to effect - we have already seen how the political segmentation of early times worked toward the

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 195.



disintegration of Jehovism.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it is probably equally true that the unity of the early monarchy was possible only because it was based on the universal recognition of Jehovah as God. The old native Baal-religion had had the effect of splitting the country up into disunited groups whose loyalty was only local - this is shown in the fact that each Canaanite city in pre-Hebrew times had had its own king.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the victories of David, a man devoted to Jehovah, over his enemies, his honoring God in public celebrations, and the building of Solomon's imposing Temple were other factors which served to strengthen the conviction that Jehovah was now the Ruler in Canaan.<sup>3</sup>

It will probably never be fully explained just why wise King Solomon took it upon himself to overthrow the faith which had finally been built up through so many years of toil. Certainly Solomon, being inspired of God, knew that Jehovah alone was Almighty God (I Kings 8:23). He had also been fully warned of the consequences of apostasy by Jehovah Himself (I Kings 9:6-9). Nevertheless, Solomon in his later years turned to worship all of the many gods worshiped by the surrounding nations (I Kings 11:4-8). His great misstep seems to have been his taking of so many foreign wives, for all of whom he erected altars to the gods

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1. Cf. *supra*, p. 54.

2. Oesterley & Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

3. Fowler, *op. cit.*, pp. 53f.



whom they had known at home. We learn from I Kings 11:33 that Solomon's people followed him into idolatry.

It would seem that Solomon, as he grew older, just simply became too impressed with his own importance. The greatest of the kings of Israel, it probably irked him that he should have to submit his will to that of a greater and more powerful Being than he. Then, too, the splendor in which Solomon lived, his immense harem, and the vast wealth which he amassed for himself rather suggest an admiration for the other Oriental potentates of the time, from whom he copied his way of life. It may be that he also copied their cosmopolitan attitude toward religion; it was not an uncommon thing in ancient times that a master nation should accept the gods of subjugated nations into its pantheon as lesser deities. At any rate, the reintroduction of idolatry under Solomon became the great tragedy of Jewish history, splitting the nation and eventually, because the evil was not done away with, bringing about the doom of both Israel and Judah.



## VII. Centers of Jehovah-Worship

We have noted in the foregoing discussion that there were some Jews who remained faithful to Jehovah throughout the many defections of which the people were guilty under the judges. This fact would seem to imply one of two causes: either these people had a deeper knowledge of God than their fellowmen and hence were not henotheistically inclined, or they were settled in a section of Canaan which traditionally belonged to Jehovah rather than to the Baals. We would like to accept the first explanation, but we can find no evidence for it in Scripture. The second seems to us the more likely answer.

In the early pages of this paper we developed the theory that Jehovah was first thought to be the God of a tract of land in southern Canaan extending from Jerusalem southward into the desert. The traditional territory seems to have been stretched in the time of Jacob, however, to include the section which lay immediately north of Jerusalem, an area which had not been considered as belonging to Jehovah until that time (Genesis 28:16). The reason for its inclusion was probably the fact that Jacob lived there for so many years - the land was naturally considered to be Jehovah's, since the prince who ruled it was a devotee of His.



If the section round about Jerusalem and slightly to the north came to be considered the property of Jehovah, we would expect to find that the people who lived there at the time of the Israelite conquest still worshiped the true God. There seems to be some evidence that this was the case. For example, the harlot Rahab, Jericho's "fifth columnist", was clearly a worshiper of Jehovah (Joshua 2:11). We are forced to ask, however, whether God would be likely to permit the destruction of nations which worshiped Him. The obvious answer would be in the negative. We find, accordingly, that there were two tribes in Canaan whom Jehovah did not permit the Hebrews to drive out of their cities.

One of these tribes is the Jebusites, who lived in the city of Jerusalem. Joshua 15:63 informs us that the children of Israel were unable to drive these people out, although God had promised to drive out the heathen inhabitants of the land "without fail" (Joshua 3:10). To us the best solution which suggests itself is the assumption that the people of Jerusalem were still worshipers of Jehovah, as they had been in the days of Abraham and Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18). This would explain also why Araunah (Ornan), the Jebusite king, appears in II Samuel 24:22-23 as a believer in Jehovah.

The other nation which was allowed to remain was the one which inhabited the four cities of the Gibeonite confedera-



cy, Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-Jearim, all of which are only a short distance from Jerusalem. These people came to Joshua shortly after the conquest of Ai and deceived him into making a treaty with them whereby their cities were spared. The thought suggests itself that God may have permitted them to thus secure their safety because they worshiped Him. Jehovah appears in II Samuel 21:1 as the Protector of the Gibeonites, visiting a three-year famine on Israel because some of them had been slain by Saul. The fact that the Gibeonites were made attendants at Jehovah's altar by Joshua (Joshua 9:27) may lend further weight to the theory that they were Jehovists. We also find that in the time of Nehemiah the Gibeonites are prominent among those who helped to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Nehemiah 3:7). If, as we believe, the Gibeonites were servants of the true God, the further suggestion may not be out of place that they may have been the descendants of the servants whom Jacob had when he lived in that area (Genesis 35:2). We know that they must have stayed in Canaan when Jacob moved to Egypt, because Genesis 46:26 indicates that he did not take them along.

