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SHORT TITLE PAGE

HENOtheISM OR MONOTHEISM?

THE OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF GOD
HENOTHEISM OR MONOTHEISM?

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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June 1959

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

One of the major problems in the field of Old Testament theology centers around the concept of God in the Old Testament. For a number of years scholars have been discussing the antiquity of the concept of monotheism in the Old Testament. Conservative scholars maintain that the Bible has always taught monotheism, while many liberal critical scholars say that monotheism in the Old Testament is a rather late development and that for centuries henotheism was the accepted concept of God among the Hebrew people.

Definition of Terms

When F. Max Mueller first introduced the concept of henotheism, he defined it "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."¹ Since then the concept has become almost synonymous with the concept of monolatry so that now henotheism is defined usually as the worship of one God whose authority and power is confined to one's own people or country but a worship which does

¹F. Max Mueller, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 275.

not exclude the recognition of other deities.² In fact the henotheist takes the existence of other gods for granted.

The Reason for this Study

That there are occurrences of henotheistic practices in the Old Testament cannot be denied, as will be shown later. The major concern of this thesis is to determine what caused these occurrences of henotheism. Is henotheism a teaching and belief which the Old Testament sanctions or is it an aberration of its true teaching? Did the Old Testament concept of God develop gradually from henotheism to monotheism, as the liberal scholars claim, or was monotheism basic to its earliest teaching which later was corrupted by sin and which degenerated into henotheism among some of the people?

The Status of Problem Today

Scholars have differed widely in their opinion concerning this question of the concept of God in the Old Testament. Some of them (Rowley, Oesterley, T. W. Robinson, Fosdick, and others) say that the Hebrew religion developed through henotheism to monotheism. Other scholars (Albright, Heinisch, May, Wright, and others) say that monotheism was always taught by the leaders of the Hebrews. Today this discussion seems to be carried on mainly by Albright and Rowley.

²G. E. Wright, The Old Testament against its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), p. 36.

The Thesis of This Paper

It is the thesis of this paper that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament as the one unique God, creator and ruler of the world, but that the Hebrew people because of sin and through contact with their pagan contemporaries degenerated into henotheism occasionally.

An Overview of the Thesis

Chapter II sets forth some of the pre-suppositions of liberal scholarship which have led to the problem of the antiquity of Old Testament monotheism. In Chapter III there is a discussion of some of the Biblical incidents which have led some scholars to the conclusion that there was a development in the Old Testament from henotheism to monotheism. Chapter IV takes up the thesis of this paper and discusses early monotheistic teachings in the light of Genesis. Chapter V is a re-study and re-evaluation of the incidents listed in Chapter III in the light of the thesis to show that these incidents admit of various interpretations. Chapter VI attempts to show that the Old Testament consistently teaches monotheism. This teaching became progressively clearer and more easily understood as God from time to time revealed Himself through each successive leader.

Position regarding Matters of Isagogics

The position of this paper concerning Biblical criticism and textual compilation and transmission will be conservatively Biblical. It appears that the problems raised by Higher Criticism are as great as the problems they seek to solve. For example, although some Higher Critics base much of their dating of the antiquity of the Old Testament books on the use of the divine names יהוה or אֱלֹהִים by the Biblical authors, it appears from a concordance study that both names are used interchangeably for God by the later writers (Isaiah 45:3,5,14) as well as by the earlier writers. To discuss the concept of God on the basis of the results of critical studies on the origin of the various books of the Old Testament would lead far afield. The Bible will be treated as the unique revelation of God given to men wherein He reveals His nature and activity in history.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM

The entire problem of the Old Testament concept of God arose in the late nineteenth century, when Old Testament scholars led by Julius Wellhausen propounded and taught the idea that in the Old Testament the concept of God among the people had developed from polytheism to henotheism and then finally to monotheism through the teachings of the prophets.¹

It would appear that these Old Testament critical scholars based their teachings on three major assumptions or pre-suppositions concerning religion. G. E. Wright says,

it is well to bear in mind certain pre-suppositions upon which it (the hypothesis of the development of Old Testament religion from simple, primitive ideas to the advanced and enlightened conception of Second Isaiah) is based. . . . In the first place it assumes that the real nature of early Israelite religion is to be discovered by the methodology of comparative religion. . . . The second major pre-supposition of critical scholarship has been the Hegelian assumption that history is a steady movement from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex. . . . A third pre-supposition of a large section of critical scholarship in the past is theological: it assumes that the Old Testament is a history of man's ideas about God, rather than a history of divine self-disclosure or of divine activity.²

Since these pre-suppositions have greatly influenced the outcome of the problems, an exposition of them follows.

¹H. H. Rowley, "Living Issues in Biblical Scholarship: The Antiquity of Israelite Monotheism," The Expository Times, LXI (August, 1950), 333.

²G. E. Wright, "Interpreting the Old Testament," Theology Today, III (July, 1946), 181-183.

The First Assumption: Comparative Religions

The first assumption of critical scholarship, which created the problem regarding the Old Testament concept of God, seems to be that the real nature of early Israelite religion is to be discerned through the methodology of comparative religion.

Since the renaissance and the Reformation, man has become increasingly more interested in his fellow man--his person, beliefs, and achievements. This interest in people led various scholars to study other cultures in the world. This also brought with it an increased emphasis on comparative religion and the history of religions. Various scholars studied the other cultures in the world and observed what these people thought about their god. They then collected and attempted to categorize these ideas of God. Many different ideas of God were observed, a few of which were: (a) Animism, the belief that all nature is possessed, pervaded, crowded with spiritual beings;² (b) Polytheism, the belief in many gods; (c) Henotheism, the belief that one god controls the worshiper's fate but also recognizes the existence of other gods in other places; (d) Monotheism, the belief that there is only one God and that no other gods exist.

³J. B. Noss, Man's Religions (Revised edition; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 18.

Critical scholarship accepts the thought that Israel's religion was much like that of her cultural contemporaries and neighbors.

From Biblical and extra-Biblical sources, it is apparent that there was much polytheism in the Biblical world during the Old Testament period of history. The Babylonians, Greeks, and Egyptians were generally and usually polytheists. Also the Ras Shamra inscriptions have shed much light on the ancient Canaanite religion with its pantheon of deities.⁴

It also appears that during the time of the Patriarchs and of the Exodus, the dominant religious concept of the Semitic and non-Semitic nomads was henotheism. It was the custom among these nomads, when they pitched their camp in a new location that they would first sacrifice to the gods that were thought to dwell in that place.⁵ An inscription uncovered at Teima in Western Arabia reveals the quandary of a nomad stranger by the name of Salmsezab. In making a sacrifice to his own tribal god, he assures the gods of Teima that he recognizes their supremacy in their own territory and begs them to consider his sacrifice as being offered to them.⁶

⁴Rowley, op. cit., p. 336.

