

Cultic Sites and Worship in the Jacob Narratives

by

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# CONTENTS

Preface .....	7
List of Abbreviations .....	9
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.3. RETROSPECTION .....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.3.1. Personal Journey .....	14
1.3.2. Theological Journey .....	16
1.3.3. Scholarly Influences .....	17
1.3.4. A New Perspective .....	20
<b>2. Methodology .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.2. STAGES IN THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2.3. AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND COMPOSITION .....</b>	<b>29</b>
2.3.1. Yahwist .....	33
2.3.1.a. Dating .....	33
2.3.1.b. Themes and Theology .....	34
2.3.2. Elohist .....	34
2.3.2.a. Dating .....	35
2.3.2.b. Themes and Theology .....	35

2.3.3. Deuteronomist .....	36
2.3.3.a. Dating .....	36
2.3.3.b. Themes and Theology .....	37
2.3.4. Priestly .....	37
2.3.4.a. Dating .....	38
2.3.4.b. Themes and Theology .....	38
2.3.5. Redaction of JE and P .....	38
2.3.5.a. Dating.....	39
2.3.5.b. Purposes and Process .....	39
<b>2.4. FURTHER INTRODUCTORY ISSUES .....</b>	<b>40</b>
2.4.1. Problems with Source Hypothesis .....	40
2.4.2. The Importance of the “G” Source .....	41
2.4.3. The Place of Oral Tradition .....	45
2.4.4. Structure of Genesis .....	45
2.4.5. A Cohesive Perspective .....	48
2.4.6. The Question of Canon .....	50
2.4.7. The Nature of Hebrew Narrative .....	51
<b>2.5. THE FAITH OF ISRAEL .....</b>	<b>52</b>
2.5.1. Patriarchal Religion .....	54
2.5.2. Altars .....	57
2.5.3. Yahweh and the Gods of the Fathers .....	59
<b>2.6. YAHWISM .....</b>	<b>61</b>
2.6.1. Orthodox Yahwism .....	61
2.6.1.a. Exclusive Worship of Yahweh .....	62
2.6.1.b. Conveying the Deity's Will .....	62
2.6.1.c. Sanctuaries .....	63
2.6.1.d. Pilgrimage Festivals .....	63
2.6.1.e. Moral and Ethical Matters .....	64
2.6.1.f. Religious Leadership .....	64
2.6.2. Heterodox Yahwism .....	64
2.6.2.a. Asherah .....	65
2.6.2.b. Masseba .....	65
2.6.2.c. Bamah .....	65
2.6.2.d. Inquiry of Divine Will .....	66
2.6.2.e. Baal .....	66

2.7. CANAANITE INFLUENCE .....	65
<b>2.8. CANAANITE RELIGION .....</b>	<b>69</b>
2.8.1. Pantheon of gods .....	71
2.8.1.a. El .....	72
2.8.1.b. Athirat/Asherah .....	73
2.8.1.c. Hadad/Baal .....	73
2.8.1.d. Anath .....	74
2.8.1.e. Ishtar/Astarte .....	75
2.8.1.f. Other gods .....	75
2.8.2. Cultic Practices .....	76
2.8.2.a. Priests .....	76
2.8.2.b. Sanctuaries .....	77
2.8.2.c. Festivals and Rituals .....	77
2.8.2.d. Prophets .....	77
2.8.2.e. Kingship .....	78
<b>2.9. INFLUENCE OF THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORIAN .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>2.10. SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>3. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>3.1. INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>3.2. THE BACKGROUND OF JACOB .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>3.3. POINTS OF INQUIRY .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>3.4. PANORAMIC SKETCH OF JACOB'S FIVE INSTANCES OF WORSHIP .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>3.5. EXEGESIS OF THE TEXTS .....</b>	<b>100</b>
3.5.1. While Fleeing from Esau, at Bethel -- Genesis 28:10-22 .....	100
3.5.1.a. Motivation .....	102
3.5.1.b. Location .....	105
3.5.1.c. Construction .....	106
3.5.1.d. Structure .....	106
3.5.1.e. Ingredients .....	107
3.5.1.f. Proclamation by Jacob .....	107
3.5.1.g. Covenants and Promises by the Deity .....	109
3.5.1.h. Participants .....	111
3.5.1.i. Money and Wealth .....	112
3.5.1.j. Vows and Oaths .....	112
3.5.1.k. Purification Rites .....	117

3.5.1.l. Prayers .....	117
3.5.1.m. Sacrifices and Rituals .....	117
3.5.1.n. Name Changes .....	119
3.5.2. While Fleeing from Laban, at Gilead -- Genesis 31:43-55 .....	119
3.5.2.a. Motivation .....	121
3.5.2.b. Location .....	122
3.5.2.c. Construction .....	123
3.5.2.d. Structure .....	124
3.5.2.e. Ingredients .....	124
3.5.2.f. Proclamation by Jacob .....	125
3.5.2.g. Covenants and Promises by the Deity .....	125
3.5.2.h. Participants .....	126
3.5.2.i. Money and Wealth .....	126
3.5.2.j. Vows and Oaths .....	128
3.5.2.k. Purification Rites .....	128
3.5.2.l. Prayers .....	128
3.5.2.m. Sacrifices and Rituals .....	128
3.5.2.n. Name Changes .....	129
3.5.2.o. Other Considerations .....	130
3.5.3. On his Arrival at Shechem -- Genesis 33:18-20 .....	131
3.5.3.a. Motivation .....	132
3.5.3.b. Location .....	133
3.5.3.c. Construction .....	133
3.5.3.d. Structure .....	133
3.5.3.e. Ingredients .....	134
3.5.3.f. Proclamation by Jacob .....	134
3.5.3.g. Covenants and Promises by the Deity .....	134
3.5.3.h. Participants .....	135
3.5.3.i. Money and Wealth .....	136
3.5.3.j. Vows and Oaths .....	136
3.5.3.k. Purification Rites .....	136
3.5.3.l. Prayers .....	136
3.5.3.m. Sacrifices and Rituals .....	137
3.5.3.n. Name Changes .....	137
3.5.3.o. Other considerations .....	137
3.5.4. While Fleeing from Shechem, at Bethel -- Genesis 35:1-15 .....	138
3.5.4.a. Motivation .....	140
3.5.4.b. Location .....	141
3.5.4.c. Construction .....	142
3.5.4.d. Structure .....	142
3.5.4.e. Ingredients .....	143
3.5.4.f. Proclamation by Jacob .....	143
3.5.4.g. Covenants and Promises by the Deity .....	143
3.5.4.h. Participants .....	144
3.5.4.i. Money and Wealth .....	144

3.5.4.j. Vows and Oaths .....	145
3.5.4.k. Purification Rites .....	148
3.5.4.l. Prayers .....	149
3.5.4.m. Sacrifices and Rituals .....	149
3.5.4.n. Name Changes .....	149
3.5.5. At Beersheba, fleeing from famine -- Genesis 46:1-4 .....	150
3.5.5.a. Motivation .....	151
3.5.5.b. Location .....	152
3.5.5.c. Construction .....	152
3.5.5.d. Structure .....	152
3.5.5.e. Ingredients .....	153
3.5.5.f. Proclamation by Jacob .....	153
3.5.5.g. Covenants and Promises by the Deity .....	154
3.5.5.h. Participants .....	155
3.5.5.i. Money and Wealth .....	157
3.5.5.j. Vows and Oaths .....	157
3.5.5.k. Purification Rites .....	158
3.5.5.l. Prayers .....	158
3.5.5.m. Sacrifices and Rituals .....	158
3.5.5.n. Name Changes .....	159
<b>3.6. JACOB'S PLACES OF WORSHIP .....</b>	<b>159</b>
3.6.1. Luz/Bethel .....	160
3.6.2. Gilead/Mizpah .....	160
3.6.3. Shechem .....	161
3.6.4. Beersheba .....	162
<b>3.7. RELATIONAL VERSUS LEGALISTIC RELIGION .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>3.8. SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>4. OTHER SOURCES CONSIDERED .....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>4.1. SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER CULTURES AND THE IMPLICATIONS ....</b>	<b>172</b>
4.1.1. Pantheon of the Gods .....	172
4.1.2. Common Cultural and Religious Roots .....	173
4.1.2.a. The Script .....	176
4.1.2.b. Language .....	176
4.1.2.c. Sagas .....	176
4.1.2.d. Religion .....	176
4.1.2.e. Cultic Poetry .....	177
4.1.2.f. Wisdom .....	177
4.1.2.g. Law .....	177

<b>4.2. ARCHEOLOGY</b> .....	179
4.2.1. Benefits for Interpretation .....	179
4.2.2. Pitfalls of Archeology .....	179
<b>4.3. SUMMARY</b> .....	189
<b>5. RELIGION AND WORSHIP</b> .....	182
<b>5.1. THE NATURE OF RELIGION</b> .....	182
<b>5.2. THE ROLE OF RITUAL</b> .....	184
<b>5.3. WORSHIP AS RELATIONSHIP</b> .....	189
<b>5.4. SUMMARY</b> .....	192
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b> .....	194
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	199

## Preface

More than just an academic exercise, the work on this thesis has been a personal journey as well. Interacting with the character of Jacob has opened up many thoughts regarding life and how we live it. Jacob is depicted as a man who kept moving regardless of the turbulent circumstances he faced at every turn. Through the rich traditions handed down to us, Jacob's life speaks volumes . . . reminding us that there is hope in the midst of hopelessness.

Most of the time spent on this academic pursuit was done with the normal load of everyday life: Teaching at Faith Theological Seminary, pastoring Lifetime Church, Missions in North India, and of course family life. Therefore this final production is the result of a few years of interaction not only with the literature mentioned in the Bibliography, but also with all the burdens of a full-time schedule. For me it has been a process of learning and developing in every area.

In addition to the normal, there was the unexpected. For over two years, my mother battled with Cancer, and finally passed away on 26 March 2007. In essence, about half of the time spent on my studies involved constant hospital visits which required a four hour one-way drive each time. Also in 2007, we dealt with my father's kidney failure, and the subsequent dialysis three times a week. My father-in-law's life and ministry was certainly an inspiration to me as he is quite adept in handling numerous responsibilities.



Special thanks are due to my promoter Dr. Willem S Boshoff. I was simply blessed not only as a result of his great insight into the area of my research, but also because of his accessibility and patience with me during the last few years of study. The library staff at UNISA has been gracious in their timely response to requests for books and articles.

I wish to express my gratefulness to the administration of Faith Theological Seminary for granting me flexibility in my schedule and a lighter teaching load during the years of my study, especially during the last two years while I focused more on my thesis. Lifetime Church also felt the burden as I backed off from many things and became less accessible to the people, especially during the last few months. Along with church members, many friends and family also encouraged me and prayed diligently.

My family certainly had a prominent role and put up with so much during the years of my study. A special appreciation to my wife Annie for her prayerful understanding and willingness to carry a heavier load at home as my focus turned to my thesis (as she also began her doctoral studies during this time). In fact, even during the early years of our marriage, I sat there for hours without end translating Hebrew and Greek texts. Both our children Nathan and Sharon were faithful to pray for me daily and were an encouragement to me. They would constantly ask me “how many pages have you finished, Daddy?”

Of course, most importantly, I thank my God (the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) for enabling me to complete something I thought would never be possible.

Alexi E. George  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJA	<i>American Journal of Archeology</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archeology Review</i>
BDB	<i>Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BR	<i>Bible Review</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
DOTP	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ISPCK	Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JLT	<i>Journal of Literature &amp; Theology</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
NICOT	<i>The New International Commentary of the Old Testament</i>
NJBC	<i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i>
NRS	New Revised Standard Version
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
TOTC	<i>Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</i>
TR	<i>Theological Review</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Jacob is depicted in the literature as a man who struggled with several dysfunctional behaviors in his life. These behavioral issues seemed to have caused him trouble wherever he went. At his parents' home he deceived his elder brother into selling him his birthright. Later he dressed up as his elder brother and deceived his aging father into giving him the blessing that was meant for his elder brother. As a result of his brother's fury, he ran away from home as a fugitive with just the clothes on his back. The narrator presents him as a restless individual trying to gain his individuality through his deceptive ways.

At his uncle Laban's home, he continued with his deceptions as he dealt with his uncle and his sons. His uncle seemed to be a man of equal trickery and determination as Jacob. In Laban he had met his match, but he continued in his deceptive ways. A similar pattern of behavior is repeated with his wives in his own home. His children begin to take on the same pattern of behavior in dealing with their father and neighboring clans as they settled in new territory. The most fascinating aspect of this narrative is that in the midst of all this trickery, deceit, and the other dysfunctions that he experienced, Jacob was portrayed as a man of worship and piety. Toward the end of the Jacob narratives, we see a change taking place in this man of vices. His attitude, focus, and his complete personality goes through a metamorphosis.

The narrator is silent regarding the paradox between Jacob's character and his piety. The depiction of God in this regard is the same way; He does not deal with Jacob's character. God is silent regarding this matter. The tradition indicates that God accepted Jacob's worship each time regardless of the deceptive situations that led him to the place where he was worshipping. The characters in the story do question each other about their deceptions, but no one relents nor changes their ways. The narrator never corrects or looks down on Jacob's character. In view of Jacob's experiences and habit of worship, what are the cultic and/or social factors that were involved in his transformation? What might have been the narrator's intent in showing Jacob as a worshiper along with all his flaws? With an in-depth exegetical analysis of five passages depicting Jacob's worship, we will explore the possible factors that resulted in a change in this intriguing character.

## **1.2. Significance of the Problem**

The depiction of Jacob as a man of vices who develops a habit of worship holds quite a significance for our study. Although it was a sporadic occurrence, he paused long enough during the important junctures of his life to call on his God. The patriarchal traditions show that Jacob gradually goes through changes in his personality as God patiently labored to bring Jacob to another level. In fact it is significant to observe that Jacob is depicted as having a personal relationship with God who deals with patience and understanding. The significance of this consideration can have important implications for grass-roots level ministry to those who experience brokenness in their lives.

The traditions also give emphasis to the cultic experiences of Jacob's journey through life. Through our study we will observe how the Canaanite influence impacted the traditions of the Israelites. During the monarchy and during the exilic and post-exilic times, the heavy

cultic and ritualistic focus of the religious and political elite influenced the reformulation of the traditions.

The Jacob narratives were an important part of the Israelite tradition. As a body of literature, their tradition had the task of communicating to a people settling and finding their place and identity in a new land. It was important for them to establish an identity apart from the other peoples of the land, yet sufficiently interrelated to the rest of the religious traditions that were prevalent at that time. Their religious identity became their foremost point of individuality and distinction as an independent nation in the new land. A theological example of this would have been the identity between the Canaanite high god El and Yahweh. Being outsiders, this connection allowed them to relate with the Canaanite culture, yet develop a separate identity (Dearman 1992:21). Thus they forged an autonomous but interdependent status in the new land.

The term “Canaanite” has a broad application in usage, both in a linguistic and cultural-religious sense. The Canaanite language finds its identity linguistically within the branch of languages in the North-West Semitic region. Uniquely connected, these languages share specific linguistic characteristics. In the cultural-religious sense, the term Canaanite represents the native religion and culture of the original West Semitic people of the Phoenician coast and Palestine. In the religious sense, it represents the specific pantheon of Gods whose head was El (Oldenburg 1969:3). It was in the midst of this powerful Canaanite culture that Israel settled and struggled to form its identity as the people of God.

In dealing with the history of Israel, it is important to note the perspective from which this discipline operates. Being distinct from a purely theological study, it focuses on the development of Israel’s religion as one among others from that time period. Theological value judgments and apologetic considerations are not primary in this perspective (Fohrer

1972:23). Of course, this seems to present the claim of an “objective” study, but such a claim would be illogical, since no history is free of the historian’s presuppositions stemming from personal faith and the confessions of one’s church. In fact, one’s personal faith need not be sacrificed on the altar of objectivity. Considering the history of Israel’s faith as a personal journey of researching one’s own “faith” tradition is a viable perspective that should be upheld. As a result of the study, our personal faith should be strengthened and enhanced. Further, a lack of complete objectivity does not have to presuppose a subjectivity either, since there are sufficient controls. “The selection of material, the emphases, and the evaluations must be proved by the criterion of their capacity to lead to the reconstruction of a continuous history which as far as possible fits all the Old Testament texts and the archaeological and historical data into a plausible overall picture” (Albertz 1992:14).

### **1.3. RETROSPECTION**

My interest in the religion of Israel comes from a deep desire to comprehend various forms of worship. Having lived in the United States and India and various parts of both countries, and having traveled to several other countries, I’ve been exposed to numerous religious traditions and different styles of Christian worship within each tradition. Generally, some of those who propose each of these styles and traditions feel that their practices are normative as a pattern for worship. Others are quite firm in their efforts to prove that their form of worship is the “true” or “original” expression that God demands. Others are convinced that their church actually follows the first century model of worship and church polity. Then there are those who place a high value on the early church fathers and their writings. They seek to incorporate these writings and interpretations of scripture into their worship. Along with these, numerous other perspectives are held by various groups to be

normative for Christian worship settings. These varying perspectives have developed in me a curiosity which is the source of inspiration for this research.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3.1. Personal Journey

Early promptings for this theological journey began in my teenage years. I remember sitting in church on a Sunday morning listening to a guest speaker as he read his text from the Bible and began to preach. The biblical text and the rest of his sermon did not seem to have much connection. What I heard was not an exposition of the text based on exegesis, rather the text was simply used as a “spring board” to validate the ideas that he had in his mind. Although at that age I certainly had no understanding of concepts such as exegesis, I was sure that proper connection was not there between the text and the sermon and that some important things were lacking. At that time, I began to develop a desire to study the Bible in depth with the hope of handling the text more responsibly.

A further prompting was my experience in ministry during those young teenage years. Growing up in the south Bronx, a not so reputable area of New York City, our family, just as everyone else there, was surrounded by the brokenness of people's lives. Hatred and violence was the environment that we grew up with. My brother and I worked together and reached out to as many people as we could with the message of hope. We distributed literature and personally spoke with people regarding the hope that they needed (yes, even at that young age, we attempted this), and I remember the few who actually responded to our presentation. As a result, we saw the eventful changes that took place in people's lives. In High School, I was involved with a prayer group that was successful in reaching out to students who were on

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<sup>1</sup> This curiosity began from childhood and has remained unresolved. It is hoped that this research will make a significant contribution to the resolution of that curiosity for the present writer and for those who share the same conflicts.

drugs and alcohol, and consequently involved in violence and crime. The change I saw in the lives of fellow students built faith within me for the message of the Bible.

There was one specific experience that is still vivid in my memory. Severe communal violence broke out between a group of students at our school and another one a few miles away. In one clash, one of our students was stabbed to death on a bus in broad daylight. In retaliation, a very large group of students from our school went to the other school and stabbed and killed several students there. The teachers and staff of our school were in a difficult situation trying to deal with the aftereffects of all this hatred and violence. The tensions were quite high with the staff, and school security personnel dealing with the police department regarding the killings. But in the midst of all this tension, our prayer group had arranged a combined meeting with a similar group at the other High School. Several people warned us not to even walk on that campus during this time of tension for fear of further retaliation. But we felt that this is exactly the time that we must do this. We went as a group (different from the other group that had gone to that school) and took part in that combined meeting. It was a joyous time of Bible reading, discussions, and prayer that we concluded with the song “Bind us together Lord bind us together with cords that cannot be broken . . . bind us together with love.” We all sang that song with tears in our eyes as we remembered all the violence and hatred that surrounded us. Although violence was a real and significant part of our daily lives, we were grateful and excited to see how one by one, lives were changed right in front of our eyes. Maybe the most significant change was the change in each one of us that gathered there. We would never be the same again. Our perspectives have been altered for life. We learned the most exciting lesson of our life that hope still lives in the midst of hopelessness. The impact of those youthful days continues within me even now. This Bible that I hold in my hands certainly has the message of hope for the hopeless. Being



a book that has given hope to so many, I am even more committed to learn to handle it responsibly just as that day I sat in church listening to that sermon.

With this perspective of changed lives, we will take a close look at the story of one man whose life was altered for the better as he was impacted by his God Yahweh. Jacob is depicted as a man who struggled with the vices in his life that caused him trouble wherever he went. This struggle was evident as he lived in his parent's home, dealt with his wives and children, associated with his in-laws, and connected with neighboring tribes.

### 1.3.2. Theological Journey

With the above mentioned background and perspective on faith, I went forward to pursue theological training. While studying for the Bachelors degree in Fresno, California, I was involved with various ministry opportunities such as Jails, Nursing Homes, Juvenile Halls, Rescue Missions, street ministry, Sunday school, youth clubs, and various other ministries that reached out to the broken and distressed. This perspective on grass-roots level ministry had become my life focus.

My studies focused generally on Christian ministry, as I wished to improve my ministry skills. My education for the Masters degree took me to Springfield, Missouri. There, I focused my studies for a different aspect of my future ministry. Since I wanted to teach along with being involved in ministry at the grass-roots level, I tailored my education to meet those ends. I took the option for a dual concentration in Christian Education and Biblical Languages, along with a further opportunity to take extra Hebrew and Greek exegesis courses. I thoroughly enjoyed the courses where we were able to use the biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) in the process of interpreting the text. Specifically

exciting was the opportunity to take the text and work through the entire process and finally come to the application for daily life.

I had a dual intent when dealing with the Bible: To be faithful in handling the text responsibly, and at the same time making the text applicable to life. Such an intent came as a result of my teenage years and the experiences mentioned above. Periodically my memory takes me back to my time as a teenager sitting on that church pew making the decision to study the Bible so as to handle it more responsibly. This focus has proved to be fruitful and challenging to me in numerous ways. Exegesis and interpretation has been quite a fulfilling task as I have been engaging the text for the purpose of writing and preaching through the years. It has also brought numerous challenges in ministry as my interpretation on several issues has differed from my church tradition. That has also been an important process in my personal journey as I have learned to deal with the ecclesiastical authorities in an attitude of respect, understanding, and patience.

### 1.3.3. Scholarly Influences

Numerous influences have impacted my theological understanding and interests. Initially, my interest in the Old Testament developed due to the influence of two of my professors in Old Testament, Dr. Stanley Horton and Dr. Roger Cotton of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. There were numerous “outside the classroom” discussions and debates that spurred me on to dig further in my studies in Old Testament. During my student teaching days at Central Bible College, Dr. Dale Brueggemann was one of the Old Testament professors there with whom I spent a considerable amount of time discussing this new and growing passion. All three of these men had significantly impacted me with their passion for the study of the Old Testament.

My perceptions on the Hebrew scriptures continued to develop further as I have been teaching Old Testament at Faith Theological Seminary, Manakala, India for the last 11 years. My thinking has developed from a pre-critical understanding to what I hope is a more responsible view of the text. With a critical view of the text, I am well aware of the developmental reality of the text. I consider the developmental aspect of the Bible as a given, but the view on how it has developed in ancient times and how it has been updated and edited is certainly open for debate. It is this aspect of the critical view that keeps filling up the pages of so many journals and books for so long. I believe this is an important aspect that we must continue exploring. In this journey, several authors have influenced my perspective on the text. Although I may not be in agreement with everything they propose, there are important areas in their work that I have come to appreciate, especially those who have a holistic view, as opposed to the extreme atomization of the text.

A convergence between biblical theology and introductory studies was recognized by von Rad to be an important step in the understanding of the Old Testament. This view was based on his desire to overcome the atomizing of the biblical text that has for so long dominated the study of the Old Testament. He stressed that the unity of the Bible was evident in its theme of promise and fulfillment. The God of Israel gave promises of land, progeny, and blessing, which are consistently being fulfilled throughout their tradition. Thus he attempted to connect the biblical traditions in a coherent manner. Another important aspect was his perspective of the development of the traditions as a result of their worship. Earlier traditions of their liturgy was adapted by each new generation according to the circumstances in which they lived (von Rad 1962).

Brevard Childs also had an impact on me in his resistance of atomizing the text, but in a different manner. He was interested in employing the results of studying the Bible using

the historical critical model to benefit the community of faith. Influenced by von Rad, he also desired to look at the traditions in a coherent manner. He was convinced that “the relation between the historical critical study of the Bible and its theological use as religious literature within a community of faith and practice needs to be completely rethought.” He was not thinking of simply minor revisions to the old methods, but rather a completely new perspective which he termed the Canonical perspective (Childs 1979).

Especially for the study of the Pentateuch, Rolf Rendtorff has attempted to bring together the ideas of von Rad and Childs. He understood the narrative traditions to be a further combination of the individual complexes of tradition. Although the “larger units” of the narratives are still distinguishable in the current text, each one stands out with its own distinctiveness. Rendtorff differs from Childs in that he does not view the Old Testament with a supersessionist view in relation to the New Testament. He is sympathetic to the Jewish readers of the Bible. Rendtorff makes a break from the source categorization of JEDP and takes a more holistic view of the text (Rendtorff 1983:160-61).

Brueggemann recently published his introduction to the Old Testament using the Canonical perspective. This is his first formal and explicit leaning toward the Canonical view, taking some important cues from Childs. But he, like Rendtorff, is careful to distance himself from the supersessionist view of Childs in relation to the New Testament. What has impacted me is his focus on making Old Testament studies accessible to more than the “experts.” For so long, it has remained as an elite endeavor intended for the academicians. He suggests that some of the newer methods such as canonical, rhetorical, and sociological allows the text to be interpreted so as to connect with the contemporary community. He contends that Old Testament studies must connect with the “contemporary interpretive community of the church” (Brueggemann 2003).

David Noel Freedman has impressed me with an approach that is so thorough that I consider almost “complete.” I’ve learned much from his crisp, clear, concise writing style. Every time I pick up his writings, he engages me deeply in the material at hand. He also has a perspective on the text that is quite balanced. “His careful dating of the composition and editing of the parts of the Hebrew Bible, for example, runs completely contrary to the late-dating, minimalizing, fictionalizing tendencies that currently mar scholarship” (Friedman 1998).

A fresh approach to the biblical text is presented by Robert Alter. I have enjoyed his analysis and commentary on the texts that we are considering here too. With a good literary eye, he looks at the text and observes what is not easily visible to the common reader. From the perspective of literary criticism, the Bible is quite unusual in its lack of authorial presentation. Historical criticism has brought out the fragmented nature of various parts of the text. He refers to the numerous perspectives that has come up as a result of all these analysts as grounded in conjecture. He has found a way of bridging the gap between both Historical criticism and literary criticism and come up with a reading and analysis of the text that is useful to gain a clear understanding of the intricacies of the literature (Alter 1992).

#### 1.3.4. A New Perspective

As my perspective has developed to what I hope is a more responsible view rather than the former precritical one, it is important to consider the text with openness. The ultimate question is, can we as interpreters of the text be as honest as the writers and compilers of the Bible? (Elazar 1994:294). They seemed to have expressed their ideas with a “dangerous” level of honesty. This seems most evident when dealing with their religious leaders and rulers of the nation. They are not hesitant to acknowledge their weaknesses and flaws. Somehow, the readers and the common interpreters seem to ignore those expressions

of the text. But we must ensure that we approach the text with the maximum level of openness possible so that we may gain much from our endeavors.

## **Chapter 2 METHODOLOGY**

The methodology described below is the framework whereby this research is done. The first section describes my own methodology for research, which comes under the general framework of the religio-historical method, with a holistic and cohesive perspective on the text. The rest of the chapter deals with general introductory issues in relation with the Pentateuch. The material is organized with my own perspectives on the introductory issues. Thus the entire chapter is intended to set the a general framework for our research.

### **2.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

It is clear that one's perspectives on God, history, theology, and many other issues play a major role in the utilization of research methodology. I prefer to take a developmental view of the text, but with a more cohesive perspective for the purpose of a more responsible exegesis. From the current form of the text that we now possess, we look back through the layers of revisions, emendations, additions, and the overall development of the concepts. I differ from the views of Van Seters who claims that much of the Pentateuch was a “creation” of later times (Van Seters 1998:503-513).<sup>2</sup> The traditions in the Bible reach back very far to ancient days. Although all aspects of the traditions that were passed down to us may not be

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<sup>2</sup> Although I disagree with Van Seters regarding his idea that the text was a “creation” of later times, I do appreciate his method of handling the text for the sake of interpretation. He looks at the text in a more cohesive way, allowing the meaning to come through as the final authors would have desired.

entirely historical, the critical core or the nucleus of their stories contain some actual historical elements.

The initial stages comprised of a long stretch of oral tradition that would have altered and made additions to the stories as they were passed down. Once the traditions were put to writing, the revisions would take a different form than the previous development through oral tradition. The written text would have provided more concreteness and thus it would become more resistant to change. This is not to imply that there were no changes after the oral traditions were put into writing. Certainly there were changes, and those changes are apparent when we take a closer look at the text.

Numerous factors were involved in the development of the traditions. The needs of the people changed with each generation. Of course, generational development and changes would have been less frequent than in modern times. Each generation followed the footsteps of the previous generation, creating more generational continuity than the modern mind may be able to comprehend. As the people settled in the new land, they experienced the drastic changes from a tribal society to a settled agrarian culture. The nature of their relations with their neighbors changed as they were not permanent in the area. Historically, as semi-nomads, they were able to move away as disagreements made it difficult for them to remain in the land (Gn 26:18-25). But now things have become different, and they relate differently in the new land. This caused them to mingle more closely and they began to intermarry, thus adopting their culture and religion more than ever before. Due to these reasons, I am inclined to believe that the greatest amount of adaptation in their traditions would have occurred during the period after the settlement, consisting of the time of the Judges and the early monarchical times. Certainly there were developments and changes to their traditions during



the time the oral traditions were passed down, but the changes after the settlement would be of a greater magnitude.

We can understand the current research and exegesis in light of a religio-historical perspective on the text. This perspective seeks to understand the religion of Israel in light of its historical development. It was important to understand the Old Testament religion with the perspective of its historical environment, including the religions of that time (Soulen 1981:167-68). It was Hermann Gunkel and his friends (Albert Eichhorn, William Wrede, Wilhelm Bousset, Johannes Weiss, Ernst Troeltsch, Wilhelm Heitmüller, and P. Wernle) who were responsible for the development of the religio-historical method. The developmental history was highly important for him in understanding the biblical religion. His concern was not a theological or ecclesiastical endeavor, but the way the various ancient traditions came together and connected with each other to produce the present tradition, and the history behind the religion as presented in the biblical text. In Gunkel's perspective, the “present tradition” is the product of a long process of formation and “traditioning.” Thus there is a primary shift in interest from “sources” to “traditions” (Gunkel & Zimmern 2006:202).

Taking a holistic view of the text, I acknowledge the great contributions of Historical Criticism. The results of critical study need to be appropriately synthesized and used to benefit the exegete. In my exegesis of the Jacob narratives, I have attempted to effectively use the results of critical study, specifically the historical development of the text to better understand the narratives in their context. The stages in the development of the text give us clues regarding the thought process of the people who used the traditions for their benefit throughout numerous generations.

## 2.2. STAGES IN THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The earliest stages in the study of the Old Testament were of a confessional nature. Jews and Christians alike studied the Bible with faith as their starting point. The Bible was studied as their primary rule of faith and practice for their religious endeavors. It was understood to be the divinely inspired Scriptures, directly given by God, as Holy Writ (Dever 2003:1). Although descending views on the scriptures did surface, the highly normative view of the Bible was so strongly embedded that any variation in perspectives would be termed as heretic and intolerable.

The next phase in biblical study had an exponential impact for generations to come, lasting even until now. This phase began to open the minds of the people and prepared the way for the critical study of the Bible. In 1678, Richard Simon published his *Histoire critique du texte, des versions, et des commentateurs du Vieux Testament*. His study of the Bible based on literary and historical analysis produced insights that were revolutionary in nature (Suelzer & Kselman 1990:1115). Careful study of the repetitious passages throughout the Pentateuch led him to the conclusion that more than one author had produced the text. Before he attracted much attention, Simon became a victim of the ecclesiastical hatchet of authority, which stifled his work and caused him to be forgotten for a long time (Kimbrough 1978:18-19). It was only many years later that his ideas were picked up and began to harvest the inevitable fruits of his labor.

Fohrer (1972:17-18) credits the age of Enlightenment and rationalism and its focus on reason. Reason and revelation were contrasted, which led to the quest to show Christianity as the ideal rational religion. This process inevitably led to the necessity of explaining the biblical text to make it more palatable to the rational mind. During the Renaissance, a historical-critical perspective was used on ancient texts of Greeks and Romans and some

documents of the church. This method did not quickly take effect on the Bible because of the strong perspective on faith held by the church (Gottwald 1985: 9-10).

It was the Protestant Reformation that freed the Bible from the strong control of the church. Martin Luther was key in emphasizing that the Bible is to be understood apart from the controlled interpretation of the organized church. Luther's intellect, with his theological expressions clearly changed the direction of Biblical Studies in a significant way and opened the doors for critical interpretation (Brueggemann 1997:1-6). Even those who do not propose the critical approach to the Bible seem to acknowledge the Reformation's impact on the "historical development of revelation"(Payne 1962:26). Harrison (1969:7-8) a strong opponent of the critical approach denied that the Reformation introduced Biblical criticism, but acknowledged Luther's rejection of certain New Testament books on the basis of not promoting Christ. Of course, if Luther did continue with this criteria for the Old Testament, it would have interesting implications which he himself would not be able to accept.

The patterns for biblical studies have changed in some significant ways. Biblical criticism with its dependence on historicism has vacillated significantly during the previous centuries. Not only were there extreme variations within the framework of biblical criticism, but also a constant questioning of its validity in evaluating the scriptures. "This may or may not be right. But, if it should be true, it will not mean that the place of biblical criticism will thereby be undermined: On the contrary, literary and linguistic criteria, properly applied, may well reinforce the soundness of the tradition of biblical criticism" (Barr 1983:106). It is yet to be seen to what extent biblical criticism has moved on to a certain focus on the literary analysis of the text.