Beeroth lay about ten miles to the north of Jerusalem, while Kirjath-Jearim was the same distance to the west. Gibeon and Chephirah lay between the other two. If we add the area between and around these five cities to the area south and southwest of Jerusalem, which had always belonged to



Jehovah, we obtain a tract of land which is insignificant in size when compared to the total land area of Canaan, but which is the home of the great majority of the Jehovah-worshippers whom we meet in the pages of the Old Testament. All of the great heroes of faith come either from this section or from Gilead, which we shall discuss shortly. King David came from Bethlehem (I Samuel 16:1), six miles south of Jerusalem, as did also Naomi (Ruth 1:1).

Of the twelve judges, Othniel, being the nephew of Caleb (Judges 3:9), probably came from Hebron, the city of Caleb (Joshua 21:12), about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. Ehud was a Benjamite (Judges 3:15), which means that he lived somewhere in the territory described north of Jerusalem. Deborah lived in Mount Ephraim, between Ramah, two miles east of Gibeon, and Bethel, six miles northeast (Judges 5:5). Gideon came from Ophrah (Judges 6:11), three miles from Bethel. Tola was also a native of Mount Ephraim (Judges 10:1), as were Samuel and his mother, Hannah (I Samuel 1:1). Ibzan came from Bethlehem (Judges 12:8), and Samson lived in Zorah (Judges 13:2), two miles west of Kirjath-Jearim. The home of Shamgar (Judges 3:31) is not given us, but the suggestion has been made that it may have been Anathoth, four miles northeast of Jerusalem. Two judges, Jair (Judges 10:3) and Jephthah (Judges 11:1), came from Gilead, another center of Jehovah-worship. The only judges who did not come from such sections of the land were Elon (Judges 12:11) and



Abdon (Judges 12:13) - of their faith Scripture gives us no hint.

Micah, another early worshiper of Jehovah, also lived in Mount Ephraim (Judges 17:1). Saul, the first king of Israel, was a native of Benjamin (I Samuel 9:1) - whatever he may have become in the last years of his life, the Bible represents him as a faithful child of God when he was first made king. Only a few of the prophets reveal their birth-places to us, but we do know of Jeremiah that he came from Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1) and of Amos that he was from Tekoa (Amos 1:1), about six miles south of Bethlehem. The prophet Micah tells us that his home was in Moresheth-Gath (Micah 1:1), while Nahum reveals that he was from Elkosh (Nahum 1:1) - both of these were southwest of Jerusalem, about midway between that city and Gerar. The messages of Isaiah and Joel lead us to suspect that they may have been natives of Jerusalem, while Hosea's constant harping on the sins of Ephraim suggests that he may have come from there.

We feel that these facts are significant; it hardly seems possible that the presence of so many outstanding worshipers of Jehovah in these sections and their almost complete absence, so far as we can tell, in other parts of the land<sup>1</sup> should be due to mere coincidence. The evidence

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1. To be fair, we must admit that some rare exceptions may be found. The outstanding one is the prophet Elisha, who came from Abel-Meholah (I Kings 19:16), a small town on the Jordan northeast of Samaria. Elisha lived and worked



here presented indicates to us that the worship of Jehovah in Canaan, particularly in the early years, was limited to a few relatively small areas which had been recognized as belonging to Him since the time of the patriarchs. We do not believe that the worship of the Baals had ever supplanted the worship of the true God in those sections.

Further proof for this thesis is the fact that all of the cities which appear in early times as centers of the worship of Jehovah are located in the area described above. Besides Gibeon, where the great sanctuary of Jehovah was located (I Kings 3:4), these cities are five in number. They are Bethel (I Samuel 10:3), located, as we have said, six miles to the northeast of Gibeon, Shiloh (I Samuel 1:3), nine miles north of Bethel, Gilgal (I Samuel 15:21), seven miles north of Bethel, Mizpeh (Judges 20:1; I Samuel 7:6), a few miles south of Bethel, and Nob, designated in I Samuel 22:19 as "the city of the priests", which was situated in Benjamin between Jerusalem and Gibeon. The sanctuaries in these places seem to have been devoted exclusively to Jehovah even during the defections in the time of the judges. Excavations at Bethel, Shiloh, Mizpeh, and Gibeon, another city in the same neighborhood, have revealed a complete absence of the figurines and plaques of Ashtoreth which are so common in the rest of Canaan. Idols are not

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in relatively late times, however.