⁵H. T. Fowler, The Origin and Growth of the Hebrew Religion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 10.

⁶James Robertson, The Early Religion of Israel as set forth by Biblical Writers and by Modern Critical Historians (Fifth edition; London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1896), p. 197.

Old Testament scholars have concluded that if these conceptions of God appeared among Israel's close neighbors, then they must also have been prevalent in Israel.

The Second Assumption: Hegelian Development

The second assumption or pre-supposition of Old Testament critical scholarship seems to be that in the Old Testament there was a steady evolution or development from the simple to the complex.

This assumption was based upon the Hegelian dialectical process of logic which greatly influenced many scholars of the late nineteenth century. Hegel taught that every idea (thesis) automatically and naturally had an opposite idea (antithesis); these two ideas would then combine and synthesize to produce a new and better idea. Because of this dialectical process, Hegel taught that ever since the world began, all ideas have been combining and developing. The liberal critical scholars took this process and adapted it and said that the idea of God also had developed or evolved with time.

Old Testament scholars as well as all scholars were greatly affected by this Hegelian dialectical process of logic. Prior to this time, almost all people used Platonic methods of logic which said that a thing or idea either was or was not. Hegelian logic which was entirely different, brought about a greater appreciation of the developing world and, unfortunately, an arrogant pride in man's abilities.

The various human conceptions of God (animism, polytheism, henotheism, monotheism) with the Hegelian concept of development and many systems were proposed to show how religion had developed from the simple idea of a god to a more complex idea of the God. The Positivist Comte believed that religion developed from fetishism⁷ to polytheism and then to henotheism. Taylor said religion had evolved from animism to polytheism and finally to monotheism. Morett corrected this and said religion progressed from pre-animism (dynamism)⁸ to animism, from animism to polytheism, and then to monotheism.⁹ All of these theories of religious development have been modified and adapted to some extent. In the opinion of the author it appears that most scholars today seem to agree that religion developed from pre-animism to animism, from animism to polytheism, from polytheism to henotheism, from henotheism perhaps to monolatry, which seems to be a synonym of henotheism, and then finally to monotheism.

⁷"Dynamism is a term which refers to the experienced presence of a powerful but silent force in things, especially any occult force which is believed to act of itself, as an addition to the forces naturally or usually present in a thing." Noss, op. cit., p. 15.

⁸"Fetishism uses the power in inanimate things. It includes the veneration and use of objects which useful powers do not have to be induced because they are already there." Ibid.

⁹W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 125.

Since the time when Wellhausen first introduced the idea that the Old Testament concept of God had changed and evolved many people have discussed and modified his theory. G. E. Wright summarizes the developmental view when he says:

Critical scholarship has interpreted the Old Testament by means of a simple story about the growth of the "God-Idea." In early days, we are told, the Hebrew nomads worshipped the spirits in stones, trees, springs, and mountain peaks. The religion of the Patriarchal days was then nothing more than animism. In the time of the Exodus and Conquest we encounter Yahweh (Jehovah) as the tribal deity of one or more of the tribes. He was a storm God who lived on a mountain, a cruel God of war who showed unpredictable favoritism and who was pictured in crudely anthropomorphic terms. When the Hebrews settled in Canaan, he became an agricultural and fertility God, differing very little from the Baalim of Canaan. His power was limited to Palestine where his people lived. This then is the second stage, that of henotheism. Then came the prophets, the true innovators and founders of Israel's religion, who gradually came to the position of ethical monotheism. Amos proclaimed the God of righteousness, Hosea the God of love, Isaiah, the holy God, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the God of the individual and Second-Isaiah, the noble concept of the universal God.¹⁰

The Third Assumption: Theological

The third major pre-supposition of liberal scholarship in the past has been theological: It assumed that the Old Testament is a history of man's ideas about God rather than a history of divine self-disclosure or divine activity.

¹⁰G. E. Wright, "Interpreting the Old Testament," Theology Today, III (July, 1946), 179. For more information on this development of the "God-idea" read: H. E. Fosdick, A Guide to Understanding the Bible (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, c.1938), pp. 1-26. Compare also W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), passim.

Concerning the question of theological interpretation of the Old Testament, G. E. Wright elaborates:

The Old Testament itself claims to present the latter, that is, its chief interest is in describing the history of revelation, the plans, the purposes, the working of God in the human scene. It is primarily focussed, therefore, on God's ideas of and purposes for man; it is concerned with man's ideas about God only secondarily as a demonstration either of the faithfulness or of the blind disobedience of Individuals or people to God's revealed will. We today are inclined to convert the whole into a story of Israel's apprehension of God and thus we make of the Old Testament something it never intended to be-- a history of ideas both good and bad.¹¹

It is these three assumptions or pre-suppositions in whole or in part which led some scholars to the position that in the Old Testament there was a development of the concept of God, and thus created the problem among scholars concerning the antiquity of monotheism in the Old Testament.

¹¹G. E. Wright, "Interpreting the Old Testament," Theology Today, III (July, 1946), 182.

CHAPTER III

THE ALLEGED BIBLICAL BASIS FOR HENOtheISM

The liberal Old Testament scholars who accept the premise that the concept of God developed in the Old Testament quote numerous occurrences of henotheistic teachings, convictions, and practices in the Old Testament. Some of these now will be enumerated and elaborated upon.

Moses

Moses is considered by most scholars to be the founder of the Israelite nation and the framer of Israel's religious system. Albright writes:

it is absurd to deny that Moses was actually the founder of the Israelite commonwealth and the framer of Israel's religious system. This fact is emphasized so unanimously by tradition that it may be regarded as absolutely certain. Nowhere is there the slightest breath of doubt cast on this irrefragable fact of Israelite tradition.¹

Therefore liberal scholars usually begin with Moses' writings in their search for early henotheistic teachings. Today much of the argument (especially between Rowley and Albright) centers around the teachings of Moses.