Numerous perspectives will continue to surface as time goes on. Each new perspective will work to broaden our understanding of the traditions, and hopefully will

accumulate to give us a more “responsible” view of the issues at hand. A recent study of the influence of the postmodern age on historical criticism by Collins, looks at the issue from a different angle. He identifies how Biblical studies has gained from postmodernist criticism, in that it goes “out to the highways and by-ways to bring new ‘voices from the margin’ to the conversation” (Collins 2005:160-61). Thus perspectives that were kept away from the mainstream now comes to the forefront. And inversely, a wider range of perspectives are available to the general public.

Israel was forced to reconcile their identity among the nations in a time of growth and power under the rule of David and Solomon. We must also take into consideration that their background was varied and revolutionary. Thus Eichrodt (1960:50) presents the Pentateuch as a “reflective commentary on the past.” Israel identified their supremacy through the God of the Fathers, who is also the Creator, who makes a choice among the peoples and worked out his purpose in developing this nation in the midst of the entire human race. Thus the Pentateuch provided for them a much needed perspective and focus to bring themselves an identity among the nations.

Since external sources for information regarding the patriarchs are not available, the biblical record remains our primary source. Secondary sources, although less reliable, will provide a fuller meaning and insight into the Biblical times. Although the biblical records were compiled much later than the actual events, “they contain units of tradition and older continuous sources that derive from earlier stages of Israel’s history” (Gottwald 1985:136). It is important to note that these national and religious traditions held a certain level of authority for the people (Barr 1983:8) since they were valued through the generations. That valuation held strong even when the traditions about their forefathers were negative, even to the extent of being immoral. The compilation of these oral and literary sources have been

and continue to be a source of constant debate. Although we will not be providing a final statement on this, we will briefly consider the options and offer some suggestions.

There has been several schools of thought regarding the biblical records in the last century. First, there was moderate revision with the Albright/Wright/Bright Baltimore school. They used archeology and supported the general viability of the biblical record. Many conservatives latched on to the findings of this group of scholars for the validity of the scriptures. This also became a foundation for proving inspiration and authority of the Bible. Second, a historical/critical approach was promoted by the Alt/Noth school. This school gave a continuing push to the classical historical/critical approach. Third, the sociological approach was taken by the Gottwald school, which provided a fresh new perspective on the Old Testament. Fourth, Soggin, Miller, Hayes, Van Seters, and Thompson said that there was no confederacy at all, and that the idea was the creation of the exilic period meant to restructure Israel's history. Although the work done by these scholars are solid, it is often difficult for many to digest their extreme views. "So the academy is divided, with a resurgent interest in the literary as well as material evidence, and utilizing narrative as well as social factors in reconstructing the history of ancient Israel" (Osborne 2005:674-75). It is important to note that each of these perspectives highlight areas that were previously neglected or unknown. It is imperative that we learn from all of them with an open mind, thereby enhancing our own position.

The critical view of the text asks questions with an attempt to be objective in perspective. Yet it is intriguing to note the perspective of an individual with the presupposition of the supernatural. When faced with such texts as the ladder on which angels descended and ascended, the Eastern mind<sup>3</sup> would readily accept the viability of the account,

3 When I mention the "Eastern mind," I refer to the Indian context that is highly religious and supernaturalistic. In such a context, the supernatural is assumed when dealing with religious expressions, either Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, or

but the critical mind would certainly ask questions of validity. The common trend has been to put these off as mere myths that must be overlooked. With such mythic language and imagery, these ancient texts are considered of no value to even get a glimpse of the history. Mendenhall (2001:44, 53) identifies other ancient peoples who also used mythic language and such imagery to indicate real events of momentous value. He concludes that just because the writer uses supernatural imagery, it does not necessarily indicate the use of ancient fiction writing. It was a form of ancient writing that expressed historical items in such a framework. Ultimately, the evaluation is completely dependent on the interpreter's perspective of reality, and how one understands the supernatural (Dillard 1994:21-25). If one begins with an anti-supernaturalistic view, then any such writing would be rejected as fiction without even a hint of historical value. Rather we need to understand that such writing may point to important occurrences in history, thus their usage of supernatural imagery.

### **2.3. AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND COMPOSITION**

Traditionally, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was universally accepted. The biblical text was seen as a heaven-sent document, given directly to the writers. Through the years, there were those who disagreed and questioned the traditional views of the church, but there was little interest to support such controversial views. As a result of the enlightenment and scientific advancements, people began to think more openly about issues that were formerly ignored. One of the early queries that opened the way for the critical issues was the question of the variation in divine names. The name Yahweh and the generic term for divinity, Elohim were used alternatively in the early chapters of Genesis. As these names were connected with similarities in vocabulary, style, and content, the suggestion was raised that several sources were behind this document. Later, the idea of the four supposed sources, any of the other religions and sects.

JEDP, was popularized by Wellhausen and became the consensus among many biblical scholars (Murphy 2001:3-7). This view held such a prominent place that it may have presented another form of the old “ecclesiastical stronghold” that once held biblical scholarship in its grip.

Now the views have shifted, and no longer does the consensus on sources have a stronghold on biblical scholarship. More attention has been given to the value of the oral traditions that predate these writings. With a more open, broader perspective, the discussions do get even more complicated than before. But that is certainly for the good of Biblical scholarship, now that even those critical “traditions” have been lifted. Due to the prominent place it had on Biblical scholarship for such a long time, our discussions here will begin with the assumptions of the traditional source critical theory of the four strands, JEDP.<sup>4</sup> Then we will move on to a more cohesive perspective on the text.

The contents and theology expressed in the text are derived from various sources. The basic content comes from primarily oral and possibly some literary sources much before the time of compilation. The perceptions about God and their relationship with God come from the religion of the patriarchs (Westermann 1987:89-90) by way of the traditions. Along with this, there is the influence of the Monarchical times, when the material was compiled into an organized body of literature. The vital nucleus of the tradition that was passed down was developed further to fit the needs of the people of that time. Israel was settling down among the nations, finally becoming “like the other nations” by installing a king. By the time of David and Solomon, their identity among the nations was in place. Although the authority structure was finally in their hands, their culture and religion was certainly influenced by the Canaanites who lived in the surrounding areas and among them. As they shared cultic sites

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<sup>4</sup> Numerous surveys and summaries are available on the four sources. Below I have used a selected list intended to survey the development of these concepts.

that were spread throughout the region and mingled and traded with each other, various aspects of their religions also became fused. Along with their religion, there was a social intermingling that had intense significance for the future of the nation. At the time of the Judges, the people intermarried with the Canaanites (Jdg 3:5-6), thus integrating the two peoples together for several generations until the time of the monarchy.

As a people struggling with their identity among the various tribal groups, Israel called upon its rich resources in tradition. The traditions began to take on a revised form among the people. Along with this oral revision, the process of writing also began. For centuries, these traditions may have remained in the oral form as myths and sagas, but it was during the time of the monarchy that it was finally put to writing. As the religion and culture of the Israelites had been reformulated because of the Canaanite influence, it was not a significant change in the actual writing process. The traditions may have already taken on the flavor of the Canaanite religious systems. Thus the oral tradition itself would reflect some of the influences from the Canaanites, though it is was a gradual process separated chronologically by a significant margin of time. The religion of the patriarchs would have been a more simple religion, further developed by the highly ritualistic Canaanite religion. That influence would continue into the Monarchical times and have direct influence on the compilers and writers of the text.

It is not a simple matter to distinguish the various influences in theology. Sometimes, in our interpretation, it may become an arbitrary decision. The aspects that stem back to the patriarchal times would be difficult to determine, and we may not know the extent of that influence, especially due to a lack of objective data of those times. The “spiritual meaning” is described by von Rad (2005:18) as the reflections of the theologian who compiled the historical narrative. Although the contents are presented as coming from the patriarchal



times, the theology has been influenced by the narrator who comes with a set of prescribed concepts from his context.

It is intriguing to observe the mundane nature of parts of the Pentateuch in relation to other religious writings (Pfeiffer 1948:5). For those coming from very pious religious traditions, various texts of the Bible may seem quite un-religious, or even sacrilegious in nature. Some books of the Bible such as Esther, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes may seem too “secular” to be included in a religious collection of writings. We need to understand that the intention of this literature is to address Israel as a nation that is Theocratic in nature (Driver 1956:6). This would explain the inclusion of the mundane and the cultic materials together as one compilation of literature. The people had to relate the daily struggles of life to the community and to their religious traditions. Thus the needs apparent in the Israelite community during the monarchy prompted the compilation and collection of the traditions. In the initial stages, the particular needs of the community were in the forefront, and the idea of compiling a broad range of literature for religious purposes only came much later in history (Gottwald 1985:93).

As we consider the proposed four “strands” of the Pentateuch, we can conveniently use the analogy of the electrical cord. “The wiring on the outside, visible to the eye, gives the impression of unity, one substance. Once the outer casing is removed, however, one detects immediately several different wires, indicated by color, inside the casing” (Hamilton 1990:15). Although this analogy gives a proper perspective, the distinction between each of the strands of sources is not so well defined. Below we will take a look at the proposed sources of the Pentateuch for the purpose of understanding the characteristics and nature of each of the strands.

### 2.3.1. *Yahwist* (J)

This strand is named Yahwist because of its use of the divine name YHWH. Since the German name for Yahweh begins with J for Jahweh, and the traditional English rendering was Jehovah, this strand has come to be known as J. Internal variations have prompted some to divide J further into two. Some identified an earlier and later Yahwist and called them J1 and J2. Later, Eissfeldt identified J1 as the lay source (L), which contrasted it with the Priestly writing that came later. Fohrer saw the nomadic elements in J2 and identified it as the nomadic source (N) (Rendtorff 1983:157-58). But more recently, the trend has moved away from the extreme atomization of the text. Many are proposing a view of the text that is more coherent than the former concepts that has been held for so long.

#### 2.3.1.a. Dating

The Yahwist narrative (J), is thought to have had its rise in Judah. This perspective is partly because of references to territorial expansion in Genesis (Gn 15:18; 27:40) and due to the general ascendancy of Judah as depicted in the source material isolated (cf. Gn 49:8ff.). Since there is no mention of a threat from the Assyrians to the Northern or Southern Kingdoms, Kaiser (1975:82-83) dates J between the middle of the tenth and ninth centuries BC. Gottwald's (1985:137) dating is more pointed, ca. 960-930 BC, during the reign of Solomon. Then there are others that posit a very late date into the Persian or early Hellenistic time period for the final production of J (Van Seters 1975:120-21). Some suggest that indiscriminately and regularly, J uses the word Elohim for Yahweh (Van Seters 1992:281,293). This argument is often countered by the possibility of later scribal glosses to bring better uniformity to the text.

### 2.3.1.b. Themes and Theology

The extent of J has always been a matter of some dispute, and thus has precluded a firm determination of its date. The J source is held to be intensely nationalistic in outlook, professing a sense of superiority over the other peoples, pride in the past achievements, and faith in its future (Pfeiffer 1948:148). He shows particular interest in recording the activities of the Hebrew patriarchs. The unity of the compilation has been dramatic. He has put together the material drawing from various traditions from Israel (Pfeiffer 1948:42-43).

From a theological standpoint it is notable for its simplicity (Ringgren 1966:6) and anthropomorphic representation of their deity, who frequently assumed quasi-human form and communed with men. The J writer also had a prophet-like interest in ethical and theological reflection, but little interest in sacrifice or ritual.

### 2.3.2. *Elohist* (E)

The Elohist strand gets its name from its use of the designation *'elohim*. Similar to J, it is presented as a narrative throughout the document. An Ephraimite origin has been suggested since it avoided the stories of Abraham and Lot, which had to do with Hebron and the cities of the valley. Also a special emphasis seems to be given to Bethel and Shechem (Gn 28:17, 31:13, 33:19f.). It is assumed that the priests at Bethel and other high places referred to their God as "Elohim," as an appellative, like "the king, the Prime Minister" (Pfeiffer 1948:168). A further reason for suggesting a northern origin is because of the prominence given to Joseph, the ancestor of Ephraim and Manasseh. This document is supposed to be more fragmentary and less continuous than J with its well defined literary parameters.

### 2.3.2.a. Dating

The dating of E is simply problematic due to its fragmentary nature. Generally, E is dated later than J, at 900-850 BC (Gottwald 1985:137). Dating E later than J may be due to its fragmentary nature and its supplementary role in relation to J. As the traditions developed into its various strands, the compilation may have brought together older and newer material in a way that would make it difficult to determine its dating.

### 2.3.2.b. Themes and Theology

In spite of its fragmentary nature, some see in E a planned logical presentation of his material (Pfeiffer 1948:176). Ringgren (1966:6) maintains that a special interest in dreams and visions can be seen in E. Wellhausen contended that in E, God dealt with people exclusively through dreams. Such a rigid perspective caused many to struggle with their interpretations of various issues. In some instances, when the text would show obvious indication that it does not come from the Elohist tradition, elements of communication by God through dreams would force the exegete to conclude an Elohist background (Yoreh 2005:95-96). Thus it is clear that contextual considerations should take precedence over structural ideals such as the assumed JEDP pattern.

Theologically it has a special religious and moralistic emphases, as evidenced in the command to sacrifice Isaac (Gn 22:1 ff.) as a means of teaching the patriarch Abraham that true sacrifice is an inward affair and not a matter of external ritual. We also see E targeting the syncretism of the ninth century northern kingdom (Brueggemann & Wolff 1975:34).

### 2.3.3. *Deuteronomist (D)*

The Deuteronomic document (D) corresponds primarily to the book of Deuteronomy, and it is named with this connection. It was during a scouring of the temple that a scroll of the law was found. The words of the law made such an impact on Josiah that he began a thorough process of religious reform in Israel. The first to suggest the relation of the law book to the book of Deuteronomy was De Wette (Hess 2007:47). As a result of the religious reform, the Deuteronomistic writers compiled a large amount of traditions and formulated their version of Israel's history. This further developed text runs from the book of Deuteronomy up to 2 Kings.

#### 2.3.3.a. Dating

Although De Wette and others who followed his line of thought felt that the text was written at the time of Josiah, the contents of this subdivision suggest a date of ca. 700 BC (Freedman 1997:107). Gottwald (1985:138-39) suggests that the traditions of the Deuteronomist began as early as the writing of E. His claim suggests that the style of instruction and writing would have a long tradition that goes much further back than the Deuteronomists themselves. I believe that this is evidence of the more holistic and cohesive perspective on the texts. The extreme atomizing of the text for so long has embedded into the minds of interpreters a certain perspective on the text that is quite fragmentary. Such observations as that of Gottwald is evidence of the possibility of the text being more cohesive than previously understood. This concept is further discussed below in the section “A Cohesive Perspective.”

#### 2.3.3.b. Themes and Theology

The primary objective of this document was to influence the people of Judah to reject their local sanctuaries and to bring their sacrifices to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem. The local sanctuaries were not only convenient, but they would hold deeper meaning for them because of the possible personal identification that they might have with those sanctuaries.

D presented the Covenant relationship with a sense of social justice, and with a unique religious philosophy of history. The formulation of this document was to present a completely different view of their history.

#### 2.3.4. *Priestly* (P)

The Priestly Code (P) was a compilation of legal and ceremonial material derived from various periods of Israelite history, and codified in such a manner as to organize the legal structure of the post-exilic Jewish theocracy. The existence of P as an independent narrative source has been questioned with a new perspective (Rendtorff 1983:159). Van Seters (1992:281) notes that the use of “*toledot*” (these are the generations of...), has been used by P as a convenient literary tool to frame the major sections of Genesis. Cross (1973:301-03) maintains that being more than a redactor, P connected blocks of material, but a detailed tradent reworked and supplemented the traditions that were handed down. Childs (1979:123) disagrees with the extent at which Cross demarcates the issue of source and redaction. Rather, he suggests that P was an independent source and also had a redactional role. Freedman (1997:111) considers the possibility of P being the compiler, but goes on to affirm that the possibility is greater for P to be an independent source. My personal view goes against that of Childs. I do not see P as an independent source, but rather a redaction of the traditions. P's attempt was to bring cohesiveness to the text by various means.

#### 2.3.4.a. Dating

Many scholars including Freedman (1997:111) propose an exilic origin while others like Childs (1979:123) take a pre-exilic view. There is a highly detailed and systematic nature for much of its contents (Ringgren 1966:6). The description of the Tabernacle (Ex 25:1-27:21), along with the complex ritual and legal material which it preserved, has been taken as an indication of the fact that the source had its origins in the exilic period, and possibly the post-exilic period (Freedman 1997:111).

#### 2.3.4.b. Themes and Theology

While P was held to contain certain narrative sections, it was thought to be more concerned with the mechanics of genealogies and the origins of ritualistic or legalistic practices and concepts than with the direct recording of events.

The theological outlook of the P document envisaged God as utilizing the legislation for a means of grace, in that the concepts of holiness and ceremonial purity would serve as a vehicle for conveying divine blessings to Israel.

#### 2.3.5. Redaction of *JE* and *P*

The combination of the supposed documents J, E, and P was a slow process after the writing of those supposed individual documents. Initially there was a process where J and E were joined together to form a continuous narrative. The dominant strand was J and E was used as a supplementary addition (Freedman 1997:106-07). As a result of its supplementary use, the final redaction only contains fragments of E. As the traditions developed further, changes would have been made by people according to the needs of their current situations.

#### 2.3.5.a. Dating

The dating of this joining of J and E documents was between 722 and 609 BC, possibly around the time Samaria was destroyed and the northern kingdom collapsed. P was a significant factor in joining J and E. The *toledot* formula ...“these are the generations... was used by P to give the text of Genesis a coherent order of presentation (Cross 1973:301).

#### 2.3.5.b. Purposes and Process

The purpose of joining J and E was to win over the surviving population of the northern kingdom and convince them to worship in the Jerusalem temple (Freedman 1997:106-07).

In 722 BC when the northern kingdom was destroyed, the Elohist document was without a receptive context. It is supposed that a redactor from the southern kingdom joined the two documents together by supplementing J with E. This may be part of the reason that E is more fragmented than J. The term JE has been used for the compiled version of J and E together (Gottwald 1985:140-41).

The manner of compilation of JE with P is a disputed matter. It was done by the writer of P or another independent editor. Scholars who affirm that an independent editor combined JE and P together stress the major difference between the two. P with its highly ritualistic and cultic focus would have difficulty incorporating his document into JE, as rituals were not valued so highly in the JE document. Because of this supposed ideological clash, numerous scholars claim that JE was combined with P by an independent redactor. Some scholars who claim that P is not a narrative source consider P as the redactor. With this view, P was written and edited into JE, all in one process. Thus P was not written separately and then joined with JE. P categorized the major sections of Genesis using the *toledot* formula,



“These are the generations of...” These are referred to as P rubrics by Cross (1973:301-05), identifying them as superscriptions given to genealogies or to sections of JE. Freedman (1991:37) on the other hand, considers P as an independent source, eventually combined by an independent editor.

## **2.4. FURTHER INTRODUCTORY ISSUES**

The selected introductory issues discussed below are an assortment with a focus on the cohesive nature of the text. Beginning with the problems surrounding the Source Hypothesis, we look at some of the issues that present the option of viewing the text cohesively. Certainly oral tradition allowed for numerous revisions of the traditions as they were passed down by the people. After the settlement, the needs of the people would have been exponentially greater, requiring a need for further revision of their traditions. It was these traditions that were later joined together and thus presents itself as various “strands” of traditions within the Pentateuch. In spite of this, there is a certain level of cohesiveness and unity which the final redactors purposed to formulate.

### **2.4.1. Problems With the Source Hypothesis**

The second half of the last century brought to the fore a move away from the Source Hypothesis on the Pentateuch. The nature and the dates of composition of the sources were reconsidered by many who have come to doubt the validity of the hypothesis that has for so long dominated Old Testament scholarship (Arnold 2003:630). In fact, there were always those who had completely disregarded the source hypothesis, but since they were outside of the mainstream of critical scholarship, and unable to engage the text and its various issues in a critical manner, their voices were unheard.

By the use of form criticism, von Rad also came to the same conclusion. He concluded that the major source documents J and E were not just put together during the monarchical times, but came through a long process of oral tradition. What we find in J and E are essentially “the conclusion and the internal balancing up of a long process of transmission.” He suggested that in the long process of transmission, there was constant revision and reinterpretation to make the traditions relevant to the times. The distance from the source documents back to the actual events would have been quite a long road, but the pioneers of literary analysis took the sources as the starting point. This, von Rad (2005:3-5) points out, is where the source theory went wrong. The long process of transmission was shaped by the community of faith as they associated the events as the path of salvation. He considered it as an acceptance of God's leadership and not as a historical record. The process of transmission and the linking of traditions that were independent units into larger blocks were understood to be a theological process in itself.

The future of the source hypothesis is certainly unpredictable. It may not be completely discarded, for it opened up our eyes to some important considerations. The idea of various strands of traditions that flow through the Pentateuch was popularized through the source hypothesis. Biblical scholarship was opened up for a more critical and responsible reading of the text. Many writers continue to use this hypothesis as a springboard for their arguments, and move on to more modern approaches of varying styles.

#### 2.4.2. The Importance of the “G” Source

The striking similarities between J and E suggests an underlying set of traditions which were common to both. This common source, often called G (from the German *Grundlage* meaning “foundation”), began with oral traditions recited throughout generations.

We may not know how early these traditions began to develop, or how early it was in circulation. It is also difficult to estimate how early it was put into writing before the compilation of J and E. The authors of J and E might have used the oral and written traditions from G as the foundation for their work. The variations in J and E may be due to the variations of the written and oral traditions of G and the personal perspectives of the compilers of the traditions (Gottwald 1985:141). These variations will include the effect from oral traditions that go further back from G itself. Freedman (1997:104) sees a possible retrospective outline of G may be found in Deuteronomy 26:5-10 and Joshua 24. A text in such an encapsulated form gives us a glimpse of their traditions passed on from generation to generation. Rendtorff (1983:159) notes that the question still to be explored is whether the compilation took place by one person, or whether it was a process that took place over a longer period of time by more than one individual. This question may never receive a sure answer, nevertheless it is important to delve into such inquiries that will give us a more responsible perspective.

It is intriguing to explore the possibility of G's background, and sources, whether oral or written. These traditions would stem from further ancient times when the population of the earth would have been less and more concentrated in certain regions. These traditions would have been carried by people as they migrated into new lands, forming new identities. It was these traditions that were put into writing as each people group or "nation" put their traditions into writing to produce their religious literature. Thus we have the seminal patterns that made the way for various religious traditions that contain similar or identical content. This concept is explored in further detail in Chapter four where we deal with other Ancient Near Eastern traditions and the similarities between the traditions.

The work of the Redactor would certainly shape the “sources” that we are dealing with. When we speak of E omitting something that J has included, are we really speaking of J and E, or are we in effect evaluating the work of the Redactor? Or are we speaking of the redactions that might have taken place in the traditions before G? We have in our possession only what has been presented to us by the final Redactor. Thus, what we know of J or E is just what the Redactors have chosen and modified. Certain parts of the original documents or traditions would have been permanently lost due to the Redactors’ work. The original may never be reconstructed back to their initial form. Yet this does not imply that the traditions were never a complete entity (Rendtorff 1983:157). What we consider today to be fragmentary may have been derived from traditions that at one time were a complete unity. But the Redactors' hands would have only selected some portions, as they saw fit to include in their compilation. All our evaluations and discussions concern the numerous Redactors who through the centuries have brought the text to its final form.

The final compilation of the Pentateuch is a highly speculative occurrence. It is obvious that the final redactor would have the privilege of shaping and designing some of the nuances of the text that we have now. That unknown redactor has had an immense influence on our understanding of the Hebrew text. In scholarly studies, several issues have been attributed to the final redactor. It has been suggested that in the Old Testament, the extent in which Israelites took God into account in their daily lives has been exaggerated. The people had the idea that all things in life come as a gift from their benevolent God, and that He intended these things for their livelihood and enjoyment. In an age where there is no distinction made between the religious lives and secular lives of the people, such perceptions do not need to be an exaggeration. This could have been the real and actual perception of the people of that time. The other issue, the idea of a distinctive monotheism by way of a strong

handed Yahwism, has also been attributed to the final redactors (Whybray 2002:6). The understanding has been that Israelite religion possessed the primary nature of polytheism, even when Yahwism began to take root. Later, as Yahwism gained popularity and became firmly established, it became a strong handed force to mold their religion to a strongly monotheistic religion.

According to Waltke and O'Connor (1990:3-4) the uniformity of the Hebrew language over an extended period of time is a feature that is unique to Hebrew literature. In my view, this reflects the possibility of two options. First, it could suggest that the Hebrews were a highly literary people who preserved their history and culture in writing from their very early days. Second, it could be evidence of later redactions, or compilations of earlier written and oral traditions, which went through rigorous editorial processes where archaisms, names, and numerous other matters were extensively updated. Albertz speaks strongly about the modern trend to push texts to a late period of compilation:

In the face of some over-critical assessment of texts or traditions as purely literary inventions of later times, I have kept to the principle that in most cases a tradition is unlikely to have formed without some occasion in reality. And in the face of the “modern” tendency to shift more and more texts or parts of texts to an anonymous “late period,” in my detailed investigation of the controversies in the post-exilic period I have often had to note that such texts do not tend to fit in there and therefore must belong to earlier periods.

(Albertz 1992:vii)

The sources (the assumed JEDP categorization or other perspectives on sources) are commonly assumed to be compiled during the period of the Monarchy. Gottwald (1985:136) maintains that further compilation, redaction and finalization of the text of the Pentateuch would have occurred during the exilic and post-exilic times. There are others (Van Seters 1998:503-13) who consider the Pentateuchal traditions as the creation of post-exilic Israel, aiming to restructure or create their history. With this view, even oral tradition would have

less value in providing some sort of framework as most or all of the “traditions” are seen as the result of creative minds that sought to bring the people into a desired framework.

#### 2.4.3. The Place of Oral Tradition

Underlying the discussion regarding sources, there are clear indications that several strands of oral traditions have played a major role in the transmission and compilation of the Pentateuch. The much popularized study of Serbo-Croatian bards stimulated the understanding of oral traditions that led to the transmission of biblical material. The Serbo-Croatian bards were able to recite and memorize poems in length without errors. This further supported the view that the transmission of Israel’s history was primarily through oral tradition (Hess 2007:61).

When the Israelites settled in the promised land, they brought with them a rich supply of traditions that were brought down through generations. These traditions continued to be reformulated according to their changing needs. Coming in to the new land produced a new and challenging set of issues that they never had to face as they previously lived with a clan system. In this situation, their traditions were altered to fit the current situation, and the current religion of the land. This is an important point where they began to adopt many of the Canaanite cultic features into their religion. Thus oral tradition continued until their traditions were put into writing sometime during the monarchy.

#### 2.4.4. Structure of Genesis

The most obvious structural indicator in Genesis is the *toledot* formula (ספר תולדות). This formula occurs ten times and is commonly translated “these are the generations of.” A better rendition of this formula would be “this is the family history of.” Either through

genealogies or through stories, the writer presents the family history. Out of the ten occurrences, five introduces genealogies and the other five introduces cycles of stories (Wenham 2000:19-20). In the primeval history, the *toledot* formula occurs five times (Gn 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10), and it also occurs five times in ancestral history (Gn 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2).

Cross (1973: 301) sees the *toledot* formula as the work of P to provide structure and a frame of reference for the Genesis document. He takes a survey of the ten occurrences to understand the patterns used by P. The first occurrence in Genesis 2:4a reads: “These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were made.” The positioning of this text has confused many for a long time. Some have suggested that the formula be moved back to Genesis 1:1, considering it as a heading rather than a concluding statement. But Cross sees no evidence to support that view. Others see it as a heading for P's creation account of creation, but it would be awkward to view the days of creation as “generations.” Cross sees this *toledot* as a heading to the traditions of creation and human rebellion found in Genesis 2:4b-4:26. He further confirms this by the observation that “in all cases in which the formula is used (apart from specific genealogical headings), it is a superscription to a section.” The second text in Genesis 5:1 reads: “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” This is the opening statement for the primordial history (Gn 5:1-6:8), which is the epic worked through by the P tradition. The third instance in Genesis 6:9 reads: “These are the generations of Noah.” Noah's genealogy begins in Genesis 5:32 with the statement “and Noah was five hundred years old; and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japhet...” The *toledot* in Genesis 6:9 is considered as the heading of the flood story. The fourth occurrence of a division by *toledot* in Genesis 10:1 reads: “These are the generations of the sons of Noah.” This covers the Table of Nations, also revised and supplemented by P. The fifth *toledot* section Genesis 11:10, uses

the heading “These are the generations of Shem.” The section Genesis 11:10b-26 is the second section of the document. With the birth of Abraham, the tradition brings the “primordial” history to a conclusion.

The second major division of the book of Genesis begins with the sixth *toledot* formula found in Genesis 11:27 with the words “These are the generations of Terah.” It is an introduction to Abraham and the other descendants of Terah. A similar system is used with the words “These are the generations of Isaac,” which is used to introduce the stories of Esau and Jacob, and not Isaac. Also, the *toledot* “These are the generations of Jacob” goes on to the Joseph story rather than focusing on Jacob. The seventh occurrence in Genesis 25:12 begins with “These are the generations of Ishmael.” This section goes on to list the generations of Ishmael. The eighth *toledot* section begins with Genesis 25:19 “These are the generations of Isaac.” The first section of the Jacob-Esau stories begins here. In Genesis 25:19b, the birth of Isaac is mentioned, which is quite unusual. It might have been a scribal gloss to add that part, which is out of place within Isaac's own genealogy. In Genesis 36:1, we find the ninth section separated by a *toledot* “These are the generations of Esau,” under which a group of genealogies is listed. The tenth section begins with Genesis 37:2 “These are the generations of Jacob.” This section presents no genealogical material, rather it introduces the story of Joseph and his brothers (Cross 1973:301-04).

Thus this formula fulfills the role of giving structure to each of the two main divisions of the book of Genesis. Several times, the *toledot* takes on other tasks such as summary (Gn 10:32) or reiteration (Gn 25:13; 36:9). In Genesis 37:2 the *toledot* introduces a narrative without an appropriate genealogy. But even in this passage, Jacob's relationship with his sons is clarified in relation to his wives: “This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons



of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father” (Gn 37:2). “The overall function of *toledot* formulas, therefore, is to juxtapose narrative and genealogical blocks, a feature that has a significant impact on the theology of the book as a whole” (Turner 2003:350).

Rendtorff (1983:138) sees that the *toledot* formula is often attributed to the priestly editorial work which sought to give the material a convenient framework for organizing the text. According to Driver (1956:6), this structure suggests that the person mentioned is quite important and that this person and his descendants will be the main focus of the matter that follows.

#### 2.4.5. A Cohesive Perspective

The previous sections (The Importance of the “G” Source, The Place of Oral Tradition, Structure of Genesis) point to some of the issues that set the stage towards a more cohesive perspective on the text. With the Wellhausen school, the pendulum swung to the extreme view of atomizing the text. This view stripped the text of any right to stand on its own, even with the skillful hand of the final redactor. “The starting point, however, is the suspicion that the text itself might have no integrity”(Rendtorff 1998:42).

That perspective of atomizing the text seems to have run its course, and we come now to a more cohesive view. Among the critical scholars, it was Gunkel's approach that finally opened up others to a different perspective. He focused on the “smallest literary units” in the Pentateuch which stood in direct contrast with the documentary hypothesis. Later, when Gunkel's approach was applied by Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westermann and several others, they almost ignored the classical source criticism. Rendtorff (1983:160) sees that it is possible

that the only reason that they did not completely ignore source criticism was because it was such a strongly held presupposition for so long.

The units of traditions were understood by von Rad to have come through a long process. The transmission took place with each of the narrative units being joined together in the main sources with a variety of processes to reformulate the tradition. Although these units were initially independent, they were incorporated into larger blocks identified as “patriarchal history, events at Sinai, the wandering in the wilderness, and other such blocks of material” (von Rad 2005:4). Although von Rad credited the Yahwist with this composition, in essence he was not thinking of various sources but the work of a skillful theologian capable of composing such a document. Rendtorff (1983:160) sees that von Rad's basic view broke with the traditional documentary hypothesis.

One of the possibilities for the development of some of these blocks of tradition may point to the tradition regarding Moses. He is said to have written the book of the law and placed it beside the ark of the covenant. In Deuteronomy 31:24ff, the law book is identified to be a witness against the Israelites when they fall away from the statutes of Yahweh. Of course, the dating of this passage is viewed in a variety of ways. But one thing we know is that what Moses wrote and placed beside the ark cannot be the entire corpus of the Pentateuch as we know today (Childs 1979:62-63). I understand this to be one of the stages of compilation and redaction as he took from various oral and literary sources available to him at that time.

These blocks of tradition were understood to have been independently developed at one time. Certainly this is true regarding the primal history and the patriarchal narratives. Although each is self contained with its own profile, they were all skillfully combined. Still, in the present form of the text, these blocks can be identified. The primal history surveys the

beginnings of history through the severe impact of the flood which brought about a guarantee from God that all of creation will continue as before. The patriarchal narratives are each developed with a different form, but joined together into this larger unit primarily through the insertion of divine promises, giving it a clear distinction (Rendtorff 1983:160-61).

#### 2.4.6. The Question of Canon

Sanders (1972:ix) presents the canonical perspective, a more recent approach that has been brewing for some time, sometimes referred to as canonical criticism. This approach employs a new perspective on canon, understanding it as a dynamic process. This is not to reject the traditional historical-critical scholarship, but to build on it with a new perception. Continuing to employ the tools of the historical-critical method, “we are now witnessing a certain change in the line of sight”(Rendtorff 1998:42-44).