found in these places until the times of the later kings.<sup>1</sup>

The other section of Canaan which remained faithful to Jehovah was Gilead, the land on the east bank of the Jordan River. In Judges 11:9-10 it is indicated that Jephthah and the elders of Gilead still believed in Jehovah at a time when their brethren across the river had forsaken Him. We read in I Chronicles 5:20 that the Gileadites were successful in battle "because they put their trust in Him (Jehovah)". The faith of Gilead is also shown from the fact that some of the great servants of Jehovah came from there. In addition to the judges Jephthah and Jair, we have Elijah, one of the greatest heroes of faith named in the Old Testament, who was "of the inhabitants of Gilead" (I Kings 17:1). The same is true of Jehu (II Kings 9:4), whom God chose to be king of Israel. It is noteworthy that God went to Gilead to find a worthy candidate to replace the corrupt royal dynasty of Israel. We know from the Moabite stone of King Mesha that Gilead remained faithful to its God for a long time even under the later kings - Mesha's inscription mentions that he sacked a sanctuary of Jehovah at Mount Nebo in Gilead.<sup>2</sup>

We are able to adduce two reasons which were probably contributing factors in keeping Gilead faithful. The most important consideration would seem to be the fact that all

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1. Albright, op. cit., p. 114.

2. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 219.



of the former inhabitants of the east bank of the Jordan had been destroyed in accordance with God's command (Numbers 21:35). Thus there was no one left in the land to mislead the Israelites who settled there. The fact that the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh, who made their home in Gilead, were primarily nomadic (Numbers 32:4) may also have been an important cause. Since they did not turn to agriculture, as did those on the west side of Jordan, there was no incentive for them to follow their kinsmen into the worship of the Baals, the gods of fertility.

The theory that worship of Jehovah in the land of Canaan was centered chiefly in the Mount Ephraim-Benjamin-Jerusalem section and in Gilead is further borne out by certain references in the poetical and prophetic books which single out these regions as the special followers of God. Thus in Psalm 60:7 and in Psalm 108:8 God says: "Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver!" In Psalm 80:2 Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (the northern part of Gilead) are designated as particularly worthy of God's protection. The same idea seems to underlie the prophecy of Jeremiah that the soul of the returning Israelites "shall be satisfied upon Mount Ephraim and Gilead" (50:19).



### VIII. Apostasy in Israel

Already during the lifetime of King Solomon God had purposed to split the kingdom after his death. I Kings 11:11 brings out the fact that the dividing of the kingdom was to be a punishment for Solomon's wickedness in reintroducing idolatry into his realm. God's purpose is set forth in I Kings 11:38 - He hoped to make a new start and build up a nation which would serve Him alone. I Kings 12:15 informs us that God caused the stubbornness of King Rehoboam over against the requests of his people in order that these ends might be accomplished.

Israel, however, was not a good place for the nurture of the worship of the true God. Comprising the northern half of the land of Canaan, it was too far removed from the traditional possession of Jehovah in the south. It does not come as any surprise, therefore, when we read that the northern tribes left the worship of Jehovah almost as soon as they had gained their independence from the southern portion of the kingdom. It seems likely that King Jeroboam, who took the initiative in overthrowing the worship of Jehovah in his dominions, was of the opinion that Jehovah, having no power in the north of Canaan, would be unable to punish him for his sin. Jeroboam's words in I Kings 12:26-



27) indicate that he was motivated by the fear that his throne and life would be forfeit if his people continued to worship Jehovah. He reasoned that his subjects, if they worshiped Jehovah, would go to the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem to pay homage to Him and would there renew there allegiance to the southern monarch.

It was to forestall any such possibility that Jeroboam established sanctuaries in his kingdom in which golden bull-calves were set up as the gods of Israel (I Kings 12: 28). Most of the modern writers on the subject assume that these bull-calves were actually meant to be images of Jehovah.<sup>1</sup> One authority even feels that the rebellion of ten tribes of Israel was a nationalistic reaction to Solomon's introduction of foreign gods and an attempt to restore the ancient worship of Jehovah in its pristine purity.<sup>2</sup> We can find no warrant for this view in Scripture, however. In the first place, there is not sufficient evidence for the thesis that Jehovah was ever worshiped under the form of a calf. The identification of Jehovah with Aaron's golden calf, to which the upholders of the above theory make reference, involves difficulties which to us seem insurmountable.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, we believe that Jeroboam's purpose was to

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1. For example, Badè, op. cit., p. 99.

2. Eduard von Hartmann, Das Religiöse Bewusstsein der Menschheit, 3te Aufl., Bad Sachsa im Harz: Hermann Haacke, Verlagsbuchhandlung, pp. 382f.

3. Cf. supra, p. 25.



prevent the worship of Jehovah in any form. Probably the most important feature of Jeroboam's action was the dropping of the very name Jehovah, for any Israelite who worshiped the name might easily have been drawn to the great Temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem.