It is felt that it is very hard to state accurately and

¹W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 196. Compare also W. C. E. Oesterley and T. W. Robinson, Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), pp. 125, 151.

clearly what Moses taught and believed. On the one hand, there is general agreement that Moses was not a polytheist in the sense that he practiced a worship of many gods. Some assume that Moses might have been a polytheist in his younger years when he lived at the Egyptian court. But on the other hand, the eminent British scholar H. H. Rowley says, "There is no evidence that Moses was a monotheist in the sense that he denied the existence of more than one God."²

Since Moses is considered as the great law-giver of the Israelite people, the Decalog and especially the first commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me"³) are carefully searched to determine what he taught. It has been pointed out that in the first commandment, "There is no denial that other gods exist. This commandment only denies the legitimacy of other gods for Israel."⁴ In the story of Moses and the Golden Calf there are indications that Moses had henotheistic convictions. After Moses had gone up onto the holy mountain, Mount Sinai, the people waiting below became afraid. As days passed and Moses did not return, the people daily became more afraid that he had died on the mountain, covered with smoke and lightning, and that they

²H. H. Rowley, "Living Issues in Biblical Scholarship: The Antiquity of Israelite Monotheism," The Expository Times, LXI (August, 1950), 335-336.

³Exodus 21:2 (Quoted from the Revised Standard Version)

⁴H. H. Shires & P. Parker, Interpreter's Bible, Edited by G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1952), II, 365.

no longer had a leader. Finally because of fear and weak faith, they forced Aaron to make a golden calf for them. As Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments, he heard the sound of music and dancing. When he perceived what had happened, he became angry and shattered the tablets. Then he took the calf and ground it to powder, poured it into the water and made the people drink it. After that he had the Sons of Levi kill some of the guilty people. Then Moses returned to Mount Sinai and there he prayed to God, "Alas this people have sinned a great sin, they have made for themselves gods of gold." (Ex. 32:15-32) Here Moses is said to recognize the existence of other gods and thus to show henotheistic tendencies.

Rowley writes, "For nowhere in the Pentateuch is Moses credited with a formal denial that any other gods exist, such as we find in Deutero-Isaiah, save in passages that quite certainly did not issue from him." Therefore he concludes, "Moses was a henotheist."⁵

Jephthah

Another trace of henotheistic conviction is found in the story concerning the judge Jephthah, who seems to have placed Yahweh, his God, on the level with Chemosh, the Moabite God. H. W. Robinson edited a book, Record and Revelation, in

⁵H. H. Rowley, op. cit., p. 336. The passages Rowley refers to are Deut. 4:35,39; 32:39. He gives no proof for his statement.

which He said, "In the times of Jephthah (Judges xi. 23, 24) and of David (I Sam. xxvi. 19) He was the God of Israel only, and the Israelites recognized the existence of other gods for other people."⁶

At that time, the Ammonites made war with Israel. The elders of Gilead sent Jephthah out to the Ammonites on a peace mission. The latter were angry because they wanted back the land that Israel had taken from them and from Moab just before Israel had entered the promised land. Jephthah first tries to explain why Israel had taken that land. When this failed, he said that Israel had a right to that land. He argued, "Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives to you? And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess." (Judges 11:4-25) Jephthah here apparently sets Chemosh on the same plane with Yahweh except that the latter was considered the stronger of the two.

Ruth

The well-known answer of Ruth to Naomi's plea to return home to her family, "Thy people shall be my people and Thy God, my God" (Ruth 1:16) is cited as a good example of henotheistic belief. This statement is said to illustrate the fact that in the mind of Ruth each people had its own god,

⁶H. W. Robinson, "The Philosophy of Revelation," Record and Revelation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 308.

people and god being inseparable.⁷ Fosdick writes:

Even a post-Exilic book, Ruth, pictures its heroine as changing gods when she passed from Moab to Bethlehem, although the two were scarcely thirty miles apart and could be plainly seen, one from the other, across the Jordan. . . .⁸

David

Another example often quoted to show that the concept of henotheism was prevalent in the Old Testament is the story of one of the encounters between Saul and David recorded in 1 Samuel 26:19ff.⁹ David and Abishai enter the camp of Saul late at night and take his spear and water jug. Then they leave and go and stand on a far hill. In the morning, David calls to Abner, the leader of the army of Saul, and reproves him for sleeping and not adequately protecting the king. Saul overhears this and recognizes David's voice. David then tells Saul that his men "have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'" His statement is regarded as perhaps the best example of a henotheistic view in the Old Testament because it conveys the two-fold impression: (a) if a person

⁷R. E. Wiltenburg, "Henotheistic Aberrations in Ancient Israel" (unpublished Bachelor's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1945), p. 5. This has a longer discussion on Ruth.

⁸H. E. Fosdick, A Guide to Understanding the Bible (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, c.1938), p. 12.

⁹Robinson, op. cit., p. 308; Rowley, loc. cit. (by implication); Wiltenburg, op. cit., p. 4; Fosdick, op. cit., p. 11.

leaves Israel, he leaves Yahweh; hence Yahweh is only the God of Israel, and (b) there are other gods in other places and if a person dwells in a different land he must serve the god of that country. H. P. Smith says, "Yahweh can be served only in his own land. The exile is compelled to serve the gods of the land in which he sojourns, Jeremiah 5:19."¹⁰ This incident is cited as giving the impression that the concept of henotheism was prevalent also among the leaders of Israel at David's time.

Naaman

Another example that is cited to show the Biblical basis for the concept of henotheism in the Old Testament is the story of Naaman and Elisha. Adams writes, "Naaman the Syrian in II Kings 5:17 assumed Jehovah was the God of Israel alone and could only be truly worshiped within his own land. (Hence 2 mules load of dirt)"¹¹

Naaman, a great commander of the Syrian army was a leper. Through a servant girl, he learned of Elisha, the man of God who could cure lepers. Naaman then requested permission from his king to go and see this prophet. As he was coming, Elisha sent a messenger to him and commanded him

¹⁰H. P. Smith, The Books of Samuel, in The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), VIII, 233.

¹¹John Adams, Israel's Ideal, or Studies in Old Testament Theology (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 34.

to go and bathe in the Jordan river seven times. This statement made Naaman very angry and he began to return home. However, one of his servants reasoned with him and he decided to go and try bathing in the Jordan. He was cleansed and believed in the God of Israel. Then Naaman asked Elisha, "Let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth, for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering to sacrifice to any god but the Lord." (2 Kings 5:17) This request indicates quite clearly that each land had its own god who could be worshiped only there. To leave one land for another was to leave one god for another. Hence if Naaman was to worship the God of Israel in Syria, he must take some of the soil of Israel with him.¹²

Post-Exilic Priests

It is pointed out that the post-exilic priests also taught a form of henotheism. According to this view, the priests taught a nationalistic, cultic type of religion. They believed that Yahweh was the God of Israel and Israel was the people of Yahweh.¹³ This attitude led to an extreme nationalism so that when the people in Palestine offered to help rebuild the temple, the returning Israelites rejected the offer

¹²R. Calkins, Interpreter's Bible, Edited by G. A. Buttrich (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1952), III, 213.