Viewed from a literary perspective, the issues are defined as diachronic and synchronic. The diachronic approach evaluates the historical development of literature and the changes it undergoes over time. The synchronic approach concentrates its focus on one stage, commonly the final form of the text. The prehistory of the text may not be considered in this view (Longman III 1987:22). Becking (1999:8) suggests a pluriformity in method when dealing with the issue of these two methods. On the issue of the debate on diachronic and synchronic methods of interpretation, it is important to note that both approaches are interconnected. When it comes to interpreting texts, they are supplementary and needs to be interdependent.

The traditions, as they were passed on primarily through oral means, went through a complicated process of redaction, which has produced what we have as the final form of the Hebrew Bible. This process of redaction was Israel’s response of witnessing to God’s work

in their community, an understanding of the source of its life as divine. “The clearest evidence for this position is found in the consistent manner in which the identity of the canonical editors has been consciously obscured, and the only signs of an ongoing history are found in the multi-layered text of scripture itself. The shape of the canon directs the reader’s attention to the sacred writings rather than to their editors”(Childs 1979:59). Thus the concept of canon should have its impact on the entire process of interpretation.

George Fohrer had raised the issue of a “canon within the canon” in his earlier writings and G. E. Wright called it an “authoritative core” within the Old Testament. Of course, their intention was not the same as that of Childs’ or Sanders’ concept of the Canonical method, but they certainly had some conceptual similarities (Hasel 1972:64-65). The development of the religion of Israel marked certain periods of time when they began to understand the commandments of God to be normative. A set of commandments were adopted as a rule of law to be observed. These were considered the direct words of Yahweh, thus the essential norm to be accomplished. These commandments were included within the limits of the literature of their religion, and were given a much higher aura of authority. Thus the understanding of a “canon within the canon” or the “authoritative core” was developed to understand these texts that were given a higher value than the rest. Such concepts were the beginnings of the development of the canon from the earlier times, now developed to a fuller extent in the Canonical method.

#### 2.4.7. The Nature of Hebrew Narrative

The narrator of Genesis expresses his extensive knowledge, even to the beginnings of all things, when God creates and brings everything into order through His words, even to the detail of the specific words used in creation. The sweeping “history” of God’s work from the

beginning and throughout the generations have been skillfully put forth in narrative form. The text presents the narrators' work through the direct speech of the people, and rarely through outward and direct articulation of the narrator. His narration of actions and speech is used methodically to present all the intricacies that he intends to give, without explicitly showing his presence in the text.

The mode of narration in the Bible is primarily laconic, where each event is presented without mediation. No focus is given on the development of the character of the individual as in the modern sense of the term. Action and plot were preferred over the introspective nature of the characters. The only information we have about the characters is derived from what they do, say, and experience, and not from their thoughts (Schwartz 1992:19). We are left to fend for ourselves and make the decisions regarding the text with our own judgment. Whatever the narrator seeks to express through the narrative, he does it through the carefully tailored use of dialog within the text. Alter (1981:183-185) maintains that we are required to ask the important questions that lead us to the implications of the text.

## **2.5. THE FAITH OF ISRAEL**

In spite of the heavily syncretistic<sup>5</sup> nature of Yahwism, several important cultic issues give the notion that the faith of Israel was unique and distinct from the other religions (Miller 2000a:57). Eichrodt (1960:42-45), with his focus on the Covenant concept, considers Israel's religion as a "religion of election," identifying it as being in opposite poles with the nature religions of their time. Israel's relationship with their God was indissoluble with a kinship-like bond which was clear in their religious self-understanding. It was this unique relationship with their God that made them quite distinct from the surrounding nations.

5 The specifics of their syncretism continued to vacillate. Some aspects of their cult, although gaining approval, later would be rejected, or the opposite may happen, where some practices initially rejected, later became incorporated into mainstream Yahwism.

The prophet Jeremiah, (along with other prophets, proclaimed that their offerings were not required by Yahweh. These were no part of the original relationship that was established during Moses' time (Jer 7:21-26). The heavy requirements of sacrifices and offerings were understood to be put on the people from the time of the monarchy. What Yahweh required was a listening ear and obedience. Their religion would have an intimate nature because their "...religion in all its power would remain a reality in the hearts of the individual Judaeans" (Leslie 1936:216-18).

The religions of the nations surrounding Israel provide us with a broader perspective on the religion of Israel. Concepts that are only scantily mentioned in the Old Testament may be understood more fully and clearly by considering the religious concepts of the neighboring religions. We must understand that since Israel's faith is unique, we must use the information from the religions of the ancient Near East with caution. Israel's religion developed over long periods of time and had the influences from various cultures and religions. The most influence was from the religion of the Canaanites who surrounded them, and lived among them. Many of them virtually became one with the Israelites. The Mesopotamian religions also present us with some similarities. There is also the possibility that several of these religions would have developed from common roots. Ultimately, all the various connections and intricacies may never be thoroughly finalized due to the complexity of the issues at hand. Thus as we approach these issues, we must acknowledge that religious concepts and customs can have various meanings depending on the specific religion within the context of their culture (Fohrer 1972:25). When attempting to interpret the religion of Israel with the help of the other Near Eastern religions, caution must be applied to avoid making sweeping conclusions using insufficient and inaccurate evidences.

### 2.5.1. Patriarchal Religion

While there was a plurality of religions in the ancient Near East, it is intriguing to observe the religion of the patriarchs in this regard. Rather than uniformity, some have suggested a certain level of pluralism or multiformity, especially when considering the “popular religion” as opposed to the “official religion” (Miller 2000a:46). Albertz (1992:19) compares “official religion” with “personal piety,” and between these, a religion of the local or village level. He analyses their institutionalization, content, and function and sees them as distinct in these areas. Such a stratification is identified with the term “internal religious pluralism.” Taking this perspective, it is necessary to consider if these “levels” of Israelite religion were in operation simultaneously or during different times in their tradition. The answer to this query depends on numerous factors including one’s perspective on the compilation of the material. Cross seeks to put the whole issue in perspective by quoting Vatke. He views Israelite religion in three stages. The second stage stands in opposition to the first, and the third goes to a higher resolution and brings everything into a synthesis.

(1) Paganism: Nature religion marked by the slavery of nature and its timelessness; magic, cult and idolatry.

(2) Prophetic religion: Spiritual, ethical, historical, individual, free. Moses the liberator initiates this stage and the free, ethical impulse. The eighth century B.C.E. prophets (Amos, Hosea and Isaiah) are the climax of this movement. They rise to a higher consciousness of God. Mechanical cultic, natural, amoral forms are overthrown in principle.

(3) Legalism: In the Bible’s Deuteronomistic and Priestly sources a new stage (synthesis) emerges: idolatry is defeated and a universal consciousness gained, but also the ethical is now frozen in law, the concrete is encapsulated in the abstract. Theocratic legalism sets in, sullyng ethical monotheism.

(Cross 2005:42)

When we take a look back to analyze the history of the religion of Israel, what we get is a “construct” of their religious practices. This is evidence of the difficulty in ever clearly understanding the culture of others. Each person who presents a construct of their religion will do so differently (Miller 2000a:xvii). Although we may never get the full picture, the collective efforts of scholars will continuously bring us closer to the reality, otherwise, it will continue to show us the complexity and the mammoth nature of our task. Our responsibility is to keep our focus on evaluating the text that has been given to us.

Patriarchal religion with its distinct flavor of family piety seems to present the common characteristics of such piety in their personal religious experiences. Views such as the understanding that a person can meet with God in everyday common human encounters, especially through theophanies, is presented in the patriarchal traditions. This is further indicated as we consider the promises of descendants given to the patriarchs. Their God was more interested in their personal well being and future than their cultic extravagances and exploits. The institutionalized religion of the Israelites did not include such promises as a part of their cultic expressions (Albertz 1992:33). We can also identify an enduring relationship of mutual trust between the family members and their deity. The depth of their relationship had its beginnings with their family ancestor and his encounter with the deity. The religion of the patriarchs had a clearly distinct flavor in comparison to the later Yahwistic religion (Albertz 1992:39). Miller (2000a:75) sees that these encounters by the patriarchs and their God served as a precursor to the more refined, religion of the Israelites.

The cultic institutions commonly associated with the patriarchs in their journeys have been previously interpreted as part of a completely nomadic lifestyle. While we do see the indications of a nomadic lifestyle, by no means is it a consistent portrayal. The patriarchs are presented as engaging in practices that were clearly indications of settled agricultural



lifestyles. This seems to indicate to us that the patriarchs were closely associated with both sedentary and nomadic lifestyles. Albertz (1992:34-35) suggests that as a result of a more careful analysis, we see more indications of a sedentary life and only several glimpses of a nomadic form of life.

Considering the view that our material on the patriarchs was compiled during the Monarchy, we need to be aware of the implications. Obviously the compilers were recipients of a large amount of tradition that was carried down through the generations. The great question remains as to how they compiled the material, how much of their own agendas and the agendas of the nation are included, and how the traditions would have gone through development, modification, addition, and assimilation.

The actual inception of Israelite religion has been an elusive concept for the scholarly community. The composition of the material by the early Israelites presents us with a problematic condition regarding the patriarchal stories and their value for history. Albertz (1992:42) maintains that it is clear that the evidence is too vague to make a definitive statement that their history begins with the patriarchs. The Israelite traditions have come down the generations orally, and would be weak, but nevertheless, these are their traditions. As we respect the traditions of a people and allow them to speak for themselves, we understand that it is to these traditions that they anchor their faith and identity.

After dealing with the issue of the Patriarchs, Ringgren seems to show a bit of frustration in his words. He then comes to an interesting conclusion:

It is not worth the effort to isolate those religious concepts and practices of later Israel that somehow agree with our picture of a “primitive” religion and read them back into the patriarchal period. There is no proof in any case that we could really discover the religion of the patriarchal period by this method. Such traits could have invaded Israel quite as easily from other sources. In the last analysis, all reconstructions of the primitive religion remain hypothetical. It should be noted further that what we have been able to discover with

reference to the religion of the patriarchs by no means deserves the name  
“primitive”; neither was the environment of the patriarchs “primitive.”  
(Ringgren 1966:26-27)

We are dealing with an issue that is immensely complicated, and the answers may remain elusive for a long time, maybe permanently. Until we acquire more data and better tools to evaluate the issues, the best we can do is to have an open mind to deal with all the issues at hand with the acknowledgment of our finite capabilities as we move toward a better understanding of the text.

### 2.5.2. Altars

Along with the use of the *masseba*, asheras, sacred trees, and teraphim, one of the foremost aspects of the cultic institutions of the patriarchs during their migrations was their construction of altars. Altars were built by the patriarchs on the occasion of settling in a new place, or important junctures along their journeys. As part of their cultic practices, they planted sacred trees, set up cultic stones, and made piles of stones with a cultic focus. Cultic symbolism served the important role of connecting the worshiper with divinity. It was their way of looking beyond the mundane aspects of daily life to something bigger, something to rely on. Their “looking beyond” was primarily centered on the basic needs of survival, of the need for food, clothing, shelter, protection from enemies and demons. This is clearly depicted in Jacob's vow: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you." Jacob expected the presence of his God with him when he said “if God will be with me.” The idea of protection is clear in the words: “and will keep me in this way that I go.” In the open

country, without a king or a form of authority and protection, they looked to God as their sole source of protection. Basic necessities such as food and clothing was sought after: “bread to eat and clothing to wear.” In looking forward, there was hope for a connection back to his past: “so that I come again to my father's house in peace.” These are some of the concepts that were apparent in Jacob's worship as he worshiped before the cultic symbols that were before him. Others discovered holy places, and visited existing cultic places of worship. Often, the patriarchs’ travels and their religious expressions gave way to the founding of later cults and cultic places.

The biblical text simply assumes the existence of altars within the context of patriarchal religion (Albertz 1992:36-37). No detailed descriptions are given regarding the construction and the specific forms of their cultic practice. Considering that the patriarchs were Semitic nomads, Fohrer (1972: 40-41) contends that it is unlikely that altars were used for their worship. He goes on to specify that they are not common among other nomadic Semites. Ringgern (1966:25) maintains that altars are only characteristic of permanent sanctuaries in settled regions. This perspective would bring one to the conclusion that the altars mentioned in the literature about the patriarchs are from later times projected back upon the patriarchs as an explanation of their cultic practices.

Albertz points to research into nomadic people with various livestock, and specifies that they lived in close association with farming communities. The two forms of economy had connections with each other in a supportive way. Van Seters (1975:105) also understood the patriarchs to be a nomadic group. According to Mazar (1990:224-25) they dwelt on the outskirts of prosperous cities and intermingled with the city dwellers as they traveled from one region to the other. Albertz (1992:34) sees that the book of Genesis also depicts the patriarchs as successful agriculturalists before resuming their nomadic life due to unforeseen

circumstances. Being well acquainted with both forms of life, the patriarchs construction of altars would not be an impossibility.

Altars correlate with sacrifices because of the nature of the terms. The mention of one naturally assumes the other. With the Patriarchs very little detail of their sacrifices is mentioned. Yet the Hebrew word *mizbeah* is derived from the verb “to slaughter.”

Originally, victims were slaughtered on the altar, but later, it was only used for the distinct purpose of offering (Castelot and Cody 2001:1266).

Sacrifices and gifts, in the ancient Near East, contributed to their task of communicating with the deity, winning their favor, or providing for them on a regular basis. Although the Old Testament goes into intense detail about sacrifices and altars, the cultic actions of the patriarchs were of a family nature and independent of official cultic formulations (Gerstenberger 2002:37).

### 2.5.3. Yahweh and the Gods of the Fathers

Cross (1973:3) maintains that the modern scholarly discussion of Patriarchal religion had its roots primarily with Albrecht Alt’s publication of *Der Gott der Väter* in 1929. The powerful influence of Alt’s work is evidenced in the major writings on the Patriarchal religion. Many of these writings on the Israelite religion use Alt’s ideas as a springboard for their discussions. Traditionally, Yahweh was connected with the god of the fathers. For Alt, the Patriarchal deities are distinct from each other and from Yahweh. Each of these gods were worshiped by various nomadic tribes during the Patriarchal period. Albertz (1992:27) sees that Alt founded his concept with a comparison of Nabataean and Palmyrene inscriptions with similar designations, dating from the first century BC to the fourth century AD (Albertz 1992:27). These deities were brought by the various nomadic tribes to Palestine. As a group,

the Jacob tribes, the Isaac tribes, and the Abraham group worshiped their respective gods. The Canaanite god El was eventually connected with each of the newly arrived deities. These tribes joined together and compiled a common history by interweaving their histories together. Their religion developed to its pre-monarchic stage with the addition of the god Yahweh by Moses, which led to an assimilation of all these gods together into one pantheon (Wenham 1980:165-167).

Alt's study directly focused on the area of the family relationship with God. At essential points of interest, numerous scholars still consider his views to be valid for discussion. Although some justified criticism has been made of his overall plan, it is certainly clear that Alt opened up our eyes to the fact that there were some distinctions in the faith of the fathers and later Yahwism. The new cult formed during the tribal period and the monarchy had to deal with the legacy of the faith of the fathers, which had to go through a process of assimilation that was theological, and cultic in nature (Gerstenberger 2002:40).

The origins of the name Yahweh involves the various views on the compilation of the Pentateuch. Albright (1992:52) sees that Yahweh was a southern Palestinian mountain god who was adopted as the god of the Moses group. The more common understanding is that the Yahwist compilation (J), "traces the origin of Yahwism all the way back to the third generation of men" (Fohrer 1972:66). The perspective of J that Yahwism goes back so far brings to light two possibilities. One option is that the tradition is in fact very old, and the other option is that J uses traditions that are projected back into antiquity due to their traditions.

## 2.6. YAHWISM

The worship of Yahweh seems to be one of the most unique and intriguing characteristic of Israelite Religion (Miller 2000a:46-62).<sup>6</sup> Any description of Yahwism would not be a direct account of its practices and stipulations, but rather a reconstruction from the available literature. The analysis of the literature and its interpretations will determine how the ancient concepts are reconstructed to formulate an idea of the actual Yahwism present during that time. The complexity of Israelite religion will preclude any possibility of an accurate and exhaustive description. Here we will consider two aspects of Yahwism: Orthodox Yahwism, and heterodox Yahwism. Miller has a third categorization, syncretistic Yahwism, yet I have chosen to integrate the syncretistic into heterodox Yahwism. It is a fine line between the two, and for our current purposes, that further distinction may not be necessary.

### 2.6.1. Orthodox Yahwism

What one person considers to be orthodox may differ from another person. Thus it is difficult to make judgments that are certain. Commonly, the tradition that held firm toward the end of Israelite Religion before Judaism is understood to be orthodox. This tradition is identified by the words of the prophets, the Deuteronomistic history, and the priestly elements and writers of exilic and postexilic Judah. We do not find complete consistency with these aspects of the tradition. There were some changes over time such as the loss of a consort and a general switch from polytheism to monotheism (Grabbe 1999:31). Certainly these issues were part of the heterodox form of Yahwism, and never acknowledged by the mainstream orthodox religious adherents. Thus it is clear that what we understand as orthodox Yahwism

<sup>6</sup> The basic concepts for this section on Yahwism has been derived primarily from Patrick D. Miller. Specific quotations and ideas will be footnoted separately, and supplementary material from other sources will also be documented appropriately.

was a religion in a constant state of flux. The only fixed orthodox Yahwism appears in the literature of the Old Testament where that ideal is upheld.<sup>7</sup> Zevit suggests the end of the tenth century as a time when Yahweh was worshiped throughout Israel. He considers the Yahweh cult to have spread and become “pan-Israelite.” The gradual shift to a more exclusive Yahweh worship began only with the Assyrian attack on Israel in 722 BC. A deculturation would have begun as a result of the people’s xenophobic response to the foreign elements that controlled their nation. It was this time period and movement that gave way to the determination of a more fixed form of Yahwism (Zevit 2001:687-89). Here are the common features of orthodox Yahwism as identified by Miller (2000a :48-51)

#### 2.6.1.a. Exclusive worship of Yahweh

Yahweh was perceived as the only preeminent power in the world. Without a specified sexuality, Yahweh encompassed powers of all blessings of fertility, continuity, health, wealth, forgiveness, victory, deliverance from threat and oppression. This feature is the pinnacle of orthodox Yahwism among other religions. Whereas they had different gods representing each of the above features, orthodox Yahwism considered Yahweh as fully capable of all things.

#### 2.6.1.b. Conveying the deity’s will

The deity conveyed his will through oracle inquiry, and prophetic audition or vision. Dreams and casting of lots were also commonly accepted to receive divine direction, but divination, soothsaying, sorcery, and necromancy were prohibited. It is often difficult to

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<sup>7</sup> Even in the literature of the Old Testament, we find variations due to an extensive time gap from one tradition to the other. As the oral traditions developed over time, certain forms became fixed in the minds of the people, and those traditions were left unaltered by the later writer and redactors of the text.

determine what was prohibited and what was allowed as techniques for consultation of the deity. The biblical tradition clearly points to these aspects as foreign cultic rituals, thus the clear prohibition is expressed.

#### *2.6.1.c. Sanctuaries*

These sanctuaries were used for sacrifices, festival meals and celebrations, prayer and praise. Some sanctuaries had a prominent role in their cult where the public worship took place. The ark of the covenant “housed” the presence of the deity, and was moved from one sanctuary to another until the temple was built by Solomon and it was placed there permanently. Various instruments and furnishings were used for their cultic practices of libations and sacrifices. There were other objects of worship that were prohibited, such as stone pillars, sacred poles or trees, and images. Any object associated with other gods and their worship was prohibited.

#### *2.6.1.d. Pilgrimage festivals*

These festivals gathered the people to celebrate Yahweh’s acts of deliverance and redemption. These festivals included the entire community gathered in one of the major shrines. Because of its partial agrarian background, they represented thanksgiving for the blessings of nature and the occasions of God’s deliverance. At these festivals, they offered sacrifices and shared meals. Other religious rites such as the Passover and the Sabbath were centered around the home.



#### 2.6.1.e. Moral and ethical matters

High stipulations regarding moral and ethical matters were common. Issues regarding neighbors, the weaker ones in the society, and family relations received special attention. Other personal matters such as conduct, dress, food, bodily functions were also regulated by the Yahwistic cult. All such things were understood to be a part of their relationship with Yahweh as their God who required holiness from them.

#### 2.6.1.f. Religious Leadership

Priests, prophets, judges, and kings provided the necessary leadership. The priests were connected with the sanctuaries and were supported with sacrifices and offerings. Prophets bore the divine oracles for the people, sometimes in relation to the sanctuaries, but also independently of the organized religious life. Kings and judges were appointed by Yahweh for the political leadership, but periodically they were also involved in the religious leadership.

#### 2.6.2. Heterodox Yahwism

Some cultic features of orthodox Yahwism came into conflict later on as changes took place. Other practices were not originally a part of Yahwism, but was amalgamated into it. These aspects of their religion are termed as heterodox Yahwism. The most common aspects of heterodox Yahwism are: the presence of cult objects that were rejected by orthodoxy, unacceptable ways of discerning the will of God, and veneration and consultation of the dead. It is important to note that there is no significant polemic in the Old Testament that identified the worship of El as heterodox. Some consider this as an indication that El and Yahweh are identified with each other. Ahlström (1963:13) maintains that this silence is seen as proof

that there was a clear and natural syncretism that was acceptable to the Israelites. Miller (2000a:51-56) presents the following common features of heterodox Yahwism:

#### 2.6.2.a. Asherah

Throughout the divided monarchy and possibly earlier, the Asherah was used in relation to the worship of Yahweh. Two Judean sites from the eighth century refers to “Yahweh and his asherah.” The inscription over Uriyahu’s tomb seems Yahwistic in nature, except that it refers to the asherah. It seems the asherah cult object was regarded as a genuine part of Yahweh worship by a fairly widespread element in the north and south. From the start, the *Masseba* and *Asherahs* were fertility symbols of the Canaanites (Albertz 1992:85).

#### 2.6.2.b. Masseba

These standing stones were found in some of the cultic sites that were excavated. Although it is not clear how these *masseba* were used in their cult for worship, and their exact nature, it is evident that it played some part in their worship. It is also important to note that these cultic figures and objects were not used consistently, but it may have gone in and out of use during certain periods of time. Calves, bulls, and the bronze serpent were also figures that were used in heterodox Yahwism.

#### 2.6.2.c. Bamah

These places of worship were prominent among important Yahwists like Samuel, Saul, and even the Deuteronomistic historian accepted it before the temple was built. Although Deuteronomy prohibits various cultic objects because of their commonality with

Canaanite worship, it says nothing about the *bamot*, the high places. One of the reasons for rejecting the high places of worship was the use of the *Masseba* (Albertz 1992: 85).

#### 2.6.2.d. Inquiry of divine will

Orthodox Yahwism frowned upon several forms of inquiry of the divine. At some points of time, even dreams were looked down upon and seen as an avenue for lies. Saul's visit to the witch of Endor is a prime example. Although he condemned the act and set the punishment of death for those who took part in it, he himself resorts to this when Yahweh rejects him. It is intriguing to note that the tradition presents Samuel as speaking for Yahweh. There is a clear indication that such necromancy continued in spite of Saul's restrictions. This is one area where orthodoxy and heterodoxy are not easy to distinguish.

#### 2.6.2.e. Baal

Several references to the worship of Baal are given in the Deuteronomistic history and Hosea as being an important religious feature. Jezebel and the Phoenician influence may have promoted the rise of Baalism among Yahwists. Although the tradition mentions a "temple of Baal," no such temple has been excavated to date.

### 2.7. CANAANITE INFLUENCE

The influence of the Canaanites on Israelite worship can be viewed from two angles. The first is somewhat nebulous, but should be taken into consideration. The patriarchal traditions that were carried down through the generations by way of oral means would not be an actual account of the past events. But we must acknowledge the reliability of some core data within the tradition. It would be that data, brought down to the Israelites through the

traditions which carry some level of influence by the Canaanites in the early development of those traditions. This initial phase of influence would be difficult to trace and define, yet the traditions give an indication of that influence. We must also consider the option of a commonality of traditions going further back to the origins of their oral traditions. With this issue, the common origins, especially that of Semitic peoples would be important (Livingston 1987:32-33). This idea of commonalities may be quite uncertain as far as having firm confirmations, but so are the traditions themselves.

The second phase of influence comes from the post settlement times when sanctuaries were erected throughout the land which were independent of any organized religious systems. These unsupervised sanctuaries and high places were a prime recipient of influences from external sources without any control by Yahwistic religious authorities (Fohrer 1972:292). It is suggested that a series of El deities are connected at various sites: El-Bethel (Gn 31:13; 35:7); El the God of Israel, in Shechem (Gn 33:20); El 'Olam in Beersheba (Gn 21:33). These are perceived to be manifestations at various localities of El, who in Ugaritic literature stands as the god of heaven at the head of the divine pantheon (Albertz 1992:30). The Exodus served as the source of importing Yahweh as their supreme, personal tribal God from the southern wilderness region. Albertz (1992:77) maintains that "Yahweh became fused with El and thus the god of Israel." It is clear that the numerous unsupervised sanctuaries spread throughout the region created such opportunities for influence upon the worship of the people.

When Yahweh was connected with El, the people transferred the monotheistic concept from Yahweh to El. It was fairly easy to do so, since El was the head of the pantheon of gods, the supreme being. They already had the concept that Yahweh was supreme over all others, and that Yahweh was to be given all the honor and worship.

Later, as Yahwism came into a more comprehensive force in the Israelite society, the expressions of Canaanite influence in any form seemed to be rejected. It was understood to be the character of Yahweh's jealousy against the worship practices of the Israelites which were influenced by the Canaanites (Fohrer 1972:297).

Israel made numerous efforts to isolate herself to avoid influence by the Canaanite culture and religion. The Canaanites were made subject to Israelite authority and they were essentially assimilated into Israelite society. Yet, the reality was that she was heavily influenced by the Canaanites in spite of her efforts against it. "It is this process of slow fusion and reciprocal penetration that the Deuteronomist redactor of the Book of Judges has described. Judges 3:5-6: 'So the Israelites settled among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivvites, and Jebusites: they married their daughters, and their own daughters they married to their sons, and they served their gods'" (Kimbrough 1978:49).

This influence is not only at the grassroots level, but we also see this at the level of national leadership. Although David began his reign in Hebron, he needed a more centralized and individualized place to establish himself. Such a place he found in the Jebusite city, Jerusalem. This city was situated conveniently between Judah and the other tribes. Not only was the location ideal, but the neutrality it embodied made it easier for the scattered tribes to relate to it without the hindrance of territorial disputes and nuances. David allowed the Canaanites to continue to live in this city as his subjects. His wife Bathsheba was a native Jebusite who became David's wife after he had her husband killed in battle (Mendenhall 2001:253). He also took possession of several other Canaanite cities on the Palestinian plain that were previously controlled by the Philistines. These cities were not assimilated into the Israelite territory, but were allowed to remain autonomous both politically and socially, yet subject to the supremacy of Jerusalem.

With the goal of integrating the nation under his rule, David made some compromises that impacted their religion. Along with Abiathar, Zadok, a Jebusite priest was appointed to be a priest of Yahweh. His son Solomon allowed an altar to be set up in the Canaanite cultic form, which was a forbidden practice (Ex 20:24-26). These decisions reveal a high level influence of Canaanite religion on the religion of the Israelites (Otto & Schramm 1980:51-53).

## **2.8. CANAANITE RELIGION**

As we study the cultic sites of Jacob, it is obvious that his forms of worship were influenced by the culture of the local communities. The traditions that came down to the monarchical times contain the nucleus of what we have today in the Jacob story. Clothed in the perspective of the times, the traditions were reformulated to reflect the religion of their day, which was heavily influenced by the Canaanite religion. This understanding leads us to take a cursory look at some aspects of Canaanite religion which may have had an influence on Israel's perspective of their God Yahweh. Some of these cultic understandings and practices would have been transferred to the Jacob narratives that we will be considering below.

The book of Genesis points to specific groups of people such as Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, Hittites, Jebusites, Kadmonites, Kenites, Kenizzites, Perizzites, and Rephaites. Using archeological evidence it is quite impossible to discern and identify these specific groups. Extensive research by many have yielded little substantial proof for the identification of these groups. It is possible that these may be clans from the region rather than various ethnic groups or nations. Thus several of these names may be used interchangeably, especially the terms Canaanite and Amorite (Schoville 1978:167).

Although Israel is shown as isolating herself from the peoples of the land, it was the opposite that took place. The book of Judges (Jdg 3:5-6) specifies that their children intermarried, and they served the gods of Canaan (Kimbrough 1978:49). The Israelites' views on the holy, on places of worship, and forms of worship were possibly adapted from the local Canaanite culture. This close identification with the cult of the Canaanites would be conceptually possible, considering their traditions regarding their roots. According to their traditions, they were a people who had numerous influences from various sources, including an Egyptian influence. Their tradition clearly claimed their emigration to Egypt, and their return to their "homeland." Whether this tradition is valid or not, this identification would be supported with the view of having common roots in Canaan (Ahlström 1963:12).

An important source of information comes from the ruins of Ugarit (modern Syria). Ras Shamra was a community that goes back quite early, possibly to the 5<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC . The Ras Shamra texts serve as a significant source of our understanding of the Canaanite religion. Many scholars oppose the idea of using Ugaritic mythology to be read into the Israelite culture. Possibly developed several millennia removed from the Israelite culture, Ugaritic mythology could not possibly have been the same as the Canaanite culture that Iron Age Israel came into contact with (Zevit 2001:649).

Although situated close in proximity, the two cultures never identified themselves to have any connection or identity with each other. This lack of identification is obvious in their culture and religion. Nevertheless, the similarities are strikingly obvious. Although we need to be cautious in connecting Canaanite religion and Ugaritic religion, it is obviously clear that they have a common heritage (Hess 2007:95-96). Smith (2002:23) maintains that this heritage is most obvious when considering the similarity between the two cultures in their sacrificial terms that were of a highly specialized nature. Ugarit's Ras Shamra and its port

were significant trading points for Mesopotamian products in exchange for building materials that Mesopotamia lacked (Curtis 1985:35). This connection with the Mesopotamian culture may be a point of connection that led to a common heritage of the two cultures. Further, the similarities seen in Israelite literature seem to have some close connection with the Mesopotamian culture. These commonalities possibly paved the way for a common heritage between these various Semitic cultures.

The city of Ugarit was probably dominated by two temples, one dedicated to Baal and the other to Dagan, with the house of the high priest in between them. These structures occupy the highest point on the mound of remains in Ugarit. The most impressive structure in terms of its greatness in size was the royal palace. Constructed in several stages over an extended period of time. At its zenith, it had about ninety rooms, six large courtyards, and other smaller courts of which some were paved (Curtis 1985:49). Such developments of the city of Ugarit point to its advanced culture, order and structure. Some limited information can be gained from the Pentateuch and from the rest of the Old Testament, but the information is highly deficient in forming a composite of their religion, for it was primarily polemic in nature. Being strictly monotheistic in nature, Yahwism vehemently opposed the Canaanite forms of worship. Oldenburg (1969:1) maintains that the descriptions found in the Bible concerning the Canaanite religion have been tainted by this bias. Yet we can glean some information from the Biblical texts and comparisons can be made with the texts from Ugarit, which will give us a fair understanding of their religion.

### 2.8.1. Pantheon of gods

The structure of the Canaanite pantheon seems to be fluid and vague at best. The Mesopotamian religion seems to have had much influence on the Canaanite pantheon in their



patterns. Some of the gods were also much like the Egyptian deities (Livingston 1987:125). Leslie (1936:232) clarifies that in the Canaanite religion, the central concept of deity was that of the life-giver and the life-protector.

The Ugaritic inscriptions present the gods in constant tension with each other causing wars between them. Baal fights against El, El against Baal, Baal against Yamm, and Baal with Mot. Baal has other enemies such as Attr, Attrt, and Asherah (Oldenburg 1969:13). The Ugaritic literature also presents Baal in various functions; as enemies and as allies.

#### 2.8.1.a. El (𐎗𐎎)

*El* was the proper name of the father of the gods, the aged head of the pantheon of the gods, and the creator. He was the one who presided over the assembly of gods. He was the paternal figure of a great family of gods (Oldenburg 1969:2). El is understood to be fused with Yahweh, as they both possess similar characteristics as being an old, wise creator. Hess (2007:97-98) sees that the debate continues concerning their similarity, if both are the same god or completely distinct. Although referred to as the heavenly “Bull,” he is quite remote and inactive. He was the highest god of the Canaanites and of most of the Semitic peoples (Ringgren 1966:21).

The meaning of his name seems to indicate “Lofty One” or “Strong One.” The very meaning of the word El may be “strength” (Oldenburg 1969:164-65). His epithets include “king” which shows his position in the pantheon; “bull” possibly showing a connection with fertility, but possibly just to indicate strength; “father of mankind” and “creator of creatures.” These epithets show how El reigned supreme, even in various roles, encompassing a wide variety of traits. Another prominent epithet is “father of years” possibly referring to the regulation of seasons, or it may point to his long life. Presiding over the assembly of gods, he

was the one to be consulted over important matters, such as building a palace for Baal (Curtis 1985:83).

b. Athirat/Asherah (אֲשֵׁרָה)

Athirat was the mother goddess, El's wife. The Ugaritic literature uses the term *athirat*, but the Hebrew commonly uses *Asherah*. This goddess also finds a place in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Arabic literature in varying forms and roles (Wyatt 1995:183-184). The Old Testament refers to her as Asherah, she was also referred to as "Holiness." In Ugarit, she was connected with the sea and was considered the mother of the gods. Yam, Mot and Athtar were descended from El and Athirat (Curtis 1985:83). With seventy offspring, Athirat and El covered a wide range of gods with their influence. Well attested in the history of Israel, Athirat was a common component in Israelite religion. It was common for the people to use a wooden post called "Asherah" to represent this goddess (Fohrer 1972:58). Blenkinsopp (2001:43,45) sees that women were especially attracted to the worship of this goddess.