On the other hand, there does seem to be sufficient evidence to show that the bull-calves were representations of the great Baal, Melek, the traditional great god of Canaan. It has been established that the Phoenicians worshiped this god under the form of a bull,<sup>1</sup> and archaeologists have discovered that the bull was also a familiar object in Canaanite Baal-worship as a symbol of fertility. A large number of figures of bulls and bull-calves have been uncovered in Palestine in strata which antedate the coming of the Hebrews.<sup>2</sup> In II Kings 13:6 the connection is definitely made between the worship of the calves and the old Baal-worship with its "asherim".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Tobit 1:5 specifically designates the calves as representations of Baal; while this book does not have Scriptural authority, it does indicate that in ancient times the identification which we have made was the generally accepted one.

From the days of Jeroboam the worship of the bull-calves of Baal (Melek) was established in Israel down to the very

1. Tiele et al., op. cit., p. 56.

2. Cesterley & Robinson, op. cit., pp. 159f.

3. Cf. supra, p. 45.



end of the nation's history (II Kings 17:22-23). As we read the history of king after king, we are struck by the constant repetition of the information that "he walked in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin" (I Kings 16:26 and many other passages). We are told this of every king<sup>1</sup> except Shallum, who ruled only for one month in the last years of the kingdom (II Kings 15:13) and Hoshea, the last of the kings (II Kings 17:4). Many of the kings seem to have been in a rather confused mind regarding the actual position of Jehovah and Baal. The bull-calves had to stay for reasons of political expediency, but many of the rulers seem to have believed in their hearts that Jehovah might still be able to exercise His power even in their domain. Kings like Jehoram and Jehoahaz, while they would not reintroduce the worship of Jehovah in Israel, nevertheless turned to Him or His prophets when they were in trouble (II Kings 6:10 and 13:4, respectively); the same is true of Jeroboam (I Kings 14:2). Even wicked Ahab named his children after Jehovah (Ahaziah, Jehoram, and Athaliah).

It may be well to include a note regarding the worship

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1. Nadab - I Kings 15:26; Baasha - I Kings 15:34; Elah - I Kings 16:13; Zimri - I Kings 16:19; Omri - I Kings 16:26; Ahab - I Kings 16:31-33; Ahaziah - I Kings 22:52; Jehoram - II Kings 3:3; Jehu - II Kings 10:29; Jehoahaz - II Kings 13:2; Jehoash - II Kings 13:11; Jeroboam II - II Kings 14:24; Zachariah - II Kings 15:9; Menahem - II Kings 15:18; Pekahiah - II Kings 15:24; Pekah - II Kings 15:28.



of Baal under Ahab and Jezebel. If we are correct in identifying Jeroboam's bull-calves as images of Baal, it is evident that Jezebel did not actually introduce a new religion into Israel. She did make Baalism especially obnoxious, however, by bringing over 800 Phoenician priests with her (I Kings 18:19) - presumably these people introduced the same scandalous sexual license which made the Phoenician city of Tyre notorious among the nations (Isaiah 23:17). Another innovation of Jezebel which particularly incurred the wrath of God was her bitter persecution of the prophets of Jehovah (I Kings 18:13). It was for these reasons that the Baalism of Jezebel was fought with special fervor by the prophets Elijah and Elisha. The foreign priests whom she had brought with her were completely destroyed by Jehu shortly after his slaying of Jezebel (II Kings 10:18-28).

God had infinite patience with Israel. For over two hundred years He permitted her to go unpunished while her people, despite repeated warnings from God's prophets (I Kings 14:15, Amos 4:10-12, Micah 1:6-7, and others), stubbornly continued to follow Baal. Finally, however, the cup of God's anger was filled to overflowing - then His vengeance struck and struck hard. In the year 721 B. C. Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, defeated Israel and took its people captive into his own land. Thus ended the great experiment by which God had hoped to raise up a nation purified of all



henotheism. The fact that Israel was taken into captivity because she had refused to obey Jehovah is specified in II Kings 18:12.

A full catalogue of the sins for which Israel was indicted is to be found in II Kings 17:8-17 - they had done wickedly (verse 11) in deliberately rejecting Jehovah's admonition (verses 13-14) and covenant (verse 15) and in disobeying His commandments (verse 16); specifically, they had served idols in direct defiance of Jehovah's orders (verse 12), building high places for them (verse 9), burning incense (verse 11), and setting up the pillars and poles which marked the worship of the fertility deities therein (verse 10). Here they had worshiped the bull-calves of Melek as well as the Baals of the heavenly bodies (verse 16). To make matters worse, they had indulged in the sinful practices which particularly rendered Baalism so repugnant - prostitution, witchcraft, and infant sacrifice (verse 17). Surely the time had come to clean out these Augean stables of henotheism and idolatry!