¹³H. W. Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1913), p. 184.

of help. (Ezra 4:3) For the priests this nationalism centered in the temple and its ritual and separated the people of Israel from the outside world. This in effect was a phase of henotheism.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Yahweh is referred to as "The God who has placed His name in Jerusalem" (Ezra 6:12) and many times He is called "The God of Israel." (Ezra 7:15,19) This extreme nationalism apparently led to the divorcing of all foreign, non-Israelite wives which is mentioned in the last few chapters of Nehemiah. As the priests viewed the nation after the Exile, they insisted that there was no hope except in a revival of religion which would become a truly national movement and which would center in the God to whom the nation owed its origin.¹⁴

These are some of the examples to which scholars point as establishing a basis for the view that there are traces of henotheism in the Old Testament and that this concept of God was a part of Israel's developing religion.

¹⁴O. J. Baab, The Theology of the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1949), pp. 104-105.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIBLE TEACHES MONOTHEISM AS REVEALED FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, BUT AS CORRUPTED AND CLOUDED BY SIN IN THE COURSE OF TIME.

The Thesis

While there are many scholars who teach that the Old Testament conception of God was henotheistic at one stage in its development, the view that the Old Testament teaches a monotheistic concept of God from the very beginning of the Bible has always been upheld. Early Biblical monotheism was advanced as a scientific hypothesis by Andrew Lang (The Making of Religion, 1900). It was defended by such distinguished Biblical scholars as Lagrange (Etudes sur les Religions Semitiques, 1903) and Wilhelm Schmidt (Der Ursprung der Gottesidee, 1912-1949).¹ Besides these scholars, who believed in early Pre-Mosaic monotheism, some scholars believe in Mosaic monotheism. Rowley writes concerning Mosaic teachings, "It was incipient monotheism and incipient universalism," ² Albright says, "the founder of Yahwism (Moses) was

¹H. H. Rowley, "Living Issues in Biblical Scholarship: The Antiquity of Israelite Monotheism," The Expository Times, LXI (August, 1950), 334.

²Rowley, op. cit., p. 338.

certainly a monotheist."³

Those who support the view that the concept of henotheism was a part of the earlier Biblical teaching, then ask the question, "If the Bible continually and consistently teaches the concept of monotheism, how do you explain the henotheistic traces which are still recognizable in the Old Testament?" In answer to this question the basic fact must be recognized that the henotheistic view of God is the view of natural, unregenerate (sinful) mankind. The Apostle Paul writes:

Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Romans 1:20-23. (R. S. V.)

Natural, unregenerate man, because of the sin of Adam, had a clouded vision of God and invented idols or had imperfect conceptions of Him as a territorial God. That there was henotheism among Israel's pagan neighbors is evident. Moab and Ammon were countries in which the dominant view of God was apparently henotheistic.⁴ Israel during the conquest and after it came into contact with these people and certainly was exposed to the henotheistic view. Some of the Israelites through ignorance or against better knowledge accepted and

³W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 207.

⁴Rowley, op. cit., p. 336.

believed the henotheistic view of God. Albright writes, "The ignorant or moronic are often polytheists or henotheists in an age of monotheism."⁵ The Bible calls Israel's following after other gods "sin." (Ex. 21:2, 1 Kings 12:30) Monotheism as taught in the Old Testament became corrupted, clouded, and misunderstood because the Israelites, like all people, were sinful and prone to evil.

The Creation

The writer of Genesis states God's supremacy and onliness when he ascribes to God the creation of the entire world and the power to create man from dust (chapters 1-3). Liberal scholars counter by saying that this argument is not valid because almost every religion in the world has some idea of a creator-god. Cesterley and Robinson write:

But by the middle of the eighth century, probably much earlier, the belief in Yahweh as the Master of the physical universe had greatly developed, and found expression in the myths of Creation. . . . Every people which adopted such a myth made its own national deity the hero. Thus in its Sumerian form it is Enlil who destroys the Chaos-monster, in Babylonia, it is Marduk, and in Assyria it is Ashur.⁶

But it is just as plausible to assume that because of sin the various people forgot the God who had created them. When they tried to explain their existence, they attributed this

⁵Albright, op. cit., p. 220.

⁶W. O. E. Cesterley and T. W. Robinson, Hebrew Religion: The Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 255.

creative power to their local pagan deity. Other religions do not seem to have the concept of a God who created the world out of nothing and formed man from the dust.

Certainly the God who is represented as cursing the earth because of Adam's sin and as condemning all men to death because of sin must be a universal God and not a local deity. (Genesis 3:17-20; Romans 5:12)

The Flood

When the Lord looked down upon the earth at the time of Noah and saw "the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," He decided, "I will blot out man whom I have created." (Genesis 6:5-7) Therefore He commanded Noah, the one man who had remained faithful to Him, to build an ark and to take two of every kind of animal into it in order to save them. After Noah had finished building the ark and had taken all the animals and his own family into the ark, God sent a storm and a flood which destroyed all life in the entire world except the people and animals in the ark. (Gen. 7:21-22) The God who can destroy all life must be the universal and sole God.

Some scholars (especially Albright⁷) believe that the story of the flood is only a myth, although a universal myth,

⁷Albright, op. cit., pp. 128, 201.

and that the story was highly influenced by later writers. It is pointed out that this was only a local flood which was caused by some geophysical change; perhaps some mountain range shifted and let the sea flood the land. It is easy to see from the topography of the Mesopotamian valley and of Palestine that only a slight change in the earth's surface would flood that area. However, no one has been able to prove that the deluge did not actually cover the whole earth.

Albright writes:

Studied in the light of their geographical diffusion certain creation-myths and especially the myth of the Great Flood appear as among the oldest religious inheritances of mankind, since they are found among primitive tribes on both continents. . . .⁸

Many of the fossils and much of the archeological data which are attributed to the numerous "ice-ages" could be better explained as the result of a cosmic flood.

The God of Genesis from Adam to Noah is best described in the words of C. G. Montefiore, "God was the one God, the only God, the God to whom all flesh draws and will draw nigh. He was no tribal or national God, but the God of the whole earth, the Lord of Creation, the universal Father."⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 201.

⁹C. G. Montefiore, "The Old Testament and Judaism," Record and Revelation, Edited by H. W. Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 433.