2.8.1.c. Hadad/Baal (בַּעַל)

In Semitic texts, Baal is often expressed as a noun that means "lord, owner." The Hebrew Bible refers to Baal as the proper name of a god (Hermann 1995:249). Epics regarding Baal may be the most archaic of the Ugaritic writings, to the time of the third to the second millennium BC. Literary styles and religious concepts were preserved with such care that some of the oldest traditions were found to be transmitted and preserved with "amazing correctness," possibly owing to the importance that was given to the information (Oldenburg 1969:3).

One passage suggests that Baal was the son of El, and there is some doubt regarding this information. Numerous passages describe him as the son of Dagan. Although Dagan had a temple at Ugarit, he does not play a part in their mythology. Baal was regarded as the storm god and the god of fertility. Thus he was called the “King of Heaven and Earth.” Although El was clearly the lead god, it seems Baal was the most active, as depicted in the epics. The bull, being a symbol of strength and fertility, was used not only of El, but also of Baal (Ringgren 1966:21). Most probably Baal was not a part of El’s family, and it is clear that there was constant strife between Baal and the members of the family of El (Curtis 1985:86).

Baal’s epithets were quite significant in showing his position among the gods. He was considered as victor, prince, king, judge, most high, lord of earth, and rider of the clouds. He is also referred by the name Hadad, a popular storm-god of the ancient Near East. His cult was, at certain times, a rival to Yahwism in Israel. Being a god depicted as wicked, immoral, and abominable, he was the one god whose worship was the greatest threat to Yahwism (Oldenburg 1969:1).

#### 2.8.1.d. Anath (ענת)

The Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible does not give any direct mention of Anath. To find such references, one would have to make excessive conjectures that would take liberty with the text. Day (1995:62) sees that Anat only shows up in a personal name and as a part of the name of a place: *Shamgar ben Anat* (Judges 3:31) and *Beth Anat* (Joshuah 19:38 and Judges 1:33). Anath was often presented in Ugaritic literature as a woman dressed like a man for battle. She was the sister of Astarte and the wife of Baal along with Astarte. Anath was also referred to as the “Queen of Heaven,” “Mistress of Heaven,” and “Mistress of the Gods.” Keel and Uehlinger (1998:126) maintain that Egyptian and Ugaritic texts present her

with different characteristics and appearances. She was a protectress, destroyer, lover, and a cruel killer.

#### 2.8.1.e. Ishtar/Astarte (עשתרת)

Astarte is better known in the Bible, although included in various literature such as Ugaritic, Egyptian, and Phoenician. Often, she was depicted as a naked girl riding a horse, and wielding weapons. She represented both war and fertility. Her emblem was the evening star, Venus. The masculine form of this word is probably connected with Venus (Wyatt 1995:204). Keel and Uehlinger (1998:261-62) note that in Tyre and Sidon, she is presented as the consort of the Phoenician Baal.

#### 2.8.1.f. Other gods (a selected list)

*Kothar* was the god of craftsmanship, magic, and music.

*Horan* was a war god.

*Resheph* was a god of war, disease, and the nether world.

*Adum* was the wife of Resheph, the red earth.

*Dagon* was the god of grain.

*Sin* was the moon god.

*Yam* was the sea goddess. She was often referred to as “princess” and “judge Nahar/River.” she, along with Mot, was called “beloved of El.”

*Mot* was also considered to be “beloved of El.” He was also referred to as “son of El” and “hero.”

*Shamash* was the sun god.

*Eshmun* was the healing god. The serpent was his symbol. (Cf. The Mosaic story of the brazen serpent in the wilderness with its healing properties, Numbers 21:6-9 [E]) (Leslie 1936:218).

The items given above was listed by Elmer A. Leslie (1936:218).

## 2.8.2. Cultic Practices

The Canaanites had an extensive set of practices that had commonality with other religions of the land. These practices were similar to those found in the Israelite religion.

### 2.8.2.a. Priests

The high priest of the Canaanite cult was the king. In two epics, “Legend of King Keret” and “The Tale of Aqhat,” the sacrifices were made by the king, acting as the priest. Although the sacrifices were for their own benefit, it can be understood that he was the priest of the entire community. There were several classifications of priests. Their importance in the society is understood from the fact that priest families are specially documented (Curtis 1985:73-78).

The literature does not give much details of the duties of priests. We can safely assume that they engaged in sacrifices, prayers, divination, and that they carried out their duties during the festivals. They also promoted healing and fertility through their special magical arts.

### 2.8.2.b. Sanctuaries

In Ugarit, a temple dedicated to Baal dating 1200 BC has been excavated. Near it was a temple dedicated to Dagon. They both had a similar pattern with three divisions, an open

area with an altar, and outer temple room, and an inner shrine. Other temples were found at Byblos, Megiddo, Hazor, Alalakh, Shechem, Lachish, and Beth-Shan. At Hazor, the temple had two pillar bases situated at the entrance to the main hall. Many of these temples had a number of stone plaques, or stelae, along with sacred vessels. There were some high places in open-air with round altars. Sanctuaries found in Egypt and Mesopotamia were considerably more complex and elaborate (Livingston 1987:127-28).

#### 2.8.2.c. Festivals and Rituals

Information about Canaanite festivals is scant in the available literature. The Hebrew scriptures give some indications about autumn and spring solstice feasts and new moon feasts among the Canaanites. Although the Bible gives little information, we do know that there was weeping, singing, dancing, and sacrifices of animals and infants were part of their cultic practices. For more detailed description, we must wait till more of the literature becomes available (Livingston 1987:128).

#### 2.8.2.d. Prophets

In I Kings and II Kings, there are several references to the prophets of Baal. Other than these, there are only two indications to the receiving and giving of oracles. The Egyptian tale “The journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia” tells of the time Wen-Amon was at the port of Byblos, dealing with a local prince. During the time the prince was making an offering, a young man was possessed by the god and gave an oracle to the prince. On a stone inscription of Zakir and Lu’ath, it is mentioned that the king received messages from his god Be’elshamayn through diviners and seers. The message says that the King will be aided in his military pursuits (Livingston 1987:128).

#### 2.8.2.e. Kingship

Issues regarding kingship in relation to their god or the nation is rare in their literature. Some use the Mesopotamian or Nile valley models to describe kingship among Canaanites, but we lack sufficient data to merit this approach. Some references to the king as “son of god X” is given, but it is uncertain if this indicates a cultic relationship indicating the king as the primary worshiper of that god. Some texts do suggest that the king was worshiped by his followers. With the limited information, we understand that the king was the high priest, made offerings, and participated in annual festivals (Livingston 1987:128-29).

### **2.9 INFLUENCE OF THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORIAN**

The book of the law found during the temple repair in Josiah’s reign was an earlier edition of the book of Deuteronomy than we now have (Blenkinsopp 2001:95). The crux of this document possibly correlates to Deuteronomy 12-26 (Wright 2001:1236). The contents of this material suggest a date ca. 700 BC (Freedman 1997:107). Some have suggested that this was an act of fraud by the priests, by placing this newly composed document into the temple so that it may be “found.” But Fohrer (1972:295) maintains that we must take the text for what it says and accept that the scroll was actually found in the temple. It was certainly customary for such documents to be stored in the temple, and in the business of the state, monarchy and other international matters, the scroll was forgotten. Although compiled about a century before its discovery, it is difficult to determine the origins of the material. The contents of the document suggest a date as early as the writing of E (Gottwald 1985:138-139). Noth has suggested that the Deuteronomic history was put together during the exile, but others have maintained their stand for an earlier date (Freedman 1997:108).

The reign of Hezekiah was suggested as a possible time of its composition, but the material may predate even those times, to an unknown age where a new perspective on the law began to take shape under the tutelage of some early reformer. It was this discovery in 622 BC that began a thorough reformation of traditional customs and rites of the people (Freedman 1997:108). Regulating the life of the people by way of the law was one of the chief characteristics of the Jewish people. This is evident in the drastic adaptation and reformulation of the ancient laws to fit the current circumstances faced by the people (Blenkinsopp 2001:95). These traditions were compiled and formulated into what we have today as the books of Deuteronomy through Kings, often called Deuteronomistic History (Gottwald 1985:138).

Freedman (1997:110) maintains that the pivotal point of the Deuteronomic Historian's work was the prophetic exhortations of Moses to the people, which was the new D document found in the temple. He concludes that "the Deuteronomic History was originally composed before the fall of Jerusalem, and that it consisted of JE and D, plus other materials of a narrative and archival nature, covering the period from the creation down to the reign and reformation of Josiah." He also states that the Deuteronomic historian did not perceive the history of Israel as beginning with Moses, but rather much earlier. So an important question must be raised at this point regarding the nature of the Deuteronomic History. Is it an editorial work, or an influence, which became a frame of reference for the writers during the period of the Monarchy?

For implementation of the prophets' teaching, a new standard of judgment had to be delineated for the people. The Deuteronomic reform would be the avenue for such an expression. The school of the prophets, from the seventh century onwards had this as their goal (Kimbrough 1978:63). Although the formulation of the laws of Deuteronomy have been



heavily influenced by the prophets, it is unlikely that the prophets authored this book (Blenkinsopp 2001:95).

With the development of Deuteronomic theology, the codified will of Yahweh became an important factor of their religion. This opened the way for an authoritative Canon, where people did not enjoy the freedom of religious expression and thought as before. Thus, the beginning of Israelite religion becoming a “religion of the book” that would be used for teaching and learning of religious practices (Fohrer 1972:300). The institutionalization of the religion of Israel took a great leap by way of the Deuteronomist.

In the Deuteronomic History, we see a general shift in values regarding the previously held systems and laws. Although the idea of the covenant is upheld, the practice of sacrifice, eating, and drinking are given less importance. The ceremonial practices no longer hold the highest place in their cultic perceptions. “The covenant between Yahweh and his people no longer rests on the mystical contract, nor even on the simple proclamation of the inspired word, but on the consideration of moral order. It is no longer imposed from without, it rests on exhortations and demonstrations” (Kimbrough 1978:65). In the patriarchal times, especially in the literature, moral issues seemed to be generally ignored, and the cultic practices, especially the building of altars and sacred places were held high in honor. In the Deuteronomic History we see a gradual shift to more ethical relations and a different level of spirituality.

There is often a common misunderstanding regarding the nature of the Old Testament being a judgmental, law-based presentation of religion. This perspective presents God’s relationship with people as having its foundation on performance and adherence to the law. But in our study, we see some evidence for the opposite view. In the life of Jacob, we saw God’s love and mercy that was poured out to him at an extreme crisis point in his life. As a

fugitive running for his life, with no possessions and no future to speak of, except the possibility of death, God in his mercy meets him at his point of need and speaks graciously to him. It was not because Jacob was a victim of simple jealousy, but Esau's vengeance was rightfully validated considering the cultural milieu of the times. In the perspective of the Deuteronomic Historian, the election of Israel to be God's people is without any doubt fundamentally prior to any commandment. This election is never mentioned in a conditional sense, that is, conditional upon their obedience. Israel was chosen before they had an opportunity to show obedience. An example of this can be seen in Deuteronomy 27:9-10: "Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, 'Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today.'" Thus von Rad (2005: 91-96) maintains that thankfulness is the true motivation for obedience.

## **2.10. Summary**

In this chapter we have dealt with a variety of methodological issues. We began with my personal methodology for exegesis and the study of the biblical text. Taking a developmental perspective on the traditions, we looked at the impact of the needs of the community on the traditions as they were passed down orally. After the settlement, the changes in the needs of the people would have been of a greater magnitude. Going from a tribal system to a broader association with numerous tribes and other nationalities produced challenges for the people that they never experienced before. A significant factor during this time was the Canaanite influence on the traditions as the people attempted to relate with their new community. These factors influenced the transmission of the traditions and made them more palatable to the local context of the new land.

The identification with the religio-historical method is significant since our aim is to understand the religion of Israel in light of its historical development. The historical development of the text will have some implications for our texts in consideration. The Canaanite influence evidenced in the heavy cultic emphasis of the religion of Israel will impact how we understand and exegete the text.

Following my research methodology, I have given the introductory issues that I consider to be important to the understanding of the Pentateuch. This survey puts my methodology mentioned above into the wider frame of reference in the overall field of Old Testament studies.

## Chapter 3 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The crux of this research is done through detailed exegesis of the five texts that depict Jacob as worshiping his God at important junctures in his life. The developmental nature of the biblical traditions requires us to interpret the text through doing a careful and responsible analysis of the traditions according to the process of development. As we consider the tumultuous life of Jacob, we will learn some important matters not only regarding Jacob, but also about how God deals with Jacob.

### **3.1. INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS**

The question of interpreting the text can be quite problematic when considering the variables involved. Although compiled during the time of the Monarchy, the traditions from which the stories developed reflect back to the ancient times of the patriarchs. Distinguishing the two importantly distinct aspects of tradition and compilation can be quite a challenge in itself. Yet the greater challenge is to decide how to interpret these texts considering all the variables involved.

Interpretation involves the discipline of exegesis and hermeneutics to determine meaning and significance. When we seek meaning, it is important to look at how the text applies to the original audience. This query immediately becomes a problematic issue. Who is the initial audience when the text comes through a long process of development through

oral and written tradition? Was the initial audience the children of the earliest storytellers? While this may certainly be true, there were many audiences throughout the ages that the stories have been carried through. As the need arose, the traditions were modified and updated to fit the need of the times. Niditch discusses the mythic dimension in the Religion of the Ancient Israelites. She states that such essential stories can be viewed at various levels: “as universal expressions of the challenges of being human; as culture-bound expressions of a particular group’s shared response to these challenges; and as individual authors’ versions of such responses” (Niditch 1997:5). As we do exegesis, it is important to uphold a broad dimension and appropriately make an analysis of the data at hand.

People of all time face the common struggles of living this life. Pain, sorrow, and the challenges are faced by everyone. The first of Niditch's options views religion as the natural expression of the struggles of life. Thus, for Niditch, any religion would be an appropriate means of that expression for the challenges of everyone would differ, and their expressions would differ according to their perspectives. Religion therefore becomes a coping mechanism to help people through life. As the expressions of the people find commonality within the group, their religious expression become the product of their culture. As a group, the expressions of their religion finds commonality. Finally, we have the particular author's view of the expressions of the people. The people may have a common form of expression for their religion, but when an author puts it in writing for others to read, things may be different. The author's personal perceptions would determine the outcome of the writing, thus the expression of the group's response would be shaped in an entirely different way from reality.

The time of the oral traditions probably ended with the monarchy, when these traditions were put into writing. The new audience was different in many ways. Previously,

the traditions just needed to speak to an ever growing clan or groups of clans. Now, with a king, Israel has become “like the other nations,” and must speak to such a settled organized society. After a long time, the nation faced its greatest tragedy as they were sent into exile. Their tradition had to speak to that situation as well just as it spoke to people throughout the generations. Finally, it must speak to our generation as the most recent readers of the tradition that was brought down to us from the beginning of time. But in our time, the text has come to a fixed form where less additions or changes will take place (Gottwald 1985:141).

In doing the task of exegesis, it is important to recognize that it is a theological pursuit and that the end result must benefit the general public. Whatever tools we employ for a thorough analysis and exegesis of the passage, we must intermingle the study with a theological frame of reference. The traditions presented in the Bible portray an intention that is primarily theological. Exegesis must not end with the analysis of the text by the use of critical techniques, but it must go on to make the findings useful and relevant to the people. They must express their voice to address the issues that all of us face today, especially localized issues that are inexpressibly challenging (Stuart 1980:11-12).

Some interpret the text with the perspective of the compiler, perceiving that he compiled the earlier traditions with a particular agenda in mind. He used the oral and written material from very early times, but adapted the stories and concepts according to the present condition and the needs of the people that he was dealing with. This perspective is held both by those who see a monarchical or exilic/post-exilic dating of the Pentateuch. We also need to consider the times which the patriarchal stories point to. Of course this presupposes that there were actual events that these stories reflect back to, carried down the years through oral

and written tradition. With this view, there are numerous difficulties that remain unresolved (Westermann 1995:32-33).

As I look at the present texts under consideration, the need for a holistic approach is apparent. The development of the traditions will help us to understand how the traditions may have been applied throughout the generations. During the long period of transmission by oral tradition, the stories were passed down with a specific purpose. It had to speak to the lives of the tribes as they struggled to survive. Thus the traditions were reformulated to meet the needs of each generation. The variations during the time of oral transmission would have been much greater compared to the later times during the monarchy when much of it was put into writing. Even then, changes and updating would have occurred to meet the needs of the ever changing nation of Israel. In essence, the Bible was always in a state of flux, changing to meet the needs of the people. As we look at the traditions concerning Jacob, it is well to understand the numerous groups of people who have shaped the tradition as it came down through the generations.

### **3.2. THE BACKGROUND OF JACOB**

In spite of his shortcomings and aggressive personal agenda, Jacob is portrayed as a worshiper. Reflecting the traditions of Abraham and Isaac, he makes worship a priority. At every critical junction of his life, we see a centrality of focus given to his expressions of worship. As a document presenting the “fathers” of the land, the compilers would naturally desire to show evidence of their worship and piety. Since Israel's religion was central to their survival as a nation, Jacob was presented as a pious figure.

This is expressly significant considering the importance given to Jacob in the traditions of the Patriarchs. Among the patriarchs, he had a unique and central role as the

“father” of the twelve tribes (Noth 1983:125). His designations as “Israel” and “Jacob” associated him with the entire nation. It was as if the nation's identity was intertwined with his, which made him “larger than life.” As his name “Israel” became synonymous with the entire nation, we see some interesting variations as well. The northern tribes were referred to as the “house of Joseph” and the southern tribes “house of Judah” (Soggin 1999:8). These designations were possibly the beginnings of a creation of an identity as a nation. Originally, each tribe held to their tribal identity, and later they were grouped as the “northern” and “southern” tribes, with the above mentioned identifying terms. The term “Israel” became an inclusive term for the entire nation. Due to the theocratic nature of this group, Childs has stressed the importance of the term “Israel” as their indication as the covenant people. He goes on to stress that there was no division between the civil and religious aspects of the Israelites (Childs 1986:178). The term was first understood under the rubric of religion and kinship as they identified themselves as “the people of Yahweh.” In their early times as a nation, they went into war under this designation rather than “Israel.” When the monarchy was established, and their identity as a state became established, the term “Israel” became more prominent (Miller 2000b:528-29). Thus it is a significant matter for Jacob to be identified with “Israel” as it was only much later in their establishment that they took on that “full” identity.

The national importance of Jacob is further expressed in the view of Erhard Blum. His perspective of the traditions developing and expanding through various stages begins with the Jacob narrative. It was in the northern kingdom that the Jacob story was first compiled. This initial core was further expanded to include the Joseph story, and Abraham and Lot narratives. It was only in the post-exilic period that these patriarchal narratives were joined with the rest of the Pentateuchal material (Arnold 2003:622-31). This compilation



involved Priestly as well as a later Deuteronomistic reworking that was done with a keen focus on a holistic view of the history of Israel.

Jacob's encounters with Yahweh are presented at an important crisis point in his life; after his departure from his family as a fugitive running for his life. There is no mention of such divine encounters before his departure, which brings us to investigate the situation surrounding his flight. The immediate motivation behind Jacob's departure as a fugitive seems to be his brother Esau's vengeance and threat for his deceit. But underlying this may be something deeper and more personal, which we will discover further.

Jacob is portrayed as an independent thinker, a person who was quick to fight for his individuality and rights. Rejecting the common socially accepted norms, he demanded the sale of his brother's birthright when the opportunity arose. After purchasing what was not for sale, he went a step further by taking the blessings that were completely intended for his elder brother. Obviously Esau did not consider either of these a fair transaction and referred to both as deceptions (Van Seters 1992:284). Esau's words are significant to consider: "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" It is obvious that the "purchase" of the birthright had a significant impact on the stability of the family. It was not just child's play, but had a practical importance that was already relevant in their family life. On the part of the narrator, no attempt has been made to bring Jacob in line with the expectations of the society. His lack of judgment, tricks, and his cunning methods have been left untouched (Schwartz 1992:12). Also from Esau's statement, we get the indication that he considered the birthright and blessing as two distinct items.

On this issue, Van Seters distinguishes the legal right of the firstborn from the blessing. The blessing deals with such issues as prosperity, fertility, and victory over

enemies. Isaac wished to give all of this to Esau not because of his right as the firstborn, but because he was his favorite son. Although Isaac wished to give all blessings to his firstborn son Esau, he gives it to Jacob as a result of this deception (Van Seters 1992:284). Others see the birthright and blessing as the same, or two parts of the same (Kidner 1967:155). In Jacob's perspective, this process of deception has proven to be profitable as he succeeds in this endeavor (Bailey 1997:56). The New Testament's reading of this tradition sees both as parts of the same, as in Hebrews 12:16-17; "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

Jacob's actions, and eventually his relation with Yahweh may be seen in connection with the unique social dynamics of his family: The father was set on the favored status for his elder son, and the mother with her relentless focus of promoting the younger at the cost of the future of her elder son, thus going against the cultural milieu of the times. The common practice was for the father to bless all the children: none were to be left out. This struggle between the father and mother focusing on their favorite child is clearly presented in this saga. Eventually it works out detrimentally when considering the future of the family. The family solidarity, which is so strongly expressed in the Old Testament, is breached causing a major turn of events (Wenham 2000:96).

Gottwald (1985:157) refers to the use of "type-scenes" as a literary tool used in sagas. These are typical situations in the lives of heroes derived from traditional elements which are understood to be incorporated into the story with varying levels of modification. This appearance of type-scenes was traditionally understood to be doublets and triplets in the narratives, which was one of the early criteria for the source critical analysis of the

Pentateuch. Alter (1981:47-62) originated the concept of “type-scenes” and went further in identifying it as “a central organizing convention of biblical narrative.” When the type-scene is passed on from one character to another, it goes through important revelatory and minute changes. Alter developed Gunkel's idea of “recurring narrative modes” within the short narrative units. It was this concept that he developed further to formulate the “type-scenes” in the biblical narratives (Brueggemann 2003:44). These forms are evident in various types such as the betrothal (Gn 24:10-61; 29:1-20) or “the endangered ancestress” (Gn 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-11) (Alter 1981:47-62). In each of these episodes, we see the basic form repeated with changes in the content. The repetition may actually be in the literature itself, as later compilers “created” these parallel stories. But the possibility is still viable that each “type-scene” could be based on actual traditions from the past, but reformulated to fit the parallel scenes. It is intriguing to note that in the portrayal of Jacob, we would expect to see the usage of type-scenes that would repeat the situation of favoring the elder son to the extreme rejection of the younger. Since this was a tragedy that he experienced in his young age, we would expect to see this “type-scene” further developed in his life. Somehow, when the narrator gathered the traditions, we see the opposite feature presented when it comes time for the blessing of his children and grandchildren.

In Genesis 49, Jacob calls his sons together to give them his blessings. They all gathered with great expectation to receive blessings from their father. Ruben, the eldest, would have expected to get the greatest blessing, but he seems to receive a curse rather than a blessing. Simeon and Levi, the next two sons, were the ones who attempted to protect the honor of the family as they dealt with Shechem. Certainly they also expected a greater blessing, but they also received something similar to Ruben. Thus the three eldest sons of Jacob all seem to receive a curse rather than a blessing (Gottwald 1985:161). This could be

the reason for giving the introduction in the first verse with Jacob's words "so I can tell you what will happen to you in the days to come" (Gn 49:1) rather than telling them that he will pronounce his blessings on them, which would be the expected norm. Such an explanatory statement could be a possible revision by a redactor to make the text more cohesive. The presentation of this narrative shows an inverse correlation with the portrayal of Isaac's blessing. Another inverse presentation is given in the account of Jacob blessing Joseph's sons. Joseph brings his two sons positioned so the elder one is on Jacob's right side and the younger on his left. Although Jacob had poor eyesight, he crosses his hands and puts his right hand on the younger and his left hand on the elder son. When Joseph objected, Jacob reaffirmed his action and specified that the younger will be greater.

The severity of this phenomenon can be understood in the discourse between Isaac and Jacob in Genesis 27:30-40. It is very clear that all blessings were reserved for Esau, and that Jacob was to be his servant. It is intriguing to note how severely the psycho-social effects of such a system would impact an individual like Jacob. Knowing Jacob's character and his keen sense of individuality, it is only imaginable what sorts of feelings would have engulfed him as he heard the voice of his father pronounce on him the blessings that were meant for his brother. This background could be the reason for Jacob rejecting his eldest three sons, and also favoring the younger son of Joseph. This shows the intensified reaction by Jacob to the experiences of his past, and the amount of emotional trauma it must have caused him.

But when Jacob "bought" the birthright and "took" the blessing, he must have justified his actions due to the above reasons. This issue must have remained unresolved in his mind since emotionally he would have felt justified, but he would remain guilty considering the social norms. Later, when he wrestles with the angel, the blessing that he

received might have been a confirmation of the blessing that he “took” by deceptive means. Cohen (2002:126) sees that certainly he would have felt justified after so many years of struggle within himself.

This “underdog” perspective concerning Jacob is quite reminiscent of the Israelite’s condition in the period of the monarchy. A very unlikely, weak, and insignificant group of people becoming a nation quite strong and influential may be the reminiscent theme. These incidents of inequality and the triumph of the “underdog” may be outlined with a clear purpose of identifying their situation in relation to the traditions of the past. It may be a sort of theological thanksgiving, intended to teach later generations of the faithfulness of Yahweh.

The divine encounters that follow his departure may be connected with the severe trauma faced during his childhood. Religious experiences in the family are an attempt “to relate the family’s own life, its own wishes, to the comprehensive realities and forces – God!” (Gerstenberger 2002:35). As individuals or families face traumatic situations in life, they relate to their deity in an attempt to understand reality. This “relating” is often expressed in their worship, and sometimes, followed by a response from the deity.

Another relation is apparent between his piety and his past. The response of the deity seems to be consistently positive and unconditional, and opposed to the later Yahwistic relations with people. This stabilizing role of religion in the individual and family level was highly significant for nomadic families, for they dealt with numerous uncertainties and dangers (Albertz 1992:36). With Jacob, his past was significantly negative due to his father’s excessive favor for his elder brother leading to a tumultuous life at home. Isaac obviously valued the rugged nature of Esau, and his ability to excel in his exploits. Since Jacob did not meet this criteria, Isaac devalued him as a person. These factors were certainly an additional influence that drew him into his relation with God.

Since the text does not present the patriarchs in a positive light, we see how they are shown to be “gradually learning the lessons of loyalty to each other and to God” (Hinson 1996:57). Jacob, in spite of all his deficiencies, is presented as God’s choice to be corrected, taught, and redirected through the intricacies of life. Elazar (1994:297) maintains that his intellect and cunning capabilities would be turned toward the benefit of moral ends. He seems to be struggling in this divine tutelage, yet it will be fascinating to explore how his worship is connected with this struggle. He acknowledged the divine activity and providence in his life, and responded in worship. He is even portrayed as one who struggles with God and with men in Genesis 32:28. This ludicrous and absurd struggle with God was completely unnecessary considering the fact that he was already the bearer of God’s blessing, albeit undeservingly (Snell 1996:279). The portrayal of his development in relation to people is seen as he relates with his sons while Jacob was in Egypt. An evaluation of each of the interactions with his sons will reveal a straightforwardness and simplicity that was not there previously. In his struggles with men he doesn’t seem to always win, but when he struggled with god (the man), he was victorious (Slivniak 2005:11).

An interesting twist has been given to this story of Jacob’s struggle with the man. While Jacob was there in the darkness, he was assaulted by a man. This word is most often translated as simply “man.” It is the statement at the end of the struggle that makes us think of this person as divine: "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (Gn 32:28). Miles argues that humans are capable of blessing others, just as Isaac blessed Jacob, which is at the heart of the conflict between Esau and Jacob. Just before dawn, as Jacob demands his opponent’s name, we see that the opponent declines. He identifies this story “from beginning to end, of disguises, masquerades, trickery and double meaning. Jacob and Esau were quite literally born

wrestling.” After being renamed by the man, Jacob names the place Peniel, which means “I have seen God face to face.” And later, when the two brothers meet, Jacob says to his brother Esau, “To see your face is like seeing the face of God.” It was as if the wordplay between the two verses was spoken in code to his brother, that he knows who attacked him during the night.<sup>8</sup> This is why Esau invited his brother to go with him, to share the land with Jacob. Esau has now realized that the stay-at-home smooth skinned mamma’s boy Jacob has emerged stronger and wiser. Thus Miles (1998:22-23) contends that it was not a stranger nor an angel, nor God, but his own brother Esau that he wrestled with during the night.

Regarding this issue, Hayward (2000: 214, 226) sees an interesting perspective by Philo of the Greek Septuagint text. He is interested in the interpretation of the name Israel as “one who sees God.” He sees a two-fold aspect of Israel as “one turned now towards God, now towards the world.” The world implies the Jewish people, thus “one who sees God” refers to the Jews as a whole. After his victorious wrestling match, Jacob is perceived as one who is “between God and the world.”

But this struggle, and possibly all his previous experiences seem to have changed Jacob dramatically. It was after this struggle that he places himself in the front of the “camps.” After placing the two handmaids and their children in the front, then Leah and her children, then Rachel and Joseph in the back, he places himself at the head of this line (Frolov 2000:57-58). He allows himself to be in the most vulnerable and dangerous position as Esau meets up with his estranged brother after many years. Certainly there has been a major change of mind, a change of heart for the patriarch. A similar transformation takes place in the life of one of Jacob’s sons, Judah. The text identifies that Judah left his brothers and went down to the town of Adullam and stayed with a man named Hiram (Gn 38:1). At

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<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, that statement could have just been a common form of showing courtesy through words.

this point Judah begins a stream of deviant and foolish acts clearly depicted in this chapter.

(1) His leaving his brothers, which was against the common clan mentality. They were to stay together as a clan.

(2) He married the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. The patriarchs were not to marry from among the Canaanites. We see this even from the example of Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for his son. Abraham's major concern was that his son should not marry from among the Canaanites.

(3) His refusal to allow his son Shelah to marry Tamar, the widow. This was in clear opposition to the Levirate law that protected widows.

(4) Visiting a prostitute is not condemned in this text, but it shows his foolish act of pledging his cord, seal, and staff to a Canaanite prostitute.

(5) Without hearing out her case, he accepts the charge of prostitution and condemns her to death by burning.

All of the struggles Judah faced as a result of his sins have worked to transform him from a rough self-seeking man to one who is caring and willing to take responsibility for the clan that he once left so defiantly. After this chapter, the narrator switches back to the story of Joseph where ultimately we see the fruits of Judah's change. When his brother Joseph, disguised as an Egyptian, treats them in a tough manner, it was Judah who spoke up for his brothers and father. He said "How could I go back to my father if the boy were not with me? I could not bear to see the anguish that would overcome my father." In a similar fashion, he tells his father that he will take responsibility for him. Thus we have a selfish man taking on the role of a hero and guardian (Clifford 2004:530-32).



Jacob seems to have a peculiar relationship with his God in contrast to his other relationships. Others have suggested that the name “Israel” may mean “God strives (See RSV footnote on Gn 32:28).” This translation would suggest that God was toiling to bring him to repentance and an acknowledgment of his personhood and character (Hinson 1995:28). Herrmann (1975:51) states that it was later a natural step to see Jacob as being associated with “Israel” considering the significance of him being the father of the twelve sons who would bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob’s struggle with God takes on a very peculiar interpretation for the prophets. The apostasy of later Israel is identified by Hosea as stemming from the character of Jacob (Whitt 1991:18-43). As for the simple and direct consideration, God is molding this man for His purpose. Jacob is unprepared and morally incapable of entering into a covenantal relationship, but God’s transformation begins with the pivotal first meeting at Bethel (Elazar 1994:298).

Thus there is an interesting contrast between Jacob's character and his worship. Though the forms of his worship were shaped by the surrounding Canaanite culture, God accepts his worship and responds by renewing the covenant that was originally made with Jacob’s forefathers (Cross 1973:297). The biblical record contains five occurrences where Jacob worships by building altars, offering sacrifices, and performing other cultic acts. The various aspects of the biblical record may have been derived from traditions that stem from quite early times, and clearly represent a strong Canaanite influence on their traditions. Details of Jacob’s worship are quite rare. Most texts just mention the act without including much specifications. The reasons for this may be numerous, yet we do notice that some of the Ugaritic liturgical texts are also not explicit regarding the structure of their offerings (Lete 1999:34). The more obvious possibility is that the liturgical practices were so common that detailed description would be unnecessary and redundant in their context. The monarchic

compilation would seem to make some additions as well as much updating of the text, which may have continued up to the exile. We can only estimate the extent of influence on the selection and arrangement of materials.

I have selected five texts for the purpose of exegesis. These five texts include instances where Jacob worships God. His experiences are varied each time according to the circumstances presented in the tradition. Thus he sees dreams, visions, hears the voice of God, offers sacrifices, sets up cultic stones, builds altars, and piles up a heap of stones. He also has numerous cultic experiences of relating to God in various ways. These are all cumulative indicators of the cultic experiences of people throughout the generations. As these stories were passed down through the generations, changes and adaptations may have been made. Even after it was put into writing during the monarchical times of the Israelites, we see updating and changes. Thus we can observe the development of their religion through the traditions.

We will consider each of the five texts in detail.

- (1) While fleeing from Esau, at Luz/Bethel -- Genesis 28:10-22
- (2) While fleeing from Laban, at Gilead -- Genesis 31:43-55
- (3) On his arrival at Shechem -- Genesis 33:18-20
- (4) While fleeing from Shechem, at Luz/Bethel -- Genesis 35:1-15
- (5) On his way to Egypt to meet Joseph, at Beersheba -- Genesis 46:1-4

### **3.3 POINTS OF INQUIRY**

These are the points of inquiry that will help us to evaluate the forms of his worship:

- (1) Motivation. What were the events that led to worship?
- (2) Location. How and where did they choose a place of worship?