After they were taken into captivity in Assyria, the Israelites were lost to history. There are no reliable indications, therefore, which might show the character of their further religious thinking. We have a hint, however, in the apocryphal book of Tobit, where we read that all of Tobit's kindred in the Assyrian captivity "did eat the bread of the Gentiles" (1:10), that is, had turned to the worship of the



gods of Assyria. We may take the statement for what it is worth - we must admit, however, that such action would certainly have been in keeping with their concept of religion as we have come to know it.

The story of Sennacherib does not differ greatly from that of his sister Sargon to the north. Judah, like Israel, was plagued by a nation which could think only in terms of heathenism. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that the two kingdoms met the same stiff-necked resistance as the Israelites when they were bidden to throw aside their false gods and turn to Jehovah alone. The history of Judah, like that of Israel, is an account of the interminable faithlessness of a nation which obstinately refused to accept the worship of a gracious God. This is the situation that continued until the time that God's patience wore thin and He resolved to destroy this nation as He had the other.

If we examine the Biblical record, however, we discover that there is a difference to be noted between the history of Judah and that of Israel. The picture is not quite so black as it seems to be true in part because a number of the kings of Judah were men who earnestly strove to live according to the will of God in part because most of the people still did not worship Jehovah in the proper manner, but at least worshiped Him to some extent. A very important feature in Judah is the fusion of the worship of Jehovah with that of the native gods. The result is the



### IX. Syncretism in Judah

The story of Judah does not differ greatly from that of her sister kingdom to the north. Judah, like Israel, was peopled by a nation which could think only in terms of heathenism. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that the Jews displayed the same stiff-necked recalcitrance as the Israelites when they were bidden to throw aside their false gods and turn to Jehovah alone. The history of Judah, like that of Israel, is an account of the interminable faithlessness of a nation which steadfastly refused to accept the mercies of a gracious God. This is the situation that continued until the time that God's patience wore thin and He resolved to destroy this nation as He had the other.

As we examine the Biblical record, however, we discover that there is a difference to be noted between the idolatry of Judah and that of Israel. The picture is not quite so black in Judah; this is true in part because a number of the kings of Judah were men who earnestly strove to live God-pleasing lives and in part because most of the people, while they may not have worshiped Jehovah in the proper manner, did at least worship Him to some extent. A very common phenomenon in Judah is the fusion of the worship of Jehovah with that of the native gods. The result is the



emergence of a new type of cultus which embodies certain features of both of the old types. Thus we find numerous instances in which Jehovah was revered under the form of an idol or in which He was identified as a Baal and worshiped as such. In still other cases Jehovah was venerated as one of a number of gods.

To all such instances of the coalescence of Jehovism and heathenism we give the name of syncretism. The reason why syncretism is so widely met with in Judah, as we shall bring out, is probably twofold. The chief cause seems to be the fact that many of the Jews were evidently never sure whether Jehovah or the Baals ruled in their land. The Baals were indeed the traditional gods of the land, but it was also true that a large part of Judah's territory was included in the possession of Jehovah. To be on the safe side, therefore, many honest and well-meaning Jews undertook to include both in their worship - hence the hopelessly confused mixture that confronts us in the days of the kingdom.

Another important factor in ancient religious psychology which helped to bring about Jewish syncretism is alluded to in Psalm 115:2-3 - this is the desire for some visible object towards which one's worship may be directed. Jehovah, of course, had no visible form; it was not unnatural, therefore, that many Jews should have been disposed to select some idol whom they designated as Jehovah. No doubt the contact of the children of Israel with the religions of



Egypt had helped to inculcate the idea that a god must be worshiped under some visible image.<sup>1</sup>

The syncretism of the worship of Jehovah with that of the heathen gods was by no means a thing unknown before the establishment of the kingdom of Judah. The earliest syncretist of whom we have record was Rachel, the wife of Jacob. Although she had accepted the God of her husband (Genesis 30:6), she still took along the idols which she had worshiped formerly when she left her home to go with him (Genesis 31:19). Not long after the Israelite conquest we encounter the case of Micah, an Ephraimite, who, although he worshiped Jehovah (Judges 17:13), had an idol temple in his own house (Judges 17:5). Even the Levite whom he employed as his priest was not troubled at this situation (Judges 17:11). Micah's mother saw no contradiction in dedicating silver to Jehovah and then making images out of it (Judges 17:3). The army of Danites which took Micah's idols and set them up in their own city (Judges 18:30) also confessed faith in Jehovah (Judges 18:10). Judges 8:24-27 tells us how the great judge Gideon, one who had spoken directly to God and had felt His power in effecting deliverance from the Midianites (Judges 6 - 8), used the golden earrings of the defeated enemy to make an idol which he set up in the city of Ophrah for all the people to worship. Even David

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1. Von Hartmann, op. cit., p. 331.



had images in his home in the early years before God revealed His full truth to him (I Samuel 19:13). In I Samuel 23:9-10 and in I Samuel 30:7-8 are recorded instances in which David directly addressed his oracle-idol<sup>1</sup> as Jehovah.