The Patriarchs

The entire purpose of the covenants established by God with Abraham, the Patriarchs, and later with the children of Israel under Moses was not to exclude the other nations, but it was a method by which God used the few for the benefit of the many. Israel was set apart as a missionary people to hold aloft the torch of revelation until the fulness of nations was gathered into God's fold.¹⁰

Yahweh's covenant with Israel was not the act of a national God but an act of universal mercy. It was not due to any virtue or merit of hers that God selected her in preference to some other nation. (Deut. 7:7-8; Amos 3:12; Hosea 11:1) In fact, there were times when the conduct of Israel was so rampantly evil that no basis whatsoever for divine favor could be discerned. (For a graphic picture of God's mercy and love for an undeserving nation read Hosea 1-3.)

By choosing Israel from all the nations, over which He had full sovereignty, God prepared and trained for Himself a people, by means of whom it was His purpose, when the fulness of time should come, to draw all others to Himself. G. E. Wright says:

Yahweh's covenant with Abraham (In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed, or In thy seed shall all the families of the earth bless themselves¹¹)

¹⁰John Adams, Israel's Ideal, or Studies in Old Testament Theology (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 102.

¹¹Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8.

expresses the thought that God had chosen Israel in order that all the people of the earth use her name in the formula by which they seek blessing for themselves.¹²

It is interesting to note that Max Mueller, the man who introduced the concept of henotheism says, "The faith of Israel, which seemed to require the admission of a monotheistic instinct is traced back to one man, to him 'in whom all families of the earth shall be blessed.'"¹³ He continues to say that the only way this faith can be explained is to assume a special divine revelation.

When Abraham was talking to the Lord shortly before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25) These words indicate clearly that Abraham had monotheistic convictions. Rowley, however, says that this is inconclusive evidence, since Abraham does not deny the existence of other gods.¹⁴ The words nevertheless state explicitly that Abraham thought God was the Judge of all the world.

This monotheistic faith of Abraham and God's covenant with him were passed on to and renewed with Issac and Jacob.¹⁵

¹²G. E. Wright, The Old Testament against its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), p. 51.

¹³Max Mueller, Essays on the Science of Religion, Vol. I in Chips from a German Workshop (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. 367.

¹⁴H. H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel (London: S. C. M. Press, 1956), footnote on page 71.

¹⁵Genesis 26:4; 28:14.

It would seem however that sin corrupted and clouded this concept quickly. Jacob appears to express henotheistic tendencies when he leaves Laban. Jacob left without telling Laban, his father-in-law, and began to return to Palestine. Laban followed after him and demanded that Jacob return the household gods that belonged to Laban. Jacob then says, "Any one with whom you find your gods shall not live." (Gen. 31:32) It appears that Jacob recognizes the existence of Laban's false gods. However it must be remembered that Jacob had spent approximately twenty years in a polytheistic nation, where he daily came into contact with wrong conceptions of God. His own wife, Rachel, had stolen the household gods from her father, evidently thinking that they were her gods also. This incident may betray a lapse of Jacob's faith.

It would appear then from a study of Genesis that the concept of God which was taught was monotheistic, but that through sin it often degenerated into polytheism or henotheism.

CHAPTER V

A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF THE PASSAGES USED TO DEFEND THE CONCEPT OF HENOtheISM

There are passages in the Bible which have led scholars to believe that there were henotheistic tendencies and convictions in the Old Testament as was pointed out in Chapter III. We shall examine them more closely to determine whether they can and should be interpreted in the light of the thesis that the concept of monotheism was indeed taught in the Old Testament, but became corrupted by sin, and thus account for the fact that these tendencies or aberrations appeared.

Moses

It is said that the very fact that Moses and other Old Testament writers mention other gods implies that they believed these other gods existed.¹ If this principle is applied consistently it would mean that most people in the world today also have henotheistic convictions. Almost any religious book or sermon that one reads refers to pagan deities as "false gods" or "other gods." Usually the only distinction made today is that people capitalize the letter "G" when they write about the true God, Yahweh, and do not capitalize it when they write about other gods. H. Bornkamm says,

¹Supra, pp. 12-14.

"We Christians apply the same word "god," with which we address our heavenly Father in prayer, also to the various pagan divinities. . . . We have no name for God, but only a concept for Him. For us name and concept coincide."² Does therefore the fact that Moses speaks about other gods, as they exist in the minds of the heathen, imply that he believed in the existence of other gods? Was he using their term in the first commandment (Exodus 20:3) not only because of various exigencies of circumstance and language?

Through Moses, God proclaimed the first commandment into a heathen world which had stocked every nook and cranny of the universe with gods. The Hebrew language was not a vehicle for metaphysical abstractions. Therefore in speaking against idolatry Moses recognized the fact of idolatry and opposed other gods by designating them as such. He told the Israelites to dismiss from their thoughts the large variety of objects, worshipped as gods, and to have as their God only the Lord, who had created the world, brought them out of Egypt, and guided the destinies of men, the Lord in whose sight a thousand generations were but a day.³

The words in the first commandment יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (besides me, before me) do not necessarily carry the notion of יְהוָה "in

²H. Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 55.

³Solomon Goldman, The Ten Commandments (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 131.

my presence." This phrase עַל־פְּנֵי appears about two hundred and ten times in the Old Testament. In one hundred and twenty-five of the instances, it is translated literally "upon the face of." (Genesis 50:1) Eighty-five times this phrase is translated "over against." (Joshua 18:4; 15:8) It is also used in the sense of "pass by" (Gen. 32:23) and "cast out." (1 Kings 9:7) There is no reason why the words here cannot mean "over against." All false gods are opposed to the true God. The worship of them is incompatible with the worship of Yahweh. A very good exposition of this verse is given by Lange, who says concerning these words "אֵלֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲרָצוֹת עַל־פְּנֵי";

The absolute negative אֵל stands significantly at the beginning. Antithesis to it is the absolute אֱלֹהֵי (I) of Jehovah at the opening of His commandments (Exodus 20:2). אֱלֹהֵי אֲרָצוֹת, the gods "become," spring up gradually in the conceptions of the sinful people, hence אֵל. אֱלֹהֵי in connection with אֲרָצוֹת is to be explained as = אֲרָצוֹת (according to Gal. 1:6) with the LXX. and the Vulgate (alieni, foreign), not = alii, "other." עַל־פְּנֵי may mean "before" my face, "besides" my face, "over against" my face, "beyond" my face. The "coram me" of the Vulgate expresses one factor of the notion, as Luther's "neben mir" (by my side) does another.⁴

Therefore it is not necessary to assume that in this passage Moses is at all recognizing the validity of other gods or that he is implying their existence. He is primarily concerned that the people worship only Yahweh.

⁴J. P. Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Translated and edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1874), p. 75.