- (3) Construction. What was the process of constructing the altar and other instruments for worship?
- (4) Structure. What was the nature of the altars?
- (5) Ingredients. Were there animal sacrifices, oils, grains and other ingredients?
- (6) Proclamation by Jacob. What were the statements made during the encounter of worship?
- (7) Covenants/promises by God. What was the nature of covenants that were made?
- (8) Participants. Was the worshiper alone or with others? Did it make any difference?
- (9) Money/wealth. Was there an offering of wealth?
- (10) Vows/oaths. What was the nature of the vows taken?
- (11) Purification rites. What was the nature of their rites of purification before they worshiped?
- (12) Prayers. What was the content of their prayers?
- (13) Sacrifices. What was the nature of their sacrifices?
- (14) Name changes. Was names of places or persons changed?

### 3.4. PANORAMIC SKETCH OF JACOB'S FIVE INSTANCES OF WORSHIP

Details	28:10-22	31:43-55	33:18-20	35:1-15	46:1-4
Motivation	Response to the dream (while fleeing from Esau)	Covenant with Laban (while fleeing from Laban)	Arrival at a new place (upon arrival at Shechem)	God's direct instruction (While fleeing from Shechem)	Arrival at a new place (on his way to meet Joseph)
Location	Luz	Gilead	Shechem	Luz/Bethel	Beersheba
Construction	He set up the stone as a pillar.	Set up a stone pillar and piled stones into a heap.	No detail about the construction of the altar.	No detail, just that he built the altar, and set up a stone pillar.	No detail, just mentions that he offered sacrifices.
Structure	Stone pillar	Stone pillar and Stone heap	Altar	Altar, stone pillar, Oak tree	Just mentions sacrifices (pl.)

Details	28:10-22	31:43-55	33:18-20	35:1-15	46:1-4
Ingredients	Oil	None	None	Drink offering and oil	None
Proclamation by Jacob	“Surely the Lord is in this place...”	None	Altar was called El Elohe Israel	None	None
Covenants/promises by the deity or others	Land, Descendants, Influence, Protection	Covenant, heap of stones, and stone pillar as a witness	None	Fruitfulness and increase. Descendants, including kings, land	Safety, greatness, God’s presence, and Jacob’s return
Participants	Jacob	Jacob, Laban, and relatives	Jacob	Jacob and his household	Jacob
Money/wealth	A tenth of future wealth	None	None	None	None
Vows/Oaths	“If God will be with me...this stone...will be God’s house”	Content of Jacob’s oath not given	None	None	None
Purification rites	None	None	None	Remove foreign gods, purification, change clothes	None
Prayers	None	None	None	None	None
Sacrifices and Rituals	None	Sacrifice and a meal	not mentioned	Poured drink offering and oil on the stone pillar	one
Name changes	Luz changed to Bethel	Gilead to Jegar Sahadutha, Galeed, Mizpah	None	Luz to Bethel/ El Bethel, Jacob to Israel, and the Oak tree named Allon Bacuth	None

### 3.5. EXEGESIS OF THE TEXTS

#### 3.5.1. While fleeing from Esau, at Bethel -- Genesis 28:10-22

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.

11 He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.

12 And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

13 And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring;

14 and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.

15 Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!"

17 And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

19 He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,

21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,

22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you" (*NRS*).

The amazing story of deception by the mother and son team is followed by a unique turn of events. This too, the narrator presents as the cunning tactic of Rebekah to redeem the pathetic situation caused within the family by her previous deeds, when she incited Jacob to deceive his father for the blessing due to the elder son Esau. Without this section, Jacob would still be the fugitive running for his life from his angry elder brother. The inclusion of this section portrays Jacob's upcoming travel as an "assignment" given by his father by way of his mother's frustrations. Thus Rebekah puts a new twist to the situation by saying to

Isaac: “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living” (Gn 27:46).

The scholarly consensus attributes this section (Gn 27:46-28:9) to P, as it diverges so much from the Yahwist’s presentation (von Rad 1956:276-77). Writing during the exile, P takes the traditions of J and reshapes it according to his personal conceptions (Westermann 1987:197). In an otherwise non-judgmental presentation of their tradition, we see a change in the line of sight. A criticism of the “sins” of Esau is given as the pivotal point of the argument. Brueggemann (1982:236) sees this as an “intrusion” into the narrative, because of its unrelated characteristic. He sees two motivations for the placement of this section into the narrative. First, it provides a criticism of Esau, the only one in Genesis. Second, it gives an alternative to Jacob being framed as a fugitive running to save his life. The Priestly redactor gives a positive perspective to an otherwise alarming situation for their patriarch.

In keeping with Rebekah’s deceptive nature, Alter sees this as a further manipulation to get her way. “She brandishes a sense of utter revulsion, claiming that her life is scarcely worth living because of the native daughters-in-law Esau has inflicted on her. This tactic not only provides a persuasive pretext for Jacob’s departure but also allows her—obliquely, for she does not pronounce his name—to discredit Esau” (Alter 1996:145). Her diplomatic tactics have won and she has her way, but only with a great price: she never again sees her son (Kidner 1967:157). In fact, when Jacob asks her about the danger of being found out, her response was quite flippant: “His mother said to him, ‘Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me’”(Gn 27:13). The text depicts a classic example of a type of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” The curse does come on her, as she never sees this son

again. Such developments of the plot would have been inserted by the compilers during the time of the monarchy as a means of presenting the perils of deception.

After this incident, Rebekah's name is only mentioned twice. Once in Genesis 28:5 while identifying Laban as the brother of Rebekah, but the final mention of her name is by Jacob in mentioning the cave of Machpelah where she is to be buried (Gn 49:31). The later redactors have intentionally inserted this comment that unifies the traditions together and brings the three patriarchs in a neat orderly succession. He does this with Jacob's words to his sons during his last moments: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors—in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah--the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites" (Gn 49:29-32).

We see the situation finally turning to a classic example of a setup, where Rebekah is completely in control of the situation. In this awkward situation, Isaac proceeds to command Jacob regarding his future using the very words of Rebekah (Elazar 1994:297). Overtaken by the influence of his wife, Isaac's weak character is presented as the pawn—along with the second pawn, Jacob, both being played by the skillful mind and words of Rebekah.

#### 3.5.1.a. Motivation

Jacob worships in response to a dream while a fugitive running away from his brother Esau. It was this dream that marked the beginning of his relationship with God, thus hearing a direct address from the Divine (Kugel 1995:209). Dreams were used by God to communicate with his people. This theophany is outside the cult and quite distinct from other

cultic theophanies (Albertz 1992:33). Yet as the religion of the Israelites began to develop further, the perceptions changed. The prophets sometimes treated dreams and visions with suspicion, and saw it as a means for spreading lies. Miller (2000a:54) maintain that dreams were perceived to be used to promote Baal worship, and the people may forget Yahweh as a result (Jr 23:23-32; Dt 13:1ff).

Dreams are coupled with miraculous signs and wonders, and specifically identifies and condemns those that encourage people to worship gods other than Yahweh (Dt 13:1ff). Thus, we see a later “refinement” of religious practices in the Yahwistic development of Israelite religion. This move is much like the modern day phenomenon when a religious movement grows and gradually organizes itself into a denomination, where they develop their “creed of faith” and begins to narrow down their focus, to the exclusion of numerous practices and customs.

In Ancient Near Eastern literature, dreams are classified in two categories: dream theophanies and symbolic dreams. By an analysis of their structure and the language that is characteristic of them, we can identify the two. In a dream theophany, God delivers the message in the dream by his appearance and speech. In a symbolic dream, symbolisms are given visually for the dreamer to interpret on his own. Jacob's dream is most commonly interpreted as a dream theophany due to its speech by God. It is understood as a means to explain how Beth-El gained its sacred status as a cultic place of worship. The core of this story is the (בֵּית־אֱלֹהִים), with its focus on the location. Other scholars interpret his dream to be a symbolic dream due to its complexity and distinctiveness. Peleg (2004:1) has done a study on the Bethel-El incident and concludes that in addition to it being a dream theophany, it also should be viewed as a symbolic dream.



Peleg (2004:5-6) has suggested a parallel reading of two perspectives. The first, as we read the incident as a dream theophany, the dream is intended to explain the sacredness of Beth-El and the means by which it acquired its sacredness. As a symbolic dream, the core of the story is the way (דֶּרֶךְ). It tells of Jacob, the one who leaves in order to return again in the future. Peleg takes a careful look at the word “ladder” (סֹלֶם) and concludes that it is symbolic of Jacob's way to the promised land and back. According to his study of the etymology of the word סֹלֶם, he suggests two parallel readings that are complementary. A literal reading would suggest the way (דֶּרֶךְ) between heaven and earth, but the symbolic reading suggests the (דֶּרֶךְ) between his destination and the immediate location. Although the interpretation of these concepts will vary, we can understand that God was dealing with Jacob in a time of intense difficulty. Thus, the message conveyed would have been an extra source of strength on his journey, providing hope for the future.

For the patriarchs, it was common practice to set up altars and worship as they traveled and arrived at new locations. Yet this text presents the extreme crisis point Jacob is faced with, and his sense of unsettledness is evident throughout this text, and in a later reflection upon this time: cf. Genesis 35:3 “Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.” For Jacob, this instance was not simply a “practice” of worship when he arrives at a new location. He is reaching out for help at a crisis point in his life.

Naturally we would expect someone to be humbled by God's response of mercy in a time of crisis. While he was clearly in the wrong, judgment would have been expected, especially for a text that was compiled during the monarchy. When Jacob woke up, he responded in fear “and he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'” (Gn 28:17). This response was

certainly with the expectation of impending judgment. But Jacob, instead of being humbled by such a merciful response of God, he continues in his devious ways (Sedgwick 1999:325).

### 3.5.1.b. Location

There is no mention of any other stopping places along the way except Bethel. As the lonely traveler, he came upon nightfall unprepared. He comes to “the place,” which for Jacob was unexpected. But the usage of the article here along with *maqom* (מקוֹמ) can imply a holy place, though the situation does not indicate it (Westermann 1995:454). In Biblical narratives, repetition is an important thematic marker. Here, the term (מקוֹמ) is repeated six times. According to the text, we have a common, anonymous location turned into the “house of god” (Alter 1996:148). With a focus on promoting the Bethel sanctuary, the narrators would certainly desire to highlight that special divine element to the story. In a human sense, there was no initial recognition by Jacob that this is a sacred place, but it was God’s plan that it should be so. It was during the time of Jeroboam (926 BC) that this sanctuary had great prominence (von Rad 1956:281). The writer took special care to outline the background of this important place of worship.<sup>9</sup>

The stories connected with Bethel and Peniel serves to appropriately endow the Jacob stories with a spiritual dimension. Without these, God’s involvement in Jacob’s life may remain hidden, and his stories would remain as a “very worldly one” (von Rad 2005:171-72).

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<sup>9</sup> It has been suggested that Jacob’s dream in the “holy place” was a form of the incubation rite, where the person sleeps in a sacred place to obtain a revelation through a dream (Also Gn 46:1-4). Thus one is able to make contact with the “other world.” This practice was never condemned, but simply recognized as an incident with the patriarch. This is never condemned except in Isaiah 65:4. The concept of those “who sit among the graves” suggests a condemnation of necromancy coupled with the incubation rite. See (Schmidt 1994:260-61).

Thus the compilers reach back to the traditions and give the clear indication of not only God's activity in Jacob's life, but that of God's special interest in him.

#### 3.5.1.c. Construction

The stone pillars discovered in the Near East are of varying sizes. The usual size ranges from 80-150 cm in height, and some have been found to be up to 2 m high (Zevit 2001:256). It would be unthinkable to propose that Jacob would be able to lift up one of the larger stones. We are left with two possibilities. Either Jacob is a man with an uttermost degree of strength, or that particular stone was just large enough for him to lift (Ben-Ami 2006:39). The evidence we have about Jacob in the literature seems to give us a different picture. As a “mama’s” boy, one would expect him to be more homely and physically weaker compared with his brother Esau who was a man of the outdoors. But as Jacob arrives at Padan Aram, we see him rolling away the stone from a well. These stones were also quite hefty and would not be movable by any ordinary person. We also see Jacob at Peniel as he wrestled with the mysterious man and was able to stand his ground. Although we don't know the approximate size of the *Masseba* that he set up, we do know from the narratives that he was a man of considerable strength.

#### 3.5.1.d. Structure

It was a common practice among the Canaanites to set up a *masseba* as part of their cultic practices. Such practices were vehemently opposed in later Yahwism, especially during the time of the compilation of these writings. For the compiler to include the *masseba* erected by their patriarch would have been a bold step before the people, especially the

Yahwistic religious community. This is a clear indication that this tradition goes back very early and had a strong hold in the memories of the people's religious traditions.

#### 3.5.1.e. Ingredients

The *masseba* was smothered with oil, which later became a representation of value, plenty, luxury, prosperity, and a token of happiness and hospitality (Brown 1979:1032). This act of pouring something of value during a time of extreme need is an indicator of the value placed on the *masseba* and the theophany (Van Seters 1998:507). It identified his longing and desire for something greater than his present situation of helplessness. It was the promise of the deity that provided that longing in his heart. The narrator skillfully connects the events where Jacob's thankfulness is expressed in his pouring out of the oil

In later times, the pillar and the oil became symbols of memorial and consecration (Kidner 1969:159). When Yahwism flourished, the stone pillar was rejected and regarded as heterodox, but the oil continued to be an important part of their worship. The oil was not used as an item of sacrifice, but as "a means of conveying power to the sacred object" (Westermann 1987:201-02). When the sacred objects were set apart for the purpose of their cult, the oil acted as an important tool in its consecration.

#### 3.5.1.f. Proclamation by Jacob

As a response to the dream, Jacob identifies the place as holy. He accentuates the sacredness of the place by calling it the House of God, and the gate of heaven. It is commonly understood that it is on sacred ground that the deity would identify himself (Ahlström 1963:20). Or, this may be understood in the opposite fashion, that it is because the deity chose to present himself there, that the place becomes holy. Thus the cause and effect

pattern would be reversed (Miller 2000a:137). Regardless of the pattern, Jacob gave a heightened value to the place.

This response of Jacob raises some issues that will prove to be problematic. The patriarchal religion, and specifically their family piety presented their God as one who is always with them. We see such a phenomenon with Abraham and Isaac, where a holy place nor altars were necessary for the worship of their God. Their relationship with God seems to be indicated with direct speech and conversation of the kind that would be found in direct human relations. If the God of the patriarchs traveled with them, then this proclamation would have been a later gloss by the redactors.

Here we see the influence of the Monarchical times when they struggled to bring the people together with one focus. The aim was to bring the people to the temple for worship. Thus, the stories of Jacob would also be used to promote the concept of holy places of worship. If they left the text as it is, with the patriarchs worshipping wherever they wished, and their God communing with them at various places, that would be an indication for them to continue worshipping at any shrine in any locality, even the local Canaanite shrines.

So these indications that go beyond the family piety and emphasize the holy places would be the direct influence of the Priestly author or redactor. P as a redactor brought a more refined, stricter form of Yahwism, and we see the same type of influence here. In Gn 28:16-17, where Jacob makes his statement of exclamation, both J and E are present. But it would be the hand of P as he “framed,” “systematized,” and “supplemented” J and E with Priestly ideas and lore (Cross 1973:324-25).

### 3.5.1.g. Covenants and promises by the deity

The promise of God was given in the dream, and Jacob worships and makes the commitment while he is awake (Brueggemann 1982:246). The dream and the promise given are somewhat paradoxical, considering the situation that he was running away from. Though he was clearly in the wrong, God appears to him in a dream, possibly establishing a direct relationship with him for the first time. The family theology is evident here in the dealings of God. Faithfulness, mercy, and love are seen as the most important personal properties of deity in the Old Testament at the family level (Gerstenberger 2002:85). Faithfulness to the family through generations, mercy on the undeserving, and love for the unloved are the expressions of God's character exemplified here. Norris (1996:32) sees that Jacob is a direct recipient of these expressions of grace.

This expression of grace is most evident when we look further at the pattern of the vow and divine promise. According to the common pattern of promises and vows, we would expect Jacob's prayer/vow to be presented first, then the deity's response by way of the theophany. In this text, we see a reversal of the common pattern, leading us to wonder about the intent of the compiler. Van Seters (1998:506-507) sees two reasons for the theophany: to introduce Jacob to Yahweh, and to promise him protection for his situation. He feels that the order was reversed because Jacob could not pray to the God that he has no relationship with. Of course he knows *of* that God, for when he brings the food to his father Isaac, he says "Because the LORD your God granted me success" (Gn 27:20).

The Bethel incident helps to understand how the story of Jacob is connected with the Abraham story. Genesis 28:10 tells of how Jacob left Beersheba to go to Haran. This indication would provide a direct connection with chapter 26, where Isaac settles in Beersheeba. Van Seters (1998:504-05) points out that since Genesis 25:21-34 and Genesis 27

does not give the name of the particular location, and since Genesis 26 is part of the Abraham-Isaac cycle of stories, then Genesis 28:10 also belongs to the same strand of stories. We can also observe that the reference to Haran in Genesis 28:10 as the destination for Jacob's travels may have a direct connection with the previous story about Rebekah's marriage in chapter 24. Connected thus by the same author or redactor, this story proposes a direct relation with Abraham and Jacob. As Van Seters argues for a continuity in some of the patriarchal stories, it is evident that we are looking at a highly systematic composition from ancient times. The full extent of the development of these stories may never be known, but we can observe the skillful intricacies of the compilation. Some of the key indicators such as place names and relationships between people are important indicators of continuity. Certainly the possibility is there that later redactors could have touched up the text even further, but from the text we have, such indicators are important to the unity of the stories.

The Yahwistic promise of land is clearly articulated here (Cross 1973:270). It is coupled with the promise of descendants in this cult etiology (Van Seters 1992:297-98). The promise brings the individual to a deeper connection with the deity and a commitment that gets stronger as the relationship is developed. Martens (1981:99) maintains that the complementary nature of this two-fold promise can be seen as a significant proposal for a fugitive with no apparent future. At this crucial point in Jacob's life, with the future being uncertain, this promise of land and descendants bring him to a point of worship and dedication to God that enabled him to have the motivation to move on.

The exilic community and the monarchical period would both appreciate the promise of land and descendants, but in different perspectives. During the monarchy, it would allude to their situation as the fulfillment of the promise to their forefather Jacob. They would be the proud heirs of the promise long awaited, ideally even from the time of Abraham, only

later reaffirmed to Jacob (Elazar 1994:298). During the exile, it would be a welcome giver of hope that the promise is still valid and forthcoming. After years of exile, the people would certainly crave for the return of their own identity as a nation.

#### 3.5.1.h. Participants

As a lonely traveler, Jacob rests at an uneventful place (Cross 1973:270). A person with his wealthy family background would have never traveled alone, especially for a long distance trek. Even the servant of Abraham, when he was sent to search for a bride, crossed the desert with much pomp with a retinue of camels and people. But Jacob's current situation has forced him to flee and travel alone (van Seters 1992:297-98). Although he went with the blessings of his father and the instruction to go to Paddan-aram, his actual point of departure may have been in haste. We may safely assume that his brother's fury was so fierce that he could not stay long enough for a proper send-off by his father. If he had stayed one more night, he might have lost his life.

It is also interesting to note that the place that was incidental, uneventful, and unimportant, becomes a place of importance to the later Israelite cult. In a similar fashion, Jacob had also "become" unimportant due to his deception and his brother's murderous reaction. His destiny is now completely out of his hands (Brueggeman 1982:242). Traveling alone as an unimportant person in an unimportant place, his God meets him, and changes everything. The place becomes a shrine of great importance, and he, becomes heir to an undeserved promise. Although he received the blessing of his father, his running away makes it practically impossible for him to enjoy the material blessings that he could have in his father's home. But meeting with his God, he receives even a greater promise, a promise greater than his father's blessing.



### 3.5.1.i. Money/wealth

He pledges a tenth of all future income. This pledge is qualified with the expectation that God would keep his side of the promise. The idea of “the tenth” was common in the LB Age political taxation scheme. For the people, it was a difficult task given the nature of the agricultural land in that area (Mendenhall 2001:107). Yet, this was part of the cultic legends of the Bethel sanctuary with a clear indication of Jacob’s vow to build a house for God and his pledge to pay the tithe (von Rad 2005:38-39).

In later times, Amos 4:4 mentions the tithe in Bethel, for which our text in consideration may have been the substantiation going back to the patriarch. Although the priests privileges were later abused, the tithe was a portion dedicated to them for their survival (Fohrer 1972:208-09). After the collapse of the nation and their religious practices, one of the things Nehemiah set in order was to reinstate the tithe for the priests (Fohrer 1972:358). He did not consider the poor and destitute situation of the people, but stayed firm on restoring the tithe. His determination shows how this practice became such an item of value to their cultic and social systems.

### 3.5.1.j. Vows and oaths

Jacob’s experiences with God seem to be connected with Isaac’s blessing for him for fruitfulness and inheritance of the land (Gn 28:3-4). Even before he leaves the land, God appears to him and extends the promise reminiscent of Abraham and Isaac. The divinity spoke with a formula of self-identification, “I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham, your forefather, and the God of Isaac.” This connects the situation back to the revelations to Isaac in 26:3-5, 24, and repeats the same in v. 24, “I am the God of Abraham, your father,” thus affirming the revelation. These words clearly affirm a continuity of the promises of God

through the generations of the patriarchs. Even the revelation to Moses in Exodus 3:6, “I am the God of your forefather, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” gives indication to the same literary pattern (van Seters 1992:298). It was on this basis that Jacob makes the commitment to Yahweh (Goldingay 1980:18-19).

The highly conditional vow made by Jacob shows the urgency in the desperate predicament in which he is now a fugitive (Albertz 1992:101). Alter (1996:150) presents him as the suspicious bargainer. Without a home for himself, he declares Luz as God’s house. The parallel verses, 19a and 22a identifies Bethel as the house of God with an immediate and a futuristic focus (von Rad 1956:278). Brueggemann (1982:240) sees that the immediate focus identifies a religious experience at a non-religious locality. The futuristic focus could be later elements from the Monarchical period, tracing the roots of the Bethel sanctuary. This Elohist section of vs. 20-22, could have been edited later to give the “futuristic” focus to the earlier traditions.

Being presented as the skilled bargainer, Jacob bargains with God an exemplary deal where he gains everything, and God gets a tenth. Even in this crucial time of distress, his worship seems to result in a vow that is in essence a classical representation of his motive for personal gain. The immediate surprise in this bargain is that Jacob gives it a twist in focus and attempts to turn it into a contract (Elazar 1994:298). This fact is surmounted as we hear his words spoken to God, but only indirectly: “If God gets me to my destination, if God supplies me with food and clothing, and if God gets me back home safely, then I promise to maintain this place as a shrine and give God back a tenth of what he has given me” (Holladay 1996:691). Considering the freely given promise by God, Jacob’s words are remarkable, if not laughable (Snell 1996:279). Of all these surprising responses by Jacob, the most unique and notable response is God’s response: Silence (Elazar 1994:298).

When compared with other vows of similar form, we see that they are “closely associated with laments or prayers offered to God in a situation of need”(Van Seters 1999:506-07). This vow by Jacob connects with the immediate situation and needs of Jacob as he departs from his home as a fugitive. In direct response to the promise in verse 15, the vow in verses 20-22 acts as a connecting point in the narrative.

This vow by Jacob gets detailed treatment by Van Seters as he states that some of the Jacob stories go back to pre-Yahwist traditions. He sets his focus on the studies done on Genesis 28:10-22 by de Pury, Berge, and Blum for a comparative study on the text. Blum has some difficulty with the statement in v.21b, “then Yahweh will be my God.” He connects this phrase with declarations of a covenantal nature where Israel makes a free choice for Yahweh. He associates this with the Deuteronomistic texts such as Deuteronomy 26:16ff. And Joshua 24:14ff. Thus he considers this to be a later addition into the vows that are a part of the tradition. Blum makes this assessment because the apodosis begins with “If Elohim will be with me” instead of “If Yahweh will be with me.” Therefore, he regards the statement, “then Yahweh will be my God” as a later addition into the text. This position is rejected by Van Seters on several grounds:

- (1) The text in v.20 cannot mean any god but a specific deity, Yahweh; and because we have already argued that the use of Elohim for Yahweh is quite regular and indiscriminate in J, its use here is of little consequence.
- (2) If Yahweh is already mentioned in v. 16 as the one who was revealed to Jacob (so Blum), then the deity to whom the vow is made is entirely clear from the context, and the author may have used Elohim to correspond with *beth Elohim* in v. 22.
- (3) The declaration that Yahweh will be his god fits very well with the statement that he will also build a house for him and offer tithes. The three statements in the apodosis go so well together that it is hard to imagine the first as a later gloss.
- (4) The *masseba* (v. 22) that is set up is taken over from v. 18 but seems to be reinterpreted here as a marker and witness stone for some future action. It is

noteworthy that in Joshua 24, after the people declare that Yahweh will be their God (vs. 18, 21, 24), Joshua also sets up a great stone in the sanctuary as a witness to what the people have said (vs. 26-27). The two scenes have been constructed in very similar fashion (Van Seters 1992:292-93).

The first statement made by Van Seters is based on the grounds that the Yahwist commonly and indiscriminately uses Elohim for Yahweh. This position may be accurate considering the fluidity of use of Elohim in those texts. With a careful look at the text, it seems quite possible that the use of Elohim for Yahweh might come from pre-Yahwistic traditions that are quite established and ancient. But it must be noted that there are a sufficient number of scholars that point to later redaction for the insertion of such statements for the purpose of solidifying the point that Yahweh was the God of the patriarchs.

The next two statements focus on a contextual consideration. In 2, he points to the mention of Yahweh in v. 16 as the revealed God, thus the author may have wanted to connect Elohim with *beth Elohim*. In 3, the statements of the apodosis seem to fit well together to form a unity. This issue of context and smooth flow of the text is somewhat elusive, yet tempting. I think we may correctly assume that if the final redactors of the Pentateuch were such masters at their task, they could have woven the traditions and texts together in such a smooth flow of text that we would have difficulty identifying the traditions that underlie the document. As it is, we are finding numerous traditions and glosses throughout the texts. But looking at the writing habits of most people, it is safe to assume that most are fragmented in their thinking. It is because of the modern convenience of computers that we are able to cut and paste, and get our thinking onto paper in an orderly fashion. If this were not available to us, and our first draft would be our last draft, I wonder how fragmented our writing would also be. This practical and simple argument shows, if anything, that it is quite a herculean task to determine the sources and traditions that can be found within the text. At the same

time, we are left to wonder about the literary and editorial competence of the redactors who had their hand on the final revision of what we have as the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes, some of our arguments about sources and traditions may simply be about the redactors' work.

Regarding 4, the *masseba* is well known from ancient Canaanite traditions that the antiquity of the item would not present much problems. And it is intriguing that the text in Joshua 24, where Joshua sets up a great stone is in a similar fashion where a covenant is made between the people and their deity. In Jacob's situation, his vow is not directly connected with the *masseba* where it stands as a witness. Rather, the *masseba* is intended as a veneration of the deity, and Jacob's statement in v. 22 gives the indication of a promise that the place where the *masseba* stands will become a shrine.

For the Israelites, Jacob's vow would have been considered as a model for establishing a new relationship with the deity and a family through the patriarch. Jacob's vow is rather well formulated to be regarded as a basis for a treaty. This vow would also present the implication of Yahweh being understood as a family deity. The deity would support the people in their struggle to live, while the people provided the deity with food, incense, and sometimes exclusive worship of the deity (Gerstenberger 2002:38-39).

The wording and tone of the vow are indicative of a man who is grateful, but not really touched nor humbled. It was only after twenty years of struggling with his father-in-law Laban that a change began to take place in him. In Genesis 32:10, he prayed a very earnest prayer: "I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies." Certainly it was a combination of the twenty years of struggle and the fear of the impending danger of meeting his brother, that incited such a response from Jacob (Sedgwick 1999:325).

### 3.5.1.k. Purification rites

There is no indication of any purification for worship. In the five instances of worship by Jacob that we have in consideration, only one includes a process of purification. The situation could have included some form of preparation, but in this situation, he may not have had the necessary resources such as water for cleansing.

### 3.5.1.l. Prayers

No explicit prayers are recorded here, but we have a clue from Genesis 35:3 “Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress.” The implication here is clear that there was some sort of cry or plea to God, maybe a prayer. His prayer may not have been similar to modern day prayers of great formality and grandeur that we are familiar with. Rather, it may have been a heartfelt cry to his God in the midst of his distress, as he runs for his life. Surely, at that moment he must have thought of his stolen blessing and the value it holds for him now as a fugitive.

Also, his vow can be coupled as a prayer. We commonly understand prayers to be mystical in nature, and expect a certain formula of address. Here, his prayer by way of his vow, is more like a conversation, which is quite common among the patriarchs. Formal liturgical-type prayers were more common in later Yahwism.

### 3.5.1.m. Sacrifices and rituals

The use of oil was one of the characteristics of Jacob’s worship that was upheld in later Yahwism. Oil came to be used in various cultic rituals. The Hebrew term for oil is *yishar* (יִצְהָר), which refers to its shining quality, and specifically refers to freshly pressed oil.

Although not specified, the common type used was olive oil. In the cultic usage, the word *semen* (שמן) was used, specifically for ritualistic anointing (Wyatt:1995:1208). Here is a selected list of later usages of Oil:

<b>Consecration</b>	<b>Offerings</b>	<b>Cleansing</b>
1. Of priests, Exodus 29:7	1. Poured on grain offerings, Leviticus 2:1	1. On the lobe of the right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, Leviticus 14:17
2. Of priests and their garments, Leviticus 8:30	2. Mixture of flower and oil to be burned on the altar, Leviticus 2:1	2. On the head, Leviticus 14:18
3. Of tabernacle and everything in it, Leviticus 8:10	3. With cakes of bread, wafers, and cakes of fine flour, Leviticus 7:12	3. Sprinkle before the Lord, Leviticus 14:27
4. Of the altar and its utensils, Leviticus 8:11		
5. On the head, Leviticus 14:27		
6. Of the sanctuary, Leviticus 21:12		

During the monarchy, as the traditions were put into writing, it would have been significant to show their patriarch instituting a very prominent part of their cultic ritual. Jacob is the first person mentioned in the Bible to have used oil in the cultic ritual of worship. As a fugitive with nothing or very little in his possession, he found it important to offer the oil to God. Zevit specifies Jacob's usage of oil in Genesis 28:18 as an acknowledgment of the inherent power of the stone. "Jacob anoints a *masseba* after he sets it up, but the anointing is neither dedicatory nor initiatory, rather it is a respectful acknowledgement of the power manifest within the stone" (Zevit 2001:260). In a crucial time of his life, such dedications would be expected.

### 3.5.1.n. Name changes

Luz was renamed Bethel by Jacob as he identified the divine presence in association with the dream he had. Nowhere in the text do we see evidence of a town with the name Luz (Alter 1996:150). It is possible that the narrator is referring to Luz as the area came to be known even before the name Bethel was used at later times. In other words, both Bethel and Luz were names given to the area during later times.

We do see the name Bethel used much earlier in Genesis 12:8. The cause for such a variation is attributed to the numerous oral and written traditions from which the biblical text is derived. There is also the concept that the older texts were later revised by redactors who were focused on correcting names that were no longer used. This kind of proleptic usage (Wood 2005:479) in ancient texts benefitted readers of later times. An example of this is in Gn 4:26 "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD." Yet in Ex 6:2-3 we see that the name "Yahweh" was not revealed prior to Moses. The earlier understanding was simply El Shaddai.

### 3.5.2. While fleeing from Laban, at Gilead -- Genesis 31:43-55

43 Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne?"

44 Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me."

45 So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar.

46 And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap.

47 Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed.

48 Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he called it Galeed,

49 and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other.

50 If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness



between you and me."

51 Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me.

52 This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.

53 May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor"-- the God of their father-- "judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac,

54 and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

55 Early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home (*NRS*).

With the blessings of Isaac behind him, Jacob conquers each difficulty he faced in Mesopotamia. But what was the use of the blessings if he could not stay home to enjoy the wealth of his family, and gain the inheritance promised to him? It is fascinating how the narrative puts the pieces of the puzzle together to bring Jacob around to ultimately get the blessing, but in an unconventional way. He arrives at Laban's house completely empty handed, and just within twenty years he leaves a wealthy man (Westermann 1980:83). And Laban himself is blessed as a result of Jacob's stay with him. All the gains attained in the two decades may be attributed to the blessing. The narrator employs a fabulous literary approach through the struggles of Jacob, to bring him to his blessing promised to him by his father.

Very early, his relationship with his father-in-law Laban turns sour, as Laban deceives Jacob in the dark by giving him Leah as his wife instead of Rachel. Laban appeals to the system of the land that the younger cannot be given in marriage before the elder. In this extensive narrative, this is the only place we see a reversal of roles and a "commentary" on Jacob's deception of his father who had weakness in his sight, to get the blessings due to the elder son (Alter 1981:180). In spite of all these difficulties, Jacob holds on and attempts to outwit Laban. This continuous volley of wit and deception goes on for an entire twenty years until Jacob, full of frustration, makes a seemingly sudden decision to leave with his family

and all his possessions to the land of Canaan. In actuality, it was in no way a sudden decision. Jacob very keenly developed his arguments and convinced his wives of the need to depart. Laban's deceptions were pointed out one by one in a very tactful way so as to win their favor and get them on his side, as opposed to their father. But as he describes Laban's deceptions, he carefully avoids mentioning the first of his deceptions during his marriage when Leah was switched for Rachel, for he needed both of their approval for this "escape." Thus he cajoled and directed their thinking so tactfully that they themselves arrived at the conclusion that Jacob wanted them to accept (Wenham 1998:270-71).