It seems to have been of rather frequent occurrence throughout the history of the Jews in southern Canaan that Jehovism and Baalism were hybridized into a new religion that continued the ancient Canaanite forms of worship, but placed a new supreme God, Jehovah, at the head of the system. This synthesis of two systems which were diametrically opposed to each other was largely made possible by the widespread ignoring of Jehovah's injunction against using the high places of Baal for the worship of Jehovah.<sup>2</sup> II Chronicles 33:17 tells us how the people sacrificed to Jehovah in the high places. According to I Kings 3:2 this was the regular practice in the time of David and Solomon, inasmuch as there was no temple of Jehovah as yet. King Solomon himself sacrificed and burned incense on them (I Kings 3:3).

In theory it is perfectly true, of course, that there was no absolute wrong in the taking over of the high places

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1. The idol spoken of here is designated in Hebrew as an "ephod", as is also the above-mentioned idol of Gideon. According to R. L. Ottley, The Religion of Israel, Cambridge: The University Press, 1922, the ephod was probably a wooden figure covered with plates of a precious metal. The word appears to mean "something thrown over".
  2. Cf. supra, p. 31.



for the worship of the true God. In practice, however, it meant the dissolution of pure Jehovism. The high places were inseparably connected in the minds of the common people with Baalism, and their use for the worship of Jehovah signified to them that He, too, was a Baal. The sneering question of Rab-Shakeh (II Kings 18:22; II Chronicles 32:12; Isaiah 36:7) indicates that outsiders at least were unable to distinguish between the worship of Jehovah and the Baalism of the high places: "If ye say unto me, 'We trust in Jehovah, our God!'", is not that He whose high places.... Hezekiah hath taken away?" Probably the great majority of the Jews were similarly unable to make the distinction. Thus it came about that Jehovism and the heathenism of Canaan were so often mixed and even identified. Excavations at Tell-el-Nasbeh in 1935 revealed the existence in that place of a temple dedicated to Jehovah and Ashtoreth at the same time. Temples of this sort do not seem to have been rare.<sup>1</sup>

It is this type of syncretism that we meet with as we follow the fortunes of Judah through the pages of Scripture. From the worship of Jehovah on the high places as it had been carried on under David and Solomon it was but a small step to the practice of Baalism with all of its evils. The resultant pollution of Jehovism is referred to

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 217.



constantly throughout Judah's history in the notation that king after king "did not remove the high places" from the land. This information is given us of every king from Rehoboam to the time of Hezekiah<sup>1</sup> - a period of over two and a half centuries. Even those kings who were themselves earnest worshipers of Jehovah did not destroy these syncretistic sanctuaries; two of them, Asa and his son, Jehoshaphat, did make token attempts to get rid of them (II Chronicles 14:5 and 17:6, respectively), but their efforts were so short-lived that the chronicler of the books of the Kings did not even bother to note them. One gains the impression that even the kings were never certain which god might be chief god in their land.

The recognition of Baalism, even in its modified form, opened the door for the introduction of the crassest forms of idolatry. Baalism adapted itself particularly well to the inclusion of any number of new gods, since there was no limit to the number of Baals; it was an easy matter to introduce a new god merely by identifying him as a Baal. We find, therefore, that many foreign idols were introduced under such kings as Jehoram (II Kings 8:18), Ahaziah (II Kings 8:27), and Ahaz (II Kings 16:10-13). The Jews even

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1. Rehoboam - I Kings 14:23; Abijam - I Kings 15:3; Asa - I Kings 15:14; Jehoshaphat - I Kings 22:43; Jehoram - II Chronicles 21:11; Ahaziah - II Kings 8:27; Jehoash - II Kings 12:3; Amaziah - II Kings 14:4; Azariah - II Kings 15:4; Jotham - II Kings 15:35; Ahaz - II Kings 16:4.



made themselves a god out of the brass serpent which Moses had made in the wilderness; they gave it the name of Nehushtan (II Kings 18:4).

This was the situation which prevailed when Hezekiah came to the throne of his fathers. The prophet Isaiah, who lived at the same time, describes the prevalence of idolatry in his day: "Their land (Judah) is full of idols!" (2:8). Hezekiah took it upon himself, however, to put an end to the faithlessness which had brought Judah low. Of him it is recorded that he finally removed the high places and destroyed them together with the pillars, poles, and idols which they contained (II Chronicles 31:1). He reopened the Temple and did his best to reestablish the true religion (II Chronicles 29:3-5). He also decreed the keeping of a Passover according to the laws which Moses had laid down - an item which had not been observed in Judah for a long time (II Chronicles 30:5). He even attempted to persuade the people of the northern kingdom to come and join with Judah in her newly revived worship of Jehovah, but his efforts met with little success (II Chronicles 30:10).