Moses later quite forcibly said that only Yahweh exists. "The Lord is God, There is no other besides Him" (Deut. 4:35) and again "The Lord is God in Heaven above and on the earth below, there is no other." (Deut. 4:39; compare also 32:39) Since these quotations are taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, it should be stated that there is much argument and discussion on the authorship and the time of writing of this book. The common opinion among Higher Critics is that the book was written around the time of Josiah. However, regardless of when it was written, these words are credited to Moses. Pfeiffer seems to imply this when he says, "In addition to the three speeches (Deut. 1:6-4:40; 5-26:28; 29-30) there are two poems (32; 33) which Moses recited before the people,"5 (The author feels and believes that Moses himself wrote these words.) These passages lead to the conclusion that Moses was a monotheist. However in order to effectively counteract the prevalent idea in the minds of the people, he used the term "other gods" which was familiar to them. W. F. Albright, a staunch defender of Mosaic monotheism says:

If the term "Monotheist" means one who teaches the existence of only one God, the Creator of everything, the source of Justice, who is equally powerful in Egypt, in the desert, and in Palestine, who has no sexuality and no mythology, who is human in form but cannot be seen by human eye and cannot be represented in any form--then the founder of Yahwism (Moses) was certainly a monotheist.⁶

5R. H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 183.

6W. F. Albright, From Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 207.

Jephthah

Scholars also take the example of Jephthah⁷ to prove there were henotheistic convictions in Early Israel. (Judges 11:24). It should be noted that nowhere in the story does Jephthah make Yahweh equal to Chemosh, the Moabite god of war. In fact, Jephthah would point out that Chemosh doesn't have much power even in his home land. If Chemosh were equal to Yahweh, then Yahweh couldn't have led the Israelites to possess the land of Moab. Albright says:

The parade example of early Israelite henotheism is singularly weak. In a speech to the king of the Ammonites Jephthah is represented as saying (Jud. 11:24), "Wilt thou not possess what Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess?"

He continues:

When Israelites address foreigners they use language suitable to their horizon and capable of producing a friendly reaction.⁸

It would appear that Jephthah is not interested in demonstrating the existence of Chemosh nor is that the point of his illustration. He is adapting his language to the current concepts of the people to whom he is talking and using this illustration to show, by their way of reasoning, that Israel had a right to the land. Jephthah perhaps could have said that Israel had a right to the land because Yahweh, the sole Lord of the universe, had given it to them; however that would not

⁷Supra, pp. 14-15.

⁸Albright, op. cit., p. 220.

be a very convincing argument against angry people prepared for war. Even if Jephthah had shown henotheistic tendencies here, this would not be the first time one of the Israelites had taken other gods. When Joshua gave his farewell address and had the people once again pledge themselves to Yahweh, he told them to "put away the foreign gods which are among you." (Joshua 24:23). It would seem that already at that time some of the people had degenerated through sin and had accepted other gods from their neighbors. It should also be noted here that the Bible is very impartial and presents the bad or wrong side of a leader as well as his good side. Albright says, "Patriarchs, national heroes, and religious leaders are described with the most impartial portrayal of faults and sins as well as of virtues. Israel's defeats are mentioned as often as her triumphs."⁹

Ruth

When scholars use the example of Ruth¹⁰ to prove their hypothesis, it again appears that they are straining their exegesis. Ruth must have learned about Yahweh from her husband while he was alive and she certainly must have been very impressed with the way in which Naomi, her mother-in-law, accepted the death of her own husband and of her two sons, one of whom was Ruth's husband. Ruth had become fully

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Supra, pp. 15-16.

convinced that Yahweh was the true God and therefore she makes a wonderful confession of faith in Yahweh. (Ruth 1:16) She does not mention other gods nor does she limit Yahweh to Israel. These problems do not concern her; she is only interested in confessing her faith in Yahweh, the true God.

Wiltenburg says:

We are of the opinion, however, that it (Ruth 1:15-16) 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 Issac, Jacob, Moses, Balaam, David, the prophets, and in the book of Job. . . .¹¹

David

In the story concerning David¹² it should be pointed out that he himself does not say that he will go and worship other gods or that if he does leave Israel, he must worship other gods. He is repeating to Saul what the soldiers of Saul had said to him earlier. He is not necessarily expressing his own convictions here. Concerning the faith of the soldiers we must remember that it is a known fact that even at the times of the greatest religious revivals, the common and

¹¹R. E. Wiltenburg, "Henotheistic Aberrations in Ancient Israel" (unpublished Bachelor's Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1945), p. 5.

¹²Supra, pp. 16-17.

ignorant people often believe various aberrations of the truth and combine and compromise their faith with the local myths and convictions. Albright says, "The ignorant or moronic are often polytheists or henotheists in an age of monotheism."¹³ So it is not surprising that Saul's men (and perhaps David through his contacts with them) fell and had henotheistic convictions, especially when this was the dominant belief in the pagan world around them. Lange surmises that:

David's line of thought here is as follows: only in the people of Israel and in the land of promise has the covenant-God His dwelling, for there are all His revelations in respect to Israel; only there therefore, in the consecrated place of His dwelling can there be true worship of the Lord; outside this holy region of God's revelation and dwelling among His people is the domain of strange gods; thither driven he sees everywhere inducement and temptation to "serve other gods."¹⁴

We may add that even if David had lapsed into a henotheistic view, this would not be his only sin. David, the anointed of God, like all men sinned. (Compare 2 Kings 11)

Naaman

In the story of Naaman,¹⁵ it is not at all surprising that a new convert to the true faith in Yahweh should still show henotheistic convictions. Naaman had been brought up and had lived in a culture where the concept of henotheism prevailed. He had heard of Yahweh through a slave girl and

¹³Albright, op. cit., p. 220. (Quoted supra, p. 22.)

¹⁴Lange, op. cit., V, 318.

¹⁵Supra, pp. 17-18.

had come to faith in Yahweh after he was cleansed from his leprosy through Elisha, the Prophet of Yahweh. It would be expecting much from such a new convert that he have a perfect monotheistic conception of God immediately, especially when many of the Israelites through sin showed henotheistic aberrations.

Post-Exilic Priests

As was pointed out earlier, some scholars would also claim that the post-Exilic priests were henotheistically inclined.¹⁶ However when a person recalls the monotheism which the eighth century prophets had proclaimed, culminating in Isaiah with his clear monotheistic teachings (Is. 44:9, 18; 45:3,5), it is hard to understand that Israel would again fall back and accept the concept of henotheism. During the time of the Exile, the two great prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel also taught the power of God in the world, showing to the people that Yahweh was God in Babylon as well as in Israel. (In Ezekiel 34 consider the power of God to gather the people from all nations. Consider also Daniel 7.) Zechariah, one of the post-Exilic prophets and a contemporary of Ezra said, "Many nations and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord." (Zech. 8:22) Malachi, the last literary prophet says, "Great is the Lord, beyond the border of Israel." (Malachi

¹⁶Supra, pp. 18-19.