In the midst of their preparation to leave, Rachel steals her father's household gods. These figurines were commonly used in the family's cultic practices (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:328-29). Again, Jacob becomes a fugitive, this time running from Laban.

#### 3.5.2.a. Motivation

Jacob is at another point of crisis in his life where he stops to worship. In Gilead, Laban finds Jacob and demands his gods (Albertz 1992:37)<sup>10</sup> that were missing. Rachel apparently considered the piety of their immediate family (Zevit 2001:274-76) more important than keeping her father happy. As she hides the gods and "sits" on them, we wonder if the writer intended a pun here targeted at the idols of other nations, and against idolatry in general. In a sense Yahweh was being contrasted to these gods that had to be protected, and carried (Brueggemann 1982:259). In contrast, Yahweh was the god who protected and provided for his people. The situation becomes a heated encounter of words as Jacob goes into a tirade against Laban in 31:36-42. Jacob ends his monologue with the claim

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<sup>10</sup> Although the value of these figurines were high, they did not hold equal status with the cultic idols that were a part of the official cult. The teraphim stolen by Rachel were only the representation of the family religion.

that God is on his side, evidenced by the supposed rebuke<sup>11</sup> of Laban by God, on behalf of Jacob. This claim by Jacob is supported by identifying this experience with the promise at Bethel which connected him with the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac.

Finally, when all attempts failed, Laban makes a final, bold statement of claim on all that Jacob owns by saying “all you see is mine.” But he realizes that there is no hope of getting them back. He finally resigns himself to the impending fate, where his daughters and grandchildren have departed, and probably most important to him, a valuable worker is lost. Being the elder, paternal figure, Laban initiates the creation of a covenant. Jacob’s worship here is a part of the covenant he makes with Laban.

#### 3.5.2.b. Location

The text identifies the place that Laban catches up with Jacob as the hill country of Gilead (Gn 31:23). Laban, having heard that Jacob was headed toward the hill country of Gilead (v.21), was in quite a hurry to reach there. The text is corrupt and unclear where he reached. A direct reading would indicate that he reached the exact locality that Jacob was and pitched his tent in the same place. Von Rad has suggested that a place name would have been given in v. 25a, along with the words “hill country.” Somehow, the precise name of the place has dropped off from the text in its transmission (von Rad 1956:303). Westermann suggests that Jacob and Laban camped in the same region, but on two separate elevations facing each other, and the words (וּלְבָן תִּקַּע אֶת־אָהָלוֹ בְּהַר הַגִּלְעָד) could be deleted, reading the text simply as: “and Jacob pitched his tent on the mountain of Gilead.” According to Westermann (2002:494) the other possibility is that the verse mentions the tents of both

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<sup>11</sup> Laban does not refer to this as a rebuke. Rather he sees it as his right to overtake Jacob and even to harm him (Gn 31:29), thus we see his final claim to dominance and final surrender—Laban has met his match (Gn 31:43).

Laban and Jacob (as in the NIV). In v.49, the name *Mizpah* (meaning outlook-point or height) is given to the pile of rocks, intending for it to be a witness between Laban and Jacob. It is possible that this name has been applied to the particular area in Gilead. Thus the name Mizpah, originally given to the pile of rocks may have become a locality sometime in the future.

### 3.5.2.c. Construction

Jacob responds to the invitation of a covenant by making preparations for the ratification of the covenant. Of all the instances of worship by Jacob, this one seems to be given the most detailed description. It is presented as a highly organized, systematic combination of several rites, possibly due to the extreme significance of this covenant which has averted a major conflict and possible death due to the high value placed on the stolen teraphim (Albertz 1992:37). The process begins with the erection of a *Masseba* as he had done in Bethel. The *Masseba* seems to be a marker for the place where this covenant was made, but it is later mentioned as a border marker between the two men (Zevit 2001:259).

Then Jacob orders his relatives to pile stones into a heap, followed by a sacramental meal. Cross (1973:269) identifies this as one of the most archaic specifications of a covenant in Biblical sources. Since both the J and E strands are present here, it is evidence of its existence in a common epic. Ringgren (1966:24) suggests that the pile of stones comes from a different tradition than the *Masseba*. Both are woven together into one and concludes with a sacral act. This may or may not be the case. It could very well have been the case that one person suggested the *Masseba*, and the other one suggested the pile of rocks. Finally, the decision was made to incorporate both items as part of the covenant. But the text clearly

states that both were Jacob's idea. This could have been the redactor's attempt to give Jacob the upper hand in the initiation of the covenant.

#### *3.5.2.d. Structure*

Two items are clearly given in the text in this situation. The stone pillar and the pile of stones each have significant meanings. But v.54 mentions a sacrifice and the subsequent meal that he ate with his relatives. No details are given about the sacrifice. The nature or the purpose is not explicitly given, though we can assume it may be the final, consummating step in ratifying the covenant between the two men as it was customary in the ancient times (Wenham 1998:279). For a sacrifice to be made, an altar is necessary, but none is mentioned. Also, we can assume that the sacrifice is made to the god of Abraham or to the god of Nahor, but that is also not clear. And if that were given, the later redactors would have changed it to Yahweh. Or, this omission could be the hand of the editor who would aim to avoid further confusion regarding the sacrifice made to a foreign god.

#### *3.5.2.e. Ingredients*

A libation with oil on the pillar may be assumed here, but the text does not mention it. The pile of stones would serve just as a marker or memorial. The animal for the sacrifice would be important here. Considering the situation and their occupation as shepherds, we may safely assume that a lamb or lambs were slaughtered as sacrifice. Finally the ceremony of sacrifice and oaths produce a contract that is irrevocable (Pollak 2001:62). The contracts, negotiation, and deceptions between the two finally come to an end.

### 3.5.2.f. Proclamation by Jacob

With the situation of the covenant, it seems Jacob has less to say. He has said all he wanted to say in defense of his actions, when he went on his tirade against Laban and his accusations. Beginning with the invitation for the covenant, the only words of Jacob we hear is the instruction to gather stones. The only other words by him comes by way of his oath in the name of the fear of his father Isaac.

### 3.5.2.g. Covenants and promises by the deity

This account of the covenant between Laban and Jacob is probably one of the most archaic covenants presented in the Biblical sources (Cross 1973:269). The account given in Genesis 31:45-47 seems to be a basic record without any insertion of additional information. The two following sections, Genesis 31:48-50 and 31:51-53 are embedded with additional information that delineate the account with further detail. Cross (1973:269) sees v.47 as a doublet of v.48 which presumes the secondary term (שְׁהִדְוּתָא) *sahaduta*. Both of these accounts are attributed to Laban. The first one clarifies Jacob's responsibilities: "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me." The second account refers to their mutual responsibilities: "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me." Commonly covenants were used for the purpose of binding, but in this situation it is used to separate these two men and their parties (Elazar 1994:299).

### 3.5.2.h. Participants

The immediate participants in the covenant were Jacob and Laban. They were the ones who would be bound by the oath that they took in the name of the gods of their fathers. For the sacrifice, both Laban and Jacob would have been active participants with equal importance, for the sacrifice ratified the covenant. For the meal, all the relatives were included. It may be safe to assume that those that came with Laban who were not part of his immediate family, were part of his household and thus took part in the meal. The meal gives the covenant a festive mood with all the children and grandchildren. In his initial statement to Jacob, this is what Laban meant about sending them away with celebration:

What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, "Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father's house, why did you steal my gods? (Gn 31:26-30).

### 3.5.2.i. Money and wealth

There were no offerings or promises of money with this covenant and sacrifice. Yet we may consider the expense of the sacrifice and meal to be a considerable amount. Feeding the family along with Laban's retinue to a festive meal would come at a cost, which was most probably covered by Jacob from his own flock.

### 3.5.2.j. Vows and oaths

The oath made by Jacob and Laban would have included items from Gn 31:48-53.

Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he called it Galeed, and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one

else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me." Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor"-- the God of their father-- "judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. (Gn 31:48-53)

The formula of the oath is not included, but these would have been the contents:

- (1) The heap of stones would act as a witness of their agreement.
- (2) The stone pillar would also be a witness of the same.
- (3) Yahweh would be invoked to keep watch between the two men.
- (4) Jacob is not to mistreat Laban's daughters.
- (5) No other wives are to be taken by Jacob.
- (6) Laban would not go past the heap to harm Jacob.
- (7) Jacob is not to pass the heap to harm Laban.
- (8) The god of Abraham and the god of Nahor are called as judges between them.
- (9) Jacob took the oath in the name of the fear of Isaac.
- (10) Laban might have taken the oath in the name of the god of Nahor.

The detailed nature of this oath emphasizes the crucial nature of the covenant. It is important to note that Laban recognizes the future possibility of Jacob returning to harm him. Until now, Jacob was part of the household of Laban, and under his authority. But now, with this oath, he is legally free and would now become the head of his own household. This extensive covenant reveals the emotional complexity of the transaction between the two men who had been working together for two decades.



### 3.5.2.k. Purification rites

Possibly due to the hurried nature of this covenant oath and sacrifice, no purification rites were performed. This was a high-intensity moment for both Laban and Jacob. This treaty was crucial for the survival of both parties, for they have now come to recognize each other's independence and ability to act on their own accord.

### 3.5.2.l. Prayers

Prayer is coupled with the oath of the covenant. It is implicitly contained in the words: "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me." The actual form of the oath is not given here, but these words would have been an important part of it.

### 3.5.2.m. Sacrifices and rituals

A sacramental meal was eaten by the heap (Schultz 1986:114-15). Some understand sacrificial meals and other rites as a permanent tie between successive generations (Kimbrough 1978:43). Thus the statement by Laban: "The women are my daughters, the children are my children..." might have been a plea from the heart of Laban, who has suddenly "lost" a major portion of his family and lineage.

The typical sacrifice was performed by the male head of the family, and the rest of the family, including wives and children participated in the meal. The cultic meal was common in the Ugaritic tradition (Otto & Schramm 1980:48). Even in later times when the Israelite worship was centralized, this same pattern would be followed in the temple in an adjacent

room. There also, the male head would offer the sacrifice, and the rest of the family would join in the meal in a chamber adjacent to the temple (Miller 2000a:69).

The sacrificial meal confirms the vow made by the two men. The term *zebah* (זֶבַח) can refer to the sacrifice and to the ceremonial meal of meat. The fat of the animal is burned as an offering, and the meat is eaten by the ones who offer the sacrifice. Jacob calling his relatives to the meal uses the word (לֶחֶם) “bread.” As commonly used throughout the Hebrew bible, (לֶחֶם) would refer to the entire meal (Alter 1996:176).

Several sacrificial feasts were instituted in Israel where the family took an active role. Clans held annual feasts (*zebah*) that was attended by all the family members. The Passover celebration was a family feast held annually within the home. In this case, all Israel took part with each family taking their role, and the head of each family taking the leadership. It was even at a later time that the feast of Purim was celebrated within the family, also as a time of feasting and celebration (Miller 2000a:68-70).

### 3.5.2.n. Name changes

The heap was named by Laban with the Aramaic name *Jegar Sahadutha*, and Jacob names it by the Hebrew name *Galeed*, both meaning witness heap.<sup>12</sup> The name Mizpah is also given, with the appended etiology: "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other." Van Seters points to the boundary markers and the uncertainty of 31:44-54 to indicate an older tradition presented here in this text. Although he finds it difficult to evaluate the Laban and Jacob story in Genesis 29-31, he acknowledges that this is an account from the pre-Yahwistic time (van Seters 1992:277-78).

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<sup>12</sup> The question remains whether the heap of stones was given the name or if the locality was renamed. In this situation, the location seems to take on the name given to the pile of rocks.

### 3.5.2.o. Other Considerations

The question of the patriarchs' polytheistic views is brought to light by v.53: "May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, [be judges] judge between us." The English translations do not use the plural "judges." The distinction between the two deities is clear considering the portrayal of the religions of Abraham and Nahor. Yet the insertion of the phrase "the God of their father" was intended to unify the two deities (Gerstenberger 2002:41), but certainly it creates more confusion. Leaving the plural "judges" would be a more accurate portrayal of the religions of these two men. Driver (1956:118) affirms that the polytheistic element was clearly Laban's part, but Cross attributes it to both of them (1973:269).

The extent of value placed on the Hebrew traditions will differ for each person according to numerous factors. But the traditions clearly present a polytheistic picture of the background of the patriarchs. Although the patriarchs are shown as monotheistic, they seem to be quite tolerant of polytheism, and that tolerance has been left without much redaction or comment in the literature. It was from the time of Moses onwards that we see an insistence on monotheism among the Israelites. In a thorough study of Hebrew inscriptions, Jeffrey H. Tigay reconsiders the issue of their monotheism. After his detailed study of the onomastic and non-onomastic inscriptional evidence from ancient Israel, Tigay concludes that polytheism was practiced in Israel, but it was a rare phenomenon.

But the extrabiblical evidence we have reviewed seems now to lend substance to those reservations. Since personal names, salutations, votive inscriptions, prayers, and oaths express thanks for the gods' beneficence, hope for their blessing and protection, and the expectation that they will punish deception, the low representation of pagan deities in Israelite names and inscriptions indicates that—so far as our evidence goes—deities other than YHWH were not widely regarded by Israelites as a sources of beneficence, blessings, protection, and justice.

(Tigay 1986:37)

It was certainly not to the severe extreme the prophets depict. Scholarly conclusions regarding polytheism in Israel is due to the Biblical evidence of the prophets speaking out against polytheism.

### 3.5.3. On his arrival at Shechem -- Genesis 33:18-20

18 Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city.  
19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for one hundred pieces of money the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent.  
20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel (*NRS*).

It is interesting to note the placement of this section in relation to the previous incidents. Jacob's return to Canaan seems to be quite eventful with his conflict with Laban and the dreadful visit of his brother Esau. After parting ways with Esau, the redactor adds: "Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth." Jacob has come full circle, many years after parting with his brother for the first time. It only seems appropriate, after his years of "running," that he would desire to settle down. Thus an old Jacob tradition is inserted (von Rad 1956:323) that he settled in Succoth.

This "settling down" of Jacob (and the other patriarchs) supports the view that they were not simply nomads without any land of their own. Such nomads wandered around with only the aim of grazing their flock. This type of pastoralism which was village-based, is called "transhumance." They have homes, but they may be gone for several weeks at a time to graze their flocks. They are not to be confused with nomadism or seminomadism (Mendenhall 2001:14-16). This is evident from the indications we receive where these patriarchs purchase land and spend a considerable length of time in one particular area. Although scholars suggest a nomadic lifestyle for the patriarchs (Van Seters 1975:105), it is

possible that he spent a considerable amount of time here in Succoth, and that his children were raised to adulthood in this location or at Shechem (Kidner 1969:171-72). The situation at Shechem seems to indicate that the children approached adulthood before their arrival at Shechem.

#### 3.5.3.a. Motivation

It is not clear why Jacob moved on from Succoth after experiencing a period of sedentary life of owning land and building a residence and sheds for the cattle. It is also evident that verse 18 assumes that he was coming directly from Paddan Aram to Shechem without any mention of interim activity in Canaan before Shechem. We also find a lack of divine instruction for him to move on to another location, which seems typical for the deity in the Jacob story.

Certainly it is a pattern for the patriarchs to erect an altar when they have arrived at a new destination (Alberty 1992:36). This instance of worship is also according to the pattern of the patriarchs, where Jacob is acknowledging God upon his arrival at Shechem. Jacob's arrival is attested with an important note about his safety. This note is strategically placed following the aversion of two major catastrophes. Both Laban and Esau held severe grudges against him. Thus Jacob continued to be a fugitive running for his life, and in search of self-identity. But now, at his arrival at Shechem, Jacob is a free man. With Laban, he has made a treaty of peace, and with Esau, he has re-established their relationship, albeit in an unexpected portrayal of submission by Jacob (Westermann 1980:82).

### 3.5.3.b. Location

This is the only time Jacob purchases land to pitch his tent and to build an altar. Being in close proximity to the city, he certainly intended to stay for an extended period of time, which may have been the case (Gottwald 1985:162).<sup>13</sup> It is possible that he was considering using the benefits of Shechem; to rely on the resources that would be available from a city. In other places, because of his itinerant nature, there was no need for the purchase of land, nor the resources of a city. It was this “settling” that led to Dinah’s meandering through the land.

### 3.5.3.c. Construction

No details of the construction of this altar is given. Since this is land that he purchased for his personal residence, we may assume that the nature of this altar is different. Altars along the way while traveling would be quite temporary, and simply built. Other travelers coming along at later times may recognize the cultic nature of the site and use the altar for future sacrifices. But Jacob’s altar here is on his own land, for the worship of his God by his family. The construction of the altars would be determined by its use (Zevit 2001:288-289).

### 3.5.3.d. Structure

Certainly the structure would have been in accordance with the local methods of construction of altars. Fohrer states that it is unlikely that altars were used since Semitic nomads simply did not employ them. Of course, this is with the presupposition that the

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<sup>13</sup> Gottwald identifies this incident to be a retrojection from the time of the conquest into the patriarchal times. He questions the validity of a tribal family’s attempt to negotiate a treaty with Shechem, a “city.” Yet we do have the admission by Jacob that he is too inferior in power if they were to join forces and attack him (Gn 34:30).

patriarchs were Semitic nomads similar to the pre-Islamic bedouin of Arabia. But we have established that the patriarchs, especially Jacob in this particular situation was not simply a nomad. Here, he purchased land and settled his family and set up shelters for his flocks (Fohrer 1972:40-41). For the common altars of that time, the outer walls may be constructed with cut stones or just field stones, in the case of altars used for *olah* and *zabah* offerings. Horns may have been used during those times, but the actual function of the horns is still in debate (Zevit 2001:346-349). Whatever the case may be, Jacob planned to stay long term, and his altar construction would reflect such a decision.

#### 3.5.3.e. Ingredients

Due to the brief cursory nature of this account, no details about the ingredients of his sacrifice are mentioned. The tradition here only mentions the construction of the altar. It is clearly possible that he began his sacrifices soon after building the altar. We do not have information regarding his regular practice of offerings. There could have been daily sacrifices, and sacrifices connected to other Canaanite religious traditions.

#### 3.5.3.f. Proclamation by Jacob

The 'El epithets used for God by the Patriarchs are often tied to particular sanctuaries and altars (Cross 1973:47). The epithet *'El Elohe Israel* can mean “God, the God of Israel” or “mighty is the God of Israel.” This is a fitting epithet in Jacob’s current situation. By this name, Jacob is attesting the previous two incidents to his God, who has delivered him from danger. With this epithet *El Elohe Israel*, several indications are evident. First, El is being connected with what is to become Israel later on. Second, El being a non-Yahwistic name (Zevit 2001:587) shows how this story of Jacob is uniquely connected with the nation of

Israel. Third, the use of *Israel* is a reminiscence of his experience with God at Peniel (Gn 32:22-32), for that is where his name was changed (Schultz1986:115). Fourth, Cross (1973:49) identifies a direct connection between the Canaanite god 'El with the god of Israel (Jacob), because of the unambiguous nature of the structure of (אל אלהי ישראל) *El Elohe yisrael*. Fohrer (1972:38) on the other hand, seems open to both possibilities of El being a mere term for God coupled with a divine name, which would indicate the expression of a nomadic El religion, or directly connecting with the Canaanite high god El, taken over by the Israelites and assimilated as their own.

#### 3.5.3.g. Covenants/promises by the deity

Details of promises by God is not given in this text. Considering the fact that we are dealing with an ongoing process of residence here in Succoth, and the nature of Jacob's interaction with his God, we may assume that he received further confirmation of promises and further instructions. Obviously this was the pattern for the patriarchs in their worship and communion with their God.

#### 3.5.3.h. Participants

For this altar at home, the participants would include his entire family. He is no longer running alone as a fugitive as when he was in Bethel. Yet there is no indication that he introduced his children to the worship of his god. The only time we see his entire family involved is when he made the treaty with Laban. There is no further indication that he passed on this faith to his children. We certainly can assume that they observed his piety and devotion to the worship of his god.



#### 3.5.3.i. Money and wealth

No indications are given regarding any offerings or promises of wealth. Whatever “offering” that he would make would be in the form of a sacrifice, for there is no formal temple or patterns of worship associated with such family religions. The idea of supporting an official sanctuary and priests came at a later time when such shrines developed a formal structure and administration. Such development only came later as Yahwism progressed with the appointment of priests and Levites as support staff.

#### 3.5.3.j. Vows and oaths

Although no formal vows are mentioned, the actual building of this altar assumes that a commitment has been made to worship his god on a regular basis. Formerly, his worship was more incidental, but now, with the construction of this altar, it would be regular.

#### 3.5.3.k. Purification rites

As a part of daily sacrifices, we may assume that some form of purification rites were performed. Such rites may have begun in the first place as a simple process of cleansing after coming from a day of work. Later times, that cleansing took on a more ritualistic meaning.

#### 3.5.3.l. Prayers

Nowhere in the traditions on Jacob do we find a formal prayer. We only find implications of it in his oaths and vows. It is unsure how and when the idea of prayers were developed. It seems that the patriarchs simply “talked” to their god, or the angel that appeared to them. The idea of a formal, organized, orderly prayer would have only come at a later time as their religion developed and became more structured.

### 3.5.3.m. Sacrifices and rituals

Having built the altar, we may assume that sacrifices were offered. The animals offered would be from his own flock, and the nature of the offerings would be according to the Canaanite traditions, as this is what he was familiar with.

### 3.5.3.n. Name changes

The Hebrew word **סֹכֶס** means “sheds” (Alter 1996:187). The narrator wants to present the patriarch as settling down to take care of his people and animals (Westermann 2002:527). We are not told if this particular locality has a particular name. The name Succoth came as a result of this word meaning “sheds.” That somehow was an important phenomenon, that of building sheds, that the name of the place took on that characteristic.

### 3.5.3.o. Other considerations

Dinah is portrayed as an innocent person who “went out to visit the women of the land,” which led to the encounter with Shechem. The patriarchs Abraham and Isaac both encounter the possibility of their wives being taken by other men, but it was God who intervened to rescue them. But with Jacob’s daughter, it was not to be so. After raping Dinah, Shechem attempts to win her favor, and the favor of her family so they would allow him to marry her. In the ensuing interactions between the two families, Dinah’s brothers feigned a treaty which would amalgamate their family into the Shechemite people by having all their males circumcised. Simeon and Levi uses this time of their vulnerability to attack the city and kill all the males and carry off their wealth. This reaction by Simeon and Levi

seems to be quite extreme considering the laws which existed in settled Israel (Freedman1997:485-95).<sup>14</sup>

Some have seen this reaction by Simeon and Levi as a precursor to later events. At the time of the settlement and afterwards, things worked out differently, indicated by Judah's absorption of Simeon (Masterman 1988). Levi also got the short end of the rope as they got no land. Instead, they were dispersed throughout the land to serve as priests (Rosenbaum 2002:128). When the Elohist presents this tradition, the question of Simeon and Levi's situation during the Monarchy may have been an issue in consideration.

Twice in Jacob's life he had to run as a fugitive due to his own doings. Here, the road has been paved for the third time as a fugitive, but this time, it is not of his own doing, but his children's. He vehemently lambasted Simeon and Levi for their wrathful acts (Hamilton 1982:126) and alerted them of the possible danger that lay ahead, and their incapability to defend themselves in the face of such a retaliation. It seemed that he was ready to settle down here for some time at least, but circumstances would drive him out of his comfort zone again. Thus Jacob is on his third run as a fugitive.

#### 3.5.4. While fleeing from Shechem, at Bethel -- Genesis 35:1-15 (אל בית-אל)

- 1 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."
- 2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes;
- 3 then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God

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<sup>14</sup> If one sees this as a retrojection from the settlement times, it produces interesting conclusions. In the new land, they propose a stricter sense of morality by the death of Shechem, which is unwarranted by their laws. David Noel Freedman (1997:485-95) makes a comparison of two incidents: Dinah and Shechem, with Tamar and Amnon. He suggests the same author for both of these stories, and goes further to state that they come from the same literary work, intending to raise their level of morality and subsequently shows how those who take to law into their own hands would also be dealt with.

who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem.

5 As they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities all around them, so that no one pursued them.

6 Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him,

7 and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.

8 And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth.

9 God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him.

10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he was called Israel.

11 God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.

12 The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."

13 Then God went up from him at the place where he had spoken with him.

14 Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it.

15 So Jacob called the place where God had spoken with him Bethel (*NRS*).

The view that Jacob is a fugitive running from Shechem is concluded from Jacob's statements in 34:30 "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.'" It is clear in this statement that they are in a position that they *must* leave the land without delay. It was the issue of solidarity within the clan that caused the actions of a few to have a collective impact on the entire group (Kimbrough 1978:44). This is the reason the clan acted together, and took collective responsibility for the actions of Simeon and Levi. At this point, Simeon and Levi are not excommunicated from the tribe, for such alienation was against the tribal unity that defined their limits. This solidarity contrasts with later changes in the Israelite society as the monarchy became

prominent and replaced the clan legislation. At that time, persons were individually held responsible for their own actions (Kimbrough 1978:51), as in Deuteronomy 24:16 “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.”

The statement in Genesis 35:5 is also important to note: “As they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities all around them, so that no one pursued them.” Thus the terror of God was needed for Jacob’s protection. The massacre created an extreme crisis that made it impossible for Jacob to stay (Kline 1970:106), and made their journey a dangerous one with the imminent danger of a retaliation by the locals.

#### 3.5.4.a. Motivation

Though the literature may identify a cause and effect pattern here, the text is compiled with a theological focus and identifies a direct statement from God to go to Bethel.<sup>15</sup> In that statement, it seems that God is identified with the theophany that Jacob experienced while fleeing from his brother Esau. Westermann (1980:88) maintains that this same identification is reiterated in a different way in 35:3, “The God who answered me in the day of my distress has been with me...” Inherent in his words is the gratefulness for the past few decades of success.

It is intriguing to note the usage of the article with El. For the phrase **אל** the NIV translates it simply “to God” whereas the RSV includes the article “the God.” Some understand the addition of the article to indicate the idea of “the true God,” thus distinguishing this El from other gods (Brown 1979:41). The parallel text uses the name

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<sup>15</sup> During the time of the divided monarchy, Jeroboam created a national shrine at Bethel. In so doing, he was staking his claim to the religious “lineage” that would connect the newly built shrine to the patriarchs, thus giving this shrine the much needed credibility.

Yahweh. This indication is used by van Seters to state that J<sup>16</sup> is identifying El with Yahweh.

It is presenting the identity of **אלהים** as the “one supreme being, the creator deity who is also the god of the patriarchs, the god of Jacob and Israel’s god” (van Seters 1999:85-86).

Westermann (2002:550) simply sees this as an indicator to connect this back to the appearance of God at Bethel, and sees the author as the redactor, and not E, nor J.

The tradition says that God tells Jacob to settle in Bethel. Yet, it seems that the prominent commentators unanimously point to this as a pilgrimage, (Brueggemann 1982:280; Westermann 1995:550 and von Rad 1956:331), I wish to look at it with a broader perspective. It is a pilgrimage to an ultimate settlement. He is coming full circle, a migration (van Seters 1992:278) back to where he began, at Bethel. It is insufficient to present this as just a pilgrimage, for this pilgrimage holds much more depth in meaning and finality of God’s plan for Jacob. Now is his opportunity to settle accounts with the God who answered him in the day of distress. God has kept his promise, now, it is his turn to keep his promise that he so carefully and thoughtfully bargained for.

We may also safely assume that we have here a case of a misplaced tradition that was not available to the present compiler. After Jacob settled in Bethel, there may have been some events that led to his departure from that place. For me, this logical assumption is preferable for resolving the question of whether it was a situation of pilgrimage or migration. It is preferable to give the text the benefit of the doubt.

#### 3.5.4.b. Location

After more than twenty years, Jacob returns to Bethel, which he had previously named. In God’s instruction to him, the name Bethel is used instead of Luz. Even when the name Luz is mentioned in v.6, the name Bethel is also given alongside it, indicating the

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<sup>16</sup> Although most scholars identify Genesis 35:1-8 with E, Van Seters says that view is misleading and attributes this section to J.

redactor's intention to clearly identify the location. Some see this incident as a resumption of the episode at Bethel where he had his first encounter with his God. These stories confirm the assertion that God has his dwelling place in Bethel (Rendtorff 1983:138).

#### 3.5.4.c. Construction

Here, the building of the altar is given with no explanation of its design. Again, the redactors probably assumed that the readers would already be familiar with the construction of altars. The portrayal of Jacob setting up the *masseba* and anointing it with oil seems to be a parallel text with 28:18. Genesis 29:10 also shows him as a man of strength as he rolls away the hefty stone from the well and waters Laban's sheep for Rachel (Holladay 1996:691).

Jacob's worship seems to have a similar pattern of setting up a *masseba* with a libation and anointing with oil. Although the *massebot* is common practice with Jacob, it is important to note that Yahwistic legislation vehemently opposed such practices, and demanded the complete destruction of the *massebot* of foreigners.<sup>17</sup>

#### 3.5.4.d. Structure

Again as in Shechem, Jacob planned to settle in Bethel. Thus the altar he built here would also have been a permanent structure. Especially with Bethel, he would have the special nostalgia of settling in this special place where he first met with God and received the promises. He had been a recipient of God's mercy, though he was undeserving of it. Along with the altar, he sets up a stone pillar just as he had done the first time he came to Bethel.

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<sup>17</sup> The Biblical text is quite intense in its wordings requiring the destruction of *massebot*. See Ex23:24; 34:13; Dt 7:5; 12:3; and Jr 43:13.

#### 3.5.4.e. Ingredients

In both of these texts, there is no mention of sacrifices, nor worship of the stone that was erected (Zevit 2001:261). The libation of a drink offering, anointing with oil and naming of the place was simply an act of worship and dedication to his God - a sign of his recognition of the presence of the deity.

#### 3.5.4.f. Proclamation by Jacob

Luz or a place nearby was once named *Bethel* “house of God” by Jacob. He also referred to it as “the gate of heaven.” This place marked Jacob’s entry into a new realm of his life, a life of devotion to El. Now the same place is renamed *El Bethel* (אל בית-אל), “El of Bethel,” or possibly “the temple of *El*” (Oldenburg 1969:168-69). This renaming may also be significant due to the indication that God has brought him back to this place, and he is now fulfilling the vow he made earlier at this same place while he was a fugitive.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth" (Gn 31:26-30).

The earlier incident in Genesis 28 may have been simply a recognition and an indication of the place as the house of God and the gate of heaven. This second one may be the actual consecration of Bethel as a cultic site in response to his pledge.

#### 3.5.4.g. Covenants and promises by the deity

Fruitfulness and increase, descendants, including kings, and land were the promises that Jacob received. To the Israelites, arrival at Canaan completely changed their perspective



on owning land. The shift to an agrarian culture shifted their values and to them, “a man without land was like a man without a country” (Kimbrough 1948:45). Thus the traditions regarding the promises of land were cherished with a sense of pride in its implication that the land was given by God.

God’s promise in 35:11 is prefaced by his self revelation as God Almighty (Knierim 1995:149-150) (ויאמר . . . אל שדי). “God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty. . .’” Note the Hebrew construction given in Exodus 6:3 (ווארא . . . באל שדי . . . נודעתיו). “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'The LORD' I did not make myself known to them.” The statement in 35:11 is P’s rendition of the tradition of God’s revelation to Jacob, and the subsequent blessings.

#### 3.5.4.h. Participants

When Jacob gives the instruction to purify themselves, it is said to his household and all who were with him. In Paddan Aram, along with the sheep, part of his wages would have been servants. This time, when he worships in Bethel at the altar and with a *masseba*, it would be such a significant time that even his servants would need to cleanse themselves and take part.

#### 3.5.4.i. Money and wealth

Although this text does not mention it, this would be the time to keep his oath. He promised a tenth of all that God gives him. In essence, all that he owns was given to him by God, which is something he clearly recognizes. This is evident from his conversation with his wives regarding the wages that Laban switched on him ten times. In that conversation is a

clear recognition that it was God who blessed him in spite of the odds that were against him (Alter 1996:167).

#### 3.5.4.j. Vows and oaths

No specific vows or oaths are mentioned in this text. Again we see him naming this place Bethel. It is important to note why the redactors left this statement in the text. Jacob goes to this place with the instruction from God to go to Bethel. So the literature (and the redactor) assumes that the place already has the name Bethel. Why place these words in the mouth of Jacob when the redactor could have easily taken it out? The words spoken by Jacob in naming the place Bethel could have been a statement of recognition of the sacredness of the locality. The previous naming of Bethel would have established it as a shrine. The people who would come afterwards would recognize this by the *masseba* erected by Jacob.

In relation to his worship, no words are spoken by Jacob. The only indication is that of him telling his relatives to purify themselves. It seems that his moving on from Bethel to another place goes against God's instruction to him to settle there. We have no indication as to why he made the decision to move on. Although he wanted to return to his father, we do not see him setting up residence in Bethel before going to his father. As it is, on the way, he faces more misery within the family before he reached his father.

#### 3.5.4.k. Purification rites

The burial of foreign gods and the rings in their ears under the oak at Shechem is an intriguing feature. When Jacob built the altar at Shechem, there is no identification of trees near the altar, yet Biblical tradition has commonly connected shrines with trees that were considered holy (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:153). At the time of Joshua, Shechem and the oak

tree is mentioned in relation with the *masseba* he set up (Jos 24:26) (Driver 1956:118).

Another conjecture is that the tree may be some form of an *Asherah* dedicated to the Canaanite gods (Smith 2002:111-12).