The change which came over the land of Judah in the time of Hezekiah is reflected in the tone of Isaiah's writings. In the earlier section of his prophecy (chapters 1 - 35) he describes the idols of Judah (2:8) and condemns them in the most severe terms, forecasting their destruction (2:18) and exhorting his hearers to return to Jehovah (26:4). The ter-



rible wrath of God (30:27) and the coming destruction of Judah and Israel are frequently alluded to (24:1-4; 29:1-6, etc.). In chapters 36 - 39, however, we read the account of Hezekiah's reform. In the latter part of the book (chapters 40 - 66) Isaiah assumes the worship of Jehovah and warns against a return to the idols (57:3-5); he brings out the fact that they are utterly valueless as gods (41:29 and often). He stresses the fact that Jehovah alone is God (45:5-6). In much of this section the future glories of the spiritual Israel and of the Messiah are foretold; evidently God considered Hezekiah's reform period an appropriate occasion for the revelation of His full glory in the Christ.

This new period of devotion to the God of Abraham was short-lived. II Kings 21:2-9 informs us that the next king, Manasseh, ushered in the worst reign of idolatry in the history of the nation. Not only did he rebuild all of the high places and altars of Baal which his father had removed, but he introduced the worship of the heavenly bodies, sacrificed his own son to Melek, and even desecrated the Temple itself with an idol of that god. There is a tradition, found in the pseudepigraphical "Ascension of Isaiah", to the effect that that prophet was killed during Manasseh's reign by being sawn asunder.<sup>1</sup> It was the wickedness of the Jews under this king that drove God to the fi-

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1. Cesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 254.



nal determination to destroy Judah as He had Israel (II Kings 21:11-14).

After Manasseh's time the situation rapidly became worse as Judah turned more and more to the coarsest forms of idolatry. The brief resurgence of Jehovism in the time of Josiah, grandson of Manasseh (II Kings 23:3-24), could not avert Judah's doom - God tells us in Jeremiah 3:10 that "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly". The situation became increasingly bad under Josiah's successors until even the surrounding nations were scandalized at Judah's wickedness, considering her "like unto all the heathen" (Ezekiel 25:8). The prophets of the Almighty who tried to warn Judah of the wrath to come were punished with imprisonment (Jeremiah 37:15 - Jeremiah); one of them was slain by the king himself (Jeremiah 26:23 - Urijah). The tragic fiasco finally came to an end in the year 587 B. C. when Jerusalem was destroyed and its inhabitants taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (II Kings 25:1).

While the cause of the destruction and captivity of Israel and of Judah were the same so far as the people were concerned, it is important that we realize that God had a different purpose in the two cases. With Israel God's purpose was to cast out forever the faithless nation that had made itself so obnoxious to Him (II Kings 17:20). Judah, however, He did not mean to destroy - He wished to give her



another chance (Jeremiah 12:14-17). It was God's intention to bring back a select remnant cleansed of all henotheism, with whom He might start anew (Jeremiah 24:5-9). The Exile was to serve the purpose of purging the Jews of all potential and actual idolaters by scattering them far and wide. Thus did God propose to build a nation that would be fit to carry on His promise and eventually bring His Son into the world.

Henotheism and syncretism did not die with Jerusalem. As soon as the few Jews remaining from the Babylonian captivity came down into Egypt, we find them turning to the worship of the gods of that land (Jeremiah 44:8). The Elohaphané papyri, a collection of documents of the fifth century B. C. From the Jewish colony of the same name in upper Egypt, contain the information that Jehovah was worshiped in the colony along with a full pantheon of some twenty other gods whom the Jews borrowed from their neighbors.<sup>1</sup>

It may be interesting to note that the Arabs who inhabit Palestine today practice a type of syncretism which is almost exactly similar to the Jewish syncretism of three millennia ago. While these Mohammedans are nominally the strictest of monotheists, it is the common custom for them to invoke the help of numerous spirits to whom they offer reverence. These spirits, dwelling in sacred trees and sa-

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1. Edouard Naville, Archaeology of the Old Testament, London: Robert Scott, Roxburghe House, 1913, pp. 139f.



cred springs, seem to be the precise equivalent of the ancient Baals of Canaan, although now they are given the names of Christian and Mohammedan saints.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it hardly seems that the Roman Catholic custom in heathen countries of identifying the various saints and the Virgin Mary with local gods and goddesses can be much different. No doubt this is true of Catholic saint-worship in general.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Fowler, op. cit., pp. 11f.