1:5) It would seem that there was here a clear monotheistic conception of God among the post-Exilic prophets.

The teachings of the priests could be explained not as an attempt to teach the concept of henotheism, but as an effort to set forth what they thought the people needed. It was a matter of emphasis, not of a different teaching. Today also in our Church we have different emphases, as can be seen from reading our various Church publications. There are some who emphasize the Confessions, some correct liturgical practices, some good preachings, etc. Baab points out also that the Bible has many different emphases. Its main topic is repentance and salvation (according to him) but the various writers approach this topic in different ways, he says:

The prophets announce the great ethical demands of this God and urge the people to observe them (Amos 5:24); the legalists codify these demands in direct relation to the practical exigencies of community life and proclaim the validity of their codes (Deut. 5:1); the priests define the ritualistic requirements for life in the holy community and prescribes the conduct becoming to a people whose God is Holy (Lev. 19:2); the wise men outline in the form of aphorisms and axioms sensible principles for daily living that is pleasing to God (Prov. 3:1-4); and the psalmists declare that he who worships in the temple must have clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3-4).¹⁷

The prophets and the priests also after the exile emphasized different things, but they did not contradict each other. They only taught as the need for different emphases arose. Porteous says, "It must be maintained emphatically that the

¹⁷Otto J. Baab, The Theology of the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1949), pp. 147-148.

basis of the ethical teaching of the prophets is to be found in part in a moral code which the priests ought to have been urging on Israel as the embodiment of the way of life befitting her as God's chosen people."¹⁸ The priests emphasized the heritage of the people and attempted to draw the scattered people together to one point, the temple and its worship. The prophets emphasized the universality of the covenant and of God.

A more careful study of the passages used to defend the concept of henotheism shows that these do not preclude the view that monotheism had always been taught but that the people had sinned and lapsed occasionally into henotheistic practices. There is no real basis for assuming a development of the concept of God in the Old Testament from henotheism to monotheism. The Bible passages, quoted by the liberal scholars who say that the Bible teaches henotheism, can be used to prove either the thesis that the Bible teaches henotheism or the thesis that the Bible consistently taught monotheism. Also these liberal scholars have not been able to prove exactly how this transition from henotheism to monotheism happened and just when Israel became monotheistic. It would be hard to explain why Israel should go through a development process especially in the light of the fact that her neighbors, Moab and Ammon, who were henotheists, never

¹⁸N. W. Porteous, "The Basis of the Ethical Teaching of the Prophets," Studies in Old Testament Prophecy, Edited by H. H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1946), p. 149.

did progress beyond that stage. Rowley says:

It is scarcely sufficient, however to say that Moses was a henotheist, and this would leave us with the problem of the transition from henotheism to monotheism. Moab and Ammon are commonly said to have been henotheistic, Even if Moab and Ammon were henotheistic however, we should still have to ask how it was that Israel became monotheistic and they did not. No profound and enduring influence on the religion of mankind came through them, whereas it did through Israel.¹⁹

It would be very difficult to defend the fact that Moab and Ammon remained henotheistic in view of the liberal assumption that every idea develops. The Old Testament knows no evolutionary development and instead sets forth a consistent teaching of monotheism which through sin degenerated into henotheistic aberrations and expressions when Israel came into contact with their henotheistically inclined neighbors.

¹⁹Rowley, op. cit., p. 336.

CHAPTER VI

A SURVEY OF THE GROWTH AND UNFOLDING OF THE MONOTHEISTIC CONCEPTION OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

While the Old Testament shows no traces of an evolutionary growth of the concept of God, an enlarged knowledge of the range and application of God's law and His righteous yet merciful purposes was revealed in the course of time. The basic emphasis, however, was always upon the distinctive and radically different character of Israel's Lord and King. Since the Old Testament was written over a period of about fifteen hundred years it is reasonable to expect such a growth. G. E. Wright says:

The Bible is primarily a history covering some two thousand years. Consequently, one cannot examine it through the spectacles of a static conception of time. One cannot expect to find the theology of Paul in the Book of Kings or that of Second Isaiah in the Song of Deborah.¹

The concept of God as the one unique Lord of creation and ruler of the world remained the same, but as time progressed, this conception of God was enlarged and made clearer to the people.

As God revealed Himself through each of the Biblical leaders to the people, He gave them information about Himself which was at all times sufficient so that they could be saved. One of the reasons for such an unfolding revelation no doubt

¹G. E. Wright, The Old Testament against its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), p. 10.

was the fact that from time to time the people sinned or because of association with their pagan neighbors they forgot God and therefore needed further instruction concerning His righteousness and His mercy. God would then further reveal Himself through a new leader in order that the people might repent and be saved.

Adam to Moses

Adam walked with God and knew Him. When he sinned, God revealed His righteous wrath by pronouncing the sentence of death on him and by cursing the ground. (Gen. 3:17-20) At that time, God also revealed His mercy when He promised a Seed who would bruise the serpents head which is the first promise of the coming Messiah.

The descendants of Adam continued in the sin of Adam and disobeyed God. It became necessary that God further manifest His righteousness. He wiped out all the life that He had created except Noah, his family and two of every kind of the animals in a world-wide deluge. Thereby God clearly revealed His righteous power over life and the things which he had created. He also showed His mercy to Noah, who had remained faithful to Him. He established a covenant with Noah and promised that He would never again destroy the world with a flood. In order to remind men of His power to destroy sinners and of His promise, never to destroy with a flood, God placed a rainbow in the sky.

But again humanity sinned, forgot God, and walked their own ways. After Noah, the people became proud and decided to build a tower reaching to the heavens so that they could make a name for themselves. Again God showed His power and "confused the language of all the earth; and from there (Babel) the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." (Gen. 11:1-9)

God then called Abraham (Gen. 12:1) and made a covenant with him, promising to make a great nation of him and through him to bless all the families of the earth. Thus He chose one man through whom all others would receive His blessings and revealed Himself as the one God who rules and controls the destiny of Men. Rowley says:

Implicit in the faith of Israel is universalism, which almost certainly finds expression long before the time of Deutero-Isaiah. In the earliest of the documents of the Pentateuch we find passages which say in relation to Abraham 'in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'²

Moses to the Prophets

Before the time of Moses, God had revealed Himself as the creator of the world, as the judge and ruler of all the world, as the director of man's destiny and life, and as the source of man's salvation. Through Moses, God revealed Himself

²H. H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Theology (London: S. C. M. Press, 1956), pp. 182-183.

more fully. The concept of God was developed by a progressive unfolding of the same idea, that God is one. H. H.