Since Jacob receives the clarification that it is the same God who appeared to him when fleeing from his brother Esau, it would be natural to consider all other gods as “foreign.” It is still inconclusive whether the burial of the “foreign gods” was a permanent rejection of all other gods except the one who appeared to him when fleeing from his brother Esau. Some suggest that the burial under a sacred tree assumes some level of veneration that remains with those deities. Even without further use, these items would continue to retain their sacredness (Zevit 2001: 156-71).<sup>18</sup>

Archaeologists have identified cult pits that are depositories for cultic objects after their use was completed. These pits are commonly called *favissae* (*favissa* – singular). Some sites contain money boxes, crude pots connected with cultic activity (some pottery smashed after their insertion into the *favissa*, animal bones, “terracotta figurines, building material, a mixture of small finds – and in one case – a fragment of marble statuary,” and other items (Pedley 1971:42). Some of these pits contain items with art work that indicate specific cultic activity (Dever 2005:226). In some instances, there was evidence of a fire toward one side of the pit, indicating a possible closing ritual for these items as they were put out of service (Haynes 2006). Such a closing ritual implies a final act, but others have been found where there was additions made at later time periods. This indicates that the *favissa* was opened at a later time with further additions (Van Taillieu, Van Lerberghe & Voet 1999). In some instances, a cave was used as a *favissa* (Zevit 2001:209). From our understanding of *favissae*

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<sup>18</sup> Ziony Zevit makes this analysis based on a buried temple that was found in Arad dated from the Iron I period, with the surrounding community that had some characteristics of Early Bronze cities. The burial of that temple may have been perfunctory, but it continued to hold some of its sacredness, because of the stone piles heaped over the site.

it is clear that the understanding of a separation between the sacred and the mundane was firmly understood and the distinction made in the way they handled cultic items. Thus we see that Jacob's burial of the “foreign” gods was not an isolated occurrence, but borrowed from the common practice of his day.

Nevertheless, we know that important items and treasures were commonly buried at locations that they could later identify. But in this situation, God’s instruction to him was to settle at Bethel, so we can safely assume that this was possibly a complete rejection of these gods. He accomplishes this using the common understanding of a *favissa*. We cannot be sure about the intentions of Jacob, yet the structure of the text in its final compilation assumes that Jacob was distancing himself from the “foreign gods” for the sake of the God who appeared to him while fleeing from his brother (Westermann 1980:89). But Fohrer specifies that during the earliest discernable stage, each tribe worshiped its own specific god. He recognizes a multiplicity of clan and tribal religions, which would maintain the accuracy of the biblical tradition that the fathers worshiped other gods (Fohrer 1972:39). Could this indicate that Jacob venerated his own God, therefore he wanted his relatives to get rid of all other gods?

Traditionally it has been understood that the earrings were those of Jacob’s family members. The understanding has been that these earrings bore idolatrous shapes and pictures of foreign deities that would be in opposition to Jacob’s God. Some have suggested that these earrings would have been pagan amulets and not simply jewelry. An obvious interpretation has been overlooked by so many, that the earrings were taken from the idols, and not from Jacob’s family members. The possessive pronoun “their” that modifies the word “earrings” could be referring to the gods. Thus “in their ears” (בְּאֲזְנוֹתָם) would refer to the ears of the idols. Earrings on idols were common in the ancient Near East as part of

the cultic regalia of the divinity, and this could well be a direct reference to such paraphernalia. Thus we explore the possibility that the earrings were not those of Jacob's relatives, but that of the idols (Hurowitz 2001:32).

If the idols were buried, the question remains regarding the importance of specifying the earrings on them. Could we not assume that the earrings would be buried along with the idols? In Deuteronomy 7:25 we may find a clue to unlock this mystery: "The images of their gods you shall burn with fire. Do not covet the silver or the gold that is on them and take it for yourself, because you could be ensnared by it; for it is abhorrent to the LORD your God." Although the wooden images would be discarded, the gold and silver on them may be taken for the value they would have for other purposes. But because of their cultic background and possible veneration by the people, these items could "ensnare" them and bring them back to idolatry. It was this possibility that God wanted Jacob to avoid (Hurowitz 2001:33).

The concept of purity, holiness, and sacredness should be reconsidered. The issue of holiness, with its various forms of the root *qds*, was joined with the related concept of purity, *tame*. Holiness and purity must be distinguished, as purity was not inferred for the deity as was the issue of holiness. Pure things may or may not be holy, but holy things demand purity. The root *qds* gives the concept of "separated, withdrawn, set apart" (Miller 2000a:131-32). The people were to be purified by changing their clothing and getting rid of foreign gods, but God was already holy in the sense of being separated, set apart from the common.

#### 3.5.4.1. Prayers

In spite of all the struggles faced by Jacob, no prayers are offered. Miller speaks of God's providence and the rubric of blessing. He points to the Joseph story as an example of

God's providence, and makes the observation that no prayers are recorded throughout the narrative. Although he is in trouble, instead of praying, he sees the troubles in his life as a means of God's provision for life. "Joseph is not the sufferer who prays for help but the interpreter and the agent of God's provision" (Miller 2000b:461-62). Jacob certainly understood God's provision in his life. The promise was given by God initially in Bethel. Thus, he goes on with faith in the God who appeared to him, with the understanding that it is this God who has had his hand on his life thus far.

#### 3.5.4.m. Sacrifices and rituals

The building of the altar presupposes a sacrifice, though no details are given. On the stone pillar, he pours out a drink offering in addition to oil. At his first time at Bethel, he only poured oil on the pillar. Possibly he was limited in resources at that time to do more.

#### 3.5.4.n. Name changes

Jacob is given the name Israel, but there is no mention of the previous transaction at Peniel. There he won the new name as a result of his wrestling with the man who blessed him with the words: "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (Gn 32:28). Jacob's life is molded and transformed to become Israel (Elazar 1994:299). A view of progression is taken by Fishbane: "to be sure, Jacob had won the name of Israel earlier (Gn 32:29). But perhaps the narrative seeks to indicate that it is only *after* the resolution of his conflict with Esau (Gn 33) that Jacob was, indeed, Israel" (Fishbane 1975:15-38). This renaming is mentioned in connection with the renewal of the covenant and renewal of the name of the site (Kline

1970:106). Cross (1973:49) sees this as the Abrahamic covenant which has come to Jacob by way of Isaac.<sup>19</sup>

Inserted with an odd positioning, verse 8 tells of the burial of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, under the oak below Bethel. The practice of burying the dead under holy trees was not common, but we know that it was practiced (Keel & Uehlinger 1998:153).<sup>20</sup> Jacob names the oak (אלון בכּוּת) *Allon-bacuth*, meaning "Oak of weeping." The same root is used for "Bokim" when the angel of the LORD brought news of a severe judgement on the people and they wept aloud (Kidner 1969:175).

#### 3.5.5. At Beersheba, fleeing from famine -- Genesis 46:1-4

- 1 When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.
- 2 God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."
- 3 Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.
- 4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes" (*NRS*).

Possibly several decades passed since the time Jacob settled in Hebron. The narratives of Jacob seem to have taken a break from chapter 35. After listing Esau's descendants in chapter 36, the narrative progresses on to the Joseph narratives. The narrative moves into significant detail centered on Joseph. It is only in chapter 46 that the patriarchal narratives restart. The characteristics of itinerary, divine oracle, and worship, indicate that this section is a continuation of the patriarchal narrative (Fohrer 2002:154).

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<sup>19</sup> Although the term "covenant" is not used, most of the features of the covenant is present here.

<sup>20</sup> The other occurrence of this practice is in 1 Sam 31:13.

Beersheba is associated with Abraham calling on El Olam (Gn 21:33). It may have been incorporated into the text regarding Hagar wandering in the desert of Beersheba (Gn 21:14-19) (Fohrer 1972:63). Here, we have Jacob being associated with this site where he presents offerings to the God of his father Isaac.

#### 3.5.5.a. Motivation

The text presupposes the understanding of where Jacob set out from by not including the name of the departing place. But the actual departure and its initiative is certainly in question. Did Jacob make the decision to depart, and then when he reached Beersheba, he received the Divine instruction to go to Egypt, or did he go to Egypt in response to God's instruction? The reading of the text implies that Jacob made the decision to leave on his own accord, and it was in Beersheba that he stopped to worship God and received further instructions. This is seemingly a misplaced text at the beginning of chapter 46. The attempt is made to clarify this incongruity by ascribing the first part of verse one to J and the rest to E (von Rad 1956:396). But this does not need to be the case. There is sufficient literary unity (Westermann 2002:154) in this section to consider the entire first five verses to be the product of E (Gottwald 1985:153). It is important to identify the nature of the instruction given by the divinity here. It is not an instruction to go to Egypt, rather the oracle is meant to dispel any fear in Jacob that he has made a wrong move. Although the text does not overtly present this fact, there is an underlying utilitarian motive behind this travel. The famine that has struck the land had become more than Jacob could bear, that he had to "flee" from his own land to a foreign land where food was available.



#### 3.5.5.b. Location

According to Gn 37:14, Jacob would have departed from Hebron. The location of this incident of worship was at Beersheba. It has a rich heritage of patriarchal tradition evident in the literature. Abraham worshiped El Olam and offered sacrifices at this place (Fohrer 1972:63). It was in Beersheba that Isaac received a revelation of “the God of the fathers”(von Rad 1956:267). It was also Isaac's residence, and the place where the traditions about him were situated.

#### 3.5.5.c. Construction

There is no mention about any construction procedures in this passage. But, since Beersheba was already a cultic place from the time of Abraham, we can safely assume that some type of an altar would have already been there. If that was the situation, Jacob would have brought his sons together to repair and build up the existing altar if it has not been maintained. It would have been common practice for travelers to use already existing altars for their worship. This is possibly the reason why it was common practice for sanctuaries to be located outside of the town (Cole 1973:223).

#### 3.5.5.d. Structure

The structure of altars in the region would have had a similar design, with very little use of dressed stones. Crude altars of stone filled in the center with earth was common practice. From the Abraham tradition we know that altars were made in Beersheba, and we can assume that the same altar would have been used by travelers that came through the place. If the structure was somehow completely destroyed, new ones were probably built

there. Of course, with Jacob's situation, we have no indication of which altar he used for his worship by sacrifice.

#### 3.5.5.e. Ingredients

The text identifies that sacrifices were offered to the God of his father Isaac. Since he “set out with all that was his,” we know that he had an abundant choice before him from his great wealth. This is certainly in extreme contrast to his time at Bethel as he was a fugitive running away from the wrath of his elder brother Esau. As he ran with just the clothes he wore, he at that time had no option of offering a sacrifice for worship. But now, although the text does not specify the nature of his sacrifice, his options are broad.

#### 3.5.5.f. Proclamation by Jacob

The text is quite light with Jacob's words during this time of worship. We see quite a contrast from the young man at Bethel as he ran for his life. At Bethel his words were many and calculated. His cunning was apparent as he bargained with God even when he had nothing to bargain with. The master deal maker continued his schemes as he was forced to run as a result of his former tricks. But now, Jacob is “on the other side” of his past. He has gone through the various stages and tests of his life. In Laban, he met his match and was unable to gain an upper-hand as he normally had done with others in the past. Laban, being older and the authority figure, had the prerogative of making and changing his decisions at his own will. Thus, we see that several decisions Laban made had the impact of being a step backward for Jacob's plans for himself and for the prosperity of his family. This proved to be the second time he became a fugitive, now running away from his father-in-law. At Sechem, he faced a painful tragedy as his daughter was raped by the son of the authority figure of the

local community. The cunning trickery and violent reaction of his sons proved to be a snare for him, causing him to run for the third time. Also, apart from the texts of our exegesis, we see Jacob wrestling with the man at Peniel. There, he seemed to have met his match physically, whereby he retains a limp for the rest of his life. So now, we come back to our text in consideration where Jacob's only words are quite simply "Here I am." All other pretensions removed, he finally has come to a point of simplicity in life.

#### 3.5.5.g. Covenants and promises by the deity

Previously God's conversation was simply assumed to be direct speech. Here, the conversation takes place at night through a vision<sup>21</sup> (it was also a vision at Bethel when fleeing from his brother). The God of his father renews his promise of presence, and assures his return. He also assures the reunion with his lost son Joseph, and that Joseph would close his eyes - signifying a fulfilled and peaceful death.

God identifies himself to Jacob in 46:3 "I am God (אל), the God of your father." In Hebrew, the article is placed with 'El, but Cross contends that since the article developed only after the beginning of the Iron Age, the article should be omitted in our consideration. This would render the text as "'El god of your father" (Cross 1973:12). We must reconsider this issue if the text was compiled during the monarchy or later, for that would require us to leave the article placed as it is. Then the question remains regarding the use of the article in the tradition - for which the only access we have is the text in its compiled form.

Jacob's travel to Egypt to be with his son Joseph is somewhat reminiscent of the Monarchy, when Solomon's reign was prosperous, but short lived. In Egypt, Jacob and his descendants were well cared for and became prosperous. Being privy to the king's influence

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote on Gn 28:10-22 (Incubation and necromancy).

in their matters was an issue of great priority which gave them security in the new land of Egypt. This same pattern is seen during the Monarchy, where under the reign of David and Solomon, the nation experienced prosperity and popularity, but unfortunately, it was short-lived as Solomon's death unleashed an array of division, turmoil, and wars with the Moabites, Edomites, Philistines, Egypt, and Damascus (Kimbrough 1978:50).

This final exchange of words between God and Jacob is significant for he is now on his way to meet his son Joseph that he longed to see for so long (Reiss 2004:93). Even in his old age, God confirms his commitment to Jacob, now specifically pointing to the end of his life. He confirms the longing of his heart, that Joseph himself will close your eyes with his own hands.

#### 3.5.5.h. Participants

At his first encounter with God at Bethel, he was the lone traveler who was caught by surprise at the quick nightfall. He just happened to be at this place all alone when he had the dream which initiated his relationship with the God of his fathers. But now at Beersheba, he has his entire clan with him. He traveled with a retinue of seventy people, mostly his descendants. At Bethel, he was on foot running for his life, but now, his sons are with him to carry him.

Although the text does not identify who were the participants during this time of sacrifice and worship, we can assume that his descendants were a part of the worship experience. But this need not be the case. There is nothing in the tradition that gives the indication that the faith of his father Isaac was effectively transferred to the next generation. It is doubtful if the faith experiences of his father was passed on to Jacob. His words of surprise when he woke up are noteworthy: "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not

aware of it. . . How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” Because of such a surprised reaction, I assume that the faith traditions of Isaac were not passed on to Jacob.

What indication would this give for the following generation? Would Jacob make the same error that his father Isaac had done in not effectively passing on the traditions? In the Biblical tradition, there are numerous examples of children repeating the mistakes of their fathers, but Jacob's situation may be different. His relationship with God had a transforming effect. He recognized the gradual work of God on his life when he was fleeing from Shechem. This is evident in his words to his household: “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.” This statement contains three important elements that are vital to our discussion here. First, there is the instruction for purification and dedication solely to his God. This is indicative of his stern commitment due to his thankfulness to God for his activity in his life. Second, he acknowledged his day of distress. This referred to his first time at Bethel where he was running away as a fugitive from the fury of his brother Esau. Within this acknowledgment there are two elements. He was not willing to forget the reality of his past, and he was willing to acknowledge that God had a significant role during the time of his distress. Thus within his tough exterior of braveness and the self-made success story, lies the soft part of his character that acknowledges that it was not all him, but only with God's intervention in his life. Third, he acknowledged the constant presence of God throughout the tumultuous experiences of his life. It seems that he understood his life as a process that God was taking him through.

The above analysis of the tradition brings me to the conclusion that Jacob had made the effort to transmit his religious values to the next generation. Looking at the traditions regarding the lives of the sons of Israel, it is doubtful whether Jacob's efforts with his children really took effect. They appear to have been plagued by immorality, violence, deceit, and other habits that seem to be an indication of similarity with Jacob's temperament. Nevertheless, the statements by Jacob considered above were directed to his household and all who were with him. This gives the indication that he served as a witness to all the people with him. So we may conclude that yes, at least his children were involved in the worship at Beersheba.

#### 3.5.5.i. Money and wealth

There is no mention of any monetary offering or pledge to his God. But as per our discussion above, if the above worship experience involved the entire group of people with him, that would total seventy people. If the sacrifices were meant for all the people, and if numerous sacrifices were offered, that would be an extensive expense for him. So, any offering of wealth would have been only indirect, by way of the sacrificial offering.

#### 3.5.5.j. Vows and oaths

The tradition makes no mention of any vows made by Jacob. Maybe the days of vows are over for him who is now in his old age. His physical condition would have been weak, considering that his sons carried him during this time. Vows made during this late age, and in his physical condition might have no chance of being fulfilled.

#### 3.5.5.k. Purification rites

There is no mention of purification rites during this time of worship. From Jacob's second time at Bethel, we know that purification rites were not uncommon, but for some reason, that information is withheld. When the foreign gods were buried under the oak at Shechem, we would understand that as a one time event. Since they went from Shechem to Bethel to build the altar for worship, it is unlikely that they returned to Shechem to retrieve those items. As they have come to Beersheba, they come without the gods that were to be a hindrance to the worship of their God. Thus one part of the purification rites (possibly a one time event) was already accomplished at Bethel.

#### 3.5.5.l. Prayers

As in Jacob's previous encounters with God, prayers are not mentioned in this tradition. We do see a response on the part of the worshiper where he makes vows in response to God's initiative. Jacob's part seems to be limited mostly to the building of altars, setting up cultic stones, and sacrifices. Even at the first Bethel experience, his prayer was more of a vow rather than petition. The concept of petitioning the deity seems to be scant in the Jacob tradition.

#### 3.5.5.m. Sacrifices and rituals

It is intriguing to note that during these years of struggle and distress, there is no mention of sacrifices. This is the second text where Jacob is presenting a sacrifice. The first one was at the time of making a covenant with Laban. In that text, a meal with his relatives was mentioned, whereas this one simply mentions a sacrifice. No other details are given regarding setting up a *masseba* with libations of drink offerings or anointing with oil. Even

the construction of an altar is not mentioned. This text has just a cursory mention of sacrifices offered to the God of Jacob's father Isaac. Possibly this could have been sacrifices of petition to seek guidance and protection from his God (Schultz 1986:116).

#### 3.5.5.n. Name changes

Although it was common for Jacob to rename places, trees and other items, we are given no such indication here. His focus may have been so strongly directed to seeing his long lost son Joseph that his focus on this cultic place was limited.

### 3.6. JACOB'S PLACES OF WORSHIP

During the compilation/writing of the documents, the nation of Israel was also forming their identity among the nations. In keeping with the custom of the times, their religious identity was coupled with their national identity. The strength of their religion was the strength of the nation, and vice versa.

The "high places," (*bamoth*) were accepted as a proper place of worship possibly up to and during the time of the monarchy. It was after the temple was built in Jerusalem that the *bamoth* were clandestine. The Masoretic text readily uses the term *bamoth*, but the LXX avoids it by using the words "high and great" (DeVries 1985:50-51). In 1Kings 3:2, an excuse is given for the people's use of the high places: "The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD." The account is quite problematic, as the text in 2Kings 23:8 shows that up to the reign of Josiah, the high places were in use (Smith 2002:160-61).



### 3.6.1. Luz/Bethel (בֵּית־אֵל)

The establishment of Bethel as a sanctuary was attributed to Abraham by the J tradition. This provides for a bit of confusion as J-E attributes that establishment to Jacob as he fled from his brother Esau. It is certainly intriguing that Yahweh applies to Jacob the same promises he made to Abraham, indicating some sort of continuity and intermingling of the traditions possibly in connection with Bethel. It was in response to the theophany at that time that he set up the stone pillar. In the placement of the stone was the dedication of this place, possibly an existing Canaanite shrine, as a place of worship for his God. But Jacob makes a promise to his God that if his future in Haran proves to be prosperous, he would construct a shrine and give a tenth of his possessions for its maintenance. Then E goes further to present one more stop at Bethel by Jacob as he fled Shechem. This time, he built an altar and set up a sacred stone (Castelot & Cody 2001:1259).

Although there were no permanent places of worship for the patriarchs, Bethel may be one of the possible exceptions (Livingston 1987:179). It could very possibly be that Jacob had come to an El sanctuary during his travel. Later, as a nation, Israel adopts this sanctuary as a place for the worship of Yahweh (Albertz 1992:76-78). After the division of the kingdom, Bethel was declared as an important worship place by Jeroboam. Later on, it served as a national temple and royal chapel (Miller 2000b:93).

### 3.6.2. Gilead/Mizpah (מִצְפָּה)

The hilly, mountainous region of Gilead is where Laban caught up with Jacob. The name Mizpah brings up several questions that we must consider here. The name is usually given with the article, which would indicate the idea of an “outlook” or “watchtower” (Rainey 1988). The text itself gives that indication: "It was also called Mizpah, because he

said, 'May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other.'" This gives the indication of someone watching over the situation to ensure that the covenant was being honored by both parties. But the text implies that the heap of stones was named Mizpah. It is possible that the use of the name was extended to include the locality.

There is sufficient connection implied in the text between Gilead and Mizpah. In one instance both are given in an order that implies that Mizpah is located in Gilead: "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through *Mizpah of Gilead*, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites" (Jdg 11:29). The Samaritan Pentateuch replaces "The Mizpah" with "the Masseba," thus pointing directly to the standing stone. Most commentators regard this as genuine and insist that it implies to an area in the northern region of Gilead. "This may be so, but in context it is apparent that Laban is referring to the stone erected as a pillar" (Wenham 1998:278-79). The text is somewhat vague, so it may be the stone or the heap that is named Mizpah.

### 3.6.3. Shechem (שכם)

When Abraham migrated into Canaan, Shechem was the first place where he stopped. Shechem is called the place (מקום), which is possibly a technical terminology for sanctuaries. As a response to God's appearance and communication with him, he built an altar. Such was the pattern for the patriarchs' establishment of sanctuaries, where the deity manifests and communicates with them, which results in the setting up of an altar. The indication is that this place was a former cultic site because of the reference to "the oak of Moreh," possibly a place for the delivery of pagan oracles.

It was at this place that Jacob arrives after his extensive experience with his father-in-law Laban. On the outer limits of Shechem, Jacob purchased land and settles there. His first

task there is to set up an altar to his God. It was possibly at the same tree that he buried the idolatrous images as a witness to his complete dedication to God (Castelot & Cody 2001:1259).

#### 3.6.4. Beersheba (באר שבע)

Along with Jacob, Abraham and Isaac are also known to have built altars at Beersheba. Abraham is thought to have planted a tamarisk tree and worshiped God in this place. Isaac experienced a theophany where God appeared to him and applied the promises given to Abraham (Castelot & Cody 2001:1259). It was at Beersheba where Isaac's servants dug a well and found water. Subsequently, Isaac named that well Shibah (שבעה) and that locality had adopted that name and came to be called Beersheba (Gn 26:32-33). Theophanies were common there since both Jacob and Isaac had such experiences at the same place. Some archaeologists posit that no settlement existed there before the Iron Age (Van Seters 1975:111). If this conclusion is reliable, then it would present some interesting concepts about Beersheba. During the time of the patriarchs, it may not have been even a small village, but a cultic site that became important for travelers. The frequently used altars would have prompted more people to use the altars, and the traditions that developed about the theophanies would have emphasized the cultic value of Beersheba.

### 3.7. Relational versus Legalistic Religion

With the preceding analysis of the five texts in consideration, we identify the patriarchal religion to be more relational and merciful than the legalistic Yahweh religion of the monarchy with its heavy emphasis on rules, regulations and detailed requirements for

their cultic practices. As the lone traveler, Jacob gets a companion in his God. This deeper level of relationship began in the day of his distress as he was running for his life.

This relational aspect of the patriarchal religion was left untouched by the later redactors. When they incorporated the traditions of the fathers into their compilation, they could have adapted the story to fit the monarchical times where their religion was more legalistic rather than relational. The traditions of the fathers would have been set so strongly in the minds of the people that they could not change the focus of the narrative that they received. Furthermore, this is even more evident in the Jacob narratives. The Jacob story is clearly presenting Jacob as a person with personal dysfunctions that follow him throughout his life. The only redeeming aspect of his life seems to be his relationship with his God. If this aspect was altered by later redactors, the Jacob story would lose its focus as a presentation of God's mercy.

This relational and merciful aspect of religion can be identified even during the time of Moses. When the Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai, God's relational character is presented: "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex 20:5-6). God identifies himself as "jealous" in guarding their relationship from being shared with other gods. The children of those who reject this relationship are to be punished up to the fourth generation. But the children of those who keep a relationship of love with God are shown love by God up to a thousand generations. Again, the focus is on love and commitment to their relationship. For those who deal with love for God, the benefits are exponentially greater.

At another time when Moses was on the mountain for a long time, the people incited Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship. When Moses finally came down and found the people worshipping the golden calf, he burned with anger. It was after this incident that he entered the “Tent of Meeting” to speak with Yahweh. The narrator specifies that Yahweh would speak with Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend. The relationship is even clearer when we examine the conversation that Moses had with Yahweh. This conversation is an important sample that presents the relationship between Yahweh and Moses. Selected words of Moses and Yahweh are listed below for further analysis.<sup>22</sup> The left hand column gives Moses' words, and the right hand column gives Yahweh's response.

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<sup>22</sup> The texts selected for this reading are taken from Ex 33 and 34.

<b>Moses</b>	<b>Yahweh</b>
See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me (Ex 33:12a).	I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight (Ex 33:12b).
Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people (Ex 33:13).	My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest (Ex 33:14).
If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth (Ex 33:15-16).	I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name (Ex 33:17).
Show me your glory, I pray (Ex 33:18).	I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy (Ex 33:19).
If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance (Ex. 34:9).	The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (Ex 34:6-7).

In the first of Moses' words, we see a plea for help. Although God had called him for this task, according to Moses' words, God has not notified him regarding who will go with him to help him. But in Exodus 4:4, God sends his brother Aaron to be his helper in this task. Yet in this conversation Moses completely ignores Aaron his helper and asks his initial question again regarding who will be his helper. The implication here is that the human helper that was sent along was no help at all, since Aaron encouraged the people in their idolatrous ways. The narrator implies that human help (and relationship as a brother) is faulty at its best compared to the relationship with God who is always faithful to keep his

promises. Now the response to Moses' request is equally surprising: "I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight." God simply points to their relationship as the ultimate answer.

Moses' second query is a request to show him God's ways so that he may know God. The response to this goes a step further than the actual question. Better than knowing God's ways and having a desire to know God, God would simply go with Moses. It is the difference between having a travel map and having the creator of the map to go along with you. The narrator skillfully weaves this conversation to express that the most important issue here is having God travel with Moses; an abiding presence and relationship.

In the third of Moses' queries, he wants to have God's presence with them to ensure the reputation of Moses and the people. Their relationship with God would bring them reputation and make them distinct from other peoples. God confirms that he will do what Moses has asked, for he has a relationship of favor with God, and is known by name. This concept of God knowing the person by name is quite a distinct and uncommon claim.

The fourth question asks God to show Moses his glory. This request is completely disconnected in the immediate context unless it is referring to the presence of God. If so, Moses is asking for a literal, physical proof of his presence with them. Nevertheless, the reply focused on God's prerogative in showing mercy and graciousness to whomever he wishes. These characteristics are a monumental evidence of a distinct and personal relationship with Yahweh that eventually got mooted in the later established, legalistic Yahwism of the monarchy.

The fifth set of responses is reversed in order. Yahweh speaks first, then Moses. As Yahweh passes by Moses, he makes a proclamation of his name and his character. The qualities mentioned this time are mercy, graciousness, slowness to anger, steadfast love,

faithfulness, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. These characteristics of Yahweh would have been so strong in the tradition that the compilers of the monarchical times did not have the choice of altering such concepts to be replaced by the rigidity of Yahweh religion. Moses responds again asking for Yahweh's presence, and asks pardon for the sins of the people.

Here we face the problematic issue before us regarding the evolution of their religion into a legalistic framework devoid of a personal relationship with the deity. Where did this transition to legalism begin? During the Monarchy, the kings were intent on establishing their authority over the people. The construction of the temple and the extreme organization of the cult certainly served the “spiritual” purpose, but the political aspect cannot be avoided. Highly influenced by the Canaanites who surrounded them and lived among them, they put a heavy focus on cultic legalism. While bringing a high level of cultic unity, it allowed them to establish their control more firmly.

The Jacob narrative is clearly presented with a relational frame of reference. Even the plot of the story is heavily dependent on the mercy of God for this fugitive. The heavy-handed legalism of later Yahwism would have prevented Jacob from “growing” in his personality. With his frequent deceptions, he would have been disqualified from entering the presence of God. We also observed that as Moses “received” and presented the law at Sinai, he experienced a direct and personal relationship with Yahweh. The mercy and graciousness of Yahweh was also reconfirmed during the dialog with Moses. Both the texts are placed adjacent to each other so skillfully by the compiler. The contrast between the law and relationship could offer some options for interpretation. What is the connection between law and relationship? Was the law given to maintain the relationship? Was the law given because the relationship was established? Or can we understand the opposite? Does obedience to the



law bring the person into relationship? Does the relationship maintain the observance of the law?

With the patriarchs and with Moses, the deity initiated the establishing of a relationship. Their knowledge of God was none or cursory. It was at this time that the relationship was established. With the patriarchs, we have very little indication of any laws and stipulations being given to them. For Moses, Yahweh appeared to him and began the relationship in connection with delivering the people out of Egypt. It was only later that the covenant was established and the laws given to the people. The relationship preceded both the law and the covenant. Thus the laws and stipulations were a means of maintaining the relationship with God, not a means for establishing the relationship.

Worship in the Old Testament is often perceived to be highly ritualistic in nature and practice. The highly common sacrificial rites, feasts, and other religious expressions have caused many to equate worship with rituals. The study of the patriarchs, and Jacob in particular, present to us a different perspective on worship. Although their worship also included rituals, it is clear that they had a personal relationship with their God. Later, the prophets spoke against the lopsided ritualistic cult of the Israelites. As they spoke on behalf of God, the sentiments were clearly presented.

The efficacious nature of cultic feasts and sacrificial rites was now challenged by the prophets. Amos declared to the pilgrims at Bethel, "I hate your feasts!" Even though the prophets may not have desired the complete obliteration of all sacrifice, their criticism of this ancient institution undermined its cultic foundation and dealt a damaging blow to the mystic foundation of ancient society. The cult was the bulwark of the society and sacrifice the bulwark of the cult. Without the latter, by what means could a relationship between God and man be established?

(Kimbrough 1978:62).

There was a seeming contradiction between the two concepts. Kimbrough asks the question regarding the possibility of the cult existing without the sacrifices when the

sacrifice seems to be the bulwark of the cult. This concept is clarified in Isaiah where this issue is directly addressed:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation-- I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool

(Is 1:11-18).

This text specifies Yahweh's preference of a repentant and righteous life over “the multitude” of sacrifices. The next passage will present the prophets' concept more clearly: “The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote” (Is 29:13). This text identifies the condition of the heart, giving an internal focus to their cult. The prophets were intent on returning the people to their former ways of a worship that resulted from the condition of the heart rather than just outward rituals.

It was after the settlement of the Israelites and during the time of the monarchy that their religion gradually became institutionalized with a structure intended to support the reigning monarchy. This development stripped their religion of the relational aspect that was prevalent during the time of their ancestors. Their traditions clearly show a religion that was less burdened with legalistic norms and highly voluntary in nature. In fact, legalistic controls and voluntary behavior are reciprocal (Mendenhall 2001:xix). Thus the people possessed a

strong tradition that presented their ancestors with a religious system that was highly relational in their response to the deity.

### **3.8. Summary**

We have just concluded a detailed study and evaluation of the five instances of Jacob's worship, each at an important juncture in his life. We considered each instance of Jacob's worship with fourteen different criteria. These criteria are meant to help us to understand the situation surrounding his worship. Jacob seems to have had a habit of worshiping whenever he arrived at a new place. Sometimes the text shows God as the initiator of his worship either by direct instruction or by visions and dreams.

Three out of the five instances give evidence of setting up a stone pillar for worship. With each occurrence, Jacob is depicted as a traveler, stopping for worship. Some of the places where he stopped to worship were possibly cultic sites that were established previously by other travelers. But in the Jacob narratives, these places are presented as an ordinary place, but because of the appearance of God, they become a holy place. The construction and the structure also support the idea that he was in the midst of his journey. The altars, stone pillars, and the heap of stones were all made at the spur of the moment. Although the text does not give the indication, some of the altars could have previously existed, but it would have been rebuilt by Jacob for his own purpose. The promises by God and Jacob's response is an indication of the relationship that he had with his God. Also, it is by way of the promises that each of these stories are joined together into the Jacob narratives. Finally, Jacob is depicted as a man who was keenly aware of the importance of his actions. As part of his cultic rituals, he renamed places, and gave names to cultic stones.

For a fugitive running for his life, the turn of events seems astounding. In fact, he is portrayed in the same role of running for his life three times, yet he still ends up with God's blessings. Although he continues in his deceitful ways, God is depicted as remaining merciful and proceeds to work with him through every situation he encounters. This characterization of God as merciful and understanding is prominent in the religion of the patriarchs. Later Yahwism began to lean more toward cultic legalism, with less focus on the relational aspect of people's relationship with God. It was during the time of the prophets that they began to oppose the cultic legalism without the "heart" aspect and without social concern for others.

Through our analysis of each of the instances of Jacob's worship, we saw how Jacob went through a transformation in his personality. Two important elements were evident in this transformation: cultic and social elements. The cultic element is due to Jacob's constant focus on worship at important junctures of his life, which is depicted with a change in his attitude and words to his God. The social element is visible in his relationship with people, as he went from one struggle to another. Each time, he is presented with a progressively different attitude.