2. Peters, op. cit., p. 120.



## X. After the Exile

One of the greatest stories in the history of the world - second only to the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ - is the dynamic narrative of the building of a nation that would be worthy to bring Him forth. This is the story about which the Old Testament is built - the theme to which the greater portion of our Bible is dedicated. The problems were many and difficult - to break down the crippling concepts which the Jews carried with them from heathenism required the utmost in the patience and resourcefulness of an Almighty God. Through the centuries of darkness, however, God's Spirit continued to strive with man, confident in His infinite wisdom that the day would come when the remnant of His people would lift up imploring hands to Him alone. We must recognize in this fact the key to understanding the chastisements of God in the Old Testament.

Our story is a tale with a happy ending. The Exile was God's extreme measure for the purging of His people. If that should fail, He had every intention to "utterly pluck up and destroy that nation" (Jeremiah 12:17). It did not fail, however; the Jews whom we meet after the Exile are no longer ready to worship any god who may live in the place



where they happen to be, but their reverence is directed to Jehovah alone. Washed clean in the streams of the Babylonian affliction, they turned at last to "praise the Lord with a whole heart" (Psalm 111:1). Thus were fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: "At that day shall a man....have respect to the Holy One of Israel, and he shall not look to...the work of his hands." (17:7-8).

There seem to have been several causes which helped the Jews to recognize at last the universality and uniqueness of their God. Of course, we must realize that we are dealing here with a select group (Jeremiah 24:5-9); not all of the exiled Jews accepted Jehovah as their only God. Ezekiel reports from Babylon that some of the Jews there have turned again to idolatry (14:3). In Ezekiel 11:16 God tells His prophet that, although the Jews are scattered far and wide, He "will be a sanctuary to them to a little extent in the countries where they shall come" - that is, only a relatively small portion of them would remain faithful to Him. No doubt this small group was the one among whom the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel lived and worked; their children became the remnant that returned.

Probably the most powerful factor in bringing home to these Jews the greatness of Jehovah was the continuation of prophecy in Babylon, a foreign land. The indisputable implication was that Jehovah must also be God of that country. A great opportunity was given the prophets to drive



hence the idea of Jehovah-worship in the fact that the otherwise leaderless Jews had to look to them for guidance; thus they were able to gain the full confidence of the people. Once they had realized the true position of Jehovah, many of the Jews were ready to suffer death rather than worship the idols of Babylon (Daniel 3:16-17). The fact of the fall of the Chaldean empire, which had been foreseen by their God, but not by the Babylonian gods, probably played an important role in bringing them at last to a full monotheism.<sup>1</sup>

The strong faith of the returning Jews is indicated in Ezra 3:10-11. They worshiped Him now as the great Jehovah who alone was God, the Creator of heaven and earth, whose name was to be blessed forevermore (Nehemiah 9:5-6). In a public assembly they made the most solemn of compacts with God (Nehemiah 9:38), forswearing the idolatries of their ancestors (Nehemiah 9:16-18, 26-28). The proper support was provided for the keeping of this compact in the institution of public worship and of the public reading of God's Law (Nehemiah 8:2-6). The keeping of the feasts of Jehovah was also attended to (Nehemiah 8:18). For a short period immediately after the return a few of the Jews did lapse once more into the henotheistic worship of the Canaanite abominations (Ezra 9:1), but the situation was brought under

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1. Oesterley & Robinson, op. cit., p. 329.



control soon enough that no great harm was done (Ezra 10: 10-17). The prohibition of intermarriage with the surrounding nations was strictly observed in order to prevent any repetition of the idolatrous incursions which had destroyed their fathers (Nehemiah 13:27).

From this time on Jewish henotheism is only an ugly memory. In the centuries that followed God's people pressed ever more closely to their hearts the gift which they had so recently realized. In later years their recognition of His glory became complete. We find this new understanding expressed again and again in the books of the Apocrypha, most of which were written shortly before the beginning of the Christian era. These writings abound in statements which testify to God's universality and omnipotence. The designation of Jehovah as the "Almighty", which in the Old Testament was used only by those few who were directly inspired of God,<sup>1</sup> is regularly employed in the books of II Esdras, Judith, Additions to Esther, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Prayer of Manasses, and II Maccabees.<sup>2</sup>

This, then, was the faith of the new Israel. It was a faith whose chief tenet was expressed by Christ: "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou

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1. Cf. note, p. 5.

2. II Esdras 1:15, 28, 33; 6:32; 8:24; 12:47; 13:23; 16:62; Judith 8:13; 15:6; 16:4, 17; Additions to Esther 13:9; 16:21; Ecclesiasticus 50:17; Baruch 3:1, 4; Prayer of Manasses 1; II Maccabees 1:24; 3:22.



serve!" (Matthew 4:10). Their faith in one God was the outcome of many centuries of bitter strife between a loving Father and His stubborn children. The moulding of a nation purified of its henotheism, which should be a fit instrument to bring God's great promise to fulfillment - this was the problem of the Old Testament. In the Exile the answer to that problem was found, and God could now set the stage for the entrance of His Son, Jesus Christ. The fulness of time was at hand.

THE END



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