Rowley writes:

There were some scholars who were more cautious, and who, while recognizing development in Old Testament religion, did not ascribe it to natural evolution, but to the seed of monotheism which was implanted in Israel's religion by Moses, and which grew to its full stature under the influence of those men of God whom we know as the Prophets.³

By means of plagues God showed His power to the Egyptians. He led the Israelites out of Egypt into Sinai and magnificently manifested Himself on the mountain. Through Moses He gave them His law, and finally led them to the promised land.

N. W. Porteous writes:

Yet another contribution to the debate comes from H. H. Rowley, who describes the Mosaic religion as implicit or incipient monotheism, coming short of speculative monotheism, but going beyond monolatry: 'though other gods may exist they are completely negligible.' In the Exodus narrative Yahweh meets with no resistance from the gods of Egypt, He is master of the situation; and all the resources of the natural order are at His disposal. Herein lies the seeds of pure monotheism which, after the syncretism of the period following the conquest, came to flower in the teaching of the great prophets.⁴

In the succeeding period the people wavered between serving God and sinning against Him. Then their sin manifested itself in their demand for an earthly king. God gave

³H. H. Rowley, "Living Issues in Biblical Scholarship: The Antiquity of Israelite Monotheism," The Expository Times, LXI, (August, 1950), 333.

⁴N. W. Porteous, "Old Testament Theology," The Old Testament and Modern Study, Edited by H. H. Rowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), pp. 298-299.

them a king who was to rule as His representative. He was to sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of the Lord in Israel (1 Chron. 28:5) and through him the people were to learn more about God. But again the people sinned and the kingship degenerated into a depraved institution.

The Prophets

God then sent His prophets, they were his instruments to reveal Himself more clearly. J. Phillip Hyatt writes:

The prophets were monotheist, from Amos on. They believed that there was only one God, Yahweh, and that he was one. Prophetic monotheism is not clearly and thoroughly presented in the writing of Second Isaiah, but it is difficult to believe that any of them, from Amos through Ezekiel, were other than monotheists. They had not, like Second Isaiah, observed and developed the various implications of monotheism, but a belief that Yahweh was the only God was implied in their theology.⁵

In the tragedy of his marital life, Hosea portrayed to the people, the love of God who continually showed mercy to them, even though they didn't deserve it by their going whoring after other gods. (Hosea 1:2; 2:19; 11:1) Joel made it clear that God would punish the people for their sins and that nothing could avert that punishment. (Joel 1) He also insisted that all the nations would be gathered together and judged by the Lord. (Joel 3:9-17) Amos proclaimed God's righteous judgments upon the nations around about Israel for

⁵J. Phillip Hyatt, Prophetic Religion (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1957), p. 151.

their crimes against humanity. (chapter 1) He also declared that Israel as God's elect not only had privileges but also responsibilities which they must fulfill. (2:4-6; 3:2)

Micah's first great prophecy is addressed to the world and proclaims that Judah will suffer for her sins. (Micah 1:2ff.) Then in magnificent terms he described how all the nations will be gathered together in peace. (Micah 4:1ff.) Jophah learned a lesson the hard way and then proclaimed to the people God's great love for all people, even the hated Ninevites.

God then revealed Himself and His gracious purposes more fully through the great prophet Isaiah. He set the coming Day of the Lord in a framework of mercy (2-4) and tells of the new and better kingdom under a son of David. (8-11) In a series of ten prophecies he proceeds to announce judgment upon the nations of the world. (13-23) In a great apocalypse Isaiah also points to the ultimate bliss of all people, both Jew and Gentile. (24-27) He repeatedly, majestically, and clearly proclaims God's power (40-42), His grace (43), His oneness, His onliness, His rule and control of history (45), His demand that man know Yahweh as God and give glory to Him (45:6), and finally God's love as manifested in the Servant's suffering and glory. (53-64) Oesterley and Robinson write concerning the teachings of Isaiah:

The great gods simply did not exist, they were nothing beyond the images (cp. Isa. xliv. 9, 18); there was only one living and true God, Maker of heaven and

earth, and Lord of all things--Yahweh, the God of Israel.⁶

In the seventh century, Jeremiah showed the people that Yahweh uses even the hated enemies to fulfill His righteous judgments.

Through Ezekiel God manifested His love for those whom He chose although they didn't deserve it. (16:8) He judges the King of Tyre, who wanted to make himself a god, and condemns him. (28:2-10) He proclaims that He has set His glory among the nations and all nations will see His judgment. (39:21ff.) Because God blessed Daniel and gave him much wisdom, God's power and glory were revealed in Babylon. (2:20-23) The Kings under whom Daniel served testify to God's universal power. (2:47; 4:34ff.; 6:25ff.) Then Daniel reveals the "ancient of days" judging and the "Son of Man" coming and receiving dominion and glory and kingdom. (Dan. 7; compare Rev. 5:12; 11:15)

In the post-Exilic period Zechariah again announces the judgment of the Day of the Lord and proclaims that all who survive this judgment shall worship the King, the Lord of Hosts. (Zech. 14:16ff.)

The Psalmist reveals God as He sits in judgment upon the gods of other nations and condemns them. (Ps. 82)

H. W. Robinson says:

⁶W. C. E. Oesterley and T. W. Robinson, Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 292.

At the end the God of the Psalmists is the only God of all the earth, all other gods being reduced to shadow-names or absorbed into His angelic court, whilst the highest moral and spiritual attributes are now assigned to Him.⁷

Ezra's great prayer in which he confessed the sins of the nation revealed God's continuing mercy and love for the people. (Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9).

This brief survey shows that there was a definite unfolding of God's nature in the Old Testament. Whenever the need arose, God sent another leader to reveal a little more clearly God's righteousness and mercy. This unfolding climaxes in Christ, who became man and set forth most clearly God's righteous judgments and His boundless mercy and love.

Conclusion

If a person views this unfolding and progressive elaboration of God's revelation with the humanistic and evolutionary presuppositions (listed in Chapter II), then he could conclude that there was a development in the Old Testament concept of God from henotheism to monotheism. But if one realizes that God in His mercy further revealed His righteousness and steadfast love as the need arose, then one need not doubt that the concept of God was monotheistic from the beginning. This fact should induce men to praise God

⁷H. W. Robinson, Record and Revelation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 321.

that He did continually unfold and manifest Himself so that all men might come to the knowledge of Him and be saved.

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