## Chapter 4 Other Sources Considered

No religion or culture exists in a vacuum all by itself, unaffected by others. The Israelites also lived among other cultures and among other religions. Numerous similarities have been identified with the religious traditions of the other cultures in the Ancient Near East. These similarities have important significance for the student of the Bible. Below we will look at the options in getting an understanding for the reasons behind the similarities that are so striking in nature.

### 4.1. SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER CULTURES AND THE IMPLICATIONS

The Israelites lived with a plurality of religions and cultures. An understanding of their surroundings will help us to get a better grasp of the Israelite traditions. Many unexplainable features can be better understood when we consider their religion in light of the other religions in the region.

#### 4.1.1. *Pantheon of the gods*

A clear similarity between Israelite and the Canaanite religions is the pantheon of the gods. Yahweh is presented as a warrior, king, and judge, who sits in authority over the assembly of the gods. It seems that there is a total similarity with the Canaanite idea of the assembly with one exception: the prophets, who are the carriers of the decrees of Yahweh.

Similarities also exist with the Mesopotamian concept of the council, but the Canaanite concept is more closely connected with Israelite religion. “Yet the parallels among the councils in all three cultures strongly suggest that the concept of the council of the gods was a common motif in the Ancient Near East” (Mullen 1980:281-84). “Yahweh may be seen as Judge in his council, as a King in his court, or as Divine Warrior surrounded by the heavenly hosts.” The more obvious passages that allude to this are found in 1 Ki 22:5-28; Ps 82; Is 6:1-12 (Cross 1971:186-90). Israel expressed the concept of the pantheon in their literature, but avoided the actual names of the gods. This connection with the concept of having a pantheon of the gods also points to the possibility of a common underlying tradition that has had a great impact on the Ancient Near East.

#### 4.1.2. Common cultural and religious roots

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were some scholars that pointed to similarities in Mesopotamian texts and the Bible and made some bold statements. They posited that anything of substance in the Bible was borrowed from southern Mesopotamia. This was with the understanding that the civilization in Mesopotamia was much superior to Palestine, which was often considered as poor and backward. During the time that the land of Israel was still at a protohistoric period, Mesopotamia was considerably more developed (Aharoni 1982:49). Mendenhall makes the statement that “the fact remains that the Bible – the product of this impoverished backwater – is the only important aspect of any of these ancient civilizations that survives to the present day. Everything else died and was largely forgotten until the archaeologists’ spade dug it up” (Mendenhall 2001:23-24). Numerous similarities and ideological connections have caused a great deal of inquisition regarding the primacy of the oral and written traditions. Even after considering all the traditions from

various cultures, a definite conclusion has not been reached, and we may never know for sure. Numerous forms and types have been adapted from other Ancient Near Eastern religions. But in the adaptation, they would have made appropriate changes in their application and usage (Hess 2007:33-34). Although concrete evidence is lacking, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence from various aspects of each society to propose common cultural roots among the nations of the ancient Near East. This may indicate that the issues we hold in question may come from roots that have a significance that was tremendously removed from the current interpretation (Ringgren 1966:24-25).

This concept brings us to examine the issue of Babylonian myths in relation to the Biblical records. Miller (2000:369-70) cites Gunkel's examination of this phenomenon. He acknowledges the sharp differences between the two traditions, and affirms that these are not two myths, but one coming from the same source in two "rescensions." Mendenhall (2001:24) observes the striking similarities between the two traditions, specifically the flood narratives. Although the Gilgamesh epic predates the Bible by more than a thousand years, the details, even to the releasing of the birds, are observed to be quite similar (Holm 2005:256). The similarities of the Biblical flood narratives share continuity with several Ancient Near Eastern flood stories. We also find similarities with the Ras Shamra texts, with Leviathan, the mythical sea monster, mentioned in Isaiah 27:1, which has almost a word for word similarity (Ringgren 1966:3).

Religious forms and symbols were also adapted from various traditions by the Biblical literature. In addition to these, it is believed that some Canaanite myths and epics from the Late Bronze Age texts from Ugarit have their origin several centuries earlier in the Middle Bronze Age. These myths and epics were circulated orally and were only put into writing much later. Parallels such as this do not immediately suggest a direct connection of

dependence on the Babylonian record, for the Israelites did not relate with the Babylonians until 586 BC. The best option for this dilemma is that various traditions go back to a common source, most probably an oral tradition (Mendenhall 2001:22-25). This common cultural and literary heritage shared by the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near Eastern texts is an obvious phenomenon. But the direct dependence can be found in only a few instances, where we can suspect the dependence on the ancient Near Eastern texts by the Biblical texts (Gottwald 1985:80-81). These oral traditions migrated to various communities and later presented itself in various forms, each adapted according to their own religious and social setting.

Another reason for the commonality of the various semitic religions lies in the use of El as the proper name for divinity. We do find usage of El as an appellative, but such usage is quite rare to be able to make definitive statements. In his book *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cross (1973:44-75) identifies appearances of El in various religious traditions. Although Cross' mention of this phenomenon was to present El in relation to the God of the Fathers, I intend to use this material to highlight the common roots of the various religions by way of the appearance of El in the various traditions. In the Ugaritic texts that were discovered from 1929 onwards, El was the proper name of their supreme god. He was the head of their entire pantheon, the god par excellence. In the East Semitic region, there is very ancient indications that El was the proper name of their god. In the most ancient Old Akkadian sources, El appears without the case ending, which is identified by Cross as a clear indication that it is a divine name and not an appellative. The notion of their god as patron, creator, "god of the Father," and warrior is apparent in their usage of the divine name. In the Amorite onomastic inscriptions of the eighteenth century BC, the god El plays an important role. Similarities are also found in the onomasticon of Amorite names. In Old South Arabic,



El is the divine proper name where we also find similarities with patterns of Amorite names (Cross 1973:13-14).

Several items of the “Canaanite Inheritance” is outlined by Otto Kaiser. Such borrowing or inheritance shows not only the similarities, but also the possibility of having common roots. These are the items on Kaiser's list:

4.1.2.a. The script. The script of Hebrew is considered to be an entirely external inheritance. Different from the difficult Akkadian cuneiform and the awkward Egyptian hieroglyphics, they adopted a simple consonantal script that became so useful that it became the parent language for several other scripts. Although the script was simple, only the nobles, land owners, and other upper class people were capable to read and write.

4.1.2.b. Language. Borrowing the Canaanite language made it possible for them to borrow the other aspects of the culture that they acquired. Also, languages are not like a bland structure of words and grammar, but it includes various aspects of their culture that shaped the language. Their second language change was probably during the post-exilic era when they adopted Aramaic. But, Hebrew held on as the language of their cult.

4.1.2.c. Sagas. A great number of sagas were adopted from the Canaanites, which they enriched with their own stories. Conversely, they enriched their own traditions with some details of the Canaanite sagas. Their own traditions could have become obsolete or maybe inapplicable in their new surroundings. In such a situation, identification and interlinking with the local sagas would have proved to be more beneficial in dealing with their life situations.

4.1.2.d. Religion. When Israel connected with the Canaanites, the two religions related in a supplementary way. Without losing their belief in Yahweh, their religion was expanded to include various aspects of the Canaanite religion. While their religion was

originally lived out in the wilderness, their perspectives in cultic practice were formed with that frame of reference. But as they settled in a primarily agrarian land, adaptations were made to their religious practice that made it more appealing to their current situation. Kaiser recognizes that the pantheon known to have been worshiped in Palestine does not have to be identical with the Ugaritic religion. While recognizing the problem of identity with the gods of the Ugaritic texts, he sees a connection of the autumn festival with the myth of the fortunes of Baal. He states that “Israel took over not only the feast, but also the idea of the victorious God from the Canaanites.” The characteristics of the gods of Canaan were borrowed and applied to their God Yahweh. The great pantheon that was once the embodiment of numerous characteristics and imagery now has been conjoined into Yahweh who now embodies all these characteristics in himself.

4.1.2.e. Cultic poetry. The poetry of the Canaanites has connections with primarily Mesopotamian and also ancient Oriental poetry. Thus numerous forms and formulas of cultic poetry would have been adopted by the Israelites. From the cuneiform texts in the ruins of the capital of king Amenophis IV or Akhnaton, the Egyptian king, we have the Amarna letters. It is concluded from these, that the Canaanites possessed a rich heritage of a literature of prayer. There seems to be a connection with their style of addressing kings and their cultic poetry. We also see some similarities between some Old Testament psalms and the style of their letters. Here are some references that show similarities: Amarna letter 264 and Psalm 139:8; Amarna letter 195 and Psalm 123. There are also some Ugaritic literature that betray some possible comparisons with the Psalms. Again, the striking similarities could indicate that the Israelites borrowed from their literature. But Ugaritic being so far back in time and distance, it would be inconceivable that they directly borrowed from them. Thus I would prefer to classify these as items that came down to them from several generations back when

their forefathers were connected with other cultures, or were a part of those cultures. Thus constituting a common heritage along with the Canaanite religion and the Ugaritic religion.

4.1.2.f. Wisdom. There is one Ugaritic text (*CTA* 4.III.17ff.) that shows connections with Proverbs 6:16-19. The style and wordings are quite similar, and it is easy to see how the connections would have been made. The Canaanite wisdom was influenced by Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature. The Israelites were also influenced by the literature of the Egyptians.

4.1.2.g. Law. As the Israelites entered into the new land, their relationships with each other and with their neighbors would also be experienced differently from their past. The earlier clan laws and practices would no longer be applicable as they moved into a settled agrarian culture. Previously, it was easier for them to make decisions within their clan or between clans, but the situation became more complex as they came into this new territory. This situation would have led them to adopt the Canaanite legal system and update their legal patterns to fit the current situation. The Canaanite legal pattern is understood to be more comprehensive and connected with the patterns of cuneiform law. In Palestine, many legal documents from the second millennium BC were found. This phenomenon is used to support the idea that these law codes were in fact connected, and that the Israelites borrowed from the Canaanites who in turn had borrowed from the other nations. Specific attention needs to be given to the forms of the Ancient Near Eastern treaties. The similarities in patterns show how the influence is deeply rooted, possibly by way of the Canaanites having already adopted those systems (Kaiser 1975:22-32).

Israelite traditions and forms were enriched by the influences of the Canaanite region and culture. This influence continued until later Judaism became closed to external influences from their region (Kaiser 1975:22-32).

## 4.2. ARCHEOLOGY

Interpreting ancient texts give the greatest challenge for the interpreter to understand the life situation in which it was written. If Archeology is used properly, it will yield results that will enhance the understanding of the times in which the texts were written, giving us the tools for more accurate interpretation.

### 4.2.1. Benefits for interpretation

William Dever speaks of using archaeological data as a “control” rather than “proof” when dealing with the Biblical texts. He identifies his own approach to the biblical text and archeology: “Approach the text, as well as the external data, with *no preconceptions*. Single out the ‘convergences’ of the two lines of evidence, and remain skeptical about the rest.” This approach is the median approach to the five he outlines ranging from the view of the extreme right to left (Dever 2003:x).

### 4.2.2. Pitfalls of archeology

When evidence found through excavations is not used appropriately, numerous dangers await us. Tappy (2003:164) quotes Pitard who brings up this issue with an example regarding the offerings left in tombs for the benefit of the dead. There was a widely acknowledged view that in Ugarit and Minet el-Beida, tombs had holes or tubes in their ceilings through which offerings were made by surviving relatives for the benefit of the dead. Pitard says that the original excavator, Claude Schaeffer, made faulty interpretations when he did not recognize that the tombs that were being considered were not from clearly demarcated cemeteries. Since these tombs were located beneath the floors of the houses, the offering tubes in question were simply drainage pipes beneath the houses of the living. Pitard

(2003:164) identifies several other fallacies: some items understood to be sacrificial altars were actually olive presses; altars with steps were only staircases to the upper floor of the houses; huge concentrations of votive offerings were really storerooms used by the people of that time. Archeological research needs to be coupled with a good understanding of biblical traditions, Ancient Near Eastern culture and religions, and a clear grasp of the latest archeological methodology. Thus the benefits of archeology can be many, enriching our research on the traditions.

### **4.3. Summary**

Israelite religion never existed in a state where it was isolated from all other religions and cultures. On the contrary, it has a deep sense of affinity with the other religions of the Ancient Near East. We have looked at the phenomenon of the pantheon of the gods, where God presides over the “assembly.” The language used in the Bible is quite similar with those of other religious traditions, and the expressed characteristics of God in this regard also seems similar. Yet the application of the concepts by the Israelites may have taken on their own meaning.

The cultural and religious similarities of Israelite religion with the other religious traditions of the Ancient Near East have been studied in depth by numerous scholars over the years. The most commonly expressed idea is that the Israelite religion borrowed from their surrounding nations. Cultural and religious traditions were certainly borrowed and adapted to fit their situation and their specific needs as a community. Archeology also attests to this concept of intermingling and connections among the various cultures in the area. Certainly the Israelites were not isolated from surrounding influences.

We also explored the strong possibility that all of the Ancient Near Eastern traditions that we know about today may be a recension from a common cultural and religious tradition that existed in antiquity. That tradition, being so far back in history would comprise the extreme nucleus or core of the traditions that we have available to us. Since that tradition existed only orally, it never had the privilege of being presented in written form. Thus all we have are the remnants of that original tradition that through the generations have been used and reinterpreted by various traditions for their own purpose.

## Chapter 5 Religion and Worship

As we study the narratives that depict the worship by Jacob, we need to get a broad understanding regarding what religion is and how it is to be understood. We will also look at how worship as the expression of the faith of people becomes a key to understanding their religion. Finally we look at the relational aspect of worship. The traditions about Jacob presupposes a personal relationship with God and Jacob. We will see how this is connected with the worship of Jacob, and how it impacts his life.

### 5.1. THE NATURE OF RELIGION

Religion "consists of a system of beliefs and practices relative to a *nescio quid*, as unfathomable to the senses as to reason. It would be defined in terms of its object, which would always be the same and this object would be the mysterious, the unknowable, the incomprehensible" (Durkheim and Pickering 1975:180). This definition focuses on the idea of "belief" regarding various issues in life, nature and the universe. When connected with a divine being, ritual observances and a moral code becomes significant. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, defined religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 2004:4). This system within the society

works to influence the individuals in their thought patterns and actions. Conversely, the individuals influence the society, creating a complexity of influences (Hess 2007:36-37).

In essence, religion is the response of humans to the environment. From the earliest times, people have responded to the things they experience in their environment such as the sun, moon, stars, oceans, death, and other important phenomenon (Becking 1999:3). These natural experiences were greater and stronger than the people, and often proved to be frightening and dangerous. This sense of awe resulted in veneration and worship of such natural phenomenon, eventually bestowing on them the status of deity. In the difficulties of life, as they looked to things greater than themselves for answers, a pattern of behavior evolved. This pattern is a shared behavior by the particular group that shares the same beliefs and follows the same pattern of practices (schoville 1978:169-70).

Religion also has the role of standing side by side with culture, giving people a sense of control. It interprets culture and provides legitimation of its systems. Religion also acts as a constant critique of culture, regulating it by principles and teachings that are accepted by the people (Dearman 1992:3). This social aspect of religion is emphasized by Rue to the point that he says that religion is not about God, but it is about us. He says that it has the task of “manipulating our brains” for the effect of impacting thinking, feelings, and actions so as to benefit individuals and society. Religious traditions have the task of creating a harmonized relationship among people within the society (Rue 2005). This is especially true when the religion has developed to create its own identity within the culture. In the religion of the patriarchs, their religion was less developed and incapable of addressing the culture. For them, religion was well connected with the culture, but with less of a defining impact on it. It is only when their religion emerged as the more established Yahweh religion that the conflicts with culture began to develop. Their religion became the stamp that would mold their culture



and bring all deviants under the subjection of the established Yahweh religion. Thus we understand that religion has an impact on culture and the culture in turn also impacts religious understandings.

## 5.2. THE ROLE OF RITUAL

Ritual is understood as “the totality of practices concerned with sacred things; even if there are rites without gods, the objects to which they refer are always by definition of a religious nature” (Durkheim and Pickering 1975:182). Not only does ritual reflect the social order and religious beliefs of the times, it creates a reality, bringing a new perspective to the participants (Hess 2007:79). The cultic significance of the ritual brings the individual to a deeper understanding of the role of the deity. The involvement of the deity in the life of the worshiper is affirmed through the rituals performed. These rituals signify meanings that are significant to the worshiper (Dearman 1992:2). Eliade specifies that this significance often reaches back to their traditions in a profound way as “every ritual is the repetition of a primal action which took place *illo tempore* (Eliade, Sheed & Holt 1996:320).

Considering the practices of Jacob, we see that they follow similar patterns that were extant in the cultic rituals of that time. Mundane objects, when used for cultic purposes, seem to take on a new value. It is true that the sacred differs from the profane, but the sacred endows upon the profane a “sense of paradox” (Eliade, Sheed & Holt 1996:30). It is this endowment that takes the profane to a higher level.

Below we will consider some of the observations made by Zevit (2001:82) regarding cult places, and make appropriate comparisons with Jacob’s worship experiences.

(1) “Rituals may be performed in a place of natural significance such as a cave, spring, mountain top, or grove of trees.” Jacob performed his rituals in places where items of nature such as caves, springs, mountains, or trees were present. The Oak tree at Shechem was the place where Jacob and his clan performed the prescribed purification rites and buried the foreign gods and the rings in their ears.<sup>23</sup>

(2) “They may be performed in a place of historical significance, e.g., the site of a theophany to an ancestor, or of a famous event, or a grave.” Places that were significant in history, such as a site of a theophany to an ancestor, places of famous events, or graves of important persons, were used to perform cultic rituals. When Jacob fled from his brother, he came to the place called Luz, which he subsequently renamed Bethel. Although the immediate tradition does not allude to it, we are aware of the tradition that Abraham had been associated with Bethel. Similarly, when he flees from Shechem, he is given the directive by God to migrate to Bethel and build an altar there.

(3) “They may take place in an enclosure, a room, or a building set aside for their performance.” Especially in the more developed Yahwistic religion, we see certain places set aside for the specific purpose of performing rituals. Rooms, buildings, and enclosures were all part of their religious practices. In the places where Jacob settled for certain periods of time, we can assume that rooms were set apart for cultic rituals, but no explicit indication is given that such a practice was followed. Taking the nomadic concept for the patriarchs, we

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<sup>23</sup> Also, when Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah died, he buried her under an oak tree below Bethel. Although it is not explicitly expressed in the tradition, we may safely assume that Jacob might have taken that opportunity to build an altar and worship his God. He gave the sacred trees a significance that was common during the times.

would not assume this, but the periodic settlements would give us the possibility for this assumption.

(4) “Rituals may involve public and/or secret aspects whose practice will be reflected in architecture.” Sometimes worship includes public or secret aspects in practice, usually revealed in the architecture. There are no identifiable secret issues involved in Jacob’s worship, but the pillar and the heap of stones certainly act as a public testimony. As travelers during later times came by these places, they could easily identify that place as a former place of worship. They would also pray and pour oil on the pillar, in recognition and homage to the local deity. The heap of stones that Laban and Jacob set up was to be a witness to the covenant they made. Both of them were not to cross to the other side to do any harm. The offering and meal near the heap ratified their covenant as a witness to future generations.

(5) “Worship involves prayer and prescribed movements which may be reflected in architecture or iconography.” Prayer and religiously motivated movements were part of worship and commonly reflected in their architecture. Commonly, prayer takes on a narrow perspective of petitioning the deity. But a broader view would include dedications, commitments, and oaths. With this view of the oath that Jacob initially made at Bethel, the stone pillar he set up would become God’s house. His prayer consummated with the pledge of a future shrine at the place of the stone, or with the stone pillar.

(6) “Architecture and appurtenances may reflect the points of major concern and the focus of attention.” Architecture may reveal the priorities of and major concerns of the people who worshiped at that particular place. Jacob’s altars, stone pillars, and the heap are

all indicative of a traveler's form of worship. We don't see any indication of dressed stones, or elaborately organized structures of any kind. His worship was less structured, and more relational.

(7) "Cult images, icons, or aniconic representations of the deity or of deities may be present." Representations of the deity, such as icons, images, and idols may be present in the worship settings. But for Jacob, we see a clear rejection of "foreign gods." The evaluation of this depends on our understanding regarding Jacob's worship. Can we understand the stone pillars as an object of worship? If so, then Jacob's worship would also come under this category of rituals.

(8) "Special facilities such as benches, altars, hearths, basins, storage bins or jars necessary for the rituals may be present." Altars, hearths, benches, and utensils may be present at the site of worship. A major part of Jacob's worship was centered around altars. No details have been given about the nature and construction of the altars. It was common for travelers to find altars and standing stones along the way, indicating that the place was used for worship to some deity.

(9) "Sacrifice may have been practiced." We don't have details about the sacrifices Jacob offered, but we know that it was done. When no animals were available for a sacrifice, he used only the stone pillar for his worship. Altars are mentioned without the specific indication that a sacrifice was performed. It is difficult to determine the reason for this omission. If we understand the text to have been compiled during the monarchy, we can

safely assume that the traditions were quite firmly set to the extent that no changes were possible.

(10) “Food and drink may be brought and either presented, consumed, or libated.”

The worshiper may have brought food as part of the offering for the purpose of presentation, consumption, or libation. When Jacob and Laban formulated a treaty of peace with each other, we see a more elaborate expression of worship by these two men. It was at this time we observe the consumption of food as part of Jacob’s worship experience. We may also describe his initial experience at Bethel, as he poured oil on the stone pillar, as another situation where food was offered.

(11) “Material objects such as votives may be presented. The act of offering may entail breakage.” Votives may be offered during worship as a part of the fulfillment of vows previously made. Jacob’s second time of worship at Bethel could have some votive elements. His actions there seem like a repetition of the events previously mentioned. The same tradition could have been repeated here for the second time, thus reflecting the same forms of worship as before. If this was not a repetition, and his travel to Bethel was to settle there, we could assume that he would build a more elaborate shrine to his God, to be God’s house. We need to consider what happened to his plans. Could there have been some conflict with the local people that prevented him from settling there? Now, if this concept of his return to Bethel is a later fabrication of the traditions, it would have been appropriate for them to have Jacob fulfill his vow by building a shrine to God.

(12) “The ritual area may have repeated symbols or redundant appurtenances.”

Repeated symbols appear at the ritual area, indicating the prominence of certain rituals over others. Since we have only little detail available regarding Jacob’s altars and places of worship, we are in the dark with our understanding of this item.

(13) “The physical plan of a building or of a site may reflect the concepts of ritual cleanliness and gradations of sanctity.” Ritual cleanliness may be reflected in the physical structure and plan of the worship site. It was at his return to Bethel that Jacob engages in a purification rite, thus involving the oak at Shechem.

(14) “The structure and its appurtenances may reflect a significant investment of wealth” (Zevit 2001:82). Elaborate and expensive structures may be identified by the construction and costly materials used for the worship place. Since Jacob is presented as worshipping primarily during his travels, the structures he built must have been temporary and crude in nature.

### **5.3. WORSHIP AS RELATIONSHIP**

Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, worship is expressed through ritual acts and prayers. Rituals are the impersonal and external aspect of worship, but the prayers of the worshiper reveal the internal reality. Prayers connect the worshiper with the ritual and deity, thus bringing the entire process into a deeper level of meaning, which can be understood as the relationship between the worshiper and his God.

Jacob lived life and experienced his God through the ups and downs of life. It seems that he lived a life filled with tragedies and turmoil at every turn. When he stopped for the

night at Luz and experienced the God of his fathers for the first time, that was a pivotal point in his life. Never before had he known this God like this. He responds: "Surely the LORD is in this place - and I did not know it!"... "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gn 28:16-17). Previously, when he deceived his father, he referred to God as "the LORD your God" (Gn 27:20), indicating a sense of aloofness. But now, the God of his fathers becomes his God when he says "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you" (Gn 28:20-22). Jacob's vow included a condition, but most importantly a commitment that Yahweh will be his God. As a fugitive running for his life, Yahweh's response was with mercy, not judgment. For Yahweh, there was no accounting of Jacob's deceptive ways with his family. Although he was clearly in the wrong, God's response was not according to Jacob's actions, for now a relationship had been established between the two just as the relationship was established with Abraham.<sup>24</sup>

At another time, when Jacob was fleeing from Laban we see a similar response from God. Jacob's time with Laban was another extended period of deception and betrayal of trust. Yet God responds with mercy again as he provides protection from his father-in-law Laban. As Laban pursues him, God speaks to him in a dream and says "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad" (Gn 31:24). It was God's intervention that provided safety

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<sup>24</sup> The extent of the relationship with Abraham is clearly evidenced at the time when he was sitting by the oaks of Mamre. Three men approached him with the good news that Sarah would have a son. When the men were about to turn to Sodom, Yahweh spoke up and said "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do...?" Behind these words and the context is the implication that the relationship with Abraham was such that Yahweh could not keep from him his plans for the nearby town.

to Jacob and his company. Laban was intending to do harm to him, but this stern warning averted the danger.

Now that this relationship has been established with Jacob and the God of his fathers, we observe Jacob at an elevated level of piety, yet continuing in his deceptive ways. Thus we see him at Shechem getting ready to settle down in that land after purchasing the plot of land where he pitched his tent. The tradition is careful to point out that the first response of Jacob is to build an altar there, which he named El-Elohe-Israel. The epithet *'El Elohe Israel* can mean “God, the God of Israel” or “mighty is the God of Israel.” Although the term “Israel” may be an updating work by the hand of a later editor, the inherent concept is important for our consideration. Jacob has “grown” in his relationship with God. From his original reference to his father's God as “your God” to a personal identification with the characteristics of this God.

When Jacob fled from Shechem and went to Bethel, he said to his household: "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes; then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone" (Gn 35:2,3). Jacob identifies the God he met at Bethel as the one who has gone with him wherever he has gone. After his time of worship there, the text points out that “God went up from him at the place where he had spoken with him” (Gn 35:13). During his initial time at Bethel God spoke to him in a dream, but at this time, he is presented as speaking directly with him. This could be a possible theophany since the qualifier is there that God “went up” from Jacob at the place where they spoke. A careful reading of this text shows the characteristics of a deepening relationship with the deity rather than just an act of piety for the sake of religious rituals.



At Beersheba, on his way to meet Joseph, he had another experience with God. In Chapter 45, the Joseph narrative, which came down in the traditions as an independent story, has reached a climax. It has come to the point of a final reconciliation with the brothers. Now, what is left is the narration where the father, Jacob is brought to be reunited with his long lost son. For this purpose, the compiler borrows from the patriarchal story of Genesis 25-36, and skillfully inserts that portion into the Joseph narrative (Westermann 2002:153-54). God speaks to Jacob in a vision at night. Again God identifies himself as the God of his father Isaac, connecting their relationship at par with that of his fathers. Yet the key to this conversation is the final statement by God: “I am God, the God of your father, do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes” (Gn 46:3,4). At a time when gods were limited to a particular locality, Jacob's God travels with him, dispels his fears, and makes promises for the future.

#### **5.4. Summary**

In the section “nature of religion” we looked at the fact that religion and culture have a reciprocal relationship. Historically they have influenced each other in productive ways. The belief systems of any group of people are the key to understanding their culture and way of thinking. Inversely, if we study the culture and way of thinking of a group of people, we would have a fair concept about their religious beliefs. These beliefs are represented and lived out through the rituals that the people perform as part of their cultic practices. Within the religion, rituals and sometimes belief systems may change over time to fit the ever changing needs of the people. Finally, we looked at the relational nature of patriarchal religious experiences. Specifically in the Jacob narratives, we see this phenomenon clearly

expressed in the literature. This seems to be quite distinct and in contrast to the highly legalistic and organized Yahwistic religion of later Israel. This aspect is a key feature in understanding our research regarding the Jacob narratives.

## Chapter 6 CONCLUSION

The rich and varied traditions of the Israelites have gone through the initial phase of oral transmission with appropriate revisions as the need arose. Their literature spoke to the issues of their lives in the ever changing life experiences of the people. Even after it took written form, it is evident that the text was subjected to numerous revisions. The major influences were during the time of the monarchy when the traditions were probably put into written form, and the exilic and post-exilic times when the Priestly and Deuteronomistic revisions were applied to the text. This “textual history” which can only be understood through historical criticism, certainly has an important bearing on the interpretation of the text. When we look at the history of the transmission of the Jacob story, our eyes are opened to important matters that impact the interpretation of the text.

We have taken a detailed analysis of five texts that depict Jacob as a worshiper. Jacob is presented as a man who struggled with the vices in his life that caused him trouble wherever he went. This struggle was evident as he lived in his parent's home where Jacob had a significant rift between his twin brother and his father. As he dealt with his wives and children, there was constant friction in his relationship within the family. When he associated with his in-laws, the constant volley of deception finally brought him to a point of desperation that he had to flee from there with his family and possessions. When he connected with neighboring tribes, they could not live in peace as neighbors.

Along with all the problems that he faced in life, we see Jacob stopping from time to time to worship his God. The narrator shows God responding to him during his time of worship. It was as if God was taking him through a refinement process in his life. In the section “background of Jacob” in chapter three, we discussed how the narrator has formulated the story to show how Jacob was developing in his character through the situations in his life. His periodic worship gives the indication that it was God who was responsible for the transformation that took place in Jacob's life. Thus we saw how Jacob “grew” in his relationship with God and with people. With God, we see Jacob depicted as developing a relationship that he formerly did not have. We dealt with this phenomenon in the section “worship as relationship” in chapter five. Originally, he had referred to his father Isaac's God as “your God” but now he develops a personal identification with the characteristics of this God. In his dealings with people, we see him depicted as an old man carried by his sons to worship God in Beersheba as he was on his way to Egypt to meet his long lost son Joseph. Jacob's interactions with his sons reveals a straightforwardness and simplicity that was not there previously.

The relational aspect of the religion of the patriarchs seems to be portrayed up to the time of Moses. Later, the Israelite religion developed into a more rigid form of legalistic Yahwism of the monarchy, which was further refined and enhanced in the literature by the Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions. The heavy influence of the Canaanite cult on the religious and political elite prompted a gradual shift to such cultic patterns within Israel. It is this cultic heavy-handedness that was the inherent result of the influence of the Canaanites on Israelite worship. The prophets are depicted as taking a different focus as they intended to turn things around and return the people to a deeper level of relationship with Yahweh. They

vehemently opposed the expression of their outward legalistic cult without the devotion of the heart.

Thus we return to our question from the introduction: What were the cultic and/or social factors that were involved in the transformation of Jacob? The literature clearly outlines the cultic traditions apparent in Jacob's life. From the beginning of his independent life to the time he goes down to Egypt, he worships God at every significant juncture. The five instances of worship seem to be the identifying mark for the important points in his life. Taking a close look at those instances, we see that his attitude toward God changes from being an almost arrogant skilled bargainer at Bethel, to a thoughtful, silent, and reserved man at Beersheba. We get a glimpse of this process in Jacob's own words to his family when he worshiped as he fled from Shechem: "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes; then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone" (Gn 35:2-3). We looked at Jacob's attitude of independence and self-reliance in his earlier days. But now, he is portrayed as an older man looking back on his life and acknowledging God's hand on his life in the day of his distress. He also acknowledged the constant abiding presence of God that was with him throughout his journey.

Socially, the impact on Jacob can be attributed to several factors. The tradition presents the most prominent of these as his mutually deceiving relationship with his father-in-law Laban. There is no doubt that in Laban, he had met his match as never before. His flight from Laban's home was his final step of desperation as he had no option but to flee. His time at Shechem proved to be another instance where he had to run for his life. Then there was the situation where he wrestled with the mysterious and unknown "man." It was a culmination of

several of the most significant conflicts in his life where he had to fear death each time. These experiences contributed to bringing a change in his life.

When the Israelites settled in the new land, they inadvertently adopted the cultic and cultural norms of the land. It was a new phenomenon for them to live and work in an agricultural setting. Thus their attempts to integrate their clans with the local people would have required numerous adjustments in thought and culture. The agricultural setting closely connected to the yearly cycles were given further interpretations in the Canaanite myths of the land. Some of these myths could have been adapted to their Yahwistic beliefs. Through such adaptations, they began to relate with Yahweh in a new way that they have never done before. The cultic patterns of the canaanites was adopted as their own, and they used them to pay homage to their God, Yahweh. Their tradition contained sagas that presented the patriarchs as having a close kinship type of relationship with their God, but the cultic practice of later Israel became rigid, due to the Canaanite-Yahwistic influence of the monarchy, which was firmly established in their literature during the exilic and post-exilic revisions.

The Canaanite influence can be identified specifically with the cultic practices of Jacob. The core of the traditions that were brought with them would have been less cultic in nature and more relational with their God. But having come into the new land and living among the heavily cultic religion of the Canaanites, their traditions would have been adapted to fit with the local religious milieu of the times. This phenomenon is clearly seen in Jacob's patterns of worship. The narrator presents Jacob with a regular pattern of setting up a Masebah with a libation and anointing with oil. Altars, sacrifices, heaps of stones, and other forms of cultic expressions are also evident in his worship. Although these cultic practices were common with Jacob, it is important to note that Yahwistic legislation vehemently opposed such practices, and demanded the complete destruction of the cultic sites of

foreigners. Due to the highly cultic nature of the Canaanite religion and the later opposition of Yahwistic prophets, we could estimate that much of the cultic practices of the Israelites were adaptations from the Canaanite cult.

Finally, we have come to the understanding that Jacob's transformation as presented in the literature was due to several cultic and social factors. The cultic factors were due to Canaanite influence, and the social factors are presented in his interaction with his family and the community. The relational and merciful aspect of the patriarchal religion allowed for a person like Jacob to approach his God in spite of all his shortcomings. The text clearly portrays God as the one who worked in Jacob's life situations, both cultic and social to bring him to the transformation that He desired.

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